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Perceptions of Gifted Male Underperformance

Laura Bryant Palmer

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PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED MALE UNDERPERFORMANCE

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DEDICATION

The inspiration for this work is found in my son, Austen, and my husband, Jeff. They have both given me insight into learning for the sake of learning. They are two of the smartest men I know, and they both helped me understand that grades do not necessarily reflect intelligence. This work could not have been finished without the support of my husband. Countless hours of studying left him waiting for me to do anything else. His love and support have been unending and I cherish him more than I can express in words. My mother, Jolene Bryant, was with me and was my encourager in the beginning. She watched me defend this study from her place in Heaven. My aunt, Dr. Malinda Willard, pushed me to go on when I was ready to quit. My daddy, Jerry Bryant, sat quietly in the background. He asked subtle questions like, “How’s your paper going?” That was his way of letting me know that I needed to continue my work. My daddy has always told me, “Baby, there’s nothing but family.” This dissertation is dedicated to my entire family. Each member played a different role in supporting me, but each was invaluable. Without them, I could not have completed this work.

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The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International was a supporter of this work. Through the receipt of the A. Margaret Boyd Scholarship, I was able to continue this journey.

Finally, Dr. Karen Pack was a constant source of encouragement. We traveled back and forth many late nights to the university and studied together for our course work and comprehensive exams. A special thank you to Dr. Pack for listening, drying tears, sharing laughter, reading, revising, and being my designated “big sis.” I would not have made it without her.

ABSTRACT

The underperformance of gifted students is a concern facing all educators. Having students who do not work up to their potential, who make grades lower than test scores show they could, and who choose to focus on other interests instead of academics are issues that occur in many schools. This study sought to learn the perceptions of educational leader in regard to this underperformance. The Palmer Model, a proposed intervention plan, was developed based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model using a 3-tier intervention approach. Using online questionnaires and focus groups, perceptions were examined and critiques of the proposed intervention plan were determined. The findings showed relevance, relationships, and competing interests as the perceptions leaders have regarding gifted underperformance. The Palmer Model was recognized as an intervention method that was appropriate to address the issues facing underperforming gifted males.

LIST OF ABBRVEATIONS

<i>AP</i>	Advanced Placement
<i>GT</i>	Gifted and Talented
<i>IQ</i>	Intelligence Quotient
<i>MTSS</i>	Multi-Tiered System of Supports
<i>RtI</i>	Response to Intervention

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I know ‘B’ is ‘BUH.’ When am I gonna learn to read?” Austen Palmer

Introduction

The underperformance of gifted males is a phenomenon that has been well documented by researchers exploring gifted education (Baker, Bridger, & Evans, 1998; Emerick, 1992; Hébert, 1993; Reis & McCoach, 2000). Issues ranging from boredom to cultural bias have been used to explain this phenomenon (Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Research findings also indicate factors such as motivation, the relevance of academic content, rapport with teachers, and parental expectations impact the performance of gifted male students (Neihart, 2006; Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015). One aspect of this issue that has seen minimal research is the perceptions of school leaders and the efforts to address underperformance.

As an educator with over twenty five years of experience, this researcher has taught many students, many males, who simply did not perform at their potential level. Issues such as lack of organization, lack of study time at home, and lack of motivation were apparent, but never was it lack of ability. This phenomenon became even more perplexing when observing young men with above average intelligent quotients (IQ), many of whom were identified as gifted by the state guidelines, who earned grades of B’s and C’s in their academic classes. Therefore, the task for educators becomes recognizing strategies that can be used to help these underachievers reach their greatest potential.

The impact that underperformance can have not only on students, but on society as a whole, is something that educational leaders must understand. It is critical to intervene so that students work to their highest potential. The risk of losing talent impacts society through potential loss of future innovators, community leaders, or academic scholars. Since much of our workforce demands higher skills than in the past, it is incumbent on educational leaders to foster the talents of our gifted populations, specifically underperforming males.

This study examines the perceptions of educational leaders of the underperformance of gifted males and explores awareness of interventions to address this phenomenon. The Palmer Model was developed based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model using a 3-tier intervention approach. The intervention plan addresses the identification of underachieving students, defines and implements strategies for academic improvement, and discusses ways to motivate the underachieving student by working with parents and mentors on approaches to support the student. Furthermore, strategies will be offered to school leaders in the Palmer Model.

Statement of the Problem

Gifted students who underachieve exhibit an inconsistency between their ability and achievement (Reis & McCoach, 2000). According to Gurian and Stevens (2005), boys earn 70 percent of D's and F's in school while girls earn 60 percent of A's. His research concerned the performance of boys' in the upper half of their classes in terms of ability, test scores, grades and future work. They also found that although there are under-motivated girls, boys are eight times as likely as girls to underperform. Cornwell, Mustard, and Van Parys (2013) argue, "The disparity in educational attainment between males and females has been so widely reported in recent years that the basic facts are now

well known and are driving public policy debate” (p. 237). This phenomenon of underachievement is not new to researchers. For example, in 1955, Gowan said, “One of the greatest social wastes in our culture is that presented by the gifted child or young person who either cannot or will not work up to his ability” (p. 247).

In addition to underachievement, Hébert and Schreiber (2010) describe a characteristic called “selective achievement.” They suggest that some gifted males decide whether to complete assignments based on their personal goals. According to the authors, “Selective achievers are intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations” (Hébert & Schreiber, 2010, p. 572). Studies regarding goal setting, the relevance of the material, and student rapport with the teacher abound. While much research has been done on the issues of gifted underperformance, little has been done on school leaders’ perceptions of this issue. “While there is a growing body of literature related to leadership in special education, there is a paucity of research addressing principals’ knowledge and skills in gifted education” (Boyer, McHatton, & Shaunessy, 2010, p. 5). This lack of research on principals’ knowledge and perceptions of underperformance will be explored in this research.

The literature reviewed pertained to the many aspects of gifted education. Among these are the many definitions of giftedness and underachievement. The numerous factors related to student performance include motivation, goalsetting, parental influences, relevant pedagogy, and teacher rapport. Understanding these factors is necessary to explore possible models for school leadership to employ that attempt to reverse this underperformance.

Purpose of the Study

This study will explore educational leaders' perceptions of underperformance of gifted males and examine awareness of interventions to address this phenomenon. Strategies for possible interventions will be offered to school leaders in the form of the Palmer Model. The Palmer Model was developed based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model using a 3-tier intervention approach. The 3-tier model, often used for special needs students, has been recently adapted for gifted students (Johnsen, Parker, & Farah, 2015; Seedorf, 2014). This in-depth interview study aims to increase awareness of underperforming gifted student populations, specifically underperforming gifted males in a school setting. This awareness may lead to strategy implementation by school leadership to minimize the discrepancy between the ability and performance of gifted students.

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) How do leaders perceive challenges facing gifted male students?
- 2) How do leaders approach interventions to underachievement?

Rationale and Significance

The literature review on student underachievement emphasized the lack of study findings discussing the perceptions of school leaders and their awareness of gifted students who underperformed. This lack of findings identified a potential gap in the research on gifted education. This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of school leaders' perceptions about the underperformance of gifted students. Understanding the perceptions of school leaders and their ideas regarding the possible interventions to reverse underachievement may provide insight into the study of gifted underperformance

that will permit us to better prepare gifted educators. A discussion of potential interventions based on the Response to Intervention (RtI) model and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) will be presented in the Palmer Model.

Methodology

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of school leaders regarding the underachievement of gifted males. Their knowledge of selective achievement was also an important component of the study. According to Creswell (2007), when “a problem or issue needs to be explored” (p. 39), qualitative research is suitable. The researcher used an in-depth interview approach to generate descriptive data on how school leaders perceive gifted students, their ideas about underperformance, and their ideas regarding strategies to counteract lack of achievement. The study included school and district-level personnel who hold key leadership positions to explore and analyze these perceptions. While gifted male underachievement occurs through all levels of schooling, this study sought to find the perceptions of secondary level leaders. Those invited to participate in the research process included the principals of two high schools, a director of gifted education, an assistant principal, a retired superintendent, the dean of an early college program, and a guidance counselor, all responded. Each of these individuals potentially held a different perspective of the underperformance of these students, offering multiple points of view for possible intervention strategies. The methods used for data collection and the responses of these leaders will be discussed in future chapters. In addition, relevant documents such as legislation regarding gifted identification, district policy, district strategic plans, School Improvement Council reports, and state report cards were

reviewed and analyzed to help identify the districts and schools in the county to be included in the study.

This study focused on two school districts located within one county in the southern United States. Each district is comprised of a different demographic. One is a small rural community, while the other is a diverse urban district. Several issues were considered as the site selection process progressed. Factors considered in selecting the districts included prior academic performance of the high schools and the focus on gifted education.

The researcher also examined federal and state databases to select multiple schools included in the study. The following information was investigated and used as part of the site selection process:

- 1) the percentage of seniors who earned a state funded college scholarship;
- 2) the poverty rate of the school;
- 3) the percentage of students who were identified as gifted;
- 4) the percentage of students taking Advanced Placement classes;
- 5) the success rate of the students taking Advanced Placement classes as measured by students who earned a passing score on the AP exam.

The districts where the study was conducted have shown success in their Advanced Placement programs. The data review revealed patterns over time, and the two schools were chosen based on questions that arose from the data.

The collection method included document review and analysis, evaluation of database information, online questionnaires, and follow-up focus groups. The sample included leaders from different schools in the districts, allowing for different

perspectives. The school and district leaders invited to participate offered a different perspective on the issues. Each participant is charged with a different aspect of a student's academic life, thereby giving an enhanced view of the overall school program. The questions in the online questionnaire and the follow-up focus groups were open-ended to allow respondents to provide in-depth replies. This open-ended method allowed for a richer collection of data (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). The research questions were designed to discover school leaders' perceptions of the underperformance of gifted male students. Further, a follow-up focus group was planned to investigate the opinions of the school leadership team in regards to intervention strategies suggested by the Palmer Model.

Researcher Assumptions

My son started 5-year-old kindergarten in 1999. I emphasized he would make new friends, learn a lot, and generally love "big boy school." He came home from school in early fall and I asked the usual question about what he had learned at school. I will never forget his response. "Momma, I learned 'B' was 'BUH.' I know 'B' is 'BUH.' When am I gonna learn to read?" Reflecting now, over 20 years later, this statement summarizes much of his school career. Having to wait on others who learn at a slower rate, listening to lessons about content that was mastered the previous year, and being expected to be interested in the topic simply because it was a state standard is a common plight among gifted students. As I have continued work on this dissertation, I have often spoken with my son about his experiences in school. He is now a grown man with a college degree, but this desire to study what he is interested in has followed him throughout his school career. He told me recently that he did not always want to go to his

gifted class in elementary school. He said that his friends got a longer recess on those days and he would have preferred to be at recess.

My own experience as a teacher has given me continued reason for reflection. I currently work in an alternative setting where students have been removed from their home schools. The reasons for the removal range from ongoing minor discipline infractions to drug use, fighting, or involvement with the juvenile justice system. While having a very different school experience than my child, these students have similar stories of giftedness. One student comes to mind. He was identified as a gifted student, but his grades did not reflect that. He was also frequently absent. I spoke to him about this once and he said, “Mrs. Palmer, I would come to school if y’all would teach me what I wanted to learn.”

Finally, I have the experiences of my husband. My personal high school experience was one of gifted classes, college preparation, and Beta Club. I was always on the Honor Roll and graduated at the top of my class. He was an average performing student who was identified as gifted. He excelled in vocational school but did the minimum required in his academics. Regardless of his grades, I feel confident he learned more than I did in high school. He once explained to me in great detail about a plane used in World War II. I asked him how he knew this information. He said, “Honey, I can read.” He went on to tell me that when he was in school, he would read the assigned chapter in the history book. If he read a sentence that intrigued him, he would go to the library and check out as many books about that one topic as he could. He was not necessarily interested in learning the content that the teacher assigned. While I was

interested in making an “A,” he was interested in learning. Although I may have more “education,” I believe that my husband is more educated.

The multiple perspectives given by my roles as a parent of a gifted student, a teacher of many underperforming students, and the wife of a husband who learned for the sake of learning give this researcher a point of view that both informs and biases. With this awareness, I analyze my findings with scrutiny and objectivity.

Summary

The gap between a student’s potential and achievement should be a concern to all members of the educational community. Identifying patterns related to leaders’ perceptions allows the academic leadership to develop professional training opportunities to address the gaps in administrative course work and gifted education best practices. If the study finds that administrators do not recognize the potential for underachievement of gifted students, there is a possibility of losing human capital by failing to cultivate talent. Offering intervention strategies and receiving feedback may prompt leaders to implement programs within their school community. Helping school leaders recognize and address an issue plaguing many disenfranchised students will benefit the educational community and society at large.

Organization of the Study

The information found in this study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction of the study, the problem statement, the rationale and significance, as well as an overview of the methodology and the research questions. The second chapter offers an overview of the literature. The topics include definitions and characteristics of giftedness and underachievement, factors impacting underperformance

and potential intervention strategies. Since the purpose of the study is to determine school leaders' perceptions, the researcher searched for other studies that also sought to find these perceptions. Surprisingly, few other research articles were found on this aspect of underachievement. A description of the methodology and procedures used to collect the data is reported in Chapter 3. An explanation for the change in site selection and other adjustments necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic will be described. It was determined that an in-depth interview design was best for this study. An online questionnaire and follow-up focus group questions were developed based on the research questions and the response to the intervention system. The fourth chapter reviews the key findings while the final chapter presents the conclusions and discussion of the findings.

Operational Terms

For this study, several key terms have been defined as follows:

Gifted- The definition used in the state selected reads as follows: “Gifted and talented students are those who are identified in grades 1-12 as demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas and therefore require educational programming beyond that normally provided by the general school programming in order to achieve their potential” (SBE Regulation 43-220: Gifted and Talented).

Underachievement -A term used to describe the discrepancy between a student's performance and their potential or ability to perform at a much higher level.

Underachievement and underperformance will be used interchangeably throughout the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“I did not believe that twelve years of unrelieved boredom was exactly what the state had in mind for me.” (Lee, p. 44)

Introduction

This in-depth interview study aimed to explore the perceptions of school leaders as related to the underperformance of gifted males and examine awareness of interventions to address this phenomenon. In addition, possible interventions based on the Response to Intervention (RtI) model and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) were explored in the form of the Palmer Model. The significance of the study is to increase awareness of underperforming gifted student populations, specifically underperforming gifted males. Understanding the perceptions of school leaders and their ideas regarding the possible interventions to reverse underachievement may provide insight into the study of gifted underperformance. This understanding will also allow us to better prepare educators of the gifted. Studying perceptions and developing awareness of underachievement allows educational leaders to avoid loss of human capital and to foster the talents of our gifted populations, specifically underperforming males.

This literature review was developed over the course of the researcher’s graduate study, beginning in 2013 and concluding in 2022. The various aspects of gifted male underperformance were researched throughout this period. The underlying causes and characteristics of underperformance were the focus of numerous literature searches. Databases available from the University of South Carolina Thomas Cooper Library and

internet resources such as Google Scholar were utilized during this research phase. Topics researched included motivation, history of gifted education, rapport with teachers, curriculum, single gender classes, response to intervention, parents of underachieving, and principal perceptions of gifted. Peer-reviewed journals, books by leading researchers in gifted education, and dissertations regarding gifted underachievement were reviewed. Searches about perceptions of school leaders found limited results. While there was a plethora of information available on gifted underachievement, there was little found on educational leaders' perception of this phenomena. There was also little information regarding strategies that educational leaders implement to combat this underachievement. The lack of results indicated a need for more research on this aspect of underachievement. This lack of findings identified a potential gap in the research on gifted education.

Once the phenomenon of underachievement was determined to be the focus of the study, further research begged the question of what should be done once this phenomenon has been recognized. Articles on reversing underperformance in the gifted community led to findings that suggested using an RtI model might have some impact. The research on RtI and MTSS involving gifted students is a newer concept.

Review of the state laws found that the Governor had recently signed legislation requiring MTSS supports for all students. The State Superintendent of Education indicated that, "... all students graduate prepared for success in college, careers, and citizenship" (SCMTSS, p. 2). In 2018, less than half of the students in grades 3-8 met expectations in reading which would indicate a lack of college and careers readiness. This new law, built on past legislation, provided a system of support for those students in

early grades who were at risk based on reading scores. The state education website goes on to offer guidance and the MTSS framework says, “SCMTSS is not a special education initiative; rather, it prompts schools to use a problem-solving model to create a strong core instructional foundation and provide supports to all students to meet their academic and social emotional needs” (SCMTSS, p. 2). If a gifted student is underperforming, the researcher would suggest their needs are not being met. While this legislation was designed to target students in lower grades regarding reading proficiency, the researcher wondered whether this model could be used by school leaders and adapted for the gifted population.

This chapter will present an overview of the current research on gifted education. The review of literature will provide the theoretical framework for the study and the foundation for topics including the definitions of giftedness and underachievement, factors that influence underachievement, underachievement vs. selective achievement, and interventions to reverse underachievement. This review will serve as the foundation as the study seeks to investigate leaders’ perceptions of gifted male underachievement.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study was based on the Motivator-Hygiene Theory developed by Frederick Herzberg and the Goal Setting Theory developed by Edwin Locke. While these two theories were initially developed and used in the workplace, the researcher was intrigued by the conceptual application to education.

Review of the Theories

Since the end of slavery and the start of the industrial revolution, organizations have gone through several paradigms related to work and the management of businesses. The industrial revolution brought the need for management styles that facilitated

productivity and efficiency. The paradigm later shifted to be more aware of the needs of workers and their attitudes toward work. Ways to increase productivity began to be seen as including the needs of the people employed. Further observations eventually led to marginalized groups being considered as they came into the workplace. As applied to the workplace, these theories also have merit in the educational setting. Motivation and goals impact both students and workers alike. These theories must be considered as educators plan for students' success, just as managers and leaders of other organizations have considered them over time.

The Motivator-Hygiene Theory, developed by Fredrick Herzberg (1966), applies specifically to how the worker is motivated in the workplace. Herzberg presented the Motivator-Hygiene model after studying job satisfaction among 200 engineers. The study revealed workers have what Herzberg called satisfiers and dissatisfiers. Herzberg found that the five major factors in job satisfaction were achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement. The factors cited as dissatisfiers were company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. When Herzberg compared these factors, he noted that the satisfiers were intrinsic, while the dissatisfiers were extrinsic. He referred to the satisfiers as “motivators, and the dissatisfiers as “hygiene factors” (Hardy, 1950). Herzberg argued that meeting workers' lower level of needs (hygiene factors) would not necessarily satisfy the upper-level needs. If these upper-level needs were met, the individuals would be motivated (Barnett, n.d.). For managers, this meant meeting the lower-level needs of workers, such as pay, safety, and benefits, were not adequate in motivating them to better performance. Factors that motivate are different than factors that dissatisfy.

The Goal-Setting Theory posits that goals are the most important factors affecting the motivation and behavior of employees. This motivation theory was developed primarily by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham. It states,

The theory of goal setting states that there is a positive linear relationship between a specific high goal and task performance. Thus, the theory makes explicit that a specific high goal leads to even higher performance than urging people to do their best (Latham & Locke, 2007, p. 291).

They state the goal chosen is affected by two factors: the importance of the goal to the individual, and the self-confidence the goal is attainable. Additionally, the theory says goal moderators include choice, effort, persistence, and strategy. Goals must be specific. Specific goals are more motivating than vague goals. Quantifiable goals help workers know what they are reaching for, perhaps reducing absenteeism. Goals must be challenging, but attainable. If the goal is too difficult, it will not have the desired effect. One of the most important things is the self-efficacy of the worker. Goals must be accepted. One of the ways to make sure that workers accept goals is to involve them in the goal-setting process. Feedback must be provided on goal attainment. Feedback helps in two ways. First, it helps people know how they are doing. Secondly, it helps them know when to make adjustments to achieve the goal. Having a specific goal provides a major source of motivation (Lunenberg, 2011).

The strength of setting a goal is it gives people something to work towards. Having workers identify that they could produce more, and help them develop a plan to do so, empowered them to feel as though they had a part in the company's success. This is the strength of this theory. Setting goals too high and making them out of the reach of

those workers, however, could be a weakness. Following the guidelines Locke set forth as producing the best work is something in which managers must be mindful.

Theories Applied to Gifted Education

The theories of Herzberg and Locke were essential to informing this study. The researcher thought there could be a connection between what was found to motivate workers and what motivates students. Just as these theories were used by business leaders in the workplace, the researcher supposed that similar ideas could be used by school leaders to motivate underperforming students.

Herzberg is interesting because he realized that meeting the basic needs did not necessarily satisfy workers. In addition to the physical needs for safety and the sensible needs for pay and benefit, workers needed managers to recognize them and award them for a job well done. Without this personal factor included, there was still a level of dissatisfaction. This theory is relevant to gifted education. Although the physical needs of school supplies, curriculum and lunch are being provided, students do their best work when there is a positive rapport with the teacher. Supporting literature will be reviewed later in the chapter.

From Dr. Locke's work, using SMART goals has been developed. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Teachers, administrators, and mentors could use this to help students develop goals that may increase achievement. Setting goals as a method of support seemed to the researcher to mesh with the MTSS process.

The research done on achievement shows that students are motivated by different types of goals. An achievement goal, according to Ames (1992), "...concerns the

purposes of achievement behavior. It defines an integrated pattern of beliefs, attributions, and affect that produces the intentions of behavior and that is represented by different ways of approaching, engaging in, and responding to achievement type activities” (p. 261).

As goal setting theory applies to gifted education, a distinction between the kinds of goals that are set needs to be included. These goals have been linked to two types of motivational processes. Ames (1992) distinguishes between two kinds of achievement goals, mastery goals and performance goals. These goals represent different reasons for reaching an achievement goal. Mastery goals emphasize students’ effort, improvement of new skills, trying to understand their work, and achieving a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standards. Mastery goals are focused on the motivation to learn, where individuals are focused on mastering and understanding content. It is an intrinsic motivation. Performance goals focus on one’s ability and self-worth, evidenced by doing better than others or achieving success with little effort. Learning itself is viewed only as a way to achieve these goals. The person’s self-worth is based on the ability to perform. Therefore, there is a threat to the self-concept when effort does not lead to the desired outcome. Performance goals foster a failure avoiding pattern of motivation.

As educators, being aware that students have these two separate types of goals can guide us as we attempt to implement goal-setting theory concepts as a means of motivation. Mastery goals have been found to increase the amount of time a child spends on a tasks and their persistence when the task is difficult. Use of short term learning, such as memorizing and rehearsing, characterizes performance goals. If students are motivated by performance goals, our goal-setting strategies will be much different.

Many of the factors related to gifted underachievement and possible interventions can be linked to these theories developed by Herzberg and Locke. The concept of selective achievement can be compared to the different types of achievement goals identified by Ames. All of these theories helped shape the researcher's study. As these theories were reviewed, the relevance to implementing intervention strategies and working to mitigate underperformance was evident.

Overview of Literature

The literature review will begin with the definitions of gifted, underachieving, and selective achievement. The factors influencing underachievement and potential methods to reverse it will be discussed. Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support will be explored with proposed possible use by gifted educators. Finally, a discussion of the role of educational leaders in students' academic achievement will be presented.

Definitions

Definition of Gifted

The definition of gifted has changed over the past 75 years. While once thought to be measured solely by a student's intelligence quotient (IQ) score on the Stanford-Binet, most states now use multiple criteria for identification (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). The definitions of giftedness differ from general descriptions to quantitative identifiers used in student identification. Joseph Renzulli is one of the most notable when it comes to gifted research. He defines gifted, "Gifted behavior occurs when there is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation), and high levels of creativity"

(Renzulli, 1978, p. 180). The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) lists on their website the definition as follows:

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act defines gifted and talented students as “Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. [Title IX, Part A, Definition 22. (2002)]

The state where the study was conducted defines giftedness as,

Gifted and talented students are those who are identified in grades 1-12 as demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas and therefore require educational programming beyond that normally provided by the general school programming in order to achieve their potential. (SBE Regulation 43-220: Gifted and Talented).

The definition used in the state will be used for this study.

Identification in Bryce County

There is no one definition or identification criteria used by educators nationwide to determine which children receive gifted education services. However, the state where the study took place has a uniform identification system.

To participate in the Gifted and Talented program in the two districts selected for the study, students must meet the state criteria outlined below in two of the three dimensions.

Dimension A - Reasoning Abilities Students must demonstrate high aptitude (93rd national age percentile or above) in one or more of these areas: verbal, nonverbal, quantitative and/or a composite of the three.

Dimension B - Academic Achievement Students must demonstrate high achievement (94th national percentile and above or advanced status) in reading and/or math as measured by a nationally normed or statewide assessment instruments.

Dimension C - Intellectual/Academic Performance Students must demonstrate a high degree of interest in and commitment to academic and/or intellectual pursuits, or demonstrate intellectual characteristics such as curiosity/inquiry, reflection, persistence/tenacity in the face of challenge and creative, productive thinking. Rising third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students may be eligible to take the Performance Task Test in March if they have already met the criteria in Dimension A or Dimension B. Beginning at the end of grade 5, students can meet the criteria in Dimension C with a 3.75 GPA on a 4.0 scale. This means that a student will make at least three A's and one B in the four core content courses: ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies (SBE Regulation 43-220: Gifted and Talented).

Students may qualify automatically with an extremely high aptitude or IQ score at the 96th percentile or higher for their age group. If students do not qualify solely on aptitude, the process above is used for screening.

Descriptions of a gifted child may include academic aptitude, ability to perform artistically, or having an above average IQ. As Schroth and Helfer (2008) highlight, how

a student is identified influences the educational models that a school implements. It also impacts which students are selected to participate, a key issue as ensuring diversity throughout gifted programs is a focus.

Definition of Underachievement

Just as there are many definitions for giftedness, there are just as many for underachievement. Hébert (1993) defined underachievement as, “Students with high potential as evidenced by academic achievement or intelligence tests results of 85th percentile using local norms, who were not achieving at a level that is expected, based on this potential” (p. 92). Underachieving refers to students who demonstrate a discrepancy between ability and performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Underachieving students exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement measured by standardized assessments and actual achievement measured by class grades or teacher evaluations (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). The discrepancy must persist over time and must not be the direct result of a diagnosed learning disability.

The definition used in this study is from the NAGC. It states, “A term used to describe the discrepancy between a student’s performance and his or her potential or ability to perform at a much higher level” (NAGC, n.d.).

Definition of Selective Achievement

As noted earlier, underachievement is a discrepancy between a student’s ability and performance. This underachievement, however, may manifest itself in another way. A study done by Hébert and Schreiber (2010) highlights the importance of working towards a goal describes a characteristic called “selective achievement.” They assert, “Selective achievers are intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches

ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations” (p. 572). The information indicating this achievement is a conscious choice made by the student emphasizes the need to raise awareness of those who have the potential to influence that students’ decision-making. This selective achievement study looked at two gifted males in a university setting. The two students were observed over time and patterns in both were noted. Both students indicated that to perform at their best, they must be working toward their chosen goal. Factors such as the relationship with teachers, interest in the subject matter, and engaging instructional methods were also needed before the two students performed at their best.

Regardless of the definition used, the underachievement of gifted students has been a concern of educators for many years. Teachers work to help students grow and learn at their highest potentials. Anytime that does not happen, educators worry the children will miss opportunities as they grow into adults. Educators have identified students whose academic performance does not match their identified potential, the potential that may be confirmed with standardized test scores or intelligence quotient tests. The reasons for this are varied and complex. Explanations include boredom, family issues, teacher expectations, inappropriate curriculum, and lack of motivation. Although these are not necessarily causal, many students with similar issues perform at high levels, these factors certainly impact the ease with which students attain grades aligned with their ability.

Factors that Influence Underachievement

Ryan and Coneybeare (2013) refer to several authors who estimate that nearly half of gifted students underachieve. This statistic emphasizes the concern educators have

shown for quite some time regarding gifted underachievement. Numerous articles related to the underachievement of gifted students were reviewed for this study. Each listed a variety of factors that may influence a gifted student to underachieve and factors that may help to reverse this. Reis and McCoach (2000) found that many of the characteristics of gifted underachievers were similar to non-gifted underachievers. The point was made that the lack of a clear definition of underachievement hampered the identification of these commonalities. Despite these obstacles, family dynamics and peer issues were highlighted. Dr. Sylvia Rimm's book "Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades" suggested five factors leading to underachievement syndrome (1995). They are initiating situations, excessive child power, inconsistency and opposition, inappropriate classroom environments, and competition. Study findings by Dr. Thomas Hébert were published twenty five years ago and identified characteristics of both high achieving and underachieving gifted males. His ethnographic study revealed the emergence of characteristics common to the group he identified as underachieving. These include inappropriate curricular experiences and counseling, problematic family issues, negative peer groups, environmental influences, and discipline problems (Hébert, 1993). Although some authors suggest different factors, there seemed to be consistency on the issues of family factors, classroom expectations, and the rapport with the teacher. While there are a multitude of variables that can impact student achievement, the researcher chose to narrow the focus to issues that school leaders could potentially impact. Subsequently, it is these three major factors that will be explored further.

Family Factors

In 1966, the report *Equality of Educational Opportunity* was published. It was commissioned to investigate policy questions relating to school funding, poverty, and race. The Coleman Report, as it came to be called, studied the effect that school quality had on student achievement. Variables such as the physical facilities, length of the school day, teachers' salaries, students' kindergarten attendance, and the teachers' race were a few of the topics studied (Towers, 1992). What James Coleman found was not what was expected. His report said what accounted for the achievement differences among students was their non-school background more so than the qualities of the school. Issues such as the socioeconomic and educational levels of the parents were a greater influence than had been expected.

The influential role played by family and home is also relevant for gifted students. Researchers have found that issues related to parenting styles weigh heavily on the student's performance. Rimm (1995) concluded that parents impact their children in various ways. Parents are role models for their children. If a parent is a poor role model, there are increased chances of underachievement (p. 46). Parent's comments regarding their feelings towards school, the admission that they did not do well or behaved badly, and their comments regarding teachers can negatively influence the child's performance. Pressure to perform, comparison to other siblings, and turmoil or divorce in the home weigh on children emotionally. It also has been shown to effect academic grades. Rimm and Lowe (1988) found gifted underachievers tend to have a home environment characterized by unclear guidelines about behavior and academic performance. Neihart (2006) noted that some families of gifted students might be more concerned about

survival based on economic or social realities than their child's ideal achievement. Likewise, parents meeting their children's basic needs do not necessarily satisfy what is required to motivate them to achieve academically. Hébert's (2001) study also found lack of appropriate family support may influence underachievement. In addition to the climate, atmosphere, and structure within the home, other family factors come into play when discussing what is significant in the motivation and success of students.

Parenting Styles

Reis and McCoach (2000) found that patterns of underachievement may be related to certain home environments. Parenting styles certainly impact that environment and have a firm basis in research as a variable involved in the motivation and success of children. There are four different parenting styles that have been identified by research, with each style being characterized by varying levels of involvement, warmth, and encouragement (Kopko, 2007). The authoritarian parents display directive behaviors, are strict disciplinarians and are highly controlling. These parents show little warmth. There is an expectation of strict adherence to house rules and there is no room for discussion. Parents expect children to do what they are told without question because "I said so." Adolescents learn that strict adherence to the rules is valued more than independent thinking. Some teens rebel and display aggressive behaviors. Others become submissive and tend to remain dependent on their parents.

The authoritative style is characterized by nurturing, involved, and sensitive parents. These parents are described as warm but firm. They are willing to listen to the child's point of view and consider it when making decisions. Although the responsibility ultimately lies with the parent, the child's opinions are taken into consideration. The

children of these parents tend to grow up responsible, competent, and independent. While authoritarian parents attempt to restrict their child's independence and control them, authoritative parents permit their children gradually gain more independence as they get older and rely less on overt control (Neihart, 2006). This authoritative style has been shown to correlate with the highest achieving students (Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995).

Permissive parenting is the third style of parenting. It is also characterized by warmth, but it is undemanding. The wishes of the child are what guide the actions of the parents. These parents do not like to disappoint or say no to the child and allow them to make their own decisions without input from the parent. The teens of these parents tend to have limited boundaries and see the consequences of their actions as minimal. These children tend to be egocentric and have difficulty with self-control.

The final parenting style identified is the uninvolved style. This parent is unresponsive to the child's needs, sometimes to the point of neglect. These parents do not care where their children go and tend to be indifferent to their peers and school work. There are no demands placed on the teen. This type of parenting may result from frustration or the parents being overwhelmed by their circumstances. The parents are often more concerned with their own lives and do not want to be bothered with the children.

In addition to the impact parenting styles have on the students' performance in general, research has been done on the impact of fathers on their gifted sons. The findings reflect similar results as compared to overall parenting styles. Hébert and Pagnani (2009) conducted a study of ten successful men. Information was collected

about the participants' fathers and the characteristics of their parenting styles. The study was designed to study only father-sons who had a positive relationship. Successful men who had negative relationships with their fathers were studied at different times. The data's characteristics were aligned with the authoritative style discussed earlier. These characteristics include the fathers' unconditional belief in their sons, encouragement, guidance combined with high expectations, modeling by the father of a strong work ethic, pride in their sons' accomplishments, and mutual father-son respect.

Teacher Rapport

The impact of having a caring teacher on a student's life cannot be overstated. As early as 1934, there has been research on its impact. Root (1934) found in a brief study that "an increase in a wholesome relationship shows itself in increased output" (p. 135). The rapport between a student and teacher impacts performance in numerous ways. The motivation to achieve in the classroom can be effected by the curriculum, pedagogy, and expectations developed by the instructor. Multiple factors related to underperformance can be tied to the teacher's expectations and relationship.

Furrer and Skinner (2003) conducted a quantitative study to determine the impact "relatedness" had on classroom motivation in students from 3rd to 6th grades. The study showed that relatedness to the teacher was a stronger indicator of engagement for boys than for girls supporting the idea that rapport is an important factor in motivating underperforming males. If a student is in the classroom of a teacher that they like, the motivation to achieve and the perception that they can perform is increased. A teacher's caring for and liking the students and their willingness to communicate about matters of interest, even personal concerns, were qualities that impacted a student's motivation to perform. Emerick (1992) goes on to say, "The students who participated in the study

believed a specific teacher was the single most influential factor in the reversal of the underachievement pattern” (p. 144). While factors such as school, home, and peers have been shown to influence motivation, student comments reflect that, “Teachers were the determining factor in whether the students did their best work or just enough to get the grade they wanted” (Siegle, Rubenstein & Mitchell, 2014, p. 44).

Classroom Expectations

Just as parenting styles influence students’ academic success, teachers’ management styles have a similar effect. Three types of classroom environments were identified: 1) the classroom with support, humor, respect and high expectations, 2) the nonsupport classroom with authoritarian control in the expectation the students might cheat or misbehave, 3) the ambiguous classroom where there was inconsistency in attention to students’ personal and academic needs. The classroom environment reflective of the authoritative parent proved to be the most successful (Walker, 2008).

In a classroom environment where the teacher is enthusiastic about the subject matter and creative with their teaching style, students are more motivated to achieve (Siegle et al., 2014). Boredom in the early grades has led to underachievement in high school. Teachers expecting students to complete assignments on concepts mastered in previous years is one of the factors found to cause this type of boredom (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Increasing the challenge of the work and offering choices in the assignments lead to a more productive student. Cooper (2012) cites VanTassel-Baska (2003), saying,

The learning strategies that are the most beneficial for gifted students, especially

gifted males, are those strategies that relate the instructional purposes, curriculum, and setting; are diverse; are generative in nature; provide a balance among active and passive activities; mesh with cognitive styles of both the teacher and the learners; and are subordinate to educational purpose (p. 178). Using these pedagogical methods and the teacher's classroom expectations are critical for the performance of the gifted male.

Potential Underachievement Results

It is easy to identify a low-performing student. Administrators, guidance counselors, and parents all tend to show concern when a student has low or failing grades. However, underachievers, those who are not failing but not living up to the academic potential their test scores indicate they could, are much harder to identify. Wolfe (1991) suggests these students tend to avoid criticism and lack the encouragement that could boost their academic success. He asserts these predominately male underachievers do "just enough to get by." Furthermore, underachieving students, and those gifted students who seem unmotivated, may not be identified and therefore not obtain key educational services (Snyder & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013).

Selective consuming was also identified as an issue with regard to gifted students (Figg, Rogers, McCormick, & Low, 2012). The study sought to verify that underachievers could be distinguished from selective consumers based on self-perception. It began by defining and differentiating between achievers, underachievers, and selective performers. The underachiever is less confident, insecure, and critical of his academic ability. The selective consumer, on the other hand, is very confident and knows he is smart but only does what he is interested in. The study classified these

students into different types of learners and then compared the preferred learning types of each. Selective consumers performed better when they had more freedom in their learning. This study also identified characteristics of the teacher with which selective consumers did not perform well. A framework identifying the specific learning needs of each type of gifted student is presented. The study involved males who had an IQ score of at least 130. Their class rank percentage was reviewed. The results indicated that achievers ranked above the top 15%, underachievers ranked below the top 15%, while selective consumers ranked below and above. The researchers concluded that although there was a statistically significant difference between achievers and underachievers self-perception, the selective consumer could not be distinguished from either group. According to the researchers the results show qualitatively that selective consumers differ from underachievers (Figg et al., 2012). This result suggested to the researcher that school leaders may need different strategies to combat academic issues faced by these two groups of students.

An issue related to gifted underachievement which may not seem obvious is the high school dropout (Landis & Reschly, 2013). Signs of underachievement can be the beginning of a lack of engagement potentially leading to students becoming high school dropouts. The concept of giftedness indicates a student's above average ability to succeed academically. Since much of the dropout prevention efforts are focused on those who fail to succeed academically, the idea a gifted underachiever might have the same issues as someone less gifted may be confusing to educators. Being a high school dropout is tied to long-term negative experiences such as poverty, poor health, and unemployment. With the possibility of losing human capital due to underperformance,

educators must develop strategies to combat this potential loss. The following section will focus on one potential strategy to help reverse this underachievement.

Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

With the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the requirements for public schools have been many. Ensuring that all students make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and putting plans in place for those who did not become a daily requirement for most public school staff members. One tool used for students with special needs was Response to Intervention (RtI). According to the National Center on Response to Intervention, RtI integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. With RtI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities.

Research currently shows the RtI system is not being fully used with gifted and talented students. Among the reasons RtI has not been fully explored for gifted students is the overwhelming focus on struggling learners and those who are more at-risk. Seedorf (2014) notes, "Perhaps the biggest road block to implementing RtI for GT students and programs is that teachers do not view the model as a needs-based model for differentiation, but a problem-based model designed to close the achievement gap" (p. 251). Teachers, therefore, may not see the benefit of implementing this intervention with students who are already above grade level.

Bryce County is in a state that passed legislation in 2018 requiring schools to implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for students. The State Department of Education describes the MTSS program as “a systemic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision-making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students” (MTSS Quickstart Guide, p. 1). The vision for MTSS is to “continuously improve Tier 1 instruction for all students and to problem-solve for students who need additional support academically and/or social emotionally” (MTSS District Memo). The framework states “The goal of a MTSS is to deliver early intervention for every student who struggles to attain or maintain grade-level performance by effectively utilizing best instructional practices within an evidence-based instructional model. An ongoing, systematic process of using student data to guide instructional and intervention decisions is required” (SCMTSS, p. 3).

The MTSS is a three tiered model. Tier 1 involves rigorous, standards based classroom instruction. In Tier 1, teachers deliver “research-supported, differentiated instruction with fidelity.” Some possible Tier 1 instructional interventions that are feasible at the secondary level include peer tutoring, afterschool homework labs, and dedicated academic study periods (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017). The focus of the proposed model will not include detailed interventions for the Tier 1 level. The focus of the model for those who are underachieving will be at Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels.

Tier 2 provides supplemental interventions in small group instruction for those not meeting grade-level expectations. This study aims to utilize this concept with those gifted students who are underperforming, although they are not below grade level.

Characteristics of Tier 2 include collaboration with parents and instructional leaders to monitor more frequently and adjust instruction based on the needs of the student. Tier 2 strategies that have shown positive results with struggling learners include an extra class period for reading or math. These classes are designed with smaller numbers of students and focus on filling gaps that students may have developed. Focusing on specific skills in math or using a reading program like Read 180 was seen as being successfully implemented (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017).

Tier 3 is individualized and intensive intervention. It has seen implementation with students who have learning disabilities in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Bartholomew and De Jong (2017) noted that the participants in their study had not found other Tier 3 interventions. The study cited a lack of money, resources, and training to implement the Tier 3 interventions.

Herzberg (1966) found that the five major factors in job satisfaction were achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement. Emerick (1992) reported that factors to help reverse underachievement include out of school interests, parents, academic classes that offered challenges, goals, the teacher, and the concept of self. Issues of relationship with teachers, interest in the subject matter, and engaging instructional methods were also present in the study of selective achievement (Hébert & Schreiber, 2010). The Palmer Model (Appendix C) was designed with these concepts and with the RtI tiered approach in mind.

Educational Leadership and Student Achievement

The connection between leadership and students' educational outcome has been studied for some time (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Aspects of leadership range from the

district level's role to the "followship" of teachers of a school level principal. The link between school leaders and the educational outcome must be considered as perceptions are studied.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008, p. 505) summarized previous empirical research regarding characteristics of effective school districts. The conditions important to note for this study include:

- A district-wide focus on student achievement and the quality of instruction (e.g., goals focused on student learning, programs aligned with state standards, support for the use of particular forms of instruction).
- District-wide use of data (e.g., capacity for reliably assessing student learning, use of such data in district decision making).
- Targeted and phased focuses for improvement (e.g., improvement efforts focused on clear goals, targeting specific areas of the curriculum and lower performing schools and classrooms).
- Investment in instructional leadership at the school and district levels (e.g., training for principals in school improvement processes, systematic and written appraisals of principals' performance).
- An emphasis on teamwork and professional community (e.g., the foster flow of ideas through district, chances for principals to share knowledge with peers, support for teacher collaboration in schools).
- New approaches to board-district and district-school relations (e.g., find appropriate balance between local autonomy and central control).

- District culture (e.g., widespread understanding of district goals, values community partners, recognition of contributions).
- District-sponsored teacher professional development (e.g., focus on district priorities, intensive teacher development opportunities).

Effective leaders have practices categorized as “setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization” (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008, p. 506). Setting directions refers to the goals and purposes of the school leader. Recall that Locke suggested that goals motivate people when the goals are challenging yet attainable (Latham & Locke, 2007). Providing support needed to improve teaching and learning describes educational leadership. Offering feedback, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation are all ways leaders can do this. This professional development of staff is what is meant by developing people. Redesigning the organization entails improving the school and district culture, building collaborative processes, especially staff collaboration. Managing the instructional program was another category added to effective practices. Practices in this category include: “planning and supervising instruction; providing instructional support; monitoring the school’s progress (including student progress); and buffering staff from external demands unrelated to the school’s priorities” (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008, p. 508). Practices in this category have shown significant effects on student achievement.

The characteristics of effective districts and the practices of effective leaders play an important role in the potential interventions of underachieving males. For instance, the characteristic of using data would lend itself to identifying students whose ability and performance do not match. A low performing gifted student could be identified by

including the student's gifted status in the data analysis of test scores. This meshes with the leadership practice of monitoring the school and student progress. Another example of using these leadership characteristics to improve student educational outcomes might include having staff collaborate on ways to help a struggling student. The staff receiving professional development on appropriate interventions, including mentoring, could help reverse underachievement identified by the data analysis. The combination of these effective district characteristics and effective leadership practices highlights the importance of educational leadership in students' academic achievement.

Summary

The research done regarding underperforming gifted males is extensive and began decades ago. The aspects of curriculum, family situation, motivation, goals, and selective achievement are just a few of the topics that have been investigated. The importance of administrators and their impact on student performance, family issues, school climate, and teacher expectations cannot be overstated. The lack of research indicating that school leaders recognize gifted underachievers is alarming. Providing a structured intervention plan for students who are not easily identified is daunting. This dissertation seeks to offer strategies for them that will assist in recognizing and intervening to allow all students to reach their greatest potential.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

“Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don’t.” Bill Nye

This study examined the perceptions of underperformance of gifted males as realized by educational leaders and explored their awareness of this phenomenon. The Palmer Model, developed based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model using a 3-tier intervention approach, was presented to school leaders. This RtI model offers strategies to address underachievement in gifted students where Tier 3 often is used for a special education referral. Insight about using this strategy for a gifted student was sought to assess the possibilities for intervention. This qualitative study aims to increase awareness of underperforming gifted student populations, specifically underperforming gifted males, in typical school settings. This awareness may lead to strategy implementation by school leadership to minimize the discrepancy between the ability and performance of gifted students.

This chapter will present the rationale for the design of the study, the setting and description of the site selected, the process for approval of the study, the reasoning for those who were chosen for interviews, and a description of the methods used for analysis. In addition, it will describe the circumstances necessitating differences in the research proposal and final implementation.

Rationale for Research Approach

This in-depth interview study sought to determine school leaders' perceptions regarding the underperformance of gifted male high school students and identify promising intervention methods to reverse underachievement. Qualitative data was collected through questionnaires and follow-up focus groups of educational leaders in two school districts. In addition to data gathered from these educational leaders, pertinent state, district, and school documents were reviewed and analyzed. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) assert internal data can, "provide clues about leadership style and potential insights about what organizational members value" (p. 137). Statistical data regarding students identified as gifted and the number of students participating in the Advanced Placement (AP) programs for each site were reviewed. Documents such as the state report card, school district strategic plans, and School Improvement Committee reports provided the general information needed to understand basic demographics within the schools. Data was gathered from study participants using online questionnaires and follow-up focus groups. These methods were used to explore factors that influenced student performance, synthesize current practices of gifted educators, characterize school leaders' perceptions of student underachievement, and establish the opinions of possible interventions by the leadership teams.

The following research questions guided this in-depth interview study:

- 1) How do leaders perceive challenges facing gifted male students?
- 2) How do leaders approach interventions to underachievement?

An in-depth interview design was used to ascertain the perceptions of school leaders regarding the underachievement of gifted males. School personnel who hold key leadership positions were sent questionnaires to best explore and analyze these perceptions. Once these

were returned and analyzed, a semi-structured interview protocol was in the follow-up focus group. Educational leaders including school level administrators, district level coordinators, and guidance counselors were asked to participate. In addition, relevant documents such as legislation regarding gifted identification, district policy, district strategic plans, School Improvement Council reports, and state report cards were reviewed and analyzed to help identify the schools in the district included in the study. Criteria considered in the site selection also included Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment, socioeconomic diversity of the student body, the percent of students who qualified for gifted services, and students' academic success as measured by scholarship eligibility and AP exam success rates.

An in-depth interview design was used for this study. "The strengths of in-depth interviews are many. First, as the term implies, in-depth interviews allow researchers to get "deep" answers to their questions from "experts" on the issue" (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 117). The experts in this case are the educational leaders who participated in the study. While the original research design had these interviews being held in person, the online questionnaire was implemented due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The interview guide was transformed into a questionnaire to ensure that all participants were providing input in order to determine perceptions. Turner (2010) refers to McNamara (2009) saying that the strength of the general interview guide approach is the ability of the researcher "...to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee" (p. 755).

An in-depth interview study design provided an opportunity to gain insight into these leaders' perceptions, allowing an opportunity to compare them with characteristics found by

previous researchers. The insights gained add to the body of work concerning the underachievement of gifted males while filling the gap in administrative perceptions. The insights of the leadership team regarding intervention plans contribute further to the study of the use of RtI with the gifted population. This study probed the views of those in one diverse, urban, southeastern county, focusing specifically on two school districts.

Setting and Participant Characteristics

Site Selection

The site selection process went through two phases. The original site, the Mossburg School District, had to be changed to Bryce County. This process and rationale will be explained moving forward.

The original district selected for the study is a large urban district in the southern United States. It has 110 schools including elementary, middle, and high, and several special schools, programs, and child development centers. It is one of the 50th largest school districts in the nation serving more than 75,000 students. The Mossburg School District has a successful school choice program in which 15% of its students participate. These magnet schools include fine arts, gifted, International Baccalaureate, career and technical centers, and others designed for alternative programming. The Mossburg School District identifies approximately 20% of its student population as gifted.

After the Mossburg School District was determined as the best district to provide rich data, specific high schools within the district were selected for closer examination. The schools determined for participant interviews were chosen after reviewing data, including Advanced Placement (AP) participation and success rates, the percent of students qualifying for state sponsored scholarships, the percent of the student body identified as gifted, and the

poverty rate. Additionally, information was analyzed to determine which of the 17 high schools in the district would be selected for this study. Of those 17 high schools, five schools were identified which could provide more data on the perceptions of administrators regarding gifted underachievement. The schools were chosen deliberately because various characteristics offered an opportunity for focused study (Saldaña, 2011). This purposeful selection came about after the researcher reviewed five years of data and chose the five sites where interviews would be conducted. The data reviewed included:

- 1) the percentage of seniors who earned a state funded college scholarship;
- 2) the poverty rate of the school;
- 3) the percentage of students who were identified as gifted;
- 4) the percentage of students taking Advanced Placement classes;
- 5) the success rate of the students taking Advanced Placement classes as measured by students who earned a passing score on the AP exam.

The primary characteristic of these schools was a discrepancy in the academic performance of students with similar demographics. Data was gathered from state report cards about various aspects of the schools' performance. The process is detailed below.

Once the data had been recorded and was organized in a chart, the researcher looked for patterns over time and chose the five schools based on questions that arose from the review. Questions such as why one school had higher AP success rates than others, why some schools had similar gifted rates but varying AP participation, and why some schools had higher percentages of those qualifying for state scholarships arose. The questions resulted from discrepancies in data, such as a high gifted population with a lower scholarship rate. Other discrepancies were noted when schools with similar poverty and gifted rates had

different numbers of students enrolled in Advanced Placement classes. These types of differences in report card data led the researcher to ponder if the leadership in the school created a different environment, or if some students were being encouraged to take AP classes in spite of their likely success on the AP exam. These inconsistencies caused the researcher to ponder what differences were happening within those specific school buildings. The criteria used for the purposeful selection of these five schools became having similar demographics with differing academic results. This process was discussed with my committee chair and the site selections were finalized.

Rationale for New Site Selection

During the winter of 2019-2020, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) spread throughout the world, resulting in an unprecedented pandemic. By the end of January, the outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) and by March, John Hopkins University reported that there were over one million people infected worldwide. Countries across the globe implemented quarantine regulations and shelter in place orders. The message of social distancing and hand washing was heard throughout the world. According to the White House, on March 1, 2020, the President of the United States declared that COVID-19 constituted a national emergency.

At the beginning of April, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) predicted close to 70,000 fatalities would be seen in the United States by August 2020. The state governors, in conjunction with the Federal government, implemented policies in an attempt to mitigate the impacts of the virus. Every state declared a State of Emergency, and governors declared that all non-essential employees were to work from home. Public gatherings of 10 or more were not allowed. Media outlets provided daily news briefings

regarding the spread of the virus. Often heard was the overwhelming need for personal protective gear, ventilators for the sick, the exhaustion of hospital staff, the effects on the world economy, and in some states, the reality of having to use refrigerated trucks to contain the dead (Rothfeld, Sengupta, Goldstein, & Rosenthal, 2020; Wan, 2020).

During this time period, school districts and universities throughout the United States put in place measures to limit person-to-person contact. Institutions closed campus classrooms and restricted instruction to an online format. Citizens were encouraged to stay at home. Businesses throughout the country closed in order to allow workers to stay at home. Those employed with grocery stores, drug stores, medical facilities, and transportation were considered essential. All others were required to work from home or were temporarily laid off.

The Mossburg School District, along with most others, was required by state mandate to restrict instruction to electronic “e-learning” methods. Teachers prepared online lessons with the use of tools such as Google Classroom and Khan Academy. Students without Wi-Fi accessed it in their neighborhoods as school busses were equipped to become hotspots, and school parking lots were used to access the Wi-Fi from outside the building. The district website provided information for parents with log on instructions and tips to help with daily assignments. School personnel throughout the state conducted online lessons and video chats with their students.

The circumstances regarding the pandemic necessitated changes in the data collection process. The researcher’s dissertation committee chair recommended that the proposal defense and all subsequent research be moved from face-to-face interactions to video conferencing only. With the closing of school buildings and a stay-at-home, shelter in place

mandate, all previously scheduled interviews were restructured to ensure not only validity concerning the data, but the safety of those participating in the study.

In order to ascertain the answers to both research questions, with consideration of the new social distancing norms now required by the COVID-19 pandemic, portions of the research protocol were redesigned. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders as related to the underperformance of gifted males and examine awareness of interventions to address this phenomenon. In addition, possible interventions based on the Response to Intervention (RtI) model and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) were explored in the form of the Palmer Model.

After the successful defense of the research proposal including the new safety protocols, approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of South Carolina before seeking approval for research from the Mossburg School District. The IRB process was completed during the early part of the 2020 summer, and the required application documents were submitted to the Mossburg School District. Prior to the proposed interviews, approval from the Mossburg School District for online questionnaires and video conferencing with the focus groups was sought. The Mossburg School District had a detailed procedure required for research conducted within the district. The process required the researcher to specify which schools were to be included in the study and with whom the researcher requested to speak. The procedure for how the information was to be kept confidential and an overview of how the information was to be used were also requirements of the approval process.

To explore the research question of leaders' perceptions of challenges facing gifted males, interview questions were to be sent via email and answered electronically by 15

participants. Three team members from each of the five sites selected were to answer the same set of structured questions that had originally been the interview guide. The principal, the director of guidance, and the curriculum coordinator from each school were to participate in the online questionnaire.

The second research question addressed leaders' approaches to interventions and sought insight from these leaders regarding the Palmer Model. Intervention programs implemented in schools often require input, planning, and oversight from the school leadership team. In an effort to explore how leaders approach interventions to underachievement, virtual focus group conferences were to be conducted with each school's leadership team. Individual questionnaire responses collected from leadership team members were meant to serve as a foundation for the discussions held in the focus groups.

The school leadership team from each of the selected sites were to participate in this focus group conference call using the Cisco Webex video conferencing platform. According to the Cisco website, "It offers integrated audio, video, and content sharing with highly secure web meetings from any browser or mobile or video device" (Cisco.com). This platform would have allowed the researcher to speak with all members of the leadership team at once. The Cisco Webex platform allows for the focus group sessions to be recorded. Recordings from each focus group session were to be transcribed using the Google Docs program.

As the summer of 2020 drew to a close, school districts throughout the United States were tasked with planning how to safely educate their students in the fall. Plans were made in the researcher's home state that included parents having the choice of returning to an in-person learning model, a hybrid model of in-person and online learning, or a total virtual

education model. The plans were contingent on the spread of the coronavirus at the time school started. School districts in some parts of the country continued with a total virtual education model.

After several months of email correspondence and delay, the evaluation specialist who is in charge of outside research in the Mossburg School District informed the researcher in the fall of 2020 that the application had been denied. She stated that it was not me or my research, but rather “the vast number of competing interests at the time.”

New Site Selection

The denial of the research application from the Mossburg School District necessitated the selection of a new research site. A discussion of another research site was had with my dissertation chair. After further review of school data, a neighboring community, Bryce County, was selected. The researcher has lived in Bryce County for many years, but the selection was not just one of convenience. Maxwell (2013) indicates that the most important consideration in qualitative selections is choosing those “times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information you need to answer your research questions” (p. 97). After Bryce County was determined as the best location to provide rich data, pertinent documents from all the school districts in Bryce County were reviewed. Factors considered in the selection of the districts included prior academic performance of the high schools and the focus on gifted education, per school documents. Two specific districts were chosen for a closer examination, each having exemplary reputations for their academic performance. The two school districts chosen for this study will be named the Stoneville School District and the Grisham School District, with Braylor Dalton High School and Rocco Haynes High School being the names for the high school in those districts. These two districts are

comprised of different demographic. One is a more rural district, while the other is in the city of Bryce.

The process proposed for research in the Mossburg School District was altered to accommodate the new requirements for the sites in Bryce County. An amendment was submitted to the IRB for approval of a site change. After the IRB approved the site change, the appropriate personnel from each district office was contacted. The approval process was different than that of the Mossburg School District and did not require a written application packet.

Once the school districts were determined, approval from district leaders to conduct research was sought. After that approval was granted from the Stoneville and Grisham School Districts, permission was sought to contact leaders in their respective schools. Educational leaders in two of the three high schools within those districts agreed to participate in the study. Braylor Dalton High School and Rocco Haynes High School were selected as sites that could offer the researcher insight into the perceptions of leaders and the possible interventions available to underperforming males. In addition, members of the leadership team at Wilson Pace Academy, an early college program in the Stoneville District, agreed to participate. Students from Braylor Dalton High School who are selected to attend the Wilson Pace Academy must meet certain criteria and be accepted into the program. The students selected to attend the academy must be males who would be first generation college students. Those who are nominated go through a selection process which includes review of academic test scores, interviews, and teacher recommendations. While this is a magnet program, the students still take some courses at the Braylor Dalton building. Their test score data is also included in the main high school data. While I have professional relationships

with the leaders in these schools that have been made over the course of my career, I have not taught in any of them.

Both the Stoneville and Grisham school districts have college preparation and AP programs that are outstanding. The Stoneville School District enumerates increased ACT scores as a priority, while the Grisham School District has included in its School Renewal Plan that all of its high school core curriculum teachers will have earned the initial endorsement in gifted and talented education from the state department of education or have completed required training in teaching advanced placement courses. The schools that were selected were chosen partly because of data collected regarding the Advanced Placement exam pass rates of the individual schools. Additional information was gathered about various aspects of the schools' performance. The researcher reviewed SAT and ACT scores, School Improvement Council (SIC) reports, and the school websites. It was clear from this information that both schools had strong community support and traditions of excellence in academics, sports, and the arts. Once the information was organized, the researcher began to look for patterns that caused further questions to arise.

The schools were chosen deliberately because various characteristics offered an opportunity for focused study (Saldaña, 2011). Four years of data were reviewed and the researcher chose the sites where the study would be conducted. This data included:

- 1) the percentage of seniors who earned a state funded college scholarship;
- 2) the poverty rate of the school;
- 3) the percentage of students who were identified as gifted;
- 4) the percentage of students taking Advanced Placement classes; and

5) the success rate of the students taking Advanced Placement classes as measured by students who earned a passing score on the AP exam.

Table 3.1 *School Report Card Data*

School	Report Card Year	Percent Earning Scholarship	Poverty Rate	Percent Gifted	Percent Taking AP Classes	Percent Passing AP Exam
Braylor Dalton	2020	20.1	63.3	22.9	16.5	NA
	2019	29.2	63.2	25.9	16.9	78.1
	2018	32.5	61.5	15.6	14.5	83.1
	2017	27.1	61.2	24.2	28.2	82.8
Rocco Haynes	2020	86.5	52.1	30.2	15.6	NA
	2019	87.9	50.6	31.3	14.5	52.3
	2018	79	51.5	20	12.5	43.5
	2017	68.9	49.4	29.6	15.7	35.1

A review of the data listed in the table offered insight into the programs that were being provided to the students in the respective high schools. Each of these components offered insight into each school's implementation of the gifted and talented curriculum.

One component of providing services for gifted students is the offering of classes that “maximize the potential of students” (SBE Regulation 43-220: Gifted and Talented). One way schools throughout the country provide this advanced curriculum to high school-aged students is to offer Advanced Placement (AP) classes. These classes provide students the opportunity to attempt college-level work while still attending high school. Examinations for each course offered are administered in the spring and students have the opportunity to earn college credit based on that score.

Bryce County is located in a state which provides college scholarships for students who meet certain eligibility criteria. These include:

1. Earning a cumulative 3.0 grade point average (GPA) based on the Uniform Grading Scale upon high school graduation;
2. Scoring 1100 on the SAT or an equivalent 24 on the ACT;
3. Ranking in the top 30% of the graduating class.

The scholarship funds are available for students who attend in-state four-year institutions, as well as those who attend technical or community colleges. This researcher compared the percentage who were making grades high enough to earn the required 3.0 minimum GPA with the percentage of students identified as gifted. This comparison allowed for exploration of possible curricular choices that were being made by students who had been identified as high ability.

Once the data had been recorded and was organized in a chart, the researcher looked for patterns over time and noted questions that arose from the review. For instance, both schools had similar numbers of gifted students and similar poverty rates. The percentage of students who qualified for scholarships, however, was very different. The state offers a scholarship based on a student's grade point average (GPA) and SAT/ACT scores. The discrepancy in the scholarship numbers between the two schools made me question the possible differences in the GPAs of these students. If the grades of students are better at one high school than another, is there a difference in the teaching pedagogy or the courses taken? Because Hébert (1993) found that curricular guidance was a factor in underachievement, and there also was a discrepancy between scholarship numbers and perhaps the GPA of students, I decided this was an important consideration in the site selection. Further analysis of the data shows comparable numbers of students taking AP courses, but different levels of

success. This inconsistency also prompted the researcher to wonder what caused one school to have a higher pass rate than the other.

Just as I had previously done in the Mossburg School District, I looked for patterns over time and chose these two schools based on the same type questions that arose from the review. While the primary characteristic of the schools in the Mossburg School District was a discrepancy in the academic performance of students with similar demographics, the characteristics for Bryce County was the difference in the AP exam success rate and the percent of students qualifying for a state scholarship. My committee chair was consulted, and the new site selections were finalized.

Braylor Dalton High School is located in the city of Bryce. It has a history dating back to the early 1900's and was renamed after the two city high schools merged during integration. Braylor Dalton has previously been recognized as one of the nation's top high schools by U.S. News and World Report, as well as being a National Blue Ribbon School winner. According to the 2020-2021 data, the demographics of the student body are as follows: 33%, are white, 50% are African American, 9% are Hispanic, 3% are Asian, and 1% are other. The percent of students who receive free or reduced lunch is 59%, and 23% percent of the population qualified to receive gifted education services.

Rocco Haynes High School is also located in Bryce County. Rocco Haynes has previously been recognized by the state administrators association for offering excellent instruction and outstanding leadership. According to the 2020-2021 data, the demographics of the student body are as follows: 78%, are white, 11% are African American, 5% are Hispanic, 3% are Asian, and 3% are other. The percent of students who receive free or

reduced lunch is 45%, and 30% percent of the population qualified to receive gifted education services.

Participant Selection

Those invited to participate in the research process held leadership positions within the schools and districts selected. The principals of two high schools, a director of gifted education, an assistant principal, a retired superintendent, the dean of an early college program, and a guidance counselor all agreed to participate in the study. These leaders were chosen differently in each district. After contacting the appropriate district office personnel to obtain permission to do research in the district, suggestions were made by the representative in Grisham County, while the contact from Stoneville County allowed me to contact those I felt could best supply appropriate data. The two principals and the dean each offered potential data regarding culture and climate that is best established from the top administrator in the building. The director of gifted and the retired superintendent offered the opportunity to understand the bigger picture of programming from a district level. The assistant principal and guidance counselor are typically the personnel in the most direct contact with students. Each of these seven individuals potentially held a different perspective of the underperformance of these students, offering multiple points of view for possible intervention strategies.

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), “effective school leaders focus their work on the core issues of teaching and learning and school improvement” (NASSP, 2011). Cotton (2003) noted the principal, as the instructional leader of a school, can directly impact school culture, thereby influencing the success of these students. While school administrators have a tremendous impact on the climate and

learning environment of the school, it is not reasonable to think one person can do that alone. With the numerous responsibilities of a secondary principal to handle sports events, discipline issues, state accountability requirements, and a multitude of other tasks, it is understandable that others would be assigned to carry out detailed curricular and guidance duties. In order to determine the perceptions of educational leaders, it was imperative that the varying perspectives of leaders who perform different roles in the school and district be explored. Hence, speaking to those who handle different aspects of the educational program was a priority in the investigation regarding leadership perceptions. Furthermore, it was reasonable to anticipate all participants in the study would offer rich data pertaining to gifted academic underperformance and possible intervention strategies.

Discussion of Interview Questions

Patton (2002) states that the purpose of interviewing “is to allow us to enter into the other’s perspective” (p. 341). In order to assess the perceptions of educational leaders, interviews with those leaders were planned. As the COVID pandemic dictated the research to remain distant, the interviews were restructured into online questionnaires. The questions were designed based on my research questions and were open ended. A semi-structured interview model was the original protocol to be used by the researcher. Due to the need for an online procedure, the interview guide was reformatted as the questionnaire (Appendix A). Although the typed responses seemed shorter than what the researcher assumed would have been given had the protocol not changed, it seemed to have an unintended advantage. With the responses coming in writing to be organized, it allowed more time for the researcher to ponder the answers and develop the follow-up focus group questions (Appendix B). Had the interviews been done verbally, there might have been unclarified responses. The

questionnaire included topics regarding the leaders' training and understanding of gifted education, perceptions of the school's gifted populations, insights into what challenges a gifted child might face, and the current knowledge level of an RtI or MTSS intervention model. The content of the questionnaire was determined based on the findings of the literature review in Chapter 2, as well as the desire of the researcher to explore the possible interventions for underperforming students.

Data Collection Process

A similar process to the one proposed for the Mossburg School District was used with the educational leaders in Bryce County to gain understanding and answer the research questions. The seven study participants answered the same set of structured questions. This set of open ended questions, previously planned to be discussed in person, ensured "the same basic lines of inquiry" were followed with each person interviewed (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

Descriptive coding was used to analyze the questionnaire responses. Saldana (2011) writes, "Descriptive Coding assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 262). As study participants returned the online questionnaires, the responses were organized by questions in a spreadsheet. Each response was given a label, the labels were reviewed, and then the question was given a code. Most questions had one to three codes, as the responses often had several common replies. Inductive reasoning was utilized to organize the codes into categories and then ultimately into emergent themes.

Once the responses were organized, follow-up questions were developed to further probe and clarify participant responses. These follow-up questions were used as a guide in the focus group sessions (Appendix B).

Approaches to interventions and insight from these leaders regarding the Palmer Model were the focus of the second research question. In order to examine how leaders approach interventions to underachievement, and to delve deeper into the responses from the online questionnaire data, virtual focus group conferences were conducted. Patton (2002) asserts, “the power of the focus group resides in their being focused. The reactions to a product or program, not a complex life issue, can be explored with a focus group” (p. 389). The foundation for the discussions held in the focus groups was based on the coding of the questionnaire responses, as well as the leaders feedback on the Palmer Model of intervention.

The Palmer Model

The Palmer Model is proposed for the Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention levels. The Palmer Model incorporates elements listed below, specifically the students who will be targeted, from a study investigated during the review of the literature (Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012). Students who are not performing at expected levels will be identified for Tier 3 intervention. Those students are:

1. Students who are identified as gifted/talented based on the state identification guidelines.
2. Grades in the bottom half of the class in language arts and/or mathematics, or a C average or below in language arts and/or mathematics
3. Recommendation by a classroom teacher, gifted specialist, and/or counselor as a bright underachiever.

Hoover-Schultz (2005) points out that perhaps parents of underachieving students do not have the skills to support their children’s unusual talents. Helping parents understand the needs of their gifted child, as well as their college and career potential, is a key feature of the

Palmer Model. Additionally, helping the students themselves understand the long-term impact of not working to one's potential, whether it be academically or in preparation for a career, is another key component.

Recall Herzberg (1966) found the five major factors in job satisfaction were achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement. Factors to help reverse underachievement include out-of-school interests, parents, challenging academic classes, goals, the teacher, and the concept of self (Emerick, 1992). Relationships with teachers, interest in the subject matter, and engaging instructional methods were also present in the study of selective achievement (Hébert & Schreiber, 2010). The Palmer Model was designed with these concepts and the RtI tiered approach in mind.

The Palmer Model

Gifted Intervention Process

Recruitment

- The students are identified for the gifted and talented program in the district. This identification typically occurs during elementary school and uses the state/district guidelines.

Monitoring

- The students' files are color coded and reviewed annually by a teacher/counselor with the results reported to the school leadership team. Grades that do not reflect ability, attendance concerns, and/or discipline issues that may be interfering with achievement are the types of things that will be monitored.

Identifying Gaps

- The school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, determines whether specific students have gaps between identified ability and performance.

Seeking Explanations

- Once a student has been identified, school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, reviews data and seeks to determine possible issues that are interfering with the student's performance.

Preparing Interventions

- The school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, identifies possible means of intervention. These interventions will vary based on the sources of concern and the grade level of the student. Such interventions may include contact with the gifted teacher to assist the student, review of pedagogy and classroom instructional techniques used by the teacher(s), referral to guidance counselors, or a reward system determined in conjunction with the student.
- The school leadership ensures that the school has implemented a number of initial interventions to assist the student lasting approximately a grading period.

Preparing for a Meeting

- The school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, determines that the student continues to have a gap between identified ability and performance after initial interventions have been implemented.
- The school leadership determines that an intervention meeting should be scheduled.

- The school leadership makes sure both the student and the parent are contacted regarding a conference, that they have transportation, and are able to attend. If the parent lacks transportation, a phone conference will be held during the school day.

Convening the Meeting

- The school leadership who attends the meeting consists of the school leader, the teacher, and the guidance counselor, who are the most knowledgeable of the student.
- The school leadership will present the data regarding the current concern of underachievement to the student and parent. The information regarding initial interventions and results will also be shared.
- Input from the student regarding obstacles to academic success will be discussed as age appropriate.
- Input from the parent(s) regarding obstacles to the student's academic success will be discussed.
- Information regarding student interests will be obtained and used in the intervention plan as appropriate. This information will be obtained through dialogue with the student and parents during the intervention meeting.
- The school leadership will make decisions on what strategies the student needs, the types of services the student/family may need, and how best to provide them. These may include helping parents design study strategies for the student, ideas for consequences/rewards in the home, or tutoring suggestions. Services such as counseling or meeting with the truancy officer may also be appropriate.

- The school leadership, in collaboration with the student and parent, will prepare a comprehensive, written action plan for the student by the end of the meeting. This plan will include small, attainable goals, as well as a timeline to achieve these goals.
- To assist with implementation, a mentor will be assigned based on the student's request. Rapport previously established with the student by the staff member will be considered. If possible, this person will be identified prior to the meeting and he/she will attend. Staff members will volunteer based on their relationship with identified underachievers.

Implementing the Intervention

- The school leadership will follow up to check the attainment of goals and adherence to the timeline. Follow up with the parents will be included.
- The mentor will be notified if concern about the student's progress arises. Otherwise, the mentor will meet with the student to offer encouragement and positive feedback.
- Student academic progress will be monitored at each grading period unless the team decides a more frequent check is appropriate. The student's performance should begin to align with his/her identified ability.
- If improvement is not noted, revisions to the plan and further discussion with the student and parents will be scheduled.

Parent/Student/Community Outreach

- Educational sessions for parents of gifted students will be offered.
- Students who are taking credit bearing courses, typically eighth graders and older, will meet in a small group or one-to-one sessions to discuss Grade Point Average and

its implications long-term. The studies cited below are examples of what might be shared.

- French, Michael T., Homer, Jenny F., Robins, Phillip K., et al. What you do in high school matters: High school GPA, educational attainment, and labor market earnings as a young adult. *Eastern Economic Journal*. 2014.
- Geiser, S., & Maria Veronica Santelices. (2007). Validity Of High-School Grades In Predicting Student Success Beyond The Freshman Year: High-School Record vs. Standardized Tests as Indicators of Four-Year College Outcomes. *UC Berkeley: Center for Studies in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7306z0zf>
- Rose, H., & Betts, J. R. (2004). The Effect of High School Courses on Earnings. *Review of Economics & Statistics*, 86(2), 497–513.
<https://doi.org/10.1162/003465304323031076>

Focus Group Protocol

Five of the seven original study participants participated in the focus groups. The principals of the two high schools had a scheduling conflict or did not respond to emails. The focus groups were arranged at the convenience of the participants. Ultimately, there were two groups of two and an individual participant. Follow-up questions were presented to the study participants to gain insight into the feasibility of implementing an RtI plan for students who showed signs of underachievement. The focus group questions were sent via email to each member in advance. The semi-structured interview protocol was followed, with all members of the focus group contributing to the responses. According to Roulston (2010), “Focus groups are particularly useful for researchers who want to examine the

possible ways that people talk about and make sense of topics, and the kinds of issues that they see as relevant” (p. 38). The focus group format allowed the teams to collaborate on the topic of underachievement and benefit from the input of the other team members. The relevance and feasibility of intervention for underachieving, gifted males were also examined.

Research Procedures

The online questionnaires were designed based on the research questions, the document review of district strategic plans, and the review of literature involving interventions for underachievement. The themes that appeared were identified and analyzed. The questions specifically attempted to identify the school leaders’ knowledge of the issues related to the underachievement of males.

The focus group sessions followed up on themes that emerged while coding the questionnaire responses. Additionally, the Palmer Model was presented, and participants reflected on the feasibility of its implementation in a high school setting. Three focus groups were held based on individual participant schedule availability. The participants from the Wilson Pace Academy, the assistant principal and, the retired Superintendent, and the Director of Gifted from Grisham School District each participated in the focus groups. Each focus group session lasted about 90 minutes and was conducted via the TEAMS virtual meeting program. This platform allowed the researcher to record the focus group meetings. The focus group sessions were also recorded on a personal recording device. Recordings from each focus group session were then transcribed using the Google Docs program.

Study participants were given consent forms prior to the study, and there was compliance with all requirements of the Stoneville and Grisham School Districts. The

participants were told prior to their agreeing to participate that the estimated time to complete all components of the study was approximately three hours. Each part of the study was designed to elicit responses that provided insight into the leadership teams' perceptions of underachievement and selective achievement of gifted males. The questionnaires were sent via confidential email approximately one month prior to the researchers' proposed due date. The focus group sessions were scheduled at a time convenient to the school leadership and were held via TEAMS meetings. Written consent was obtained from those who agreed to participate in the study, and all participants did so on a voluntary basis. To eliminate potential risks to participants, pseudonyms were created for each educational leader, district, and high school by using a website that generates random names. The study was conducted during the fall and spring of the 2020-2021 school year.

Upon completion of the data collection, the researcher began the analysis of the data with the following process:

- Online questionnaire data was organized and coded.
- Transcripts for each focus group were prepared. Observations made by the researcher were also noted at this time.
- Pseudonyms were created for each participant.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2007) describes member checking as taking the data back to the participants in the study. This can be done by having participants review the transcripts and field notes and comment on the accuracy. Once the focus groups were transcribed, copies were sent via email attachments, and participants reviewed the accuracy of the researcher. Creswell goes on to highlight triangulation as a validity procedure, describing it as a search

for “convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). Numerous educational leaders were interviewed in each district, allowing the researcher to experience different points of view within the same setting. Various school sites were chosen for this study, each with a different demographic, to provide multiple data sources.

Subjectivity Statement

Maxwell (2013) asserts, “Separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypothesis, and validity checks” (p. 45). As I stated in Chapter 1, my son has an above average intelligence quotient (IQ). He was in his district’s gifted program from the third grade until he graduated. He was in accelerated Algebra, Physical Science, and Latin I in the eighth grade. When he brought home a grade of mid to low “B,” I began to question what I should do as a parent. He was your average, unorganized, highly gifted teenage boy. The adults in our family discussed at length what should be done to encourage him. I did not think that a “B” was good enough when I knew that he could make an “A,” especially since the educator in me knew how important class rank would be in a few years.

In discussions with his teachers, many of whom I had known for years being in the same school district, they said that they knew he was not performing up to his potential. I met with the guidance counselor about possibly testing for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). She checked his permanent records, saw his IQ and grade point average (GPA) did not match, and said I needed to see a doctor. The doctor thought that my son was just bored. In the tenth grade, when my son heard his class rank was number 96 out of about 400 kids, he realized that what I had been saying since the eighth grade was correct. During a parent conference,

his tenth grade AP Computer Science teacher said, “If he is interested in something, his presentation is one of the best you will ever see. If not, it is hard to get him to complete it at all.” What is a mother to do with that? When you have a child who is described as funny, respectful, charming, independent, and intelligent by non-family members, it is hard to put him on restriction for making a “B.” I had to make a decision for my family. Was I willing to lose our relationship for the “A”? After a personal tragedy in the fall of the eleventh grade, I knew I could not put any more pressure on my son. The risks of losing him were too great.

Reflecting now on how his college opportunities played out, I wonder what I could have done in the eighth grade to motivate him. I bring this life experience to my study. I know what a conundrum seeing your own child underperform academically at school, while being outstanding in other areas, causes parents. Being reflective also causes me to wonder if I made the right choices in regard to how I handled him. I think every mother second guesses things she did raising her children, and I am no different. I also have to question how I define underachievement. Although my own son did not always make an “A,” did he underachieve? He was a National Merit Semi-Finalist, the drum major for the band, voted Who’s Who in the high school yearbook, and a member of the city’s Youth Council. By most definitions he was very high achieving.

As I analyze the findings from this research, I will have to be careful that I do not mix personal feelings with facts. Knowing that these personal experiences may cause bias, using the methods detailed regarding trustworthiness was essential. As Maxwell (2013) quotes, “Validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference, but of integrity” (p. 124).

Conclusion

The methods and research design that was used to study the underperformance of gifted males, the school leadership team's perception of this, and possible intervention strategies were discussed in Chapter 3. The qualitative in-depth interview method allowed for a deeper understanding of these perceptions and tiered strategy possibilities.

The justification for a qualitative design and why an in-depth interview study was suitable for the study of underperformance and intervention were discussed. The site selection process, the rationale for a site change, including purposely selecting a diverse county, and the review of state report card data to select appropriate school settings, were outlined. Participant selection and the research protocol were discussed, as well as trustworthiness and ethical interpretation of results. The study examined leadership perceptions of underperformance and collected data regarding a possible tiered approach to intervention.

The research findings for this study will be presented in Chapter 4. The data will show the perceptions of these educational leaders as well as the overall themes that emerged. The feedback that was given on The Palmer Model will also be included. Chapter 5 will include the key findings and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Yeah, worse than that, if I take that class, I won't be able to have lunch with my girlfriend. It's that simple.

This study examined the perceptions of underperformance of gifted males as realized by educational leaders and explored their awareness of this phenomenon. The Palmer Model, developed based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model using a 3-tier intervention approach, was presented to school leaders. This model offers strategies to address underachievement in gifted students, just as it might be used to develop individualized education plans for students with learning disabilities. Insight about the proposed strategies was sought in order to assess the possibilities available for intervention. The significance of this qualitative case study is to increase awareness of underperforming gifted student populations, specifically underperforming gifted males in a school setting. This awareness may lead to strategy implementation by school leadership to minimize the discrepancy between the ability and performance of gifted students. The following research questions guided this in-depth interview study:

- 1) How do leaders perceive challenges facing gifted male students?
- 2) How do leaders approach interventions to underachievement?

Methodology

The focus of this study was to ascertain the perceptions of school leaders regarding both the underperformance of gifted males and potential intervention strategies to mitigate the underperformance. The study was conducted in diverse community located in the southeast. This community consists of seven school districts containing nine high schools. The large expanse of Bryce County includes an urban city environment with more rural outlying communities. The purposeful selection of these school districts was based on professional relationships with school and district-level personnel, as well as my knowledge of the school systems and their perceived strengths in gifted and talented education. Additionally, pertinent documents such as school report cards and School Improvement Council (SIC) documents were reviewed to develop an understanding of the gifted population and Advanced Placement (AP) test results. Criteria considered in the site selection also included Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment, socioeconomic diversity of the student body, the percent of students who qualified for gifted services, and the academic success of students as measured by scholarship eligibility.

The collection of study data was in the form of online questionnaires sent to individuals, followed by three focus group interviews. Study participants were chosen based on their roles as educational leaders in the chosen districts, as well as their expertise in gifted education. Study participants included various educational leaders from Bryce County: the principals of two high schools, a director of gifted education, an assistant principal, a retired superintendent, the dean of an early college program, and a guidance counselor. Each of these individuals offered different perceptions of the

underperformance of gifted male students, contributing multiple points of view for possible intervention strategies.

Online questionnaires were sent to study participants via email. The iterative process of initial coding of responses included sorting the data and assigning descriptive codes. These codes helped identify patterns, categories, and emerging themes. Data analysis was guided by my research questions as I explored participant perceptions of underachievement and interventions. The results of this initial coding process helped generate the follow-up questions discussed in focus group sessions. This researcher continued with an iterative approach to review and code data from questionnaire responses, focus group transcripts, and interview notes.

Maintaining confidentiality of study sites and participants was accomplished with the use of pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identity of the school districts, specific high schools within those districts, and individuals contributing to this study. The county where the districts are located will be referred to as Bryce County. The two school districts will be referenced as Stoneville School District and Grisham School District. There were seven participants that returned questionnaires out of the ten invited to participate. There were five focus group participants out of the seven invited to participate.

Questionnaire and Focus Group Findings

Questionnaires were provided to key administrators and district personnel throughout Stoneville and Grisham School Districts. The principals of two high schools, a director of gifted education, an assistant principal, a retired superintendent, the dean of an early college program, and a guidance counselor all responded, returning the

completed questionnaires. Questions included in the questionnaire are provided in Appendix A, and subsequent discussion will reference this as the online questionnaire. All study participants except for the two high school principals were members of follow up focus groups. Questions included in the focus group interview guide are provided in Appendix B, and subsequent discussion will reference this focus group questions. The findings will be organized in a way that allows online questionnaire responses and responses of focus group participants to overlap. The focus group questions were developed based on the initial coding of the online questionnaires. Subsequently, data analysis of both will be discussed together.

During the late fall of 2020, questionnaires were sent via confidential email to all participants. The results were organized and coded, reflecting emerging patterns in the data. After the initial coding of the online questionnaire responses, follow up questions were developed for the focus groups. The focus groups were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Participants were informed other members of the study would be involved, and their identity would be known by the members of that focus group.

The first focus group was conducted with two members of the leadership team at Wilson Pace Academy. Mr. Zeck is the Dean of Students of the academy, and Ms. Hill is the guidance director. The next focus group was conducted with Ms. Decker, the Director of Gifted Education in Grisham County. The final focus group was conducted with Mrs. Bradshaw, assistant principal in charge of curriculum at a local elementary school in Grisham County, and Mr. Moses, who is a retired Superintendent in Stoneville County. Mrs. Bradshaw was formally the assistant principal at Rocco Haynes High

School with Mr. Arias. Mr. Moses served as a guidance counselor, high school assistant principal, principal, and Superintendent during his career.

The questions sent to participants in the online questionnaire were originally designed to be used as a semi-structured interview guide. When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the restructuring of the research design, these questions became the first source of data collection. Once the questionnaires were returned, further questions arose when the responses were reviewed and analyzed. Follow-up questions were developed into a guide that was used during the focus group interviews. The focus groups were conducted using the Microsoft Teams online meeting tool. The questions were sent to participants approximately two days in advance of the focus group session for review.

The online questionnaire was organized so that various aspects of a topic were explored before gradually moving to another topic. Focus group questions were then developed based on participant responses to the online questionnaire. For instance, the questionnaire started with an exploration of the leaders' descriptions of gifted students. The responses indicated that intellectual curiosity was a descriptor of a gifted child. The follow-up focus group question explored how educators encourage curiosity. This pattern of analysis and follow-up question development was repeated until all online questionnaire answers had been thoroughly explored and responses clarified. The findings will be organized in a way that combines the responses from the online questionnaires and the subsequent follow-up questions. Since the focus group questions were developed based on the initial coding of the questionnaires, these similar topics will be discussed together. After a summary of participant responses, the findings will show

the overall perceptions of the leaders towards underperformance and their ideas regarding interventions for those students.

The online questionnaire portion of data collection began with the collection of demographic information about the participants. Study participants were then asked to describe a gifted and talented student. Responses tended to reflect thoughts of students who were capable, exceptional, and curious. Phrases such as high achievement, great intellectual curiosity, and being capable of performing at levels significantly beyond their peer age group were used. Mr. Peterson commented, “Gifted and talented could be classified in many different areas. Students who are academically, artistically (visual or musical), or athletically gifted or talented could fall into one or both of those categories.”

The terms “inquisitive” and “curious” emerged in numerous participant responses. These ideas were further investigated during the focus group discussion. Specifically, how educators encourage curiosity was explored. Respondents agreed that the curriculum should be open-ended and focused on the interest of the child. Making curriculum relevant, as well as allowing opportunities for choice and independent work, were also common responses. Mr. Moses gave a very detailed response to this question. He stated,

...what educators do to encourage a gifted child's curiosity, I think of three things.

The first one is questioning. To make sure that the questions that you ask are open-ended and leading types of questions as opposed to yes or no short answer kinds of things. But, the kinds of questions that somebody would have to, you know, do some of that higher order thinking.

He goes on, “Secondly, I think the encouragement part of it, is to reinforce that higher level thinking, I think from that whole climate standpoint when we talked about meaningful work, that you present age-appropriate, and challenging, and relevant real-world problems.” He also suggested that the work must be meaningful to the student. He used words like challenging, relevant, and real world. Mrs. Bradshaw agreed stating, “...find out what kids are interested in, and then build some curriculum or build some activities individually around what it is that they want to learn.” Mr. Peck recognized that educators must teach some “rote knowledge.” He also said,

You’ve got to get the basic, what I call it, domain information to lead to your innovative ideas. The other thing is, I think that students need to feel open to come to teachers, faculty, staff to discuss ideas they may have.

This pattern of encouragement and openness was consistent in all responses received. Participants noted the need for coursework to offer relevant, real-world knowledge and that students needed choices in how that knowledge was assessed.

As with other populations of students, gifted and talented students have their own set of challenges. The desire to be perfect, lack of social skills, and unrealistic adult expectations are challenges mentioned by the study participants. They often “stand out” according to Mr. Moses in, “ways that bring unwanted attention making socialization difficult for some situations.” Mr. Arias wrote, “Honestly, the biggest issue with gifted or talented students is the teacher’s idea that GT students need more busy work or are bored.” The expectations of parents and teachers were comments repeatedly expressed in the online questionnaire. Additionally, socialization issues and perfectionism were concerns mentioned.

Parent and teacher expectations, as well as socialization skills, were discussed during the follow-up focus group. Mr. Moses commented regarding the expectations of all involved. He said,

What occurs to me is to clearly define and clearly communicate standards and expectations for parents, teachers, and students. And then, present opportunities to practice. And that's opportunities for parents to practice that with students, and for students to practice that with teachers, and for students to practice that with students.

He offered the example of teaching children how to have a casual conversation by practicing at home during dinner. A way to help students with socialization at school was given by Mrs. Bradshaw.

I thought about at the high school, that's a little more tricky. But, you might encourage kids to maybe join a sports team or a club to-just because, normally in high school if you're socially awkward, you don't have a lot of friends or you're not very involved. So, maybe encouraging him to get involved.

Ms. Hill indicated that over her career, she had dealt with both issues. As a veteran guidance counselor in the Stoneville School District, she has had many families reach out to her about both socialization issues and expectations of the child. She began her comments with a light-hearted remark about her colleague, Mr. Peck. She said, "I do think that we have a stereotype in our society that bright people are geeky and awkward. And they don't have to be geeky and awkward. Look at [Mr. Peck], he's not geeky and awkward. He's pretty smart." To provide context, Mr. Peck was very successful in the corporate world prior to becoming an educator. He holds several patents in his field.

Ms. Hill continued, “We have to make sure that there are opportunities to again honor the child where they are. And there are some who are odd.” Ms. Hill also notes the pressure that gifted identification can have on children. She said,

When those children are carrying their little bags that say [Gifted and Talented], it might as well say I'm smart because everybody tells me I am. And I think that, from a very early level, creates great stress on the children who have been identified as gifted, and those who have not.

She elaborates by stating, “And I think that- so those children grow up, from about the third grade, with their having to live up to something- their parents’ expectations, or the one the school districts put on them, or whatever it is.” Mr. Peck points out that there is often a perception a gifted child is under pressure to be gifted across the board. He said, “But yet, we expect this so-called gifted kid to be gifted in everything, right. So, I think one of the issues is helping the kid identify where his gift is.”

Gifted students have the ability to perform at the highest academic level. That is part of the definition of gifted. Even with this ability, it seems that students do not always make the highest grades in school they could. Underachievement was described by study respondents in a variety of ways. Ms. Decker stated, “Underachievement is not always reflected in grades/test scores. Underachievement can often be a result of lack of motivation, poor work ethic, expectations that don’t match their gifts/abilities.” Mr. Peterson’s answer was similar. He said, “Underachievement is not living up to or taking advantage of your God-given talent. Everyone underachieves....it may be a lack of motivation, lack of resources, or failure to apply themselves truly.” All agreed that gifted students could underachieve.

Each of these educational leaders described underperforming with similar terminology. Lack of effort, lack of interest, and below ability performance were common phrases used. When asked about specific examples of these characteristics, the category of the area of interest was overwhelming. Respondents described students who would work well in areas that were of interest and show disregard for other areas. Mr. Peterson gives a vivid description saying,

Many students are truly academically gifted and fail to reach their true potential. Byron is a student that comes to mind. He comes from a well-to-do family with all the resources to enhance and sharpen his academic talents. He was one of the smartest students that I have ever come across. He only took his history class seriously and put effort into it. This was his only interest, and his goal was to work in a museum. For this reason, he was unmotivated to do well in any of his classes when he could have easily been an all “A” student.

As previously stated, a student’s gifted potential may only surface when working in an area of interest. This was validated by numerous participant respondents when describing a gifted student. Respondents felt the gifted underachievers could be motivated by making the content relevant and allowing choices within assignments. As all educators know, however, there are academic standards that must be taught in each course. Teachers do not have complete freedom to allow students to only study what interests them. The focus group followed up on this idea by discussing ways that high school teachers could use the student’s area of interest in Advanced Placement (AP) curriculums, while still meeting the standards guidelines.

The leaders all agreed that giving a choice in the way standards are assessed is a way to include the student's area of interest. They all also acknowledged the difficulty in doing so. Ms. Hill said, "I guess it's the term, maybe it's a little too strong, the encouragement, maybe the encouragement, to get outside of the box."

Mr. Moses elaborated,

There's a thousand different ways to teach the standards. And I'm not saying that it's easy. I'm not saying that it doesn't require thought and critical thinking on the part of the instructor, the teacher, or whomever. But that goes all the way back to that whole climate that you're creating where you're looking for those teachers to create that kind of an environment in the classroom. And to go the extra mile to figure out what clicks with those groups of kids individually, collectively, or in small groups and what kind of project would turn them on.

Although teachers may work to incorporate choice in assessments, offer real-world examples, and make the standards relevant, there will still be those students who do not perform. Study participants were provided the meaning of a selective achiever as defined by Hébert and Schreiber (2010). It states, "Selective achievers are intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations" (p. 572). They were then asked if these students were problematic. Responses varied from "Very" to "Not necessarily." Mr. Arias stated, "I don't think they are problematic. I think it is just a personal choice, and we need to accommodate that." Mrs. Bradshaw viewed these students differently, replying, "Selective achievers are problematic because they are not living up to their full potential. They may also miss out on future opportunities due to low grades/GPA."

In order to help selective achievers, leaders think there are a variety of approaches to encourage increased achievement. Strategies suggested by those questioned included having conversations about their futures, continuing to focus on their areas of interest, and balancing those interests with the requirements of the curriculum. Ms. Hill pointed out, however, that selective achievers will experience consequences by doing only what they want to do. “Selective achievers must be held to the norms of our education system and our society...we do not get to choose to drive on the left side of the road.” Aside from the consequences of only choosing to do what they are interested in, some leaders stated that conversations were important in combatting selective achievement. Comments like “Help them to see the Big Picture,” and “Finding a way to help them connect effort now with achieving future goals would be helpful” were made. Follow-up questions pertaining to what information should be shared and who would have those conversations with underachieving gifted students led the discussion into the area of parental responsibility and mentors.

Throughout the analysis of the responses, there were comments regarding relationships with students, building rapport with students, and having conversations with students. When underachievement was noted in a child’s performance, all of these were strategies mentioned. The focus groups discussed who is responsible for initiating the types of conversations that might motivate a student. While the specific person responsible varied with each study participant, one attribute was repeated. The adult must have a prior relationship with the child. Mrs. Bradshaw recalled her time at Rocco Haynes as an administrator and said,

Yeah, there were a lot of kids at the high school that I needed to do certain things, that I didn't have a relationship with. And, I used their coaches to get messages across to them. And so, that's exactly right. You had to find the people that they were close to. And so, yeah, utilizing coaches was a big one at the high school.

The discussion continued around the topic of what information to share and who should be responsible for these conversations. Mr. Moses and Mrs. Bradshaw both offered detailed responses during their focus group. Mrs. Bradshaw said,

Well, I think you first have to get to know the kids and find out what their future plans are. Because, the way that their education is going to affect their future depends on what they want their future to be. And you know, a lot of that should be the role of the parent, but it's not. Because if the parents are not educators themselves, they don't know how to best advise their child. So it is, a lot of that heavy lifting, has to be done by the school, and by teachers, and by guidance counselors, and by administrators.

Mr. Moses carried on the line of thought as the focus group continued. He said, First, let me address “who” first. I think his parents, teachers, mentors, guidance counselors, coaches, peers, students or peers. I think business and industry, and the community have a role as well. But, in my personal opinion, the lion's share of that responsibility should lie with the parents. I would agree with [Mrs. Bradshaw], too, that in helping them understand the connection, first of all, you’ve got to know what their areas of interest are. And that's more than just one conversation with folks. He concluded his responses by saying that the adult had to get the student to understand the connection between what they are doing now and what they will be doing in the future.

As I probed deeper into male underperformance, peer pressure was noted again as a specific reason. Mr. Peterson noted,

Many times with so few other students in the gifted category, a male student might feel embarrassed when showing their gifts or talents. It has also been said by many males that it is not cool to be smart, so they dumb themselves down around their peers.

They don't want to be seen as the "nerd," according to Ms. Decker. Ms. Decker also noted, "At the middle school level, they may have too many other choices and opt-out of a gifted program." Other choices such as sports and work obligations were noted in the questionnaire responses.

The focus group discussion continued on the topic of peer pressure, specifically how adults can help gifted males cope. Mr. Moses put this answer into the context of relationships with adults. He said that a person who has a relationship with the student needs to engage in a conversation through "active listening." He also stated,

So, to get them to listen to what you're saying, I think that you've got to have encouraging conversations through active listening. And true examples to help put the present peer pressure in perspective with what the future holds. And things change. And as a part of that conversation, hopefully, you are conveying that things change in terms of peer pressure. Those people aren't always going to be in their life, and to persevere through this. To have grit pays off in the long run. But, you're not going to get that message across unless, like [Mrs. Bradshaw] said, in the very, very beginning, if there's not trust there, if there's not a relationship there, then you're- it's falling on deaf ears.

Mr. Peck discussed the importance of showing students examples of adults who have excelled in life. He notes that they might not all have been in the “top 10%,” yet they have been successful. He responded,

Because, at the end of the day, you've got to find somebody that understands how you feel, right. And so, if a kid has somebody he can talk to that says, “Well hey, you know what, I didn't make [gifted] either, I didn't make honors, I didn't make AP, you know. And, and I went to college.”

Gifted students who underperform might not feel peer pressure, or have any other obstacle preventing them from being academically successful. Their underperformance may simply be a choice. The literature distinguishes between a student who is underperforming and a selective achiever (Neumeister & Hébert, 2003). As the researcher worked to understand the perceptions of school leaders, she sought to see if they also made a distinction between underachievers and selective achievers. All but one of the study participants did note a distinction. Unlike the rest of the respondents, Mrs. Bradshaw saw these two types of students differently. She stated,

Not necessarily- they are each choosing to do what they want to do in their own way. At the end of the day, they are both not achieving like they should. That becomes a school problem then- what are we doing to challenge them?

In the focus group session, the comment on how to challenge the students led the researcher to ask how leaders could use the area of interest to encourage students to excel in other areas. Two of the comments really stood out. Mr. Moses replied,

It's not easy. And I think that one of the important things is to not let your personal frustration at not reaching a child get to the point that you quit trying.

You just cannot stop trying. I think if you can recognize the power of transfer in learning, and can somehow communicate that to the child in a positive way, that could be helpful.

Mr. Peck pointed out that what he felt would help was exposure. He explained, "... it's hard to work hard for something when you can't see what that something is. It's hard to motivate yourself to work at something when you don't know what that is. But if you can get out there and see it, it makes it a lot easier."

A student who is interested in one subject may not work up to potential in another class. Participants in the focus group discussed ways school leaders use the student's areas of interest to encourage them to excel in other areas. The responses echoed some of the previously mentioned strategies. Mrs. Bradshaw reiterated,

Well, and you can't do any of that without a relationship with a kid. Because even if a kid hates a subject, if you have a good relationship with him you are going to get him to do a whole lot more, just because they like you.

Mr. Moses pointed out that often teachers get frustrated when they know that a student is not working up to their potential. He discussed how showing a student how learning something in one class might carry over into the class they are interested in might be a strategy.

Students who are identified as gifted and talented in elementary grades do not always matriculate to taking AP courses in high school. The reasons why are numerous and vary from student to student. As school leaders, we often seek to understand why that is the case. Themes that emerged were lack of motivation, fear of failure, and lack of understanding the value of taking the courses. The principal of Rocco Haynes pointed

out that the student's gifted abilities may lie within the arts. Therefore, the student might not be interested in an AP course unrelated to that field.

Many of the responses mentioned a lack of encouragement or support from the family. Subsequently, how to make parents understand the value of taking honors and AP courses were explored. The overwhelming response was the personal sharing of information with parents and students. At Rocco Haynes, parent information nights were held that focused specifically on AP courses. Mrs. Bradshaw explained the process that was used.

Like, we would invite, or we had several strategies, but we would invite parents into the school. And we'd have a night all about AP classes where we could explain everything to them and answer any questions. And then we would literally go through the rosters of AP classes and look at who was in them. And then, we look at the honors classes at the beginning of season and who shouldn't be in this class because they should be an AP. And then, we would call the students in individually and explain the benefits of it. We would call their parents individually. And so, any of those that didn't attend the sessions, and weren't signed up for the classes, and we knew were AP material, we just got down one to one and, and tried to explain it to each student and each parent.

Mr. Moses followed up in the focus group session noting that sharing data was critical when talking to parents. He emphasized,

But to [Mrs. Bradshaw's] point, my answer to it would be data. And like she was talking about, the real examples of the benefits from students like them, or like their child, um, that have had success. And if you can't find people like them

in their school, then look to other schools. But find someone that they can definitely identify with and personalize it for them. Um, and talk about the spillover of what it takes to be successful there, in terms of a work ethic, workplace problem solving, higher-level thinking. Um, going back to what I said earlier, you've got to provide concrete data that they can relate to, that makes them answer positively, 'Yeah, the sacrifice is worth it.'

These educational leaders described what a typical honors or Advanced Placement class was like in their buildings. Classes were rigorous, fast paced, engaging, and demanded a lot of time and independent studying outside of class. Students are expected to devote time to independent reading, analysis, synthesis, and other higher level thinking skills while meeting the requirements of rigorous course content. Instructors of AP courses are required to hold advanced certification in the courses they teach. Mr. Peterson shared, "Our AP program is one of the top AP programs in the state. It is a very intense college-level course taught by some of our best staff members."

Strategies described by these educational leaders to motivate students varied. Some approaches suggested were included in curricular decisions. Strategies such as offering students choice and competition were mentioned. Ms. Decker wrote,

Competitions have proven to be highly motivating for gifted students, so we implement virtual game time for GT students across the district. We also have special programs that gifted students can qualify for that involve competition at the national level (Word Masters & Math Olympiads).

Mrs. Bradshaw mentioned that teachers must discover what motivates students. She stated, “One strategy might be giving choice in activity, so the student can choose an activity that is personally meaningful.”

Participants also noted personal ways to motivate students. Mr. Arias noted the importance of relationships. He said, “Our strategies are the same for all students- our teachers seek to build positive relationships with each student and get on their level to build capacity and community with each student.” Mr. Moses agreed, “Encouragement is most effective across a wide range of gifted and non-gifted students.”

Still another motivator was realizing a positive outcome. Mr. Peck noted, “Not really, but boys are more attracted to the material benefits awarded those students that work hard,” while Mr. Peterson said, “Our students are motivated by the opportunity to gain the college credit that is offered through AP.”

The online questionnaires noted the importance of encouragement and motivation. The focus group explored how school leaders build a climate that encourages and supports students. Mr. Moses opened the discussion with these remarks.

The people in that organization who are in a position to encourage or support have to know that they have a responsibility to respond in an appropriate way. I mean, attitude makes a difference. Secondly, I would say I'm reminded of that old quote, “The difference between courage and discouragement is the presence or absence of encouragement.”

The group had similar thoughts regarding administrators listening and supporting staff. Trust was also a key factor noted when building a climate that supports and encourages students. Mrs. Bradshaw commented,

Before you can do any of that, the people in your building have to trust you, and have to know that you're going to support them like you said. That it's okay to make a mistake, and it's okay to be wrong, when other people around you are going to build you up.

Mr. Peck felt that it was imperative that the entire faculty must work together to build this culture for students. He said,

Well, I think the thing that has to happen is the administration and staff have to get together and be on the same page, right. Because, depending on what you want your school environment to be, you have to, before you can establish your culture, you have to set what you want your culture to be.

Competing interests was one of the obstacles respondents felt kept some students from “living up to their potential.” These competing interests varied and were caused by different personal situations. The competing interest might be a sport at which the young man excels. For example, one of the study participants explained that one male student was told he was talented enough to play professional football. This resulted in a mindset for the student where he believed there was not a real need to study, thus not living up to his academic potential. Another scenario described a young man who dropped out of honors classes so he could work to help his mother support their family. While the competing interests vary, the results were similar. The students stopped taking gifted level classes in order to balance the study time needed with the competing interest.

Another obstacle noted was the financial situation in the home. The socioeconomic status (SES) of the home has long been a factor in education (Ziegler, Chandler, Vialle, & Stoeger, 2017). This is no different for gifted students. When a

young man sees his mother struggling, often it is more important for him to get a job and help than it is to continue taking classes that require extensive study and preparation. Ms. Hill commented,

But, what I experienced before when I was working almost exclusively with 9th graders was that kids who are academically talented, but who are at a different, not a real high socioeconomic level, would stop. They would stop out because it was too hard. There weren't people who looked like them in the class, and I don't just mean race or ethnicity. I mean, they didn't have the right clothes.

Mentors can play a role in helping underperforming students deal with competing interests and obstacles. Having the right person who is consistently available is a key component that respondents felt could help students deal with competing interests. According to Mr. Moses, "And kids who really need mentors, and need guidance from teachers and coaches and counselors in their lives, the last thing they need is somebody to quit on them, or to spend two or three, six months with them."

Whether a student is an underperformer, selective performer, or is just "not living up to his potential," educators will implement different strategies to help him succeed. The educational leaders in the study shared a variety of approaches they have tried. These included making plans of improvement and conferencing with the students. Mr. Arias replied concisely, "Targeted scheduling, conferencing sessions, and relating to their career goals." Mrs. Bradshaw had a more detailed response saying,

Strategies will vary depending on the willingness of the teacher to find ways to help, expectation of administration, etc. I have seen teachers who care take time to

make a plan with the students and parents and then follow through to make sure the plan is implemented and the student is successful.

A different perspective was given by Mr. Moses who responded, “Often the strategies include criticism, ridicule and humiliation. These are mostly ineffective and often cause less effort.” As the idea of plans of improvement was explored, the next question was who should be in charge of working with students to develop a plan of improvement. This concept was discussed during the follow-up focus group with respondents again offering varied insights. The overall idea, however, was that it is not just one person’s responsibly. Mrs. Bradshaw expanded on the cliché,

Well, it takes a village, just like you say with raising our own children, it takes a village. It takes the whole school. It takes everybody. But ultimately, ultimately like we've been talking about this whole time, you got to utilize those people they have the best relationships with. But, the people that have the best relationship with, might not be the most knowledgeable. And so, that's why you need everybody working together to develop a plan for a child.

The concept of adults working together for the benefit of the child was echoed by Ms. Hill. “I think it's usually the counselors, the parents, and the teachers, and they come together. I've never had a situation where teachers were not willing to work out a plan for a child who is really motivated.” An important point was made by several of the respondents. They felt that picking the right people and ensuring that the student had a relationship with this person was imperative. Mr. Moses added, “Mentors are not necessarily school people. But, mentors should be people who are not randomly selected, but purposefully picked.” For example, if the student has a mentor at Scouts, or little

league, or a member of the faith community, these outside of school resources should be considered.

In addition to the support of mentors, developing a plan of improvement for those who are underachieving was studied. The person who would be in charge of this plan of improvement was discussed. Respondents agreed that the ideal would be for parents to be responsible for the plan of improvement. Mr. Moses commented, “I hope that in most cases it’s the parent who says this is my responsibility.” Ms. Hill added,

Well, I think um, I think guidance counselors do that pretty well, to be honest. If there's interest from the family, I don't see that as being any different from a child on an IEP. If the family has a desire to do it.

After the initial work from the family, study participants agreed that teachers, coaches, and other community leaders should be involved. Mr. Moses continued, “And then the third tier are people in the community and people in business and industry who often are speaking to groups of students or to educators and talking about, you know, what matters and that kind of stuff.”

After the discussions of what defines a gifted student, curriculum, expectations, and underachievement, the study participants were asked to describe a successful high school experience for a gifted male. The overwhelming response included the word “perform.” Mrs. Bradshaw focused on the successful experience being dependent on many school factors. She responded,

A successful one would be an experience in which the school and teachers understand that all students learn differently and are motivated differently. A

school that is flexible and willing to work with students and families will help ensure a successful experience for gifted males.

Mr. Peck commented, “A student who performs well academically and is also involved in extra-curricular activities like sports, fine arts and other clubs/programs. He also understands the value of giving back to his community and volunteers to help others.”

Mr. Arias looked at not only the student and their activities, but what the child would look like on paper. He wrote,

A successful high school experience for a GT male would be a transcript littered with honors, AP, and dual enrollment offerings, showing potential colleges, employers, etc. that our student took the most rigorous level of classes we offered. All of this was done while meeting the needs of the student socially, emotionally, academically, and physically. My hope is that this student would also be a valuable asset to our various clubs and sports teams, and any student-led organizations on campus.

As part of the development of The Palmer Model, Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) concepts were reviewed. The study participants were asked about their understanding of RtI or MTSS. All of them were aware of what each was and several had implemented these approaches within their own schools. Responses varied from general understanding of the improvement methods to full use of the system. Mr. Arias replied,

At our school, every student receives some type of RtI support. We have lived and breathed RtI before it was a buzzword. MTSS is a new one for us, but we

have piloted the program for [Grisham School District] the last two years, and made great strides in providing various levels of support for our students.

While all the respondents had an understanding and some experience with RtI and MTSS, most did not have experience using it with gifted students. Since The Palmer Model is designed to use this 3-tiered framework, it was important to understand how these approaches were being used. The study participants agreed that underperformers were generally being served under the Tier 1 level. Within Tier 1, all students receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction provided by qualified personnel to ensure that their difficulties are not due to inadequate instruction. Mrs. Bradshaw supported this stating, “All students are taught by highly qualified teachers. Teachers may also use differentiated instruction to reach gifted students on their level.”

Some responses noted the importance of classroom instruction to meet the needs of gifted students. Ms. Hill wrote,

Assessment of class rigor and content is ongoing to ensure students are ‘getting what they need,’ teams of teachers meet weekly to assess problems/concerns students may have, grade level counselors are included in the decision making, administrators/counselors assess distribution of grades, etc.

As the need for intervention progresses to Tier 2, students are provided targeted interventions. Students not making adequate progress in the regular classroom in Tier 1 are provided with increasingly intensive instruction matched to their needs based on levels of performance and rates of progress. The overwhelming strategy used for gifted students is additional instruction. Mrs. Bradshaw noted a difference based on the age of the child. She responded, “At the elementary level, students are provided a period of

enrichment each day. At the middle and high school level, gifted students are placed in Honors/AP classes.” Ms. Hill said at Wilson Pace Academy, “Students are provided additional instruction, tutoring, lessons in organization skills and time management.” All respondents noted some approach involving extra time or tutoring.

The interventions implemented in Tier 3 are intensive and include comprehensive student evaluations. At this level, students receive individualized, intensive intervention that target the students’ skill deficits. Two respondents said there was no intervention for gifted students at the Tier 3 level, while other respondents offered a different viewpoint. Mr. Moses wrote, “This happens for non-gifted students but not for gifted students.” Alternately, Ms. Decker listed in her written response, “Assessments include a body-of-evidence approach (e.g. full portrait of strengths and needs), nomination for formal identification, parents involvement in decision making, sustained differentiation needed in areas of strength.” At the Wilson Pace Academy, an early college program, there is also support at this level. Ms. Hill responded, “Students are enrolled in after school support, special sessions to address specific needs, teachers with special areas of competence are engaged in helping students, counselors make referrals for special services, etc.”

As educational leaders, a basic level of knowledge in the students you deal with is reasonable. I asked these leaders what professional learning opportunities they had for gifted education. The majority of them had only one course during their college preparations. Some of them noted that their preparation had come from career experience only. Participants who are administrators noted that they relied heavily on the expertise of their teaching staff. Mr. Arias wrote, “I have not received any formal GT learning

opportunities, just have been really fortunate to be around quality GT teachers and programs in various schools. The best professional development is the teachers in the room.” Mr. Moses concurred,

Training was limited to a graduate level course in gifted and talented instruction, some seminars and conferences, and personal interaction with teachers of gifted and talented students. I trust the expertise and experience of the leadership for our gifted and talented students.

The focus group sessions all concluded with a discussion of The Palmer Model (Appendix C). This intervention model was developed as an ongoing process to offer intervention strategies for gifted underperformers. The model proposes reviewing academic records, beginning in elementary school, noting concerns each year. Issues such as truancy and discipline may indicate underperformance could arise. Study participants were asked to define their knowledge of the MTSS and RtI programs and describe how these ideas are currently being implemented in their local schools. Feedback on The Palmer Model and the specifics of it were requested in the follow-up sessions. This model was described by Ms. Hill as an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for gifted students. The educational leaders all agreed this model is feasible for use in their districts, with several indicating that some level of MTSS was already taking place. Issues such as the time needed to implement, as well as budgetary concerns were mentioned.

One of the components of The Palmer Model is to share information with students about the GPA and how it could impact future financial success. During the focus group discussion I asked participants if they felt this was relevant or would have an impact on

underperforming students. Mr. Peck and Mr. Moses had responses that were somewhat different. Mr. Peck gave the following anecdote:

I've got a friend who works at [Large Company]. He's worked different areas, but he's been in HR. And he stresses, he's actually been and talked to our boys before. His older daughter's at [State University] and his younger daughter is in high school. And I used to think he was really too hard on them when they were going up. But the one example he shares, he says one time they hired two engineers for [Large Company], from the exact same school, to do the exact same job for the company. And one had like a 3.1, because they don't hire anybody less than a 3. One had like a 3.1, and one had a like a 3.7. They started doing the exact same job but the one with the 3.7, they started him at \$10,000 more. And what this guy says is the other guy will never catch up. Now, will the other guy do well? Absolutely, but he will never catch up in his whole career. And he says as an HR guy, I know that, right. And I had that conversation with our sophomores about a week or two ago. I shared that same story. So, it is relevant.

Mr. Moses had a different perception. While Mr. Peck was talking about college GPA, Mr. Moses was more focused on the high school GPA. He said,

I think it was a lot more relevant 10 years ago than it is today. And I think ten years from now, GPA and SAT scores will be a lot less relevant. The whole grade point average thing was developed in order to rank students. The ranking of students academically was a result of colleges, college entrance requirements, on high schools. So, high schools, in response to the demands of higher education, had to come up with a system whereby they can rank their kids. And so

now, colleges are figuring out, colleges and universities are figuring out, it's an antiquated system. And it really is antiquated. It's more than a hundred years old. And that there are better ways today for determining entrance into college.

The responses from Mr. Moses and Mr. Peck offered different perspectives on the importance of GPA at the high school and college levels. References to antiquated systems and changing college admission requirements pose additional hurdles. For this study, the focus will remain on how this information may impact decisions made for and by underperforming gifted students.

Emergent Themes

This study examined the perceptions of educational leaders regarding the underperformance of gifted males. Additionally, The Palmer Model, developed based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model using a 3-tier intervention approach, was reviewed. By using an in-depth interview process that included an online questionnaire and follow-up focus groups, I examined how educational leaders view underperformance, the potential causes, and possible interventions. The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) How do leaders perceive challenges facing gifted male students?
- 2) How do leaders approach interventions to underachievement?

The analysis of data and abstraction of categories was a multi-faceted process, guided by the research questions. Participant responses to the online questionnaire led to deeper exploration of the underperformance of gifted students during focus group sessions.

The initial coding of the online questionnaire responses, combined with the focus group responses, provided multiple points of view. Furthermore, each response led me

down a path of further questioning. When all the data was reviewed in totality, three themes emerged. The *relationships* of students and adults, the *relevance* of the information being presented, and the existence of *competing interests*.

Relationships

Whether discussing the rapport between teachers and students or the dynamic needed for a successful mentor, the overarching theme was the importance of relationships. The responses of the study participants were consistently referencing coaches, community members, and rapport when discussing interventions for underperforming students. These categories were mentioned specifically when respondents were asked about what strategies were being used currently in their school buildings.

As noted earlier, Mr. Arias stated that his staff works to build positive relationships with each student. This is done through the 25 minute flexible learning time each morning. He stated "... students have the opportunity to receive various services through mental health and guidance, or meet with teachers to catch up work or make up assignments, or spend time with their peers." The importance of being able to meet regularly with the adults who can help with the issues students are having is part of the relationship building that these leaders noted was important when developing interventions for those gifted students who underperform.

The use of a mentor was repeatedly referenced as an intervention for underperformance. The importance of a specific type of mentor, however, was noted. Mr. Moses referenced the book "Same Kind of Different As Me" when noting the importance of the type of mentorship he felt was needed. He gave a short summary of

the book saying that it was about this homeless person who was approached by the husband of this woman who had had a relationship with the homeless person. She had passed away, and now the husband wanted a relationship with the homeless person. He invited him to breakfast and the second time he invited him to breakfast, he was a little more direct about wanting to establish a friendship with him. Mr. Moses continues,

And the homeless person said to him, "I have heard of this kind of fishing. And I do some of this trout fishing where you aren't allowed to keep the fish. It's called catch-and-release." He said, "If you're interested in a catch-and-release relationship, I don't want anything to do with it." And kids who really need mentors, and need guidance from teachers and coaches and counselors in their lives, the last thing they need is somebody to quit on them, or to spend two or three, six months with them. And now, they've got other interests, and they don't have time for them anymore. So, the consistency, I think, of that real mentorship is what's, uh, extremely important there.

The relationships and rapport that students have with teachers were seen as extremely beneficial when encouraging students to work to their potential.

Relevance

The theme of relevance emerged as I continued to code the data and review the categories of responses. The categories of using real life examples, excelling in areas of interests, allowing choices in the curriculum, and using independent study were all merged into the theme of relevance. It was also important when helping parents understand the advantages and the rigor involved with the curriculum when students take gifted level classes. Study participants noted these categories numerous times throughout

the online questionnaire responses as well as the focus group conversations. Using real life examples was a strategy mentioned when helping students understand the importance of honors classes, when investigating how to combat underperformance, and when talking to parents.

The perceptions of these leaders regarding selective achievement overwhelmingly reflected the idea that selective achievers excel in their area of interest. Emphasizing the relevance of the material for the achievement of future goals was a strategy used to combat underachievement.

Presenting the data to students and parents regarding Advanced Placement courses and college and career was a method that was used at Rocco Haynes High School and highlighted by Mr. Arias and Mrs. Bradshaw. Mrs. Bradshaw shared the following,

And some parents, it did matter what you told them, they weren't going to do it. Because they would talk about, maybe, the horror stories they had heard from somebody the year before. A lot of parents were really worried because they knew that kids in previous years made B's in those classes instead of A's. And so, we had to explain to them that those kind of classes are on at the 5.0 scale and not a 4.0, and how that's going to benefit. It was just really, it was educating the student, educating the parents. Giving them as much information as possible. And then, at that point, it was just up to them.

The sharing of information, making curriculum relevant to student's future, and using real life examples were all part of this emergent theme.

Competing Interests

The concept of competing interests was repeated by participants throughout the online questionnaire and in the follow-up focus group sessions. Research has shown that the family situation frequently impacts the success of students. This concept of competing interest goes beyond that idea. Competing interest fell into two categories. There was the interest of family and work obligation which is related to the prior research about the impact of family and income (Ziegler et al., 2017). The other competing interest was one that seemed to actually be caused by the success of the student in other realms of their school career. The idea that a young man might be successful athletically seemed to be a competing interest that was almost encouraged by the adult in the student's life. A parent who feels that their child will be selected for an athletic scholarship might not see the need to apply pressure for the level of academic success that the child may have the ability to achieve. Mr. Peck gave the example of a young man who was a good football player. He had been offered a football scholarship at Duke University. Mr. Peck explained, "Now, Duke is a tier-1 academic school, they are a tier-1 basketball school, but they are a tier 2 football school." He offered examples of tier 1 football programs such as Clemson University and The University of Alabama. He went on to say that the student's mother wanted to wait to see if a better offer was given. He stated,

I remember the coaches and administrators in the district office were trying to convince this kid's mother, your kid needs to take that offer. And the mother was convinced, no we're going to wait because we might get something better, football type offers. And we were trying to get her to understand, do you know what the

value of a Duke education is, right. Outside of football, you know what the value of that is? And we could not get through to that mother.

Ultimately, the scholarship offer was rescinded and the student went to a less prestigious college. Mr. Peck suggested that in order to mitigate the effect of this competing interest, having college coaches address the potential players about the academic requirements might help. Another concern expressed by Ms. Hill was “What you hear on the spice aisle at the grocery store.” She meant that the parents of athletically talented students hear comments from others in the community suggesting that the student has the potential to be a higher level, perhaps even professional, athlete. These comments influence the parent’s guidance towards the student.

While discussing some of the sacrifices that a young man might have to make to perform well in and AP class, Mr. Moses commented what may at first sound flippant, but is all too true with a young man in high school. He said, “Yeah, worse than that, if I take that class, I won't be able to have lunch with my girlfriend. It's that simple.”

Summary

The findings from this study have been presented in Chapter 4. The data received from the educational leaders were analyzed and showed their perceptions of the challenges faced by gifted males. The information shared during the online questionnaire portion of the study and the follow-up focus groups showed an awareness of the issues facing gifted students. Peer pressure, lack of interest, motivation issues, and unrealistic expectations were all obstacles that leaders identified. The possible interventions that were noted included choices in curriculum, real-life examples, and mentors.

The themes that emerged throughout the data were relationships, relevance, and competing interest. The Palmer Model was discussed as a way to combat gifted underachievement.

Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and relate those to the research questions. The current research will be compared to the findings, and the gap in school leaders' perceptions will be addressed. Thoughts on the implementation of an intervention plan like the Palmer Model and discussion of possible future research will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

“I don’t understand the point of school if you are just trying to get an A.” Austen Palmer

The underperformance of gifted students is a concern facing many educators. Students who do not work up to their potential and make grades lower than standardized test scores show they could, and who choose to focus on other interests instead of academics, is an issue occurring in many schools. This study sought to learn the perceptions of educational leaders about to this underperformance. A potential intervention in the form of a Response to Intervention (RtI) model was proposed and insight was sought from these leaders. Using online questionnaires and follow-up focus groups, the researcher examined perceptions and determined critiques of the proposed intervention plan.

The underperformance of gifted males has been explored by several researchers in gifted education (Baker, Bridger, & Evans, 1998; Emerick, 1992; Hébert, 1993; Reis & McCoach, 2000). An analysis of current literature revealed factors and patterns in gifted underachievement. Findings indicate factors such as motivation, relevance of academic content, rapport with teachers, and parental expectations have an impact on the performance of gifted male students (Neihart, 2006; Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015); however, the perceptions of school leaders and their efforts to address underperformance were aspects that had seen limited research. The perceptions of educational leaders were similar to the research found in the review of the literature regarding the characteristics of

gifted males and factors that impact their performance. Possible interventions were also consistent with the prior findings. Although leaders were aware of underperformance and strategies to mitigate it, there seemed to be little focus on actual identification of these underachievers and implementation of mitigation strategies. The finding of obstacles, such as the focus on athletics, was a concept that the researcher had not previously seen. The realization that some adults would encourage more focus on extracurricular activities rather than the academics of a gifted student was something the researcher had not found in prior literature. This finding adds to the current body of knowledge on gifted education.

Research Design

An in-depth interview design was used to study the perceptions of educational leaders and seek feedback on a proposed RtI model. The researcher designed the Palmer Model as a step-by-step intervention method (Appendix C). Online questionnaires and follow-up focus groups were used to collect data (Appendix A and Appendix B). Seven educational leaders completed the online questionnaires and five of those seven participated in the focus groups. A semi-structured interview process was used during the follow-up focus groups.

The online questionnaires and follow-up focus groups explored factors influencing student performance, synthesized current practices of gifted educators, characterized school leaders' perceptions of student underachievement, and established the opinions of possible interventions by the leadership teams.

The following research questions guided this in-depth interview study:

- 1) How do leaders perceive challenges facing gifted male students?

2) How do leaders approach interventions to underachievement?

Study participants included various educational leaders from Bryce County: the principals of two high schools, a director of gifted education, an assistant principal, a retired superintendent, the dean of an early college program, and a guidance counselor. Each of these individuals offered different perceptions of the underperformance of gifted male students, contributing multiple points of view for possible intervention strategies.

Relevant documents such as legislation regarding gifted identification, district policy, district strategic plans, School Improvement Council reports, and state report cards were reviewed and analyzed to help identify the schools in the districts included in the study. The schools determined for study inclusion were chosen after reviewing data including Advanced Placement (AP) participation and success rates, the percent of students qualifying for state sponsored scholarships, the percent of the student body identified as gifted, and the poverty rate.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of educational leaders regarding the underperformance of gifted males and to ascertain their ideas regarding intervention strategies. The conclusions of the researcher will be presented in the following discussion.

Results for Research Question One

The perceptions of educational leaders regarding the underachievement of gifted males was the focus of the first research question. The leaders' perceptions were similar to much of the research given in the review of the literature. The study participants similarly described gifted students. They responded that gifted students were intellectually curious, had above average academic ability, and often socially awkward.

They also noted students could be gifted in many ways including academics, music, dance, or art. Multiple participants believed lack of motivation and boredom were typical characteristics of an underachieving student. Excelling in areas of interest and subjects relevant to future goals was also a recurring response.

These educational leaders perceived the challenges facing gifted males in various ways. Several respondents saw issues with peer pressure causing students to underachieve. The fear of appearing “nerdy” or being in classes different from those of their social group were often challenges these students faced. The lack of resources provided by the school or by the family was also noted as a potential barrier to the students realizing the gifts they possess.

The perceptions of these school leaders also included competing interests as a challenge for gifted males. Some of those competing interests were afterschool jobs and extracurricular activities. If a young man sees a parent struggling financially, he may choose to work after school instead of taking more rigorous classes. Meeting the basic level of Maslow’s Hierarchy was mentioned. Providing what Abraham Maslow (1954) called the physiologic needs of food, clothing and shelter is paramount in the ability to progress developmentally. Neither students nor parents can put learning first until the family’s basic needs are met. The student might take classes requiring less study, allowing him to work 30 or more hours a week while still maintaining grades that qualify for college acceptance.

Another competing interest mentioned by study participants was participation in extracurricular activities. The opportunity for an athlete to win a sports scholarship to college was noted as the reason a gifted male might not sign up for an honors or

Advanced Placement (AP) course. While being athletically gifted may be inherent, developing the skills required for performance at the college level requires much time practicing and training. These goals of playing sports at the secondary level, or even becoming a professional athlete, are interests competing with academic potential. Even parents and community members sometimes reinforce this mindset. The student being told they are a talented athlete could prevent his classroom performance from being a priority.

An additional obstacle noted was some families' lack of knowledge regarding the advantages of participating in the AP and Honors level courses. The families of those who would be first generation college students may not have the experience of this level of coursework. They may hesitate, fearing the student would struggle and become overwhelmed with the rigor. Hearing from another community member the course was too difficult for another child might deter the parent from encouraging their child to take it. This fear of the student being unsuccessful might cause the parent to suggest a less rigorous course.

Some of the factors mentioned might be characterized as internal factors. Selective achievement, working only on assignments that the students deem relevant and of interest, would define those internal factors. Factors seen as external factors were peer pressure, the importance placed on extracurricular activities, and the pressure to help with the family's finances. All of these internal and external factors were issues identified by the study participants.

Results for Research Question Two

Leaders' perceptions of the underachievement of gifted males were explored in question one. Underachievement factors included lack of motivation, competing interests in extracurricular activities or family struggles, and selective achievement. The educational leaders also recognized numerous interventions could be used to mitigate some of these factors.

Creating a relevant curriculum that included the student's area of interest was an intervention that was continuously repeated. Giving students choices with assignments and assessments, asking open ended questions, and presenting real-life examples were strategies that these educational leaders suggested. The research in Chapter 2 suggested these were all factors impacting underachievement (Cooper, 2012; VanTassel-Baska, 2003). The results of this study concurred with the previous research.

Mentors were also an important tool perceived as an intervention by the study participants. Having a relationship with the student was a key factor in fighting underperformance. The mentor did not necessarily have to be a teacher. The important idea was this person needed to be respected by the student and be consistently present in his life. Having a "catch and release" mentoring program should be avoided. The person selected must be someone who will be in the student's life for more than just a semester. The adult selected as the mentor could be anyone from the lunch lady, a trusted coach, a scout leader, to a member of the faith community. The student would determine with which adult they felt most comfortable. There was also consensus this mentor be involved as an advocate for the child. The respondents felt the student must feel at ease going to this adult for help, whether for personal issues or school related concerns. The

results for this question again concurred with prior research findings. Relationships with caring adults who show concern for the student's interests and encourage their strengths had the potential to reverse underachievement in these young men (Hébert & Olenchak, 2000).

Providing relevant information to both students and parents regarding gifted level classes was another intervention respondents thought was effective. Clarifying the level of work and study required in AP classes and explaining the future potential benefits of such a curriculum were strategies these leaders used. Having informational sessions and individual conferences were ways this information was shared. These conferences enabled educators to lessen the apprehensions of families, ensuring that students were assigned the appropriate course level.

The Palmer Model was discussed as a systematic intervention developed by the researcher based on an RtI model. Study participants offered feedback on the proposed model, giving both agreement and suggestions for improvement. Respondents noted that the plan resembled an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which is used to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. The Palmer Model was described as a gifted IEP. The focus group members commented that the model was systematic and liked the researcher's suggestion that school staff starts tracking students' progress early in their school careers. Having reviews of students' records as early as 5th grade, noting areas of concern, was deemed appropriate by the participants. The researcher would suggest that educational leaders implement this tracking in all of the district's elementary schools. The method of gifted education in Bryce County for elementary students involves a weekly supplemental "gifted" class. The teacher of this class would be

responsible for the review of the students' report cards and the implementation of the schools intervention procedures. Just as a special education teacher works with the regular education teacher regarding students with disabilities, the gifted teacher would do the same. The perception of study participants was that the idea for early intervention was appropriate. Developing the protocol for the intervention process would be determined at the district level. Developing the procedures for which staff members were responsible for which components would be determined at the school level. This system would allow for the establishment of "...stable routines, structures, and procedures in the district and school thereby providing the infrastructure for change" (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008, p. 508).

Several comments were provided which will be considered when the researcher revises the model. One comment provided by Mrs. Bradshaw suggested the goals for the student be reviewed more than once per grading period. This comment caused the researcher to note that the model's timing must be made clearer. The model intends that the mentor will meet weekly with the student. Another comment emphasized the importance of including the monetary implications of the model. While much of the intervention would be done with existing staff members, including the budget for providing training for mentors, guidance counselors, and teachers was a suggestion. Since school districts have limited funds, the researcher needs to include these concerns in the model.

Conclusions

This study showed educational leaders are aware of underperforming students, even those identified as gifted. They agree these students show educational curiosity, even though that may only be in the student's particular area of interest. They also agree

students need to have their gifts honored. While some students will be gifted in many areas, some may show talent in only one academic subject or the fine arts. The importance of building rapport and having relationships with students was also recognized. When a student underperforms academically, the study participants agreed to have a mentor for the student was an important strategy. While this mentor needed some level of training, he/she did not necessarily need to be a teacher. School staff, coaches, band directors, members of the community, and business leaders could all play a role.

One of the themes which emerged was that of competing interests. While the other themes were supported by research, this was a factor not found in the review of the literature. Family structure and students' desire to work to contribute to household finances were not surprising. Sports was also a competing factor noted by study participants. Extracurricular activities certainly diminish the amount of study time a student might have. While students focusing more on extracurricular activities is seen frequently, parent encouragement of participation in sports over academics was a new concept. There are students whose talent lies more outside the classroom than inside. Therefore, putting the focus on that talent is understandable. The researcher was surprised when this phenomenon of focusing on the outside the classroom talent was also seen in the gifted population.

Recommendations

As Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) have become popular strategies to address students who underperform academically, these strategies have only been used with struggling learners. Selective achievers and

gifted students, in general, do not seem to have the same level of attention from school leaders. While these leaders recognize that gifted underachievers are present in their buildings, the focus is not on them. Often standardized test scores are used to identify students in need of intervention plans. These gifted students are not identified due to their above average test scores. I would encourage elementary and middle school gifted educators to begin monitoring students in the 5th grade. Some issues such as truancy and misbehavior can be signs of underlying issues. These issues could prevent gifted students from performing “up to their potential” academically. I would also encourage coaches of all sports, beginning as early as possible, to start talking with students about what is needed to be accepted to a college, not just accepted as a member of the sports teams. Requiring certain grades to participate in school athletic programs offers those with competing interests the motivation to perform well in both arenas.

Recommendation One: Mentoring

A recurring theme that presented itself throughout the literature review and the current study was the use of mentors to help underachieving students (Hébert & Olenchak, 2000). Schools should work to identify mentors of all ages and professions to help support underperforming gifted students. Often mentoring programs target students deemed “at-risk” due to discipline issues or low test scores. Gifted students who show discrepancies between their ability and performance should also be considered “at risk.” A mentor should be assigned once a gifted student is recognized as underachieving. Some mentors could be found within the school. Anyone with whom the child has a rapport would be acceptable. Other mentors could be found in local faith communities, volunteer organizations, or colleges. All mentors should be adults that the student feels

comfortable with and that will be supportive of the process of intervention. The duties of the mentor must be explained prior to the adult making the commitment to the child. The researcher would recommend that mentors have a training session and be willing to work closely with the parents of the student. The mentors must also be willing to serve in this role. In Bryce County, there are several colleges that require community service for members of sports teams and academic scholarship recipients. In past school years, Stoneville School District has used some of these mentors to work in local schools with students deemed “at-risk.” Pairing an underperforming student with a college freshman would allow the mentor to consistently guide him throughout the four years of college. Additionally, the pairing has the potential of providing a mentor offering the opportunity for the student to develop a relationship with someone closer to his age and have the experience of talking to a student who has been accepted to a college. Another mentoring option would be for teacher cadet participants to work with these underperformers to offer tutoring and guidance. Providing choices for mentors and intervention strategies will enhance the effectiveness of the program.

Recommendation Two: Extracurricular Activities

School leaders have an influence over the climate and culture within the school. School and district administrators should encourage the leaders of extracurricular activities to require certain grade minimums for participation. While the state in which the study was conducted requires students to earn passing grades in their classes, coaches of sports teams and sponsors of other extracurricular activities could require more. For instance, if sponsors required students to maintain either a “C” average or attend a study hall before practice, there would be an intervention for the competing interests found in

the study. Additionally, having college visits and academic field trips with the extracurricular group might provide insight into what would be required to succeed after high school graduation.

Recommendation Three: Interventions

As the Palmer Model suggests, intervention should begin as soon as underachievement is noted. In the state where the study was conducted, gifted students are not formally identified until the 3rd grade. Therefore, the yearly monitoring of records and attendance would start in the 5th grade. The researcher's rationale for this timeline is to allow the student an opportunity to adapt to the weekly gifted classes and analyze any potential warning signs of underperformance before the student moves to the middle grades. Furthermore, to prevent apathy that appears to begin in the middle grades, having classes designed specifically for gifted students may be appropriate. Allowing students to begin more advanced math or reading courses before middle school, instead of remaining in heterogeneous classrooms, is recommended. Preventing academic boredom that arises from hearing standards previously mastered may encourage gifted students to maintain enthusiasm for learning. Offering strategies to parents who may need help guiding students with gifted level course work could also be provided.

Recommendation Four: Scheduling

An issue noted by study participants was peer pressure. The pressure to look "cool" or not be labeled a "nerd" seemed to increase in the middle grades. This pressure is noted especially among young men and people of color (Crawford, Snyder, & Adelson, 2020; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Lovett, 2011). Having class schedules that intentionally group gifted males and persons of color together could be an option.

Intentionally seeking diverse faculty members to teach these gifted students would also be recommended. Grouping young men who are struggling with competing interests and teaching them how to use study groups outside of school would be a strategy this researcher recommended. Working with coaches, mentors, and parents, emphasizing the importance of academics in conjunction with outside of school responsibilities, would also be an important piece. Celebrating success in the classroom, in the sports arena, and on the job could help these young men deal with the pressure of being gifted. This topic is one the researcher suggests as needing further investigation.

Implications

Researchers

The results of this study suggest more research is needed in interventions for gifted students. The review of literature offered some research on using an RtI process with underperformers (Seedorf, 2014). However, most of this research showed intervention strategies being used in the area of special education and with students who have learning disabilities. More research is needed on the success or failure of early intervention strategies with gifted students. Deliberately targeting underperformers and tracking their progress through high school could offer insight into ways to address discrepancies between identified abilities and the performance of gifted populations.

Educators

In the state where the study was conducted, elementary schools primarily use a “pull out” model where gifted students attend supplementary classes once a week. The educators who teach these classes have endorsements in gifted and talented education; however, as students matriculate through the middle and high school grades, not all

teachers must be trained in gifted and talented pedagogy. While all AP teachers have been trained in the advanced content they will be presenting, they are not necessarily required to be trained to use techniques found most effective in teaching gifted students. Requiring training in gifted pedagogy for these upper level teachers would benefit this population of students.

The lack of curricular guidance is another issue pertinent to educators. This lack was noted by the researcher and the review of the literature (Elijah, 2011). Students having the appropriate knowledge to make academic decisions seemed to be wanting. Students not understanding the importance of GPA in their long term success was an issue. Often it seemed that adults assumed that gifted students would “get it” because they are smart. Perhaps the adults even think the lack of academic success is just laziness or defiance. This researcher would conclude it is a lack of understanding of the system and a group of adults focused on the lower ability students.

It is imperative the educational leaders intervene as soon as gifted underachievement is noted. The potential loss of human capital is not something that can be taken lightly. With the current level of education necessary for many jobs, having students who do not live up to their potential is a concern for everyone in the community. With the decline of low-tech jobs, it is imperative that educational leaders be aware of the needs of their students. Not seeing gifted male underperformance as a critical concern in education is a mistake that leaders must not make.

Final Thoughts

This study showed the perceptions of educational leaders regarding the underperformance of gifted students and their thoughts on possible interventions. In

addition to finding the insights of these leaders, the researcher wanted to offer an intervention model and have study participants offer feedback. The emergent themes of relationships, relevance, and competing interests are supported and added to the current body of research.

While these educational leaders were aware of the issues facing gifted underperformers, study findings caused the researcher to reflect on whether these students were receiving interventions. While leaders appeared knowledgeable about intervention strategies, there remained a question of whether these strategies were being used.

Throughout this study's being conducted, I had numerous conversations with colleagues, students, and family. My son and husband have been constant sounding boards for this work. My son and some of his friends were home from college, and I spoke with them about my research. I asked what type of goal motivated them. The answers were quite interesting. They all replied they felt motivated to learn if the topic was interesting to them. If they felt the topic was irrelevant to their long term goal (calculus for the English major), although they were interested in learning, they simply wanted to do well and be done with that class. This comment demonstrates that content needs to be relevant to students.

Further discussions revealed a conundrum educators and students face daily: the balance between learning for learning's sake and the demand for test scores and GPA. A comment made by one of these students prompted deeper reflection. He stated, "I don't understand the point of school if you are just trying to get an A" (Austen Palmer, personal communication, June 23, 2013).

What is the point of school? Why should a parent or school leader worry about what motivates a child? Whose responsibility is it to see that our young men perform at their highest potential? Should we as educators be worried about test scores or students love of learning? I think the answer lies in what we want our society to be. That is an educated citizenry that enjoys learning for learning's sake. An informed society that is curious, questioning, and self-actualized. I think that is what we as educators are all hoping to achieve. As this study points out, it is imperative that we encourage, mentor, and assist our most gifted students so they may live up to their potential, eliminating the discrepancy between ability and performance. We as educators must incorporate these findings into an effective classroom environment where students are achieving. That is the point of school.

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APPENDIX A

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Name:

Gender:

Race:

Years of Experience:

Gifted/Talented Endorsement: yes/no

2) What roles have you had during your educational career?

3) How would you describe a gifted and talented student?

4) Describe any problems or challenges you see for gifted students.

5) How would you describe underachievement? Do you think that gifted students underachieve?

6) “Selective achievers are intrinsically motivated individuals whose performance matches ability only in specific areas that satisfy their interests and personal goal orientations” (Hébert & Schreiber, 2010, p. 572). Can you think of students who might fit this definition? Describe that student. What did you observe in that student?

7) Do you think selective achievers are problematic? Are they underperforming?

8) What do they think should be done for “selective achievers”?

9) What are some specific reasons you think a gifted male might underperform?

How might these reasons effect performance?

10) Do you see a difference between a “selective achiever” and an “underperforming” student? Explain.

- 11) Why do you think a gifted student might not be taking honors or Advanced Placement courses?
- 12) Describe a typical honors/AP course in your building.
- 13) Describe strategies that are used to motivate students. Are those ways different for gifted and nongifted? Male and female?
- 14) Can you provide some examples of gifted males who are “not living up to their potential?” What strategies could be implemented to help those students succeed?
- 15) For those males identified as “not living up to is potential,” an underperformer, or a selective performer, how are strategies implemented to help him succeed?
- 16) Describe a successful high school experience for a gifted male.
- 17) Explain your understanding of Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS).
- 18) What interventions are currently being used with gifted underperformers at each Tier level?

Tier 1: High-Quality Classroom Instruction, Screening, and Group Interventions

Within Tier 1, all students receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction provided by qualified personnel to ensure that their difficulties are not due to inadequate instruction.

Tier 2: Targeted Interventions

Students not making adequate progress in the regular classroom in Tier 1 are provided with increasingly intensive instruction matched to their needs on the basis of levels of performance and rates of progress.

Tier 3: Intensive Interventions and Comprehensive Evaluation

At this level, students receive individualized, intensive interventions that target the students' skill deficits.

- 19) Share with me any professional learning opportunities you have had for gifted education. Do you feel that your professional preparation has given you the tools you need to ensure that gifted children are supported appropriately?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How do school leaders build a climate that encourages and supports students?
2. What do educators do to encourage a gifted child's curiosity?
3. What can educational leaders do to help with socialization skills and parental/teacher expectations?
4. How do you incorporate a student's area of interest into a high school curriculum?
5. What information should be shared with students to help them understand the connection between their education and future? Who is responsible for having these conversations?
6. How can the adults in the school help gifted males cope with peer pressure?
7. How can school leaders use the student's area of interest to encourage them to excel in other areas?
8. What can be done to help students and parents understand the value of taking honors and AP courses?
9. What role should/could mentors play to help underperforming students deal with competing interests?
10. Who should/could be in charge of working with students to develop a plan of improvement?

11. The Palmer Model is designed to address students who are identified as gifted and begin to show Tier 2 or Tier 3 level of need. How could this model be used to address some of the issues you see within your school?

APPENDIX C
THE PALMER MODEL
The Palmer Model
Gifted Intervention Process

Recruitment

- The students are identified for the gifted and talented program in the district. This identification typically occurs during elementary school and uses the state/district guidelines.

Monitoring

- The students' files are color coded and reviewed annually by a teacher/counselor with the results reported to the school leadership team. Grades that do not reflect ability, attendance concerns, and/or discipline issues that may be interfering with achievement are the types of things that will be monitored.

Identifying Gaps

- The school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, determines whether specific students have gaps between identified ability and performance.

Seeking Explanations

- Once a student has been identified, school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, reviews data and seeks to determine possible issues that are interfering with the student's performance.

Preparing Interventions

- The school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, identifies possible means of intervention. These interventions will vary based on the sources of concern and the grade level of the student. Such interventions may include contact with the gifted teacher to assist the student, review of pedagogy and classroom instructional techniques used by the teacher(s), referral to guidance counselors, or a reward system determined in conjunction with the student.
- The school leadership ensures that the school has implemented a number of initial interventions to assist the student lasting approximately a grading period.

Preparing for a Meeting

- The school leadership, in conjunction with teachers and counselors, determines that the student continues to have a gap between identified ability and performance after initial interventions have been implemented.
- The school leadership determines that an intervention meeting should be scheduled.
- The school leadership makes sure both the student and the parent are contacted regarding a conference, that they have transportation, and are able to attend. If the parent lacks transportation, a phone conference will be held during the school day.

Convening the Meeting

- The school leadership who attends the meeting consists of the school leader, the teacher, and the guidance counselor, who are the most knowledgeable of the student.

- The school leadership will present the data regarding the current concern of underachievement to the student and parent. The information regarding initial interventions and results will also be shared.
- Input from the student regarding obstacles to academic success will be discussed as age appropriate.
- Input from the parent(s) regarding obstacles to the student's academic success will be discussed.
- Information regarding student interests will be obtained and used in the intervention plan as appropriate. This information will be obtained through dialogue with the student and parents during the intervention meeting.
- The school leadership will make decisions on what strategies the student needs, the types of services the student/family may need, and how best to provide them. These may include helping parents design study strategies for the student, ideas for consequences/rewards in the home, or tutoring suggestions. Services such as counseling or meeting with the truancy officer may also be appropriate.
- The school leadership, in collaboration with the student and parent, will prepare a comprehensive, written action plan for the student by the end of the meeting. This plan will include small, attainable goals, as well as a timeline to achieve these goals.
- To assist with implementation, a mentor will be assigned based on the student's request. Rapport previously established with the student by the staff member will be considered. If possible, this person will be identified prior to the meeting and

he/she will attend. Staff members will volunteer based on their relationship with identified underachievers.

Implementing the Intervention

- The school leadership will follow up to check the attainment of goals and adherence to the timeline. Follow up with the parents will be included.
- The mentor will be notified if concern about the student's progress arises. Otherwise, the mentor will meet with the student to offer encouragement and positive feedback.
- Student academic progress will be monitored at each grading period unless the team decides a more frequent check is appropriate. The student's performance should begin to align with his/her identified ability.
- If improvement is not noted, revisions to the plan and further discussion with the student and parents will be scheduled.

Parent/Student/Community Outreach

- Educational sessions for parents of gifted students will be offered.
- Students who are taking credit bearing courses, typically eighth graders and older, will meet in a small group or one-to-one sessions to discuss Grade Point Average and its implications long-term. The studies cited below are examples of what might be shared.
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