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FAST TRACK TO EXCELLENCE: IMPACT OF ENGLISH I ACCELERATION ON
GIFTED LEARNERS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND COURSE SELECTION
AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

By
Camey Whitt

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Camey Whitt under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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“Nobody knows how things will turn out, that's why they go ahead and play the game ... You give it your all and sometimes amazing things happen, but it's hardly ever what you expect” (Choldenko, 2004, p. 42). This was better than I could ever have expected.

Abstract

FAST TRACK TO EXCELLENCE: IMPACT OF ENGLISH I ACCELERATION ON GIFTED LEARNERS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND COURSE SELECTION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL. Whitt, Camey, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Academic acceleration, sometimes referred to as “appropriate developmental placement” (Lubinski & Benbow, 2000, p. 138), is a differentiation practice providing academically gifted students with opportunities to learn curriculum more quickly. The research study was a mixed method experimental design where the evaluator examined two dependent variables in the study: academic performance and scheduling choices of academically gifted students. The independent variable was the intervention put into place for academically gifted students at the middle school: accelerated English I. The study compared AIG students who accelerated the English I class with those who did not in order to isolate whether or not the class influences the outcome (grades and performance) in upper level English classes and testing requirements as well as future scheduling choices offered at the secondary level (Creswell, 2014). After careful analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results, the findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the English I acceleration program had positive effects on both student achievement and student scheduling. This mixed methods study addressed the use of subject-specific acceleration at the middle school to meet the needs of academically gifted learners. The findings of the study added to the limited research on the effectiveness of accelerated academic programs put into place to meet the needs of gifted students.

Keywords: academically gifted learner, acceleration, English language arts,
differentiation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Study

Fewer than one in four teachers, or 23%, report that academically or intellectually gifted (AIG) students are a top priority in schools and classrooms, and only 5% of these teachers believe gifted students receive personal attention in the classroom (Robinson, 2010). Considering these startling statistics, how can schools and educators effectively meet the unique needs of academically gifted students? Often cited as America's quiet crisis (Walley, 1994), the academically gifted have at times been criticized or neglected in an attempt to meet the needs of other student populations. Many high-achieving, academically gifted students will become future leaders in various areas of society whose talents will keep the nation secure and economically competitive well into the future, and it is in the country's best interest to ensure a strong and differentiated education for them (Bloom, 1985; Terman & Oden, 1959). Differentiation strategies allow gifted and talented children to "realize their contribution to self and society" (Marland, 1971, p. ix). In a world where students must now compete globally, it is imperative that schools work to provide more comprehensive classrooms and curricula to meet the needs of the academically gifted.

The United States' efforts to differentiate learning for the academically gifted student can be traced to William Torrey Harris's efforts in 1868 (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2015). Harris, the superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools from 1868-1880, initiated a program allowing gifted students the opportunity to advance to higher curricula every 5 weeks based on academic performance (Jolly, 2009). Various studies and initiatives were implemented after Harris's, but it was not until the

launch of Sputnik in 1957 that the United States began putting legislation into place to meet the specific needs of the academically gifted student. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was the first official piece of legislation passed in 1958 establishing programs on behalf of academically gifted students, especially in areas of mathematics and science (Hunt, 2016). Later legislative acts, including Public Law 94-142 or The Education for all Handicapped Children Act passed in 1975 and the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act passed in 1988 (NAGC, 2015), continued to support academically gifted programs and put mandates in place for public schools to follow. These mandates ensured needs of the academically gifted were considered when implementing educational plans at the school level.

According to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, academically gifted students are defined as those

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 – General Provisions, 2005, p. 1539)

Allowing the definition to include areas of creativity and artistic ability requires educators to focus on a child's talents as a whole and not solely on his/her intellectual ability (Codd, 2018). Reis and Renzulli (2009) found there "is no single homogeneous group of gifted children and adults, and giftedness is developmental, not fixed at birth" (p. 233). The ESEA assists schools in identifying and serving gifted and talented students and ensures programs and activities address the learning needs of all students,

including gifted and talented students.

Significant changes in gifted education began to occur in 1988 as a part of the reauthorization of the ESEA. The Jacob Javits Act, named after Senator Jacob Javits of New York for his role in promoting gifted education, further coordinated programs to meet the special educational needs of gifted and talented students (Eckes, n.d.). The only federal program that focuses specifically on the needs of academically gifted and talented students, the Javits Act supports the development of gifted and talented students by allowing the U.S. Department of Education to fund competitive grants involving research into gifted and talented education (Eckes, n.d.).

As legislation was passed to ensure differentiated learning for academically gifted students, differing pedagogical theories emerged on best practices of differentiation.

Marland (1972) defined three characteristics for a differentiated program:

(1) a differentiated curriculum which denotes higher cognitive concepts and processes; (2) instructional strategies which accommodate the learning styles of the gifted and talented curriculum content; and (3) special grouping arrangements which include a variety of administrative procedures appropriate to particular children, i.e. special classes, honor classes, seminars, resource rooms, and the like. (pp. 2-3)

Based on these characteristics, educational settings in the United States have sought to meet the needs of academically gifted students through various programs including accelerating, curriculum compacting, and grouping (NAGC, 2015).

Academic acceleration. Academic acceleration is a differentiation strategy allowing students to move through traditional curriculum at rates faster than typically

completed (NAGC, 2015). This acceleration can include grade skipping, early entrance to kindergarten or college, or dual-credit courses; and many researchers consider it to be appropriate educational planning as it matches the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). Proponents of traditional curriculum pacing argue acceleration harms a child's social development, but evidence suggests social impacts are positive for many forms of acceleration (Rogers, 2007).

Curriculum compacting. Curriculum compacting is a differentiation strategy allowing teachers to “test students on upcoming material to avoid teaching them what they already know” (Sutton, 2001, p. 22). According to Renzulli and Reis (1998),

curriculum compacting involves three steps: (1) assessing students' academic strengths; (2) eliminating skill work and content that students have already mastered; and (3) replacing the work that has been eliminated with more challenging alternatives, some of which are based on students' interests.

(p. 62)

Educators who successfully implement curriculum compacting in their classrooms can alleviate boredom many gifted students experience while also allowing opportunities for advanced, accelerative work or participation in special programs and activities (Renzulli, Smith, & Reis, 1982).

Grouping. Grouping is a differentiation strategy allowing academically gifted students to be organized in either heterogeneous (varied abilities) or homogeneous (similar abilities) groups to receive instruction. Grouping is defined as “any arrangement that attempts to place students with similar levels of ability in instructional groups”

(Neihart, 2007, p. 333). The merits of homogeneous groupings have been debated for decades with supporters citing increased social and academic benefits for students (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Kulik & Kulik, 1997; Lawton, 1992; Moon & Rosselli, 2000; Oakes, 1992; Rogers, 1991; Slavin, 1990). Critics often claim homogeneous grouping leads to elitist classes and denies differently abled students the opportunity to be stimulated mentally by high-ability classmates (Moon & Rosselli, 2000; Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1987). Regardless of the continuing debate, academic grouping allows the cognitive ability of academically gifted students to be challenged in an environment specific to the abilities and needs of the individual learner (Vogl & Preckel, 2014).

Background

In order to meet the needs of academically gifted learners, it is necessary to first determine a method of identification of these learners. According to the United States Department of Education, academically gifted students are defined as those

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 - General Provisions, 2005, p. 1539)

Giftedness can also include the manifestation of performance evident at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain relative to other high-functioning individuals including developmental talent in the beginning stages where potential is the key variable and continued talent in later stages where achievement is the measure (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011).

As early as the mid-19th century, Francis Galton, an explorer and anthropologist

known for his studies in human intelligence, conducted a study on academically gifted individuals titled *Hereditary Genius* where he researched the lineage of prestigious men in Europe to determine the origins of their superior qualities (Human Intelligence: Francis Galton, 2013). His findings indicated intelligence was passed through successive generations (NAGC, 2015).

Following Galton, Lewis Terman, a leading psychologist of the early 20th century who is often referred to as the father of the gifted education movement, spent much of his life studying intelligence and revising the Binet-Simon Scale, a French tool for measuring intelligence (NAGC, 2015). The Binet-Simon test required participants to complete 30 tasks to receive an overall mental age (Piotrowski, 2010). Terman adapted this test to include an individual's chronological age, thereby arriving at what today is known as a person's intellectual quotient, or IQ (Piotrowski, 2010).

While these tests are good indicators of potential and exceptional ability at the earliest stages of talent development, further assessments measuring abilities such as verbal and mathematical reasoning ability or spatial ability are needed to help determine placement and programming and options such as acceleration that respond to student abilities in order to develop them further (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015).

Galton's and Terman's research focusing on intelligence as hereditary also revealed troubling ideas concerning racism and biases. Galton specifically focused on intelligence between races, an idea not controversial for his time, believing differences were genetically based (Lynn, 2012). Terman's Stanford-Binet test, much like many standardized tests used to identify academically gifted students, reveals biases against minority students including the fact that

(1) language differences exist between the test (or test maker) and the students; (2) the test questions center on the experiences and facts of the dominant culture, and the answers support middle class values, which are often rewarded with more points; (3) the tests favor highly verbal students (e.g., they require a great deal of reading, word recognition, vocabulary, sentence completion, and verbal responses); and (4) the tests do not consider the extent to which some students may not be oriented toward achievement. (Ford, 1998, p. 8).

Erwin and Worrell (2012) found African American students make up just 9% of academically gifted students and Hispanic students make up just 12%, while European American students account for 68% of academically gifted identified students. As programs and identification measures continue to evolve, educators must ensure equity for all academically gifted students.

Many states use a version of Terman's Stanford-Binet IQ test and other assessments as well as student cumulative records to determine identification for academically gifted programs. The setting for this research study used the matrix found in Figure 1 to identify academically gifted students.

AIG PLACEMENT MATRIX

Pathway Option	Full Scale/Aptitude	Subtest/ Content Aptitude	Achievement	Performance
Pathway 1A <i>Intellectually Gifted (IG)</i> <i>Students need 2 of 2 criteria boxes for one area of AIG placement in this row.</i>	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 98 th percentile full scale score on an approved test.	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 98 th percentile on an approved test in verbal (reading) or non-verbal (mathematics) subtest.		
Pathway 1B <i>Academically & Intellectually Gifted (AI)</i> <i>Students need 4 of 4 criteria boxes to qualify for one area of AIG placement in this row.</i>	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 98 th percentile full scale score on an approved test.	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 98 th percentile on an approved test in verbal (reading) or non-verbal (mathematics) subtest.	Nationally Normed Achievement Test 98 th percentile on NC EOG/EOC or approved on-grade level test. OR 93 rd percentile on an approved above-grade level test. <i>Qualifying subtest area from aptitude/IQ test must be in the same content area.</i>	Grades "A" in reading and/or Math. <i>Dependent on desired areas of service.</i> OR Gifted Rating Scale 98 th percentile in both qualifying areas (A/I) and (C/M/L)
Pathway 2 <i>Academically Gifted (AG) Math Only (AM) Reading Only (AR)</i> <i>Students need 3 of 4 criteria boxes to qualify for one area of AIG placement in this row.</i>	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 93 rd percentile full scale score on an approved test.	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 90 th percentile on an approved test in verbal (reading) or non-verbal (mathematics) subtest.	Nationally Normed Achievement Test 93 rd percentile on NC EOG/EOC or approved on-grade level test. OR 85 th percentile on an approved above-grade level test. <i>Qualifying subtest area from aptitude/IQ test must be in the same content area.</i>	Grades "A" in reading and/or Math. <i>Dependent on desired areas of service.</i> OR Gifted Rating Scale 90 th percentile in both qualifying areas (A/I) and (C/M/L)

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY INFORMATION: Students who have cultural/linguistic/economic differences, physical/sensory disabilities, and/or documented learning/processing disabilities should be evaluated with an appropriate instrument as determined by the AIG team. Alternative pathway consideration may be warranted.				
Pathway Option	Aptitude	Achievement	Performance	Performance
Alternative Pathway Pathway 3 <i>Academically Gifted (AG) Math Only (AM) Reading Only (AR)</i> <i>Students need 3 of 4 criteria boxes to qualify for one area of AIG placement in this row.</i> <i>If using the portfolio performance task, a GRS must also be completed.</i>	Nationally-Normed Aptitude/IQ Test 93 rd percentile full scale score on an approved test. OR 90 th percentile on an approved test in verbal (reading) or non-verbal (mathematics) subtest.	Nationally Normed Achievement Test 93 rd percentile on NC EOG/EOC or approved on-grade level test. OR 85 th percentile on an approved above-grade level test. <i>Qualifying subtest area from aptitude/IQ test must be in the same content area.</i>	Grades "A" in reading and/or Math. <i>Dependent on desired areas of service.</i> OR Portfolio 85% or higher using the UCPS Product or Portfolio Scoring Rubric. Scoring conducted by school-site AIG team.	Gifted Rating Scale 90 th percentile in both qualifying areas (A/I) and (C/M/L)

Figure 1. AIG Student Identification Matrix for Research Setting.

Students identified as academically gifted require appropriately differentiated curriculum designed to address their individual characteristics, needs, abilities, and interests (Berger, 1991). These students are identified using a combination of objective (quantifiably measured) and subjective (personally observed) measurement tools in order to collect information on both performance and potential in order to improve the likelihood that students' gifts will be developed into talents (NAGC, 2015). Once identified, it is necessary to meet these specific needs in order to provide a fair and equitable education for these students.

Programs available to academically gifted students vary from state to state as federal law does not mandate specific requirements for service. North Carolina, the state where this study occurred, adopted six standards to guide the identification of and programs available to these students. The standards include (a) student identification, (b) comprehensive programming within a total school community, (c) differentiated curriculum and instruction, (d) personnel and professional development, (e) partnerships, and (f) program accountability (North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards, 2018). These standards serve as a framework to guide local school agencies in the development and implementation of a comprehensive AIG programs (North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards, 2018). The identification process begins in the third grade, and qualifying students receive various services including enrichment, extension, and acceleration (North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards, 2018). The focus of academic acceleration occurs in the middle school where students have the opportunity to take rigorous high school level classes, receiving graduation-required credit upon completion.

In December 2010, the North Carolina State Board of Education, using GS-115C-81 as a statutory reference, amended policy NC GCS-M-001 in order to define course for credit and allowed students in the middle grades to accelerate English I, a course typically taken during a student's ninth-grade year. The Board amended the policy to read that beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, "students in grades 6-8 who pass English I courses [as] described in and aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for grades 9-12" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2019, para. 3) may earn credit towards graduation.

Local school boards had the option to implement this policy, and the school system chosen for the study selected the 2013-2014 school year for implementation. The program implemented allows students who have tested into the AIG program to be participants in the accelerated English I class during their eighth-grade year, and it allows them to receive high school credit, although the grade earned does not factor into future GPA data for high school.

Statement of the Problem

As the need for improved excellence in the American educational system continues, so does the need to better serve the academically gifted population of students. The 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk* warned American citizens of mediocre educational performance in schools and a dismantling of essential support systems which at one time helped make educational gains possible. This study demanded changes in the realm of education to benefit both students and society and offered tools to help schools and the public make a renewed commitment to reform for excellence.

In a similarly shocking study published in 2004, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools*

Hold Back America's Brightest Students, Colangelo et al. reported gifted students were performing above expectations but were not afforded opportunities to be further challenged for growth. Instead, they were forced into learning in a lock-step manner with their classmates based on age rather than readiness and motivation (Colangelo et al., 2004). This stifling of academic freedom and growth not only harms the gifted student at the elementary and high school level, but it has lasting effects at the postsecondary level as well. A study conducted by Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, and Benbow (2001) revealed students who were identified as academically gifted during adolescence and received services were more likely to pursue doctoral degrees and advanced terminal degrees than those who were not afforded the same opportunities.

Academic acceleration allows “students to move through traditional educational organizations more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation” (NAGC, 2004, p. 1). Student acceleration has been noted as one of the most important issues in gifted education, and its effects on a student’s academic achievement and social development have been studied extensively. The practice of academic acceleration has been determined to be an effective and efficient intervention for high-ability learners (Steenbergen-Hu, 2009).

Acceleration can include grade level or subject-based advancement, with both being used at all levels of K-12 education. While many educators are resistant to acceleration for fear students are not mature enough emotionally and/or socially, research cites that students’ emotional and social health is intertwined with their cognitive needs (Rambo & McCoach, 2012). The use of acceleration as a means to meet the needs of academically gifted students is a practice more school districts are following to ensure

gifted learners become capable, valuable, effective, and successful contributors to our global society (North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards, 2018).

While current literature provides a wealth of information on benefits of acceleration, most current studies focus on acceleration in the elementary grades or subject acceleration in the math or science concentration in the upper grades. The United States embraced the idea of academic acceleration in the subjects of math and science since the launching of Sputnik by the former Soviet Union. Sputnik's "beeping signal from space galvanized the United States to enact reforms in science and engineering education so that the nation could regain technological ground it appeared to have lost to its Soviet rival" (Powell, 2007, para. 2). Several studies have documented positive academic results for gifted students who participated in accelerated mathematics programs (Assouline & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2005; Guyton, 2013; Mills, Ablard, & Gustin, 1994; Preckel, Goetz, Pekrun, & Kleine, 2008), and combining acceleration and enrichment opportunities for students in mathematics provides further support for the needs of academically gifted students (Johnson, 2000). In one study, Lubinski and Benbow (2006) found students who were "challenged by intellectually rigorous math-science educational opportunities that are responsive to one's learning needs increases the likelihood of being in a STEM career 20 years later" (pp. 334–335). Studies further reveal academically gifted students who are accelerated in math have higher growth in self-esteem than their similarly abled peers who are not accelerated (Ma, 2005).

While these studies on math acceleration have concluded positive impacts for the academically gifted learner, similar studies focusing on English acceleration do not exist.

This study addressed this gap and sought to provide much needed analysis for the subject of English language arts on the academically gifted learner. The limited amount of research on the benefits of accelerated English language arts on the academically gifted students made this study needed.

This study provides districts and educators with added research on acceleration and its effects on the academically gifted student. This study specifically researched the middle school student and the impact acceleration of high school English in the eighth grade has on student achievement and choice of coursework at the high school level. Readers will gain a deeper understanding of the needs of both students and teachers who participate in the acceleration program as well as the policies and procedures put into place to ensure success for the student, educator, and school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of English I acceleration, a class traditionally taken during ninth grade, in the eighth-grade middle school English language arts classroom. The researcher focused on gifted learners' academic achievement and future scheduling choices at the secondary level. The study compared academic and scheduling data of AIG accelerated English I students (Group A) with similar data of AIG nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). One group (Group A) consisted of two cohorts of AIG students who participated in the English I acceleration program in the eighth grade. The second group (Group B) consisted of three cohorts of AIG students who did not participate in the English I acceleration program in the eighth grade.

This study first examined the effects of accelerated instruction versus

nonaccelerated instruction on academic achievement. The study sought to find if there was a difference between the mean achievement of students who participated in the accelerated program (Group A) and those who did not (Group B). Achievement data included testing requirements (End of Course [EOC] and ACT scores).

The study next examined if students continued to schedule and complete accelerated English coursework at the secondary level. Students, regardless of identification, can self-select course levels at the secondary level and are therefore not required to continue to take accelerated classes. The study sought to find if there was a relationship between taking English I in the eighth grade and continuing to choose to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level when given the opportunity to self-select coursework.

Finally, the study sought to find motivating factors in student scheduling choices at the secondary level. While secondary students are encouraged to discuss scheduling choices with counselors, parents, and current teachers, only a parent signature is required on student scheduling paperwork each year for registration. The study focused on current senior students who completed all English coursework and sought to find motivating factors for scheduling choices.

This mixed methods study addressed the use of subject-specific acceleration at the middle school to meet the needs of academically gifted learners. The findings of the study added to the limited research on the effectiveness of accelerated academic programs put into place to meet the needs of gifted students.

Research Questions

The purpose of a study's research questions was to "narrow the purpose statement

into specific questions that will be examined in the study” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 160). This study determined the effects of the acceleration of the English I curriculum in a large school district in the piedmont of North Carolina. The research questions sought to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in order to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the acceleration. The use of both “quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5). The researcher also followed an explanatory sequential design for the study starting with a collection of quantitative data to be followed by a qualitative study to help explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does implementation of the accelerated English I program impact academically gifted populations’ academic achievement?
2. For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what is the impact on selection of specific scheduling options?
3. For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what are the motivating factors for selections of specific scheduling options available at the secondary level?

Theoretical Framework

After determining a topic and research questions, it is important to find the “link between *what* to study and *how* to study it” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 48).

Researchers should also prepare a plan for their study that searches for answers to larger philosophical ideas in order to explain why qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods

approaches are used (Creswell, 2014). This study used a post-positivist approach, a traditional form of research sometimes called the scientific method, to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes (Creswell, 2014). This post-positivism theoretical approach evaluated how the current implementation of the accelerated English language arts program is working and identify any gaps that may be used to guide teachers and district-level personnel in the future (Butin, 2010). This study also sought to find if acceleration is a best practice that leads to future student success (Butin, 2010).

The study was based on the Social Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura (1986, 1997). This theory is based on the assumption that people are purposeful, goal-directed beings who are primarily motivated through their beliefs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations stemming from their actions within specific social contexts (Erlich & Russ-Eft, 2011). Social Cognitive Theory explains human agency through the interdependence of determinants using a 3-point model called “triadic reciprocal causation” (Bandura, 1986). The model visually resembles a triangle with the following points interacting and mutually influencing each other: personal factors including cognitive, affective, and biological events; environment; and behavior. Figure 2 is a representation of this triadic causation.

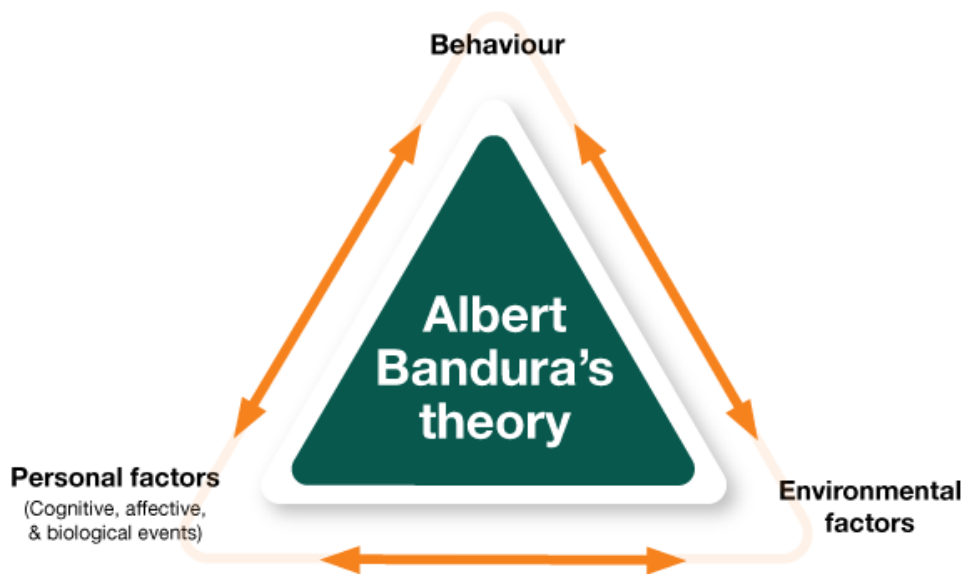


Figure 2. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory Visual.

As studied by Smedsrud (2018), important factors included in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory include motivation, self-efficacy, individual stress levels, and academic self-belief that lead to performance across different levels of intellectual ability (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000). Studies have supported the need for academically gifted students to be appropriately challenged in the academic setting in order to better influence motivation in this continuous reciprocal relationship (Phillips & Lindsay, 2006; Winner, 2000). In order to develop high motivation, academically gifted students need to be challenged at their cognitive level or run the risk of becoming complacent and apathetic towards their learning, thus breeding underachievers (Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen, & Maxey, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Academic acceleration is a method to be considered in order to meet the motivational needs of the academic gifted learner. The post-positivist approach to this study sought to collect and analyze data in order to shape knowledge about the accelerated program and to describe the causal relationships of

interest found in the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

Minority students continue to be underrepresented in gifted education programs (Borland, 2004; Skiba et al., 2008). Environmental factors for many minority students, including social and psychological experiences, allow the opportunity for these same students to build negative expectations about the value of gifted education (Ecker-Lyster, & Niileksela, 2017; Grantham, 2004). Without proper environmental factors being met, including a challenging academic setting, many of these students will continue to miss equitable educational opportunities the current educational system is tasked with providing to all students (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014).

Setting of the Study

The study took place in a large public school district located in the piedmont of North Carolina. There were 10 traditional sixth-eighth grade middle schools in the county and nine of these schools offered the accelerated English I program. One middle school was part of an alternative school offering a different environment for students in Grades 9-12 to complete graduation requirements. These middle schools fed into 12 high schools throughout the county where accelerated students had access to various scheduling choices in upper grades. Scheduling choices at the 12 high schools included various honors and advanced placement (AP) classes as well as collegiate level classes that could be taken concurrently while enrolled at the high school level. Students also had the opportunity to take various elective courses while enrolled in high school.

Population of the Study

The study focused on two distinct populations. In order to answer Research Question 1, the researcher compared student achievement scores of students who did not

accelerate because the program was not available (Group B) with those students who accelerated with the program's implementation in 2013-2014 school year (Group A). Group B was comprised of three cohorts of students who graduated between the years of 2015-2017. Group A was comprised of two cohorts of students who graduated between the years of 2018-2019. The researcher had access to student achievement data that included EOC exam scores as well as ACT scores for both groups. The researcher focused only on Group A to answer Research Questions 2 and 3.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are characteristics limiting the scope and defining the boundaries of a study and are in the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). In order to complete the study for the acceleration of English I in the eighth grade, the researcher made the choice to collect student data from one public school district found in the southern piedmont of North Carolina. There were currently nine middle schools in the district implementing the English I program. The middle schools fed into a total of 10 high schools.

Participants in the study were limited to two groups: AIG students who did not accelerate English I in the middle school and AIG students who did accelerate English I in middle school.

Limitations of Study

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study and are out of the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). For the purpose of the study, the researcher was limited by the number of years the accelerated English I program has been implemented in the middle schools. The 2019 school year was the sixth student cohort to complete the accelerated English I program. This limited the amount of student assessment data available for

collection for the study.

Definition of Terms

Academically gifted. In North Carolina, AIG students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experiences, or environment. AIG students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both the intellectual areas and specific academic fields (Academically or Intellectually Gifted, n.d.). In the North Carolina county where this study took place, a matrix is used to determine AIG certification based on testing and academic fields.

Acceleration. Moving through the traditional curriculum at rates faster than typical. The various forms of acceleration include grade skipping, early entrance to school, and AP courses. Acceleration is appropriate educational planning that matches the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student (Colangelo et al., 2004).

AP. AP courses allow students to take college level work while they are still in high school in order to earn college credit and placement (Discover AP, 2018).

Career and college promise (CCP). The CCP program allows students to earn college credit while still in high school. Students are dually enrolled in their high school and at a local community college allowing them to receive both high school and college credit for courses taken through the program.

Dual enrollment. Students enroll in postsecondary coursework while also enrolled in high school. This approach seeks to improve academic outcomes for students. Approximately 80% of the sites are community colleges with a strong emphasis on

offering responsible students the opportunity to pursue an education and training at community colleges for free (Fact Sheet: Expanding College Access Through the Dual Enrollment Pell Experiment, 2016).

English II EOC. Assessment used to sample a student’s knowledge of English II concepts as specified in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. This assessment also provides a global estimate of the student’s mastery of English II (North Carolina End of Course Tests, n.d.).

North Carolina Final Exam (NCFE). Standardized artifact reflective of student growth for teachers and school growth for participants in the teacher evaluation process. NCFEs are required in the following secondary coursework: English I, English III, English IV, Math 2, Discrete Math, Advanced Functions and Modeling, Precalculus, Earth and Environmental Science, Physical Science, Physics, Chemistry, World History, American History I, American History II, and Civics and Economics. This course-specific assessment is a student’s required final exam and the results count as a minimum of 20% of the student's final grade (North Carolina Final Exams, n.d.).

Summary

While more targeted curricula and differentiated programs have been implemented since the mid-20th century in American schools in order to meet the needs of gifted learners, current research suggests academically gifted students “are not being given the tools they need to realize their potential and compete” (Finn, 2014, p. 51). The publication of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students* (Colangelo et al., 2004) highlighted the need for schools, parents, and teachers to embrace the idea of academic acceleration to better challenge and motivate academically

gifted students. In a country where there are an estimated three million academically gifted students in Grades K-12 (Chen, 2014; Gifted Education in the U.S., n.d.), it is imperative to challenge the status quo and explore various avenues to meet the academic needs of all students, including those who excel and may not fit the traditional lock-step model implemented by most American schools.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Many conventional school practices and current curricula fail to stimulate the minds of the academically gifted student, leaving many of these students to never realize their full potential (Chen, 2014; Reis, 2015). Generally, an academically gifted learner excels in the classroom, but this is often only seen where instruction and differentiation occur that are commensurate with the learner's ability level (Councill & Fielder, 2017). Where differentiation is provided, academically gifted students are challenged with instructional modifications allowing for greater depth and complexity, adjusted pace, and greater independence (Hertberg-Davis, 2009). Where differentiation is not provided, academically gifted students often find themselves bored and frustrated and learn little they did not already know before (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Differentiation has been defined as an “instructional approach in which the instruction addresses the needs of academically diverse learners, is intended to engage and support all learners, and adapts instructional content, process, and product in response to learners’ different cognitive resources” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 153). According to Kaplan (2009), differentiation includes four distinct areas of interest:

- (1) the who – the learner and his or her needs, interests, and abilities; (2) the what – the content and skills of the subject matter to be taught; (3) the how – the pedagogy to be used to teach the content, skills, or both; and (4) the where – the setting, grouping, or both needed to effectively implement the curriculum (the what) to the learner (the who). (p. 107)

Differentiation for the academically gifted student (the who) must allow for the content

(the what) to be presented and taught (the how) in differing ways that both challenge and engage the learner. Barring these students from a diverse educational experience is discouraging excellence and encouraging lower standards in the classroom (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Academic acceleration is a valid differentiation tool intended to improve rigor and expose populations of students to higher level content and more challenging assignments earlier in their education (Acceleration Definition, 2013). This practice allows students to move through school coursework at a pace more rapidly than their peers or to take courses at ages younger than typical students (Pressey, 1949). As students are moved forward more rapidly, opportunities provided are accelerated as well, allowing for more “appropriate developmental placement” (Lubinski & Benbow, 2000, p. 138).

Overview of the Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to add to the limited research available on the acceleration of English language arts at the middle school level. Current literature focuses primarily on acceleration in the elementary grades or subject acceleration in the math or science concentration in the upper grades. The limited amount of research on the effects of accelerated English language arts on the academically gifted student in the upper grades made this a needed study. The researcher sought to support the purpose of this study through the investigation and analysis of current research on gifted students, motivations of gifted learners, and acceleration strategies used to meet gifted learners’ needs.

The literature review focused on the research questions of the study. Questions

required relevant and recent research concerning identification of academically gifted learners, the history and development of gifted education, various uses of academic acceleration for academically gifted learners, diverse perceptions of academic acceleration, and academically gifted student motivation factors. Using these topics as keyword searches, the researcher focused on using EBSCOhost and ProQuest databases to collect current and relevant literature aligned to the study's research questions.

Literature Search Strategy

The study was grounded in a post-positivist worldview, thus requiring the researcher to challenge the traditional notion of truth and recognizing one cannot be positive about claims of knowledge when studying actions of humans (Creswell, 2014; Phillips & Burbules, 2000). This deterministic philosophy necessitated an intense literature review in order to better understand how understandings about academically gifted students have evolved as well as how best to meet the needs of this population. The researcher used various databases supported by the library in order to acquire current and past literature for the study. Using various themes that became apparent after concept mapping for the study, the researcher structured the literature review to logically progress through the following topics: (a) the identification of academically gifted students, (b) the history of meeting the educational needs of these students, (c) current differentiation strategies implemented in the educational setting, (d) the focus of academic acceleration as a best practice, and (e) the current perception of academic acceleration. Each topic focuses on supporting themes found in the research questions guiding the study.

Definition of Gifted Students

The term academically gifted carries various definitions and meanings dependent upon both the user of the term and the intended audience. Giftedness has been defined to

(a) reflect the values of society; (b) [be] manifested in actual outcomes, especially in adulthood; (c) [be] specific to domains of endeavor; (d) [be] the result of the coalescing of biological, pedagogical, psychological, and psychosocial factors; and (e) [be] relative not just to the ordinary (e.g., a child with exceptional art ability compared to peers) but to the extraordinary (e.g., an artist who revolutionizes a field of art). (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 3).

As the definition suggests, both society and the individual are jointly responsible for providing and seeking out opportunities for advancement and growth. As society plays a significant role in making resources available to support the development of these individuals, many societies, including the United States, have created their own specific definition to support the specific needs of the population and culture.

United States federal definition for gifted and talented. The first United States federal definition for gifted and talented students listed in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendment of 1969 stated these students have “outstanding intellectual ability or creative talent, the development of which requires special activities or services not ordinarily provided by local education agencies” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965, p. 152). This definition was modified in 1972 to identify these students as those

who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance ... who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those

normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contributions to self and society ... [and who are] capable of high performance and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, ability in the visual or performing arts, and psychomotor ability. (Marland, 1972, p. 5).

Not satisfied with the modified version, the Marland (1972) version was again edited in 1978 through the Gifted and Talented Children's Education Act (Public Law 95-561) to define giftedness as

possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high-performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing and visual arts and who by reason thereof require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. (Section 902)

The updated version excluded psychomotor abilities when determining giftedness but broadened the range of individuals to be included in gifted education to those in preschool as well as specified the term youth to include both young children and adolescents (Stephens & Karnes, 2000). Educational reform continued to take place after 1978; and in 1988, Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey introduced the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act modifying the definition once again to read,

children and youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require special services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities. (Jacob K.

Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988, PL 100-297, Title IV, Sec. 4103).

This iteration of the definition removed a reference to the performing arts and also no longer included the terms preschool, elementary, or secondary levels. After the release of the *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993) report by the United States Department of Education, the definition evolved again to define these students who

with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment ... exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields ... [and] require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. [These] outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (p. 26)

This most recent definition eliminates the use of the term “gifted” as it implies learning and ability is a completed ability rather than one requiring development and challenge (Stephens & Karnes, 2000).

State definitions of gifted and talented. As federal pieces of legislation were adopted concerning academically gifted children, states also adopted their own variations of the adopted federal definition to guide their own gifted standards and curriculum. A study published by Karnes and Collins (1978) revealed that “although thirty-three states adopted definitions during or after 1972, only twenty-four states employed the [federal]

definition at that time” (p. 62).

A follow-up study conducted by Karnes and Koch (1985) revealed, “all states ha[d] a definition, or proposed definition ... [with] only a few states us[ing] a modification or exact definition from 1972. Nine states [gave] precise definitions of the students to be identified and served” (p. 306). Originally enacted in 1961 and established in 1975, the state of North Carolina defined a gifted student as

one who falls within the upper ten percent in the total school district on intelligence tests, achievement tests, and/or scales that rate behavior characteristics ... has academic talent and generally performs above average in his class work and/or may demonstrate a special talent in areas such as creativity, communication, leadership, decision making, forecasting, and planning as indicated by the use of behavioral scales and checklists. (Karnes & Collins, 1978, p. 53)

This definition was later modified and adopted in 1996 to define academically gifted students as those who

exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both intellectual areas and specific academic fields ... require differentiated educational services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program ... [and] are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (North Carolina General Statute, 1996, § 115C-150.5)

This current state definition incorporates terms from the modified 1994 federal definition to ensure students are identified correctly and appropriate standards and programs are

developed for this population.

Social science definitions of gifted and talented. Beyond federal and state definitions, psychologists and theorists have also defined giftedness in various measures. Terman's (1925) *Genetic Studies of Genius* longitudinal study identified gifted individuals as those who scored in the top 1% of the Stanford-Binet IQ test. Terman used the Binet-Simon standardized test created by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon in his study and added a number of new tests to create a numerical intelligence quotient (IQ) that calculated intelligence on the basis of the ratio between an individual's mental age and chronological age (Hunt, 2010). DeHaan and Havighurst (1957) later added creative thinking, scientific ability, social leadership, mechanical skills, and talent in the fine arts as skills to be added to the definition of gifted and also proposed two levels of giftedness: extremely gifted (top 1%) and superior (top 10%). Tannenbaum (1983) furthered this definition of giftedness to include five factors: (a) a sliding scale of general intelligence, (b) special ability, (c) nonintellective factors, (d) environmental factors, and (e) chance factors. He would name this the sea-star model of giftedness. This psychosocial conception locates giftedness both within the individual and within the psychosocial context in which he or she operates (Borland, 2015). These factors allow "students to become critically acclaimed in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual or aesthetic life of humanity" (Tannenbaum, 1986, p. 33). Renzulli (1978), an American educational psychologist, furthered the identification of gifted students and coined the theory of a "three-ring conception" of giftedness. This theory states that those who have received recognition possess a set of three interlocking clusters of traits to include (a) above average ability, (b) creativity, and (c) task

commitment (Renzulli, 1978). Renzulli argued that each trait is equally important and one major error that continues to be made in identifying academically gifted students is overemphasis on ability over the other two factors (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005).

Theorists and researchers continue to modify and develop the definition of giftedness as studies reveal a deeper scope of ability and accessibility.

Identification of Gifted Students

While federal legislation has been passed concerning the definition of the academically gifted as well as standards to be used as a guide to meet their educational needs, the process of identifying and servicing these individuals has been left in the hands of individual states. Standards cite the purpose of identifying academically gifted students is to provide “education programs that will challenge them in regular classroom settings and enrichment and accelerated programs to enable them to make continuous progress in school” (Why Are Gifted Programs Needed, n.d., para. 1). As intelligence can be revealed in various manners, researchers agree with adopting identification processes to include multiple sources of information including traditional IQ tests and nonverbal testing findings as well as observations and recommendations from teachers (Assouline, 2003; Callahan & Miller, 2005; Hagen, 1980; Lohman, 2005; Renzulli, 2005). Using data collected from various sources acknowledges the fact that human abilities are multidimensional, not unidimensional (Lohman, 2005).

IQ testing. As discussed previously, Terman (1925) modified the Binet-Simon standardized test to what is now known as the Stanford-Binet IQ test in order to create a standard IQ to measure one’s intellectual abilities. Many school districts continue to use this test as a means of identifying academically gifted students; however, it should not be

the sole data source for identification purposes. The test does not account for various modifications in the definition of giftedness including that of gifted potential and talent development (Krisel, 2012; Pfeiffer & Blei, 2008), and the test is also considered racially biased which could lead to underrepresentation of minority students (Hodges, Tay, Maeda, & Gentry, 2018). The test measures both verbal and quantitative abilities, and most have adopted a score in the 98th percentile or higher as an identifier of academic giftedness (Minton & Pratt, 2006).

Nonverbal tests. A variety of nonverbal tests are used by states and districts in addition to the Stanford-Binet IQ test to identify academically gifted students. These tests do not require an examinee to speak, read, or write and assesses a student's spatial and reasoning abilities without measuring specific verbal and quantitative abilities (Lohman, Korb, & Lakin, 2008). These assessments include the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC).

NNAT. The NNAT is a nonverbal test of ability educators can use to predict academic achievement for children ages 5 through 17 years. The test requires examinees to use logic and reasoning to determine relationships between visual stimuli in the form of shapes and geometric designs (Dumont & Willis, 2013). In order to reduce cultural bias in test items, the NNAT focuses on assessing problem-solving, reasoning, and observation skills and does not rely on language or cultural knowledge (Lewis, DeCamp-Fritson, Ramage, McFarland, & Archwamety, 2007; Naglieri & Ford, 2003).

CogAT. The CogAT, first published in 1954 by Irving Lorge and Robert L. Thorndike, used both verbal and nonverbal skills to measure abstract reasoning skills that

were important for students in educational settings (Piotrowski, 2010). The current seventh edition of the assessment focuses on verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal components to assess a student. While a nonverbal assessment is a key component in identification of academically gifted students, Lohman (2005) found the nonverbal component of the CogAT is least correlated to academic achievement, further supporting the need for a multi-faceted identification process.

WISC. The WISC was created by David Wechsler who defined intelligence as the “overall capacity of an individual to act purposefully, think rationally, and deal effectively with the environment” (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 2047). The assessment was originally published in 1939 but has since been revised to its current third edition published in 1998 and consists of 13 subtests organized into two groups: the verbal subtests and the performance subtests which require minimal or nonverbal responses (Piotrowski, 2010).

Appropriate identification of academically gifted students is necessary when planning and implementing an educational program for these students. According to Lohman (2005), identification processes should include the following:

- (1) except for very young children, academic giftedness should be defined primarily by evidence of academic accomplishment; (2) measure verbal, quantitative, and figural reasoning abilities in all students; (3) consider nonverbal/figural reasoning abilities as a helpful adjunct for both minority and nonminority admissions, but only as a measure of last resort; and (4) use identification tests that provide useful information for all students, not just the handful selected for inclusion in the gifted and talented program. (pp. 133-134)

Differentiation to Meet the Needs of Gifted Learners

Differentiation in classroom teaching and curriculum presentation seeks to respond to the various differences and needs of students (Shalaway, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999). “This approach to teaching stands in stark contrast to approaches that assume that all students in a classroom, regardless of its heterogeneity, benefit and learn from a standard, one-size-fits-all curriculum” (Hertberg-Davis, 2009, p. 251). While teachers should strive to differentiate learning for all learners, gifted students benefit from differentiation strategies that modify the curriculum to include greater depth and complexity, adjusted pace, and greater independence (Hertberg-Davis, 2009).

Academically gifted learners require differentiated learning opportunities in order to meet the unique needs of the learner. NAGC created national standards “in programming and services and teacher preparation to guide high quality education for the nation’s estimated three to five million gifted and talented students” (National Standards in Gifted and Talented Education., n.d., para. 1). These standards call for educators to “differentiate their curriculum and instruction by using pre- and post-, performance-based, product-based, and out-of-level assessments [in order to] deliver the curriculum” (Standard 2: Assessments, n.d., para 1). This differentiation is meant to include instruction as well as assessment and should “ensure that what a student learns, how he/she learns, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning” (Tomlinson, 2004, p. 188). VanTassel-Baska and Little (2011) defined differentiated instruction for academically gifted students as being

tailored to the needs of groups and/or individual learners, that provides

experiences sufficiently differentiated from the norm to justify specialized intervention, and that is delivered by a trained educator of the gifted using appropriate instructional and assessment practices to optimize learning. (p. 10)

According to researchers VanTassel-Baska and Brown (as cited by Kanevsky, 2011), effective differentiation for gifted students includes

(1) use of advanced curricula in core areas of learning at an accelerated rate; (2) grouping gifted students instructionally by subject area for advanced curriculum work that would be flexibly organized and implemented based on students' documented level of learning within the subject areas; (3) embedding multiple higher level thinking models and skills within core subject area teaching to enhance learning; (4) the use of inquiry as a central strategy to promote gifted student learning in multiple modalities; (5) the use of student-centered learning opportunities that are issue- or problem-based and relevant to the student's world. (pp. 351-352)

History of Academic Acceleration

There is limited research focused on gifted child education prior to the 1920s and 1930s, but it was not until the 1957 Soviet launching of Sputnik that there was a resurgence in the common concern for educating America's brightest students (Robins, 2010). This race for scientific and technological superiority over the Soviets propelled the advancement of academically gifted students in the United States and encouraged the use of alternative strategies in the educational setting. Academic acceleration allows a student to participate in an educational intervention designed to move a student through a course's standard curriculum at an accelerated pace or at a younger age based on

readiness and motivation (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Davis & Rimm, 2004; Pressey, 1949), and this intervention became more focused in the educational setting at this time in order to develop the minds of the brightest and best students for the benefit of the country.

Times of crises have also seen a rise in the use of academic acceleration in educational settings. “In times of war, America traditionally has encouraged students to get through college faster” (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 12), due to the need for skilled workers and teachers. Colleges and universities also have lengthened the academic school year in order to accelerate curriculum to assist older veterans in completing graduation requirements needed for future careers (Pressey, 1946).

Acceleration has not been a practice readily embraced in the American school setting. “Many gifted students in early American history could accelerate as far as they could if their parents could afford tutors” (Hargrove, 2012, p. 72), and unfortunately this financial barrier left most gifted students to follow the lock-step, 12-grade program adopted by school systems. When the race to space began between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1960s, schools began to look for alternative methods to advance academically gifted students, specifically in the areas of math and sciences.

Accelerated Programs

Acceleration provides academically gifted students with opportunities to learn curriculum more quickly, thus allowing the opportunity for gifted learners to take higher level courses of interest and participate in enrichment activities beyond the prescribed curriculum. Cohoon (2015) focused on the fact that there is no federal policy concerning acceleration for gifted and talented students. Because of this, individual states, and

sometimes individual districts, have varying programs available for students.

Various acceleration programs have been implemented at the secondary school level to provide opportunities to differentiate learning for gifted students, and researchers have identified up to 18 practices that can be used to challenge the academic abilities of students (Colangelo et al., 2004; Davis & Rimm, 1988; Gallagher, 1985; Kitano & Kirby, 1986; Southern & Jones, 1991, 2004). Table 1 outlines acceleration programs available to academically gifted students at the secondary level.

Table 1.

Acceleration Programs for Academically Gifted Students at the Secondary Level

Grade or Content Based	Acceleration Method	Description
Grade Based	Early Entrance to College	Students can complete high school requirements before the traditional 4 years and transition to college
Content Based	Single Subject Acceleration	Student completes required curriculum before the traditional grade level
	Concurrent/Dual Enrollment	Students are enrolled in advanced coursework when grade level proficiency is met
	AP	College level coursework is offered at the high school level and students earn credit based on final examination score
	International Baccalaureate	Advanced program offered at approved high schools where students complete university level curricula and international examination. Students receive advanced standing when entering university.

Acceleration practices available to academically gifted students at the secondary level vary dependent upon state and local offerings.

Early entrance to college. Students may enter college early based on various

scenarios. Credits may be accrued early as many public secondary schools only require 20-26 credit hours to receive a general diploma. With many schools operating on a block schedule, students now have the opportunity to collect eight credits per year, allowing requirements to be met in as little as 3 years. Many academically gifted students will finish secondary graduation credit requirements prior to the traditional 4 years. These same students believe that early entrance to college will develop both intellectual and personal strengths and create personal and professional experiences that cannot be met at the traditional secondary level (Boazman & Sayler, 2011). Gross and Van Vliet (2005) found radical acceleration to college is an effective practice to meet the educational needs of academically gifted students, although it is rarely used.

Students can also participate in radical acceleration programs allowing them to complete 4 years of secondary education in less than the traditional 4 years. The University of Washington offers an Early Entrance Program (EEP) where students complete secondary requirements in 1 year and then transition to the collegiate level. Studies reveal students who chose to participate in the program were satisfied with their decision to accelerate and that a significant number also decided to attend graduate school (Noble, Robinson, & Gunderson, 1993).

Single subject acceleration. Content acceleration refers to the presentation to gifted students of curricula that was intended for older students (Gallagher, 1996). Single subject acceleration is a practice often adopted at the middle and secondary level and students either physically move to a higher level class for instruction or use higher level curricular materials within their original classroom (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska, & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015). Allowing academically gifted students the

opportunity to learn subject-specific material at an accelerated pace allows for ability grouping, an “educational interventions that seeks to promote learning for high-achieving and high-ability students” (Steenbergen-Hu, Makel, & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016, p. 850).

Concurrent/dual enrollment. Current secondary education settings allow students the opportunity to earn college credit for classes taken at a postsecondary institution (Allen, 2010). Many community colleges partner with local school systems in order to offer entry level and general education requirements to high school students who have availability in their course schedules. These programs oftentimes allow for better access to advanced coursework when compared with AP or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, as credit is not dependent upon a passing score on a summative assessment (Borden, Taylor, Park, & Seiler, 2013). Dual enrollment programs vary state to state, but the program itself began to be adopted in the 1980s when many states adopted policies allowing currently enrolled high school students to attend community colleges concurrently (McCarthy, 1999).

AP classes. AP classes allow students in high school to take courses that offer college credit if they successfully complete a final College Board exam. These classes were first offered to high school students in 1952, and College Board acquired the program in 1955. AP classes offer rigorous and challenging curriculum to students. Tiemann (2011) found that students who took and were successful in AP level courses at the high school level, especially those who took and were successful in multiple AP level courses, had a higher rate of academic success at the college level during their first year.

IB. The IB program seeks to develop challenging international education programs with rigorous assessment that challenges students to become active,

compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right (The History of the IB, 2017). Many studies have found schools need to increase rigor in the classroom setting, and the IB program meets this need (Spalding, Eden, & Heppner, 2012). Students enrolled in this program follow curriculum focused on theory of knowledge, creativity, activity, service, and the extended essay.

Benefits of Academic Acceleration

Academic acceleration benefits the academically gifted students' academic, social, and financial areas of life. These students seek to be challenged in the classroom but are often held back due to current policies, accepted norms, or fear for their emotional and social well-being.

Academic. Multiple studies reveal various educational benefits to academic acceleration. Kulik and Kulik (1984) conducted a meta-analysis study revealing that academic acceleration has a positive correlation to learning. Chen (2014) found students learn best from a curriculum that moves at their pace and is at the appropriate depth of their rate of learning. These findings support research found in *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (Colangelo et al., 2004) that shows both academic and social benefits of academic acceleration. Studies also reveal a positive connection between academic acceleration and standardized achievement test scores, grades in college, prestige of university attended, and future employment outcomes (Lubinski & Benbow, 2006; Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011; Wai, Lubinski, Benbow, & Stieger, 2010).

Social. Fears of social acceptance and emotional readiness oftentimes play a

significant role in reasons why academically gifted students are not accelerated. Many parents and educators believe students who skip grades or classes struggle to fit into society; however, the reality shows that those very students tend to lead American society to greater heights (Colangelo et al., 2004). Many academically gifted students struggle to form friendships among same age peers due to the fact they tend to be more emotionally and socially mature than their peers (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Financial. Over the course of 2014-2015, the United States spent a total expenditure of \$668 billion, or \$13,119 per public school student, for public elementary and secondary schools (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). This number does not include the spending for postsecondary education at both public and private colleges and universities. According to the article “College Costs: FAQs” (2019) published by College Board, the average cost of yearly tuition for students is between \$3,440 and \$32,410. Acceleration options for academically gifted students would help to alleviate the financial burden placed on both the government and individuals and their families. “Nationally, the parents of over one million students who, in 2004, took 1.9 million AP exams, are saving millions of dollars in college costs each year” (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 3).

Summary

As previously stated, improved excellence continues to be a need in American schools, including the need to better serve the academically gifted population of students. By definition, academically gifted students have the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment and require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools (National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent,

1994). Academic acceleration has been identified as an appropriate and effective method of differentiation to meet the needs of the academically gifted learner (Colangelo et al., 2004); and various forms of acceleration have been implemented at school levels including grade skipping, early enrollment in elementary and postsecondary levels, and single subject acceleration. These acceleration methods seek to stimulate growth and meet the academic needs of gifted learners, thereby “altering attitudes about acceleration [and] ending [academic] grouping by birth date” (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 40).

While current literature provides a wealth of information on benefits of acceleration, most current studies focus on acceleration in the elementary grades or subject acceleration in the math or science concentration in the upper grades. The limited amount of research on the benefits of accelerated English language arts on academically gifted students made this a needed study. The research to follow used a mixed method experimental design with a post-positivist framework seeking to test the impact of a treatment that may influence an outcome (Creswell, 2014). This study provides districts and educators with research on acceleration and its effects on the academically gifted student, specifically the academically gifted middle school student and the impact acceleration has on student achievement and choice of coursework at the secondary level. Readers will gain a deeper understanding of the needs of students who participate in the acceleration program as well as the policies and procedures put into place to ensure success for the student and the school.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Restatement of the Problem

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, a reauthorization of the ESEA, schools across the United States have become more focused on standards-based teaching and state-mandated testing requirements, a situation causing many educators to struggle to meet the needs of all students in the classroom (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). Oftentimes in the classroom setting, educators assess for baseline competencies and minimal expectations, a place where academically gifted students find themselves becoming more apathetic and complacent in their learning and growth (Colangelo et al., 2004). In order to meet the specific academic needs of the academically gifted learner, many states have adopted state-specific standards for specifically identified students and their teachers. While there is no set of national standards for the academically gifted, and standards vary state to state, the focus is intended to be on student outcomes for goals, rather than teacher practices, highlighting the need for diversified learning opportunities for the student (NAGC, 2015).

Academic acceleration is an alternative educational practice allowing academically gifted students the opportunity to move through a program at a faster rate that matches the readiness and motivation of the student (Colangelo et al., 2004; Harris, 1981; Pressey, 1949). When implemented appropriately, academic acceleration can lead to both positive academic and social outcomes for students grouped with like-ability or like-performing peers (Rogers, 2007); however, it is a practice not commonly embraced in traditional school settings. Despite research studies supporting the use of academic acceleration, many schools and districts force students to learn in a lock-step manner

where they are grouped with similarly aged students who may not be similarly academically abled.

Rationale for the Study

The English I course in North Carolina follows a standards-based curriculum and is traditionally taken by students who enter high school in the ninth grade. This curriculum follows the state standard course of study and “provide a framework for preparing students to effectively meet the literacy demands of a text-saturated and communication-driven world” (North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts, K-12, 2017). As students advance through English I, II, III, and IV, they are expected to meet each year’s grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades (North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts, K-12, 2017). For English I, these standards include reading standards for informational text, writing standards, listening and speaking standards, and language standards. In December 2010, the North Carolina State Board of Education, using GS-115C-81 as a statutory reference, amended policy NC GCS-M-001 in order to allow students who pass English I during sixth-eighth grades and perform to the standard course of study to earn credit towards graduation (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2019).

Review of the research questions. Extensive research exists on the topic of academic acceleration including early entrance, whole grade acceleration, and dual enrollment. Recent research studies on subject-specific acceleration (Assouline & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2005; Guyton, 2013; Mills et al., 1994; Preckel et al., 2008) have focused on the effects of math acceleration on the academically gifted student; however,

there is limited research on the effects of whole grade English acceleration. This quasi-experimental study focused on the acceleration of the English I curriculum in the eighth-grade middle school classroom and used the following research questions:

1. How does implementation of the accelerated English I program impact academically gifted populations' academic achievement?
2. For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what is the impact on selection of specific scheduling options?
3. For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what are the motivating factors for selections of specific scheduling options available at the secondary level?

The 2018-2019 school year marked the sixth year of acceleration of English I in the middle school setting within the study's county, and there has been no research-based evaluative studies completed to determine worth and value of the program.

The study evaluated those students who elected to take English I in the eighth grade and their success in upper level high school English courses. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for evaluation, as this diverse data presented a more complete understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2014). The study used two sources of archived quantitative data to evaluate student success including EOC scores and ACT scores. The researcher also collected and analyzed student registration data to evaluate student scheduling choices. The study also examined qualitative data from student surveys in order to gain insight on the perspectives of each population concerning the program and student success.

Description of the Methodology of the Study

Research methods can be defined as quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method; with each focusing on question-driven data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Quantitative studies dominated research until the mid-20th century; but with “multiple ways of seeing and hearing” (Greene, 2007, p. 20), a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative research, a mixed methods approach, became a natural outlet for many present studies (Creswell, 2011). The mixed methods research approach, with a focus on positions, inferences, and interpretations, has evolved into a separate methodological orientation with its own worldview, vocabulary, and techniques (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Any approach to research “involves the intersection of philosophy, research design, and specific methods” (Creswell, 2014, p. 5), and this study sought to follow a mixed method design and post-positivist philosophical worldview in order to answer specific research questions concerning the acceleration of English I. This form of inquiry “actively invites [one] to participate in dialogue about multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished” (Greene, 2007, p. 20).

Mixed methods design and rationale. The research was a mixed method quasi-experimental design using a post-positivist framework. In a quasi-experimental design, an evaluator seeks to test the impact of a treatment that may influence an outcome (Creswell, 2014). The evaluator examined two dependent variables in the study: academic performance and scheduling choices of academically gifted students. The independent variable was the intervention put into place for academically gifted students at the middle school: accelerated English I. The researcher compared the AIG students

who accelerated the English I class (Group A) with those who did not (Group B) in order to isolate whether or not the class influenced the outcome (performance) in upper level English testing scores (Creswell, 2014). The researcher also analyzed high school scheduling data for students who accelerated the English I course (Group A) to determine if academically gifted students continued to accelerate once given the opportunity to self-select courses. Table 2 outlines the quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed during the study.

Table 2

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Required for Research Questions

Research Question	Data Collected to Answer Question	Data Type
How does implementation of the accelerated English I program impact academically gifted populations regarding academic achievement?	Student achievement data (English II EOC scores, ACT English, reading, writing, math, science, and composite scores) AIG classes prior to 2018 graduating class (Group B nonaccelerated students)	Quantitative
	Student achievement data (English II EOC scores, ACT English, reading, writing, math, science, and composite scores) AIG 2018 graduating class to present (Group A accelerated students)	
For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what is the impact on selection of specific scheduling options?	Class registration and enrollment data for accelerated AIG students 2018 and 2019 graduating cohorts (Group A)	Quantitative
For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what are the motivating factors for selections of specific scheduling options available at the secondary level?	Student Survey 2019 graduating cohort (Group A)	Qualitative

Research Question 1 design. The researcher focused on collecting and analyzing specific archived quantitative data in order to answer the first research question. This data included the following archived student achievement data for Research Question 1: (1) EOC scores for English II; and (2) ACT English scores, reading scores, writing scores, math scores, science scores, and overall composite scores.

Research Question 2 design. Quantitative data for Research Question 2 included collecting and analyzing archived class registration data for the following courses: (1) English II Honors, (2) Advanced Inquiry, (3) English III Honors and AP Language, (4) English IV Honors and AP Literature, (5) IB courses, (6) various AP non-English courses, (7) CCP electives students choose to take due to scheduling opportunities made available through acceleration, and (8) flex (early release). Some students elected to have early release during the school day if they had met all graduation requirements. The researcher created eight specific accelerated English tracks to determine if students continued to accelerate once given the ability to self-select English courses. Table 3 outlines the specific tracks accelerated students could follow to continue English acceleration.

Table 3

Accelerated Tracks

Track	Grade Level					Acceleration Designation
	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	
Accelerated Track 1	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	AP English Language	AP English Literature	Full
Accelerated Track 2	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language	AP English Literature	CCP Courses	Full
Accelerated Track 3	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	CCP Courses	Full
Accelerated Track 4	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	English IV Honors	CCP Courses	Full
Accelerated Track 5	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	English IV Honors	Gap Year (No English Class) OR Flex	Full
Accelerated Track 6	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	IB Program	IB Program	Full
Accelerated Track 7	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	Site Level English Elective	Full
Accelerated Track 8	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	Partial
Accelerated Track 9	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	English III Honors	English IV Honors	Partial

Tracks 1-9 allowed students the opportunity to pursue accelerated English coursework; however, completing accelerated English I did not require students to continue on an accelerated track throughout the secondary school level. Students who followed Tracks 1-7 chose full acceleration of English coursework either by completing

AP level English coursework or by completing honors level English coursework prior to the traditional grade level of completion. Students who followed Tracks 8 and 9 had the opportunity to continue taking accelerated English coursework (AP level) after completing the Advanced Inquiry class or to complete required honors level English coursework during the traditional grade level of completion. Students who chose not to take an AP level English course were considered partially accelerated for English. For example, a student in Track 2 who took AP English Language in Grade 11 and Honors English IV in Grade 12 would be considered partially accelerated because he/she only completed accelerated coursework for Grades 8, 9, and 11. Another student who followed Track 2 and completed Honors English in Grades 11 and 12 would also be considered partially accelerated as he/she only completed accelerated coursework in Grades 8 and 9.

Accelerated Track 1. Students who followed Track 1 followed full acceleration of English coursework. Students who followed Track 1 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. This track was the district's expected schedule for accelerated English I students. Table 4 outlines Accelerated Track 1 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 4

Accelerated Track 1

Grade	Accelerated Track 1				
	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	AP English Language	AP English Literature

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, Advanced Inquiry or AP Seminar in Grade 10, AP English Language in Grade 11, and AP English Literature in Grade 12. This track is the district's expectation for students who accelerate English I in Grade 8.

Accelerated Track 2. Students who followed Track 2 followed full acceleration of English coursework. Students who followed Track 2 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. Table 5 outlines Accelerated Track 2 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 5

Accelerated Track 2

Accelerated Track 2					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language	AP English Literature	CCP Courses

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, AP English Language in Grade 10, AP English Literature in Grade 11, and a dual enrollment class in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 3. Students who followed Track 3 followed full acceleration of English coursework. Students who followed Track 3 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. Table 6 outlines Accelerated Track 3 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 6

Accelerated Track 3

Accelerated Track 3					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	CCP Courses

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, AP English Language or English III in Grade 10, AP English Literature or English IV in Grade 11, and a dual enrollment class in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 4. Students who followed Track 4 followed full acceleration of English coursework. Students who followed Track 4 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. Table 7 outlines Accelerated Track 4 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 7

Accelerated Track 4

Accelerated Track 4					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	English IV Honors	CCP Courses

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, English III in Grade 10, English Literature or English IV in Grade 11, and a dual enrollment class in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 5. Students who followed Track 5 followed full acceleration

of English coursework. Students who followed Track 5 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. Table 8 outlines Accelerated Track 5 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 8

Accelerated Track 5

Accelerated Track 5					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	English IV Honors	Gap Year (No English Class) OR Flex

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, English III in Grade 10, English Literature or English IV in Grade 11, and took a gap year for English coursework or enrolled for flex in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 6. Students who followed Track 6 followed full acceleration of English coursework. Students who followed Track 6 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. These students completed English coursework through the IB program offered within the district. Table 9 outlines Accelerated Track 6 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 9

Accelerated Track 6

Accelerated Track 6					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	IB Program	IB Program

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9,

English III in Grade 10, IB English in Grade 11, and IB English in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 7. Students who followed Track 7 followed full acceleration of English coursework. Students who followed Track 7 continued to complete accelerated English coursework after completing English I in Grade 8. Table 10 outlines Accelerated Track 7 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 10

Accelerated Track 7

Accelerated Track 7					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	Site Level English Elective

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, AP English Language or English III in Grade 10, AP English Literature or English IV in Grade 11, and an English elective class at the high school in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 8. Students who followed Track 8 followed partial acceleration of English coursework. These students were partially accelerated as they completed accelerated subject level coursework in Grades 8 and 9, however they chose to return to the traditionally scheduled English classroom in Grades 11 and/or 12. After completing Advanced Inquiry or AP Seminar in Grade 10, students had the option to continue taking accelerated English coursework by completing AP level courses or to return to the traditional schedule of taking honors level English during Grades 11 and 12. Because students had the opportunity to take either AP level English in either Grades 11 or 12 as there is no prerequisite for either class, students in Track 8 could have completed

AP in either Grades 11 or 12. Students who chose to take honors level English in either Grades 11 or 12 were identified as partially accelerated students in English. Table 11 outlines Accelerated Track 8 used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 11

Accelerated Track 8

Grade	Accelerated Track 8				
	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, Advanced Inquiry or AP Seminar in Grade 10, AP English Language or English III Honors in Grade 11, and AP English Literature or English IV Honors in Grade 12.

Accelerated Track 9. Students who followed Track 9 followed partial acceleration of English coursework. These students were partially accelerated as they completed accelerated subject level coursework in Grades 8 and 9, however they chose to return to the traditionally scheduled English classroom in Grades 11 and 12. After completing Advanced Inquiry or AP Seminar in Grade 10, students had the option to continue taking accelerated English coursework by completing AP level courses or to return to the traditional schedule of taking honors level English during Grades 11 and 12. Students following Track 9 chose to take honors level English in Grades 11 and 12, placing them back in the traditionally scheduled classroom with their peers. Students who chose to take honors level English in either Grades 11 or 12 were identified as partially accelerated students in English. Table 12 outlines Accelerated Track 8 used to

answer Research Question 2.

Table 12

Accelerated Track 9

Accelerated Track 9					
Grade	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English Coursework	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	English III Honors	English IV Honors

Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, Advanced Inquiry or AP Seminar in Grade 10, English III Honors in Grade 11, and English IV Honors in Grade 12.

Research Question 3 design. Qualitative data were collected to answer Research Question 3. The researcher created a survey to share with accelerated students who were currently high school seniors over the age of 18. The researcher used the White and Simon (n.d.) Survey and Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (VREP) in order to ensure questions were acceptable and met standards for the study. Research instruments are oftentimes not “subjected to structured analysis and evaluation criteria” (Goes, 2016, para. 1), thus this rubric allowed the opportunity to assess the rigor and validity of both the survey and the interview protocol. A copy of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Methodology

Setting of the study. The study took place in a large public school district in the piedmont of North Carolina. The district served approximately 42,000 students attending 52 primary-secondary schools, and nearly 70% of these schools earned an A or B school

performance grade from the Department of Public Instruction. Of these students, 9,990 attend middle school and 14,693 attend high school. Table 13 outlines student demographics for middle schools found in the district.

Table 13

Student Demographics for District Middle Schools

District	Student Demographics							
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	Grand Total
Piedmont Public School District Middle School population	5.02%	11.90%	17.98%	0.17%	3.62%	0.08%	61.23%	9,990
Piedmont Public School District Middle School AIG Population	10.86%	2.97%	8.90%	0.18%	2.70%	0.09%	74.30%	2,257

The following demographics describe middle school students in the county: 6,116 (61.23%) White; 1,189 (11.90%) Black; 1,797 (17.98%) Hispanic; 502 (5.02%) Asian; 17 (0.17%) Indian; 362 (3.62%) Multi-Racial; and seven (0.08%) Pacific Islander. The following demographics describe middle school AIG identified students in the county: 1,677 (74.30%) White; 67 (2.97%) Black; 201 (8.90%) Hispanic; 245 (10.86%) Asian; four (0.18%) Indian; 61 (2.70%) Multi-Racial; and two (0.09%) Pacific Islander. There are 10 traditional Grades 6-8 middle schools in the county, and nine of these schools offer the accelerated English I program. The middle school students transition into 11 high

schools throughout the county where accelerated students have access to various English scheduling choices in upper grades. Table 14 outlines student demographics for high schools found in the district.

Table 14

Student Demographics for District High Schools

District	Student Demographics							Grand Total
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	
Piedmont Public School District High School population	3.51%	12.90%	16.94%	0.20%	2.70%	0.40%	63.35%	14,693
Piedmont Public School District High School AIG Population	7.79%	4.35%	8.03%	0.23%	2.56%	0.05%	76.99%	5,703

The following demographics describe high school students in the county: 9,308 (63.35%) White; 1,895 (12.90%) Black; 2,489 (16.94%) Hispanic; 516 (3.51%) Asian; 29 (0.20%) Indian; 397 (2.70%) Multi-Racial; and 59 (0.40%) Pacific Islander. The following demographics describe high school AIG identified students in the county: 4,391 (76.99%) White; 248 (4.35%) Black; 458 (8.03%) Hispanic; 444 (7.79%) Asian; 13 (0.23%) Indian; 146 (2.56%) Multi-Racial; and three (0.05%) Pacific Islander. Nine of the high schools are traditional Grades 9-12 settings and are zoned according to students' residences. One of the high schools is a magnet school, requiring students to complete an application process in order to qualify for lottery admittance to one of five academies offered. The last high school is an early college where students have the

opportunity to earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree in 5 years.

Scheduling choices at the 11 high schools include various honors, AP, and IB classes as well as collegiate level classes that can be taken concurrently while enrolled at the high school level. Students also have the opportunity to take various English elective courses while enrolled in high school.

Students in the district were assigned to one of nine specific clusters of middle and high schools. These clusters were determined based on students' residences throughout the county. Students also had the opportunity to attend the county's magnet high school or Early College as well. The following sections outline the demographics of each middle and high school.

High school demographics. There are 10 high schools students may attend throughout the district. Table 15 outlines student demographics for these high schools.

Table 15

Student Demographics District High Schools

School	Student Demographics							Grand Total
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	
High School A total population	10.45%	4.66%	4.15%	0%	3.18%	0.11%	77.46%	1,761
High School A AIG population	16.67%	3.63%	3.21%	0.00%	4.47%	0.14%	77.65%	716
High School B total population	7.22%	6.37%	5.38%	0.07%	2.04%	0%	78.92%	1,523
High School B AIG population	9.56%	3.36%	2.12%	0%	1.42%	0%	83.54%	565
High School C total population	4.67%	7.46%	7.35%	0.05%	1.81%	0%	78.65%	1,822
High School C AIG population	5.34%	4.27%	4.06%	0%	1.28%	0%	85.04%	468
High School D total population	1.82%	12.62%	18.60%	0.35%	3.40%	0.12%	63.09%	1,704
High School D AIG population	1.95%	3.58%	8.47%	0.33%	1.63%	0%	84.04%	307
High School E total population	1.77%	17.82%	15.98%	0.42%	3.82%	0.07%	60.11%	1,414
High School E AIG population	2.00%	11.60%	5.20%	0.80%	4.00%	0%	76.40%	250
High School F total population	0.55%	9.99%	10.91%	0.37%	2.57%	0%	75.62%	1,091
High School F AIG population	0%	2.01%	6.71%	1.34%	1.34%	0%	88.59%	149
High School G total population	0.87%	32.72%	54.56%	0.10%	3.11%	0%	8.64%	1,030
High School G AIG population	2.30%	27.59%	51.72%	0%	3.45%	0%	14.94%	87
High School H total population	0.54%	26.62%	33.73%	0.11%	2.48%	0.11%	36.20%	928

School	Student Demographics							
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	Grand Total
								(continued)
High School H AIG population	1.89%	13.21%	19.81%	0%	1.89%	0%	63.21%	106
High School I total population	1.30%	3.81%	11.05%	0.46%	1.30%	0%	82.09%	1,312
High School I AIG population	1.69%	0.34%	4.39%	1.01%	1.01%	0%	91.55%	296
High School J total population	3.60%	9.42%	12.09%	0.35%	2.56%	0%	71.98%	860
High School J AIG population	4.66%	6.99%	10.10%	0%	2.85%	0%	75.39%	386
High School K total population	3.45%	8.05%	30.75%	0.29%	2.59%	0%	54.89%	348
High School K AIG population	3.54%	5.31%	31.86%	0.88%	2.65%	0%	55.75%	113

High School A currently has 1,761 students. The demographics of the school are 77.46% White, 4.66% Black, 4.15% Hispanic, 10.45% Asian, 3.18% Multi-Racial, and 0.11% Pacific Islander. The AIG demographics of the school are 77.65% White, 3.63% Black, 3.21% Hispanic, 16.67% Asian, 4.47% Multi-Racial, and 0.14% Pacific Islander. The school received an A rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School B currently has 1,523 students. The demographics of the school are 79.82% White, 6.37% Black, 5.38% Hispanic, 7.22% Asian, 0.07% Indian, and 2.04% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 83.54% White, 3.36% Black, 2.12% Hispanic, 9.56% Asian, 0% Indian, and 1.42% Multi-Racial. The school received an A rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and

exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School C currently has 1,822 students. The demographics of the school are 78.65% White, 7.46% Black, 7.35% Hispanic, 4.67 Asian, .05% Indian, and 1.81% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 85.04% White, 4.27% Black, 4.06% Hispanic, 5.34% Asian, and 1.28% Multi-Racial. The school received an A+ rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School D currently has 1,704 students. The demographics of the school are 63.09% White, 12.62% Black, 1.82% Asian, 18.60% Hispanic, 0.35 Indian, 3.40% Multi-Racial, and 0.12% Pacific Islander. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 84.04% White, 3.58% Black, 1.95% Asian, 8.47% Hispanic, 0.33% Indian, and 1.63% Multi-Racial. The school received a B rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and met expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School E currently has 1,414 students. The demographics of the school are 60.11% White, 17.82% Black, 15.98% Hispanic, 1.77% Asian, 0.42% Indian, and 3.82% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 76.40% White, 11.60% Black, 5.20% Hispanic, 2.00% Asian, 0.80% Indian, and 4.00% Multi-Racial. The school received an B rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School F currently has 1,091 students. The demographics of the school are 75.62% White, 9.99% Black, 10.91% Hispanic, 0.55% Asian, 0.37% Indian, and 2.57% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 88.59% White, 2.01% Black, 6.71% Hispanic, 1.34% Indian, and 1.34% Multi-Racial. The school

received an B rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and met expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School G currently has 1,030 students. The demographics of the school are 8.64% White, 32.72% Black, 54.56% Hispanic, 0.87% Asian, 0.10% Indian, and 3.11% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 14.94% White, 27.59% Black, 51.72% Hispanic, 2.30% Asian, and 3.45% Multi-Racial. The school received a D rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and did not meet expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School H currently has 928 students. The demographics of the school are 36.20% White, 26.62% Black, 33.73% Hispanic, 0.54% Asian, 0.11% Indian, 2.48% Multi-Racial, and 0.11% Pacific Islander. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 63.21% White, 13.21% Black, 19.81% Hispanic, 1.89% Asian, and 1.89% Multi-Racial. The school received a C rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and did not meet expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School I currently has 1,312 students. The demographics of the school are 82.09% White, 3.81% Black, 11.05% Hispanic, 1.30% Asian, 0.46% Indian, and 1.30% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 91.55% White, 0.34% Black, 4.39% Hispanic, 1.69% Asian, 1.01% Indian, and 1.01% Multi-Racial. The school received an A+ rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School J currently has 860 students. The demographics of the school are 71.98% White, 9.42% Black, 12.09% Hispanic, 3.60% Asian, 0.35% Indian, and 2.56% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 75.39% White,

6.99% Black, 12.09% Hispanic, 3.60% Asian, 0.35% Indian, and 2.56% Multi-Racial.

The school received an A+ rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

High School K currently has 348 students. The demographics of the school are 54.89% White, 8.05% African American, 30.75% Hispanic, 3.45% Asian, 0.29% Indian, and 2.59% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 55.75% White, 5.31% Black, 31.86% Hispanic, 3.54% Asian, 0.88% Indian, and 2.65% Multi-Racial. The school received an A+ rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle school demographics. There are nine middle schools students may attend throughout the district. Table 16 outlines student demographics for these middle schools.

Table 16

Student Demographics District Middle Schools

School	Student Demographics							Grand Total
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	
Middle School A total population	16.167%	4.46%	4.02%	0.07%	3.87%	0.07%	70.83%	1,368
Middle School A AIG population	22.59%	2.19%	2.73%	0.18%	4.01%	0%	68.31%	549
Middle School B total population	10.50%	6.17%	7.13%	0.08%	2.88%	0.32%	72.92%	1,248
Middle School B AIG population	16.10%	3.38%	4.57%	0%	1.79%	0.40%	73.76%	503
Middle School C total population	4.63%	6.55%	8.12%	0%	2.92%	0.07%	77.71%	1,404
Middle School C AIG population	5.11%	3.23%	5.38%	0%	2.69%	0%	83.60%	372
Middle School D total population	2.60%	11.92%	20.13%	0.32%	4.34%	0.08%	60.62%	1,267
Middle School D AIG population	4.72%	2.15%	9.87%	0.86%	2.58%	0%	78.83%	233
Middle School E total population	2.20%	16.26%	18.21%	0.33%	5.85%	0.08%	57.07%	1,230
Middle School E AIG population	3.66%	3.66%	12.20%	0.61%	3.66%	0%	76.22%	164
Middle School F total population	0.12%	10.23%	12.08%	0.37%	4.43%	0%	72.75%	811
Middle School F AIG population	0%	0.98%	6.86%	0%	2.94%	0%	89.22%	102
Middle School G total population	0.35%	29.81%	60.79%	0.12%	2.20%	0%	6.73%	862
Middle School G AIG population	1.37%	9.59%	71.23%	0%	2.74%	0%	15.07%	73
Middle School H total population	0.64%	27.84%	37.24%	0.26%	3.74%	0%	30.28%	776

(continued)

School	Student Demographics							Grand Total
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Indian	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	
Middle School H AIG population	1.43%	8.57%	41.43%	0%	0%	0%	48.57%	70
Middle School I total population	0.78%	5.08%	14.45%	0.10%	2.05%	0%	77.54%	1,024
Middle School I AIG population	1.05%	0.52%	6.28%	0%	1.57%	0%	90.58%	191

Middle School A currently has 1,368 students. The demographics of the school are 70.83% White, 4.46% Black, 4.02% Hispanic, 16.67% Asian, 0.07% Indian, 3.87% Multi-Racial, and 0.07% Pacific Islander. The AIG demographics of the school are 68.31% White, 2.19% Black, 2.73% Hispanic, 22.59% Asian, 4.01% Multi-Racial, and 0.18% Indian. The school received an A rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School B currently has 1,248 students. The demographics of the school are 72.92% White, 6.17% Black, 7.13% Hispanic, 10.50% Asian, 0.08% Indian, 2.88% Multi-Racial, and 0.32% Pacific Islander. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 73.76% White, 3.38% Black, 4.57% Hispanic, 16.10% Asian, 0% Indian, and 1.79% Multi-Racial. The school received an A rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School C currently has 1,404 students. The demographics of the school are 77.71% White, 6.55% Black, 8.12% Hispanic, 4.63% Asian, 2.92% Multi-Racial, and 0.07% Pacific Islander. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 83.60% White, 3.23% Black, 5.38% Hispanic, 5.11% Asian, and 2.69% Multi-Racial. The school received an A rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and

exceeded expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School D currently has 1,267 students. The demographics of the school are 60.62% White, 11.92% Black, 2.60% Asian, 11.92% Hispanic, 0.32% Indian, 4.34% Multi-Racial, and 0.08% Pacific Islander. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 78.83% White, 2.15% Black, 4.72% Asian, 9.87% Hispanic, 0.86% Indian, and 2.58% Multi-Racial. The school received an B rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and met expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School E currently has 1,230 students. The demographics of the school are 57.07% White, 16.26% Black, 18.21% Hispanic, 2.20% Asian, 0.33% Indian, 5.85% Multi-Racial, and 0.08% Pacific Islander. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 7.22% White, 3.66% Black, 12.20% Hispanic, 3.66% Asian, 0.61% Indian, and 3.66% Multi-Racial. The school received a C rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and met expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School F currently has 811 students. The demographics of the school are 72.75% White, 10.23% Black, 12.08% Hispanic, 0.12 Asian, 0.37% Indian, and 4.43% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 89.22% White, 0.98% Black, 6.86% Hispanic, and 2.94% Multi-Racial. The school received an C rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and did not meet expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School G currently has 862 students. The demographics of the school are 6.73% White, 29.81% Black, 60.79% Hispanic, 0.35% Asian, 0.12% Indian, and 2.20% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 15.07% White, 9.59% Black, 71.23% Hispanic, 1.37% Asian, and 2.74% Multi-Racial. The school

received a D rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and did not meet expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School H currently has 776 students. The demographics of the school are 48.57% White, 8.57% Black, 41.43% Hispanic, and 1.43% Asian. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 63.21% White, 13.21% Black, 19.81% Hispanic, 1.89% Asian, and 1.89% Multi-Racial. The school received a D rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and did not meet expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Middle School I currently has 1,024 students. The demographics of the school are 77.54% White, 5.08% Black, 14.45% Hispanic, 0.78% Asian, 0.10% Indian, and 2.05% Multi-Racial. The demographics of the AIG population at the school are 90.58% White, 0.52% Black, 6.28% Hispanic, 1.05% Asian, and 1.57% Multi-Racial. The school received an B rating from the North Carolina Department of Education and met expected growth for the 2016-2017 school year.

Participants. The participants in the study included academically gifted students within the county who participated in the English I acceleration program since the 2013-2014 implementation year (Group A) as well as academically gifted students who took English I traditionally in the ninth grade prior to the 2013-2014 school year (Group B).

Participants included in the study were a convenience sampling. The researcher was confined to this sampling because students were in naturally formed groups due to their AIG identification for English/language arts. Most students were identified since elementary school when AIG testing was initially conducted during a student's Grade 3 school year. The participants used in this study are students who have been identified as

AIG and who have elected to take English I in Grade 8 as well as AIG students who did not accelerate prior to the program's implementation. As the students were not randomly assigned to a specific group, the study was quasi-experimental (Creswell, 2014). The total number of students in the sample was 2,859; 1,707 AIG students did not participate in the accelerated program, and 1,152 AIG students did participate in the accelerated program.

Data Collection Procedures

In a mixed methods study, data collection procedures consist of sampling, gaining permissions, collecting data, recording the data, and administering the data collection (Creswell, 2011). Various forms of data were collected to complete the study. These data included student surveys, student achievement data, and high school student registration data. Quantitative data were archived data the district maintains for all students completing required coursework at both the middle school and secondary level.

English II EOC scores. All students who take English II took the EOC test, and the test counted as 25% of a student's overall achievement grade for the class. These scores were naturally collected after a student completed the English II course, and scores were electronically stored in the district's database.

ACT scores. Students enrolled in English III were required to take the ACT during their junior year. The test was taken during the student's 11th-grade year even if the student chose to take English III before his/her junior year. The ACT math and verbal sections of the test counted towards a school's accountability measures, so achievement data for students were naturally collected for students. Scores were stored electronically on the district's database. The researcher analyzed English, math, science,

writing, and composite data collected from the ACT.

Student registration data. Student registration and scheduling data were naturally archived and stored electronically for all students within the county. The archived data were stored on the district database and were available to the district's data manager. Students were coded in the database according to their AIG math and reading identification. Data shared with the researcher had all identifying information removed: Student numbers were removed; and student names were randomized with letters, symbols, and numbers. Student grade levels were available as well as their respective school sites. Students had the option to take eight traditional semester-long classes each school year at the secondary level. Coursework at the secondary level matches the program of studies published by the school district each school year.

Survey data. The researcher created and shared a survey with current seniors over the age of 18 within the district. The seniors were AIG students who participated in the English I acceleration program. The survey collected data on student motivations for participating in the accelerated course and future scheduling choices made at the secondary level. Completing this qualitative piece in the explanatory sequential study allowed the researcher's initial quantitative data to be explained further (Creswell, 2014). The survey was completed anonymously and no identifying information on students was collected. The survey was sent to students electronically using their school email accounts. The researcher worked with the technology facilitator for the district to send the survey to students. Students had a 3-week window to complete the survey. The researcher sent a reminder email to complete the survey 1 week before the survey closed.

Procedures for participation. Participants in the survey process were current

students within the district, and it was necessary for the researcher to obtain proper permission before sharing any forms or collecting any data. The researcher had full Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before the study began. Once IRB approval was granted, the researcher worked with district-level personnel to send electronic permission to 12th-grade students who were eligible for participation in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collected in a mixed method study is meant to answer research questions using both quantitative and qualitative results. The analysis of the data is meant to address the research questions through distinct steps and key decisions made by the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These steps include “(1) preparing the data for analysis; (2) exploring the data; (3) analyzing the data; (4) representing the analysis; (5) interpreting the analysis; and (6) validating the data and interpretations” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, pp. 205-206). The researcher analyzed each data piece specific to the research question in order to make further interpretations for the study as a whole.

The first research question in the study asked how participation in the accelerated English I program affected the academic achievement of the academically gifted population. Table 17 outlines data available for analysis concerning this research question.

Table 17

Achievement Data Availability

Graduation cohort	English I acceleration	English II EOC scores	ACT English, reading, math, science, writing, and composite scores
2015		X	X
2016		X	X
2017		X	X
2018	X	X	X
2019	X	X	X
2020	X	X	

The county where the study occurred had archived data from two distinct groups: those students in Grade 8 who were able to accelerate English I during the 2014 school year (Group A) and those who were not able to accelerate because the program was not available (Group B). Because the district had archived data for these two distinct groups, the researcher conducted independent *t*-tests to test if there was a statistically significant difference in achievement between the two groups. The *t*-test is a type of inferential statistic used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of two groups (Urdan, 2010). The researcher performed *t*-tests for the following groupings: (a) nonaccelerated students (Group B) to accelerated students (Group A) English II EOC scores; and (b) nonaccelerated students (Group B) to accelerated students (Group A) English, reading, math, science, writing, and composite ACT scores.

The second research question asked if there is a relationship between participation in the accelerated English I program and continued participation in accelerated English courses. The researcher sought to know if academically gifted learners chose to continue

acceleration when given the opportunity to self-select coursework and course levels.

Table 18 outlines registration data available for analysis concerning this research question.

Table 18

Student Registration Data Availability

Grade 8 cohort	English I	Advanced Inquiry	English III Honors	English III AP	English IV Honors	English IV AP	CCP	Flex
2014	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2015	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2016	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Registration data for accelerated students were analyzed using descriptive statistics for this research question. Due to scheduling constraints, students who did not accelerate were limited in their abilities to take various English electives, including the district's Advanced Inquiry class and the CCP courses available through a partnership with the local community college. CCP courses are tuition-free college level courses available to juniors and seniors as dual-enrollment opportunities where they may earn college credit while still in high school. Students may attend classes at the community college campus or complete course requirements online. Classes available included career and technical education pathways as well as transfer pathways that provide general education requirements for colleges and universities. For this reason, the researcher analyzed whether academically gifted students in English language arts chose to take AP and CCP classes (another form of acceleration) or if they chose alternate coursework. Finally, the researcher analyzed registration data for flex scheduling. Students who were

seniors could choose to register for fewer than four classes per day if they needed less than eight credits to graduate. This modified scheduling allowed students to leave school early or arrive late based on scheduling of other classes. The researcher analyzed if students used the space in their schedules to continue to take other accelerated coursework.

The third research question sought to find factors that motivate the academically gifted population to participate in AP/CCP district level elective English classes or other accelerated scheduling choices. This qualitative piece of the sequential explanatory study was dependent upon the quantitative data pieces collected for the other questions but looks to further explain this data. The researcher surveyed current 12th graders in the district who participated in the English I acceleration program. The researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. This coding involved “dividing the text into small units, assigning labels to each unit, and then grouping the codes into themes” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 208). Coding allowed the researcher to observe how these themes could be grouped together to show a larger dimension or perspective in order to fully answer the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The analysis and evaluation focused on answering research questions with valid and reliable data. The research questions were thoroughly described and clearly aligned to the student survey protocol. The analysis continued with findings and implications of the accelerated program. Details concerning data collection and results of data analysis followed. Table 19 outlines the data analysis plan, tools, and instruments used in the analysis and how each piece of data and method of analysis is aligned to each research

question.

Table 19

Data Analysis Plan

Research Question	Tools Instruments	Data Collected to Answer Question	Data Type	Method(s) of Analysis
How does implementation of the accelerated English I program impact academically gifted populations regarding academic achievement?	English II EOC scores ACT Scores [verbal and writing]	Student achievement data AIG classes prior to 2018 graduating class (Group B - nonaccelerated students) Student achievement data AIG classes 2018 graduating class to present (Group A- accelerated students)	Quantitative	Statistical two sample independent <i>t</i> -test
For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what is the impact on selection of specific scheduling options?	Registration data for secondary English coursework and other accelerated coursework	Class registration and enrollment data for accelerated AIG students (Group A)	Quantitative	Descriptive statistics
For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what are the motivating factors for selections of specific scheduling options available at the secondary level?	Student surveys and interviews	Student survey responses about motivation for participation in accelerated program and future scheduling choices (Group A)	Qualitative	Thematic coding Descriptive statistics

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) reminded researchers of the need to incorporate valid procedures of data analysis for quantitative and qualitative strands of a study.

Focusing on specific statistical tests and qualitative coding techniques allowed the researcher to analyze data completely and with validity in order to make final interpretations concerning the study.

Threats to Validity

There are several threats to validity when using a mixed method design to guide a study. The researcher used threats noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) in order to outline potential threats to the study and how to minimize these threats in Table 20.

Table 20

Potential Threats to Validity of Study

Potential Threat	Strategy to minimize threat	Application to study
Selecting inappropriate individuals for the quantitative and qualitative data collection	Draw quantitative and qualitative samples from the same population to make data comparable	AIG identified students were used in study Students who participated in accelerated program were used in study
Obtaining unequal sizes for the quantitative and qualitative data collection	Use large samples or small samples so the same number of cases can be collected	Large nonaccelerated student population and large accelerated population used for student achievement data Large AIG population used for study (district wide)
Not discussing the mixed method research questions	Address each mixed method question	Data collection and analysis plan outlined for each question in study

It is possible for the researcher to select inappropriate individuals for data collection in a study. To minimize this threat, the researcher used only students who were identified as academically gifted for both quantitative and qualitative pieces of the study. When the researcher began planning this study, one threat identified was whether

the data available for the nonaccelerated group of AIG students would be large enough to compare with the accelerated AIG students. The researcher met with the data manager responsible for the county and found data recently had been collected concerning accelerated and nonaccelerated students for the district's AIG plan. Numbers revealed that each population was comparable with one another. The nonaccelerated AIG student population (Group B) was 1,708 students and the accelerated AIG student population was 1,153 students. One final threat to validity of the study could be not discussing the mixed method questions fully in order to determine a final analysis. To combat this threat, the researcher created specific data collection and analysis plans, for each question focused the study in a sequential explanatory manner in order for each question to further explain the implications of the study.

Summary

Meeting the diverse educational needs of the academically gifted learner is a task educators must embrace, if the goal of school is to educate the whole individual.

Through a mixed method, sequential explanatory study, the researcher collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data concerning the English I acceleration program to determine its worth and value as an educational intervention for academically gifted students.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview of the Chapter

In Chapter 4, the researcher restates the problem and purpose of the study. The chapter continues with a presentation of the quantitative data that are used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2 followed by quantitative and qualitative data used to answer Research Question 3. The researcher organized the data in this way in order to be responsive to both qualitative and quantitative criteria and to reflect the methods design in order to add to the sophistication and credibility of the study (Creswell, 2011). The findings are summarized with general results of the study.

Restatement of the Problem

The need for improved excellence in the American educational system continues to be an important topic in current decision-making conversations. This need extends to many different populations of students including those who are identified as academically gifted. Several studies, including *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* in 2004, highlighted the mediocre educational performance in American schools and the limitations gifted students were experiencing in order to begin conversations to promote much needed change. Further studies specifically directed towards academically gifted students revealed that stifling of academic freedom and growth not only harms gifted students at the elementary and high school level, but it has lasting effects at the postsecondary level as well.

Academic acceleration as an educational practice allows “students to move through traditional educational organizations more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation” (NAGC, 2004, p. 1). This academic practice has been implemented in

American schools since the introduction of the one-room schoolhouse and has continued to be a practice encouraged in order to appreciate individual differences (Colangelo et al., 2004). Student acceleration has been noted as one of the most important issues in gifted education, and the practice of academic acceleration has been determined to be an effective and efficient intervention for high-ability learners (Steenbergen-Hu, 2009).

Current research studies on academic acceleration reveal the benefits of the practice, however most studies focus on acceleration specifically in the elementary grades or subject acceleration in the math or science concentration in the upper grades.

Presentation of Results Organized by Research Question

Research Question 1: How does implementation of the accelerated English I program impact academically gifted populations' academic achievement? To

answer this question, the following data points were collected and analyzed.

EOC English II achievement scores. EOC achievement scores for English II allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the English II EOC scores from these two groups. A *t*-test for independent samples with unequal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement scores. The *t*-test analysis results are detailed in Table 21.

Table 21

English II EOC Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
English III EOC Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1149	4.21	.490	.014
	Nonaccelerated	1701	4.00	.724	.018

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
EOC English Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed Equal variances not assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
		35.432	.000	8.552	2848	.000	.209	.024	.161	.257
				9.192	2847.983	.000	.209	.023	.164	.253

Figure 3. English II EOC Achievement Scores t-test Data.

Unequal variance status was verified using an F-test for the unequal variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (n) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,149 and 1,701 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 4.21 and 4.00 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2847.983, the *t*-statistic was 9.192, and the *p* value was 0.000. The *p* value (0.000) was less than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was a statistically significant difference between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the English II EOC scores from accelerated students (Group A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), *t*-test results showed that implementation of English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year resulted

in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' scores with accelerated students scoring higher on the English II EOC.

ACT English achievement scores. ACT achievement scores for English allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated English I students (Group A). To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the ACT English scores from these two groups. A *t*-test for independent samples with equal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there was no difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement scores. The *t*-test analysis results are detailed in Table 22.

Table 22

ACT English Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
ACT English Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1151	25.89	5.534	.063
	Nonaccelerated	1707	25.37	5.666	.137

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ACT English Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed	.635	.426	2.419	2856	.016	.518	.214	.098	.938
	Equal variances not assumed			2.430	2506.041	.015	.518	.213	.100	.936

Figure 4. English ACT Achievement Scores *t*-test Data.

Equal variance status was verified using an F-test for the variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (n) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,151 and 1,707 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 25.89 and 25.37 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2856, the t -statistic was 2.419, and the p value was 0.016. The p value (0.016) was less than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was a statistically significant difference between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the ACT English achievement scores from accelerated students (Group A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), t -test results showed that implementation of English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year resulted in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' scores with accelerated students scoring higher.

ACT reading achievement scores. ACT achievement scores for reading allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the ACT reading scores from these two groups. A t -test for independent samples with equal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in

the students' achievement scores. The *t*-test analysis results are detailed in Table 23.

Table 23

ACT Reading Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
ACT Reading Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1151	27.16	5.660	.167
	Nonaccelerated	1707	26.62	5.902	.143

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
ACT Reading Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed	.008	.929	2.436	2856	.015	.539	.221	.105	.974
	Equal variances not assumed			2.456	2535.725	.014	.539	.220	.109	.970

Figure 5. ACT Reading Achievement Scores t-test Data.

Equal variance status was verified using an F-test for the variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (*n*) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,151 and 1,707 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 27.16 and 26.62 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2856, the *t*-statistic was 2.436, and the *p* value was .015. The *p* value (0.015) was less than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was a statistically significant difference between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the ACT reading achievement scores from accelerated students (Group

A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), *t*-test results showed that implementation of English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year resulted in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' scores with accelerated students scoring higher on the ACT reading test.

ACT writing achievement scores. ACT achievement scores for writing allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). Due to changes in scoring implemented with College Board, students from the nonaccelerated group (Group B) received a score between 1-36, while students from the accelerated group (Group A) received a score between 1-12. The researcher used a conversion table provided by the College Board to determine scores for Group B. A copy of this conversion table can be found in Appendix B. To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the ACT writing scores from these two groups. A *t*-test for independent samples with unequal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement scores. The *t*-test analysis results are detailed in Table 24.

Table 24

ACT Writing Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
ACT Writing Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1151	7.80	1.534	.045
	Nonaccelerated	1707	5.11	2.215	.054

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
ACT Writing Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed	399.091	.000	35.807	2856	.000	2.690	.075	2.542	2.837
	Equal variances not assumed			38.347	2854.005	.000	2.690	.070	2.552	2.827

Figure 6. ACT Writing Achievement Scores t-test Data.

Unequal variance status was verified using an F-test for the variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (n) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,151 and 1,707 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 7.80 and 5.11 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2854.005, the *t*-statistic was 38.347, and the *p* value was 0.000. The *p* value (0.000) was less than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was a statistically significance difference between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the ACT writing achievement scores from accelerated students (Group A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), *t*-test results showed that implementation of

English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year resulted in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' scores with accelerated students scoring higher on the ACT writing test.

ACT math achievement scores. ACT achievement scores for math allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the ACT math scores from these two groups. A *t*-test for independent samples with unequal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement scores. The *t*-test analysis results are detailed in Table 25.

Table 25

ACT Math Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
ACT Math Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1151	26.68	4.674	.138
	Nonaccelerated	1707	26.40	5.313	.129

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ACT Math Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed	5.674	.017	1.428	2856	.153	.276	.193	-.103	.655
	Equal variances not assumed			1.464	2663.746	.143	.276	.188	-.094	.645

Figure 7. ACT Math Achievement Scores t-test Data.

Unequal variance status was verified using an F-test for the variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (n) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,151 and 1,707 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 26.68 and 26.40 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2663.746, the *t*-statistic was 1.464, and the *p* value was 0.143. The *p* value (0.143) was more than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was no statistically significant difference between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher accepted the null hypothesis and rejected the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the ACT math achievement scores from accelerated students (Group A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), *t*-test results showed that implementation of English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year did not result in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' ACT math scores.

ACT science achievement scores. ACT achievement scores for science allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated

English I students (Group B). To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the ACT science scores from these two groups. A *t*-test for independent samples with unequal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement scores. The *t*-test analysis results are detailed in Table 26.

Table 26

ACT Science Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
ACT Science Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1151	25.68	5.034	.148
	Nonaccelerated	1707	24.84	5.160	.125

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ACT Science Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed	1.164	.281	4.346	2856	.000	.847	.195	.465	1.229
	Equal variances not assumed			4.367	2508.019	.000	.847	.194	.467	1.227

Figure 8. ACT Science Achievement Scores t-test Data.

Equal variance status was verified using an F-test for the variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (n) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,151 and 1,707 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 25.68 and 24.84 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2856, the *t*-statistic was 4.346, and the *p* value was

0.000. The p value (0.000) was less than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was a statistically significant difference between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the ACT science achievement scores from accelerated students (Group A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), t -test results showed that implementation of English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year resulted in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' scores with accelerated students scoring higher on the ACT science test.

ACT composite score. ACT composite achievement scores allowed the researcher to look for statistically significant differences between the two student sample populations: accelerated English I students (Group A) with nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). To determine the impact of the accelerated English I course, the researcher compared the ACT composite scores from these two groups. A t -test for independent samples with equal variance was calculated to determine quantitative differences between the two groups with the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' achievement scores. The alternative hypothesis, if accepted, was there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement scores. The t -test analysis results are detailed in Table 27.

Table 27

ACT Composite Achievement Scores

	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean
ACT Composite Achievement Scores	Accelerated	1151	26.45	4.622	.136
	Nonaccelerated	1707	25.92	4.926	.119

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ACT Composite Achievement Scores	Equal variances assumed	.004	.952	2.899	2856	.004	.531	.183	.172	.891
	Equal variances not assumed			2.936	2569.928	.003	.531	.181	.181	.886

Figure 9. ACT Composite Achievement Scores *t*-test Data.

Equal variance status was verified using an F-test for the variance between the two groups of students (Creswell, 2012). The sample size (*n*) for accelerated students (Group A) was 1,151 and 1,707 for nonaccelerated students (Group B). The mean scale achievement score for accelerated students was 26.45 and 25.92 for nonaccelerated students. The degrees of freedom was 2856, the *t*-statistic was 2.899, and the *p* value was 0.004. The *p* value (0.004) was less than the alpha value of 0.05, indicating there was a statistically significant difference of the ACT scores between the students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade and those who did not. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the ACT composite achievement scores from accelerated students (Group A) and nonaccelerated students (Group B), *t*-test results showed that implementation of English I standards and curriculum in eighth grade beginning in the 2013-2014 school year resulted in a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students' scores with accelerated students scoring higher on the ACT.

Summary of *t*-test findings. In order to answer Research Question 1, the researcher collected student achievement data from EOC and ACT tests in order to find if there were statistically significant differences between the two sample populations. Conducting two sample *t*-tests revealed statistically significant differences in the following student achievement scores: English II EOC, ACT English, ACT reading, ACT writing, ACT science, and ACT composite. The sample accelerated student population (Group A) scored significantly higher than the nonaccelerated student sample (Group B) on all assessments except ACT math.

Research Question 2: For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what is the impact on selection of specific scheduling options? To answer this question, the researcher collected student scheduling data and separated it into eight distinct tracks. The tracks revealed if accelerated AIG students continued to accelerate coursework when given the opportunity to self-select classes. The researcher collected scheduling data for Grades 9-12 for students who accelerated English I. These students were the first two cohorts to graduate from the district having had the opportunity to participate in the accelerated English I program. These two cohorts were labeled as 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort, signifying their high school graduation years.

As stated previously, students who followed all eight tracks participated in academic acceleration for English coursework at the secondary level; however, only students who participated in Tracks 1-7 followed full acceleration for English coursework. Students who participated in Tracks 8 and 9 followed partial acceleration. Table 28 outlines the number of students in the sample population who participated in each scheduling track.

Table 28

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Tracks 1-9

	Number of students from 2018 cohort	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts	Acceleration designation
Track 1	91	15.91%	89	15.34%	180	15.62%	Full
Track 2	9	1.57%	3	0.52%	12	1.04%	Full
Track 3	11	1.92%	2	0.34%	13	1.13%	Full
Track 4	55	9.62%	43	7.41%	98	8.51%	Full
Track 5	116	20.28%	162	27.93%	278	24.13%	Full
Track 6	27	4.72%	27	4.66%	54	4.69%	Full
Track 7	47	8.22%	18	3.10%	65	5.64%	Full
Track 8	69	12.06%	88	15.17%	157	13.63%	Partial
Track 9	98	17.13%	125	21.55%	223	19.36%	Partial

Of the total 1,152 sample student population, 700 students (60.76%) followed a full acceleration track for English coursework: 180 students (15.62%) participated in Track 1, 12 students (1.04%) participated in Track 2, 13 students (1.13%) participated in Track 3, 98 students (8.51%) participated in Track 4, 278 students (24.13%) participated in Track 5, 54 students (4.69%) participated in Track 6, and 65 students (5.64%) participated in Track 7. Of the total 1,152 sample student population, 380 students (32.99%) followed a partial acceleration track for English coursework. Of the students who followed partial acceleration, 157 students (13.63%) participated in Track 8, and 223 students (19.36%) participated in Track 9.

The remaining 72 students, or 6.25%, were outliers of the designated tracks. Of these 72 students, 40 students (55.56%) did not take an English class between Grades 9-11, 12 students (16.67%) took the English requirements and completed an additional AP class, 15 students (20.83%) completed English requirements through dual enrollment, and five students (6.94%) repeated a required English class due to failure.

The following data points outline specific scheduling data collected and analyzed

for the sample population participating in English acceleration.

Student scheduling Track 1. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed the district's prescribed and expected accelerated track for accelerated English I. This track was a fully accelerated track as students accelerated English I and II for traditional grade levels and then took accelerated AP level English during Grades 11 and 12. Students in this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, Advanced Inquiry in Grade 10, AP English Language in Grade 11, and AP English Literature in Grade 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 29 reveals the number of students who followed Track 1.

Table 29

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 1

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 1	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 1	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 1	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 1
Track 1	91	15.91%	89	15.34%	180	15.62%

A total number of 180 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 1 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 1 was 15.62% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 91 students, or 15.91% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 1. The 2019 cohort had 89 students, or 15.34% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 1.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A) following this track, 180 students, or 15.62% of the total sample population, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level.

Student scheduling Track 2. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 2 for accelerated English I. Students in this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, AP English Language in Grade 10, AP English Literature in Grade 11, and a CCP class (dual enrollment) in Grade 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 30 reveals the number of students who followed Track 2.

Table 30

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 2

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 2	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 2	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 2	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 2
Track 2	9	1.57%	3	0.52%	12	1.04%

A total number of 12 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 2 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 2 was 1.04% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had nine students, or 1.57% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 2. The 2019 cohort had three students, or 0.52% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 2. All 12 students chose to take AP level English

classes in the 10th and 11th grades.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A) following this track, 12 students, or 1.04% of the total sample population, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level.

Student scheduling Track 3. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 3 for accelerated English I. Students in this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, AP English Language or honors level English in Grade 10, AP English Literature or honors level English in Grade 11, and a CCP class (dual enrollment) in Grade 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 31 reveals the number of students who followed Track 3.

Table 31

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 3

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 3	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 3	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 3	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 3
Track 3	11	1.92%	2	0.34%	13	1.13%

A total number of 13 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 3 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 3 was 1.13 % of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 11 students, or 1.92% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 3. The 2019 cohort had two students, or 0.34% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 3. Of these 13 students, five chose to take AP level

English Language in the 10th grade, and eight chose to take AP level English Literature in the 11th grade.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A) following this track, 13 students, or 1.13% of the total sample population, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level.

Student scheduling Track 4. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 4 for accelerated English I. Students following this track took honors level English I in Grade 8, honors level English II in Grade 9, honors level English in Grade 10, honors level English in Grade 11, and a CCP class (dual enrollment) in Grade 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 32 reveals the number of students who followed Track 4.

Table 32

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 4

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 4	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 4	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 4	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 4
Track 4	55	9.62%	43	7.41%	98	8.51%

A total number of 98 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 4 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 4 was 8.51% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 55 students, or 9.62%

of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 4. The 2019 cohort had 43 students, or 7.41% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 4.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A) following this track, 98 students, or 8.52% of the total sample population, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level.

Student scheduling Track 5. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 5 for accelerated English I. Students following this track took honors level English I in Grade 8, honors level English II in Grade 9, AP or honors level English in Grade 10, AP or honors level English in Grade 11, and then schedule flex time during Grade 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 33 reveals the number of students who followed Track 5.

Table 33

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 5

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 5	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 5	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 5	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 5
Track 5	116	20.28%	162	27.93%	278	24.13%

A total number of 278 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 5 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 5 was 24.13% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 116 students, or

20.28% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 5. The 2019 cohort had 162 students, or 27.93% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 5. From the total 278 students who chose to follow Track 5, 76 students completed AP level English Language in the 10th grade, and 54 students chose to take AP level English Literature in the 11th grade.

The researcher separated the data further to analyze whether English I accelerated students were continuing to take accelerated coursework even if it was not concentrated in English. Research suggests students who study curriculum that is meaningful are allowed to make connections with individual experiences and goals and long-term outcomes, providing a context for personal relevance and growth (Little, 2012). All students who completed Track 5 accelerated their required English classes, however the researcher found that only 35 students, or 12.54%, who followed Track 5 failed to continue to take accelerated coursework after meeting English requirements. The remaining 243 students completed coursework in 398 STEM-related subjects and 234 humanities-related subjects.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A) following this track, 278 students, or 24.13% of the total sample population, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level.

Student scheduling Track 6. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 6 for accelerated English I. Students following this track took honors level English I in Grade 8, honors level English II in Grade 9, and honors level English in Grade 10 and then followed a prescribed curriculum for the IB program in Grades 11 and 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019

cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 34 reveals the number of students who followed Track 6.

Table 34

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 6

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 6	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 6	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 6	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 6
Track 6	27	4.72%	27	4.66%	54	4.69%

A total number of 54 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 6 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 6 was 4.69% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 27 students, or 4.72% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 6. The 2019 cohort had 27 students, or 4.66% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 6.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A) following this track, 4.69% of the total sample population chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level.

Student scheduling Track 7. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 7 for accelerated English I. Students following this track took honors level English I in Grade 8, honors level English II in Grade 9, AP Language or honors level English III in Grade 10, AP Literature or honors level English IV in Grade 11, and an additional school-based English elective in Grade 12.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices into the appropriate track. Table 35 reveals the number of students who followed Track 7.

Table 35

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 7

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 7	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 7	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 7	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 7
Track 7	47	8.22%	18	3.10%	65	5.64%

A total number of 65 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 7 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 7 was 5.64% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 47 students, or 8.22% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 7. The 2019 cohort had 18 students, or 3.10% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 7. Of the 65 students who followed Track 7, 24 students chose to take AP level English Language in the 10th grade, and 23 students chose to take AP level English Literature in the 11th grade.

Based on the scheduling data collected from accelerated students (Group A), 5.64% of the total sample population chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level by completing Track 7.

Student scheduling Track 8. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 8 for accelerated English I. Students following this track had an opportunity of following a partially accelerated track.

Students accelerated English I in Grade 8 and English II in Grade 9 and then had the option of taking accelerated AP level English during Grades 11 and 12. Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar in Grade 10, either AP English Language or English III Honors in Grade 11, and either AP English Literature or English IV Honors in Grade 12. Students who followed this track were considered partially accelerated because they only completed one AP level class after completing the Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar class. Students who chose to take the honors level English classes in Grades 11 or 12 were considered partially accelerated, as this schedule placed these students back on the traditional scheduling for one section of secondary English coursework.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices according to each track. Table 36 reveals the number of students who followed Track 8.

Table 36

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 8

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 8	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 8	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 8	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 8
Track 8	69	12.06%	88	15.17%	157	13.63%

A total number of 157 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 8 when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 8 was 13.63% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 69 students, or 12.06%

of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 8. The 2019 cohort had 88 students, or 15.17% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 8.

Student scheduling Track 9. The researcher collected student scheduling data from accelerated students who followed Track 9 for accelerated English I. Students following this track had an opportunity of following a partially accelerated track as students accelerated English I and II for traditional grade levels and then had the option of taking further accelerated English coursework. Students who followed this track chose to only accelerate English coursework for eighth and ninth grades. Students following this track took English I in Grade 8, English II in Grade 9, Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar in Grade 10, English III Honors in Grade 11, and English IV Honors in Grade 12. Students who chose to take the honors level English classes in Grades 11 and 12 were considered partially accelerated, as this schedule placed these students back on the traditional scheduling for two sections of secondary English coursework.

The researcher obtained student scheduling data from the 2018 cohort and 2019 cohort and then organized scheduling choices according to each track. Table 37 reveals the number of students who followed Track 9.

Table 37

Student Data for Students Following Scheduling Track 9

	Number of students from 2018 cohort in Track 9	Percentage of students from 2018 cohort	Number of students from 2019 cohort in Track 9	Percentage of students from 2019 cohort	Total number of students from both cohorts who followed Track 9	Percentage of students from 2018 and 2019 cohorts who followed Track 9
Track 9	98	17.13%	125	21.55%	223	19.36%

A total number of 223 accelerated students from both cohorts followed Track 9

when completing high school English requirements. The combined cohorts of accelerated students who followed Track 9 was 19.36% of the total sample population. This sample population was 1,152 students. The 2018 cohort had 98 students, or 17.13% of the total 2018 cohort, follow Track 9. The 2019 cohort had 125 students, or 19.36% of the total 2019 cohort, follow Track 9.

Overall student scheduling track results. Based on the nine different full or partially accelerated English tracks students could follow while in high school, 700 students, or 60.76%, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework after accelerating English I in Grade 8. Students completed 273 sections of AP English Language and 254 sections of AP English Literature. Accelerated English students also completed 65 sections of English elective coursework including Journalism, Creative Writing, Speech and Debate, and Mythology after completing English graduation requirements. Students completed 98 sections of dual enrollment English coursework after completing English graduation requirements prior to their 12th-grade year. This dual enrollment guaranteed college credit for these students if they chose to attend a public college or university in the state of North Carolina. Outlier students who did not follow any of the nine tracks also completed dual enrollment coursework, however these courses were taken in order to meet English graduation requirements. Students who registered for flex time during their senior year after completing English graduation requirements continued to accelerate in other subjects. Of the 278 accelerated students (24.13%) who registered for flex time, 243 students completed 398 sections of advanced STEM classes and 234 sections of humanities classes. Finally, 54 students (4.69%) chose to continue their acceleration through IB coursework.

Of the total sample population of 1,152 accelerated English students, 380, or 32.99%, chose to complete partial English acceleration while at the secondary level. This partial acceleration included 155 students, or 13.45%, accelerating three of four required English classes. The remaining 225 students, or 19.54%, accelerated two of the four required English classes. The 6.25% of students remaining in the sample population were outliers and did not follow the specific outlined tracks.

Research Question 3: For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what are the motivating factors for selections of specific scheduling options available at the secondary level? To answer this question, the following data points were collected and analyzed.

Student survey. To answer this question, the researcher shared a survey with current seniors over the age of 18 who had participated in the English I accelerated program while in the eighth grade. The survey contained 22 questions concerning student motivation and scheduling choices. The survey was sent to 381 students through the students' school email accounts. The survey was shared with students on April 8, 2019 and was closed on April 30, 2019. A reminder announcement was also shared on Canvas, the district's technology platform, on April 18; and the announcement remained public until April 30. A reminder email was sent to all 381 students on April 28. All students had access to the survey because the district participates in a 1:1 technology program where all students have personal Chromebooks. Of the 381 current seniors who had access to the survey, 112 students, or 29.40%, completed the survey.

Participation in English coursework. The researcher sought to find student opinion on the importance of taking an English coursework during all 4 years at the secondary level. Students who accelerated English I in the eighth grade had the opportunity to complete English graduation requirements by their 11th-grade school year. Survey items 1 and 2 collected student responses for this topic.

Importance of taking English coursework at the secondary level. Item 1 on the survey used a Likert scale response to measure students' opinions on the importance of taking an English class during all 4 years of high school. The item stated, "Taking English during all 4 years of high school is important," and asked students to answer in the following manner: disagree strongly, disagree, agree, or agree strongly. A total of 112 students answered the item. Table 38 outlines the responses to item 1.

Table 38

Item 1: Taking English During All 4 Years of High School Is Important

Likert Scale Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
Disagree Strongly	6	5.36%
Disagree	32	28.57%
Agree	41	36.61%
Agree Strongly	33	29.46%

As shown in Table 38, approximately one third of respondents, or 33.93%, disagreed or disagreed strongly that taking English during all 4 year of high school is important, while 66.07% agreed or agreed strongly.

Based on student responses from survey item 1, the majority of students, 66.07%, felt taking English during all 4 years of high school is important.

English coursework taken at the secondary level. Item 2 on the survey asked students to identify themselves as students who took English coursework during all 4 years of high school or as students who took English coursework in Grades 9-11. The item asked students to identify as one of the following students: “I took English classes in Grades 9-12” or “I took English classes in Grades 9-11.” One hundred twelve students answered the item. Table 39 outlines the responses to item 2.

Table 39

Item 2: Student Identification

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I took English classes in Grades 9-12	85	75.89%
I took English classes in Grades 9-11	27	24.11%

As shown in Table 39, approximately three fourths of respondents, or 75.89%, took English classes in Grades 9-12, while 24.11% took English classes in Grades 9-11.

The researcher further separated the data to look for connections between items 1 and 2. Table 40 outlines the comparison between item 1 and 2 responses.

Table 40

Item 1 and Item 2 Comparison

Item 1 Response	I took English classes in Grades 9-12	I took English classes in Grades 9-11
Disagree Strongly	3	3
Disagree	16	16
Agree	34	7
Agree Strongly	32	1

As shown in Table 40, of the 38 (33.93%) students who disagreed or disagreed strongly with item 1, 19 students (16.96%) of the total respondents took English classes in Grades 9-12, and 19 students (16.96%) of the total respondents took English classes in

Grades 9-11. Also shown in Table 40, 74 (66.07%) students agreed or agreed strongly with item 1, with 66 students (58.93%) taking English classes in Grades 9-12, and eight students (7.14%) of the total respondents taking English classes in Grades 9-11.

Figure 10 shows the comparison between items 1 and 2 from the student survey.

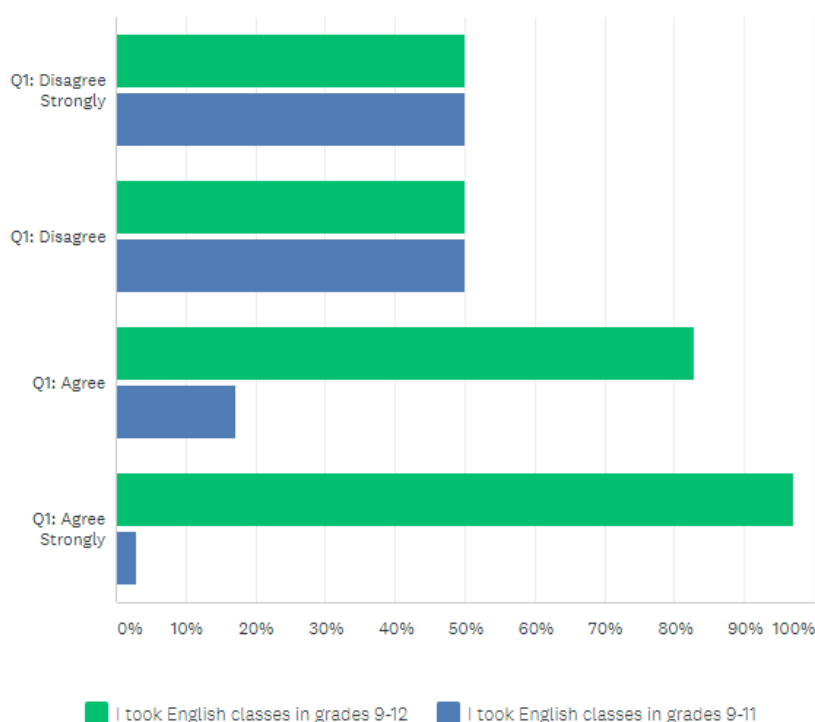


Figure 10. Comparison of Student Responses from Items 1 and 2.

Based on student responses from survey item 2, the majority of students, 75.89%, took English during all 4 years of high school.

AP acceleration. The researcher sought to find motivating factors for students who chose to participate in the AP acceleration program. This program allows students in high school to take courses that offer college credit if they successfully complete a final College Board exam. Survey items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 17 collected student responses for this topic.

Participation in AP English coursework. Item 3 on the survey used a Likert-Scale response to measure students' opinions on the importance of taking AP classes as an AIG student. The item stated, "Taking AP English is important to me as an AIG student," and asked students to answer in the following manner: disagree strongly, disagree, agree, or agree strongly. One hundred nine students answered the item, and three students did not answer. Table 41 outlines the responses to item 3.

Table 41

Item 3: Taking AP is Important as an AIG Student

Likert-Scale Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
Disagree Strongly	10	9.17%
Disagree	42	38.53%
Agree	30	27.52%
Agree Strongly	27	24.77%

As shown in Table 41, 52 respondents, approximately one-half, or 47.7%, reported they disagreed or disagreed strongly that taking AP is important as an AIG student, while 57 respondents, 52.29%, agreed or agreed strongly.

AP English coursework chosen at secondary level. Item 4 on the survey asked students to identify which AP English classes they participated in while in high school. The item asked students to identify whether they participated in AP English Language, AP English Literature, or both AP English Language and AP English Literature. A total of 112 students responded to item 4. Table 41 outlines the responses to item 4.

Table 42

Item 4: AP English Classes Taken in High School

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
None	56	50.00%
AP Language (English III) AND AP Literature (English IV)	21	18.75%
AP Language (English III)	20	17.86%
AP Literature (English IV)	15	13.39%

As shown in Table 42, 56 respondents, 50% of the 112, did not take an AP English class while in high school. Of the 56 respondents remaining, 21 (18.75%) took both AP English Language and AP English Literature, 20 (17.86%) took only AP English Language, and 15 (13.39%) took only AP English Literature.

Based on student responses from survey item 4, half of the students who accelerated English I took an AP English class and half of the students who accelerated did not.

The researcher further separated the data to look for connections between items 3 and 4. Table 43 outlines the comparison between item 3 and 4 responses.

Table 43

Item 3 and Item 4 Comparison

Item 3 Response	AP English Language	AP English Literature	AP English Language AND English Literature	None
Disagree Strongly	0	0	0	10
Disagree	2	4	0	36
Agree	9	5	9	7
Agree Strongly	9	6	11	1

As shown in Table 43, of the 52 respondents (46.43%) who disagreed or disagreed strongly with item 4, only six respondents (11.54%) took an AP English class.

None of these respondents took both AP English classes. Fifty-seven respondents (50.89%) agreed or agreed strongly with item 4, and only eight respondents (7.14%), did not take any AP English class.

Motivating factors for participation in AP English coursework. Item 5 on the survey was designed to find motivating factors for student participation in AP English classes. The item asked students to identify what factor was most influential when deciding to take an AP level English class. A total of 108 students responded to item 5, and four students did not respond to item 5. Table 44 outlines the responses to item 5.

Table 44

Item 5: What Factor Influenced You Most When Deciding to Take AP English?

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take AP English	54	50.00%
Quality points applied to GPA	21	19.44%
Individual desire to excel in English	16	14.81%
Family influence/expectation	7	6.48%
Peer influence	5	4.63%
Teacher recommendation	4	3.70%
Guidance counselor recommendation	1	0.93%

As shown in Table 44, respondents chose either an internal motivational factor for taking AP level English classes (individual desire to excel in English) or external motivating factors for taking AP English classes (all other responses). As reported in Table 43, seven students, or 6.48%, reported they were motivated to take AP English based on their family's influence or expectation; five students, or 4.63%, reported they were motivated to take AP English based on peer influence; 16 students, or 14.81%, reported they were motivated to take AP English based on an individual desire to excel in English; 21 students, or 19.44%, reported they were motivated to take AP English based

on quality points added to their overall grade point average (GPA); and 54 students, or 50.00%, reported they did not participate in an AP English class.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide further explanation of their choice by completing an “other” choice on the survey item. Eleven students (10.19%) chose to respond to the “other” choice offered for item 5. Nine respondents who provided further explanation were students who did not take AP English classes and two students who completed AP English classes. The researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. This coding involved “dividing the text into small units, assigning labels to each unit, and then grouping the codes into themes” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 208). Coding allowed the researcher to observe how themes could be grouped together to show a larger dimension or perspective in order to fully answer the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The researcher found three common themes for motivation expressed in student responses for item 5: guaranteed college credit, alternative program requirements, and required rigor. Table 45 outlines student responses associated with the three common themes.

Table 45

Themes Found in Item 5 Responses

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Guaranteed college credit	5	45.45%
Alternative program requirements	3	27.28%
Required rigor	1	9.09%

For item 5’s “Other” response, five students, or 45.45%, reported they chose not to take an AP level English course because college credit is not guaranteed at the completion of these courses. Students are required to take an examination at the

completion of the course, and passing scores on this test (ranging from a 3-5) are accepted on a limited basis by many colleges and universities for the following reasons: no course credit is allowed for any AP work, restrictions on the number of AP subject areas eligible for credit, hikes on the minimum score needed for credit, and caps on the total amount of AP a student can receive (Weinstein, 2016). One student responded,

I did not take AP English, but instead opted for dual enrollment classes because it transferred better to college. Instead of being forced to do well on a single test, if I got a C or better, I would get college credit.

Another student answered, “I chose to take CCP English over AP to automatically get the credit rather than taking the AP test which is nothing like a college course.” Three students, or 27.28%, responded they did not take AP level English courses due to alternative program requirements. The district offers an IB program, and three students responded they completed IB English requirements. One student responded he did not take AP level English classes due to the rigor of work required for the course. The response was,

The half of a GPA point you receive for the rigorous course load is simply not worth it. AP English classes are three times as much work and as rigorous as an honors level course making the half a point not worth it at all.

The other two students responded they chose to take the AP level classes and cited reasons as a combination of responses offered as well as a prospective college recommendation as motivating factors.

Based on student responses from survey item 5, 54 students responded they did take an AP English class due to both internally and externally motivating factors. Of

these 54 respondents, 16 (29.63%) listed the internal motivating factor of an individual desire to excel in English. The remaining 38 students responded with external motivating factors including earning quality GPA points, peer influence, family influence and/or expectation, teacher recommendations, and guidance counselor recommendation. Of these 38 respondents, 21 respondents (38.89%) cited the opportunity to earn quality GPA points as a motivating factor, five respondents (9.26%) cited peer influence as a motivating factor, seven respondents (12.96%) cited family influence and/or expectations as a motivating factor, four respondents (7.41%) cited teacher recommendations as a motivating factor, and one respondent cited guidance counselor recommendation as a motivating factor. The responses indicated a split between intrinsic motivating factors, with 16 respondents (29.63%) citing an internal desire to excel as motivation, and external motivating factors, with 38 respondents (70.37%) citing various externally driven motivations.

Influences for only taking one AP level English class. Item 6 on the survey was designed to find motivating factors for student participation in only one AP English class. The item asked students to identify what factor(s) was most influential when deciding to take only one AP level English class. A total of 56 students responded to item 6, and 56 students did not respond to item 6. Again, the researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. The researcher found five common themes for motivation expressed in student responses for item 6: poor prior experiences, required rigor, needed skills, scheduling conflicts, and dual enrollment opportunities. Table 46 outlines student responses associated with the common themes.

Table 46

Item 6: If You Only Took One AP English Class, Please Explain What Influenced This Decision?

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Scheduling conflicts	13	23.21%
Required rigor	9	16.07%
Needed skills	6	10.71%
Poor prior experiences	3	5.36%
Dual Enrollment opportunity	3	5.36%

As shown in Table 46, respondents chose motivating factors for taking only one AP English class. Of the 56 students who responded to item 6, 13, or 23.21%, listed scheduling conflicts as motivating factors for only taking one AP level English class. AP English Language and AP English Literature are both yearlong classes and limit the number of other courses a student may participate in at the secondary level. One student stated,

I took AP Lang, a yearlong AP, my sophomore year but was really heading more toward a STEM career path and decided not to take another yearlong AP (lit) so that I could instead take more math, science, and engineering classes.

Another student stated,

AP Literature and Composition is a yearlong class at my school, and I thought that because Honors English IV was only one semester, taking this class would give me the opportunity to take another Theatre Arts class before I graduated.

Six students, or 10.71%, listed needed skills as a motivating factor for taking only one AP level English class. In both AP level English classes, students focus on textual analysis and writing skills to prepare for the College Board test administered at the end of the course. One student replied,

While I don't struggle with reading, sometimes comprehension is a little difficult for me. I thought, and still do, that AP Language would help with my essay skills, which are a necessary part of both college and job applications, and to learn more about understanding a text in order to be able to handle myself in more difficult classes in the coming years.

Another student stated, "I knew I was lacking in skills designated for writing and analysis of literature. I felt these were important to have before moving to postsecondary education."

Nine students, or 16.07%, listed required rigor as a motivating factor for taking only one AP level English class. These responses were all negative in nature. One student wrote, "I enjoyed taking AP Language, however it came to my attention that AP Lit involved a lot of reading books and that was the most challenging part of Lang for me." Another student responded,

AP Language teaches you more how to write essays and read passages effectively, along with a focus on proper MLA format and grammar. AP Lit involves much more reading and writing, and I am not a huge fan of reading, so I did not take it.

Three students, or 5.36%, responded that poor experiences in prior English classes motivated them to only take one AP level English class. One student stated, "I had a poor experience in AP Language," while another student responded, "the class did not benefit me in the end, so I did not continue to take the next AP level course."

Three students, or 5.36%, responded they only took one AP level English class due to the opportunity of dual enrollment. Students who successfully finished

coursework through a partnership with the local community college were guaranteed credit to be used at the college level. One student stated, “I have not taken an AP English class. I am currently finishing English 111 class right now. I felt as if it was unnecessary to take an AP English class at the high school.”

Based on student responses from survey item 6, the majority of students who only took one AP level English class listed external factors including scheduling conflicts and required rigor as most influential for motivating them away from taking more AP English classes.

Influences for taking no AP level English class. Item 7 on the survey was designed to find motivating factors for students who did not participate in taking any AP level English class. The item asked students to identify what factor(s) was most influential when deciding to not take any AP level English class. A total of 72 students responded to item 7, and 40 students did not respond to item 7. Of the 72 respondents, many chose multiple themes in their answers as reflected in excess of responses in Table 47. Again, the researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. The researcher found seven common themes for motivation expressed in student responses for item 7: personal desires, scheduling conflicts, required rigor, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) focus, alternative program requirements, future plans, and dual enrollment opportunities. Table 47 outlines student responses associated with the common themes.

Table 47

Item 7: If You Did Not Take AP English, Please Explain What Influenced This Decision.

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Interest Level	18	24.32%
STEM opportunities	12	16.22%
Scheduling conflicts	11	14.86%
Required rigor	10	13.51%
Dual enrollment opportunities	9	12.16%
Future career plans	8	10.81%
Alternative program requirements	6	8.12%

As shown in Table 47, respondents chose motivating factors for not taking an AP English class. Eleven responses (14.86%) listed scheduling conflicts as motivating factors for not taking an AP level English class. AP English Language and AP English Literature are both yearlong classes and limit the number of other courses a student may participate in at the secondary level. One student stated, “I could not take all my AP math and science classes as well as my AP English.” Another student responded, “I took other AP classes and did not have room.” One student voiced an opinion by saying,

The guidance counselors were so worried about me not having English all 4 years of high school, they put me in Advanced Inquiry, an honors level class that neither gives me English credits nor rewards me for taking English 1 in eighth grade.

Ten responses (13.51%) cited required rigor as a motivating factor for taking no AP level English class. These classes require a yearlong commitment and have rigorous reading and writing assignments. One student responded, “I convinced myself that I would not be able to handle the workload of the class along with AP US History and AP Calculus.”

Eighteen responses (24.32%) cited interest level for taking no AP English class.

One student stated,

I did not take an AP English because I did not think it was necessary when the time came. Putting myself under that much stress (for someone like me that is not such a great writer) was not worth it junior or senior year.

Another student stated, “I did not want to stress myself out. I simply did what was good for me.”

Twelve responses (16.22%) cited a desire to take more STEM-related classes as a motivating factor for taking no AP level English class. Of the AIG students identified in the Group B population, 1,046, or 90.80%, are identified in areas of both math and reading. Student responses included, “I was more interested in pursuing AP math and science classes,” and “I wanted to focus more on AP math and science classes.”

Seven students responded with future career plans as a motivating factor for taking no AP English class. Student responses included, “I saw it as unnecessary because my job doesn't require college to “impress,” and “I had other priority classes for my desired career pathway.”

Six responses (8.12%) listed alternative program requirements as a motivating factor for taking no AP level English class. These students participated in the IB program in the district, and this program prescribes its own upper level English courses for a student's junior and senior year. One student did elaborate on this item stating,

I took IB English instead. I felt that the IB curriculum was a better fit for me, but if IB was not at my school then I would absolutely take AP English to challenge myself and prepare myself for writing in college as well as interpreting literature

to better understand and appreciate the human experience.

Nine responses (12.16%) cited dual enrollment opportunities as a motivating factor for taking no AP level English class. As stated previously, students have the opportunity to receive college credit when taking a class through the local community college that partners with the school district. Students were candid in their responses stating, “I had an opportunity to take a SPCC English class that will transfer to my college,” and “Dual enrollment was a much better option. I succeeded more and learned more from community college than I ever would have in AP.”

Many students responded with a combination of these themes. One student stated,

I did not take AP English because it is not something I was interested or wanted to do. Although I was in AIG and took English in eighth grade, it is not something I would consider my strong suit, so I did not bother taking it. It is also a yearlong class and I had other classes I would rather take, so that's what I did. They are unnecessary and are a yearlong, so I was better off taking a shorter AP with a more appropriate workload and one that I would enjoy. AP English is notorious for assigning hugely unneeded amounts of work. My standardized test scores didn't need improvement, so I just made my life easier.

Another student responded, “English language arts classes have always been my least favorite. Even though I excel in the subject, I believe my rigorous course load should be focused on material I am genuinely interested in, such as sciences and mathematics.”

Ten students responded either as N/A or that they had taken an AP English level course.

Based on student responses from survey item 7, the majority of students who took no AP level English class listed scheduling conflicts, interest levels, required rigor, and STEM/dual enrollment opportunities as most influential motivating factors.

Survey item 17. Item 17 on the survey was designed to find what AP coursework students chose to take after completing English requirements. A total of 89 students responded to item 17, and 23 students did not respond to item 17. Table 48 outlines student responses.

Table 48

Item 17: I Did Not Take an English Class My Senior Year but Chose to Take Alternate Accelerated Coursework During My Senior Year. I Took the Following AP Classes (Not English) At My High School After Completing English Requirements.

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take other AP classes after completing English requirements	48	53.93%
I took the following AP classes after completing English requirements (not English)	41	46.07%

Table 48 reveals 48 students, or 53.93%, answered they did not take other AP classes after completing English requirements. Forty-one students, or 46.07%, responded they took AP classes after completing English requirements. Students who answered they did take AP coursework were asked to list what courses they took. Students responded they participated in the following AP courses: 24 math classes (including Calculus and Statistics), 39 science classes (including Biology, Environmental Science, Human Geography, Chemistry, and Physics), three computer science classes, 18 history classes (including U.S. History, Psychology, World History, and European History), and two foreign language classes (Spanish).

Based on student responses from survey item 17, almost half of student respondents, 41 students (46.07%), chose to take non-English AP classes after completing English requirements.

Advanced Inquiry class. The researcher sought to find motivating factors for students who chose to participate in the Advanced Inquiry class offered within the district. This class follows a pre-AP curriculum and seeks to prepare students for the reading, research, and writing required in AP English Language and Composition and AP English Literature and Composition. While the district encourages students to take this class if they are pursuing AP English coursework, only one high school in the district requires accelerated students to take this class. Survey items 11, 12, and 13 were used to collect student responses for this topic.

Survey item 11. Item 11 on the survey was designed to find students who participated in the Advanced Inquiry class offered by the district. The class curriculum focuses on research and writing skills needed when students take AP level English classes. All 112 survey respondents answered item 7. Table 49 outlines student responses.

Table 49

Item 11: I Took the Advanced Inquiry English Elective.

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	70	62.50%
No	42	37.50%

As shown in Table 49, of the 112 students who answered item 11, 70 students, or 62.50%, responded they took the Advanced Inquiry class; and 42 students, or 37.50%, responded they did not.

Based on student responses from survey item 11, the majority of students took the Advanced Inquiry class offered by the district.

Survey item 12. Item 12 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding to participate in the Advanced Inquiry class. A total of 103 students answered item 12, and nine students did not answer. Students were also able to leave comments when completing item 12. Respondents could choose to add comments by completing the section marked other. Eleven of the 103 respondents chose to also answer this section. Table 50 outlines student responses.

Table 50

Item 12: What Factor Influenced You Most When Deciding to Take the Advanced Inquiry English Elective?

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take Advanced Inquiry	41	35.96%
Guidance counselor recommendation	38	33.33%
Teacher recommendation	18	15.79%
Other	11	9.66%
Individual desire to excel in English	4	3.51%
Peer influence	2	1.75%

As shown in Table 50, respondents chose either an internal motivational factor for taking the Advanced Inquiry class (individual desire to excel in English) or external motivating factors for taking the Advanced Inquiry class (all other responses). As shown in Table 50, of the 103 students who answered item 12, the following external motivating factors were most prominent: 38 responses, or 33.33%, listed guidance counselor recommendation; and 18 responses, or 15.79%, listed teacher recommendation. Four responses, or 3.51%, listed the internal motivating factor of an individual desire to excel in English. Students were able to add comments to this item; and of the 11 who added

comments, all responded they assumed the class was a requirement. Student responses included, “I was required to. I had to take an English all 4 years, or at least I was led to believe I did, and I had already taken English I so I had to take Adv Inquiry”; and “Many students who took English during middle school were required to take advanced inquiry in order to put them at the same level as other students and to make sure they were taking one English class per year.”

Based on student responses from survey item 12, the majority of students who participated in the Advanced Inquiry class listed external motivating factors including guidance counselor recommendation and teacher recommendation as most influential motivating factors, while 9.66% of respondents were under the impression that it was a requirement.

Survey item 13. Item 13 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding not to take the Advanced Inquiry class. A total of 58 students responded to item 13, and 53 students did not respond to item 13. Again, the researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. The researcher found three common themes for motivation expressed in student responses for item 13. Table 51 outlines student responses.

Table 51

Item 13: If You Did Not Take the Advanced Inquiry English Elective, Please Explain What Influenced This Decision.

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Unnecessary	14	48.28%
Personal choice	11	37.93%
No plans to take AP English	4	13.79%

As shown in Table 51, 14 responses, or 48.28%, cited they did not take the

Advanced Inquiry class because they felt it was unnecessary. One student responded,

I felt that taking a class that largely was review and counted merely as an elective was a waste of time. Instead I was able to continue acceleration and complete my high school years with two college English credits under my belt.

Another student stated,

I knew that not taking the Advanced Inquiry English would put me ahead one year and I would be able to take SPCC English that could transfer to college.

Since it is not a class required to graduate, I felt it was unnecessary to take.

Four responses, or 13.79%, cited they did not take the Advanced Inquiry class because they did not plan to take AP level English classes while in high school. One student responded, “My guidance counselors assumed I was taking AP English and made it seem like Advance Inquiry was only super necessary if I was taking AP English classes, which I wasn't, so I didn't see the point of taking it.” Another student responded,

Early on in high school, I knew I wanted to take advantage of my English I credit from middle school. I did not take the Advanced Inquiry Elective because I was aiming for a 12th-grade curriculum consisting entirely of math and science.

Advanced Inquiry would have prolonged my English studies, something I was not interested in doing.

Eleven responses, or 37.93%, listed they made a personal choice to not take the Advanced Inquiry class. Because scheduling at the high school level is self-selection regardless of AIG identification, students may register for any level class they choose. Seven students simply responded with “I didn’t want to”; however, one student responded, “At the time I thought being done with English by my junior year would be a

good idea. I regret that now as I should have taken English 4 as a senior.”

Twenty-three students responded they did take the class under the assumption that the class was required. Responses included, “I was under the impression I had to” and “My counselor made me think I had to.” One high school in the county does require taking Advanced Inquiry for students who took the accelerated English course in middle school.

Based on student responses from survey item 13, the majority of students who did not participate in the Advanced Inquiry listed the class not being necessary and personal choice as most influential motivating factors

IB acceleration. The researcher sought to find motivating factors for students who chose to participate in the IB acceleration program. This program allows students to complete university level curricula and international examination. Students receive advanced standing when entering university. Survey items 8, 9, and 10 collected student responses for this topic.

IB information meeting. Item 8 on the survey was designed to find how many students attended a meeting about the district’s IB program. The program has six subject groups and allows students to complete independent research and a project that usually involves community service (Diploma Programme, n.d.). One high school within the district provides the IB curriculum. The item asked students to answer whether or not they had attended an information meeting at their home school site concerning the IB program. A total of 112 students responded to item 8 and no students did not respond to item 8. Table 52 outlines student responses.

Table 52

Item 8: I Attended A Meeting About Participating in the District's IB Program.

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	15	13.39%
No	97	86.62%

As shown in Table 52, 15 students, or 13.39%, responded they had attended an information meeting; 97 students, or 86.62%, responded they did not attend an information meeting for the IB program.

Based on student responses from survey item 8, the majority of students in the district did not attend an information meeting concerning the IB program.

Motivating factors for participation in IB program. Item 9 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding to participate in the district's IB program. A total of 111 students responded to item 9 and one student did not respond to item 9. Table 53 outlines student responses.

Table 53

Item 9: What Factor Influenced You Most When Deciding to Participate in the IB Program?

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
Teacher recommendation	1	0.90%
Family influence/expectation	0	0.00%
Peer influence	0	0.00%
Individual desire to excel in academics	5	4.50%
Information gained from the IB meeting	2	1.80%
I did not participate in the IB program	103	92.79%

As shown in Table 53, respondents chose either an internal motivational factor for participating in the IB program (individual desire to excel in academics) or external

motivating factors for participating in the IB program (all other responses). Only eight students (7.21%) responding to this item indicated they participated in the IB program. Of those eight respondents, five respondents (4.50%) indicated an internal individual desire to excel in academics as a motivating factor; two respondents (1.80%) indicated information gained from the IB meeting as a motivating factor; and one respondent (0.90%) indicated teacher influence as a motivating factor. One hundred three students, or 92.79%, responded they did not participate in the district's IB program. One student added a comment to his/her response stating, "the IB program is not offered in our district."

Based on student responses from survey item 9, the majority of students in the district did not participate in the IB program and therefore had no motivating factors. Of those who did participate in the program, the majority listed an individual desire to excel as the most influential internal motivating factor.

Influences for not participating in the IB program. Item 10 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding not to participate in the district's IB program. A total of 92 students responded to item 10 and 19 students did not respond to item 10. Again, the researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. The researcher found four common themes for motivation expressed in student responses for item 10. Table 54 outlines student responses.

Table 54

Item 10: If You Did Not Participate in the IB Program, Please Explain What Influenced This Decision.

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Uninformed	41	45.05%
Lack of access	21	23.08%
Program Restrictions	20	21.98%
Personal Choice	9	9.89%

As shown in Table 54, 41 students, or 45.05%, responded they were uninformed about the IB program in the district. Student responses included, “I was not given adequate resources to make this decision. I’m still not entirely sure what the IB program is”;

I completely lacked knowledge of the IB program. No teacher or administrator or counselor ever spoke to me about it. I did not know exactly what it was, who was eligible for it, how to participate in it, or even why someone should participate in it; and “the IB program was not heavily promoted by counselors, so I was unaware my district offered it.”

Twenty-one students, or 23.08%, responded lack of access as a motivating factor for not participating in the IB program. As stated before, only one high school in the district offers the program, and the school is not centrally located in the county. Student responses included the program was “not offered at my school and I did not want to transfer to a different school,” and “No accessibility at my school. It was just not convenient for me to transfer schools just in order to be in the IB program.”

Twenty students, or 21.98%, responded program restrictions as a motivating factor for not participating in the IB program. Students in the IB program follow a strict

six subject group curriculum comprised of language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics, and the arts (Diploma Programme, n.d.).

Student responses for item 10 included,

I did not pursue the IB track because I wanted to pursue math and science and IB is not a good path especially for math as they do not learn anything close to the level of calculus I learned in AB calculus;

and

I consider myself to be a more math and science oriented person. I attended the meeting and I concluded that the AP route would be the best for me since IB math and science focus more on writing than I wanted.

Nine students, or 9.89%, responded personal choice as a motivating factor for not participating in the IB program. Student responses included, “I did not see the point” and “I saw my older siblings participate in the program and decided it was not for me.”

Based on student responses from survey item 10, the majority of students who did not participate in the IB program listed lack of information, lack of access, and program restrictions as most influential external motivating factors.

Dual enrollment/CCP acceleration. The researcher sought to find motivating factors for students who chose to participate in the CCP acceleration program. This program is a dual enrollment program and allows students in the current secondary education setting the opportunity to earn college credit for classes taken at a postsecondary institution (Allen, 2010). The local community college partners with the local school systems in order to offer entry level and general education requirements to high school students who have availability in their course schedules. Survey items 14,

15, 16, 18, and 19 collected student responses for this topic.

Participation in CCP English coursework. Item 14 on the survey was designed to find what English dual enrollment coursework accelerated students took at the high school level after completing required English coursework. A total of 109 students responded to item 14, and three students did not respond to item 14. Table 55 outlines student responses.

Table 55

Item 14: I Took the Following College Level English Elective(s) Through the CCP Program After Completing English Graduation Requirements.

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take a CCP English elective	92	84.40%
ENG 111 - Writing and Inquiry	15	13.76%
ENG 112 - Writing/Research in the Disciplines	2	1.83%

As shown in Table 55, 92 students, or 84.40%, responded they did not take an English related dual enrollment class.

Motivating factors for participation in CCP English coursework. Item 15 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding to take dual enrollment English classes offered at the local community college. A total of 110 students responded to item 15, and two students did not respond to item 15. Table 56 outlines student responses.

Table 56

Item 15: What Factor Influenced You Most When Deciding to Take an English Class Offered Through the CCP Program?

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take a CCP English class	92	83.64%
Possibility of earning college credit early	14	12.73%
Guidance counselor recommendation	1	0.91%
Teacher recommendation	1	0.91%
Individual desire to excel in English	1	0.91%
Peer influence	1	0.91%

As shown in Table 56, respondents chose either an internal motivational factor for taking an English class through the CCP program (individual desire to excel in English) or external motivating factors for taking the English class through the CCP program (all other responses). Of the 110 students who answered item 15, only one student responded with an internal motivating factor of an individual desire to excel in academics. Fourteen students, or 12.73%, responded with the external motivating factor of the possibility of earning college credit.

Based on student responses from survey item 15, the majority of students who did take a dual enrollment English elective listed the possibility of earning college credit as most influential external motivating factors.

Motivating factors for not participating in CCP English coursework. Item 16 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding not to take a dual enrollment English. A total of 86 students responded to item 16, and 26 students did not respond to item 16. Again, the researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. The researcher found six common themes for motivation expressed in student responses for item 16. Table 57

outlines student responses.

Table 57

Item 16: If You Did Not Take a CCP English Elective, Please Explain What Influenced This Decision.

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Scheduling conflicts	15	22.39%
Uninformed	14	20.89%
Personal choice	14	20.89%
AP Credit	10	14.93%
Traditional class preference	7	10.45%
College transfer restrictions	7	10.45%

As shown in Table 57, 15 responses, or 22.39%, cited they did not take the dual enrollment English class due to scheduling conflicts. One student responded,

I did not have room in my schedule to. Taking English 1 in 8th grade allowed me to skip English 4 my junior year and take it my senior year to make room for other classes of interest and importance to me my junior year.

Another student stated,

I did not feel the need to take an English elective through CCP because I knew that in order to receive an English college credit I would need to take multiple English electives through CCP, and I did not have enough room in my schedule to take enough of the classes in order to receive the credit.

Fourteen responses, or 20.89%, cited they did not take the dual enrollment English class because they were uninformed. Students are supposed to receive information about the dual enrollment program from their guidance counselors before they register for their junior (11th grade) year. One student responded, “I did not know that the program could count as an English class at the school until it was too late.”

Another student stated,

I lacked knowledge about the CCP classes; no teacher, administrator, or counselor ever discussed them with me. As a result, I took Advanced Inquiry my sophomore year to make sure I would have an English class to take my senior year (AP English IV). By the time I realized we had CCP, I had taken Advanced Inquiry and there was no room in my schedule for CCP.

Fourteen responses, or 20.89%, cited they did not take the dual enrollment English class due to a personal choice. One student responded, “I didn’t want to take another English class, and I don’t drive.” The student expressed no desire to take another English class; however, the English classes offered as dual enrollment through the county are online classes, adding to the lack of information provided to students concerning the classes. Another student responded, “I wanted to have a laid-back senior year.”

Ten responses, or 14.93%, cited they did not take the dual enrollment English class due to receiving AP credit at their high school. One student responded, “I focused on AP classes offered at the school and took Advanced Inquiry so senior year would align with AP Literature.” Another student stated, “We were not allowed to take college classes if an AP alternative was offered at the school and could fit in our schedule.”

Seven responses, or 10.45%, cited they did not take the dual enrollment English class because they preferred the traditional high school class setting. Many of the dual enrollment classes offered are online, and students complete coursework either at home or in the high school’s online lab classroom. One student stated, “I do better in a face-to-face class in English and did not want to take it online”; and another responded, “I wanted to take classes at my high school and did not want online classes.”

Seven students, or 10.45%, cited they did not take the dual enrollment English class due to transfer restrictions with prospective colleges. The dual enrollment courses are only guaranteed credit for in-state public colleges and universities. One student stated, “I knew I was going to an out of state school so I saw no reason for me to take a CCP course.” Another student responded, “I have been planning on going to university in Ontario since ninth grade. It came to my attention early on the most AP classes and CCP classes would not transfer for me.”

Of the remaining 19 students, eight students responded they did participate in the program, three students wanted to focus on STEM based classes, and the remaining eight students responded it was not required, so they chose not to participate.

Based on student responses from survey item 16, the majority of students who did not participate in the dual enrollment English electives listed scheduling conflicts, lack of information, personal choice, and gaining college credit through AP classes as most influential external motivating factors

CCP coursework chosen at secondary level. Item 18 on the survey was designed to find what dual enrollment coursework students chose to take after completing English requirements. A total of 105 students responded to item 18, and seven students did not respond to item 18. Table 58 outlines student responses.

Table 58

Item 18: I Took the Following College Level Elective(s) (Not English) Through the CCP Program During My Senior Year After Completing English Graduation Requirements.

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take a CCP elective	77	73.33%
I took CCP Electives (NOT English courses)	28	26.67%

As shown in Table 58, 28 students, or 26.67%, responded they took a dual enrollment course after completing English requirements. Students responded they participated in the following dual enrollment courses: eight math courses, 22 history courses, six science courses, five business courses, one criminal justice course, five foreign language courses, six art courses, and seven vocational courses (including Cybersecurity and Drafting).

Based on student responses from survey item 18, the majority of respondents (73.33%) did not participate in dual enrollment electives after completing English requirements.

Motivating factors for participating in CCP non-English coursework. Item 19 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding to take a dual enrollment elective class that was not an English class. A total of 103 students responded to item 19, and nine students did not respond to item 19. Table 59 outlines student responses.

Table 59

Item 19: What Factor Influenced You Most When Deciding to Take Other Accelerated Elective Classes and/or Classes Offered Through the CCP Program at Your High School?

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not take a CCP elective class	61	59.22%
Possibility of earning college credit early	19	18.45%
Individual desire to excel	17	16.50%
Guidance counselor recommendation	2	1.94%
Peer influence	2	1.94%
Family influence/expectation	1	0.97%

As shown in Table 59, respondents chose either an internal motivational factor for taking an elective class through the CCP program (individual desire to excel in English) or

external motivating factors for taking the elective class through the CCP program (all other responses). Seventeen students, or 16.50%, responded with the internal motivation of an individual desire to excel in academics. Nineteen students, or 18.45%, responded with the external motivating factor of the possibility of earning college credit early.

Students had the opportunity to add comments to this item when responding. Eight of the 103 respondents (7.77%) chose to make comments. Two students (1.94%) chose to take the courses due to requirements of prospective colleges. The other six (5.82%) students chose to take the dual enrollment classes for personal growth or interest. One student stated, “I recognized that I needed help with my public speaking skills. I thought this class would provide a safe environment for me to become more comfortable with that.”

Based on student responses from survey item 19, the majority of students who did participate in dual enrollment opportunities listed internal and external motivating factors including a personal desire to excel and the opportunity to earn college credit as most influential.

Flex scheduling. The researcher sought to find motivating factors for students who chose to arrange flex time into their class schedule. This program allows students who are seniors to register for fewer than four classes per day if they need less than eight credits to graduate. This modified scheduling allowed students to leave school early or arrive late based on scheduling of other classes. Survey items 20, 21, and 22 collected student responses for this topic.

Participation in flex scheduling. Item 20 on the survey was designed to find if students registered for flex time in their schedule after completing English requirements.

A total of 110 students responded to item 20, and two students did not respond to item 20. Table 60 outlines student responses.

Table 60

Item 20: I Scheduled Flex Time in My Schedule After Completing English Graduation Requirements.

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	24	21.8%
No	86	78.81%

As shown in Table 60, 24 students, or 21.80%, stated they scheduled flex time in their schedule after completing English graduation requirements, and 86 students, or 78.81%, responded they did not schedule flex time in their schedule after completing English graduation requirements.

Based on student responses from survey item 20, the majority of students did not schedule flex time into their class schedules during senior year.

Motivating factors for participating in flex scheduling. Item 21 on the survey was designed to find what motivating factor influenced students most when deciding to schedule flex time into their class schedule. A total of 94 students responded to item 21, and 18 students did not respond to item 21. Table 61 outlines student responses.

Table 61

Item 21: What Factor Influenced You Most When Deciding to Flex?

Response	Number of Responses	Percentage
I did not participate in flex	85	90.43%
Peer influence	7	7.45%
Guidance counselor recommendation	1	1.06%
Family influence/expectation	1	1.06%

As shown in Table 61, respondents chose either an internal motivational factor for

scheduling flex time (individual desire to excel in English) or external motivating factors for scheduling flex time (all other responses). Of the 94 students who answered item 19, seven students, or 7.45%, responded with the external motivation of peer influence.

Students had the opportunity to add comments to this item when responding. Nine of the 94 respondents (9.57%) chose to make comments. In these comments, students stated the following reasons as motivating factors: no other courses available at their school, flexibility of schedule, work, and personal decision. One student stated, “I used personal judgement. I wanted to spend more time focusing on fewer classes and still have time built in for sports, job, and the college process, as well as have extra time to not be overworked.” Another student responded, “I could’ve graduated after finishing required classes junior year, so senior year was all electives and I wanted to take time in the day to work.”

One student chose to make a comment in this section that was not specifically related to the item. The student stated,

Side note that I would like to put as there is no other place for comments: Looking back on my English schedule, I now regret taking English I in 8th grade due to the push to have English in every year of high school. I feel as though the decision ended up feeling like it punished me for not being able to follow the normal curriculum of having English I in freshman year, English II sophomore, etc. I would rather the school system have pushed me to take an AP level class in my senior year that my schedule would not allow for, and it does not look good to colleges.

Based on student responses from survey item 21, the majority of students who did

schedule flex time listed peer influence as the most influential motivating factor.

Student use of scheduled Flex time. Item 22 on the survey was designed to find how students used the Flex time built into their schedule. A total of 54 students responded to item 22, and 57 students did not respond to item 22. Again, the researcher used descriptive coding for survey responses to look for common themes. The researcher found two common themes for use of time expressed in student responses for item 22.

Table 62 outlines student responses.

Table 62

Item 22: If You Decided to Participate in the Flex Schedule, How Did You Use the Time Made Available?

Common Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Study	17	45.95%
Work	12	32.43%
Rest/Exercise	8	21.62%

Of the 54 students who answered item 22, 12 responses (32.43%) cited they spent their time working either at a job or at an internship. One student responded, “I used the time made available in the flex schedule to intern and to work on my family farm.” Another student stated, “I work part time I also completed an internship through the county and 2 out 5 days of the school week were dedicated to that.”

Seventeen responses (45.95%) cited they spent their flex time to study for the courses they were taking. One student stated,

Flexing allowed for less classes giving me an overall less workload. This helped me to not be stressed and focus on the classes I was taking. The extra time in my day allowed for me to complete homework while not in school, while still allowing time for other activities. Often when taking multiple AP classes, you are

held down to only schoolwork and it is very hard to add any extracurriculars.

Flexing helped to let me focus on the AP's I wanted while allowing time for other things as well.

Another student stated, "I used the time to finish homework and/or rest before I would have to participate in extracurricular activities."

Of the 29 responses (78.38%) citing spending their flex time at work or studying for classes, eight responses (21.62%) also cited using the time for rest or exercise. One student responded, "I made sure to get the proper amount of sleep, rather than the limited time normal school hours cause," while another stated, "I flexed my last period of the day and used that time to exercise."

The remaining 25 students responded they did not participate in the opportunity to flex scheduling.

Based on student responses from survey item 22, the students who participated in the flex schedule listed they used the time to either study or work.

Summary of the Results

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the study's three research questions. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were used to analyze data in order to describe the sample population used and to draw a conclusion about the characteristics of a larger population the sample is to represent (Urdan, 2010). The researcher used SPSS software to enter quantitative student achievement data in order to conduct the *t*-test needed for the study. The researcher separated quantitative student scheduling data in order to answer Research Question 2 in order to gain an understanding of how students are using extra space created in their high school schedule. Qualitative

data included a student survey the researcher used to answer Research Question 3 in order to understand the motivating factors for scheduling choices students made in Grades 9-12. Analyzing all sets of data allowed the researcher to gain a larger picture of student choices and motivations at the district level.

When analyzing the data as a whole, the researcher was able to determine the students who participated in the accelerated English I program showed statistically significant differences on eight of nine testing achievement scores than those students who did not accelerate English I. Analysis of the scheduling data for accelerated students also revealed 60.76% of academically gifted students who accelerated English I continued to participate in accelerated English coursework at the secondary level. Seven hundred academically gifted students within the district were able to participate in various accelerated classes in order to continue to meet not only their cognitive needs but also their emotional and social health needs as well (Rambo & McCoach, 2012). Final analysis of the survey data allowed the researcher to have insight into motivational factors that drove students to make scheduling choices. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative data are furthered discussed in Chapter 5. The researcher will make broader recommendations for the English I accelerated program based on the findings of collected data.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Results

Introduction

Educators in today's classrooms understand the diverse needs of students arriving in their classrooms each day. Meeting the needs of these heterogeneous groups of students can be challenging, but it must be the focus of the educational system if excellence is the expectation of both educators and students. Academically gifted students are one identified group of students who have specific needs to be met on a daily basis in the classroom. One strategy that has been used to meet these specific needs is academic acceleration. This strategy allows "students to move through traditional educational organizations more rapidly, based on readiness and motivation" (NAGC, 2004, p. 1).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of English I acceleration. Although this is a class traditionally taken during ninth grade, during acceleration, it is taught in the eighth-grade middle school English language arts classroom. The researcher focused on gifted learners' academic achievement and future scheduling choices at the secondary level. The study compared academic and scheduling data of AIG accelerated English I students (Group A) with similar data of AIG nonaccelerated English I students (Group B). Students from Group A who accelerated English I in Grade 8 had the option to continue English acceleration at the secondary level or move back to traditional scheduling with their peers for remaining English requirements.

This mixed methods study addressed the use of subject-specific acceleration at the middle school to meet the needs of academically gifted learners. The findings of the study added to the limited research on the effectiveness of accelerated academic

programs put into place to meet the needs of gifted students.

Summary of Findings

The study focused on answering three research questions using valid and reliable data. The analysis resulted with specific findings and implications of the English I accelerated program. Details concerning data collection and results of data analysis follow. Table 63 outlines the data analysis plan, tools and instruments used in the analysis, and how each piece of data and method of analysis aligned to each research question as well as study results.

Table 63

Data Analysis Results

Research Question	Tools Instruments	Data Collected to Answer Question	Data Type	Method of Analysis	Results
How does implementation of the accelerated English I program impact academically gifted populations regarding academic achievement?	English II EOC scores ACT Scores	Student achievement data AIG classes prior to 2018 graduating class (Group B - nonaccelerated students) Student achievement data AIG classes 2018 graduating class to present (Group A- accelerated students)	Quantitative	Statistical two sample independent <i>t</i> -test	Accelerated students (Group A) performed better than nonaccelerated students (Group B) on all achievement scores except ACT Math
For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what is the impact on selection of specific scheduling options?	Registration data for secondary English coursework and other accelerated coursework	Class registration and enrollment data for accelerated AIG students (Group A)	Quantitative	Descriptive statistics	60.76% of accelerated students chose to continue taking accelerated English classes when given the opportunity to self-select. Track 5 was most frequently selected by accelerated student sample.
For students who participate in the accelerated English I program, what are the motivating factors for selections of specific scheduling options available at the secondary level?	Student surveys	Student survey responses about motivation for participation in accelerated program and future scheduling choices (Group A)	Qualitative	Thematic coding Descriptive statistics	Motivation included both internal and external factors for each accelerated track

Student achievement. This study first examined the effects of accelerated instruction versus nonaccelerated instruction on academic achievement. The study sought to find if there was a difference between the mean achievement of students who participated in the accelerated program (Group A) and those who did not (Group B). Research supports the need for academically gifted students to be appropriately challenged in order to develop high motivation or run the risk of becoming complacent and apathetic towards their learning, thus breeding underachievers (Colangelo et al., 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). School districts, including the district of this study, have implemented academic acceleration as a strategy in order to continuously promote high achievement in academically gifted students. Achievement data analyzed to answer Research Question 1 included mandated state tests (EOC and ACT).

In order to gain an understanding of the impact of the English I acceleration program, the researcher used a quantitative analysis to compare the testing data between Groups A and B. Studies reveal a positive connection between academic acceleration and standardized achievement test scores and grades in college (Lubinski & Benbow, 2006; Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011; Wai et al., 2010). It was determined that there were statistically significant differences between the two groups on the following student achievement tests: English II EOC, ACT English, ACT reading, ACT writing, ACT science, and the overall ACT composite. The students in the accelerated student sample (Group A) scored significantly higher on all these tests than the nonaccelerated students (Group B). ACT math scores were the only achievement scores that did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students.

As the findings of this study imply, the implementation of the accelerated English

I program supported an increase in student achievement scores. These findings support current research that reports positive effects for both grade-based and subject-based acceleration with no significant differences between the two groups (Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011).

Continuation of acceleration. The study next examined if AIG students continued to schedule and complete accelerated English coursework at the secondary level after acceleration in eighth grade. Students, regardless of identification, can self-select course levels at the secondary level and are therefore not required to continue to take accelerated classes. The study sought to find if there was a relationship between taking English I in the eighth grade and continuing to choose to take accelerated coursework at the secondary level when given the opportunity to self-select coursework. The researcher used Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory to support this idea of self-efficacy and desire to continue to succeed in the accelerated classroom. The theory reflects a triadic causation which includes three points interacting and mutually influencing each other: personal factors, environment, and behavior. The theory asserts that if students are placed in the correct environment to meet their academic needs, they will continue to believe in their own intellectual ability and begin to take ownership of their own academic desires; thus, students will continue in self-selecting academically accelerated coursework after placed in an appropriate environment.

In order to gain understanding of the influence the English I accelerated program had on student scheduling choices, the researcher analyzed quantitative data from student schedule quantitative data. The data revealed there were nine distinct tracks indicating full or partial English accelerated coursework options students could follow. Table 3

outlines these tracks and identifies each as full acceleration or partial acceleration.

Table 3

Accelerated Tracks

Track	Grade Level					Acceleration Designation
	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	
Accelerated Track 1	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	AP English Language	AP English Literature	Full
Accelerated Track 2	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language	AP English Literature	CCP Courses	Full
Accelerated Track 3	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	CCP Courses	Full
Accelerated Track 4	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	English IV Honors	CCP Courses	Full
Accelerated Track 5	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	English IV Honors	Gap Year (No English Class) OR Flex	Full
Accelerated Track 6	English I Honors	English II Honors	English III Honors	IB Program	IB Program	Full
Accelerated Track 7	English I Honors	English II Honors	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	Site Level English Elective	Full
Accelerated Track 8	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	AP English Language OR English III Honors	AP English Literature OR English IV Honors	Partial
Accelerated Track 9	English I Honors	English II Honors	Advanced Inquiry/AP Seminar	English III Honors	English IV Honors	Partial

Overall, 60.76% of the student sample population chose a track of full acceleration when given the opportunity to self-select coursework.

The track most frequently selected scheduling track was Track 5. Based on the

scheduling data collected from accelerated students following this track, 278 students, or 24.13% of the total sample population, chose to continue to take accelerated English coursework at the secondary level. Students following this track completed all English coursework requirements by their 11th-grade year. These students could choose to take English electives or other advanced coursework or register for flex time during their senior year. The researcher separated the data to analyze whether English I accelerated students were continuing to take accelerated coursework even if it was not concentrated in English. Research suggests students who study curriculum that is meaningful are allowed to make connections with individual experiences and goals and long-term outcomes, providing a context for personal relevance and growth (Little, 2012). All 278 students from the sample population who completed Track 5 completed accelerated English coursework, and only 35 students, or 12.54%, who followed Track 5 failed to continue to take accelerated coursework after meeting English requirements. The remaining 243 students completed coursework in 398 STEM-related subjects and 234 classes in humanities-related subjects. This continuation of STEM-related classes and other humanities classes further supports acceleration to be appropriate educational planning as it matches the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Data also revealed that only 180 students, or 15.63% of the sample population of 1,152 accelerated students, followed the prescribed track (Track 1) for the district. The prescribed track recommends students take English I in the eighth grade, English II in the ninth grade, Advanced Inquiry in the 10th grade, AP English Language in the 11th grade, and AP English Literature in the 12th grade. It is the intention that accelerated English

students will take the Advanced Inquiry course, a class with a curriculum focused on research and writing, in preparation for the rigor required in AP Language and Literature. Many colleges and universities require AP test scores of 4 or 5 in order to receive course credit (Duffy, 2010; Farkas & Duffett, 2009); and in order to improve student achievement scores, the district implemented this course. However, only one high school in the county requires accelerated English students take the course; the other high schools in the county only recommend the class.

Data collected for student scheduling also revealed of the 1,152 students in the sample population, 380 students, or 32.99%, chose to pursue partial acceleration of English coursework. This partial acceleration included 155 students completing acceleration of three of the four English classes required for graduation and 223 students completing acceleration of two of the four English classes required for graduation. Only 6.25% of students who accelerated in eighth grade did not align with either a fully or partially accelerated track.

Providing opportunities for continued acceleration is an effective strategy to meet the unique needs of gifted students. Many of these students come to classes with readiness different from average ability students, including already knowing much of the content before learning it (Tsai, 2007). Academic acceleration allows educators to meet the learning needs and promote students' desires to continue to succeed in the classroom. Data collected and analyzed for this study support Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory asserting that if students are placed in the correct environment to meet their academic needs, they will continue to believe in their own intellectual ability and begin to take ownership of their own academic desires.

Student motivating factors. Finally, the study sought to find motivating factors in student scheduling choices at the secondary level. While secondary students are encouraged to discuss scheduling choices with counselors, parents, and current teachers, only a parent signature is required on student scheduling paperwork each year. Ultimately, secondary level students are given the opportunity to self-select coursework regardless of identifying student markers including being academically gifted. Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory includes motivation as a part of the triadic causation supporting the need for its inclusion in the study. Studies continue to support the need for academically gifted students to be appropriately challenged in the academic setting in order to better influence motivation in this continuous reciprocal relationship (Phillips & Lindsay, 2006; Winner, 2000). In order to analyze student motivation for scheduling choices, the study focused on current senior students who had completed all English coursework and sought to find motivating factors for scheduling choices in AP courses, IB courses, and dual enrollment courses. The researcher analyzed both internal and external motivating factors influencing student scheduling choices.

Motivation for participation in AP English classes. The AP program was originally designed to provide high school students with opportunities to complete work aligned to university curricula (Blackmer et al., 1952). This subject level acceleration allows students to complete college level coursework at the secondary level and earn college credit upon completion of a final exam. In order to determine student motivation for completing AP coursework, the researcher collected qualitative survey data from current seniors in the district who had participated in the English I acceleration program.

Based on student responses from the survey, students who took an AP level

English class listed both internal and external factors as motivating influences; 29.63% of the student respondents who took an AP level English class cited an individual desire to excel in English as the most influential internal motivating factor for taking an AP level English class. Responses support research that suggests success is more prevalent when students have a love of learning and a desire to persevere on tasks of interest (Ames, 1992); 38.89% of student respondents who took AP English cited earning quality GPA points as the most influential motivating external factor for participating in an AP level English class. Studies have revealed gifted students are often valued for their high performance, and many of these students equate self-worth with performance (Sowa, McIntire, May, & Bland, 1994). Survey results support this research in students' desires to attain the highest quality GPA points possible. Many students' class ranks are separated by tenths of a point from their GPA, and these high-achieving students are willing to take more rigorous accelerated classes to achieve the higher ranking.

Motivation for no participation in AP English classes. Students in the study completed either full or partial acceleration, but not all students completed AP level English coursework. AP was only one form of English acceleration students in the sample population could follow. In order to determine student motivation for completing no AP English coursework, the researcher collected qualitative survey data from current seniors in the district who had participated in the English I acceleration program.

Students had the opportunity to choose to participate in the AP level English class, but they were not required to do so. Research supports student choice and independence in learning as a motivating influence (Hay, 1993; Montgomery, 1996; Uresti, Goertz, & Bernal, 2002). Further, educators and parents, as much as possible,

should allow students to explore areas of their own interests, as this independence allows student motivation to increase further developing their learning skills (Peters, Grager-Loidl, & Supplee, 2000; Phillips & Lindsay, 2006). While not all students within the student sample population chose to take AP English courses, 60.76% did choose to follow full acceleration for English coursework.

Based on student responses, the majority of students who took no AP level English class listed factors including scheduling conflicts, required rigor, and STEM/dual enrollment opportunities as most influential.

Many AP courses require a yearlong commitment in a student's schedule, and gifted students typically have heavier academic loads than their nongifted peers. Both AP level English classes are scheduled as yearlong classes, while many other AP level classes including AP Environmental Science or AP Psychology are scheduled as semester long classes. This scheduling commitment forces students to choose between AP courses offered at the secondary level. One student stated, "I could not take all my AP math and science classes as well as AP English."

Students also listed required rigor as an external motivating factor. One student stated, "English is not my strong suit nor my favorite class, and I knew that AP English would be a lot of difficult work that I would have had trouble keeping up with while focusing on other AP classes." Research supports the importance of challenging the gifted pupil (Clinkenbeard, 1994; Eyre, 2013; Freeman, 1998; Wallace, 2000), but the challenge needs to be consistent and appropriate. Many students viewed the rigor required in AP English classes as inappropriate due to responsibilities and commitment to other advanced classes.

Student respondents also listed STEM and dual enrollment opportunities as external motivating factors in their choice to not take AP level English coursework. One student stated, “Even though I excel in the subject, I believe my rigorous course load should be focused on material I am genuinely interested in, such as sciences and mathematics.” This response further supports research stating gifted students should be allowed to explore areas of their own interests, as this independence allows student motivation to increase further developing their learning skills (Peters et al., 2000; Phillips & Lindsay, 2006).

IB participation. IB classes offer rigorous curricula and allow students to move at an advanced pace (Bleske-Rechek, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2004; Lubinski & Benbow, 2000). This program allows students the opportunity to continue acceleration at the secondary level.

In order to determine student motivation for participating in the IB program, the researcher collected qualitative survey data from current seniors in the district who had participated in the English I acceleration program.

Based on student responses from the survey, the majority of students in the district did not participate in the IB program due to lack of information, lack of access, and program restrictions. Of the current seniors who were given the opportunity to complete the survey, only 27 participated in the IB program. For these students, they indicated an internal motivation stemming from an internal desire to excel.

Motivation for participation in dual-enrollment classes. Dual enrollment is an acceleration strategy used that allows students to be enrolled in two levels of school simultaneously (Assouline et al., 2015). In the district where the study occurred, students

are encouraged to take coursework at the local community college where credits can be transferred to any public state-supported college or university. In order to determine student motivation for not completing dual-enrollment coursework, the researcher collected qualitative survey data from current seniors in the district who had participated in the English I acceleration program.

Based on student responses from survey, the majority of students who did take a dual enrollment English elective listed the possibility of earning college credit as the most influential motivating factor. Allowing acceleration through dual enrollment can give students the opportunity to take coursework more specific to their interests while also preparing them for postsecondary education (Dare & Nowicki, 2015). Results from the survey support this research.

Flex scheduling. In the district where the study occurred, students who accelerate and complete graduation requirements early have the opportunity to register for flex time in their 12th-grade schedule. This time allows them to leave school early or come in late, and students have the freedom to choose what to do during this time. The researcher sought to find what motivated accelerated students to schedule this time and how these students used this time after completing English requirements.

Based on student responses from the survey item, the majority of students who did schedule flex time listed peer influence as the most influential motivating factor. Research supports the influence of peers on academic achievement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). The researcher also collected responses about how students used this flex time when scheduled. Based on student responses, the students who participated in the flex schedule listed they used

the time to either study or work.

Implications and Conclusions of Study

Considering the findings from this study, results indicate that the acceleration of English I in the middle school classroom improves student achievement on various standardized testing measures and allows students the opportunity to pursue continued accelerated coursework at the secondary level. Students identify a mix of internal and external motivating factors when determining future scheduling choices at the secondary level.

The study supports research conducted by Steenbergen-Hu et al. (2016) revealing gifted students “benefit greatly from being placed in special groups or programs that [a]re specifically designed to serve them” (p. 889).

The results of this study support the continued use of acceleration as a means to meet the diverse educational needs of the gifted learner. Students identified as academically gifted require appropriately differentiated curriculum designed to address their individual characteristics, needs, abilities, and interests (Berger, 1991).

Research Recommendations

The results of the study support the use of academic acceleration for the gifted learner, however the researcher found additional areas and opportunities for further research.

Continued tracking of student achievement. The study compared accelerated student achievement to those students who were not accelerated. The researcher used student achievement scores from state-required testing to analyze and determine differences. In order to further analyze the implementation of English I, it is

recommended future studies occur on accelerated student success at the postsecondary level. Research studies are available on subject-specific acceleration (Assouline & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2005; Guyton, 2013; Mills et al., 1994; Preckel et al., 2008), but these studies have focused on the effects of math acceleration on the academically gifted student. There is limited research on the effects of whole grade English acceleration, and there are no studies that focus on postsecondary effects. In addition, the researcher recommends additional studies at other sites and school districts in order to determine if similar effects occur with similar populations of students.

Research and analyze AP scores. The study compared accelerated student achievement to those students who were not accelerated. The researcher used student achievement scores from state-required testing to analyze to determine differences. In order to further analyze the implementation of English I, it is recommended future researchers consider AP scores for English Language and Composition and English Literature and Composition.

Research and analyze student growth scores as opposed to achievement scores. Student achievement scores and student growth scores are tools used to hold schools accountable for student performance. However, these tools project very different forms of data. Student achievement focuses solely at final proficiency on an assessment, while growth focuses on student progress from 1 year to the next. This study focused solely on student achievement scores. In order to gain a more comprehensive analysis of the effect of the English I acceleration program, the researcher recommends the inclusion of growth data for analysis as well.

School District Recommendations

The results of the study revealed the current success of academic acceleration of English I for the gifted learner in the study's district, however the researcher found additional areas and opportunities for further recommendations for the district.

Improved information sessions for IB program. The IB program seeks to develop challenging international education programs that challenge students to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right (The History of the IB, 2017). The district currently offers the IB program; but according to survey results, students are not well-informed about this program. Of the 112 students who completed the survey, 86.62% reported they did not attend a meeting concerning IB. In order to be more inclusive and available to students, the district needs to improve how they relay information to students concerning this program.

Determine district wide if Advanced Inquiry will be a required course. AP level English courses allow students to earn college credit while in high school, however most college policies only offer credit for a score of 3 or higher (Duffy, 2010; Farkas & Duffett, 2009). The district created the Advanced Inquiry curriculum in order to prepare students for the rigor of the AP classroom. According to student survey results, students do not see value in the class or are under the assumption the class is required. In order to improve AP English test scores, the district needs to determine if this class will be required of future AP level students.

Continue to promote CCP classes. Dual enrollment classes continue to offer gifted secondary students, opportunities to experience college life, explore individual

interests, and engage in academic challenges beyond the scope of high school (Dare & Nowicki, 2015). As revealed in this study, after accelerated English students completed graduation requirements, they continued to accelerate through not only AP classes but also through dual enrollment opportunities. Data revealed accelerated students completed 632 dual enrollment classes. These classes are guaranteed college credit, saving students both time and money at the postsecondary level. In order to continue to offer accelerated coursework to gifted students, the district needs to continue its partnership in the CCP program.

Promote impact of English I acceleration. Academic acceleration is considered to be appropriate educational planning for academically gifted students as it matches the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student (Colangelo et al., 2004). English I acceleration was implemented in the eighth-grade classroom during the 2013-2014 school year in the district where the study occurred, and no studies were previously conducted to determine the effectiveness of the program. Without current research and findings, many parents struggle with scheduling acceleration for their academically gifted child, as many argue acceleration harms a child's social development; however, evidence suggests social impacts are positive for many forms of acceleration (Rogers, 2007). The findings of the study, including improved test scores, support this research. The district should use the findings of the study to provide further support for parents as they make educational choices for their gifted learners.

Final Conclusions

After careful analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results of this study, it

can be concluded that the implementation of the English I acceleration program has had positive effects on both student achievement and student scheduling. Acceleration, including subject-based advancement, is currently being used at all levels of K-12 education with research supporting a student's emotional and social health as being intertwined with their cognitive needs (Rambo & McCoach, 2012). The use of acceleration as a means to meet the needs of academically gifted students is a practice more school districts are following to ensure gifted learners become capable, valuable, effective, and successful contributors to our global society (North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards, 2018). This study supports the use of academic acceleration in order to meet the needs of the academically gifted learner.

Academic acceleration provides differentiated educational experiences for the academically gifted learner. Research studies suggest a school's greatest failures occurs when it does not provide for differences among students (Lubinski, 2016). As Tsai (2007) stated,

The curriculum should be flexible to cope with [gifted learners'] special needs. Since they can learn faster, deeper and broader, and since they come to classes with readiness, with starting points different from their classmates, they should be allowed to move forward with a faster pace. (p. 89)

In a time when public schools are being targeted for mediocrity, it is imperative to meet the needs of all students. Academically gifted students require differentiation and alternative learning environments in order to meet the complex cognitive and social needs of the total learner. As supported by this study, academic acceleration can be an effective differentiation strategy to meet the needs of the gifted learner.

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Appendix A
Student Survey

English I Acceleration Survey for Student Participants

My name is Camey Whitt, and I am a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University conducting research on the acceleration of English I at the middle school. I am asking current seniors within the district who participated in the accelerated English I program to complete a survey in order to gain an understanding of student motivation for participation in the program and their choices for future high school English courses. Thank you for participating in this survey. I appreciate your honesty and willingness to assist in this research.

Participation in English classes in high school after completing English I in the eighth grade:

1. Taking English during all four years of high school is important.
 - Disagree Strongly
 - Disagree
 - Agree
 - Agree Strongly
2. Please choose which track identifies your English coursework while in high school:
 - I took English classes in grades 9-12
 - I took English classes in grades 9-11

Participation in AP English classes offered by the district after completing English I in eighth grade:

3. Taking Advanced Placement (AP) English is important to me as an AIG student.
 - Disagree Strongly
 - Disagree
 - Agree
 - Agree Strongly
4. Which English AP classes did you participate in while in high school? Check all that apply.
 - AP Language (English III)
 - AP Literature (English IV)
 - None
5. What factor influenced you most when deciding to take AP English?
 - Guidance counselor recommendation
 - Teacher recommendation
 - Family influence/expectation
 - Peer influence
 - Individual desire to excel in English
 - Quality points applied to GPA

- Other: _____
- I did not take AP English

6. If you only took one AP English class, please explain what influenced this decision.

7. If you did not take AP English, please explain what influenced this decision.

Participation in IB program offered by the district after completing English I in eighth grade:

8. I attended a meeting about participating in the district's IB program.

- Yes
- No

9. What factor influenced you most when deciding to participate in the IB program?

- Guidance counselor recommendation
- Teacher recommendation
- Family influence/expectation
- Peer influence
- Individual desire to excel in academics
- Information gained from the IB meeting
- Other: _____
- I did not participate in the IB program

10. If you did not participate in the IB program, please explain what influenced this decision.

Participation in the Advanced Inquiry class offered by the district after completing English I in eighth grade:

11. I took the Advanced Inquiry English elective.
 - Yes
 - No

12. What factor influenced you most when deciding to take the Advanced Inquiry English elective?
 - Guidance counselor recommendation
 - Teacher recommendation
 - Family influence/expectation
 - Individual desire to excel in English
 - Peer influence
 - Other: _____
 - I did not take Advanced Inquiry

13. If you did not take the Advanced Inquiry English elective, please explain what influenced this decision.

Participation in Career and College Promise (CCP) English classes offered by the district due to schedule openings from completing English graduation requirements early:

14. I took the following college level English elective(s) through the Career and College Promise (CCP) program after completing English graduation requirements:
 - ENG 111 - Writing and Inquiry
 - ENG 112 - Writing/Research in the Disciplines
 - Other
 - I did not take a CCP English elective

15. What factor influenced you most when deciding to take an English class offered through the CCP program?
 - Guidance counselor recommendation
 - Teacher recommendation
 - Family influence/expectation
 - Individual desire to excel in English

- Possibility of earning college credit early
- Peer influence
- Other:_____
- I did not take a CCP English class

16. If you did not take a CCP English elective, please explain what influenced this decision.

Participation in other accelerated classes offered by the district due to schedule openings from completing English I in eighth grade:

17. I did not take an English class my senior year and chose to take alternate accelerated coursework during my senior year. I took the following AP classes (not English) at my high school after completing English requirements:

18. I took the following college level elective(s) (not English) through the Career and College Promise (CCP) program during my senior year after completing English graduation requirements:

- I did not take a CCP elective

19. What factor influenced you most when deciding to take other accelerated elective classes and/or classes offered through the CCP program at your high school?

- Guidance counselor recommendation
- Teacher recommendation
- Family influence/expectation
- Individual desire to excel

- Possibility of earning college credit early
- Peer influence
- Other_____
- I did not take a CCP elective class

Participation in the Flex program offered by the district after completing English I in eighth grade:

20. I scheduled Flex time in my schedule after completing English graduation requirements grade

- Yes
- No

21. What factor influenced you most when deciding to Flex?

- Guidance counselor recommendation
- Teacher recommendation
- Family influence/expectation
- Peer influence
- Other:_____

22. If you decided to participate in the Flex schedule, how did you use the time made available?

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Thank you again for participating in the student survey.

Appendix B

ACT Writing Conversion Table

1-36 score	Concorded 2-12 score
1	2
2	2
3	2
4	3
5	3
6	3
7	3
8	4
9	4
10	4
11	5
12	5
13	5
14	6
15	6
16	6
17	6
18	7
19	7
20	7
21	8
22	8
23	8
24	8

25	9
26	9
27	9
28	10
29	10
30	10
31	11
32	11
33	11
34	12
35	12
36	12