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ABSTRACT

This report describes and evaluates the Raven School, a charter school established in 1998 to serve adjudicated youths ages 16 to 18. The school is administered by the Gulf Coast Trades Center, a private nonprofit organization located in the Sam Houston National Forest in rural Texas. In addition to academics and GED preparation, other program components include life skills, employability skills, and vocational training programs. During the last 6 weeks of their program, students are encouraged to participate in work experience programs with local and area nonprofit organizations. Other services include recreational activities, health services, substance abuse counseling and education, and job placement services. The second half of the report evaluates partnerships of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration between the school and state and local agencies. Interviews with staff, volunteers, job site supervisors, and students indicate the importance of these partnerships in contributing to the success of the school. As a result of these partnerships, the school is provided with valuable resources or funding in exchange for volunteer services from students. Additional data from student exit interviews, recidivism rates, and percentage of students passing the GED substantiate conclusions drawn from the interviews. Appendices include an overview of the history of the Gulf Coast Trades Center, interview questions, and the student exit interview. (LP)

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Running head: A CHARTER SCHOOL IN PARTNERSHIPS

A Charter School in Partnerships for At-Risk Youth

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Abstract

The Gulf Coast Trades Center/Raven School is a new open enrollment charter school in the State of Texas. The school serves students who are adjudicated and who come from all parts of the State. The program is built on a continuum of partnerships from cooperation to coordination to collaboration. These different types of partnerships facilitate students learning key concepts and then applying them in real-world job site experiences. The testimony of all the major players—administrators, staff, job-site supervisors, community members, and students—is given here to support the view that these partnerships are the key to a successful program. Review of documents and observations also support this perspective and indicate that individual student success is dependent on such partnerships as well.

A Charter School in Partnerships for At-Risk Youth

Partnerships have been heavily promoted over the last few years as a means for developing benefits for public schools and their clients (Davies, 1996; Franks, Hokey & Sangfroid, 1999; Hopkins & Wendell, 1997; Rug, 1994; Lioness, 1992). The federal government has promulgated some of the partnerships through legislative action seen in such bills as The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Hickey, 1995). Several authors highlight such partnerships as the means to address the special needs of at-risk students (National School-to-Work Office, 1996; Legters & McDill, 1995). Bidwell (1997) highlights the benefits of integrating applied academic and vocational training for work site school partnerships in a review of Ohio's Work SITE Learning model.

Recently in Texas, charter schools have been created to allow new educational opportunities to address learning needs of varying populations of students. Twenty charter schools were permitted by law in 1995 when the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) was authorized to grant 20 charters (TEC, 1995). Another 100 opportunities for charter development were added with subsequent legislation (TEC, 1997). This created new partnerships throughout the state. The open enrollment charter school associated with the Gulf Coast Trades Center was approved in June 1998. So for this past year a new partnership has been in place—that between the State of Texas and the GCTC/ Raven School.

Eleven of the original 19 charter schools were classified as “at risk” schools. The second year evaluation report from TEA (1998) states that these schools declared their “...intention to serve primarily at-risk students (p. 1).”

The Gulf Coast Trades Center with its associated charter school has declared a similar intention. The mission is “...to increase the social and economic independence of

disadvantaged youth, who have been adjudicated through academic/vocational training to be responsible and mature citizens” (Buzbee, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken to describe the Gulf Coast Trades Center and its new status as a charter school that addresses the needs of at-risk students through many partnerships. Key areas of inquiry are the importance of partnerships to the success of the organization and to the success of individual students. Findings were revealed through a series of interviews and some document review.

Questions asked of the administration addressed primarily categories of partnerships--cooperation, coordination and collaboration--and the importance of each to the success of the Gulf Coast Trades Center. Questions to staff, to community people who worked with students in volunteer efforts, to job site supervisors, and students focused on the specific programs highlighted as particularly important during the interviews with the administrative staff.

History and Program of the Gulf Coast Trades Center

At its start in June 1971, the GCTC was chartered by the State of Texas as a private, non-profit corporation. For the last 28 years, the Center has been located in the Sam Houston National Forest on 46.6 acres. Key points in the history of the Center are noted in Table I.

Table I

<u>Key Dates in the History of the Gulf Coast Trades Center</u>	
1971	Chartered by the State of Texas
1971	Houston ISD Partnership
1987	Licensed by the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS)
1988	Partnership with New Waverly Independent School District for the academic program
1995	Licensed by the Texas Education Agency as a proprietary school
1995	Licensed by the Texas Workforce Commission

1997	Community Housing Development Organization
1998	Authorized by the State Board of Education to serve as an Open Enrollment Charter School
1998	Four homes built in New Waverly. Youthworks and Youthbuild participation.

Many partnerships have sustained the school and its program. Other important dates for GCTC are listed in Appendix A. Included are the many awards received by the Center.

Student Eligibility

In order to be eligible for GCTC, students must be adjudicated, 16 to 18 years of age, able to benefit from the vocational courses offered, referred by a state or county youth service agency. In addition each student must participate in an assessment process and must participate in a personal interview and make a campus visit (Belcher, 1998).

Educational Program

At the present time all students enrolled are economically disadvantaged, recovered dropouts and at risk of dropping out. Forty-two percent are parent students, and five percent are students of limited English proficiency.

The daily schedule of each student reflects the fact that the educational program uses a non-traditional approach. Academic skills are addressed 2 hours each day through multiple applications of technology in a Learning Resource Center (LRC). Individually paced programs are employed through the Computer Curriculum Corporation (CCC) and Plato 2000. Learning objectives are addressed in a logical sequence for each student. These systems are also utilized to provide tutorials to help with basic skill areas of English/Language Arts and Mathematics as well as preparation for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, the General Education Development (GED) tests, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Financial support for the academic areas comes primarily through the new partnership with the State.

A second part of the GCTC educational program, called Career Connections, focuses on the development of life skills such as how to bank, use a checking account, buy a used car, and plan a budget. Learning about health and nutrition, hygiene and first aid, and HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is included in Career Connections. Other life skills related to employment are included in a 64-hour course of study in Pre-Employment Work Maturity (PEWM). The U.S. Department of Labor developed the 11 competency areas. The first 5 competency areas help the student get a job. Such competencies focus on how to complete an application, make career decisions, be oriented to the labor market, complete a resume, and conduct oneself in an interview. The last 6 competency areas stress skills needed to keep a job—punctuality, attendance, positive attitudes and behaviors, an appropriate appearance, good interpersonal skills, and task completion.

A major portion of the educational program is delivered through 9 vocational areas addressed through Career and Technology Education experiences that are scheduled for 5 and 1/2 hours a day. The nine vocational areas are: auto technology, building trades, mill and cabinet making, building maintenance, bricklaying/stone masonry, technical introduction to desktop publishing, culinary arts, painting and decorating and horticulture (S. Belcher, personal communication, August 31, 1999).

Residential Program

Another key part of a student's experience comes through the required residential living. The unit for independent living, Independent Living Skills Environment (ILSE) becomes an important aspect of most students' learning. Not all students participate in ILSE; however, many students that benefit from a community-based, work-experience program with local and area non-profit organizations do live at the ILSE during the last 6 weeks of their program. Pay is provided through a grant from Houston Works (JTPA) and Youthbuild, USA. Students reside together in small groups according to the vocational training received. Through these small groups, youth are able to develop close

relationships, learn positive social behaviors and experience intense intra-structural peer support. Group sessions are held daily to give each student the opportunity to discuss the day's activities and problems. These sessions are conducted by staff who work regularly with the same group they have in class. (Belcher, personal communication, August 31, 1999).

Other Services

The center provides a wide variety of recreational activities both on and off campus. On campus, youth may participate in football, baseball, gym, basketball, volleyball, swimming, and high and low level ROPES programs. Eligible students may take part in off-campus activities such as bowling, skating, and movies.

Substance abuse counseling and education services are available to all students enrolled at the Center. The goal is to address the inability of the youth to deal with those negative peer pressures that result in substance abuse.

Health services are provided for routine medical and dental services through contracted physician services in the Huntsville area. The increasing number of referrals with mental health problems has prompted the Center to enter into contracts with various mental health professionals to provide this type of medical service on campus.

Job placement services begin while the student is in the initial orientation phase of the program. New students are made aware that a primary program objective is to secure employment after discharge. Upon graduation from the program, a Community Service specialist assists the student in the job search. Once students are placed on the job, a thirty-day, sixty-day, and ninety-day follow-up is done to track student progress. Aftercare specialists also work under the Community Service umbrella. Presently, all Texas Youth Commission (TYC) students residing in Harris County receive aftercare services. Aftercare services include but are not limited to job placement assistance, substance abuse assistance, family counseling, and continuing education. Aftercare continues for 90 days after release from the Center.

Partnerships of the GCTC

Partnerships with many agencies, state and local, are vitally important to the success of these programs. GCTC partnerships have been sorted and categorized as one of three types—a partnership of cooperation, coordination or collaboration. This categorization follows a model suggested by Intriligator (1992) and indicates a continuum of involvement by the various agencies with GCTC. Cooperation is characterized as short-lived and goal-focused with the agencies conducting “...all their business as usual except for some collective activities (Intriligator, 1992).”

Coordination is characterized as a longer arrangement between agencies and involves some relinquishment of agency autonomy to accomplish their joint goal (Intriligator, 1992, p.3). Collaboration is characterized by an even longer arrangement between agencies where “Everybody’s energies, skills and resources are needed to fulfill the collective enterprise; a combined effort is likely to be much more successful than any single agency’s efforts (Intriligator, 1992, p. 3)”.

A continuum of interagency efforts using this model of categorization I is seen in Figure I.

Figure I

<u>Continuum of Interagency Efforts</u>		
Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration
X	X	X
Independence		Interdependence

(Intriligator, 1992, p. 2)

A summary of key partnerships by category is listed in Table II, Table III and Table IV. The purpose of each partnership is briefly explained as well. Table II focuses on cooperation, Table III focuses on coordination, and Table IV focuses on collaboration.

Table II

Partnerships of Cooperation: Examples from GCTC

Sam Houston Museum Folk Festival - Set up stages, cut straw, cut materials, made wax cannon balls for the folk festival. Tended to the children's booth.

American Diabetes Association Walk - (Woodlands) - Provide walkers and runners with refreshments during the activity.

Lobster Feast - Walker County Chamber of Commerce - Annual fundraiser student's set-up for the dinner.

Montgomery County Fair Association - Assist in preparation for fair festivities and assist senior citizens on Senior Citizens Day.

Scott Johnson Elementary School – Constructed a gazebo for 4th grade students.

New Waverly Food Bank Distribution - (for the needy) - Students distribute and sort food items for family members.

New Waverly Volunteer Fire Department - Set up and serve Bar-B-Q for the annual fundraiser.

Lions Club Auto Swap - Students directed drivers to parking areas.

St Joseph Catholic Church Bazaar - Assist in the food area, built tables, help with auction, and tend a booth for GCTC Leadership Program. Vocational Shops build and donate prizes for the silent auction.

Table III

Partnerships of Coordination: Examples from GCTC

Youthbuild USA – Stipend for student training, construction tools, and incentives. Instructors salaries.

Youthworks American Institute for Learning - Construction supplies and materials necessary to complete projects. Instructors salaries.

Habitat for Humanity - Built 3 homes with Habitat volunteers.

City of Huntsville - Parks and recreation (maintain city parks, and ground beautification) build concession stand/score keeper building, restroom facilities.

The Friendship Center - Students involved with "meals on wheels" packaging, distribution, and visitation with seniors.

City of Willis - Work with city employees on maintenance issues in the water and wastewater division.

Willis ISD - Work with employees at the bus barn (AT students), grounds (HC students) cafeteria (CA students), office assistants (TI students), and library assistance (TI students).

Montgomery County Precincts #1, #2, #3 - Grounds and maintenance of county parks and roadways.

Huntsville ISD - Work with ISD employees in maintenance, clerical, cafeteria settings.

SHSU Museum - Maintain and beautify museum grounds and do minor maintenance of county parks and roadways.

Texas Forest Service - Work with forest service employees doing vehicles and equipment maintenance, grounds maintenance as well as work with forestry personnel.

Huntsville State Park - Assist employees with everyday park maintenance and operations.

New Waverly ISD - Work with maintenance department doing both building and grounds maintenance.

City of New Waverly – Work with city employees doing repairs and maintenance of city water and wastewater systems.

City of Magnolia - Work with city employees doing street and road repair and maintenance as well as vehicle and equipment maintenance.

Walker County Pct. 3 - Work with county employees doing road and bridge repair and maintenance as well as vehicle and equipment maintenance.

Walker County Senior Center - Work with office staff doing clerical duties. Also, help cafeteria staff prepare and serve meals to senior citizens.

Table IV

Partnerships of Collaboration: Examples from GCTC

U.S. Forest Service - Work with Government employees protecting and maintaining the Red Cockaded Woodpecker habitat. Landlord for 46.6 acres with a 30-year lease agreement for the property with GCTC.

Houston Works - (JTPA-WIA) - Provides funding for the Work Experience Program and Campus-Wide Summer Work Program.

Texas Education Agency - Provides funding for the open enrollment Charter School, also receives federal money quarterly.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology, a series of semi-structured interviews, was selected rather than a quantitative research methodology because the study was seeking to discover thoughts and feelings about programmatic areas as seen in one or more categories of partnerships. The primary foci are the importance of partnerships to the success of the educational programs as perceived by staff, administration, job site supervisors, and community members who work with the students in a volunteer capacity. Also, the importance of experiences supported by partnerships as perceived by students—particularly in the vocational and academic areas—was considered.

Participants

A convenience sample of individuals was selected from staff, job site supervisors, community members, and students for the interviews. Staff were selected for their representation of different trades and/or varying roles that each had filled at the GCTC. Job site supervisors were located in Huntsville or in New Waverly. Community members who had worked with students were selected and students who were ready or almost ready for release were interviewed. Permission for interviews was given by the executive director of the GCTC, by the individuals involved, and by the Sam Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Procedure

How administrators, staff, job site supervisors, community members, and students feel about GCTC/Raven School partnerships and what they perceive their contribution is to the GCTC/Raven program and to other organizations was addressed through a series of taped interviews. All interviewees were contacted first and had the project explained to them before being asked if they would volunteer to be interviewed for approximately 30 minutes. Administrators were asked questions seen in Appendix B. Job site supervisors and community members were asked a similar set of questions seen in Appendix C. Staff members were asked questions in Appendix D and students were asked questions

contained in Appendix E. Results from the interviews, each conducted independently, follow.

Both the principal and the executive director were interviewed first to determine their perception of the partnerships for the Gulf Coast Trade Center and the associated Raven Charter School. Staff, job site supervisors, community members, and students were interviewed about the partnerships identified by the administrators as most important to the success of the program. Questions were submitted to the GCTC principal first for review and revision before being used in the interviews. In addition, a review of documents—particularly student exit interviews, re-adjudication rates and graduation rates based on GED mastery--and observations on site were used as means to provide triangulation or substantiation of findings gained through interviews. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) explain triangulation as a way to mitigate the affects of bias in analyzing the transcriptions of the interviews, as a way to enhance the validity of case study findings. Findings were drawn from each set of interviews and matched with observations and document review for corroboration.

Results from Interviews

Results from each set of interviews are given and the findings gathered from the entire set of interviews are summarized. Discussion of the results/findings follows with implications for areas of further study. A review of documents and a series of observations are reported to validate the interview findings.

Administrator Interviews

Both the Principal and the Executive Director of the GCTC/ Raven School indicated that they have substantial experience with the entire program. The Principal has been associated with the Center for 15 years in various roles. In 1998, she was appointed Principal/ Educational Director after last serving as manager of the Learning Center.

The Director has been associated with the GCTC since its inception in 1971, 28 years ago. He testified to the importance of partnerships through grants right at the start of the interview by explaining that the Center had had to close in 1975.

We had the educational part, but we did not have the residential component.... At that time the director left and I became the director. ...In 1975 we started developing services with agencies and we also got a lot of Carl Perkins' money.... It was considerable. Actually, the school district (Houston ISD) would pay for personnel and we paid the expenses in vocation.

When the director was asked to indicate which partnerships had contributed the most to the GCTC program giving one example of cooperation, one of coordination and one of collaboration, he indicated that the collaborative partnership with the United States Forest Service is the most significant of that category. During its entire life, the Center has been housed on the Forest Service property.

We have been very beneficial to them and they also for us. We are in the process of obtaining the property. We have a 30-year permit and we renew it about every 5 years so it is kind of a perpetual agreement.

Further discussion illuminated the mutual benefit for the partnering organizations. The Forest Service has its trails cleared each year by GCTC students. The Principal explained that none of the trails would have been cleared this year were it not for the help of these students. In the past, students have constructed various buildings for the U.S. Forest Service as well.

The Principal indicated that, in her view, the recent, collaborative partnership with the State of Texas, is probably the most significant partnership of this type. The funding that flows from the State does have some strings attached, but the opportunities afforded from those monies are substantial. She indicated that the State provides 100% of the charter school funding (Belcher, Interview, September 10, 1999).

The most significant partnership in the form of coordination brought agreement from both the Director and the Principal. Both parties noted that the Youthbuild USA/Youthworks partnership with GCTC has allowed students to get hands-on experience in real-world ways. The Director said,

It allows us...to provide personal support for our young people that are in construction-related trades. They get a lot of hands-on experience. In the last year, Youthbuild has been very, very helpful.... We went to Austin and were able to convince them [the Legislature] to set up a statewide program similar to Youthbuild.... What we have been able to do is secure the construction balance and we've been a partner with them.

The Director also noted that the Center has about 40 job sites, not all active at once, in which students participate. These include the Sam Houston State University Museum, and other work sites in Montgomery and Walker Counties.

The Principal commented that,

Youthbuild U.S.A. is...one of the biggest assets we have participated in for several years. It gives our students an actual, hands-on experience at building homes. Not only does it help the kids; it also helps the community to have affordable homes for community members. It provides training materials, stipends for the students and in support of a vocational program, I don't think you could ask for anything more. This work-based program and work-based curriculum are integrated and it brings the community and the Center closer together. We're putting these vacant lots back on the tax rolls with \$60,000 to \$70,000 homes on each. That can only benefit the community. Our kids are doing it. That's one of the best things we have done, ever. Four homes have been built. Three of them are sold right now.... It's just a wonderful wealth of experience for the kids. These are kids actually building these homes and not builders. They take the skills

they have learned in a shop onto an actual job site. The work ethic alone is something that our kids need to know.

The most important partnership(s) following a pattern of cooperation-- short-term efforts involving little mix of resources--were identified as a set of, not just one of, many volunteer activities. Work with area school districts, churches, the food bank in the Woodlands, and the Volunteer Fire Departments are wonderful examples of this coordination. Comments from Director Buzbee highlighted the volunteer work with the New Waverly and Willis Fire Departments and the area churches. "We were able to build items to be auctioned off for fundraising (for the VFD). We know for a fact that if we have any problems; we can always call on them. We work with the churches when they have bazaars."

Principal Belcher added,

The volunteer activities allow us to show the terrific things that our kids do....At the church bazaar, we had our booth this year. We helped the community members set things up and take things down. We helped them do clean up besides run our booth. With the VFD, we actually clean up the area. We also help prepare food. It gives our kids a lot of exposure...I really think the local participation that we have is the most crucial to our success.

When asked about the importance of partnerships to the GCTC and the Associated charter school as an organization, Principal Belcher said,

Without partnerships and people believing in what we do, we would be sunk.... It wouldn't happen for us.... We would have to shut our work experience program totally down [without partnerships]. We would still provide independent living skills training but if you are talking independent living, they couldn't do it. They need to live and work independently. We couldn't do it. There is no way.

Director Buzbee stated,

Partnerships have been one of our strongest points. The strength in the program is there, but we also do a lot of things for the community at the same time. It strengthens the program, builds the community and provides the students the opportunity to gain real-world experience.

When asked about the importance of the GCTC/charter school partnerships to individual students, Principal Belcher replied,

Individuals ...have to learn how to get back into the community to relate to society. [One] has to learn to deal with [people]. That's been one of our goals.... [Work site experiences] definitely give them the opportunity get back to the work force, give them the work skills and help them get along with people.

Director Buzbee added,

It gives kids the opportunity to give back to the community showing them that you can do that and try to bring them into the main stream rather than keep them as outsiders. I think that is very important...If we can keep them active and busy, you can do some things. If they see what they do, that's very important and then if they see that they are compensated and at the same time that they can be evaluated on how they are performing. We've found that it is really very helpful to the students because they are able to see that they can do things whereas before all they saw is that, 'I'm a loser.' They learn that they can make a contribution and become a part of the mainstream and that's really what we're all about.

Interviews with Job Site Supervisors and the GCTC Liaison

Five interviews were held with job site supervisors. The Director of Parks and Recreation for Huntsville, Texas, a clerk for Walker County, the Director of Sam Houston State University Museum, the GCTC director for the Youthbuild, Youthworks house-building operation, and a supervisor from the U.S. Forest Service were interviewed. All but one had at least a five-year partnership with the Gulf Coast Trades Center. The Youthbuild, Youthworks operation is only

one year old. Students from the various trades groups were provided real-world work experiences at these sites. The comments from all of these supervisors were very similar.

The Director of Parks and Recreation said,

We have been working with these students since 1993. Eighty of these students have been with us over these years. I have written 63 letters of recommendation for those who have come here. They have to earn it. We have had to ask GCTC not to return just a few of these students.

He explained that the students have built restrooms and concessions stands and have done all variety of ground maintenance. He said that he could see the pride in the faces as the construction resulted in something that would remain. His concluding statement was that “It helps the city all the way around.”

The museum director echoed this interview by noting that the students took pride in the building of the barn and in the repair of Sam Houston’s home. The grounds are a constant challenge to maintain and students are regularly assigned to the museum for this purpose from the Horticulture trades. It provides good manpower for a site on a very limited budget. The students in turn receive real world experience and are exposed to students at the University who work here as well. They can see that there are other options in life. So there is a mutual benefit. The director went on to explain that he too has written letters of recommendation on request if the student has performed well.

The County clerk explained that the students were usually a great help to someone who was really shorthanded. Filing, computer record-keeping, labeling of books, and working before, during and after elections in various capacities were all jobs that have been performed by students from the Gulf Coast Trades Center. She noted that at times she had to ask that a certain student be picked up or that s/he not be returned to her, but right now she was wishing that one of the good ones was available. “They really do help get a lot of this paper work done”, she said. Again, it was noted that the real-world experience was something that was very much needed by the students.

The Youthbuild, Youthworks supervisor explained that his team led by example as they were building houses in New Waverly. He was grateful for the partnerships from the Youthbuild, Youthworks organizations as it allows him to teach kids as he believes they should be taught. He explained that when kids see them (the supervisors) digging ditches and tying up rebar, they tend to want to get in there and do it too. They tend to become team players.

They get on the job training that is hands on and all that we do out here is from the ground up. The students work with the staff like on the job you have foremen and supervisors. It's a starting point to come out here on a job. It's just a good program for these kids. ...Lots of our students when they come, they don't have any self worth. They've never accomplished anything except getting into trouble. We've served 38 students in this new program. I don't think we've had but 1 or 2 students that didn't conform and turn around and become what we thought they could be. Not necessarily that we think that everyone of them going through the program is going to be a total success, because life is not like that. If we can save just a handful, then all the effort and all the things that we do out here are going to be well worth it down the road for society and those kids that we save.

The U.S. Forest Service representative spoke to the importance of the partnership for them in that, "The budget is shrinking and the government these days is looking for outside ways of getting projects done without additional costs. It works out well for us." She went on to explain that the GCTC has a special lease permit with the U.S. Forest service and has arranged to pay the lease fees by having kids come up and work on projects. "We assess each of the projects, the cost, what it would cost the government to have the project done otherwise. Then we apply that to their lease." Projects that GCTC students participate in are construction of restrooms and recreation rooms, adding on to the main U.S. Forest Service Office, garbage pickup, maintaining trails, and maintaining the red-cockaded woodpecker habitat and nest boxes. Her assessment was that "It works out to be a good partnership for both of us."

Comments from the Gulf Coast Trades Center work site liaison person who views all of the work sites and the results of each of these partnerships indicated that these experiences brought

out the typical response that would be found through interviewing all work site supervisors. The mutual benefit has both partners desiring to maintain this relationship. Not all students experience success on these job sites, but the overwhelming majority does find these work site experiences most helpful.

Staff Interviews

In addition to the staff member cited already, the Site Supervisor for the Youthbuild, Youthworks projects, four other staff members were interviewed. Three staff members from trades--building maintenance, horticulture, technical introduction to desktop publishing--and one supervisor from the ILSE contributed their views about the program and partnerships of GCTC. All of these staff members had served in multiple roles at GCTC and all had from 6 to 12 years of experience here. None had any difficulty in discussing examples of partnerships of cooperation, coordination or collaboration. In fact they seemed to enjoy the discussion. Most of the examples of partnership that were discussed in their interviews can be found in the earlier listing provided in Tables II, III and IV. Additional examples of partnerships such as the renovation of the Walker County Center for Drug and Alcohol Abuse, the production of banners and menus for the library fundraiser, the production of banners and fliers for the Catholic bazaar, preparing the Lion's Club monthly newsletter, visiting the convalescent home in New Waverly to help celebrate birthdays, and picking up trash for recycling were cited as additional examples.

Reflections about the opportunities for student growth and for GCTC program development through all 3 types of partnerships show just how much all the partnerships mean to all those associated with GCTC. One staff member commented,

It gives the kids, our young men, the opportunity and experience actually on a job site where they have to be quiet, where they have to watch their language, and stay dressed properly because there are so many people working there in an occupied building.

Another staff member added,

It lets them, the students, see that other people take interest in what they are doing and note how well they work. We get lots of compliments here about how well the students work. The students take pride in that.

One staff member talked about the visits to the convalescent home. “They seem to really enjoy helping older people, talking with them and they always ask to go back. It’s a good experience for the kids.” Another saw that, “These experiences help build self-esteem. The students are hard-working. They feel like they’ve been given the trust to work off campus.”

When asked to comment in general about partnerships of GCTC, staff members noted that the partnerships had helped promote better public relations. “You have to have positive publicity if you are going to change our community and our peoples’ minds about our juveniles. Just because they’re juveniles today doesn’t necessarily mean they have to end up in TDC. We have to change that.”

Almost all of them said in one way or another the following which is quoted from one of the staff. “Partnerships—that’s what makes us. It is so meaningful to students to be able to go out in the community and work. It reinforces everything that they’re learning in their classes and shop.”

Community Member Interviews

Three community members were interviewed. One was working with the library fund, one was working with the church bazaar, and a third was working with the food bank for New Waverly. All of these efforts have been supported by the Gulf Coast Trades Center. Students have worked to set up tables, to create prizes for the auctions, printed menus and banners, and more. With this kind of background, it was not surprising that the comments about GCTC and its contribution through partnerships to the community were positive.

I don't know what we'd do without Gulf Coast. Anytime you have a banquet or you need something done, the first one they suggest that we go to is the Gulf Coast Trades Center....They just are very community-minded. They never say no.

Another community member commented,

This is good for the community. It gives them (the students) a chance to learn a trade. It gives them a lot of responsibility and to know that there's nothing wrong in going out there and working from 8 to 5 and then going home. A lot of these kids just haven't had that chance.

Two of the comments seem to sum up the thoughts and feelings of those interviewed. "Most community members appreciate GCTC. You will have your few complainers but GCTC has a very good name in New Waverly," and "If they are going to do all this for the community, then we as a community ought to support GCTC. We ought to stick behind them. I appreciate them."

Student Interviews

Three students were interviewed. One was based in the Culinary Arts, one in Building Trades and one in Office Services, now called Technical Introduction to Desktop Publishing. Each of these students recognized the value of the Gulf Coast Trades Center in their development.

This experience will help me. You can get hands-on training. They could lay a book in front of you and try to teach us all this but we can learn getting out to the job site. The Gulf Coast experience made me realize that I could learn something. It wasn't impossible to do it.

Another summarized, "In this school I got what I need—a driver's license, a trade and a GED. I can make it now."

A third student said, "I've worked in several job sites. They helped me learn different ways of figuring out my problems. How to handle them. The job has helped with social skills."

The students saw the opportunity to apply skills learned through various training sessions, whether a trades class, a counseling session, or a general job skills training, as critical to their success. Such applications were appreciated for preparing them for the “Free”—the free world and independence.

A written comment found on one of the student exit interviews says it all. “I am thankful I came here and finish [sic] this program and get out with my life and take the advices [sic] that Gulf coast has truly gave me.”

Review of Documents: Student Exit Interviews, Re-adjudication Reports, GED Mastery

One part of the program evaluation for the collaborative, cooperative and coordinated efforts mentioned in the history and highlighted in the administrator interviews is the student exit interview (See Appendix F). Five statements with their ratings from students were selected for analysis with the view that the success or failure of these efforts reflects directly or indirectly on the partnerships under review. The five statements are:

- * The Trades classes prepared me for work.
- * The LRC helped me increase my academic performance.
- * GCTC helped me learn a trade.
- * I know what is expected of me when I get home.
- * Gulf Coast Trades Center has been a good influence on me.

Results of the exit interviews from 1998 and 1999 were gleaned from sample documents from each year. Two hundred and ninety-seven students exited in 1998. Only 168 Exit Interview folders were available for review. Every fourth folder was reviewed so that 42 folders provided the data seen in the Table V. Not all statements were rated in each document so the total number of responses varied substantially from question to question.

Table V

GCTC Student Exit Interviews, 1998

1. The Trade classes prepared me for work

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0	0	0	12	19	31
0%	0%	0%	38.70%	61.29%	100%

2. The LRC helped me increase my academic performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0	0	2	7	17	26
0%	0%	7.69%	26.92%	65.38%	100%

3. GCTC helped me learn a trade.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0	0	1	7	26	34
0%	0%	2.94%	20.58%	76.47%	100%

4. I know what is expected of me when I get home.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0	0	2	2	26	30
0%	0%	6.67%	6.67%	86.66%	100%

5. GCTC has been a good influence on me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0	0	1	5	24	30
0%	0%	3%	16.67%	80%	100%

For the 1999 analysis, the administrator responsible for exit interviews pulled 35 sample documents for the research from 226 exit interviews that had been completed to date, September 13, 1999. These results are seen in Table VI.

Table VI

GCTC Student Exit Interviews, 1999

1. The Trade classes prepared me for work.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
2	0	3	10	19	34
5.88%	0%	8.82%	29.41%	55.88%	100%

2. The LRC helped me increase my academic performance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
4	2	2	5	19	32
12.50%	6.25%	6.25%	15.63%	59.38%	100%

3. GCTC helped me learn a trade.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
3	0	0	5	21	29
10.34%	0%	0%	17.24%	72%	100%

4. I know what is expected of me when I get home.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
2	0	1	16	7	26
7.70%	0%	3.85%	61.54%	26.92%	100%

5. GCTC has been a good influence on me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
0	0	0	9	26	35
0%	0%	0%	25.71%	74.29%	100%

These student exit interviews from 1998 and 1999 show that the students' view of the GCTC experiences is overwhelmingly positive. From this set of students' perspectives, it can be inferred that the partnerships supporting the learning and application of learning in the trades areas and in the academic learning resource center, the LRC, are meeting the needs of many of these at-risk youth assigned to this experience through adjudication. Further evidence of this is seen in the data on recidivism. The track record for re-adjudication is seen for the years 1985 through 1997 in Table VII.

Table VII

Re-adjudication Percentages by Year, GCTC

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
13%	4%	24%	17%	26%	12%	10%	13%	18%	8%	8%	10%	3%

The numbers speak strongly of a developing success in helping the students adjust to become productive, self-supporting citizens.

One other set of information that supports this result is the pattern of passing the General Education Development (GED) exams (Table VIII) and the celebration seen in the graduation ceremonies sponsored by GCTC. The average passing rate over the last 9 years is 57%.

Table VIII

General Education Development (GED) Passing Rates/Graduation Rates

<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
<u>56%</u>	<u>57%</u>	<u>60%</u>	<u>56%</u>	<u>53%</u>	<u>60%</u>	<u>59%</u>	<u>57%</u>	<u>55%</u>

Observations

Observations of student-staff interactions were made on five different days. On three days interactions in class were noted in the various trades classes and in the LRC. On two days, interactions between the job site supervisors and the students were observed. The concern of each of the instructors for the growth and welfare of their students was seen in their conversation, in upholding of certain standards, and in their willingness to model what needed to be done. The students were treated with respect. The job-site supervisors also upheld real-world standards of performance and insisted that students perform to a certain standard in order to remain on the job site. It is clear that the consistent application of standards for behavior and learning in the school and again in the job setting is beneficial to the students. In other words, the partnership of classroom learning and the real-world application to job sites is pivotal to program and student success.

Discussion and Conclusion

Information from the interviews, from the document review and from observations support comments made by Director Buzbee and Principal Belcher in the early interviews. Without partnerships of many types, in many different settings, Gulf Coast Trades Center /Raven School would not be in existence. The interaction of Gulf Coast Trades Center as an organization with other organizations both locally in New Waverly and in other area communities such as Huntsville, Willis, and Magnolia results in positive recognition for the Center (Appendix A). This recognition, in turn, has led to more partnerships. Opportunities through partnerships have not come without much hard work on the part of

many. Gulf Coast Trades Center has taken time to build trust with referring agencies through student success. They have taken time to build trust with their neighbors through partnerships of cooperation, coordination and collaboration. Students working in teams with staff members, working as individuals, and staff members working as individuals have helped to create supportive working and learning environments. Community members have learned to reach out to Gulf Coast Trades Center for assistance in many ways. As one community member commented, “It’s a small town and everybody knows everybody else. Gulf Coast fits right in.”

Principal Belcher thinks that the new partnership with the State of Texas will, “...open many avenues for our agency, not only to state-wide exposure but also to national exposure. We do so many things well that nobody knows about that I think it’s an opportunity for us to shine.” Director Buzbee notes that, “One reason we’ve been somewhat successful is that we’re not such a bureaucracy that if something doesn’t work we won’t change and do things in a little different way.” Certainly the change to charter school status has brought some improvements. Established partnerships will be maintained but new partnerships may be presumed to be in the future for the Gulf Coast Trades Center/Raven School.

A Final Question

A question raised by this study concerns the relationship of partnerships to the success of other charter schools in Texas or in other states. Are partnerships along the entire continuum of involvement necessary for any charter school to succeed? Future research is recommended to answer this question as charter schools seek to establish themselves as a continued part of the education scene in the U.S.A..

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Appendix A

Gulf Coast Trades Center: 25 Years of Service

- 1971 *The Gulf Coast Trades Center is incorporated.
- 1972 *First Graduating Class completes the program.
- 1978 *Ford Motor Company names the Center as Outstanding Youth Program Award.
- 1979 *National Governors' Association – The Center is one of five (5) top youth training programs.
- 1982 *Construction is completed on the new cafeteria.
- 1984 *The Center is accredited by Southern Association of College and Schools.
- 1985 *The Center is recognized by Texas Youth Commission as Outstanding Contract Program.
- 1986 *The Center purchases I-45 property for the Independent Living Program.
- 1988 *The Center initiated the off-campus Student Work Experience Program.
- 1989 *The Center was re-accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (SACS-COEI)
- 1990 *Houston Job Training Partnership – The Center was designated as Subcontractor of the Year Award.
- 1991 *The Center completed the first home for Habitat for Humanity.
- 1992 *The Center completed the second home for Habitat for Humanity, and the Center was recognized by the National Governors' Association for innovative programming.
- 1993 *The Center dedicated the Operations Center.
*The Center completed the third Home for Habitat for Humanity.
*Houston Works JTPA award the Center for Program Achievement.
- 1994 *The Center received the Texas Attorney General's Outstanding Youth Criminal Justice Award.
*The fourth Habitat for Humanity home is completed by the Center
*Re-Affirmation for six years, Council on Occupational Education.
- 1995 *Houston Works JTPA award for Program Achievement.
*The fifth Habitat for Humanity home is completed by the Center.
- 1996 *Houston Works/Gulf Coast Trades Center received an incentive award for outstanding Model Youth Program.
*The Center was selected by the National Youth Employment Coalition and the U.S. Department of labor as one of the recipients recognized as a promising and effective youth employment program.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Administrators, GCTC

1. How long have you been with the GCTC/charter school?
2. Please describe your experience with the GCTC/charter school.
3. Partnerships that the GCTC has participated in are many. These have been tentatively categorized as partnerships of cooperation, coordination, or collaboration. Please reference the attached list of sample partnerships in each category and select one in each category that you think contributes the most to the GCTC. Explain your response, please.
4. Please comment generally about how important partnerships are to the GCTC and the associated charter school as an organization.
5. Please comment generally about how important partnerships are to the individual students at the GCTC/charter school.
6. How do you evaluate the importance of partnerships that the GCTC/charter school has?
7. Please add any other information about the GCTC partnerships as they relate to at risk youth.

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Job Site Supervisors
and for Community Members

1. How long has your organization been associated with GCTC? Explain the relationship.
2. How are students given work /life experiences here with your organization?
3. What benefits do you see for your organization? Losses?
4. What benefits do you see for the students and for GCTC? Any harm done?
5. How do you feel about this partnership?
6. Do you have any other comments to make about these experiences?

Appendix D

Interview Questions for GCTC Staff Members

1. How long have you been with the GCTC/charter School?

2. Please describe your experience with the GCTC.

3. I have been learning about different peoples' viewpoints about 3 different kinds of partnerships that GCTC has and I would like to ask you a question about each. A partnership of cooperation is one where the activity is short-term and goal-focused. The organizations each conduct business as usual except for some collective activities such as a bazaar. Volunteer activities at GCTC are examples of cooperation. Have you been involved with this kind of a partnership with the students? If so, would you reflect on these experiences and how these activities of cooperation relate to the GCTC as an organization and to the individual students as well?

4. Another kind of partnership is coordination where there is a longer-term relationship with procedures and agreements about how the agencies relate to one another. The various job sites have been noted as examples of this kind of partnership. Have you been involved with this kind of a partnership with the students? If so, would you reflect on these experiences and how these activities of coordination relate to the GCTC as an organization and to the individual students as well?

5. A third kind of partnership is collaboration. Here agencies work collectively in long-term agreements for gain on the part of each body. The U.S. Forest Service and the State of Texas have been cited as partners of collaboration. Have you been involved with this kind of a partnership with the students? If so, would you reflect on these experiences and how these activities of collaboration relate to the GCTC as an organization and to the individual students as well?

6. Please comment on your view of partnerships in general for GCTC and for its students.

Appendix E

Interview Questions for GCTC Students

1. How long have you been with the GCTC/charter School?
2. In which job sites have you participated?
3. Tell me a little bit about how you feel about each of the job sites you have mentioned in answering question 2.
4. Do you think that the job site experience has helped you with job and life skills? Explain.
5. In what volunteer activities have you participated?
6. Please tell me how you feel about these volunteer activities.
7. How does this school compare to your past school experiences?
8. Explain what you think makes the difference between this school and the others you have experienced?

GULF COAST TRADES CENTER: EXIT INTERVIEW

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 No Opinion 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

	1	2	3	4	5
TRADES:					
The Trades classes prepared me for work.					
The Trade teachers helped me learn things for a job.					
The Trades teachers helped me adjust to the program at GCTC					
My Trades teacher knew his/her trade well.					
The Trade classes were well equipped.					
SOCIAL SERVICES:					
I was scheduled to meet with my social services staff at least one time per week.					
I participated in my monthly ICP staffing's.					
My Social worker encouraged my family to participate in my goal setting and attainment.					
My social service staff began discharge planning by my third Month.					
RESIDENTIAL					
I participated in recreational activity one hour per day.					
Participated in recreation helped me to relax.					
Participating in recreation helped me to learn teamwork.					
Participating in recreation helped me to build trust in others.					
I participated in positive peer culture one hour per day.					
Group work was helpful.					
DRUG COUNSELING:					
I benefited from drug counseling – MAC/Dealers choice.					

	1	2	3	4	5
I participated in weekly drug counseling.					
MEDICAL:					
My medical and psychological needs were met.					
Medical services were available.					
LRC:					
The LRC helped me increase my academic performance.					
The LRC staff were helpful to me.					
The GED classes were helpful to me.					
The Life Skill classes will help me in my home environment.					
The Employment Classes helped me prepare for the world of work.					
The Pre-Release classes helped me better prepare myself for release.					
The computer lab was beneficial to my academic performance.					
ISLE:					
The ISLE Caseworker was helpful.					
I am able to work more cooperatively with peers and supervisors.					
Independent Living Skills classes were helpful.					
The work experience job let me use the skills I learned in Trade classes.					
The Supervisor on my job cared about me as a person.					
OVERVIEW:					
GCTC helped me learn trade?					
I know what is expected of me when I get home.					
I understand what a job developer role will be regarding me.					
GULF COAST TRADES CENTER has been a good influence on me					

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5. In what volunteer activities have you participated?
6. Please tell me how you feel about these volunteer activities.
7. How does this school compare to your past school experiences?
8. Explain what you think makes the difference between this school and the others you have experienced?

GULF COAST TRADES CENTER: EXIT INTERVIEW

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 No Opinion 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

	1	2	3	4	5
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