

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING
ENVIRONMENT ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF
GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

By

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Title of Study: PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-STAKES ENVIRONMENT ON LEARNING
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Abstract: This study looked at teacher and administrator perceptions of the high-stakes policy environment on the influence of teaching gifted and talented students through the lens of systems theory. The national accountability standard of NCLB created a previously unmatched standard of accountability for student performance through high-stakes testing. This law formed standards of improvement for public schools designed to promote school practices and environments that ensure the success of all students, with an enhanced emphasis for those students considered “at risk” (NCLB, 2001). While some gifted classrooms flourished under NCLB, others did not and have not under ESSA (Tofel-Grehl, Feldon, & Callahan, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2008). For example, NCLB was designed and implemented to benefit all students by systematically pushing all public schools towards “on grade level” success. However, those students achieving above grade-level have not been effectively addressed by NCLB (2001) or subsequent legislation such as ESSA (2015). Despite touting that all students benefit from NCLB, or all students can succeed with ESSA, schools often focus on addressing students who are below achievement level instead of those achieving above grade level (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018; Moon et al., 2003; NCLB, 2001; Scot et al., 2009). The purpose of this case study was to explore teacher and administrator perceptions regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low performing school engaged in academic improvement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of Problem

During the 14 years of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the focus on raising achievement for low performing students and underperforming schools has created a high pressure accountability environment focused on meeting minimum standards for student outcomes (Fisher & Frey, 2012; NCLB, 2001). While the newest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), called Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), has focused on improved assessment flexibility and reduced punitive measures on failing schools (ESSA, 2015), there remains an atmosphere of high pressure for assessment results. The effects of NCLB (2001) resulted in a concentration of resource allocation, including time and money, into promoting the success of underachieving students and their schools. However, an unintended consequence from these efforts is that, in many schools, this legislation has led to the neglect of the educational experience of many gifted and talented students (Fisher & Frey, 2012). ESSA superseded NCLB in 2015; it was designed to improve NCLB by providing training for teachers to meet needs of gifted students (ESSA, 2015). However, despite reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) that called for the development of

educational supports to meet the diverse needs of gifted and talented learners, there remains an ongoing struggle to meet this goal (Kaul & Davis, 2018; Moon, Brighton, & Callahan, 2003; NCEE, 1983; Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009). Furthermore, since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, there has been very little movement to improve gifted and talented education (Gallagher, 2015). This lack of attention on gifted and talented learners during a timeframe in which policies were established to protect at-risk and special education students, stands in stark contrast to the resources, time, and personnel provided to both the students and teachers in gifted programs (Gallagher, 2015; NCLB, 2001).

Problem Statement

The national accountability standard of NCLB created a previously unmatched standard of accountability for student performance through high-stakes testing. This law formed standards of improvement for public schools designed to promote school practices and environments that ensure the success of all students, with an enhanced emphasis for those students considered “at risk” (NCLB, 2001). While expectations of NCLB have improved the performance of many students who are considered “at risk,” demonstration of success on high-stakes exams does not always meet the needs of gifted and talented students (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg- Davis & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007). ESSA, the legislation that replaced NCLB, makes little improvement to focus on gifted students with only one subsection “required by ESSA to include any references to gifted and talented students” (Kaul & Davis, 2018, p. 160). While some gifted classrooms flourished under NCLB, others did not and have not under ESSA (Tofel-Grehl, Feldon, & Callahan, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-

Davis, & Callahan, 2008). For example, NCLB was designed and implemented to benefit all students by systematically pushing all public schools towards “on grade level” success. However, those students achieving above grade-level have not been effectively addressed by NCLB (2001) or subsequent legislation such as ESSA (2015). Despite touting that all students benefit from NCLB, or all students can succeed with ESSA, schools often focus on addressing students who are below achievement level instead of those achieving above grade level (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018; Moon et al., 2003; NCLB, 2001; Scot et al., 2009).

NCLB’s oversight of schools ended after 14 years with the recent authorization of the ESSA (2015). ESSA made it possible for states to reduce the number of tests students take throughout their years in school pushing for more creative ways for students to demonstrate academic competence (ESSA, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). ESSA (2015) has been touted as a major change away from some of the overdone accountability standards for NCLB; however, while there have been changes, an atmosphere of accountability and limited resources remains. ESSA simply changed one set of accountability standards from NCLB for another set of standards under ESSA (ESSA, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Although ESSA may have given more flexibility in accountability than its predecessor, it has not eliminated accountability, and the environment of high-stakes testing has not changed (ESSA, 2015; U.S. Department of education, 2016). This environment continues to place pressure on site personal. This focus has often created an atmosphere within schools that pits one group of students against another vying for resources with the teachers and administration to decide which group of students takes priority (ESSA, 2015).

Although gifted students, typically, have little trouble passing high-stakes exams, they tend to more accurately express their competencies in more innovative and creative ways (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg et al., 2007; Park & Oliver, 2009; Reis, & Morales-Taylor, 2010; Reis, & Renzulli, 2010; Scot et al., 2009; Tofel-Grehl et al., 2018). Specifically, high-stakes exams designed to ensure students have met minimum competencies do not provide a platform for gifted students to demonstrate their skills and capacity for innovation and creativity. Additionally, with increased demands for students to perform well on tests, teachers commonly “teach to the test” resulting in limited learning opportunities for gifted students to develop understandings beyond minimum competency standards. However, educators may resist more flexible assessments because of the requirements or the unfamiliarity of such assessments. In this high-stakes policy environment, teachers in gifted and talented classes struggle to meet the needs of uniquely gifted students (Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg et al., 2007; Richardson, Henriksen, & Mishra, 2017; Moon et al., 2002; Park & Oliver, 2009; Scot, et al., 2009). In some cases, students in gifted and talented programs have reported being frustrated with work given and lack of curriculum flexibility preventing them from receiving more rigorous assignments (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg et al., 2007; Rawlins, 2004; Vanderbrook, 2006). Such irregularities in gifted and talented programs may exist due to a districts’ unwillingness to supply resources to the program in the form of professional development to teachers, curriculum that engages students, and instructional strategy training for teachers to bridge gaps in the skills of their students (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Gallagher, 2015; Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Kyburg et al., 2007;

Yeung, 2014). Even though ESSA (2015) aims to provide training for teachers, many state plans were not designed specifically to train teachers for work with gifted students (Kaul & Davis, 2018). Although ESSA was designed to allow greater flexibility in assessing student progress and skills (ESSA, 2015), it is unclear whether schools are actually tailoring programs to more effectively meet the needs of gifted students under the new legislation (Kaul & Davis, 2018). In other words, emphasis on high-stakes accountability standards and subsequent standardized testing under NCLB and ESSA seems to have minimized creative outlets for gifted students. Due to these concerns, more research is needed to understand how the current high-stakes environment has influenced teaching practices in gifted and talented programs. ESSA (2015) and state testing regulations, influences the ability of teachers and administrators to meet the needs of gifted students. Currently, the point of view of teachers and administrators working in this environment is lacking in the literature. Specifically, understanding the perceptions of teachers and administrators that work with gifted and talented students, especially in low performing schools that struggle to meet ESSA mandates, will contribute to an understanding of how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced gifted and talented programs.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to explore teacher and administrator perceptions regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low performing school engaged in academic improvement.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study captured the perceptions of educators by listening to their “voices.” The following research questions guided the study:

Overarching Question: From a systems perspective, what are the perceptions, in this school, of teachers and administrators involved in a gifted program of the influence of high-stakes accountability on the learning experiences of gifted and talented students?

1. How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive the processes that support learning for gifted students in this school?
2. What are teachers’ and an administrator’s perceptions of the resources or inputs provided for the education of gifted students in this school?
3. How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive their outputs, under the high-stakes environment in this school?
4. How is feedback utilized regarding the teaching and learning of gifted students utilized in this school?

Epistemological Perspective

This qualitative case study utilizes a constructivist approach. The constructivist viewpoint directs the study to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). This paradigm “describes the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them” (Crotty, 1998/2003, p. 79). The constructivist approach in this study captured the meaning held within each individual’s experience (Crotty, 1998/2003).

Theoretical Framework

This study drew from systems theory to explain the influence of the high-stakes

policy environment on the learning experiences of gifted and talented students (Bryan, Klein, & Elias, 2007; Lewis, 2005; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). Systems theory can be applied to explain connections between hierarchical levels within the school and how they interact with experiences of students (Bryan et al., 2007; Lewis, 2005). The systems approach allows for the examination of the inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback to the system. Each of these elements has root in a school. Inputs enter a public school in multiple ways such as Title I funds, assessments, staff values, staff perceptions of teaching, and program initiatives (Institute of Medicine [IOM], National Research Council [NRC], & Committee on Assessing Integrity in Research Environments [CAIRE], 2002). Processes take place within a school through operation of policies, procedures, mission statements, instructional strategies, and organizations that examine inputs (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002; Owens & Valesky, 2015). Outputs of the system can be viewed in state assessment results, grade promotion, teacher's advocacy for the school, student ability to problem solve, teacher's job satisfaction, and students prepared for further education (King & Frick, 1999; IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002; Lewis, 2005; Owens & Valesky, 2015).

Feedback can often be viewed as input resulting from the output of the system (Senge, 2006; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). This could be positive or negative feedback on the processes or outputs from the system (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). This lens can provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers and administrators in a school through examining the interactions in this system (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Understanding how the individual perceives and acts in a system that has been strongly influenced by high-stakes accountability standards and requirements

can elucidate how individuals within the system respond when legislation provides more flexibility to meet and assess student needs.

Procedures

Methods

This case study will use a constructivist paradigm to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of teachers and administrators involved in the gifted program in the studied school on how the high-stakes testing and the high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching and learning experiences offered in the gifted environment (Crotty, 1998/2003; Patton, 2002). The case under study will involve one school in one urban district in a Midwestern state that employs 47 teachers and one administrator that serve gifted students. Teachers between the third and fifth grades, along with the administrator of the building, were chosen as the purposeful sample due to the fact that it is between these grades that state testing occurs in elementary school. These teachers were familiar with the goals of the school in regards to state testing and the resources used to accomplish proficiency among the student body. Data were collected through interviews with teachers and one administrator. Observations of teachers and document analysis data were collected. Additional information regarding each of these data collection strategies is explained further in Chapter III. Triangulation from multiple data points was used to provide trustworthiness of findings in the study.

Reflexivity

As with most qualitative research, the researcher plays a part in the study as the key instrument of the study. The examination and collection of interviews, observations, and documents all center on the judgment and diligence of the researcher (Patton, 2002).

It is the researcher's responsibility to report the phenomenon as it occurs within the constraints of the study without bias to taint the findings (Patton, 2002). In this process, the researcher must not shut out their own experiences but instead must use reflection and the insights gained in conjunction with the collection of data to render a fair interpretation through rigorous triangulation of the information (Patton, 2002).

The interpretation of the gathered information will have limitations based on the researcher's own potential biases. I have worked in Title I schools for the past 16 years and have been a part of establishing honors programs. I have also given standardized tests and identified students for gifted programs. This closeness allows for a better understanding of the issues involved; however, it could also lead to biased assumptions while interpreting and analyzing the data collected (Peshkin, 1988). I am aware of the personal frustrations I have had with the resources allocated to honors programs. Understanding and actively identifying any possible subjectivity in this regard will allow me to place this subjectivity in its proper place (Peshkin, 1988) so that the voices of the participants, rather than my own, are represented in the findings of the study.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research centers on the credibility the researcher conveys to the audience (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011; Patton, 2002). The methods to convey trustworthiness and dependability used in this study included peer debriefing, and triangulation. Peer debriefings required a trusted colleague familiar with qualitative research to take an active role in reviewing and providing feedback on data to the researcher in an ongoing basis (Creswell, 2009; Gay et al., 2011). Triangulation allows for multiple sources of data to create a contextual depiction of the phenomenon while

providing a method to cross-check consistency across data (Creswell, 2009; Gay et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). The themes that emerge from multiple data sources add to the trustworthiness of the study (Patton, 2002).

Assumptions

1. It is assumed the teacher and administrator participants will be forthright during interviews and observations.
2. It is assumed no data entry errors will occur while coding or transcribing data.

Significance

Research

This study contributes to the much larger body of literature on gifted and talented education. Scant literature could be found that captures teachers' and an administrator's perspectives about their influence in gifted and talented learning experiences under a high-stakes policy environment. In prior research, students in gifted programs have expressed encountering low rigor and inflexibility in gifted curriculums (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg et al., 2007; Rawlins, 2004; Vanderbrook, 2006). Additionally, findings indicated difficulties in providing the resources to gifted programs in order to address student needs, teacher training, or engaging curriculum that meet the demands of a program under a high-stakes policy environment (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Gallagher, 2015; Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Kyburg et al., 2007; Vanderbrook, 2006; Yeung, 2014). Situating this investigation of teachers and administrator perceptions alongside the prior student research can build a wider view of

experiences within this environment. This research has the potential to expose a deeper understanding of the perceptions of educators of gifted students.

Theory

Through use of the constructivist lens, understanding how teachers work with the established conventions of their school in a high-stakes environment can reveal a deeper meaning of this environment (Crotty, 1998/2003). The way teachers and administrators make sense of the current reality is valuable in understanding how they view the learning experiences they can provide to these students within the current constructs of gifted education under a high-stakes environment. Specifically, utilizing the lens of systems theory to uncover these individual realities can reveal the struggles of teachers and administrators in the gifted environment even when changes have been made in legislation to allow enhanced flexibility. The systems theory lens reveals connections between the teacher and the high-stakes environment they are working under in these programs.

Practice

A more encompassing understanding of the gifted and talented environment can influence how schools can best develop supports for gifted teachers and students. Although results from this study are not generalizable, the close examination this study provides can reveal how high-stakes climate in this school influences the learning experiences of gifted student and how these teachers work under these influences. These findings may be transferrable to schools with similar contexts and demographics. Furthermore, this study can have the effect of informing the practices at this site in regards to professional development, funding utilization, and teacher practice. How

teachers and administrators perceive the current high-stakes policy environment influences on the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low performing school engaged in academic improvement, can provide insight that informs future attempts to improve education.

Definition of Terms

Acceleration: “Acceleration is an intervention that moves students through an educational program at rates faster, or at younger ages, than typical” (Colangelo, Assouline, and Gross, 2004, p. xi).

Enrichment in the classroom: Enrichment is a common strategy used with gifted students that focuses on providing additional academic stimulus for gifted students which can be embedded in mixed ability classrooms (Colangelo et al., 2004; Renzulli & Reis, 2002; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007).

Limitations

As with all qualitative research, this study is limited in the ability to generalize the findings. The research is further limited by examination of only primary teachers and an administrator who worked with gifted programs. Interviews were carefully transcribed in order to provide the information necessary for subjective use of the findings. Interviews can potentially be limited by the bias of the researcher along with the teacher interviewee’s own emotional state at the time of the interview, which can cause them to answer in ways for purely personal reasons not related to this study (Patton, 2002). This is why additional data points would be taken. Observations made can be limited due to the fact they observe only what can be seen in actions of the teachers and administrators (Patton, 2002). Yet, observations taken in context of interviews can minimize the

limitations of each. Additionally, the examination of documentation used in this study have limitations centered on how well the records were maintained prior to and during the research (Patton, 2002). Considering these factors, the best strategy to move past these limitations is triangulation of data so no one piece of data is used to tell the whole story (Patton, 2002).

The qualitative nature of this study limits the generalizability, and therefore the goal of the study is not generalizability of findings. However, the population to which the study would have the most transferability would be public elementary school teachers and administrators, in schools with similar contexts and demographics, under a high-stakes environment, who are engaged in gifted and talented activities.

Summary

This study comprises five chapters. Chapter I is organized with subsections including an introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of study, research questions, definition of terms, significance of the study, and limitations. Additionally, a summary of the epistemology of constructivist is used to focus the understanding of the information obtained through the use of the case study method. This chapter also provides an overview of systems theory and its key elements the theoretical framework.

Chapter II provides a summary of the literature that provides a thorough understanding of the topic under focus. The topics in the literature that will be concentrated on are: history of gifted, current state of gifted, systems theory, identification processes, gifted curriculum and instruction, and gifted teachers' connections with students. The review of literature will bring to focus and speculate why some gifted programs have been successful under NCLB and some have not.

Chapter III provides an explanation of the methods that used in the study, including research design, participants, instrumentation, research procedures, data analysis, assumptions of the study, limitations of the study, and summary. Detailed information is provided for all topics, including participants, in which the sample population and sample method are considered. Assumptions of the study will also include a description of trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethical considerations.

Chapter IV presents the research findings. The data collected from interviews, observations, and documents are presented with full qualitative detail needed for the case study.

Chapter V is the final chapter in the study and, as such, will include summary, conclusions, discussion, and suggestions for the future research. Additionally, implications to practice, research, and theory are thoroughly discussed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to explore teacher and administrator perceptions regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low performing school engaged in academic improvement. During intense review of the literature on gifted and talented students, several themes emerged as reoccurring patterns. This section will cover the literature review themes. The themes contained in this section are: history of gifted and talented, giftedness in schools, and theoretical framework.

History of Gifted and Talented

In 1916, Lewis Terman (1916) published a revision of Binet-Simon intelligence scale. He used Intelligence Quotient (IQ) in much of his work with gifted student identification including his longitudinal study of gifted students (Jolly, 2008). The longitudinal study was one of the first centered on gifted students focused on “to what degree the gifted child varied from the average child of ‘normal intelligence’” (Jolly, 2008, p. 28; Owens, 2013). Terman’s belief that differentiated curriculum was needed to meet the needs of gifted students still echoes in the discussion of gifted curriculums, furthermore, his work to understand who the gifted student was and how they matured in

society lead to advancements in the study of gifted students along with the use of longitudinal data (Jolly, 2005, 2008).

Hollingsworth, a colleague of Terman, worked with Terman on studies including longitudinal studies with gifted students, but unlike Terman, Hollingsworth believed nurture or environment played a role in gifted development (Hollingsworth, 1926; Jolly, 2005, 2008). Throughout Hollingsworth's career, Hollingsworth's "research interest were broad—ranging from curricular issues to the physical traits of gifted students" (Jolly, 2007, p. 57). Hollingsworth developed one of the first textbooks on gifted and talented students furthering curriculum for gifted education (Hollingsworth, 1926; Jolly, 2005, 2007). Hollingsworth was a focused and driven observer who understood the value of observation as she stated, "in order finally to clear away the uncertainties, and to gain information which would serve as a secure basis for action, as in education, it is necessary to observe gifted persons directly and to know them in childhood" (Hollingsworth, 1926, p. 16). Hollingsworth's research led to a better understanding of curricular design focused on meeting the needs of gifted students, which themselves demonstrate a range of curriculum needs (Jolly, 2007).

In 1957, the launch of Sputnik so unnerved the American people with the thought that Soviet understanding of science and math may be head of the United States, action had to be taken (Branscome, 2012; Flattau et al., 2006; Mehlinger, 1982; National Defense Education Act, 1958; Wissehr, Concannon, & Barrow, 2011). The action was clear, as indicated in the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958: "The Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the Nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women"

(p. 1581). NDEA brought a new focus of improvement to education in the math and sciences (Flattau et al., 2006; Mehlinger, 1982; NDEA, 1958; Wissehr et al., 2011). This focus included opportunities for gifted students to advance with improved courses and resources not previously provided in most public schools (Flattau et al., 2006; Mehlinger, 1982; NDEA, 1958). The NDEA (1958) further advanced gifted education by funding a program of identification for gifted students:

A program of testing students in public secondary schools, and if authorized by law in other secondary schools, of such State to identify students with outstanding aptitudes and ability, and the means of testing which will be utilized in carrying out such program... (p. 1592)

The NDEA (1958) was set up to give a boost to education. The Act lasted for a short time but had a lasting effect on the federal government's involvement in public education (IDA, 2006; Mehlinger, 1982, NDEA, 1958):

The Congress reaffirms the principle and declares that the States and local communities have and must retain control over and primary responsibility for public education. The national interest requires, *however* [emphasis added], that the Federal Government give assistance to education for programs which are important to our defense. (NDEA, 1958, p. 1581)

Following NDEA (1958) was a series of reports and legislation that sought to examine concerns with student outcomes in public education and make improvements to further student academic success (ESSA, 2015; NCEE, 1983; NCLB, 2001). However, the focus on gifted education has been limited and lacks concerted effort in comparison to other student groups (Gallagher, 2015). *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) emphasized a push to

improve the education of all students as a national imperative. It was articulated and reiterated throughout the report with strong language: “We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry” (NCEE, 1983, p. 32).

The report further pressed for specific improvements for gifted students:

Attention must be directed to both the nature of the content available and to the needs of particular learners. The most gifted students, for example, may need a curriculum enriched and accelerated beyond even the needs of other students of high ability. (NCEE, 1983, p. 32)

However, little motivation for change endured (Gallagher, 2015).

In 2001, NCLB set a standard of improvement and accountability; however, the primary focus of funding and management was on low performing students. Within hundreds of pages of NCLB (2001) four were focused on gifted and talented students’ subpart. It is in this subpart that the Javits Act was embedded, but the focus on gifted students in NCLB was more limiting than its newest iteration in ESSA (2015). Embedded in ESSA (2015) was the reauthorization of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program. This subpart focuses specifically on gifted and talented students, but most notably, within ESSA, funds are given more flexibility to be used for gifted and talented students (ESSA, 2015).

Coming out 4 years after NCLB, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students* a report that took a look at gifted research within schools in the United States and focused on the practice of acceleration (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross 2004). It developed a persuasive argument for the use of acceleration with gifted

students, emphasizing “acceleration is critical to the vast majority of academically gifted children who will not have the means to find alternatives” (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. xi). However, the use of extensive research in the report does identify inconsistencies between research with acceleration and practice with gifted students (Colangelo et al., 2004). *A Nation Deceived* was another report that again focused attention on gifted education reiterating an imperative for improvement “in every state, in every school, in huge cities, and in tiny farm communities, students are ready for much more challenge than the system provides” (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 1). From NDEA (1958) to ESSA (2015), the federal government has attempted legislation to further improve and develop education in the United States each time with small increases to support gifted students between long periods of inaction (ESSA, 2015; Gallagher, 2015; NCLB, 2001). Every few years another piece of legislation is passed, it brings with it another set of accountability standards for improvement of the lowest performing students and little sustainable focus on gifted students (ESSA, 2015; Gallagher, 2015; NCLB, 2001).

Giftedness in Schools

Gifted and talented programs must establish a valid curriculum that meets the needs of diverse learners and engages their abilities (Gallagher, 2015). Many of the accelerated curriculums for gifted students are very structured in nature and can act as a measure that filters out some students due to the disapproval of students for one size fit all curriculums (Briggs et al., 2008; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg et al., 2007). Furthermore, the volatile nature of funding for gifted education along with layers of political policy from the local level up to the federal level, makes sustained curriculum that is focused on gifted advancement difficult (Gallagher, 2015). It is important that

curriculum and gifted education legislation meet the needs and goals of the gifted students it is designed to support (Gallagher, 2015).

Enrichment

Enrichment is a common strategy used with gifted students that focuses on providing additional academic stimulus for gifted students which can be embedded in mixed ability classrooms (Colangelo et al., 2004; Renzulli & Reis, 2002; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). The Renzulli Enrichment Triad Model (1976) model is a well-known enrichment model that includes three levels of enrichment and has been in use for decades (Renzulli, 1976, 1977; Renzulli & Reis, 2002; Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010; VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). This model centers on providing enriched individual academic experiences for gifted students that adjust depending on their ability through levels of enrichment (Renzulli, 1976, 1977; Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010). At the lowest level enrichment searches for a student's interest and at the highest level students would be focused on the creation of original work on a specific subject (Renzulli, 1976; Renzulli, 1977; Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010). This type of enrichment system also allows for deeper understanding of individualized content and associated skills as opposed to the sole use of an acceleration strategy (Renzulli, 1976, 1977; Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010). However, both enrichment and acceleration have a place in gifted curriculum by providing different opportunities in learning styles and ability (Renzulli & Reis, 2002; Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010). Acceleration strategies are most often used at the secondary level focusing on an increased pace of curricular content separate from lower ability students often through the use of specialized classes (Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2014; Callahan, Moon, & Oh, 2017; Colangelo et al., 2004; Renzulli, 1976). In the most recent

iteration of the Enrichment Triad Model known as the Schoolwide Enrichment Model both enrichment and acceleration strategies were included in order to build on all types of learning styles (Renzulli & Reis, 2002; Renzulli & Renzulli, 2010).

Teacher Quality

There are a myriad of regulations regarding who can teach gifted students, yet very little financial or resource support are provided from the different levels of government (Gallagher, 2015) to support needed training. Even if the support existed, teacher preparation for gifted programs must be more focused and dedicated at the university level (Gallagher, 2015). Additionally, difficulties in evaluating teachers on student gains in gifted programs becomes difficult due to the specific set of students they work with and the already high ability the students possess (Welsh, 2011). Furthermore, classrooms in which teacher quality was in question contributed to student disinterest (Vanderbrook, 2006).

Gifted Teachers' Connections With Students

The educational climate in the United States has continued to increase the focus on achievement and improvement of underachieving students (Fisher & Frey, 2012; No Child Left Behind, 2001). Gifted and talented programs have developed to provide support to those students achieving at higher levels (Briggs et al., 2008; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Many of these students enroll in gifted and talented or advanced classes with the expectation of working with the best teachers (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Rawlins, 2004). These students have expressed the desire to be challenged with creative higher order thinking curriculums, wanting both guidance and a partnership with the teacher (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008;

Vanderbrook, 2006). Studies have shown that gifted students become more engaged in the classes if they believe the teacher respects their opinion and interacts with them as more of an equal, in regards to the content (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Scager, Akkerman, Pilot & Wubbels, 2013; Vanderbrook, 2006).

Students entering gifted classes have expressed an understanding of the increased workload that goes along with many of the gifted classes (Rawlins, 2004). These students have reported a perception of higher expectations placed on them by teachers in the gifted classes, and the students have reported a willingness to work towards those expectations (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Rawlins, 2004; Scager et al., 2013). Studies have noted a willingness on the part of the student to accept work in gifted classes as valuable centers on the student's belief in the ability of the teacher (Gentry, Steenbergen- Hu, & Choi, 2011; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Vanderbrook, 2006). In some cases, students believe in the quality of the gifted teachers, these students have stated the quality of a teacher can be seen when the teacher shows excitement for their subject and provides a well-prepared, engaging lesson (Briggs et al., 2008; Gentry et al., 2011; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008, Kyburg et al., 2007; Rawlins, 2004; Vanderbrook, 2006). However, this was not a consistent student perception of advanced teachers (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Vanderbrook, 2006). In some studies, students expressed that teachers in gifted classes did not come prepared to provide engaging lessons (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Vanderbrook, 2006). Students quickly lost faith in teachers who did not seem to have the skills to advance students at the higher levels they expected (Vanderbrook, 2006). The students became frustrated doing work they felt was too easy, or a waste of time they could have used to gain a deeper understanding of

content (Vanderbrook, 2006). Fisher and Frey (2012) reported these students felt the teacher should take the lead in making students feel a part of learning and keeping them motivated to learn.

Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008) note that the teacher teaching the course can make a difference in how the class engages in learning beyond what is found in non-gifted courses. It is obvious students in gifted classes communicate among themselves in regards to the quality of teachers (Scager et al., 2013). Teachers who lack knowledge of their content or are unprepared to provide work for gifted students at the higher levels they desire invoke a level of resistance from students that borders on anger (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Scager et al., 2013). Teachers of advanced courses can provide great support or become barriers to students (Seeley, 2004; Vanderbrook, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Background to Systems Theory

To understand systems theory and its implications on organizational theory an examination of predominant theories prior to systems theory must first be performed to understand the void it fills in organizational theory. Previous to systems theory, the industrial revolution had brought an ever increasing focus on efficiency and the specific steps or parts of production (Owens & Valesky, 2015). This type of thinking focused on the one best way to increase efficiency by increasing the efficiency of each segment of production (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Frederick Taylor, the developer of scientific management, held the following four aspects of management: (a) scientific way of deciding how work should be done, (b) scientifically matching workers to the job they are to perform, (c) management and workers are assigned different task, and (d)

managers complete their task and workers complete tasks assigned to them (Owens & Valesky, 2015). In this model focus is directed to efficacy of each part of production and a hierarchical top-down approach to organizational leadership that reduces an organizations' relationships to a chain of command structure (Owens & Valesky, 2015). The pervasive influence of this organizational structure can still be seen in school districts struggling with issues of school reform (Owens & Valesky, 2015).

Max Weber's ideas about bureaucratic theory expanded on ideas of efficacy through improvement of the parts (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Weber believed the ideal bureaucracy should be the perfect most efficient organization because it limited human mistakes and isolated decision making to a limited number of highly specialized individuals (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Bureaucracy's utmost goal is to make the best decisions in the most efficient way by allowing specialists to make decisions suited to their skills and without emotional distraction (Owens & Valesky, 2015). However, the reality of organizational interactions makes this model's ideal state difficult to attain (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Both the scientific model and bureaucratic model focus very little on the value of interactions within an organizational system or between the individual and the system which leaves a void in the understanding of organization systems.

It is within this context of organizational theories that Biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy designed what he called general systems theory. Early in his career he demonstrated an interest in using diverse scientific fields in his work addition with a focus to combine ideas that would allow analyzing of phenomenon throughout different fields of research (Caws, 2015; Drack, 2009; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). During the

time of post-World War I era, both the world of physics and biology were in a state of fluctuation which developed into a debate of mechanicism and vitalism (Drack, 2009). In this debate, mechanicism can be defined as "...any entity [that] can be analyzed in parts whose properties can be studied in isolation from the other ones" (Drack, 2009, p. 564), at which point the whole could be understood through the sum of its parts (Drack, 2009). Vitalism's meaning suggests a biological organism is embodied by a phenomenon that provides it with a characteristic different than non-living things therefore; the organism is greater than the sum of its parts (Drack, 2009; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). This was the debate in which von Bertalanffy was wading into and the spur to drive him forward (Drack, 2009). It was his goal to develop some set of laws for the wholeness of life (Drack, 2009; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). He argued that although reducing an organism into its parts and describing it in terms of chemistry had met with success, it had difficulty describing the complex chemical organizations of the whole organism and how they interact with the whole organism (von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008).

von Bertalanffy (1950/2008) stated:

... We come to the conclusion that it is not possible to state exact laws for the basic biological phenomena, such as self-regulation in metabolism, growth, morphogenesis, behavior, etc., because they are much too complicated to allow a thorough understanding and an analysis of all the processes involved. (p. 140)

Additionally, he applied this same difficulty of using physical chemistry to the understanding of sociological phenomena due to the intricacy of variables at work (von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). Von Bertalanffy's view was to examine the interconnections of the entire system of the organism or the relationships between the parts that organize into

the whole system (Drack, 2009; Owens & Valesky, 2015; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). The systems theory he designed did indeed span multiple disciplines including the social sciences. The idea of examining the interconnections of the whole system to understand the system filled the void left by previous organizational theories and has since developed into multiple different specialized branches (Owens & Valesky, 2015).

Explanation of Theory

A system is “a set of connected things or parts forming a complex whole...” (New Oxford America Dictionary, 2010, para. 1). Whereas scientific management and bureaucratic theory looked at the pieces that created the whole, systems theory seeks to understand the cause and effect of interactions between people and the system with which they interact (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Systems theory understood in its simplest form could be described as a system where there is input into it, process within it, output from the system, and feedback to the system as input (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; Owens & Valesky, 2015). Organizational theory seeks to understand the “perspectives that may be used in thinking about organizations” (Owens & Valesky, 2015, p. 2). Systems theory placed in this perspective is used to develop an understanding of an organization that elucidates the relationship of people in the system of the organization (Owens & Valesky, 2015). To understand systems theory’s place in organizational theory, several key characteristics must be reviewed. Systems exist as either open or closed systems in which the closed system does not exchange material with the environment (Caws, 2015, Drack, 2009; Owens & Valesky, 2015; Von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008; Zelichenko, Pozdeeva, & Voitekhovskava, 2016). A closed system will not allow any materials into or out of the system, and, therefore, it will try to establish a condition in which the system’s entropy is

maximized and stable (von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008; Zelichenko et al., 2016). However, this level of entropy will collapse the system due to the increased levels of entropy (von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008; Zelichenko et al., 2016). An open system has a permeable barrier that can continuously trade material between the interior environment and exterior environment while having the ability to maintain a steady state within the system (Caws, 2015; Bausch, 2002; Drack, 2009; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). This stable and permeable state of the open system is the norm for living organisms and organizations (Owens & Valesky, 2015; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008; Zelichenko et al., 2016).

In an open system, the dynamic exchange through the permeable structures of the system allows entropy to decrease as the system levels into a steady state (Drack, 2009; Owens & Valesky, 2015; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). Although a closed system receives no inputs and provides no outputs, an open system is influenced by each, which in turn affects the operation of the system's internal functioning (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002; Owens & Valesky, 2015; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). This dynamic interchange works with the system to provide a steady state through its ability to persistently maintain and react to a flow of inputs and outputs to the system (von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008).

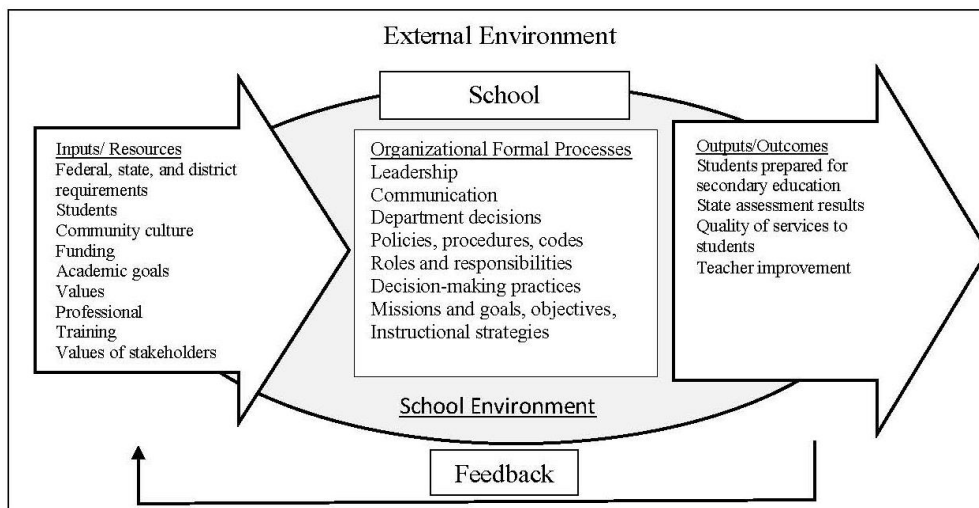
Zelichenko et al. (2016) described this process of a steady state:

...Entropy does not increase despite the irreversible processes taking place in the system. Such a situation becomes possible due to the system's interaction with the environment. The processes inside the system cause the entropy to increase; on the other hand, in the course of exchange a negative entropy or negentropy is developed, which may slow down an overall increase in entropy or even stop it....
(p. 1366)

Through the use of inputs and outputs, the open system is able to maintain a steady state, thereby allowing the system to adapt to the environment (Owens & Valesky, 2015). The use of outputs as inputs is often referred to as a feedback loop (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002; Owens & Valesky, 2015). Primarily, feedback to the system provides the information that allows the system to make adjustments and remain in a steady state (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Furthermore, it should be noted that any open system with poor ability to adjust to the feedback to maintain a steady state will ultimately decline into entropy (Owens & Valesky, 2015). All of the inputs ultimately affect and engage with the system in the process of changing the inputs desired output (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002). Knowing the differences in the systems and the key characteristics can help to understand and analyze the systems model in the structure of an organization (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Description of an Open System of a School



Note. This model demonstrates the systems cycle and the relationships between the external environment delivering inputs to the school environment, the processes within

the school, and the outputs created by the school (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002). The system is connected by the feedback loop of returning outcomes from the external environment back to the internal environment of the system (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002). Adapted from “Integrity in Scientific Research: Creating an Environment that Promotes Responsible Conduct,” by Institute of Medicine, National Research Council, & Committee on Assessing Integrity in Research Environments, 2002, Washington DC: National Academies Press.

Use of Theory

The use of systematic approach in gifted education was examined by Ziegler and Phillipson (2012) by looking at gifted and talented programming from the view of the whole system down to the individuals and the role of interaction within the environment. An examination of the current state of gifted education reveals it is often focused on the parts of the gifted whole instead of examining the relation of connections of the parts that make the gifted whole (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012). Specifically, the current system separates the gifted student from the environment they are a part of in order to examine the parts of giftedness (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012). Breaking down giftedness into separate gifted components and applying general strategies is not effective in supporting the individual learner (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012). Ziegler and Phillipson (2012) stated, “The continual expansion of a person’s action repertoire depends on the interactions of their goals, subjective action space and environment” (p. 27). There should be a focus on development of learning environments that are specific to the students and their interactions with the environment (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012). In other words, a single part of an individual cannot be focused on since the part has an effect on the whole, but

instead, a holistic approach must be maintained for talent improvement to be obtained (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012). This holistic approach should include but not be limited to “appropriate learning sociotopes, instructions and feedback” (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012, p. 26).

The systems approach was used by Gallagher (2015) in examining the framework of policy and regulations and the interactions from federal level down to the effect in the classroom. Gallagher (2015) used the comparison of similarities and differences between special education policies and gifted programs’ policies to make a case for future improvements of gifted programs. The report first looked at national goals of gifted programming then examined the interactions with funding at the federal level down to the local level (Gallagher, 2015). Gallagher (2015) called for the different groups effected by policy to work together to create an environment that sustains a system focused on providing the holistic supports necessary to serve students in gifted programs. The gifted education system is not isolated to the classroom, what is done at the local, college; state, and federal level affect who receives resources and how those are delivered to the gifted student (Gallagher, 2015). The classroom and local level are connected to the state for additional funds as well as the college to train suitable teachers to meet gifted students’ needs (Gallagher, 2015). Both funds and manpower are connected to the output of a better preparation of gifted students by the school (Gallagher, 2015). This level of interconnectedness should facilitate the varying levels of the gifted system to work together to create a more focused educational experience for all gifted students (Gallagher, 2015).

Systems theory has been used to examine the individual's place within the system to gain a better understanding of the whole system. King and Frick (1999) looked at the output of students as they left school and their capabilities to be productive professionals, able to work as a team, and as individuals with the skills necessary to solve problems they face and the failure of traditional schools in this regard. The use of a general systems thinking perspective was used to provide insight to reform, redesign classrooms, and redesign schools, thereby allowing schools to meet the needs of individuals (King & Frick, 1999). King and Frick (1999) compared the interaction of traditional setting, Montessori classroom and museum school by using systems thinking to examine the linkages, and connections between the learner, teacher, classroom, school, and personal learning goals. This included the classroom system guiding how students were provided learning activities, either as a teacher lead group or more independently and self-guided (King & Frick, 1999). It was found that school systems should allow for a diversity of learners and be able to adapt to the learners' needs in a dynamic way such that the learner plays a key role in their education (King & Frick, 1999). Understanding the interactions between the learner, classroom, school, and personal learning goals provides the setting for a more complete learning system (King & Frick, 1999). This includes a process of examining what the inputs and outputs to the system are along with the final outcome of the classroom or program (King & Frick, 1999). This examination process through the lens of systems theory can lead to a more focused program that allows for the full enrichment of students (King & Frick, 1999).

Bryan, Klein and Elias (2007) used open systems theory to examine emotional learning programs in urban schools. Bryan et al. (2007) posed the following view:

Schools and organizations function more like complicated, living systems than neat and compartmentalized units. Often, success experienced on one level (an exemplary school or schools) can be blocked by inadequate mechanisms for resource sharing and coordination at the district level. (p. 387)

At a district level all levels of the system have to work together in order to build upon the lower levels, experiences (Bryan et al., 2007). The study examined the issues in developing a systems integrated program, such as social emotional learning needed to improve the success of all students (Bryan et al., 2007).

By implementing a district-wide program, the study looked at the ties between classrooms, curriculum, and different levels of schools throughout the district using the lens of systems theory (Bryan et al., 2007). Additionally, the open systems nature of the school district meant input pressure from the external environment could manifest in such a way that any new program may implement under pressure from the state and the federal requirements (Bryan et al., 2007). The integration of a program or initiatives into a system requires sustained efforts from all levels of the system, this allows connections to the program despite fluctuations in the classroom, management, or school district, in order to create sustainable outcomes (Bryan et al., 2007).

The aforementioned studies are representations of gifted systems' views either focusing on the examination of the individual or the greater view of the systems' infrastructure from the local level to the national level. Bryan et al. (2007) embedded systems theory to look at problems across the whole organization in examining emotional learning programs. This in conjunction with Gallagher (2015) shows how gifted education as a whole must be viewed as an interconnecting system in which a teacher and

administrator may have to bear the burden of both developing a program and working under the inputs of high-stakes testing (Bryan et al., 2007).

This proposed case study aims to fill the void in gifted education work by taking a closer examination of a gifted and talented teacher and administrator perspectives in one school of one district. Examining and comparing the perceptions of gifted teachers and administrators within the perspective of prior research at the national level allows a clearer examination of the system to come to light. System theory provides the approach to understanding the inner relationships of connections within the school as a system (Owens & Valesky, 2015). The school as an organization is an open system allowing it to fit securely within a systems framework, which will be used to analyze the study (Owens & Valesky, 2015; Zelichenko et al., 2016).

Although studies like Gallagher (2015) demonstrated the connections from the local level to the federal and how they all interacted to affect the site based gifted program, Bryan et al. (2007) reminds us, “consistent with open systems theory, schools are just as susceptible to the effects of state and federal mandates as they are to local, community-based phenomena” (p. 389). This study will focus on the system in a school and what influences the learning experiences provided by gifted teachers. King and Frick (1999) examined introducing and fostering a new program into an urban school from which lessons can be examined, such as, the need for all levels of a system to communicate and work together in order to provide for a successful program. This study will concentrate on the existing gifted program in a school and the connections extending out from the teacher and administrator in the system. Several inputs will be analyzed through the lens of systems thinking. Funding such as Title I can be the largest funding a

school receives. How this input is processed through decision making and policies within the school to influence the resources provided to the gifted classroom is one thread that connects levels of the school's system. The understanding of these connections between different levels of the system and how they interact has been found to be necessary in the design of a new program (Bryan et al., 2007). Although the gifted program studied is not new, the connections should still be included as part of the system. Additionally, benchmarks and values of staff enter as inputs, the relationship they have as they interconnect in the internal process of the school under policies, decision making, mission statements, and ultimately how they connect to the gifted teachers and administrators; is of key interest to this study and can be elucidated by systems theory.

The systems theory also provides a structure for examining the outputs from the system, such as results on high-stakes testing, quality and quantity of services provided to students, and student preparation for further education. King and Frick (1999) point out that each day, when students leave for home, they become an output from the classroom level of the system, ultimately becoming an output upon leaving that grade-level or school. This ties the connection of classroom level to the teacher, school level to the administrator, and all as one system (King & Frick, 1999). Looking at how gifted teachers' connections relate to this output and its subsequent return to the system from the external environment provides for a complete understanding of the system that influences experiences gifted teachers can provide. This theory can provide a lens to clearly view how the resources in the system are delegated and why (Owens & Valesky, 2015). A systems approach can provide a deeper understanding of the successes and

failures experienced by teachers and administrators in a school through examining the human interactions in this system (Owens & Valesky, 2015).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to explore teacher and administrator perceptions regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low-performing school engaged in academic improvement.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

Overarching Question: From a systems perspective, what are the perceptions, in this school, of teachers and administrators involved in a gifted program of the influence of high-stakes accountability on the learning experiences of gifted and talented students?

1. How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive the processes that support learning for gifted students in this school?
2. What are teachers' and an administrator's perceptions of the resources or inputs provided for the education of gifted students in this school?
3. How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive their outputs, under the high-stakes environment in this school?
4. How is feedback utilized regarding the teaching and learning of gifted

students utilized in this school?

Qualitative Paradigm

This qualitative case study utilizes a constructivist epistemology. The constructivist viewpoint directs the study to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). This paradigm “describes the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them” (Crotty, 1998/2003, p.79). To understand teacher and administrator perceptions regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low-performing school engaged in academic improvement in this specific experience. The constructivist approach will allow for different participants to describe their experiences within the high-stakes environment and examine for the meaning held within each individual experience (Crotty, 1998/2003).

Methods

Introduction

This section contains a description of the research design, reflexivity, data sources, data collection, data analysis, researcher’s role, and ethical consideration, along with a section summary. A case study was selected for “...what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33).

Research Design

This case study sought to use a constructivist paradigm to gain a better understanding of teachers’ and one administrator’s perceptions regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the learning experiences of gifted and talented students within a low-performing school engaged in academic improvement.

The constructivist paradigm allowed the researcher to appreciate the participant's individual understanding of experience within the case study (Crotty, 1998/2003). The case study under examination allowed the researcher "to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The case identified for this study provided the opportunity for the researcher to investigate the perceptions of teachers and one administrator working within a gifted and talented program in a school.

Reflexivity

The ongoing process of examination and interpretation regarding all aspects of the study including data, participants, limitations, the researcher's own values and perceptions, along with the effect researchers' actions can have on the study is reflexivity (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). As an educator for the past 21 years, I have worked exclusively in Title I schools. I have experienced personal frustrations in developing honors courses in Title I schools. In these schools, a teacher's time is often limited, and using this time to work on the honors curriculum instead of remediation is not always welcomed. As a proponent of meaningful honors programs, this has undoubtedly influenced my perceptions of honors programs in Title I schools. I cannot eliminate these past experiences from my knowledge; however, through the ongoing process of reflexivity, I can draw valuable insights and mitigate threats to subjectivity by listening to the voices of participants (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Peshkin, 1998).

Data Sources

Population

The district selected for this study was chosen because of both size and access. It is an urban district and is also the second largest district in the state. This district has many schools that are receiving federal money for academic improvement. The district receives additional funding from the state for gifted education each year. The school selected for this study has a gifted and talented program directed by the district and established by the principal over an 8-year period. Both the district and the site have been given pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality.

District Demographics

The North Central Public School district (NCPS) [a pseudonym], was selected for this study. The school district is in a north central location in the state and makes up the state's second largest urban school district.

Approximately 17.3% of the surrounding community is below poverty with the average income at \$24,445 and approximately 90.4% of the students eligible for free and reduced lunch (District Website, 2015). Additionally, there are approximately 90.3% of students eligible to receive additional services and materials through Title I funding in the district (District Website, 2020). During the 2019-2020 school year the district went through a restructuring of schools reducing the number of elementary schools from 55 to 33. It increased middle schools from 11 to 13, decreased high schools from 10 to 8, and increased various alternative or charter schools from 16 to 23 (District Website, 2015, 2020). The goal of the restructuring was to provide more instructional benefits to all students (District Website, 2021c). The district receives federal money through Title I,

but it also receives state funds for gifted and talented students amounting to \$1.8 million according to the district CFO (personal communication, August 29, 2016). There are 35,873 students in the school district, with 15,090 students identified as bilingual, 5,479 identified as special education students, and 1,473 students who are listed as homeless (District Website, 2015, 2020). The average teacher experience in the district is 11 years (District Website, 2020). The demographic breakdown of students by race is 56% Hispanic, 20% Black, 14.9% White, 2.6% American Indian, 1.9% Asian, and 5.9% other (District Website, 2020). These statistics indicate a minority majority in this urban school district.

Site Demographics

Southwest Elementary school is a high poverty school with a 97.3% economically disadvantaged and 6.9% homeless student population (District Website, 2020). Southwest Elementary was established in 1953 and has gone through several renovations and improvements with the most recent in 2013. The school supports 642 students of which 76.3% are Hispanic, 10.5% are White, 5.9% Black, and 7.3% other (District Website, 2020). The school has experienced a recent drop in students identified as gifted due in part to an enrollment decrease. This was because of the current pandemic, which limited gifted identification for a year in the district. Currently, 3.6% of the students are identified as gifted students. The school currently supports 39 staff members who have a 17.9% minority makeup and demonstrate a 96.6% attendance rate, with the average number of years of experience at 8.7 years (District Website, 2020). The difference in minority rates between students and staff in this school is 71.6% (District Website, 2020).

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to select five teachers and one administrator from this one Title I public elementary school designated by the state for schoolwide academic improvement. The use of “purposeful sampling involves studying information-rich cases in depth and detail to understand and illuminate important cases rather than generalizing from a sample to a population...” (Patton, 2002, p. 563). The administrator of this school is the only elementary administrator in the district with over 600 students who has been at the same building for over 5 years. This gives the principal a unique perspective to speak to the influence of high-stakes accountability in this school. In this study, teachers with experience teaching gifted and talented students were selected as potential participants. Teachers who teach only accelerated pull-out classes were not included in this study. Participants included in this study were two third-grade teachers, one fourth-grade teacher, one remediation teacher, one English language (EL) teacher, and one administrator. The remediation teacher had also served as one of the third-grade teachers during the 1st quarter of the school year. This selection of varied participants captures the different viewpoints that can speak to the case under examination. An email was sent to the staff seeking volunteers to participate in the study. Seven teachers responded with interest in being participants. One teacher later declined and one did not meet requirements. Southwest Elementary had one principal, one assistant principal, and one administrative intern. Both the assistant principal and the administrative intern declined to participate. Teacher and administrator consent was obtained and participants were reassured they could exit the study at any time.

Data Collection

Data collected for the study included information from interviews, observations, and documents including district and State Department of Education online documents. The review of these multiple points of data sources allows for triangulation of sources (Patton, 2002). Triangulation is the process by which multiple sources of data are used to create a depiction of what is being studied (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation was used to test for consistency from various points of data with the understanding that slight differences can yield a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Interviews

Interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and were conducted with the consent of participants (Creswell, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Patton, 2002). A total of six interviews were conducted. Five interviews were with teachers and one was with an administrator. The administrator interview allowed for a better understanding of the experience of the administrator who developed the internal systems intended to meet the needs of students in the school. The selected site was a Title I site with a program of educating gifted students. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' full knowledge. There were four interviews done in person at Southwest Elementary in their respective classrooms at a time they requested. A virtual interview was set up for one participant and one interview was done on the phone at the request of the participant. As Patton (2002) stated, "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (p. 340). The thoughts, feelings, and perspectives individuals hold within can be accessed and examined by the careful questioning of the interviewer (Patton, 2002). During the one-on-one interviews, the researcher used a semi-structured

interview process as Merriam (1998) outlined. During the interview, a recorder was used to capture accurately the interview for later transcription, and notes were taken to capture quotes or expressive body language demonstrated during the interview (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Interview recordings were transcribed as soon as possible to take into account the researcher’s notes and unique patterns that emerged (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Patton, 2002). A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Patton, 2002). A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized during each of the interviews to ensure consistency in the information gathered (Merriam, 1998). Interview questions used in this study are in Appendix A. The questions were designed to be open ended and non-leading. The same process was used for both teachers and the administrator. All questions were created to capture the emic perspective of both the teachers and the administrator. All interview sessions were recorded and transcribed afterward.

Table 1

<i>Interview Question Alignment</i>				
	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Research Question 4
Interview Question 1	X			
Interview Question 2	X			
Interview Question 3	X			
Interview Question 4		X		
Interview Question 5		X		
Interview Question 6				X

Interview Question 7					X
Interview Question 8	X				
Interview Question 9		X			
Interview Question 10				X	
Interview Question 11				X	
Interview Question 12					X
Interview Question 13					X
Interview Question 14	X	X	X	X	X

Observations

Patton (2002) contended, “Part of the value of open-ended naturalistic observations is the opportunity to see what there is to see without the blinders of hypotheses and other preconceptions” (p. 278). The observations took place twice during the fall semester (Creswell, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Patton, 2002). Permission was obtained through both the principal and the district to establish a welcoming environment to conduct observations needed for the study (Creswell, 2009). Observations with teachers and the administrator were done with the use of an observation protocol (see Appendix B for observation protocol). Field notes were taken during all observations (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 1998). Field notes were compiled into a single document, and the document was analyzed to identify patterns that emerge (Emerson et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). Observational data were collected on several activities and settings. Observations were conducted during faculty a meeting, academic review meeting, and instructional time in the classrooms.

Documents

In addition to the collection of observations and interview notes, documents were analyzed to gain a more complete understanding of the case under study (Patton, 2002). The documents examined in this study included teacher lesson plans, school policy and procedure, district policy on gifted and talented students, district budgets, assessment results, faculty meeting agendas, leadership meeting agendas, walkthrough observation tool, building master schedule, and state law on gifted and talented students and programs (see Appendix C for list of potential artifacts). All of these documents were used to illuminate context at the site environment as it exists in the rules and regulations of the state and district. Artifacts of teacher work, such as lesson plans, classroom charts, or other documents allowed for a deeper understanding of the teachers' perceptions (Norum, 2008). In evaluating the value of using documents as data, Merriam (1998) stated, "Using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations" (p. 120). All documents were obtained either through participants or online sources open to public review.

Informed Consent

It was important for participants to have a clear understanding of their rights and the researcher's obligation in the study (Patton, 2002). There was no complicated method employed to gain consent. The consent form was reviewed with each teacher and administrator and a copy was provided to each for further review (see Appendix D Informed Consent Form). To maintain clarity of purpose the participants in the study also reviewed the research questions and were told the study focused on their perceptions answering the questions. Furthermore, they were told their participation would include

two interviews and observations during which notes would be taken.

Data Analysis

Interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed and transcribed along with the researcher's observational field notes and impressions of events as close to the initial collection of data as possible (Patton, 2002). This provided constant comparative data analysis throughout the data collection process as guided by Merriam's (1998) data analysis methods. Merriam (1998) was used to focus the analyzing process "simultaneous data collection and analysis occurs both in and out of the field" (p. 162); therefore, data was reviewed, analyzed, and revisited many times throughout the research process starting from the moment of data collection (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) explained the process of the constant comparative method:

The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated. (p.159)

Using the method Merriam (1998) outlined, data and connections between data were continually analyzed in an ongoing process.

Organize Data

Multiple types of data were organized and prepared. Transcripts from interviews, observation notes, and documents were reviewed and notations made as data was collected (Merriam, 1998). The data collected was organized into a system to allow the researcher to review and analyze throughout the ongoing process of collection. While

transcribing, the opportunity for prolonged analysis of each interview was made possible. This provided sustained examination time to look for emerging themes. During the data collection period, data was reviewed and possible categories and themes were noted. I organized all data in a binder according to the participant and date it was collected. After going through the data several times as themes emerged, a spreadsheet was used to organize quotes from participants, and specific pieces of data from both observations and documents.

Code Data

As I collected data, notations and comments were made for use in coding. This process was described by Merriam (1998) as starting with your first piece of data: “You read and reread the data, making notes in the margins to comment on the data” (p. 161). This process was used as a guide while data cross-checking for patterns across collected data (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). When reading through the data, specific pieces of similar information were color coded. I repeated the process of analyzing and color coding during several more readings of the data. Each of the color-coded pieces of data were then printed onto individual half sheets of paper to be used as note cards marking each by data source or participant. These coded pieces of data were sorted into categories.

Generate Categories or Themes

Note cards with similarly coded data were organized into categories. The chunks of data that appeared to have connections in common were then placed into categories. These categories were then analyzed to perceive the themes within the data. Emerging themes were analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework and the research questions of this study.

Interpret Meanings for Findings

As Merriam (1998) explained, categories become a critical link to the understanding of data “when categories and their properties are reduced and refined and then linked together by tentative hypotheses, the analysis is moving toward the development of a theory to explain the data’s meaning” (p. 192). The findings of this study were presented with full descriptions of participants, observations, and the uniqueness of the case under study (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). In this way, a clear and deep understanding of the case was presented. The interpretation of meanings of the study were viewed through the lens of systems theory.

Researcher’s Role

I played a part in the study as the key instrument of the study. The examination and collection of interviews, observations, and documents all centered on my judgment and diligence as the researcher (Patton, 2002). It was my responsibility to report the phenomenon as it occurred within the constraints of the study without bias to taint the findings (Patton, 2002). I have been an administrator in the NCPS district for 16 years. It was important to present myself in the role of researcher with participants and not as an administrator. To assure participants felt free from administrative evaluation of their actions and would present honestly during interviews and observations. This was done through open transparency of my role in the research. Additionally, the control all participants had to participate or leave the study on their choosing was emphasized. In this process, it was also important not to shut out my own experiences but instead use reflection and insights gained from experience in conjunction with the collection of data

to render a fair interpretation through rigorous triangulation of the information (Patton, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

I have been an administrator at the NCPS district, in which the study took place for 16 years. Over that time, I have worked as both an elementary and secondary principal. I have also worked with many district teachers and administrators. I have never worked at the building understudy, but I did work with the principal 9 years prior. It was important that, because of our past work history, I used reflexivity to assess my own views of the principal. Creswell (2009) explained reflexivity as follows:

In qualitative research, the inquirer reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data. (p. 186)

This process allowed me to stay aware of the experiences being recorded as opposed to any biases I may possess. The awareness allowed me to remove any biases from the process of data collection. Understanding my potential bias, I used open and honest communication with all participants including the principal to ensure that a clear understanding of the study and that there was no compulsion to join if they did not want to join. Additionally, the process to obtain permission of research in the district has additional safeguards to follow up with the principal confirming freedom to choose participation. As the researcher of this study, I took care to document accurately all data collected and reported the case as observed.

Assumptions

1. It is assumed the teacher and administrator participants were forthright during interviews.
2. It is assumed no data entry errors occurred while coding or transcribing data.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research centers on the credibility the researcher conveys to the audience (Gay et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). This section will discuss methods to convey trustworthiness and dependability. Triangulation was a key method used to convey trustworthiness and dependability. Triangulation allows for multiple sources of data to create a contextual depiction of the phenomenon while providing a method to cross-check consistency across data (Creswell, 2009; Gay et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). Through the use of triangulation, the ideas expressed in policy may provide context to what is stated in interviews and observed during observations (Gay et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). The themes that emerge from multiple data sources will add to the trustworthiness of the study (Patton, 2002).

Table 2

Trustworthiness Criteria and Activities

Criteria	Results	Field Activities
Prolonged engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Built relationships	I have worked in district for years and during fieldwork I made connections through consistent communication
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collected accurate data	I observed participants at the site during instructional time and school meetings

Peer debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information analyzed by a trusted source 	I worked with peers and faculty to review the process for this dissertation
Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased reliability 	I used school and district documents, observations, and interviews to verify reliability and gain insight
Transferability		
Thick description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrated amount of information 	I provided descriptions that offer both details and context to the study

Summary

Chapter III provides a description of the methods used in the study. Interviews were used to obtain the emic “voice” of all participants. This data was cross-checked with the information from both observations and document examination. This method of triangulation provided reliability and trustworthiness to the data. The information was analyzed for consistency of the themes presented. Ethics of the study were defined and potential biases were explored. Additionally, a trustworthiness table was developed and included criteria for transferability.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter describes the school district, Southwest Elementary school [a pseudonym] identified in this case study, participants, and major themes of the study. The description of data presented in this section is derived from the data collected during interviews, observations, and documents analysis. The major themes presented in this chapter emerged from the data during analysis. Each of the major themes is explored in detail in the following section. The chapter begins with rich descriptions of the setting and participants followed by a description of the themes that have emerged through data analysis.

District Context

North Central Public School district (NCPS) [a pseudonym] is an urban school district. The school district is located in a north-central location in the state and makes up the state's second largest urban school district. The community has an approximate per capita income of \$24,445. Additionally, NCPS meets the ESSA (2015) requirements for Title I funding, which provides eligibility for roughly 90.3% of all low-income students to receive additional services and materials through Title I funding in the district (District Website, 2015, 2020). NCPS school district provides PK through secondary education with full-day PK classrooms at all elementary schools. The size of NCPS has varied

over the years from the highest enrollments of over 70,000 in the mid-1960s to the current enrollment of just over 30,00 students (District Website, 2020). In the past 5 years, enrollment has dropped from over 40,000 to its current enrollment numbers. The decrease in enrollment caused a need to reduce the number of school buildings. In the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years, the superintendent attempted to close schools to reallocate district funds. The community was outspoken against school closures, and no changes occurred.

During the summer of 2018, the current superintendent was hired to lead the district. His first full school year was the 2018-2019 school year. The superintendent took a different approach to the closure of school buildings. He held several community meetings and proposed the consolidation of buildings would come with improvements he called “trade-ups.” The benefits that he articulated included increased social emotional supports, virtual learning, full-time art, music, and physical education, and reduced class sizes (District Website, 2021c). These examples were just a few “trade-ups” that helped the community understand what could be gained by closing a few schools. The closure for buildings and implementation of “trade-ups” was set for the 2019-2020 school year. The year of implementation began with many unplanned complications. For example, as the number of schools decreased Transportation Department struggled to adapt bus routes to transport the increased number of students to the remaining schools. The buses were frequently late or dropped off students at the wrong locations. Teacher vacancies and increasing student enrollment at remaining schools meant schools were understaffed to safely monitor students. This lack of supervision resulted in a sharp increase in violent student behavior in the district. These first missteps in planning during the first few

months of the school year resulted in several unfavorable news reports in the local television broadcast. As the 2nd semester began, the worldwide pandemic caused by COVID – 19 had begun to force schools throughout the country to switch to distance learning for student instruction. For the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, NCPS operated a distance learning program for all students. Once classes resumed in the following year, many issues had been resolved, trade-ups were underway, and the number of schools in the district had been reduced (District Website, 2021c). During the 2019-2020 school year, the restructuring of schools reduced the number of elementary schools from 55 to 33.

Gifted Programs in NCPS

Each school year, the district engages in testing to identify students for the district's gifted program. Information for ongoing identification of students, materials for testing, and training for how to work effectively with gifted students are sent by district level administration to every school site. The district receives both Title I federal funds and state aid for \$1.8 million dollars for gifted and talented education (personal communication, August 29, 2016). Even with these funds, there are no certified gifted teachers hired by the district for elementary schools nor are there adequate staff funds for a dedicated teacher of gifted students in elementary schools. From 2019 through 2021, testing of students to identify those who qualified for the gifted program occurred in the district. However, the ongoing multicriteria identification (matrix) was limited when virtual learning was implemented because of the pandemic. The matrix process requires the observation of characteristics that are difficult to observe when students are learning virtually. As part of the matrix, a teacher needs to observe and score a list of 10 creative

behaviors such as exceptional ability in art or athletics. Observing and scoring such abilities as many afterschool art and athletics programs were shutdown made it difficult and impractical to complete.

School Context

The site selected for this study included one elementary school in this urban district. Southwest Elementary School is located in the center of a square mile block, equal distance from the main roads surrounding it. The school is a neighborhood school located in one of the neighborhoods it serves. Most students walk to school or are dropped off by family members, usually mothers. Teachers and teacher assistants provide supervision every morning to welcome students into the building. As students enter the building, they pick up their breakfast from the cafeteria and walk to their classrooms to eat. Breakfast for all students in Southwest Elementary School is free through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a federal program for low-income school districts (District Website, 2018). As students finish eating their breakfast and late arrivals quickly file into the classrooms to eat breakfast, Principal Luthor [a pseudonym] begins the morning assembly that they have named the “Rise and Shine Assembly” at the official start of the instructional day. Due to the pandemic, the daily, in person gathering of “Rise and Shine” has become an online interactive presentation that the students participate in from their classrooms. Ms. Luthor makes a strong effort to create a welcoming environment at the start of every day.

The school has a cheerful atmosphere. Along the school’s hallways, bulletin boards are filled with student work and student-made crafts, all neatly placed on the boards by teachers. The building is a square donut with an open courtyard in the middle

used for a student garden, bird feeders, and some playground equipment. The front and back halls extend further on one side of the building. One leads to the cafeteria and gym, the other to more classrooms. The hallways and rooms adjacent to the courtyard have windows giving the school an inviting atmosphere. The building is split-level with some of the hallways higher than others. Ramps connect the higher and lower hallways, turning them into long runways. Students are seldom seen without an adult supervising them, whether it be a teacher or teaching assistant. There are also several EL paraprofessionals or teacher assistants that help in the morning with parents and students. During the school day, all assistants working with students are designated as EL assistants, and all teachers have an assistant to work in their rooms at some time during the week. Students are kept in neat lines providing easy movement in the narrow hallways even during high traffic times of the day. Throughout the building, there are small stickers of feet, numbers, or patterns on the floor where students line up for water or in front of a classroom.

All visitors to the building must be admitted by office staff, giving all visitors access only to the main office when they enter. Hanging in the main office are attendance charts showing classrooms with perfect attendance and indicating they are on track to collect greater attendance rewards as part of the school's encouragement system utilized to increase attendance. In the front office, a teachers' special events bulletin board lists challenges teachers participate in to develop a fun atmosphere among staff. Once inside the main office, visitors sign in to receive a visitor's badge at which point the bilingual office staff will let them through to the building.

Elementary Gifted Process

The gifted student process at NCPS is not a “program” but rather a “process” that was created by the district and placed in policy to identify and serve students who demonstrate gifted abilities. The process is outlined in policy and restated on the district web page. To adhere to district requirements, Southwest Elementary begins the process in the early fall by testing students in first grade and any student who is new to the district. By district requirement, a staff member is selected to serve as the Gifted Champion. At Southwest Elementary, this person was also an instructional coach. The Champion is responsible for attending the district Gifted Champion meetings and coordinating any requirements, training, and identification testing.

District policy allows elementary schools to select one of three models for working with gifted students. For example, a school could select an after-school model where gifted students would receive enrichment 1 day a week after school. Another option is a Saturday gifted academy in which a school would provide gifted classes on Saturdays. However, due to lack of staffing, funding, and transportation, few elementary schools in the district can select either option. Southwest Elementary, like most of the elementary schools in the district, selected the third option, an enrichment model that provides enrichment activities during the regular school day. At Southwest Elementary, teachers are responsible for providing enrichment for all gifted and talented students and for meeting gifted requirements in their classrooms. At the core of the site based enrichment plan is the role teachers play in the identification and instruction of gifted students. Once a site has an enrichment process in place, it is designed to create a process that supports all gifted students in the school.

Teachers are also responsible for using a matrix form to identify any additional students who may be gifted. This process is an additional method for a student to qualify as gifted. The matrix identification process can be initiated by either a parent/guardian or teacher who believes a student may be gifted even if the student has not met the necessary gifted test score during testing identification (District Website, 2005). Therefore, the matrix requires both the parent/guardian and teacher to fill out a gifted questionnaire. The parent questionnaire focuses on learning behaviors, and the teacher questionnaire focuses on gifted indicators. The two forms are scored by the building's Gifted Champion, and the gifted test score the student received is given a value on the form. Once all the values have been added together, decisions can be made regarding whether or not the student has met the matrix score necessary to be identified as gifted. There is no set time for the matrix identification to be completed. The matrix identification of new gifted students is meant to be ongoing throughout the school year.

Testing occurs during the first few months of the year as part of the district requirements of gifted programming. All principals are responsible for creating a gifted and talented site plan that describes the gifted program at a specific school. Ms. Luthor was responsible for creating a site gifted and talented plan according to district policy utilizing a district provided template. The site plan for Southwest Elementary includes the site's Gifted and Talented Committee, which includes teachers, the Gifted Champion, and a parent member. The gifted site plan template lists possible academic accommodations for gifted students. Potential accommodations include options to select standard enrichments, ways to implement enrichments, and site specific enrichments provided by the school. The document also describes how the site gifted plan is implemented

throughout the school. As part of the Southwest Elementary plan, STEM enrichment was included on the form as an opportunity that could be provided in addition to the standard list of enrichments options. Once a site plan is completed for a school, it is submitted to the district and then uploaded by the district administration to the district web page. The posting of gifted site plans provides open access to the community for review of any gifted program at any school site.

As the testing identification period concludes, teachers and students must wait approximately 2 weeks to receive results. The documents are returned to Planning, Research, and Evaluation Department (PRE), which ensures the scoring and collection of all documents. Once the results are returned, they are uploaded to the student information system, and from that point on, identified students will show a small flag at the top of their digital record when their file is viewed. This flag identifies students as gifted when teachers or administrators view the student file. According to board policy, parents must be notified if their child is found to be gifted, and the school must provide an overview of the gifted program and opportunities available to support the needs of the student (District Website, 2005). Each site notifies the parents using district forms.

Participants

A total of six interviews were conducted during the study. As noted in Chapter III, purposeful sampling was used to select teachers who have experience working with gifted students. Table 3 shows the years of experience each participant has in the school and total experience as an educator. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of each participant.

Table 3*Participant Experience*

Participant	Position	Experience in School	Total Experience
Ms. Brady teacher 1	ELL teacher	2	25
Mr. Green teacher 2	Fourth grade	4	4
Ms. Johnson teacher 3	Third grade	1	7
Ms. Lee teacher 4	Third grade teacher and remedial teacher	4	19
Ms. Smith teacher 5	Third grade	1	19
Ms. Luthor	Principal	8	18

Teacher 1

Ms. Brady is an EL teacher in her mid-40s who has worked at Southwest Elementary School for the past 2 years. She has 25 years of experience at various grade levels in both Oklahoma and California. She referred to her experience at other schools and personal experience with her own children when talking about the gifted program at Southwest Elementary. Working as an EL teacher, she often uses all content areas to teach her students. She is a high-energy teacher who takes pride in providing lessons that allow the students she teaches to demonstrate their improvement in language through different content areas. The transitions in her classroom are fast, and she works to keep the students on schedule in every lesson. The room is clean, organized, and limits student movement around the room for efficiency as she delivers instruction. Once students enter the classroom, they each have a spot on the carpet facing her, but as she moves around

the room to present from different areas, students turn to face her. The EL students Ms. Brady teaches are a subgroup that is tracked for state testing, their academic improvement is closely monitored by site and district administration.

Teacher 2

Mr. Green is in his mid-40s and has 4 years of experience as a teacher at Southwest Elementary. His wife also works at Southwest Elementary as a Counselor. Mr. Green is a highly energetic and friendly teacher. He often uses both an expressive voice and body language to keep the interest of his students while he delivers instruction. He has arranged students in groups of four to five with their desks pushed together so they face each other. He has filled each area of his room with items that appeal to students' interests. For example, there is a small alternative seating area to read in one part of his room, a hydroponics plant growing system in the corner, and a bird feeder just outside his window with a related "Bird Frequency" chart in the room. This classroom, like others in the school, posts anchor charts on the windows facing the courtyard. Mr. Green posts his standards and learning objectives next to the anchor charts along the window. Mr. Green uses all of these interest points to engage with students throughout his instruction. If, during his instruction, a bird lands on the feeder outside the window, the designated student bird watcher alerts the class and notes the chart accordingly. Mr. Green then follows up with a quick analysis of the frequency chart and why bird visits may be up or down over a given time. At the start of each day, Mr. Green uses the hydroponic vertical garden to calculate fractions with the students based on the yield of the harvest planted; during the instruction, he makes light-hearted promises of tantalizing future salad they will all share.

Teacher 3

Ms. Johnson is a third-grade teacher, and although she has 7 years of experience in education, this is her 1 year at Southwest Elementary. The third-grade at Southwest Elementary is departmentalized, which makes Ms. Johnson responsible for teaching reading and social studies. She has anchor charts and state standards posted on the windows that run the length of the room. She has highlighted critical points to review on each state standard. Ms. Johnson has a large carpet used for “carpet time” in the corner of the room where she begins class with students using personal whiteboards to answer her questions. Like all teachers in the building, she has a teacher assistant assigned to help with EL students in her classroom during a specified time of the day. When the assistant enters the classroom, she moves to the EL student or students she is assigned to support during instruction. Every inch of the walls in the room are filled with charts, posters, student reading groups list, or state standards. Ms. Johnson has set up small, academically-homogenous reading groups and groups she calls her “Fab Four,” which are heterogeneous groups with the highest academic student as the leader. During her instruction, she uses these groups differently as needed. The classroom feels inviting and focused on reading. When teaching, Ms. Johnson is often seen with a smile on her face using a gentle guiding tone of voice.

Teacher 4

Ms. Lee is in her late 50s and is not much taller than an average fourth-grade student. During the first 8 weeks of the 1st quarter, Ms. Lee worked as one of the third-grade teachers. Once a new teacher was hired, she was transferred to a remediation position to support students in reading development. She has 19 years of experience and

holds a reading specialist certification. Ms. Lee can always be seen carrying a chart listing her students and the standard they are struggling to understand. She often reviews the chart before and after working with students so she can focus each group on a specific academic skill. Ms. Lee constantly writes notes on the chart at the end of each class, jotting down improvements a student may be demonstrating. The students are divided into color coded groups. In her classroom, there are five round tables set up for students to sit three to a table, allowing students to work in small groups during instruction. There is also a horseshoe table she uses as the primary space to work with students individually or in small groups. This classroom arrangement allows her to work with the whole group and with individual students. Despite always seeming to be in a rush, Ms. Lee has a relaxed personality when instructing students, which allows for a stress free instructional time. She never seems to force students to learn, but instead guides them gently with questions. During her lessons, she makes time to work with each student individually making sure the student is focused on one specific next step for improvement.

Teacher 5

Ms. Smith is a veteran teacher of 19 years with this being her 1st year at Southwest Elementary. She is in her late 40s and teaches science and math in her third-grade classroom. When she is not with students, she is hurriedly setting up a lab or getting materials ready before students come back to class. She is direct when speaking and not the kind of teacher that makes small talk. Instead, she likes to use discovery and curiosity to keep students interested while they explore learning. Redirection of students often takes the form of questioning them about their experiment, puzzle, or video hook she is using. The classroom is arranged into two large sections. One section has a student

carpet close to the calendar where students sit to do “calendar time” and quick reviews of math concepts. Here, they use small whiteboards to answer questions. Next to the carpet is a small reading area enclosed by bookshelves where students can read while using the novelty of a lap desk to hold their books. On the other side of the room are student desks arranged in five rows with the back row parallel to the Smartboard and the other rows in between the board and back row running perpendicular to the Smartboard. Above the rows, hanging on a piece of string, are several pictures of famous scientists from different fields of study and cultural backgrounds. These are the names of their science groups. At the front corner is a horseshoe table and teacher desk. The Smartboard is mounted in the middle of a long whiteboard that is exposed on each side. The state standards the lessons will address are posted at the front of the room by the whiteboard. Anchor charts supporting math operations are posted on the large windows opposite the entrance.

Principal

Ms. Luthor has been principal at Southwest Elementary for 8 of her 9 years in administration. She is in her mid-50s and likes to wear clothing items that have seasonal patterns. For example, she wears pumpkin patterns during the fall, snowflakes during winter, and flowers for spring. Ms. Luthor often uses her cheerful attire as a conversation starter with younger students who have anxiety staying at school. She uses it to focus their attention on something else other than their anxiety. She works diligently to make the school inviting to both students and staff. Inside the main office, there is a bulletin board for staff events. These events change with the seasons or holidays. The events are fun competitions in which the staff can participate. These events are done to build a fun work environment and alleviate some of the stress the staff may feel throughout the

workday. At the start of each day, the Rise and Shine announcements are done virtually. All classrooms sign in and the class of the day leads the announcements with Ms. Luthor providing any important announcements on attendance, reviewing building procedures, or announcing upcoming events. After morning announcements, she goes to classrooms that have perfect attendance and, with her assistant principal, sings a chant that promotes good attendance with students. Mrs. Luther indicated attendance is also worth up to 11% of the state test score. It is clear that Ms. Luthor sets the tone for what is allowed and not allowed in her school academically and culturally. She is one of only a few elementary principals who have remained at the same building as the lead administrator for 8 years or more. This speaks to her relationships in the community and trust from the district.

Major Themes

Four themes emerged from data analysis: disconnect between gifted processes and district requirements, student success, gifted success, and program challenges. The first theme, disconnect between gifted processes and district requirements is best explained through three sub-themes: gifted identification, gifted professional development, and site plan resources. Each of these themes is explained in detail in the following sections.

Disconnect Between Gifted Processes and District Requirements

Through the analysis of the data including interviews, observations, and document analysis, one of the themes that emerged was a disconnect between the gifted process and district requirements. Southwest Elementary provided required documentation to the district on gifted testing, professional development, and site plan for compliance purposes. Teachers did not receive gifted professional development, and participants' understanding of the gifted identification process was deficient. Despite the school's

compliance with district requirements for documentation, there was little evidence that implementation influenced the learning of gifted students.

Gifted Identification

One of the areas of disconnect was apparent in the identification of gifted students. Once a year, during the start of school, students are tested for gifted identification. The policy from the district states:

Children identified as gifted and talented will be offered gifted and talented educational programs directly through the facilities of this district. The parents or guardians of children so identified will be advised in writing of that fact and will be provided an overview of the gifted student educational program offered in this district. (District Website, 2005)

The requirement is further reinforced by the outline of gifted identification found on the district web page in the section of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment: Gifted and Talented Learners, which states:

All students in the first grade or new to the district will be given the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test-Second Edition (NNAT2) to test for giftedness. A student may also be referred for screening for gifted by a parent/guardian, a teacher or other staff member, the student themselves, or any other individual with knowledge of the student. Students scoring at the 97th percentile or higher will be identified as gifted. (District Website, 2021b)

However, Principal Luthor was the only participant that could outline the basic Southwest Elementary process reported to the district for gifted student enrichment planning at the school. When speaking to Principal Luthor, her tone and body language

gave the impression of formality; her statements were delivered with automaticity as she quickly outlined her role as a facilitator for gifted requirements. Principal Luthor stated, “I work to make sure those who have been identified and the teachers know the students that have been identified. Check lesson plans to make sure we have things planned for the kids, for their growth on that.”

At the start of the school year, during identification testing of gifted students, the district takes a leading role in setting deadlines and creating the systems to conduct the testing and maintain communication with the site. At Southwest Elementary, the Gifted Champion role was filled by the Instructional Coach. He was required to attend district level meetings with other Gifted Champions, lead testing, ensure ongoing matrix testing, and act as a liaison for any further requirements. When discussing gifted programming at Southwest Elementary, teachers mentioned the identification testing process with a basic working knowledge of the school’s adherence to the district requirements of testing for gifted identification. Ms. Smith summed up most of the teacher statements in this regard when she said, in her matter of fact manner, directly and with exasperation, “I know they did testing to see who would qualify. That’s all I know.” Teachers at Southwest Elementary spoke openly about what they knew of the program or what they did not, but there was an underlying tone of trepidation. Ms. Smith explained what she understood of identification testing in her own grade level:

All I do know is our Instructional Coach did an assessment to see who qualified . .
.. And really, in our whole school, only one student actually qualified from that,
but then they used other criteria to identify like eight other ones. And so, we have

three of those in my two classes, but as far as anything else, I just don't know what they are doing. (personal communication, October 21, 2021)

The understanding of the identification process was an element in which the teachers expressed a similar voice. When speaking about gifted programming Ms. Johnson, a member of the Gifted Committee, reiterated Ms. Smith's views:

I know that they have some test or assessment that they have given them. I've had students pulled out to go to it. I have heard talk of a matrix, but I have not seen and I don't know who administers the matrix. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

While commenting on gifted testing for identification, Ms. Johnson's generally friendly demeanor seemed to overlay a feeling of exasperation. After speaking about the similarities of the required test in this district to another test she gave in a different state, she went on to say, "I'm pretty sure those that missed last year and new to the district were pulled earlier in the school year to go take that. Those results haven't come back for those students."

Ms. Brady was also aware that gifted identification testing was a part of the school's process for identification saying, "Well they're testing the kids, that's one. I don't think the kids were not tested last year and they test everybody." Ms. Brady went on to explain:

I'm not exactly sure but they did the entire grade and that's very fair, that's appropriate. That's a step in the right direction. Don't just pick who you know. Leave the discussion to the teachers to decide who's getting tested that's not right, you test across the board beyond barriers. You know, language barriers, you just

test everyone and see what happens. (personal communication, November 3, 2021)

Another requirement of the gifted process was the ongoing identification of students through the matrix identification process. The ongoing process throughout the year provides another means for students to be identified. Because it is an ongoing process, there is no set due date for completion. The number of gifted students identified by a specific school is posted on the district website for the community. The district also communicates to the community the process of matrix testing through the district web page: Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment: Gifted and Talented Learners: “Students may also be identified as gifted through multiple criteria which could be a combination of academic test scores, parent and/or teacher recommendation, and NNAT2 scores” (District Website, 2021b).

None of the teachers spoke to their role with this part of gifted identification. Ms. Johnson who also sits on the Gifted Committee for Southwest Elementary said, “I have heard talk of a matrix, but I have not seen and I don’t know who administers the matrix.” Ms. Smith could only say, “There isn’t anyone in third grade that is specifically like qualified, qualified, but using that matrix I guess or whatever there were three using other criteria.”

Gifted Professional Development

Another area in which there was a disconnect between actual district processes and requirements was in professional development provided to staff. In addition to the responsibility of administering the required testing, there is required training for staff, which was listed on the gifted site plan for the school. This training covers the basic

requirements set in policy, the testing procedures, and explanation of how to maintain records. However, none of the teacher participants mentioned training to increase their capacity to work with gifted students. Three teachers took a wider view of training when talking about gifted training. When addressing the topic of required professional development, Ms. Lee's manner seemed nervous, her eyes scanned side to side as if looking for something. She said, "Not really, maybe a small PD that you could opt into. I think there was one at the beginning when I came to [this district]. They're pretty good about offering those, but that's about it." She went on to say, "Now our principal does try and to have us. We are going through our PD and we are going through the Marzano's and things like that for rigor and things like that, so yea they try." Ms. Brady spoke thoughtfully, taking a moment to reflect on her experience with professional development and working with gifted students:

Over the years, professional development differentiated instruction training, working with gifted and talented teachers, and learning from them how to expand on content so to help them, hmm years of experience so I mean I, I would say probably a lot of professional development and then working with teachers that teach gifted and talented. But I mean it's just knowing the content really well. In California, I taught the highest level of math and just getting really good at how to teach that at the challenge math group. (personal communication, November 3, 2021)

Mr. Green echoed similarly a wide view perspective of professional development by stating he had "been taking a few college classes, most of them have been on general classroom management, and lesson planning it has touch some on scaffolding and higher

level hmm things for gifted students, but nothing really focused.” When Ms. Johnson was asked about what training had been provided, she said:

None. With that said, in previous years in previous districts, there have been minor PD forums where you might talk about it a little bit, not a significant amount. A lot of time, the conversation is about the negative behavior that you see from gifted students across the nation; rushing through work, sloppiness. These are normal traits you will see in a good number of gifted children. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

In addition to the comments from staff, when asked about what training supports are provided to work with gifted and talented students, Ms. Luthor said, with absolute clarity “none.”

Site Plan Resources

A third area where a disconnect between district processes and district requirements was evidenced was in the area of allocation of resources. The district requires sites submit a gifted site plan to the district gifted coordinator. This plan is then posted to the district web page for any parent or member of the community to review. The Southwest Elementary site plan was created by the gifted and talented committee of the school which included the instructional coach, several teachers, and a parent who filled out and submitted the document to the district. The site plan listed completion dates of training and possible accommodations at Southwest Elementary. Included on the form were several enrichment options such as book clubs, learning centers, and mentorships. The committee also included STEM as an option of enrichment, but there was no explanation of how any of these opportunities would be implemented at the site. Once the

plan is sent to the district, it is uploaded to the district website where any parent, staff member, or community member can review it. Principal Luthor's answers were clear on her view of the gifted program. She spoke reflexively with clear and direct language saying, "It is an enrichment program based on learning standards per grade-level. We use the STEAM lab; we use the Action Based Learning lab, the calm down room, as all spaces to give them spaces to work and learn." Principal Luthor went on to say:

We have a level bookroom so if their reading level, if they're gifted in reading and needing more in reading that bookroom has Reading, Social Studies, Science, and Math does all of the things. STEAM lab offers them an opportunity to do hands on things. They can be gifted in motor development things, you got your ABL lab which works towards that. We also participate in the Y, has come in and team sports, and team activities with that fine motor that they can work on the social skills as well. (personal communication, October 22, 2021)

In contrast, few teachers could name any resources that were connected with the gifted program as mentioned by the site plan or Principal Luthor. When thinking about the resources available for gifted students, teachers had very little to say. Ms. Johnson thought for a moment and then quickly added, "I'm not really aware of resources that are available. Even if I had them available, I don't know if I would have the time or resources to use them very extensively." She further said, "There may be resources out there. I just don't know about them yet. I'm not in a place where I can give time and devotion to that." Ms. Smith's only thought on the matter was, "Well, I know we have our own Instructional Coach. If I had questions I could ask him for help, but other than

that, I'm just not aware of what resources we have." Ms. Lee thought for a moment with a strained, but curious look, saying:

Now I think we have the STEM room, the STEAM room, so you know if they were it would be there. I don't really know of other, anything else around there unless an individual teacher in their room provides it. (personal communication, November 16, 2021)

Neither Mr. Green nor Ms. Brady could name any of the outlined resources included on the site plan.

Student Success

Student success emerged from the data as a second theme; however, student success was primarily focused on efforts to promote the success of underperforming students. Staff at Southwest Elementary had clear systems in place to focus on the progress of low achieving students to higher levels of academic success.

Southwest Elementary school is designated by the State Department of Education as an Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) school. There is a clear system to track the success of subgroups focused on in the building English Learners (EL), special education students, and African Americans. The first two groups align to the State assessment standards which are calculated as part of the school's proficiency score. The third group was chosen by the district as a group to be tracked within the district. This third group also includes any student in the building performing below grade-level proficiency. Additionally, improved student attendance is monitored daily because attendance is worth up to 11% of the school's state test score. Attendance data of students by grade-level are reviewed with staff at faculty meetings. This discussion is

accompanied with a reminder for teachers to call each student's home when students are absent. When student improvement was discussed, the systems to which participants referred were almost entirely focused on a few key programs and systems for monitoring underperforming students. A new student assessment system, NWEA, has been adopted in the district to identify specific skills students need to progress to grade-level performance.

During one of the weekly ATSI meetings designed to analyze student performance data, Ms. Luthor led the team to analyze data from the NWEA system. The room where the data are analyzed is used as a data room, and the back wall has the three tracked subgroups categorized by grades and performance. In the meeting were several lead teachers, assistant principal, intern assistant principal, instructional coach, and instructional leadership director (ILD) Principal Luthor's supervisor. Just as the meeting was starting, the ILD, an older woman who has a direct and coarse tone, asked a question on overall student achievement and how it could be seen on the system. The team began to look at different ways to answer this question, and once an answer was found and the data reviewed, Principal Luthor asked the teachers present, "How will this improve instruction?" Discussion centered on how a teacher could analyze what students do not understand by specific standards. No questions were asked about students performing above grade-level standards. When there was a realization of good use of data during the meeting, they chanted what they called "church talk," by stating, "We must build a bridge to understanding," while clapping in rhythm. During this meeting, they also looked at the program's ability to break down data by standard, student, and skill the student lacks. The system tracks a student's skill up to grade-level proficiency or better. During this

meeting, the focus was on the three subgroups and the lowest achieving members of those groups. Principal Luthor asked the team, “How do we feel about this?” She then asked, “How does this help newcomers?” Following this question, a discussion ensued on how new understandings based on data analysis could be used for the building and in the classroom. After this discussion, Ms. Luthor encouraged attendees to follow up with the use of this data during PLCs.

The system of tracking students for improvement through the focus on basic understanding of state standards was also observed during classrooms observations. Ms. Johnson’s third-grade classroom had 16 students huddled for “carpet time” as she began her reading lesson. She carefully reviewed the state standards in terms of the goal for the day, and the actual standard was posted clearly on the main board. Ms. Johnson had the students rate their understanding with a thumbs up or down before moving on. If a student indicated they did not understand, she reviewed the skill with the whole class. As Ms. Johnson wrote on the small whiteboard, an Assistant came in with three EL students and stayed to assist the students with understanding the lesson as needed. EL students are a part of a tracked and monitored subgroup. The improvement of this group to grade-level proficiency is measured and reported on state mandated assessments. The assistant never made an attempt to assist any other students with understanding the lesson. All other students were working with the whole group with Ms. Johnson.

During the observation, the focus on monitoring and tracking subgroups further came into focus when the instructional coach and remedial teacher came into the classroom. The instructional coach came in to speak with the EL assistant, pointed at data displayed on his iPad, and looked to one of the students she was with. The assistant

nodded and moved back to the three students she was working with. Ms. Johnson now transitioned the students to an academic activity. The students began the activity with Ms. Johnson supporting them as needed. The gifted student picked up quickly while other students struggled to understand. Ms. Johnson spent time supporting the other students while the gifted students waited without an extension activity. As the activity was taking place a remedial teacher came into the room with student data on her clipboard. She showed it to Ms. Johnson and said, "That's still the problem." The remedial teacher gave Ms. Johnson a look of acknowledgment as she left the room. During the lesson, the gifted girl received no different work or instruction. She picked up the game quickly but answered no more than any other student.

The emphasis on focused elements to improve low achieving students could also be seen in Ms. Smith's room. In her room, each student had a small whiteboard on which to respond, as Ms. Smith reviewed the goals for the lesson. The standards are posted to the side of the Smartboard in front of the students. Each of the learning targets was meant to support student progress up to grade-level proficiency on a specific standard. No learning targets or goals were posted to support students above grade-level proficiency. After a short review of factor trees, the students used their small whiteboards to respond to factor tree questions. Ms. Smith began a short Math video in an effort to review what they had just done with factors, then moved the students on to the next topic of instruction. Just before beginning the next lesson, the EL assistant came into the room and began to help the EL students. Students were required to figure out the missing product, using their understanding of factors and skip counting, using a small two column chart. The student who had been identified as gifted moved quickly through his work and

waited without issue for the others. During the lesson, the gifted boy received no different work or instruction. He understood quickly and completed his work first every time the number sets changed. However, he did not help another student, and no specific enhancement was provided to him.

The focus to improve students' test scores on state assessments to grade-level proficiency was observed in every room. In Ms. Brady's classroom, the state standards were posted and attached to the whiteboard on which the Smartboard was hung. As the students came in, she moved students quickly into the lesson after reviewing the goals for the day. Ms. Brady told the students, "This is warm up because we have to move on. This is a noun. This is our second day." She spoke with urgency during the review so they could move to the next lesson. After some practice, she revealed a t-chart of verb agreement. She explained to students, "You're tested on it and tested on it. You have to get this right. I have the standards posted." She continued with the lesson of verb agreement until time to leave.

The monitoring of grade-level goals and instruction focused on the improvement of basic grade-level skills could further be observed in Ms. Lee's classroom. The students in her class were nestled around the horseshoe teacher table with Ms. Lee in the teacher's spot in the middle. Posted on the bulletin board on a poster size sticky pad were the grade-level standards and learning targets. No learning targets or goals were posted that would measure students above grade-level proficiency. Each standard had words written in different colors indicating verbs and subjects in the standard. The posted standards emphasized the focus on improvement from underachievement to grade-level performance. Ms. Lee worked with each student individually, and she allowed them to

use “shoulder partners.” As the lesson proceeded, the ILD and Principal Luthor came in and began to look around with pads in hand. They checked on what students were doing and spoke to Ms. Lee about learning goals, taking notes as they left the room. They did not ask if any enrichment activities would be included in the lesson.

Even during times when administrative observers or specialists were not coming into classrooms, the emphasis on essential elements that improve the school’s state test score could be observed. In Mr. Green’s room, he reviewed goals and had students pull dry erase markers out of their desks to work out problems as they answered questions from their seats. He reviewed place value with students and asked them questions. As he gave problems at higher difficulty levels approaching grade-level skills, he moved around the room to check student understanding. During transition time, Mr. Green asked, “Students are we getting popcorn?” They all answered, “Yes.” Mr. Green then asked, “Why do you get that?” The students all answered, “Because we have perfect attendance and spelled out crocodile.” The promotion of improved attendance is a tracked and monitored improvement at Southwest Elementary that has direct benefit to the overall state score for the building.

All rooms had a similar pattern of prominently posted standards, multiple learning targets, and assistants working with EL groups of students. None of the rooms provided learning targets or goals that would extend students performing above grade-level proficiency. No specific process was evident to direct higher achieving students. All instruction seemed to focus on monitoring student progress in achieving grade-level goals and target areas. The effort placed on standard improvement practices with a focus on the three main subgroups for Southwest Elementary was clear and felt throughout Southwest

Elementary. Ms. Smith commented, “I just had like eight people on a ‘rigor walk’ checking target and task alignment. I knew the principal, the LSI people, and the Assistant Superintendent, but I did not know everyone. I’m used to it.” Similarly, Ms. Johnson stated, “I don’t care about your push on EL, Sped, African American due to your report card.” With great frustration showing in her face Ms. Johnson she spoke of an African American girl in her class:

She is being tracked, and we’re constantly questioned about growth, but she does not really need the help. I have other students in non-monitored subgroups that could use the help, both students lower and higher. It doesn’t seem right to be using all of this time [and] energy because you fall into a subgroup. It has nothing to do with your ability, only that you are in a subgroup that the district wants to track. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

Additional data support the finding that there is a clear focus on supporting grade-level needs of students, specifically those found in targeted groups. The frustrations mentioned for such a focus were also expressed by Principal Luthor:

We spend too much time testing kids, and not enough time using what we learn about the kids to enhance their learning because we don’t have the time, talent, or the resources. We are focused on those kiddos that are not gifted, that are behind, not even gifted per se. The kiddos that are below grade-level expectations. All our time is spent filling achievement gaps and not extending those babies that are ready to fly. (personal communication, October 22, 2021)

Gifted Success

The third theme that emerged was the process for understanding gifted student success. There was no curriculum or sequence of activities specific for gifted instruction that would provide instructional targets or goals. The understanding of success was dependent on the teacher and how they perceived the success of gifted students. The success for gifted students was mostly perceived as maintaining their academic level or leadership abilities. There was, nevertheless, no thought out process, strategy, or monitoring system used for the continuous improvement of gifted students. When asked about what goals were set and how Southwest Elementary knows when they have been reached for gifted students, Principal Luthor stated, “No comment.”

All but one teacher participants described a concern with gifted students “hitting a stopping point” in their academic growth. Ms. Johnson recounted the work a teacher has to do to keep gifted students moving forward with their growth:

First, maintaining their academic achievement levels, and some of them are academically below because gifted does not necessarily mean they are academically achieving. So making sure they are doing that. I have had several that you really have to ride herd on them to keep them on task. They are easily bored on things they think they already know it all about. And monitoring they are actually giving their best work to you. One thing I found extremely successful is conferencing with them individually where you talk about their work and what you expect from them. They want to turn in substandard work, they want to get done fast, they want to do the bare minimum, and going back and saying nope this isn't good enough. Doesn't matter what anyone else does. This isn't your best

work. Here is what I want to see from you. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

Ms. Smith echoed similar concerns with providing challenges to gifted students that led to academic growth while working with the other students in her classroom. While thinking about a current student in her classroom, Ms. Smith stated:

It just seems like everything we do is just easy for him. It might be we might start seeing some behavior issues because of that. I don't know [that] we are challenging him enough because so many of our kids are so low. We are working hard to work with that and that leaves him sitting there going "this is super easy." (personal communication, October 21, 2021)

Ms. Smith went on to say:

I just like to see them make progress and show growth. We can use the I-station and the NWEA data testing and Map testing data to see that they are growing and improving from what they are now. And really, to me, that's just the main goal just to continue to see that growth. A lot of times in the past I mean I've used NWEA at my old school for many years and you can see some of the students that are at a really high level just kinda plateau and stay there instead of continuing up, so I'm hoping we don't see that, we'll see. (personal communication, October 21, 2021)

Mr. Green and Ms. Lee both echoed concerns about academic entropy using the words "flatline" and "stagnate" respectively. Mr. Green explained, "My goals for gifted and talented students is for them to continue to excel and accelerate their growth and not just flatline, because they can get by class easy."

Within the idea of gifted improvement, the teachers often wove in the idea of leadership as a goal for growth among gifted students. Several teachers went on to link leadership as part of the success they have with gifted students. Mr. Green said:

As much as I can within the classroom I try and challenge my gifted kids I try to get them involved in helping other kids learn on a mentor basis. Put them in leadership roles in projects, things like that. (personal communication, November 12, 2021)

To explain this idea of success demonstrated in leadership, Ms. Smith talked about a specific student with whom she was working:

They're able to help other students. One of them in particular, he is kinda of a, he's got the personality to be a leader. That's been helping because he will kinda just naturally go and help other kids. That's successful for him in particular. (personal communication, October 21, 2021)

Ms. Johnson talked about making it a point to move students to lead in her room. She said:

They are academically successful. They turn in good work. The one in my homeroom class is a extremely shy quiet girl. She does not like to talk, share; it's only been in the last two weeks that I'm getting her to actually participate and I'm getting her to come up and do some things take the lead once in a while. The other one is a talker and is absolutely fine with leading a group doing things like that. One of the things I set up in my classroom is the fab four groups, where I have carefully selected groups where I have an academically high student that can read on grade-level and then my very lowest and fill it in between so that everyone has

a job and each group can work independently on something we are doing whole group then bring it back to the whole class and be successful doing that. The young lady in my homeroom class that's very uncomfortable to lead out. But she can do it, and I want to push and facilitate her being more outgoing and more comfortable in her abilities regardless of what anyone else's are; and she really has to read for her group. The other young lady in the other class, she has no problem leading out. She is happy being in charge of that group, gladly boss everyone around, give them a job, whatever needs to be done. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

Several teachers and Principal Luthor viewed these internal processes in the gifted program as an individualized way to find solutions in the building or classroom to meet the needs of gifted students. Principal Luthor explained the direction provided by the district: "They test for us or they test to help identify the kids, but once they are done with the testing it is up to the individual building to meet those needs." The teachers' views are that the inclusion of enrichment activities as part of the current program for gifted students was purely based on individual teachers in their classrooms without much connection between each other. Ms. Brady stated, "We don't have a program, and it doesn't meet the needs. I mean it's all individual."

Program Challenges

The final theme that emerged from data analysis included the perceived program challenges that teachers face in meeting the needs of gifted students. The systems for academic improvement at Southwest Elementary focus on underperforming students. Only random success with gifted students could be accomplished by individual teachers.

Every teacher and administrator recognized a lack of clear programming for gifted and talented students. All interview participants indicated there was no specific program for gifted and talented students they knew of, and none of them included enrichment activities as part of any gifted program at Southwest Elementary. Principal Luthor also shared this belief. The teachers and the principal were forthright about the need for a program led by a teacher dedicated specifically to gifted students in some capacity, either full time or as a pullout. Principal Luthor said, in regard to the gifted program at Southwest Elementary, “It struggles because each; just like every kid they all need something different. Without a full time gifted teacher, you really can’t guarantee you’re meeting the needs, even with a teacher you can’t guarantee you’re meeting the needs.”

Principal Luthor went on to say:

They don’t have a full-time teacher so we know that every single week we know that there is something specifically direct for them so they can direct their own learning. You are at the mercy of the state mandated curriculum, standards all those things. I don’t have anyone that is just dedicated just to them. (personal communication, October 22, 2021)

Ms. Johnson made it clear there was no specific program at Southwest Elementary for gifted students, and she emphasized there was no staff member assigned to pull students for focused support. Ms. Johnson stated the following:

I think it’s lacking. I think they would benefit from some kind of pullout, the same way you remediate with many students, and if they benefit from pulling out and doing something a little different, a little something extra, a little more rigorous, more hands on involved. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

Ms. Johnson continued her description:

I think that opportunity to work with other kids who also excel in a more closed environment where they could free think a little more, think outside the box more, given the opportunity to explore things they are interested in with other kids who are like minded and who also excel. I think would be a real benefit to some of those kids that are in our classes. (personal communication, October 14, 2021)

Ms. Smith explained what she would like to see for all gifted students at Southwest Elementary. Ms. Smith said:

I would like to see there be something for them even though there's not that many students in the school. It seems like we should be; there should be something to help target them and help to improve their, to help them show growth and all of that. Right now I just don't see anything. So really if I'm going to add anything it's like, it would be nice if there was something in place that we could use to help them. (personal communication, October 21, 2021)

Ms. Brady indicated a belief that a full-time teacher every day was the best way to meet the needs of gifted students; however, she summed up the feeling of the other teachers when she said, "There's no gifted and talented teacher. There's no teacher, there's no classroom, there's no time for them to be pulled out."

Summary

Chapter IV provided a presentation of the data collected and themes for this study. This chapter described the school, participants, and gifted program under study. Chapter V will present answers to the research questions, discussion, and implications.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The national accountability standard of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) created a previously unmatched standard of accountability for student performance through high-stakes testing. Although expectations of NCLB have improved the performance of many students who are considered “at risk,” demonstration of success on high-stakes exams does not always meet the needs of gifted and talented students (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg- Davis, & Callahan, 2008; Kyburg et al., 2007). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the legislation that replaced NCLB, made little improvement to focus on gifted students (ESSA, 2015; Kaul & Davis, 2018). Although some gifted classrooms flourished under NCLB, others have not under ESSA (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Hertberg- Davis, & Callahan, 2008; Tofel-Grehl et al., 2018).

Chapter V presents the findings of the study. Each research question is answered with supporting data to provide a deeper understanding of each question. Following, the results are explained through the lens of systems theory for each of the research questions. Next, the conclusions of the study are presented, and the implications for practice, research, and theory are outlined. Finally, a summary of the study is presented.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to explore teacher and administrator perceptions

regarding how the current high-stakes policy environment has influenced the teaching of gifted and talented students within a low-performing school engaged in academic improvement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Overarching Question: From a systems perspective, what are the perceptions, in this school, of teachers and administrators involved in a gifted program of the influence of high-stakes accountability on the learning experiences of gifted and talented students?

1. How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive the processes that support learning for gifted students in this school?
2. What are teachers' and an administrator's perceptions of the resources or inputs provided for the education of gifted students in this school?
3. How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive their outputs, under the high-stakes environment in this school?
4. How is feedback utilized regarding the teaching and learning of gifted students utilized in this school?

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive the processes that support learning for gifted students in this school?

Although the district had clearly defined expectations for meeting the needs of gifted students, Southwest Elementary did not have a strong or well defined process for enhancing gifted students learning. Principal Luthor described gifted support as a series of possible enrichment activities a teacher could use. Teachers recognized the fact that

the school had no clearly defined gifted program and only spoke to the elements of the gifted process they understood. The teachers could not make the same level of connections between gifted students and the enrichment process that Principal Luthor stated existed in Southwest Elementary. One of the foundational aspects of the gifted process in Southwest Elementary was the identification of gifted students. Understanding how identification of gifted students occurs in Southwest Elementary is a key part of gifted learning and enrichment. This understanding was lacking among all teacher participants.

When asked about the gifted program at Southwest Elementary, the perception of all teachers was that no specific process to support gifted students existed. Principal Luthor perceived her role as providing for the required enrichment activities listed on the gifted site plan submitted to the district for public review on the district website. However, because no specific implementation plan exists to provide support for gifted students, findings suggest Southwest Elementary meets the most basic requirements set by the district without intentional planning to unilaterally support gifted learning. A plan to ensure enrichment activities exists, but the plan seems to be developed to meet district requirements rather than to create an action plan to meet student needs.

The main focus of understanding the teachers had for any part of the gifted process was the testing and identification of students. Although teachers may understand it was occurring and it had the purpose of identifying students in their classrooms, there was little connection to the process and connection to the role teachers play in planning day-to-day activities for gifted learners. Even within the process of identification of gifted students, teachers were faintly aware of their part in the matrix testing. Ms.

Johnson, a member of the gifted committee, did not understand the value of the matrix testing, nor did she and other teachers have an understanding of the ongoing part they play in the process. Ms. Lee indicated the instructional coach took care of identification. Teachers viewed this process as separate from their daily responsibilities.

Another area found lacking at Southwest Elementary is teachers planning for every lesson with their gifted students in mind. This neglected planning was in addition to a school wide focus on learning needs of underperforming students. Observations during class meetings support the understanding that administrators and other observers were specifically looking for evidence of teacher support of the three categories of students identified as needing additional support. There was no indication that administrators were seeking evidence of planning to meet the needs of gifted students. The only support teachers received was the identification of gifted students; however, little support was available to assist teachers in meeting the needs of gifted students in their classrooms.

Additional lack of processes to support learning needs of gifted students was found, in that, gifted and talented professional development was not a focus of Southwest Elementary. Principal Luthor provided no opportunity specific to gifted and talented professional development; this forced teachers to make connections between professional training not focused on gifted students to meet the needs of gifted students. Mr. Green used his current classes in college that covered a range of instruction topics, yet he had no specific training to support gifted students' learning. Ms. Brady's called upon her experiences from a variety of states, districts, and even different schools to understand the needs of gifted students. Ms. Johnson also viewed experiences she gained at previous

districts as serving her at Southwest Elementary. Her experience with professional development was related more to the quality of work and behavior of gifted students. In regards to professional development, teachers focused on taking the professional development they had received in any capacity and applying it to the process of supporting gifted students.

The supports for student learning and academic monitoring at Southwest Elementary have been developed to improve learning for students underperforming academically or in targeted subgroups. Gifted students underperforming academically have access to processes developed to assist students in attaining grade-level proficiency. Ms. Luthor and Ms. Smith both mentioned the use of the NWEA system to help identify gifted students and apply needed enrichments to support their learning. However, there was no use of this system to include tracking of gifted students achieving above grade-level performance to introduce enrichments to them. Furthermore, any use of enrichments with gifted students is random with no monitoring from administration.

Research Question 2: What are teachers' and an administrator's perceptions of the resources or inputs provided for the education of gifted students in this school?

The primary source of inputs coming from the district for gifted and talented students was in the form of gifted site plan requirements Southwest Elementary had to fulfill. Principal Luthor discussed the support of the gifted program in terms of the enrichments named on the site plan. She described the district as having detached involvement outside of the requested documents. This is similar to her own detachment from the gifted program. Although the enrichment activities of STEM, ABL lab, and others were indeed at Southwest Elementary in the form of a dedicated area, their use was

not monitored or planned. When speaking with Ms. Lee, she and many participants struggled to make a connection between the named enrichment activities and their support for gifted students. Ms. Johnson, a member of the gifted committee, could not name any resources and admitted she would not have the time to use them if she knew of any. The enrichment activities were developed from the input received through district requirements of site planning. The district's approval of the plan was an acknowledgment that the site could expend manpower, time, and equipment to create a program with the enrichments. However, there was little evidence to show thoughtful planning for their use. Furthermore, lesson plan templates provided by the district had space and opportunity for planning enrichment activities but there was no visible, discussed, or deliberate planning schedule for the use of these enrichments activities. The use of enrichment activities was not reviewed at faculty meetings when discussing student success nor was it mentioned by supervisors or staff during student performance meetings. Principal Luthor and several teachers described gifted student success as a function of an individual teacher's responsibility to plan for gifted students. This includes the planning of any enrichment resources for instruction. The analysis of all information would indicate participants viewed gifted resources as an afterthought of practice.

Additionally, when discussing the provided resources for gifted students, every participant recognized and spoke to the lack of resources for gifted students. Participants described a need for a specific time and teacher to instruct gifted students. They viewed this need as a way to provide consistency of instruction but also an opportunity for gifted students to work with other gifted students. Principal Luthor spoke about the randomness of instruction for gifted students and the need for a full-time teacher that could provide

the individualized needs of gifted students daily. Due to Ms. Brady's own personal and professional experiences, she believed gifted students should be provided a full-time inclusive atmosphere for them to learn within. The idea of an inclusive atmosphere was shared by Ms. Johnson. She thought a teacher and a scheduled gifted class time was needed for gifted students' growth. She believed a pullout class would be best for gifted students because they needed time to work and explore with other gifted students. Findings from this study indicate that students are not currently receiving this type of support.

Research Question 3: How do teachers and an administrator of gifted students perceive their outputs, under the high-stakes environment in this school?

Southwest Elementary is a school highly focused on the improvement of state test scores for underperforming students with every part of the day focused on the results of these upcoming tests. Teachers' lesson plans have students grouped by remediation skill, meetings reviewed improvements on tracked subgroups, allocation of teacher assistance to support tracked subgroups, site based data monitoring reviews done with district supervisors, and scheduled meetings for teachers and leadership teams to assess improvement data weekly to provide a process of improvement. These processes were established to produce academic improvement on state testing for underperforming students. Principal Luthor's statement, "All our time is spent filling achievement gaps and not extending those babies that are ready to fly," underscores the fact that tracked student groups and improvement data points to meet state test standards are the perceived valued outputs.

In comparison, the teachers identified growth as a valued output for gifted students but with less clearly defined outputs or processes than those of tracked subgroups and low achieving students. When asked about what goals were set for gifted students Principal Luthor gave “no comment” as a reply indicating that little time was spent determining what outputs were planned for gifted students in Southwest Elementary. Given more time, she indicated gifted students should improve in the strength of their gifted ability to achieve their academic success, but she did not indicate a goal or targeted output for gifted students. She emphasized students being able to develop abilities in the enrichment activities listed in the gifted site plan. Ms. Smith discussed the ability to use the academic tracking process to monitor gifted students’ movement to academic growth, but no teacher was observed using this method to plan for gifted students. Imbedded in the conversations of growth was the underlining idea that growth must be developed with gifted students to prevent any plateauing of academic gains. The growth of gifted students as an output was described by teachers as a prevention of academic “stagnation.”

The growth of gifted students was not limited to academic growth. For gifted students, there was also the idea of growth for a less quantifiable skill of leadership. Leadership growth was also viewed as a skill to improve and therefore, a valued output of gifted students for which teachers expended work. Teachers accomplished the improvement of this skill by assigning the gifted student to lead, mentor, or support a group of students, less academically capable, for a specific task. For example, Ms. Johnson described directly moving a shy gifted student to work in a more lead capacity in an assigned group to grow the student’s leadership abilities. The idea of gifted students

developing leadership through facilitating, and leading groups was a part of gifted growth and perceived outputs of the teachers. However, the measurement of the output was based solely on teacher observations.

Research Question 4: How is feedback utilized regarding the teaching and learning of gifted students utilized in this school?

Principal Luthor assumed a primary role in communicating the feedback that was used by teachers to affect learning. She has developed and put in place programs and processes to support student academic growth for academically underperforming students. These processes focus on goals based on state test score feedback but the goals are not designed to improve those students performing above grade-level proficiency. Working for 8 years at Southwest Elementary enabled Principal Luthor to develop processes in the building that can adapt to test score feedback, yet she has not developed a process to use gifted student data for improvement.

The most substantial use of feedback through the embedded systems occurs with any gifted student that is EL, special education, African American, or underperforming for grade-level content. These students will be tracked and receive specific corrective instructional actions if they are underperforming. In lesson plans and observations, teachers analyze data by content from internal collection systems and design lessons to meet the needs of tracked subgroups and underperforming students. During the ATSI data meeting with Principal Luthor, PLC teams provide student information to the principal and lead teachers to analyze. This information is analyzed by the group and additional monitoring of programs supplies information on tracked subgroups and low performing students. This team then provides the information back to the PLC teams.

During this review, the same interventions and supports will be provided to gifted students performing below grade-level in a content area. Once those students are performing at or above grade-level they are removed from the supports. There is no external feedback or internal monitoring to improve gifted students above grade-level. With no external feedback or internal monitoring, the application of enrichments to improve gifted students' instruction is based on each teacher. A teacher may schedule enrichment activities or may not all year.

Gifted identification is an important external feedback received by Southwest Elementary. The completion of this requirement is reviewed with principals during their evaluation, and failure to complete gifted identification testing can result in negative feedback. The test results identifying gifted students are provided to the district and teachers at Southwest Elementary. Feedback from the district is to inform students and parents of students' gifted status and the general plan of gifted programming created for students at Southwest Elementary, as stated in district policy. However, with no processes in place to guide gifted instruction individual teachers plan gifted instruction as they decide. The most common practice associated with gifted students across participants was grouping them into positions that allow them to facilitate learning activities with other students who are of lower academic level than themselves. Teachers used this as a way to improve the leadership and mentoring abilities of gifted students. Despite this being the most often used learning strategy with gifted students, there was no building wide goal or standard for the use of this strategy. It was measured entirely by teacher observation with no direct feedback from administration on the outcome of using this strategy.

Discussion

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes systems theory to explain the influence of high-stakes accountability on the learning experiences of gifted and talented students. Each of the subheadings below align with a specific research question to explain the answer to that research question through the lens of the theoretical framework. Systems theory can be applied to explain connections within the school and how they interact with the experiences of students (Bryan et al., 2007; Lewis, 2005). The systems approach allows for the examination of the inputs, processes, outputs, environment, and feedback to the system (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002). All “open systems import some form of energy from the external environment” (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 23). Inputs enter into a public school in multiple ways such as Title I funds, assessments, staff values, staff perceptions of teaching, and program initiatives (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002). The “systems such as schools use four kinds of inputs or resources from the environment: human resources, financial resources, physical resources, and information resources” (Lunenburg, 2017, p. 32). Processes take place within a school through the operation of policies, procedures, mission statements, instructional strategies, and organizations that examine inputs (IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002; Owens & Valesky, 2015). The outputs of the system can be viewed in state assessment results, grade promotion, teacher’s advocacy for the school, student ability to problem solve, teacher’s job satisfaction, and students prepared for further education (King & Frick, 1999; IOM, NRC, & CAIRE, 2002; Lewis, 2005; Owens & Valesky, 2015). The element of environment can be described as, “the environment surrounding the school/school district includes the social, political, and

economic forces that impinge on the organization. The environment in the open system model takes on added significance today in a climate of policy accountability”

(Lunenburg, 2017, p. 33).

The feedback to a system can often be viewed as input resulting from the output of the system (Senge, 2006; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). This could be positive or negative feedback on the processes or outputs from the system (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; von Bertalanffy, 1950/2008). The systems lens can provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers and administrators in a school through examining the interactions within this system (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Understanding how the individual perceives and acts in a system that has been influenced by high-stakes accountability standards and requirements can elucidate how individuals in the system perceive the learning experiences of gifted and talented students.

Research Question 1: Processes at Southwest Elementary that Support Learning for Gifted Students

The process element of systems theory is the point in the system where the input of resources into the system are processed or converted into something else (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lunenburg, 2017). It is during this element of the system that inputs or resources into the system must begin to change within the system (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lunenburg, 2017). For a school, the processing can be done by groups such as departments, committees, or individuals (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lunenburg, 2017). The end result of any process within the system will be the output from the system (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lunenburg, 2017). Looking at Southwest Elementary as a system, the lead agent for the process of change is Principal Luthor. As Lunenburg (2017) stated, “The school

administrator's job involves combining and coordinating these various resources to attain the school's goals-learning for all" (p. 32).

Southwest Elementary did not have a strong or well defined process for gifted students. Principal Luthor viewed gifted supports as a series of possible enrichment activities that any teacher could use. Despite having created a gifted committee that would develop and focus on a plan of learning for all gifted students at the school; the committee had, in function, become a process for completing the task of reporting gifted documents back to the district. When asked about the gifted program at Southwest Elementary, the perception of all teachers was that no program to support gifted students existed. Teachers had little connection to the role they have in planning and gifted student development. Teachers understood to various degrees that identification through testing was occurring; however, they could see limited value in it. Once a student was identified as gifted the next phase of the process was the use of enrichment activities to improve gifted instruction learning. This goal originated from the district, and it was demonstrated in policy and posted as public information. However, Principal Luthor had not connected resources into a process that created a consistent system for gifted programing. The lack of processes extended to professional development for gifted instruction and instruction presented to gifted students. Principal Luthor did provide professional development, however none of it specific to the needs of gifted students. Furthermore, the process for academic improvement focused on underperforming students. Teachers and Principal Luthor could clearly define these processes, but could not connect them to gifted students performing above grade-level performance standards.

Furthermore, an element promoted by the gifted site plan for Southwest Elementary was the idea that gifted students would receive enrichments as part of the process of the gifted program. Principal Luther had developed the ability for teachers to use these enrichments, however, she had not developed a process for consistent scheduling or monitoring use of these activities. The process for gifted instruction was developed and planned for at the teacher level with no real involvement of the principal.

Research Question 2: Resources or Inputs Provided for the Education of Gifted Students at Southwest Elementary

Inputs enter the system in different ways before being acted upon by the process of the system Katz and Kahn (1978) explained, “Open systems import some form of energy from the external environment. The cell receives oxygen from the bloodstream; the body similarly takes in oxygen from the air and food from the external world” (p. 23). They further explain, “Similarly, social organizations must draw renewed supplies of energy from other institutions, or people, or the material environment. No social structure is self-sufficient or self-contained” (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 23).

A source of inputs for gifted students to Southwest Elementary was the district requirements. These requirements help to ensure gifted students are identified and a process of instructional enrichments are in place for the students. Principal Luthor used the required site based gifted committee to complete all gifted documents and submit them to the district. The site plan, created by the gifted committee ensures that enrichment activities exist at Southwest Elementary and the district’s approval of the plan is an acknowledgment that the site could move forward on the use of manpower, time, and equipment to provide enrichments to gifted students. However, the processes

connecting gifted students to these enrichment activities is based on individual teachers including them during instruction.

The largest resource or input used with gifted students is that of the funds and manpower used to create the process for tracking and intervention for any students in the tracked subgroups or underperforming. Those gifted students below performance levels would receive all the funded processes for intervention in place at Southwest Elementary. Gifted students above performance levels for their grade benefit from the individual instructional practices of their teachers and any enrichments used during instruction. Enrichment activities are resources available to teachers for the instruction of gifted students. These resources are funded by the district, community partners, or grants. However, many of the teacher participants could not demonstrate consistent use of the enrichment activities in their instruction. Participants also stated the enrichment activities were not sufficient for a gifted program as defined by participants. There was a clear perception more resources were needed beyond enrichments. Some participants wanted a full-time teacher allocated for gifted students. Others wanted to ensure a specific time for gifted students to all participate together in a pullout class. Either plan would require more resources input into the Southwest Elementary system.

Research Question 3: Outputs for Gifted Students Under the High-Stakes Testing Environment at Southwest Elementary

All open systems must export outputs to the environment. According to Luneburg (2017):

It is the administrator's job to secure and use inputs to the schools, transform them-while considering external variables-to produce outputs. In school

organizations, outputs are attainment of goals or objectives of the school district and are represented by the products, results, outcomes, or accomplishments of the system. (p. 33)

Southwest Elementary is a school highly focused on the output of state testing with multiple supports during the day focused on the improvement of the results for the upcoming tests. The perception of teachers and Principal Luthor is that demonstrating improvement on state testing assessments is the most critical output. There is a concentrated effort to monitor classrooms and plan instruction specific to improvement toward grade-level performance. This focus provides supports only to those gifted students performing below grade-level. Once these students reach grade-level performance, the supports are removed because the focus output of grade-level performance is reached. The use of state test scores to focus on improvement to grade-level standards creates instructional goals that are less challenging for gifted students, which does not improve their academic potential.

All participants identified growth as a valued output for gifted students. However, this goal was stated with less clear terms than those of tracked subgroups and low achieving students. Teachers described the idea of growth as an output for gifted students to prevent them from reaching a plateau where they neither failed nor improve. There was no clearly defined growth goal for gifted students to demonstrate a successful output. Teachers also described leadership as a skill gifted students needed to improve. Teachers stated they had gifted students take on lead, facilitator, or mentor roles with other students as a strategy to improve leadership skills. The measurement for this output was based on the teacher's informal observations.

Research Question 4: The Feedback Loop and Learning of Gifted Students at Southwest Elementary

The environment is what exists outside the system. Lunenburg (2017) explained, “The environment surrounding the school/school district includes the social, political, and economic forces that impinge on the organization. The environment in the open systems model takes on added significance today in a climate of policy accountability” (p. 33). The external environment in which the system is positioned provides feedback to the system (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lunenburg, 2017). Feedback supplies needed information back to the system Katz and Kahn (1978) clarified, “The simplest type of informational input found in all systems is negative feedback. Information feedback of a negative kind enables the system to correct its deviations from course” (p. 26).

Southwest Elementary school is designated an ATSI school by the state department of education. This designation indicates a deviation from standard or average grade-level growth expected based on the state department’s tracked student groups in the building as a whole. This provides feedback from the external environment that receives the greatest focus at the school. Additionally, the school district indicated this feedback should be focused on by ensuring district leaders spend time discussing and reviewing the school’s assessment data based on the need for improvement to grade-level standards. Principal Luthor has taken a key part in communicating the importance of student performance through the development of processes and interventions to support student growth towards grade-level proficiency. This focus on specific feedback from the external environment creates an internal system that provides only limited contact with gifted students. Gifted students in the tracked subgroups are monitored, and those who

fall below grade-level expectation in performance will receive all interventions Southwest Elementary has to offer, for academic improvement. Gifted students who perform above grade-level expectations receive enrichment only based on the individual teacher's planning for enrichments. There is no meaningful statistical gain for the advanced improvement of small numbers of gifted students on the state report card. Therefore, there is no meaningful feedback from the external environment to the school for gifted students.

At Southwest Elementary, once gifted students have been identified teachers are responsible for planning enrichment activities. Additionally, teachers use leading, facilitating, and mentoring student groups in the classroom to improve leadership abilities of gifted students. Nevertheless, there was no feedback on the successful use of enrichment or leadership growth strategies, nor was there feedback on the minimal use of gifted identification data. Currently, teachers create their own gifted programming without feedback or any clear process to monitor for improvement.

Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate Southwest Elementary, as a system, strongly emphasizes reaching state mandated proficiency on high-stakes testing, primarily for underperforming students. However, findings from this study support a lack of implementation of processes to advance learning for gifted students. Although Southwest Elementary School fulfills district requirements for identifying gifted students, no processes of support to enhance their learning above grade-level were evident. In explanation, findings from this study suggest the national accountability standard of both NCLB (2001) and ESSA (2015), which have created a focus on underperforming

students on high-stakes testing, have overridden any effort to enhance educational outcomes for gifted students in this school. Findings from this study support understandings in the literature regarding the effects of high-stakes accountability standards that have necessitated teachers and administrators to decide which group of students receive priority access to limited resources (ESSA, 2015). At Southwest Elementary School, resources are primarily utilized to support the needs of underperforming students with little to no allocation of resources exists to support advancement of gifted student learning. Although NCPS created policies and processes designed to meet the academic needs of all students, little monitoring of gifted students suggests gifted student progress is not a primary concern at Southwest Elementary.

An explanation of these findings may lie in the fact that, after the previous years' state test scores, the State Department of Education designated Southwest Elementary as an ATSI school. Feedback from the external environment of the community and district office also communicated a need for Southwest Elementary to improve its test scores. In response, the site took an active role in monitoring the improvement of low achieving students. District and site administration were involved in data meetings and classroom visits to evaluate progress on an ongoing basis. Principal Luthor integrated district policy into the regularly scheduled data meetings and classroom visits. Conversations during data meetings focused on students' growth toward grade-level proficiency. Furthermore, Principal Luthor directed Title I funds to obtain teacher assistants to work with EL students daily in all classrooms to improve their grade-level proficiency. Principal Luthor also ensured a strong focus on increasing the attendance of students through daily celebrations with students and weekly attendance data updates with staff at various

meetings. Increasing grade-level proficiency for low performing students, EL students, and the improvement of attendance are all important markers that NCPS utilized to increase their primary output: student test scores at Southwest Elementary. Evidence from this study suggested teachers at Southwest Elementary are closely connected to each process working to improve the proficiency of low performing students.

In contrast to evidence supporting resource allocation to improving test scores for underperforming students, the system for the enrichment of gifted and talented students did not demonstrate the same level of emphasis. Although NCPS created a policy to guide the academic improvement of gifted students and Southwest Elementary developed a process to identify gifted students, there was no system in place for monitoring the implementation of gifted policy requirements nor did teachers take an active role in ongoing gifted identification. In fact, teachers did not perceive any gifted program actually existed at Southwest Elementary. This finding was observed in the lack of planning for enrichment lessons for gifted students. Principal Luthor was not observed directing resources, acquiring resources, or expending funds to directly create a meaningful process to support the gifted program at Southwest Elementary.

At Southwest Elementary the goal for gifted programing, stated to both the district and community, was to provide planned enrichment activities for gifted students' academic improvement. However, there was no building wide goal clearly defined for gifted student outputs. During data meetings, faculty meetings, and lesson planning there was no emphasis on gifted enrichment. The goal of using enrichment activities and lessons to improve the academics of gifted students had no cohesive system in the school to accomplish this as an output. In contrast to system-wide support for meeting the needs

of underperforming students, the gifted process at Southwest Elementary is independent of district and site administrative support. Findings from this study suggest individual teachers are expected to determine their own means to meet the needs of gifted students. However, these expectations are not communicated to teachers, and no resources are provided to teachers to meet the needs of gifted students. This finding stands in stark contrast to other curricular programs at NCPS as there is no other curricular program in NCPS that gives the sites full control over the implementation and creation of curriculum. Core content areas and elective courses have outlined curriculums and goals. Special education has clearly defined plans and goals.

As a result of no implementation of gifted processes at Southwest Elementary beyond identification of gifted students, it follows logically that the learning needs of gifted students have not been met in this school. This finding is important because evidence from the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (Renzulli & Park, 2002) suggests that gifted students are strongly represented among high school drop outs. Further, estimates suggest that fifty percent of gifted high school students actually perform below their potential and are at risk of failing (Ryan & Coneybeare, 2013). Studies have also found a link between unchallenging curriculum, boredom, and dropping out of school (Ryan & Coneybeare, 2013). The evidence in this study that there is no established program to enrich gifted students' learning suggests that these students may be in danger of long term educational consequences if their needs are not met. Not only is their talent likely to be underdeveloped, these students' academic growth may be stunted due to boredom and lack of allocated resources. A challenging curriculum as part

of a gifted program that monitors gifted students is vital to prevent negative outcomes in gifted students.

The perception among the participants was the need for additional resources to create a meaningful program for gifted students. Findings from this study suggest that at Southwest Elementary school under the current policy environment, with its emphasis on high-stakes accountability testing, has diverted resources away from students who are identified as gifted, resulting in inequity in meeting the needs of gifted students. While underperforming students have been historically marginalized (Hung et al.,2020; Thompson & Allen, 2012), findings from this study suggest that a focus on bringing underperforming students up to grade-level has resulted in marginalization of gifted students in this school. This finding is especially concerning because the talent of some of the brightest students in this school is not being developed. With the current legislation, “Every Student Succeeds,” findings from this study suggests that success, in this school, means grade-level performance. However, one must question whether grade-level performance for gifted students is actually a sign of “success” when their potential is limited by lack of programming. This finding is important because it suggests that, once a student has reached grade-level proficiency at Southwest Elementary, efforts are diverted toward other students who are underperforming, leaving student skills and competencies severely underdeveloped.

Implications

Implications for Practice

The gifted enrichment plan was not well defined at Southwest Elementary. The enrichment activities that were in place had no means to monitor or track improvements

for gifted students. The procedures for tracking low performing student groups were well defined and constantly monitored. However, with processes focused on attaining the average level of student performance, it overshadowed the needs of those students working above grade-level. Students who easily obtained higher levels became less important. Participants in this study felt it was essential to include gifted students in the tracked groups of students and monitor their performance levels.

Moving forward at Southwest Elementary the participants felt supporting gifted students in equitable ways, similar to the way they identify needs of low performing students and designing an education plan to promote growth, would provide better instructional service and help gifted students reach their academic potential. A major factor lacking from the gifted processes in this school was intentionality of implementing a system of support to meet the needs of gifted students. By providing gifted students similar supports as those given to underperforming students, Southwest Elementary would increase the involvement of all teachers in the gifted processes. Due to this involvement, gifted students would be monitored and tracked routinely allowing teachers to plan for ways to further advance the ability of gifted students, instead of simply providing opportunities for “leadership” or tutoring underperforming peers. Additionally, a plan to provide a specific teacher to work with and monitor the growth of gifted students is needed to assist in providing the missing supports for gifted students. These supports can be provided in much the same way interventionists work with underperforming students, or special education teachers work with special needs students.

These strategies are similar to what is already in place and used throughout many school districts when working with students demonstrating below grade-level

performance. By adding this same level of intentionality to the processes for gifted education Southwest Elementary could track the success and failures of its program through measurable outputs. This information would be a critical step forward in refining the allocation of funds and other resources in an equitable way that produces positive academic results for all students at Southwest Elementary.

Implications for Research

This study added to understandings in the literature regarding how the high-stakes testing environment has influenced learning opportunities for gifted students in one district in the Midwest. Though not generalizable, these findings are important because they may have long term implications regarding future societal contributions of some of the brightest students in NCPS. It is likely high-stakes accountability mandates have had a similar influence for gifted students across the United States. Additional research is needed to understand the wide-spread effects of high-stakes accountability mandates and their implications for gifted students. Particularly since at Southwest Elementary the “Every Student Succeeds” Act seems to have resulted in a marginalization of gifted students.

At Southwest Elementary there was no intentionality in the design of the systems and processes for gifted students. Additional research could specifically examine a school with an enrichment gifted program that applies processes and systems to its gifted program similar to the systems and processes implemented with underperforming students at Southwest Elementary. This could provide findings important to understanding how support processes interact with gifted students. This research may provide a better understanding of which processes best support gifted students.

Furthermore, the focus at Southwest Elementary to improve underperforming students coming from the external environment at the district level resulted in gifted student marginalization. Further research exploring the district as a system and the outputs and inputs connecting from the district central office to the schools it leads could reveal schools successfully working with gifted students under the same conditions and why they are successful. Such a study would also allow for the examination of the district's connections to the state level offices and the influence the state office may have throughout the system of the district.

Implications for Theory

Systems theory was used to describe connections within an urban elementary school. This study has added to the use of systems theory by examining an urban elementary school engaged in gifted instruction and school improvement within an external environment of high-stakes testing. The learning processes differed for student groups as input from the external environment focused on district priorities. This study shows how the theory can illuminate processes connecting different learning outputs within the same building.

Summary

This chapter included findings from each research question of the study. It continued with an examination of research questions through the lens of systems theory and a review of the implications for practice, research, and theory was provided. This study indicates that Southwest Elementary, as a system, emphasizes reaching state mandated proficiency on high-stakes testing, focused on underperforming students. Principal Luthor dedicated funding, staffing, and designed processes to support

underperforming students. The teachers at Southwest Elementary had clear processes to follow and support the academic improvement of underperforming students.

Additionally, curriculum, monitoring, and training all designed to focus on the needs of underperforming students are in place. Furthermore, the teachers had a clear understanding of how the processes in the school worked to support underperforming students. Teachers could immediately identify students in need of these supports and provide them to the student consistently.

However, the singular focus to improve underperforming students at Southwest Elementary prevented the development of gifted processes within the school. Few resources are directed to the gifted program. There is no curriculum, no goals, no planning, and no data monitored that would advance gifted students beyond grade-level proficiency. Participants demonstrated concern that gifted students would become bored with work or fail to progress academically, yet there is no cohesive plan to challenge these students. The finding of the study suggests that individual teachers are expected to determine their own means to meet the needs of gifted students. The lack of a thorough program has created an atmosphere in which gifted students' competencies are underdeveloped. This is compounded in a district in which students were learning from home for over a year due to the pandemic. During this time the student lost academic growth and resources. For example, teachers were limited in their ability to identify gifted students, access to school resources, hands on experiments, interactions with academic peers, and teachers' ability to use teaching moments as they occurred were all limited in the prior school year. These issues made it important in the current school year to reengage all students learning. However, the lack of intentional gifted systems and a

focus on underperforming students marginalized gifted students at Southwest Elementary.

Even though Principal Luthor is well respected and successful in the district, the lack of clear systems for gifted students has resulted in inequity for gifted students. The findings of this study highlight the need to ensure gifted students are not marginalized, especially in low performing schools where a high degree of focus is on raising students to grade-level proficiency. The findings of this study suggest the “Every Student Succeeds” Act has resulted in the marginalization of gifted students. This has created an equity issue, in which underperforming students receive the majority of intentionally planned resources and systems that gifted students cannot access. If every student is to succeed, schools must embed systems that provide support for all students. Otherwise, the lack of academic challenge may cause students with the highest academic potential to become amotivated and fail to reach their full potential.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions: Teacher Questions

1. What is your role in working with gifted/talented students at this school?
2. What kinds of training have you had to help your success in working with these students?
3. Can you please explain/describe the gifted/talented program at this school?
4. From your perspective, how does this program meet the needs of gifted/talented students?
5. What resources are available to meet the needs of gifted/talented students?
6. What needs do they have that are not met?
7. What additional challenges exist in meeting the needs of gifted/talented students at this school?
8. How have you, as a classroom teacher, addressed these challenges?
9. How has the district/school addressed these challenges?
10. What are your goals for gifted/talented students and how can you determine if they have reached those goals?
11. What successes do these students have?
12. What kinds of data (or information) are used to help inform the program?
13. How is this data used and what kinds of changes have been made to the

APPENDIX A (Continued)

program as a result?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding how this program meets the needs of gifted/talented students?

APPENDIX A (Continued)

Interview Questions: Administrator Questions

1. What is your role in working with gifted/talented students at this school?
2. What kinds of training have you had to help your success in working with these students?
3. Can you please explain/describe the gifted/talented program at this school?
4. From your perspective, how does this program meet the needs of gifted/talented students?
5. What resources are available to meet the needs of gifted/talented students?
6. What needs do they have that are not met?
7. What additional challenges exist in meeting the needs of gifted/talented students at this school?
8. How have you, as an administrator, addressed these challenges?
9. How has the district/school addressed these challenges?
10. Can you please explain the goals for gifted/talented students? How does the school/district determine if they have reached those goals?
11. What successes do these students have?
12. What kinds of data (or information) are used to help inform the program?
13. How is this data used and what kinds of changes have been made to the program as a result?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding how this program meets the needs of gifted/talented students?

APPENDIX B

Observation Protocol

(Harris, E., 2020a)

Observation Protocol

1. The Setting

- Map the space.
- What is the physical environment like? (e.g., displays, posters, technology...)
- What is the desk arrangement?
- What is the context? (What is the backdrop? Community? Demographics?)
- What kinds of behavior does the setting promote or prevent?
- How is the physical environment decorated and maintained?
- What values are conveyed through the organization and décor?

2. The Participants

- Who is in the scene? Describe them.
- How many?
- What are their roles?
- Who is allowed and not allowed to participate in the scene?

3. Activities and Interactions

- What is going on?
- What are they saying?
- How do they interact?

APPENDIX B (Continued)

Observation Protocol

(Harris, E., 2020a)

4. Time: Frequency and Duration

- When did the situation or scene occur?
- How long does it last?
- Is it a recurring type of situation or is it unique?

5. Subtle Factors

- Unplanned Activities?
- Nonverbal Communication?
- What is not happening that is supposed to?
- What is happening that is not supposed to?

APPENDIX C

Traditional and Digital Artifacts

(Harris, E., 2020b)

Traditional (hardcopy and physical artifacts)	Contemporary (digital artifacts produced and stored in electronic or virtual environments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents in the public sphere (e.g. pictures, articles, documentaries, educational material, books that may have been produced by or used by members of a culture or social setting) • Files • Statistical records • Meeting minutes • Accreditation records • Documents used in daily work (e.g. internal manuals, written procedures, wall posters and other public postings in a workplace, chart flow sheets) • Memos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Websites • All Social Media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) • Electronic Newsletters • Grant Proposals • Digital Flyers • Webinars • YouTube • Articles <i>about</i> School or <i>by</i> School Site Educators • Peachjar • Banners • LinkedIn • Videos • Online Discussion Groups • Chat Rooms • Testimonials • Online Conferences • Television Broadcasts (E.g., news broadcasts or televised board meetings) • OSDE Website • Podcasts and other audio files • Images • Photographs • Canvas Courses

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form



College of Education, Health, and Aviation

CONSENT FORM

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING ENVIRONMENT ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study perceptions of high-stakes testing environment on learning experiences of gifted and talented students. You were selected as a possible participant because you work in the school where the study is taking place and with students who are designated gifted and talented. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time.

This study is being conducted by: Marcus Macias, College of Education, Health and Aviation at Oklahoma State University under the direction of Dr. Katherine Curry.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in an interview with the researcher while being audio taped. The questions will be related to the study topic perceptions of high-stakes testing environment on learning experiences of gifted and talented students. Participate in two observations with the researcher while notes are taken.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: The interview session will be a one-time session of approximately 60 minutes. The observation will be to sessions of approximately 40 minutes each.

What Steps Are Being Taken to Reduce Risk of Coronavirus Infection?

The following steps are being taken to address the risk of coronavirus infection:

When possible virtual meetings and observations will be done virtually.

Screening: Researchers and participants who show potential symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, etc.) will NOT participate in person at this time.

Physical distancing: Whenever possible, we will maintain at least 6 feet of distance between persons while conducting the study.

Mask/Covering: Researcher will wear a cloth face cover or mask during the study, even when maintaining at least 6 feet of distance. Tissues will be available to cover coughs and sneezes.

Handwashing: Researchers and participants will wash hands before interview or use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

Compensation

You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report



Approved: 03/25/2021
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APPENDIX D (Continued)

Informed Consent Form

Because of the nature of the data, I cannot guarantee your data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported. The researchers will make every effort to ensure that information about you remains confidential, but cannot guarantee total confidentiality. You will have the option to participate in the interview online. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to the virtual connection during the interview because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online interview involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the connection provider privacy policy for Google Meet at [Google Meet security & privacy for admins - Google Workspace Admin Help](#). Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story/situation/response.

We will collect your information through audio recorded interviews and observation notes. This information will be stored on an encrypted flash drive. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than May 2022. The audio recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately two months from the interview dates.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at (956) 534-3861, marcus.macias@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____



Approved: 03/25/2021
Protocol #: IRB-21-99

VITA

Marcus Anthony Macias

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING ENVIRONMENT ON
LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF GIFTED AND TALENTED
STUDENTS

Major Field: Educational Leadership

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in your major at
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Experience:

Teaching: Donna Independent School District (6th)
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Building Administrator: Oklahoma City Public Schools
Assistant Principal 2005-2011
Principal Middle School 2011-2013
Principal Elementary School 2013-2019
Principal K-12 2019-2022

Professional Membership: The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi