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### Underachievement in Gifted High School Students: Examining School Administrator Perceptions

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Underachievement in Gifted High School Students: Examining School Administrator  
Perceptions

By  
Lamont Moore

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2018

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Lamont Moore 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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## Acknowledgements

*For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry (Habakkuk 2:3).*

I would first like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because I am nothing without Him. His grace has carried me to this point, and I know that it will continue to lead me to higher heights.

I would like to thank my maternal grandmother, the late Mary E. Moore. You believed in me before I knew to believe in myself. I love and miss you dearly.

To my mother, Sandra Doster (Greg), you are my rock from whom I have received love, support, and strength my entire life. Thank you for being a living epistle for me and sacrificing to make sure that I succeeded. I love you to life!

To my father, Michael McMoore (Cynthia), thank you for the love and support throughout the years.

To my in-laws, Lee Earnest (Francena) Brown, thank you for encouraging me to accomplish this goal. You are wonderful in-laws!

To my wife, Dr. Shemmicca Moore, thank you for being the wind beneath my wings and encouraging me to push through when things became difficult. I love you!

To my children, Lamiyah and Christopher Moore, I dedicate this work to you and pray that you go further than I could ever go! Above all, you should know that you can do anything you put your minds to. I love you both.

To all of my brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins who pushed and supported me during this process, thank you!

## **Abstract**

Underachievement in Gifted High School Students: Examining School Administrator Perceptions. Moore, Lamont, 2018: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Underachievement/Gifted Education/Student Achievement/Student Behavior

Throughout the history of gifted education, the underachievement of gifted students has been a conundrum for educators. In fact, underachievement in gifted students is defined in various ways by researchers. A wide range of contributing factors for gifted underachievement exists in previous studies. The perceptions held by students and educators regarding these factors have been studied by many researchers as an attempt to understand the nuances that exist within the concept of underachievement in gifted students.

This quantitative study examined the perceptions of school administrators concerning the factors that impact underachievement in gifted students. The study surveyed administrators from multiple school districts in South Carolina. The study sought to gather perceptual data related to how gifted students perceived themselves; how gifted students perceived peers, adults, and society felt about them; and how gifted students perceived instructional programs.

The data analysis revealed that the administrators felt that a lack of student motivation was the biggest factor contributing to the underachievement of gifted students. The research provided in previous studies supported administrator perceptions regarding the lack of student motivation. The research from previous studies also revealed that the quality of instructional programs and teacher skills were big factors contributing to the underachievement of gifted students.

This study did not reveal anything in the data that presents a negative effect on gifted education. It supports the body of research that indicates that the instructional programs for the gifted continue to improve over the years.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Academic underachievement is described as a discrepancy between potential (or ability) and performance (or achievement; Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995).

Underachievement in students identified as gifted and talented has been a pervasive and persistent issue across the nation. It is a recurring concern for students, parents, and educators in both K-12 education and higher education (Bethea, 2007). Although this is a very widespread occurrence, literature suggests that much of it appears to go undetected (Montgomery, 2009).

The Carnegie Corporation of New York (1996) produced a report that captured the essence of this underachievement phenomenon as it relates to gifted students in the United States. The report stated,

Make no mistake about it; underachievement is not a crisis of certain groups: it is not limited to the poor; it is not a problem afflicting other people's children.

Many middle and upper-income children are also falling behind intellectually.

Indeed, by the fourth grade, the performance of most children in the United States is below what it should be for the nation and is certainly below the achievement levels of children in competing countries. (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1996, p. 1)

Davis and Rimm (2004) indicated that studies on high school dropouts revealed that between 18% and 25% of the students who did not graduate were in the gifted range of abilities. In lieu of this statistic, it is surprising that there is no consensus in the field on the definition of underachievement (Seeley, 2004). Some experts claim that underachievement only exists when both the measure of performance on standardized achievement or intelligence tests and the evidence of performance on school tasks show a

considerable amount of discrepancy over time (Clark, 2002). Others believe that underachievement is not indicated through the monitoring of test scores and grades but observed through the patterned behaviors of a student (Dai, 2010). Educators do not fully understand why this exists in gifted students (Schultz, 2002). In fact, there is not a common list of characteristics for the underachieving gifted student upon which educators clearly agree.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Oakland and Rossen (2005), the rest of the world consistently outperforms our nation with regard to academic achievement. Our brightest learners continue to experience limited opportunities due to underachievement. The gifted high school learners who consistently underachieve contribute to this evolving concern (Gabelko & Sosniak, 2008). Struggling learners who have lower academic abilities consistently receive more financial resources than students of high abilities. Educators may need to adapt a program intended for all gifted students to meet the specific needs of gifted underachievers as these learners cannot be denied access to educational services that are the most accommodating to their abilities (Bethea, 2007).

In the 2003 report from Colangelo and Davis, it was revealed that 10-15% of high school dropouts tested in the gifted range. The report also revealed that only approximately 50% of high school underachievers completed 4 years of college. There is a clear misalignment between the low achievement of these gifted learners and the higher performance of their peers who were considered high achievers (not gifted) in high school. These underachievers also failed to attend the rigorous colleges that were attended by the gifted achievers (Colangelo & Davis, 2003).

According to Landis and Reschly (2013), dropouts among those identified as

gifted is a puzzling irony for educators. Because underachieving students are less likely to be recommended for service through gifted education programs than high-achieving students, it stands to reason that those who were identified as gifted and talented were learners who spent at least their early formal schooling years achieving at a high level (Landis & Reschly, 2013). Therefore, when students who are identified as gifted students drop out of high school, they crash from demonstrating greater performance than many of their peers to struggling to obtain minimal levels of education (Landis & Reschly, 2013). The estimated amounts of gifted dropouts vary by study and the definition of gifted status (Matthews, 2006); however, the percentage appears to increase as definitions become less rigid. Underachieving gifted students who drop out of high school experience many of the same negative life outcomes as other dropouts, including reduced earnings and increased need for government assistance (Shaw & Tallent-Runnels, 2007). The potential is diminished and essentially lost with these students; leaving very little to be contributed to society.

Gifted learners, essentially, are identified by the fact that they are learners who have high levels of intelligence and also perform at these high levels. Underachievement, on the other hand, is commonly associated with low performance or a failure to perform at all; thus, it appears at first glance that gifted underachievement is an oxymoron (Hoover-Schultz, 2005).

Gifted underachievement was labelled as a major reform issue in the early 1990s, and the federal government recognized this as a national need with the release of the federally commissioned report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (Renzulli, Reid, & Gubbins, 1992). This report urged schools across the nation to reform by doing two things: eliminating barriers that could prevent economically

disadvantaged and culturally and linguistically diverse students from participating in gifted and talented programs and developing strategies to serve students from underrepresented groups in gifted education programs (Renzulli et al., 1992). This signified the acknowledgement that underachievement was not just an educational enigma, it was a national problem (Hoover-Schultz, 2005).

Educators are not only charged with defining underachievement, they are also expected to identify the causes of it and implement strategies to prevent it. This is a challenge because underachievement within gifted learners is sometimes undetected and mistaken for some other issue. This can be further complicated as underachievers often mask the fact that they may be severely underachieving. As a result, gifted underachievement becomes linked with a multitude of hypotheses which include low motivation, delinquency, perfectionism, oversensitivity, and moral and ethical concerns (Englund, 2009).

According to a recent article, underachievement often begins in middle school for gifted learners (Ritchotte, Rubenstein, & Murry, 2015). Teachers of gifted middle school learners are often surprised to encounter those who were considered high academic achievers in elementary schools (Ritchotte et al., 2015). The middle school instructional program is cited as a possible culprit for the beginning of underachievement. Either the curriculum is not challenging enough and intensifies the boredom of gifted learners or the curriculum presents a new challenge for gifted students who failed to develop study habits that involve self-regulatory skills. The inability to successfully triumph when faced with a frustrating or difficult-to-solve challenge leaves students vulnerable to poor self-efficacy and, consequently, underachievement. Commonly, gifted students may begin to question whether they are still “gifted” once they enter middle school, which

may in turn produce loss of self-confidence (Ritchotte et al., 2015). This starts the pattern of underachievement that continues well into high school.

Seeley (2004) stated that schools underserve special populations of gifted students, which allows underachievement to go largely unnoticed. A change in conceptualization of underachievement allows us to look at this population as an at-risk group of learners (Seeley, 2004). It is important to note that the gifted are also within at-risk groups who are receiving attention in public education (Seeley, 2004). Most school reform efforts are focused on many of these at-risk groups, and the highly gifted students who underachieve should also be included in the concerns (Seeley, 2004).

What is not definite, in underachievement research, is a clear understanding of how a child's achievement or underachievement changes or remains constant over time (Matthews & McBee, 2007). Some researchers have concluded that, in general, gifted underachievement is reasonably steady over time once recognized (Matthews & McBee, 2007). Other researchers have studied individuals who have successfully reversed behaviors that are associated with underachievement; however, such reversals occur among an indefinite fraction of underachieving students (Matthews & McBee, 2007).

It is important to examine perceptions from school administrators and allow these perceptions to inform educational research and practice in the field (Gentry & Owen, 1999). Due to the increased accountability placed on school administrators, some researchers now say that school administrators are second only to teachers in their impact on student achievement (Hull, 2012). The relationship between school administrators and student outcomes has been examined in recent studies. These studies indicate that the job of school administrators has drastically changed to now focus on student achievement while retaining traditional administrative and building manager duties (Hull,

2012). Walters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) reported that highly effective school administrators can increase student scores up to 10 percentile points on standardized tests in just 1 year. Research that seeks to understand how underachievement is perceived among educational leaders is needed (Holman, 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of administrator perceptions of the factors that contribute to the underachievement of gifted learners. The guiding question for the study was, “What are the perceived factors related to the low performance at the high school level by underachieving gifted students?”

Many theories for the causes of underachievement in gifted students exist within the field of education. Many of these theories attribute underachievement to psychological and internal (personal) factors that are influenced heavily by family dynamics (Grobman, 2006). Interpersonal factors such as low self-esteem, lack of perseverance, lack of self-management skills that come, social stigmas, and many other factors have been noted as causes for underachievement (Hoover-Schultz, 2005).

Other theories attribute underachievement to external (school) factors that exist within the learning environment. These external or school factors include the existence of an anti-intellectual school atmosphere, inflexible graduation requirements, the absence of academic acceleration options, the lack of a continuum of services for gifted learners, and the failure of educators to keep gifted students engaged in the process of learning (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2008; Hoover-Schultz, 2005).

Davis and Rimm (2004) also stated that approximately 50% of educators are not formally trained or experienced in techniques for teaching the gifted child in their

classroom. Teachers can only identify gifted potential if they are not only aware of the characteristics of gifted children but trained in effective methods. When working with learners who are considered average or below average, teachers must constantly take advantage of opportunities to discover giftedness.

Low self-esteem is consistently found to be characteristic among underachieving gifted students. These students do not fully believe they are competent enough to accomplish what their family, teachers, or society has expected them to accomplish (Davis & Rimm, 2004). The pressures that come with the label of being gifted is stated to potentially be directly related to the manifestation of this low self-esteem in gifted underachievers (Davis & Rimm, 2004). There are also many other contributing factors to gifted underachievement that are related to the perception gifted students have of themselves, the perception they believe their peers have of them, and the perception they believe adults or society have of them.

Underachievement affects students of various ability ranges but is more prevalent and damaging in some groups than in others (Montgomery, 2009). Gifted students are at particular risk of underachievement and social-emotional difficulties due to the many characteristics involved with giftedness (Blass, 2014). Despite coming from a range of backgrounds and cultures including socioeconomic statuses, abilities, and talents, there are certain traits that gifted students have in common (Blass, 2014). Gifted students are known to be sensitive, perfectionists, and experience social isolation, which are all considered risk factors for poor social-emotional difficulties and underachievement (Blass, 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

The insight of high school leaders is critical in addressing the factors that

contribute to underachievement. A quantitative approach appropriately served the needs of this study. The surveying of a group of high school leaders outlined specifics related to their perceptions of gifted student underachievement. This study's purpose was to provide insight into school administrator perceptions of the factors that contribute to underachievement in gifted students. The work of this study was significant as there are far-reaching personal and political implications when gifted students fail to maximize their potential (Hoover-Schultz, 2005).

This study presented a unique angle to the issue of gifted underachievement by focusing on the perceptions held by the educational leaders. This is an area that is not prevalently found in the current research. Research reveals teacher perceptions, parent perceptions, and even student perceptions; however, the perceptions of those who lead schools with gifted underachievers is not well represented in the body of research. This study helped to provide more insight into why school administrators perceive gifted learners underachieve. The findings of this research should help educators differentiate instruction, assist students in achieving the potential their ability indicates, and prevent this cycle for future gifted underachievers.

The research presented not only provided more research on the phenomenon of the high school gifted underachiever but also highlighted the perspectives of the educational leaders who manage their schools. Educational leaders may use these findings to assist other educators in determining how to best identify issues of gifted student underachievers and how to best meet their needs within the classroom.

This research examined administrator perceptions of gifted student underachievement in order to inform those in the field of education as they work to meet the needs of these learners. The research related to the perceptions of students at the high

school level and why they are underachieving is not plentiful. In response, this study helped provide clarity as to why gifted students experience underachievement. The principles of quantitative methodology were utilized for this study.

According to Schultz (2002), gifted learners in general have distinct needs that should not be ignored by educators. Underachieving gifted students present a different dynamic to this issue and function as a viable topic of research as new insight could provide an opportunity to further prove that gifted learners are unique and need unique services. It is vital for educators to be aware of the fact school administrators have a valuable perspective about underachieving gifted learners. The data from this research may assist the field of education in the quest to find creative ways to design curriculum and instruction that respect the learning needs of this particular at-risk population (Hands, 2009). Educational leaders may utilize this research to lead staff members who are responsible for educating underachieving gifted learners which will enable them to reach their full potential.

### **Context of the Study**

Through the use of a quantitative approach, this study revealed the perceptions of high school administrators in school districts in South Carolina. School administrators were asked to share perspectives on the underachievement of high school gifted and talented students who have a mismatch between their course grades and their scores on standardized assessments.

This research targeted gifted high school students and the factors that are perceived to affect their underachievement. Colangelo and Davis (2003) revealed that 10-15% of high school dropouts tested in the gifted range. The report also revealed that only approximately 50% of high school underachievers completed 4 years of college.

There is a clear misalignment between the low achievement of these gifted learners and the higher performance of their peers who were considered high achievers (not gifted) in high school. These underachievers also failed to attend the rigorous colleges that were attended by the gifted achievers (Colangelo & Davis, 2003). When students who are identified as gifted drop out of high school, they crash from demonstrating greater performance than many of their peers to struggling to obtain minimal levels of education (Landis & Reschly, 2013). Underachieving gifted students who drop out of high school experience many of the same negative life outcomes as other dropouts, including reduced earnings and increased need for government assistance (Shaw & Tallent-Runnels, 2007). The potential is diminished and essentially lost with these students, leaving very little to be contributed to society.

### **Research Question**

The following research question was addressed in this study: What are school administrator perceptions of factors that contribute to underachievement in gifted students?

### **Background of the Study**

For several decades, questions regarding why students with superior abilities failed to achieve academically have been posed by educators. This has dated back as far as 1860 (Golberg, Passow, & Raph, 1966). Gifted underachievement within the United States and research regarding it have been traced back to before World War I. The expression “gifted” was not defined formally by the federal government until the 1970’s in the Marland Report; and correspondingly, the advocacy for gifted programs accelerated, especially in recent years (Hoover-Schultz, 2005). Advocates for gifted children depict them as learners who possess extraordinary abilities and needs that are

partially fulfilled in the traditional classroom (Davis & Rimm, 2004).

South Carolina State Law 59-29-170 states that gifted and talented students at the elementary and secondary levels must be provided programs during the regular school year or during summer school to develop their unique talents in the manner the State Board of Education must specify and to the extent state funds are provided (South Carolina General Assembly, 2014). South Carolina Board of Education Regulation 43-220 defines gifted and talented students as those who are identified in Grades 1-12 as demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas and therefore require educational programming beyond that normally provided by the general school programming in order to achieve their potential. South Carolina Board of Education Regulation 43-220 states that school districts must provide instructional services beyond the regular classroom setting to gifted and talented students who show high ability in three areas: intellectual, artistic, or a specific academic subject (South Carolina State Board of Education, 2013). Funding for gifted and talented programs has historically been an issue across the nation; and in many schools, resources have been drastically cut or eliminated altogether. In South Carolina, gifted and talented programs are funded at 50% of what is recommended in SC Law 59-29-170. It is arguable that gifted students have unique educational needs just as students who are served through special education programs.

### **Definition of Terms**

Vital terms that are used at length in this study are defined as follows.

**Achievement test.** An assessment that is used to indicate an academic talent within a learned content area. These are standardized tests that produce scores based on national norms (Davis & Rimm, 2004).

**Gifted underachiever.** A learner who possesses a discrepancy between expected and actual academic performance that is not the result of a diagnosed learning disability (Sousa, 2009). This could also be a learner who has shown or who has potential for exceptional performance but is falling short of fulfilling this potential as measured by school grades and an identified gifted student who receives a “C” or below (gifted is defined as above average, whereas “C” is defined as average in the sampled school district).

**Perception.** For the purpose of this study, this was defined as one’s own awareness of one’s understanding of a particular issue or concept.

**Underachievement.** Davis and Rimm (2004) defined underachievement as a discrepancy between the child’s school performance and some index of his or her actual ability such as intelligence, achievement, creativity scores, or observational data. The main index of ability is test scores.

**Gifted learner.** The 1993 federal definition states children and youth 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. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas; possess an unusual leadership capacity; or excel in specific academic fields. They require services of activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (Davis & Rimm, 2004).

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were present in this study.

1. The participants for this study represent the larger population of high school

administrators who lead schools with gifted students who underachieve.

2. The participants are honest in their responses throughout the study and understand the grounds of the questions.
3. Prior knowledge of the phenomenon of gifted underachievers by the researcher and the participants is excluded from the results.

### **Limitations**

This research study was devised to gather the perceptions of high school administrators of gifted underachieving learners and their explanations for why they are underachieving. The following limitations may have been present in this study.

1. The study population represents high schools without an identified talented and gifted program.
2. Included within the study is the bias of the researcher and the participants.
3. The participants represent a small, unscientific sampling of the high school administrators for this gifted population.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study reflected the identification of themes from the experiences of secondary school administrators and their perceptions of why gifted learners were underachieving in classrooms. Participants were given a survey that allowed for quantitative information to be provided. High school administrators were selected based on the district roster and the administrators' work with advanced academic or gifted education programs within the school. District-level permission was obtained using an approved Internal Review Board (IRB) process prior to initiating the study.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

The underachievement of gifted learners is a phenomenon that impacts the

multiple facets of the field of education. The research of this study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the introduction of the problem, background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, rationale, research questions, significance of the study, definition of the terms, assumptions, limitations, nature of the study, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 details a literature review of previous studies, pertinent historical background, and the defining of underachievement. Chapter 3 includes an introduction to the methodology, research design, population and sampling procedure, sources of data, validity and reliability, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The results of the study are located in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research findings, related conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Helping learners achieve their maximum academic potential is an increasingly challenging task for public schools (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Gifted learners present a unique perspective to this challenge because, for many public schools, explaining this enigma can create controversy (Reis & McCoach, 2000). High school gifted underachievers, who for the purposes of this study are defined as learners who are enrolled in Grades 9-12 and have been identified as gifted and talented, are particularly puzzling to educators.

In this chapter, literature related to (a) the history of gifted education, (b) defining gifted underachievement, (c) factors contributing to underachievement, and (d) recent studies on underachievement will be examined to connect the purpose of this study and its design. This chapter also includes suggestions, found through this research, which schools might use to be more successful in addressing underachievement in gifted learners. The information contained in this chapter is essential to educators in South Carolina because the global purpose of education is to ensure the success of all learners, one of the national priority goals is to improve learning by ensuring that more students have effective teachers and leaders, and because South Carolina has established several closing-the-gap initiatives.

### **The History of Gifted Education in the United States**

Recognition of the need to educate intellectually advanced students dates back to 380 B.C. when the philosopher Plato created a free academy for boys and girls that was based on intelligence and physical ability (Housand, 2014). This academy continued until 529 A.D. when Emperor Justinian closed it. Education for the gifted remained dormant throughout the Dark Ages (500-1000 A.D.), throughout the Renaissance (1200-

1500 A.D.), and through the 16th century. In 1868, a school to educate the gifted was founded in St. Louis, Illinois by the superintendent of public school William Torrey Harris. This marked the nation's earliest initiative to educate gifted students in public schools (Housand, 2014).

At the turn of the century, which was only 33 years later, evidence of our nation's desire to implement a separate instructional program for gifted students emerged. In 1901, the first special school for gifted children was opened in Worster, Massachusetts. Four years later, French researchers Binet and Simon developed a series of tests to identify children functioning at various intelligence levels. These tests were designed with the purpose of measuring mental age (Regional Office of Education, 2014). Initially, these tests were used to separate children with lower intelligence and place them into special classes (Housand, 2014). It was not until 1920 that the term "gifted" was first used by Lewis Terman. Terman was also credited for developing the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale which revolutionized the field of education (Regional Office of Education, 2014).

By the mid-1900s, there was quite a buzz in the field of gifted education; however, in 1941, only 2-4% of the nation's schools were determined to have services for the gifted and talented. This was determined by a study conducted by Paul Witty (Regional Office of Education, 2014). A year later, Leta Stetter Hollingworth opened a school for gifted learners and published the very first textbook on gifted education (Regional Office of Education, 2014).

In 1954, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) was founded and the "Gifted Child Quarterly" was first published (Regional Office of Education, 2014). NAGC was established as an organization that supported and developed policies and

practices that encouraged and responded to diverse expressions of gifts and talents in children and youth from all cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. The organization engaged in research, development, professional learning, advocacy, communication, and collaboration with other organizations and agencies that worked to improve the quality of education for all students (NAGC, 2015). NAGC's (2015) overall goal was to make gifted learners a national priority by investing resources to train teachers, encourage parents, and educate administrators and policymakers on how to develop and support gifted children.

This overall goal of NAGC (2015) was drilled down to be expressed in four strategic goals to drive the work of the national organization. The first strategic goal was related to leadership. NAGC worked to be established as the leader in establishing that schools be the place where children with great promise, regardless of background, were guaranteed to have the resources and variety of educational settings that they needed to achieve at the highest levels (NAGC, 2015). This goal was actualized in the hosting of the annual NAGC national conference (NAGC, 2015). The conference functioned as a summit to convene well-known thinkers from a variety of domains and disciplines with leaders who were interested in defining the connection between giftedness and the national interest (NAGC, 2015). The second strategic goal of NAGC was to influence change through the anticipation of trends, the identification of partners, and development of synergetic relationships that nurture high-potential youth. The third goal of NAGC was to develop the expertise inside and outside the field of gifted education to ensure that parents and all professionals have the knowledge and skills to support high-potential youth. Much of this work was accomplished through the creation of the NAGC standards and their "Gifted Child Quarterly" publication (NAGC, 2015). The final strategic goal of

this organization was to augment and align financial, human, and product resources so the organization would be effective in responding to opportunities for innovation and member needs (NAGC, 2015). This was accomplished by establishing national committees, networks, and task forces that engaged the nation in the work of the organization (NAGC, 2015).

Finally, in 1958, the federal government took note and passed the National Defense Education Act. This effort focused on collegiate studies and also provided funding to state educational agencies to improve instruction in science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages (Kosar, 2011). This was considered the first large scale effort affecting the field of gifted education to be issued by the federal government (Housand, 2014).

Shortly after this major effort in gifted education through the improvement of science and mathematics instruction, the nation became the leader in the space race and the interest in gifted and talented declined (Regional Office of Education, 2014). This decline continued until 1972 with the publishing of the Marland Report. The Marland Report was the first national report on gifted education and is most notably known for its definition of giftedness (McClellan, 1985). Two years after the release of the Marland Report, the U.S. Office of Education gave the Office of Gifted and Talented an official status (NACG, 2014).

In 1983, America's brightest students and their failure to compete with their international counterparts were highlighted in *A Nation at Risk*. This report outlined many indicators of the risk that our country was not providing all citizens with the opportunity to develop their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). One of the indicators highlighted

underachievement in gifted students when it stated that over half of the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). This report went on to outline appropriate policies, practices, and curriculum for gifted education.

Only 5 years later, Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (Javits). The Javits Act was passed to support the development of talent in U.S. schools (NAGC, 2015). This was the only federal program dedicated specifically to gifted and talented students (NAGC, 2015). This act however was not designed to fund local gifted education programs. Its purpose was to support scientifically based research, demonstration projects, innovative strategies, and similar activities to both build and enhance schools to meet the needs of gifted learners (NAGC, 2015). The Javits Act focused resources on identifying and serving traditionally underrepresented groups in gifted and talented programs. This was particularly to include economically disadvantaged, limited-English proficient, and disabled students. The goals were to help reduce achievement gaps and encourage the establishment of equal opportunities for all students (NAGC, 2015). The Javits Act funded demonstration grants as well as a National Research and Development Center which ensures that research in this field continued to inform educational practice (NAGC, 2015). This research included exploratory study, impact evaluations, and leadership and outreach activities (NAGC, 2015). This was all a part of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The year 1990 brought about the establishment of several National Research Centers on the Gifted and Talented through the funding of the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act. Centers were housed at Yale University, the

University of Georgia, the University of Connecticut, and the University of Virginia. These centers were created to sustain research on gifted students. Three years later, the U.S. Department of Education outlined the neglect of America's most talented youth in a report entitled *National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent*. This report also provided several recommendations that went on to influence research in gifted education (NAGC, 2015).

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, which was included in NCLB, was broadened to include state grants. This also introduced a revised definition of gifted and talented students. These students were defined as students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity or in specific academic fields and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (NAGC, 2015).

In 2004, a national report entitled *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* was published by the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa. This report outlined research-based strategies for advanced learners.

Only 2 years later, NAGC published the National Gifted Education Standards. These standards were intended for teacher preparation programs and to provide general knowledge and skill standards in gifted education for all teachers. Teacher standards are necessary to ensure that the top learners are adequately identified and nurtured in the context of school settings (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Previously, the field of gifted education utilized standards that were created in 1985 by the Council for Exceptional Children, The Association for the Gifted (TAG) Division (CEC-TAG)

(VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007).

Six major differences existed between the older standards from 1985 and the ones introduced in 2006 (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). One difference was that the newer standards emphasized state-of-the-art, research-based best practice in the field of gifted education (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The newer standards reflected the evolution of the field since the initial adoption of the original standards. Another difference was the fact that the newer standards were developed through a consensus over time (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). While the older standards were developed primarily by one national organization, the newer standards incorporated the efforts of a joint task force that included various stakeholders and experts from the field of gifted education (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Because the older standards were not developed in this manner and adhered very closely to the language and spirit of the field of special education in terms of instruction and assessment, they were criticized by university educators as not being reflective of the field of gifted education (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The joint task force approach that the new standards utilized allowed for an alignment between the content emphases of the standards and the desired practice (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). A third difference between the old standards from 1985 and the new standards was the fact that the new standards reflected a much stronger emphasis on diversity (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Diversities in culture, intellect, linguistics, sexual orientation, and disability were all strategically integrated into the language of the indicators as well as the standards themselves. Issues such as cultural stereotyping, tolerance for differentness, and the celebration of multiculturalism proved to be important parts of the new standards. Because of the underrepresentation of specific groups receiving educational services for the gifted and

talented, the task force was mindful to make sure that the new standards stressed diversity (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Approximately 40% of the new standards explicitly addressed diversity (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The fourth difference between the old and new standards was that the new standards reflect a stronger emphasis on the practice of appropriate differentiation. Depth and breadth were added to the indicators that related to instructional planning and strategies with more tailored emphases (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). A fifth difference was that the new standards were written to highlight cognitive science research and findings from other related domains of learning beyond the gifted community (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Research on learning strategies that emphasized higher order thinking, concept mapping, metacognition, and problem-solving became the foundation of the newer standards (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). Although many of these elements were included in the older standards, they were addressed to the same degree as the newer standards. The final difference between the new standards and the old standards was the fact that the new standards reflected the connections between gifted education, special education, and general education. This was done through the linkages to content expertise in instructional strategies, the educational reform agenda, and the use of technology (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007).

The introduction of these new standards represented a new era in consensus on what teachers must understand and be able to demonstrate competency for in gifted education (VanTassel-Baska & Johnsen, 2007). The standards influenced the initial and advanced preparation of educators of gifted students (Johnsen, 2012). According to Johnsen (2012), the use of professional standards has a positive effect on professional competence and the field of gifted education. She went on to state that the use of

standards legitimizes the field of gifted education; builds consensus; offers guidance for the development of programs at the university, state, and local levels; and evaluates and advocates for the field (Johnsen, 2012).

These standards were revised in 2013. Although the content of the standards and elements were not substantially changed, the original 10 standards were reduced to seven standards (Johnsen et al., 2015). The original 77 elements were reduced to only 28 and placed within the new seven standards (Johnsen et al., 2015). Redundancy was eliminated and closely related elements were combined. The elements were tweaked to focus on what educators needed to know rather than on student performance (Johnsen et al., 2015). Narratives that helped educators to understand the standards and elements were rewritten to elaborate more on the required foundational knowledge and skills. The research base for the 2006 standards was updated and expanded in the 2013 revision by incorporating the latest research regarding effective practices with students (Johnsen et al., 2015). This research included literature/theory-based, research-based, and practice-based research. A marked alignment to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards was evident in the revision when examining the language used to develop the titles of the revised standards (Johnsen et al., 2015). InTASC is a consortium of state educational agencies and national educational organizations dedicated to the reform of the preparation, licensing, and ongoing professional development of teachers (InTASC, 2013). The language for the titles of the revised standards came directly from the 2011 InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards (Johnsen et al., 2015). The sharing of this common language allowed educators to collaborate within and beyond the field of gifted education (Johnsen et al., 2015).

In 2014, funding for the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act

was reinstated after being halted in fiscal year 2011 (Samuels, 2014). Five million dollars were allocated to fund applied research initiatives in the field of gifted education. This was released in the same budget that provided an increase of \$497 million for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which brought its total funding to \$11.5 billion (Samuels, 2014). Also in 2014, approximately \$732 million was allocated for English Learner Education. In 2015, the U.S. Congress decided to double the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act funding to \$10 million to fund additional research initiatives, to continue the work of the National Center on Research on Gifted Education, and to make more grant funds available competitively to states and districts to support their work with underserved, high-ability students (NAGC, 2015). Eight states also received state grants to support schools and teachers in the identification of and provision of services to gifted and talented students (including economically disadvantage individuals, individuals with limited English proficiency, and individuals with disabilities) who may not be identified and served through traditional assessment methods (NAGC, 2015). Fiscal year 2016 funding for the Javits program continued in the same pattern as fiscal year 2015. For 2016, the Senate appropriations committee approved \$11 million for the Javits program, while the House eliminated the program (NAGC, 2015). The two chambers are presently working to reconcile differences between the funding levels for the support of gifted and talented students (NAGC, 2015).

### **Defining Gifted Underachievement**

Defining underachievement has not been an easy task to accomplish. Attempts dating as far back as 1980 reveal that there has been no universally agreed upon definition of underachievement (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Reis and McCoach (2000) reviewed 3 decades of research on the underachievement of gifted students. Their

research did not reveal one definition for gifted underachievement but did reveal three general themes that emerged from the operational and conceptual definitions of gifted underachievement.

The first theme portrayed underachievement as a discrepancy between potential (or ability) and performance (or achievement). Table 1 outlines key authors and their definitions that fall in this first theme. Key researchers related to this theme included Susan M. Baum, Joseph S. Renzulli, and Thomas Hébert. These researchers collaborated in a multiple case study that was described in the report entitled *The Prism Metaphor: A New Paradigm for Reversing Underachievement*. In this report, it was concluded that underachievement could be influenced by a variety of factors. Those factors included emotional issues, social and behavior problems, inappropriate curriculum, and learning deficits (Baum et al., 1995). Teacher behaviors were also stated to help reverse underachievement. Six specific behaviors that promoted student success were taking time to get to know the students, focusing on positive traits of the students, focusing energies on locating and providing resources for the students, understanding the individualized small group investigations of real problems, applying the role of teacher as researcher, and conveying a belief in student abilities (Baum et al., 1995).

Emerick concurred with this theme as he measured potential in gifted students through standardized achievement tests and scores on aptitude tests while identifying underachievement through the poor performance on classroom test scores, grades, and teacher observations. Whitmore examined the discrepancy between high aptitude test scores and low grades and/or achievement scores. Whitmore also looked at the discrepancy between high achievement test scores but low classroom grades and/or poor daily work (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Discrepancies that were found between any of

these elements indicated underachievement. Butler-Por also defined underachievement as a large discrepancy between school performance and potential (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

The second theme that emerged from this research is that underachievement is a discrepancy between predicted achievement and actual achievement. A smaller group of authors were noted as falling within this theme. This theme, as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, views underachievement as a regression equation involving human potential and performance (Reis & McCoach, 2000). These authors believed that when students (on measures of achievement) perform at levels below what one would expect based on measures of ability, the student is underachieving (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

One of the noted researchers from Table 3, Richard Redding, defined underachievement as the discrepancy between actual Grade Point Average (GPA) and predicted GPA (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Redding (1990) is documented as referring to this as a “performance discrepancy” in his study of 50 gifted underachieving students from the middle/upper middle class of a suburban junior high school. Redding predicted that student mean scores on an achievement subtest that required analytical processing would be lower than their mean scores on subtests that require a holistic information processing style. The results proved this to be significantly true (Redding, 1990). Redding concluded that underachievers perform at high levels on tasks that require synthesis and poorly on tasks that require detailed, computational or convergent problem-solving skills (Redding, 1990). He further asserted that the deficiency shown in analytical tasks does not appear to be due to cognitive inferiority in analytical or convergent problem-solving skills. He inferred that learning styles or specific skill deficits, rather than discrepant intellectual abilities, may determine the discrepancy in the

performance results (Redding, 1990).

The third theme expresses that a student's failure to develop or utilize latent potential is underachievement. This theme makes no reference to other external criteria (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Researchers who propose definitions related to this theme do not attempt to clearly define or assess potential. Underachievers in this theme are viewed as individuals who failed to self-actualize (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Table 4 outlines two researchers who define underachievement in this manner. One of them, Sylvia Rimm, also published an article entitled "An Underachievement Epidemic in 1997." In this article, Rimm asserted that research that defines underachievement in terms of a relationship between a student's achievement and IQ scores provides an inadequate explanation of underachievement (Rimm, 1997). Rimm stated that because of test problems related to cultural differences, a rigid definition that compares only test scores underrepresents the number of underachievers on a large scale (Rimm, 1997). She further suggested that when children underachieve over time, both IQ and achievement test scores may decline. Rimm's definition of underachievement describes it as a discrepancy between a child's school performance and some index of the child's ability. If the child is not working to their ability in school, they are underachieving (Rimm, 1997).

Table 1

*Definitions of Gifted Underachievement That Include a Discrepancy Between Potential and Performance*

Author	Date	Key Concept
Whitmore	1980	High aptitude scores but low grades and achievement test scores, or high achievement test scores but low grades due to poor daily work.
Butler-Por	1987	Large discrepancy between school performance and potential.
Emerick	1992	Evidence of giftedness included standardized achievement test scores, scores on tests of general aptitude, or other indicators of potential for well-above average academic performance. Evidence of underachievement included average or below average academic performance as assessed by test scores, grades, and teacher observations.
Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert	1995	High potential as evidenced by intelligence, achievement tests, or tests of specific aptitude, teacher observation, grades; underachievement as evidenced by discrepancy between performance and potential.

Table 2

*Definitions that Emphasize Specific IQ/Ability Test Scores as a Criterion for Identification as a Gifted Underachiever*

Author	Date	Key Concept
Gowan	1957	Giftedness as evidenced by an IQ of 130 or above. Diagnosis of underachievement occurs when a student falls in the middle third in scholastic achievement in grades, and severe underachievement occurs when a student falls in the lowest third in scholastic achievement.
Krouse & Krouse	1981	Underachievers—those individuals who consistently, over a number of years, perform at higher levels on instruments of academic aptitude or intelligence than they do in regular classroom situations.
Green, Fine, & Tollesfson	1988	Giftedness as evidenced by scores in the top 2% of the Tollesfson norm group on an intelligence test. Underachievement as evidenced by one of the following criteria: (a) earning a C or below in at least one major academic subject; (b) having at least a one-year difference between expected and actual performance on a standardized achievement test; or (c) failing to complete work or submitting incomplete work at least 25% of the time as indicated by teacher records.
Supplee	1990	High academic ability as assessed through an IQ score or through achievement test scores at the eighth or ninth stanine. Low achievement as evidenced by achievement test scores that were at least two stanines lower than the IQ score, or by teacher ratings, or by school grades showing marked discrepancy from expected achievement based on IQ or achievement tests.
Colangelo	1993	Giftedness as evidenced by scores at the 95 <sup>th</sup> percentile or above on the ACT; underachievement as evidenced by GPA of 2.25 or below in high school coursework.

Table 3

*Definitions of Gifted Underachievement That Stress Predicted Achievement vs. Actual Achievement*

Author	Date	Key Concept
Thorndike	1963	Underachievement refers to the fact that a group of pupils all of the same age, the same IQ, the same type of home background will still vary in the scores they receive in school.
Redding	1990	Underachievement—the discrepancy between actual GPA and predicted GPA, based upon a regression procedure used to predict GPA based upon full-scale WiSC-R IQ scores.
Gallagher	1991	If the actual achievement scores fall some distance lower than what was predicted the student can be labeled underachiever.
Lupart & Pyryt	1996	1. Determine the correlation between IQ and achievement. 2. Estimate the expected IQ in relation to achievement for each student using the standard error of estimate. 3. Individuals with a discrepancy beyond one standard error of estimate were targeted as possible underachievers.

Table 4

*Definitions of Gifted Underachievement That Stress Development of Potential*

Author	Date	Key Concept
Richert	1991	1. Achievement among gifted students—developing four aspects of giftedness: Ability, Creativity, Productivity Performance, Motivation-Emotions-Values.
Rimm	1997	If students are not working to their ability in school, they are underachieving.

Defining underachievement has been difficult for researchers to agree upon because of the misalignment of several practices and philosophies within the field of gifted education. One of these practices is the identification of gifted students. This practice can vary from state to state and from school district to school district (Reis & McCoach, 2000). It becomes difficult to clearly define underachievement if there are

varying philosophies related to the identification of gifted students and the philosophies are not comparable.

### **Factors Contributing to Underachievement**

Because underachievement is such a conundrum for theorists and practitioners in gifted education, it is important to examine what research reports to be contributing factors of underachievement. After examining research, factors contributing to underachievement could be organized into three perceptual themes: factors related to the perception gifted students had of themselves, factors related to the perception gifted students believed their peers had of them, and factors related to the perception gifted students believed adults or society had of them.

### **Gifted Student Perceptions of Themselves**

Psychiatrist Jerald Grobman conducted a study on a group of exceptionally gifted adolescents between the ages of 14 and 25. These students were referred to Dr. Grobman for exhibiting behaviors related to self-destructive behavior, anxiety, depression, and underachievement. They were treated by Dr. Grobman over the course of a number of years (Grobman, 2006). Dr. Grobman's study of these individuals revealed six emotional factors that contributed to the adolescents' underachievement. Three of the emotional factors related to the individuals' perceptions of themselves.

The first factor Grobman (2006) reported was that these individuals possessed feelings of being controlled rather than being in control. Many of them had an internal drive that pushed them to explore their curiosities and to challenge common understandings. Although at times many of them found that it was exhilarating to give into this internal drive, at other times they felt that it was imprisoning. These adolescents felt that they were being ruled by forces beyond their control (Grobman, 2006).

Another factor from Grobman's (2006) study pointed to these individuals viewing themselves as a failure. They were described as often having struggles with their own internal criticisms of themselves (Grobman, 2006). They often experienced multiple frustrations with their attempts to perfectly reproduce what was in their mind's eye (Grobman, 2006). As opposed to facing their limitations, these individuals would often give up or withdraw into their own private world where there were no efforts or failures (Grobman, 2006).

A third factor mentioned in the study referenced their irrational fears of defectiveness or disability. In addition to feeling like failures, they worried that aspects of their giftedness were flawed (Grobman, 2006). Even when no one else agreed with their worries or perceptions of themselves, these individuals held on to their anxieties irrationally.

Galbraith and Delisle (2015) stated that underachievement ultimately tied to the development of a child's self-image. They asserted that when children learned to see themselves in terms of failures, it eventually caused them to place self-imposed limits on what is possible (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). Academic successes are written off as lucky accidents, while low grades and achievement reinforce negative perceptions that they have of themselves. This results in internal and/or external comments about themselves such as "Why should I even try," or "Nothing I ever do is good enough, so why bother?" The end result is a low self-image which causes the students to see themselves as academically weak, and the underachieving cycle continues (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015).

Bourgeois (2011) conducted a qualitative study that examined the underachievement of high school gifted students in upstate South Carolina. The purpose

of the study was to identify influences that caused the students to underperform in comparison to their academic abilities (Bourgeois, 2011). Students who were classified as gifted but failed to perform up to their identified academic abilities met the criteria for underachievement as established by this study (Bourgeois, 2011). Bourgeois interviewed counselor-selected students from five school districts across South Carolina's upstate region who were identified as underachieving.

Bourgeois (2011) used a semi-structured interview method that allowed her to ask 10 open-ended questions to collect data based on participant views and experiences. The interviews were taped and interpreted to assist Bourgeois in identifying common themes (Bourgeois, 2011). A lack of self-motivation was determined to be the key factor that contributed to underachievement among gifted students in this study (Bourgeois, 2011). The failure to present challenging curriculum and a lack of training by teachers in educating gifted students are factors that were noted as aiding in a lack of inner motivation among the students (Bourgeois, 2011).

Rand (2005) conducted a case study of five students to examine factors that were perceived to be contributors to student underachievement in a charter school for gifted students. The students in the study were classified as underachieving by their school counselor because they fit into the following criteria:

The student must have received a final grade of C or lower for the 2002-03 school year at the high school at which the study was conducted, in at least two core classes (English, social studies, math, science, and/or foreign language). (Rand, 2005, p. 21)

One of the major focuses of this study was to gauge student perceptions on what it was like to be an underachiever in a high school for the gifted (Rand, 2005). Rand

(2005) conducted two audiotaped student interviews per student, one at the beginning of the school term followed by one during the middle of the year; at least one classroom observation on each student; and an audiotaped interview with the students' teachers and one with the school counselor to collect data for the study. Based on the findings from Rand, the students in her study reported that they were not prepared in the earlier years for the academic rigor of a gifted high school; and others reported that they were not concerned about being viewed as underachieving because grades were not an indication of learning. The teachers and counselors stressed that not every student was gifted in every academic area, but some students were able to perform well even in the areas that they were not identified as gifted through hard-work and dedication (Rand, 2005).

Fisher (2003) conducted a comparative study to compare the differences in self-concept, academic behavior, and self-reported personal experience between a group of Black high-achieving and underachieving students. The study was designed to understand factors that contribute to the successfulness or the underachievement of African heritage students who were judged by their teachers to have high ability for academic success (Fisher, 2003). The study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Fourteen males and females from one central Massachusetts high school were used for this study. The significant findings included that there were differences in ethnic and linguistic background, participation in extracurricular activities, parental attitudes toward school, student attitudes toward school, and differences in the formation of goals between the high-achieving students and the underachieving students (Fisher, 2003). The conclusion made by this study was that the high achievers of African descent were motivated and invested in their education as a result of various factors including family influences, self-determination, and participation in organized extracurricular

activities (Fisher, 2003). It was also concluded that underachievers in this study were unable to achieve their full potential because of factors such as family influences, previous academic experiences, lack of self-motivation, and peer influences (Fisher, 2003).

### **Gifted Student Beliefs Regarding Peer Perceptions**

A fourth factor of underachievement from Grobman's (2006) study was attributed to the adolescents' periodic feelings of strangeness and isolation. Grobman discovered that these adolescents' quirky senses of humor, off-beat nature, and unique ways of perceiving the world often left them feeling socially isolated from their peers and from others in general. For many of them, it was even challenging to gain connections with their very smart peers. This feeling that they were strange, coupled with the feeling of loneliness or isolation, caused them to perceive their naturally advanced abilities as bizarre (Grobman, 2006).

The fifth factor was described as guilt. Effortless success seemed to create a sense of guilt as opposed to pride. To many of them, it seemed unfair to possess very advanced abilities when compared to their siblings, peers, parents, and even teachers (Grobman, 2006).

The sixth and final factor of underachievement from Grobman's (2006) study highlighted these adolescents' fears of envy and retaliation. These exceptionally gifted individuals complained about being placed on a pedestal above their peers and siblings (Grobman, 2006). They often worried that underneath the admiration of their peers were feelings of malicious envy towards them (Grobman, 2006). Many times, this would develop into paranoia within these individuals and feelings that others were automatically hurt and diminished by their giftedness.

Reis, Hébert, Díaz, Maxfield, and Ratley (1995) conducted a study on high-ability students who were identified as high achievers who underachieved in high school. Qualitative methods were used to examine the perceptions of students, teachers, staff, and administrators about the reasons why some academically talented students failed to achieve in high school while others who came from similar types of homes and families achieved at high levels (Reis et al., 1995). A conclusion of the study was that achievement and underachievement were not disparate concepts. The students in the study experienced both periods of achievement and underachievement throughout their school careers (Reis et al., 1995). High-ability students who achieved acknowledged the importance of peers in supporting and challenging them to succeed and the positive effects of being cluster grouped with other students of similar abilities (Reis et al., 1995). Rimm (1997) stated peer relationships create pressures that cause students to underachieve.

Gentry and Owen (1999) conducted a study that investigated the effects of total school flexible cluster grouping on gifted and talented identification, achievement, and classroom practices. The study was a longitudinal, causal comparative investigation of the implementation of an elementary total school cluster grouping program. The study examined the application of the program over time with two entire graduation classes of students (Gentry & Owen, 1999). Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed. The treatment sample included all students from two graduation classes (Class of 2000 and 2001) who attended the elementary school where the clustering program was implemented. The comparison sample was selected based on its demographic similarity to the treatment school and because the students were not involved in the cluster grouping program (Gentry & Owen, 1999). For both datasets

(Class of 2000 and 2001) of the treatment group, more students were identified as high achieving each successive year, while fewer students were identified as low achieving. Ninety-three percent of the teachers surveyed and all administrators surveyed believed that the increase in the number of students identified at higher levels was directly related to the cluster grouping practices used in the treatment school (Gentry & Owen, 1999). The teachers in the study believed that removing the highest achievers from four of the five classrooms gave other students the opportunity to grow and achieve at higher levels than they might have if the highest achieving students had remained in the classroom (Gentry & Owen, 1999).

### **Gifted Student Beliefs Regarding Adult and Societal Perceptions**

Rimm (1997) reported that underachievement is usually a combination of home and school causes especially for first and only children, children in single-parent households, or children of difficult divorces. Rimm went on to state that gifted children are at risk of being given too much power too soon and may also experience early health problems which also act as a risk factor.

Rimm (1997) asserted that although children may say they are bored in school, the term “boring” could mask feelings of inadequacy. Classrooms that are over competitive, under competitive, challenging, or lacking challenge could also cause students to underachieve (Rimm, 1997). Rimm believed that contradictory messages by adults are major sources of underachievement in students. Extreme praise by parents or teachers causes students to believe that adults expect more of them than they can produce (Rimm, 1997). Informal labeling of students within the family such as “the smart one,” “the jock,” “the social one,” or “the creative one,” also causes underachievement.

Galbraith and Delisle (2015) stated that underachievement is a problem for

children because it is recognized as such by adults. The authors emphasize that underachievement is a learned set of behaviors by gifted students for whom “school” and “education” exist in separate spheres. The 1972 Commissioner’s report known as the Marlan Report was cited to support this concept with its quote, “The boredom that results from discrepancies between the child’s knowledge and the school’s offerings leads to underachievement and behavioral disorders affecting self and others” (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015, p. 164).

Galbraith and Delisle (2015) asserted that these children learn to assess their abilities relative to what they have not accomplished instead of what they are capable of doing, and the disapproval felt when things do not go well overrides the occasional success which the child notes as an exception and nothing more. They further referenced the 2004 report entitled *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students* by agreeing with the authors of the report that declare that America’s schools infrequently use acceleration practices that allow gifted students to take classes ahead of their age group (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). Galbraith and Delisle believed that instead of saying yes to giving bright kids complex math problems, yes to letting them learn a new language, and yes to letting them take classes ahead of their age group, adults say no and undermine the motivation of the bright students.

Other factors that are believed to affect underachievement are the content area and instructional situations (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). Galbraith and Delisle stated that children who do not succeed in school are often successful in outside activities such as sports, social events, and hobbies. Children who perform poorly in most school subjects often display talents in at least one school subject (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). When adults label students as underachievers without specifying the specific areas of

underachieving behaviors, it disregards anything positive that the child displays in other areas (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015).

The study by Reis et al. (1995), similar to Bourgeois's (2011) study, concluded that student underachievement was caused when adults did not provide students with the appropriate levels of challenge in school. Other findings included the following: no relationship between poverty and underachievement, between parental divorce and underachievement, or between family size and underachievement (Reis et al., 1995). The study did conclude that students who underachieved in school did not exhibit the same belief in self (as those who achieved in school), they often came from families in which problems were evident and were not resilient enough to overcome urban environmental factors such as gangs and drugs (Reis et al., 1995).

A study was conducted by Bethea (2007) who examined perceived elements that contribute to the underachievement of fourth and fifth grade gifted students in a rural South Carolina school district. Bethea used both quantitative and qualitative methods in the form of a survey and five open-ended questions to collect data. Palmetto Achievement Test (PACT) scores and classroom grades were analyzed for students assigned to the gifted program (Bethea, 2007). The school counselors and gifted teachers administered the survey and open-ended questions to the students, and Bethea analyzed the data for themes and trends (Bethea, 2007).

Four trends were utilized in this study to analyze the data: (a) interest, (b) challenge, (c) choice, and (d) enjoyment (Bethea, 2007). Students indicated that they are motivated while undertaking a challenging task, when there is a level of choice in the assignments, and when the assignments are enjoyable (Bethea, 2007). Bethea (2007) recommended academic counseling in the form of tutoring and strategies to improve

study and test-taking skills, trained qualified teachers being placed in gifted classrooms, and a continuum of curriculum delivery options to meet the needs of the gifted learner.

O'Connell (2013) conducted a qualitative study to gather the perceptions of suburban gifted high school students as to why they performed exceptionally high on standardized tests but earned low classroom grades. The participants used in this study were labeled as underachieving gifted students because of the discrepancy between their classroom grades and their standardized test scores (O'Connell, 2013). The study utilized a "basic qualitative" design to describe the idea of what it means to be an underachieving gifted student (O'Connell, 2013, p. 52). The researcher conducted interviews with nine twelfth-grade students. O'Connell found that the common themes in his study were that (a) the students wanted a variety in the teaching styles among the teachers, the students viewed lectures as the least effective in meeting their academic needs; (b) the students consistently stated the homework grade was a major reason for their poor classroom scores, and the homework assignments were not correlated to what they were learning in class; (c) the study's participants cited concerns with the teaching methods and learning methods used within the classroom; and (d) the students felt like the assignments lacked meaning.

### **Factors of Underachievement Related to Schools and Instructional Programs**

School factors also influence the achievement of gifted students. Ford (1997) reported that minority underachieving gifted students reported to have less positive teacher-student relations, little time to understand instructional material, less supportive classroom climates, and less motivation and interest in school. Gifted minority students who underachieve also stated their concerns regarding the lack of attention to multicultural education in their classes which contributed to their lack of interest in

school (Ford, 1997).

Lack of substantive training in gifted education has also been cited in research as a factor that contributes to underachievement. According to the 2014-2015 State of the States in Gifted Education report, 19 of 29 responding states (66%) reported that professionals in gifted and talented programs were required to have gifted education credentials. Of the 40 states reporting, only 10 required local school districts to have a gifted and talented district administrator, none were required to be full time, and only one required the administrator to have gifted and talented training (NAGC, 2015). Thirty-nine states required general education teachers to receive professional development on gifted students after initial certification with only five states requiring it through policy (without any set number of hours). Twenty-three states leave it up to LEAs due to state policy (5) or absence of state policy (18), while another 11 make it voluntary (NAGC, 2015).

The presence of task meaningfulness in school programs is also cited as a school-related factor that influences underachievement within gifted students (Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012). Students must find school tasks meaningful and valuable. Even if students believe they have the skills (self-efficacy) to do well, if they do not see their school work as meaningful, they may not complete it (Rubenstein et al., 2012). Gifted students not only have extensive background knowledge, they also have the ability to acquire new knowledge at faster paces and have a variety of personal interests contributing to them not feeling intellectually stimulated in class (Archambault et al., 1993). Task meaningfulness contributes to the stimulation of the personal interests of gifted students.

In conclusion, student perceptions of school and home events; the nature of

teacher and parent expectations and support; and the patterns of interaction among students, teachers, and parents all have an impact on academic attitudes and behaviors (Rubenstein et al., 2012).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Restatement of the Problem

As previously stated, explaining the factors related to underachievement continues to be a challenging task for researchers and practitioners in the field of education. Underachievement affects students of various ability ranges but is more prevalent and damaging in some groups than in others (Montgomery, 2009). Gifted students are at particular risk of underachievement and social-emotional difficulties due to the many characteristics involved with giftedness (Blass, 2014). Despite coming from a range of backgrounds and cultures including socioeconomic statuses, abilities, and talents, there are certain traits that gifted students have in common (Blass, 2014). Gifted students are known to be sensitive, perfectionists, and experience social isolation, which are all considered risk factors for poor social-emotional difficulties and underachievement (Blass, 2014). Gaining an understanding of the perceptions of the educational leaders is essential to comprehending this issue.

Although much of the research on underachievement has focused on characterization of underachievers, the most important unresolved issue is how to reverse this process (Siegle & McCoach, 2009). By investigating gifted underachievement within high schoolers through the analysis of school administrator perceptions, this study seeks to provide recommendations that can be used to inform the field of education and assist with reversing the effects of underachievement.

Through the use of a quantitative method approach, this study revealed the perceptions of school administrators in multiple school districts in South Carolina. School administrators were asked to share perspectives on the underachievement of gifted and talented students who have a mismatch between their course grades and their

scores on standardized assessments.

This research targeted gifted students and the factors that are perceived to contribute to their underachievement.

### **Research Question**

The following research question was addressed in this study: What are school administrator perceptions of factors that contribute to underachievement of gifted students?

### **Methodology**

Gifted populations tend to be small. Accordingly, much research investigating underachieving students has employed a qualitative, clinical, or single-subject methodology (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Quantitative methods typically require access to a larger number of subjects than qualitative methods as well as adequate instruments to measure student achievement and perceptions, which can be difficult to quantify. Qualitative studies are criticized for not being generalizable (Higgins, 2009), so utilizing a quantitative approach offers advantages.

Quantitative methodologies use empirical observations to address research questions, describe data, develop illustrative arguments from such data, and speculate about why the data occurred in a specific manner (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

The factors of gifted underachievement have been studied by several researchers over the years in order to expose the occurrence and to assist educators in targeting interventions. For instance, educators may want to determine why there are gifted students who are not successful in the classroom. How do their school administrators view these students' experiences in school? Why do the school administrators believe

these students do not work harder in school? How can their teachers and school leadership be more responsive to their unique educational needs?

Many researchers have utilized a quantitative approach to answer such questions. By applying a quantitative research methodology in this mixed-methods study, the researcher hopes to obtain a depiction of administrator views of the gifted underachiever. By utilizing statistical data regarding the perspectives of school administrators, an analysis of the perceptions of school administrators could be conducted in a way that a qualitative methodology would not allow.

### **Participants**

Research usually discusses individual, family, and school-related factors as contributing to underachievement within gifted learners (Baker, Bridger, & Evans, 1998). Perceptions from parents, teachers, and the students themselves are usually considered. Researchers rarely take into consideration the perceptions that school administrators have regarding the factors that contribute to underachievement in gifted learners.

This study presented a unique angle to the issue of gifted underachievement by focusing on the perceptions held by the educational leaders. It helped to provide more insight into why school leaders believe gifted learners underachieve in high school. The findings of this research may help educators differentiate instruction, assist students in achieving the potential that their ability indicates, and prevent this cycle for future gifted underachievers.

This quantitative study focused on factors that school administrators believe affect gifted students' motivation and performance. Participants involved in this study were identified as high school or middle school principals or assistant principals in various school districts in South Carolina. Neither the amount of experience in the field of

education nor the amount of experience as a school administrator was used to exclude participants from this study.

### **Instrument**

One major reason few quantitative research studies on gifted underachievers exist is the lack of a valid and reliable identification instrument for these students (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). McCoach and Siegle (2003) created and validated the School Attitude Assessment Survey (SAAS), an instrument that was designed to evaluate gifted students' perceptions on five specific constructs: (a) academic self-perceptions, (b) attitude toward teachers, (c) attitude toward school, (d) goal valuation, and (e) motivation/self-regulation. Slight modifications were made, with permission of the researchers, that allowed this instrument to capture school administrator perceptions regarding these same constructs. A draft of this instrument is included in the Appendix.

### **Validity**

Initially, an analysis of data collected with this instrument was able to discern differences between academically able achievers and underachievers along these five constructs. While the motivation/self-regulation and the academic self-perception factors exhibited a very high correlation, approximately 0.80, McCoach and Siegle (2003) decided to revise the 20-question version of the SAAS in an effort to provide sturdier proof of validity among academic self-perceptions and motivation/self-regulation factors. McCoach and Siegle's revised edition includes confirmatory factor analyses revealing that the goal valuation and motivation/self-regulation factors were highly correlated ( $r = 0.79$ ) with the other factors exhibiting moderate (0.48 to 0.66), positive correlations (Diem, 2013); indeed, whether students value the goals of school is a necessary precursor to their being motivated to put forth the effort required to achieve in school (Diem, 2013).

**Reliability**

Subsequent investigations demonstrated validity in SAAS-R's ability to discriminate among high school gifted students based on these five factors (Suldo, Schaffer, & Shaunessy, 2007). These subsequent investigations simultaneously proved the reliability of SAAS-R. Suldo et al. (2007) further explained the possible use of SAAS-R in other educational practices. Suldo et al. stated that practitioners may administer the SAAS-R to entire student bodies as a needs assessment or progress monitoring tool or administer to at-risk students to pinpoint attitudes that need intervention (Diem, 2013). With modifications to the survey questions, the researcher expected the same reliability of this instrument.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Prior to collecting research data, the researcher waited to receive research approval from the IRB. When permission was granted, the researcher worked with resources provided through the South Carolina Department of Education to identify the school administrators who were requested to participate in the survey. Communications were made with the district coordinator for gifted and talented programs. Working alongside the district coordinator, the survey was sent to school administrators.

When the requested school administrators agreed to participate in this study, they were directed to a link to the web-based modified version of the SAAS-R instrument. All participants were assured that the information collected through these processes were strictly confidential and would not reveal individual, school, or district names. The school administrator survey was designed to obtain their perceptions regarding gifted student interest, motivation, school experiences, faculty, staff, curricular opinions, and school involvement. Participant identities were protected at all times. After the data

were collected, the responses were prepared for thematic analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Once all surveys were collected, the surveys were examined to ensure that all values added were within the given parameters. Any surveys that contained errors were discarded to ensure the validity of the study. The data were then imported into IBM SPSS, statistical data analysis software. The data were managed and calculated using statistical methods employed by IBM SPSS.

The data calculated in this study were analyzed for frequencies and differences and relationships between variables. A Likert scale was used to answer the questions of the survey. A frequency distribution was constructed to display the data. For each response, chi square was also tabulated and analyzed. “Chi square was the appropriate statistical statistic used to determine goodness-of-fit because the data was divided into distinct categories, the data was nominal, and frequency tables were used” (Nattress, 2013, p. 108).

## **Chapter 4: Report of Data and Data Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of administrator perceptions of the factors that contribute to the underachievement of gifted learners. The guiding question for the study was, “What are the perceived factors related to the low performance at the high school level by underachieving gifted students?”

### **Presentation of Data**

The following data were collected using Survey Monkey and then imported into SPSS. The seven-point Likert scale responses were given numerical codes starting with one and ending with seven. Strongly disagree was coded as one, disagree was coded as two, slightly disagree was coded as three, neither agree nor disagree was coded as four, slightly agree was coded as five, agree was coded as six, and strongly agree was coded as seven.

The survey instrument was designed to evaluate school administrator perceptions of gifted students regarding five specific constructs: (a) academic self-perceptions, (b) attitude toward teachers, (c) attitude toward school, (d) goal valuation, and (e) motivation/self-regulation.

### **Construct 1: Academic Self-Perceptions**

Table 5 displays the results of 10 survey questions related to the first construct: administrator perceptions of gifted underachievers’ academic self-perceptions. There were 11 responses from secondary school administrators who participated in the survey. The researcher obtained 11 responses for each of the 10 questions related to this construct, which calculated a 100% response rate from the administrators.

Table 5

*Administrator Perceptions of Gifted Underachievers' Academic Self-Perceptions*

	ST.D.	D.	SL.D.	Neutral	SL.A.	A.	ST.A.	Total
Believe they concentrate on their schoolwork.	4			1	2	4		11
Use a variety of strategies to learn new material.	2	1		6	1	1		11
Believe they are intelligent.		4		1	3	3		11
Believe they have the ability to learn new ideas quickly in school.		3			4	4		11
Believe they are smart in this school.	1	2		1	3	3	1	11
Believe they work hard at this school.		3		3	2	3		11
Can grasp complex concepts in this school.		1			4	5	1	11
Are good at learning new things in this school.				1	4	6		11
Are believe they are capable of getting straight A's.	1	1		1	2	4	2	11
Believe they are responsible students.	1	1		1	4	4		11

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they concentrate on their schoolwork, four respondents (36.3%) disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and six respondents (54.4%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students use a

variety of strategies to learn new material, three respondents (27.19%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; six respondents (54.55%) were neutral; and two respondents (18.4%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent, four respondents (36.36%) slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they have the ability to learn new ideas quickly in school, three respondents (27.27%) slightly disagreed and eight respondents (72.72%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are smart in school, three respondents (27.27%) slightly disagreed; three respondents (27.27%) were neutral; and five respondents (45.45%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they work hard at this school, three respondents (27.27%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and seven respondents (63.63%) either slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students can grasp complex concepts in this school, one respondent (9.09%) slightly disagreed and 10 respondents (90.90%) either slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students are good

at learning new things in this school, one respondent (9.09%) was neutral and 10 respondents (90.90%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are capable of getting straight A's, two respondents (18.18%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and eight respondents (72.72%) either slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are responsible students, two respondents (18.18%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and eight respondents (72.72%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

### **Summary of Construct 1: Academic Self-Perceptions**

The data from Table 5 indicated that 63.6% of the responses from school administrators (70 of 110) agreed with the questions posed about gifted underachievers' academic self-perceptions; 22.7% of the responses (25 of 110) disagreed with the questions posed. Of the 110 responses, 13.6% (15 responses) were neutral regarding the questions posed.

### **Construct 2: Attitude Towards Teachers**

Table 6 displays the results of six survey questions related to the second construct: administrator perceptions of gifted underachievers' attitudes toward their teachers. There were 11 responses from secondary school administrators who participated in the survey. The researcher obtained 11 responses for each of the six questions related to this construct, which calculated a 100% response rate from the administrators.

Table 6

*Administrator Perceptions of Gifted Underachievers' Attitudes Toward their Teachers*

	ST.D.	D.	SL.D.	Neutral	SL.A.	A.	ST.A.	Total
Relate well to their teachers.		3	2	3	3			11
Like their teachers.			3	3	5			11
Believe the teachers care about them at this school.			3	2	6			11
Teachers make learning interesting.		1	1	5	3	1		11
Complete their schoolwork regularly.	1	1	4	1	4			11
Believe that most of the teachers at this school are good teachers.			4	1	6			11

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students relate well to their teachers, three respondents (27.27%) slightly disagreed; two respondents (18.18%) were neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students like their teachers, three respondents (27.27%) respondents were neutral and eight respondents (72.72%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe the teachers care about them at this school, three respondents (27.27%) were neutral and eight respondents (72.72%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that teachers make learning interesting for underachieving gifted students, one respondent (9.09%) slightly disagreed; one

respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and nine respondents (81.81%) either slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students complete their schoolwork regularly, six respondents (54.54%) either strongly disagreed, disagreed, or slightly disagreed and five respondents (45.45%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe that most of the teachers at this school are good teachers, four respondents (36.36%) were neutral and seven respondents (63.64%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

### **Summary of Construct 2: Attitude Towards Teachers**

The data from Table 6 indicated that 65.2% of the responses from school administrators (43 of 66) agreed with the questions posed about gifted underachievers' attitudes toward their teachers; 15.2% of the responses (10 of 66) disagreed with the questions posed. Of the 66 responses, 19.7% (13 responses) were neutral regarding the questions posed.

### **Construct 3: Attitude Towards School**

Table 7 displays the results of 11 survey questions related to the third construct: administrator perceptions of gifted underachievers' attitudes toward their school. There were 11 responses from secondary school administrators who participated in the survey. The researcher obtained 11 responses for each of the six questions related to this construct, which calculated a 100% response rate from the administrators.

Table 7

*Administrator Perceptions of Gifted Underachievers' Attitudes Toward their School*

	ST.D.	D.	SL.D.	Neutral	SL.A.	A.	ST.A.	Total
Find their classes interesting.	4	2	1		2	2		11
This school is a good match.	1	1	3		3	3		11
Like this school.			3		4	4		11
Glad they attend this school.		1	4		2	4		11
Believe this is a good school.		1	4		2	4		11
Want to do their best in this school.		4	2		2	3		11
Believe this school is easy for them.	1	2	2		2	4		11
Are proud of this school.			5		2	4		11
Believe it's important to do well in this school.	1	3			2	5		11
Believe they are responsible students.	2	1	2		2	4		11
Like their classes.	1	2	1		2	5		11

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students find their classes interesting, six respondents (54.54%) disagreed or slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and four respondents (36.36%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement this school is a good match for underachieving gifted students, two respondents (18.18%) disagreed or slightly disagreed; three

respondents (27.27%) were neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students like this school, three respondents (27.27%) were neutral and eight respondents (72.72%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students are glad that they attend this school, one respondent (9.09%) slightly disagreed; four respondents (36.36%) were neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe this is a good school, one respondent (9.09%) slightly disagreed; four respondents (36.36%) were neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students want to do their best in this school, four respondents (36.36%) slightly disagreed; two respondents (18.18%) were neutral; and five respondents (36.36%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe this school is easy for them, three respondents (27.27%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; two respondents (18.18%) were neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students are proud of this school, five respondents (45.45%) were neutral and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe it is important to get good grades in school, four respondents (36.36%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed and seven respondents (63.63%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe it is important for them to do well in this school, three respondents (27.27%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and seven respondents (63.63%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students like their classes, two respondents (18.18%) slightly disagreed; three respondents (27.27%) were neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

### **Summary of Construct 3: Attitude Towards School**

The data from Table 7 indicated that 55.4% of the responses from school administrators (67 of 121) agreed with the questions posed about gifted underachievers' attitudes toward their school; 22.3% of the responses (27 of 121) disagreed with the questions posed. Of the 121 responses, 22.3% (27 responses) were neutral regarding the questions posed.

### **Construct 4: Goal Valuation**

Table 8 displays the results of three survey questions related to the fourth construct: administrator perceptions of gifted underachievers' goal valuation. There were 11 responses from secondary school administrators who participated in the survey. The researcher obtained 11 responses for each of the six questions related to this construct, which calculated a 100% response rate from the administrators.

Table 8

*Administrator Perceptions of Gifted Underachievers' Goal Valuation*

	ST.D.	D.	SL.D.	Neutral	SL.A.	A.	ST.A.	Total	
Want to get good grades at school.		2		2		2	4	1	11
Believe that doing well in this school is important for their future career goals.		1		3		3	4		11
Doing well in this school is one of the goals.				4		1	6		11

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students want to get good grades at school, two respondents (18.2%) slightly disagreed; two respondents (18.2%) were neutral; and seven respondents (63.7%) either slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe that doing well in this school is important for their future career goals, one respondent (9.1%) slightly disagreed; three respondents (27.3%) were neutral; and seven respondents (63.7%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that doing well in this school is one of the goals for underachieving gifted students, four respondents (36.4%) were neutral and seven respondents (63.6%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

#### **Summary of Construct 4: Goal Valuation**

The data from Table 8 indicated that 63.6% of the responses from school administrators (21 of 33) agreed with the questions posed about gifted underachievers' goal valuation; 9% of the responses (three of 33) disagreed with the questions posed. Of the 33 responses, 27.3% (nine responses) were neutral regarding the questions posed.

### Construct 5: Motivation/Self-Regulation

Table 9 displays the results of six survey questions related to the fifth construct: administrator perceptions of gifted underachievers' motivation/self-regulation. There were 11 responses from secondary school administrators who participated in the survey. The researcher obtained 11 responses for each of the six questions related to this construct, which calculated a 100% response rate from the administrators.

Table 9

#### *Administrator Perceptions of Gifted Underachievers' Motivation/Self-Regulation*

	ST.D.	D.	SL.D.	Neutral	SL.A.	A.	ST.A.	Total
Believe they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork.		1	3	1	3	3		11
Complete their schoolwork regularly.	1	2	2		2	3	1	11
Check their assignments before turning them in.		4	3		2	2		11
Believe they are self-motivated to do their schoolwork.			3	3	3	2		11
Spend a lot of time on their schoolwork.		4	2	1	1	3		11
Are organized about their schoolwork.	1	1	3		5	1		11

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork, four respondents (36.36%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students complete

their schoolwork regularly, five respondents (45.45%) either strongly disagreed, disagreed, or slightly disagreed and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students check their assignments before turning them in, seven respondents (63.63%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed and four respondents (36.36%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are self-motivated to do their schoolwork, three respondents (27.27%) slightly disagreed; three respondents (27.27%) were neutral; and five respondents (45.45%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students spend a lot of time on their schoolwork, six respondents (54.54%) either slightly disagreed or disagreed; one respondent (9.09%) was neutral; and four respondents (36.36%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students are organized about their schoolwork, five respondents (45.45%) either strongly disagreed, disagreed, or slightly disagreed and six respondents (54.54%) either slightly agreed or agreed with the statement.

### **Summary of Construct 5: Motivation/Self-Regulation**

The data from Table 9 indicated that 45.5% of the responses from school administrators (30 of 66) agreed with the questions posed about gifted underachievers' motivation/self-regulation; 45.5% of the responses (30 of 66) disagreed with the questions posed. Of the 66 responses, 7.6% (five responses) were neutral regarding the

questions posed.

### Data Cross Tabulation

The following analyses are based on ordinal level data; therefore, the appropriate measure of association is the Gamma ( $\gamma$ ).

Table 10

*Underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent. \* Underachieving gifted students believe they are responsible students. Cross Tabulation*

Count		Underachieving gifted students believe they are responsible students.					Total
		D	SL. D.	Neutral	SL. A.	A	
Underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent.	SL. D.	0	1	1	1	1	4
	Neutral	1	0	0	0	0	1
	SL. A.	0	0	0	2	1	3
	A	0	0	0	1	2	3
Total		1	1	1	4	4	11

### Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma .515	.257	1.867	.062

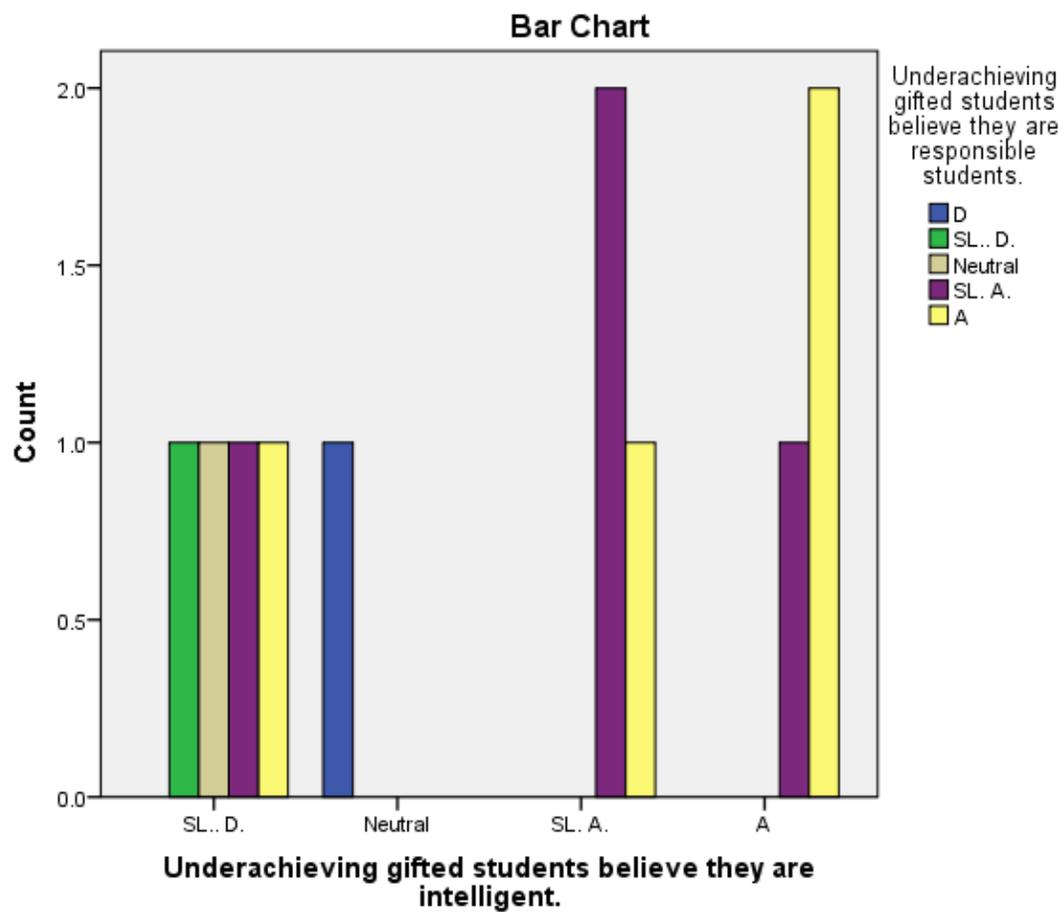
N of Valid Cases 11

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

### Summary of Table 10

The results of the Gamma( $\gamma$ ) showed a strong positive association between underachieving gifted students believe they are responsible students and underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent that was not significant ( $G = .515, p = .062$ )



*Figure 1.* Underachieving Gifted Students Believe They are Intelligent.

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Table 11

*Underachieving gifted students relate well to their teachers. \* Teachers make learning interesting for underachieving gifted students. Cross Tabulation*

Count		Teachers make learning interesting for underachieving gifted students.					Total
		SL. D.	Neutral	SL. A.	A	ST. A.	
Underachieving gifted students relate well to their teachers.	SL. D.	1	1	0	1	0	3
	Neutral	0	0	1	0	1	2
	SL. A.	0	0	3	0	0	3
	A	0	0	1	2	0	3
Total		1	1	5	3	1	11

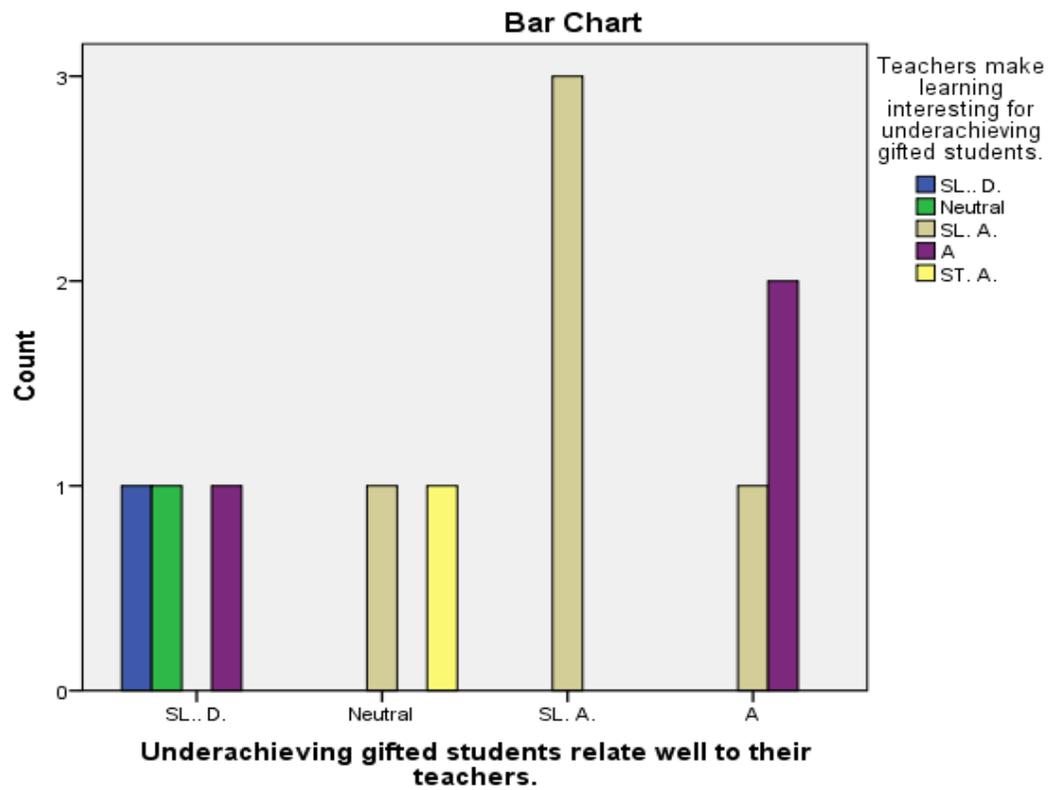
Symmetric Measures		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.389	.334	1.133	.257
N of Valid Cases		11			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

### Summary of Table 11

The results of the Gamma( $\gamma$ ) showed a strong positive association between underachieving gifted students relate well to their teachers and teachers make learning interesting for underachieving gifted students that was not significant ( $G = .389, p = .257$ ).



*Figure 2.* Underachieving Gifted Students Relate Well to Their Teachers.

---

Table 12

*Underachieving gifted students find their classes interesting. \* Underachieving gifted students believe it is important for them to do well in this school. Cross Tabulation*

Count		Underachieving gifted students believe it is important for them to do well in this school.					Total
		D	S. D.	Neutral	SL. A.	A	
Underachieving gifted students find their classes interesting.	D	0	1	1	1	1	4
	SL. D.	1	0	0	0	1	2
	Neutral	0	0	0	0	1	1
	SL. A.	0	1	0	0	1	2
	A	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total		1	2	1	2	5	11

#### Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.235	.229	1.044	.297
N of Valid Cases		11			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

#### Summary of Table 12

The results of the Gamma( $\gamma$ ) showed a strong positive association between underachieving gifted students find their classes interesting and underachieving gifted students believe it is important for them to do well at this school that was not significant ( $G = .235, p = .297$ ).

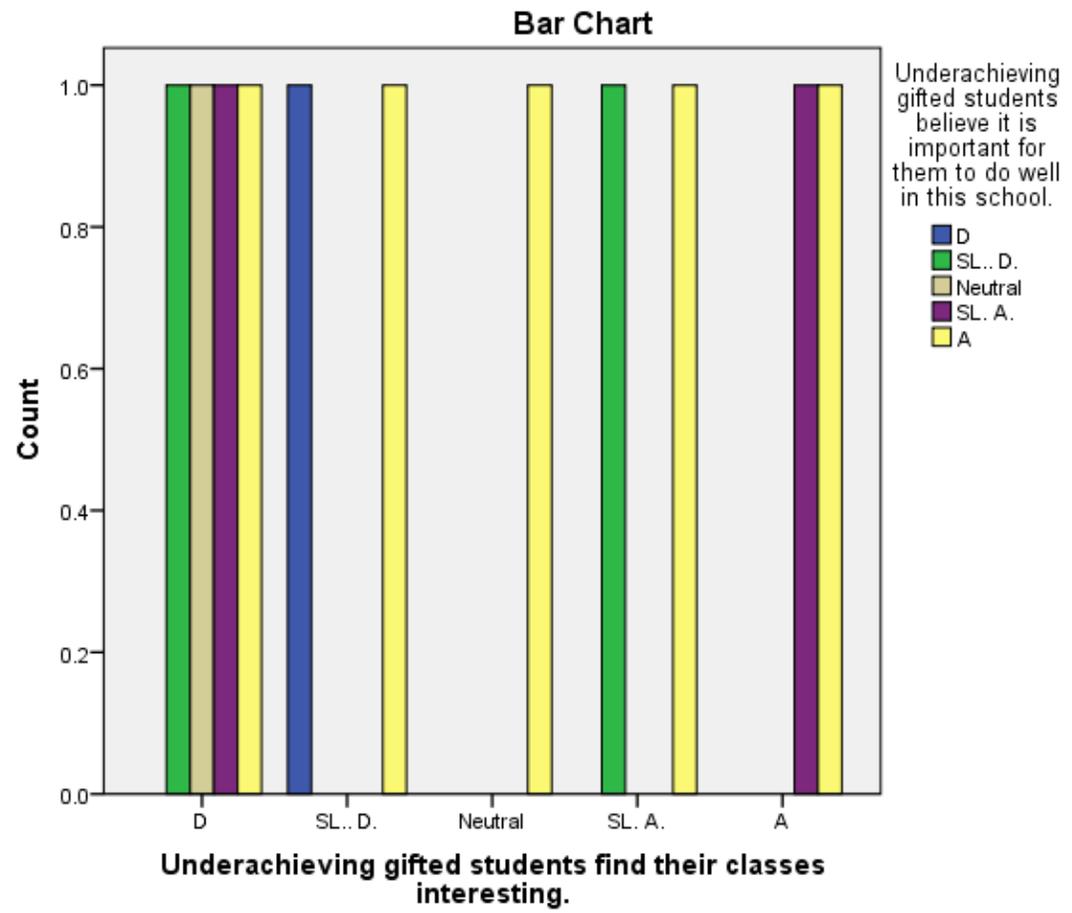


Figure 3. Underachieving Gifted Students Find Their Classes Interesting.

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Table 13

*Underachieving gifted students believe that doing well in this school is important for their future career goals. \* Doing well in this school is one of the goals for underachieving gifted students. Cross Tabulation*

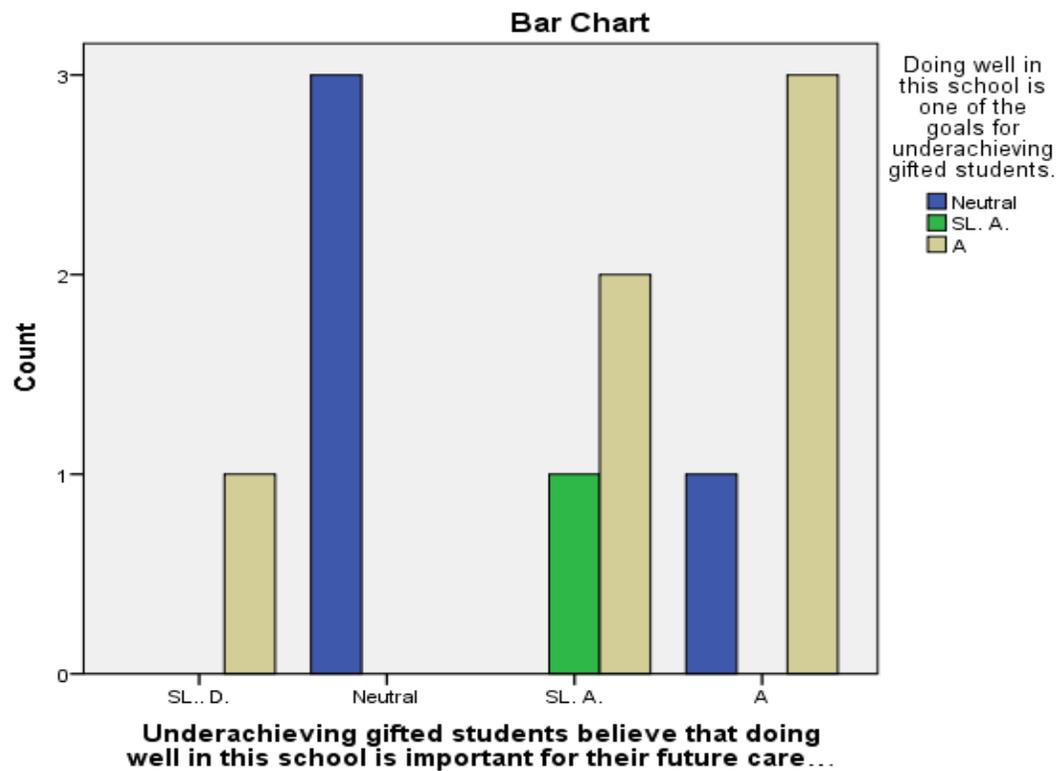
Count		Doing well in this school is one of the goals for underachieving gifted students.			Total
		Neutral	SL. A.	A	
Underachieving gifted students believe that doing well in this school is important for their future career goals.	SL. D.	0	0	1	1
	Neutral	3	0	0	3
	SL. A.	0	1	2	3
	A	1	0	3	4
Total		4	1	6	11
Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.448	.364	1.156	.248
N of Valid Cases		11			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

### Summary of Table 13

The results of the Gamma( $\gamma$ ) showed a strong positive association between underachieving gifted students feel that doing well in this school is important for their future career goals and doing well in this school is one of the goals for underachieving gifted students that was not significant ( $G = .448, p = .248$ ).



*Figure 4.* Underachieving Gifted Students Believe that Doing Well in this School is Important for Their Future Careers.

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Table 14

*Underachieving gifted students believe they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork. \* Underachieving gifted students believe they are self-motivated to do their schoolwork. Cross Tabulation*

Count		Underachieving gifted students believe they are self-motivated to do their schoolwork.				Total
		SL. D.	Neutral	SL. A.	A	
Underachieving gifted students believe they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork.	D	1	0	0	0	1
	SL. D.	2	0	0	1	3
	Neutral	0	1	0	0	1
	SL. A.	0	1	2	0	3
	A	0	1	1	1	3
<b>Total</b>		3	3	3	2	11

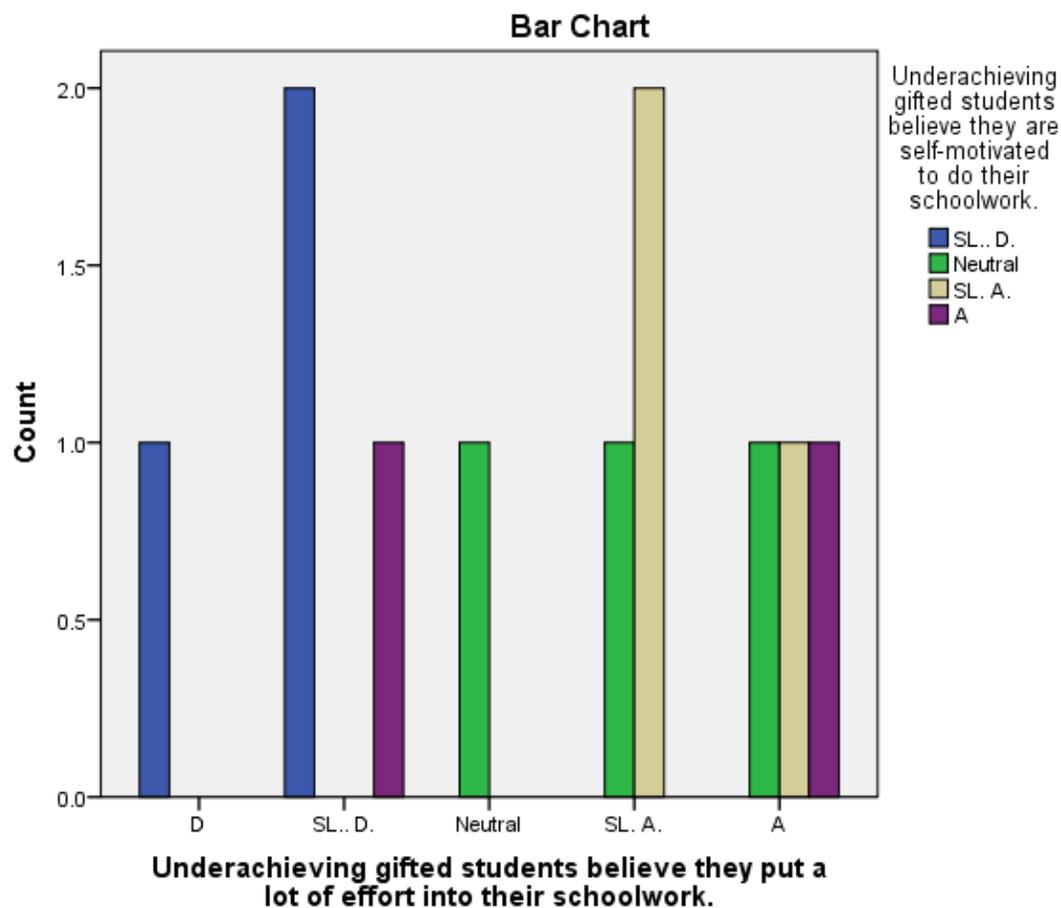
Symmetric Measures		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.579	.307	1.821	.069
N of Valid Cases		11			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

### Summary of Table 14

The results of the Gamma( $\gamma$ ) showed a strong positive association between underachieving gifted students believe they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork and underachieving gifted students believe they are self-motivated to do their schoolwork that was not significant ( $G = .579, p = .069$ ).



*Figure 5.* Underachieving Gifted Students Believe They Put a Lot of Effort into Their Schoolwork.

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## Summary

Chapter 4 includes descriptive statistics for the purpose of organizing and presenting the data collected for this study. The data are organized thematically to align with each of the research questions. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings and their relationship to the literature review, implications of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 5: Results and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of administrator perceptions of the factors that contribute to the underachievement of gifted learners. This chapter analyzes and reports the data collected from a 38-question survey that was used to determine the thoughts of secondary administrators on the underachievement of gifted learners. The guiding research question for the study was, “What are the perceived factors related to the low performance at the secondary level by underachieving gifted students.” Correlations between previous research and this study, implications of the research, limitations, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

### **Correlations Between this Study and Previous Research**

There were correlations found between the constructs evaluated by the survey instrument and the perceptual themes that are expounded upon in the literature review section of this paper. This section analyzes the correlations between this study and other sources of research on the factors that contribute to the underachievement of gifted learners. The correlations will be examined through the lenses of the perceptual themes as indicated in the literature review section of this paper. The first perceptual theme deals with factors related to the perception gifted underachievers have of themselves and their self-motivation. The second perceptual theme deals with factors related to perceptions that adults, society, and peers have of gifted underachievers. The final perceptual theme deals with factors of gifted underachievement related to schools and instructional programs.

### **Perceptual Theme 1: Self-Perceptions and Self-Motivation of Gifted Students**

Within the research that was outlined in the literature review of this paper,

Grobman (2006) indicated that many of the gifted underachievers believed that they had an internal drive that pushed them to explore curiosities and challenge common understandings. This is similar to what is indicated in the data analysis of Construct 1 (Academic Self-Perceptions) of the survey; 63.6% of the responses from school administrators agreed with the questions posed about the academic self-perceptions of gifted underachievers. Specifically, when given the statement about whether gifted underachievers believed they concentrate on their schoolwork, 54.4% of the administrators agreed. When given the statement about whether underachieving gifted students believe they have the ability to learn new ideas quickly in school, 72.7% of the administrator respondents agreed. When given the statement about whether underachieving gifted students believe they work hard at school, 63.6% of the administrators agreed. When given the statement underachieving gifted students believe they can grasp complex concepts at school, 90.9% of the administrator respondents agreed. The survey data spoke to Grobman's research that indicated that gifted underachievers believe they possess an internal drive that pushes them intellectually.

Grobman's (2006) research also stated that gifted underachievers viewed themselves as failures and also struggle with internal criticisms of themselves. Research from Galbraith and Delisle (2015) stated that when students view themselves as failures, academic successes are written off as lucky accidents, while low grades and achievement reinforce negative perceptions they have of themselves. This causes the students to question whether they should even try to succeed or if any of their efforts will be good enough. When correlating this previously conducted research to the administrator perception survey data, 54.4% of the administrator respondents did not agree with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are smart in school; however,

when presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are capable of getting straight A's, 72.7% of the administrators agreed. Also, when presented with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are responsible students, 72.7% of the administrators agreed. This indicates that the secondary school administrators feel that underachieving gifted learners believe they are successful because of what they can work to achieve through responsible work ethic as opposed to having the innate ability to be successful because they are naturally smart in school. The administrator perceptions support what the research of Grobman and Galbraith and Delisle suggested regarding the impact of how gifted underachievers view themselves.

Bourgeois (2011) indicated in his research that gifted underachievers have a lack of self-motivation that impacts their self-perceptions. In the survey, 54.4% of the administrators indicated that they did not agree that gifted underachievers believed that they were smart in school; however, 54.4% of the same administrators agreed with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent. This indicates that secondary administrators believe that although gifted underachievers see themselves as intelligent, they do not see themselves as smart within the context of school. These conflicting data support the notion that, within the context of school, barriers exist that influence perceptions gifted students have of themselves that would affect their self-motivation in school.

Rand (2005) reported that gifted underachievers viewed themselves as underprepared for the academic rigor of high school. According to the perceptual data collected during this study, 54.4% of the administrators agreed that underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent but did not view themselves as smart in school. This

provides merit to the Rand study. The survey data also revealed that 63.6% of administrators did not agree that underachieving gifted students checked their assignments before turning them in to teachers; 54.4% also indicated that they did not agree that underachieving gifted students are self-motivated to do their school work. The Rand study revealed that teachers and counselors stressed that every student was not gifted; however, students were able to perform well in areas that they were not identified as gifted through hard work and dedication. The findings of this study support Rand's study.

### **Perceptual Theme 2: Adult, Societal, and Peer Perceptions of Gifted Students**

Within the research that was outlined in the literature review of this paper, Grobman (2006) attributed underachievement of gifted students to their periodic feelings of strangeness in comparison to others and feelings of isolation from others. Grobman went on to state that for many underachieving gifted students, it was challenging to gain connections with others. He asserted that their quirky senses of humor, off-beat nature, and unique ways of perceiving the world left them feeling socially isolated from others.

Rimm's (1997) research reported that extreme praise by parents or teachers cause students to believe that adults expect more of them than they can produce. This research went on to emphasize that the informal labeling of students by adults as "the smart one," "the jock," "the social one," or "the creative one" also causes underachievement.

Galbraith and Delisle (2015) asserted that underachievement is a problem for students because it is recognized as such by adults. The authors emphasized that underachievement is a learned set of behaviors by gifted students for whom "school" and "education" exist in separate spheres (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015).

When comparing these previous studies to this study on administrator

perceptions, correlations can be made regarding how gifted underachievers believe they are perceived by others. The survey revealed that 54.4% of the administrators stated that gifted underachievers relate well to their teachers; 72.7% of the administrators stated that gifted underachievers like their teachers and believe that their teachers care about them at their school. These data points do not support the claims that Grobman (2006) made regarding the difficulties gifted underachievers have connecting with others including their teachers; however, because of the contrast that these data points have with what is suggested by Grobman, these data points seem to support the claims of Galbraith and Delisle (2015) that suggested that “school” and “education” exist in separate spheres for underachieving gifted students.

### **Perceptual Theme 3: Impact of School/Instructional Programs on Gifted Students**

The research of Rimm (1997) asserted that although children may say they are bored in school, the term “boring” could mask feelings of inadequacy. Classrooms that are over competitive, under competitive, challenging, or lacking challenge could cause students to underachieve (Rimm, 1997). The research of O’Connell (2013) revealed that students who scored high on standardized tests but had low classroom grades wanted a variety in the teaching styles among teachers and felt that the classroom assignments lacked meaning. Rubenstein et al. (2012) cited that the absence of task meaningfulness in school programs was a related factor that influences underachievement within gifted students. Rubenstein et al. went on to assert that even if students believe they have the skills to do well, if they do not see their school work as meaningful, they may not complete it.

When correlating the previous research that has been done related to the impact of school/instructional programs on the underachievement of gifted students to the survey

results, it was revealed that 54.5% of the school administrators did not agree that underachieving gifted students find their classes interesting; 54.5% of the administrators also did not agree that underachieving gifted students want to do their best in their school. These data points substantiate the claims of the research of Rimm (1997).

Galbraith and Delisle (2015) reported that underachieving gifted students learn to assess their abilities relative to what they have not accomplished instead of what they are capable of doing. This report also agreed with the 2004 report entitled *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* when it was stated that America's schools infrequently use acceleration practices that allow gifted students to take classes ahead of their age group (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). Reis et al. (1995) concluded in their study that underachievement was caused when adults did not provide students with the appropriate levels of challenge in school. The research of Bethea (2007) recommended academic counseling in the form of tutoring and strategies to improve study and test-taking skills, trained qualified teachers being placed in gifted classrooms, and a continuum of curriculum delivery options to meet the needs of the gifted learner.

When correlating this research to the survey data, it was revealed that 54.5% of the school administrators agreed with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe school is too easy; however, it was also revealed that 54.5% of the administrators agreed with the statement that their school was a good match for underachieving gifted students; 72.7% of the administrators agreed with the statement that underachieving gifted students like their school; 81.8% of the administrators agreed with the statement that teachers make learning interesting; and 63.6% of the administrators agreed with the statement that underachieving gifted students believe that the teachers at their school are

good teachers. These data points seem to conflict with what the previous research would suggest to be the perceptions of underachieving gifted students.

### **Implications of Research**

The research question from this study was answered using a survey that was completed by secondary administrators who had a context of interacting with underachieving gifted students and working with those who teach these students. The results from the survey were collected using Survey Monkey and analyzed with IBM SPSS. The data obtained were similar to research found in previous studies on factors that impact the underachievement in gifted students. The research from those studies is discussed throughout this section.

The research question, “What are school administrator perceptions of factors that contribute to underachievement of gifted students,” was designed to ascertain what administrators perceived regarding factors that had an impact on gifted students underachieving. Based on an analysis of the results, it appears that the administrators thought that although these students believed they were intelligent and responsible, the students did not see themselves as smart and successful in school. The work of Galbraith and Delisle (2015) spoke to the heart of this conundrum when it claimed that the concept of school performance and academic ability seemed to exist in separate spheres with underachieving gifted students. This implies that underachieving gifted students do not make a connection between their performance in the school setting and their view of their intellectual ability. In essence, poor performance in school would not necessarily trigger these students to work harder or even desire to improve because they do not feel their intelligence is threatened by their poor performance in school.

The researcher would recommend that administrators engage in professional

development opportunities that will aid them in digging deeper into the tendencies of gifted students to mentally separate their performance in school from their view of their intellectual abilities. This recommendation is based on the fact that school administrator perceptions align with previous studies that indicated there is a difference in these students' perceptions of school performance and intellectual prowess. Exploring this topic at length and obtaining more insight from experts will prove to be useful for school administrators.

The analysis of the results of the survey also reveal that school administrators felt that the underachieving gifted students in their school had positive perceptions of the teachers and that teachers within their school were effective in instruction. The administrators also reported that their schools were a match for underachieving gifted students; the students liked and were proud of their schools. The same administrators reported that they did not believe underachieving gifted students in their schools found their classes interesting, wanted to do their best in their schools, or completed their schoolwork regularly. This seems to indicate that these administrators perceive underachieving gifted learners as expressing two extreme behaviors in school. The first perceived behavior involves the underachieving gifted students exhibiting a love for the school, teachers, and instructional programs. The second perceived behavior is related to these students not completing work, showing interest in classroom instruction, or wanting to do their best in their schools.

Grobman (2006) suggested that making connections with others is a challenge for underachieving gifted students because of their quirky senses of humor, off-beat nature, and very unique way of perceiving the world. This is in direct conflict with what the survey revealed about how well administrators felt underachieving gifted students

connected with others in the school. This brings into question the methods that are employed by administrators to determine whether or not an underachieving gifted student is legitimately connecting with others within the school. Also, whether or not the administrators understand the differences between platonic connections and authentic connections made by underachieving gifted students should be brought into question.

Because these perceptions seem to conflict with one another, the researcher recommends that school administrators verify whether their perceptions are accurate by conducting a survey with the underachieving gifted students. This survey should be designed to uncover how the students truly feel about their teachers, the instructional program, and the school as a whole. The survey will also uncover student thoughts regarding classroom assignments and performance expectations of the school. This exercise will help administrators confirm whether their perceptions of the behaviors of underachieving gifted students are aligned with how the students actually view and behave within the school.

Rimm (1997) indicated in her research that underachieving gifted students could be masking inadequacy by stating that they are bored in their classes. Rubenstein et al. (2012) cited that the absence of task meaningfulness within instructional programs contributes to students not completing work or stating that they are bored. According to the survey, 81.8% of the administrators agreed with the statement that teachers make learning interesting for the students.

The researcher recommends that the school administrators be trained on observing and monitoring the implementation of engaging instructional practices, culturally responsive instruction, and authentic student work. This would assist school administrators in ensuring that instructional programs are engaging to students. It is also

recommended that school administrators employ student engagement surveys that will be given to the students to complete during instructional units. These surveys should be designed to gain feedback from the students on whether or not they feel engaged in their classes. Student feedback should be used to inform decisions that are made to improve the instructional program. This should help align administrator perceptions to the actual student experiences and should minimize underachievement.

It is also interesting to cross reference the survey responses that are related to administrator beliefs about the rigor of their instructional programs, expertise of their teachers, and interest of underachieving gifted students in their schools with those that are related to the motivation and engagement of underachieving gifted students. This cross-reference reveals that many of the administrators believed that their instructional programs are rigorous, their teachers are experts, and underachieving gifted students are interested in their schools. It also reveals that administrators believe that gifted underachieving students are disengaged and not motivated to perform in their schools.

This discrepancy calls into question the method that these administrators used to determine rigorous instructional programs, teacher expertise, and student interest. When student engagement and motivation is acknowledged to be at a low level, administrators should question if instruction is truly rigorous, if teachers are truly experts, and if students are truly interested in their programs. When students are not responding favorably to the instructional programs at school, schools should reexamine the design of their programs.

The researcher recommends that administrators engage in book studies that challenge their mindset and encourage a shift from fixed mindsets to growth mindsets. This would encourage them to seek ways to fix instructional programs that do not yield

high achieving gifted students as opposed to seeking ways to address underachieving gifted students.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There were several areas the researcher noted could be addressed in further research on the underachievement of gifted students. One area is the defining of underachievement itself. Research could be done to provide more of a definitive explanation of what it is and how it is caused. As indicated in the literature review section of this paper, there are various definitions of underachievement and various views on what causes it. This makes it difficult to examine as there are many ways that it can be defined. Slight deviations in how underachievement is defined can greatly impact whether educators can confirm that it is actually occurring in students.

Another recommendation would be to do a mixed-method analysis or program study that examines the experiences of underachieving gifted students in various instructional program models. The research seems to suggest that underachievement starts at the middle school level for gifted students. Research needs to be conducted on the differences between the elementary program model for gifted students and the secondary program model for gifted students. It would be valuable to know exactly where gifted students become disengaged in the instructional programs. This research could help educators design instructional programs that fully engage gifted students and curtail underachievement. Students, teachers, and parents could be interviewed and surveyed to get their perspective on the impact and experiences with instructional programs. Within the research, there could be a study of the common themes among the parents and students as they relate to engagement and motivation in secondary gifted education programs.

Finally, the researcher recommends doing a study that builds upon this research. The researcher recommends analyzing South Carolina Ready, South Carolina PASS, South Carolina End-of-Course Exam, Advanced Placement Exam, and International Baccalaureate data as well as other standardized assessment data used by the state to measure student growth and to determine if there is a substantial difference in academic performance between elementary, middle, and high school gifted students who are in school districts that implement progressive practices (acceleration, curriculum compacting, virtual coursework) and those who are not.

### **Limitations**

This study presented some limitations that prevented the researcher from making unquestionable conclusions about school administrator perceptions. The first limitation was the lack of consistency in how administrators defined underachievement in gifted students. The respondents replied to the survey statements based on their experiences with underachieving gifted students within their schools. Because underachievement can be defined differently by each respondent, it is possible that these responses were not fully calibrated in a way that would lend itself to the researcher to make irrefutable conclusions. It is logical to presuppose that this limited the researcher in ascertaining what lenses the surveys truly reflected.

Another limitation was amount of and access to the participants. The surveys were distributed to administrators located in various counties within South Carolina. Because the geographical location of the researcher was not in proximity to all of the participants, it presented a limitation in soliciting more survey responses. It is logical to presuppose that the researcher could have had a greater level of participation if he had a closer proximity and more access to the participants.

A final limitation was the method of this study. Because the study was solely quantitative, the researcher had no opportunities to engage in the unpacking of the survey questions with the respondents. This prevented the researcher from having an opportunity to identify misunderstandings, perceptual nuances, and the full context of the survey responses. It is logical to presuppose that the researcher could have had made better informed recommendations and conclusions if the method of the study included qualitative measures.

### **Conclusion**

Educators are charged to create instructional programs that provide an atmosphere of learning that allows for every student to reach his or her maximum potential. When there is a conundrum such as underachievement in students identified as gifted, it should challenge educators to think critically. The data found in this research validate the need for educators to examine their perceptions regarding underachievement and work tirelessly to address this disparity. Therefore, educational practitioners should consider challenging the mindsets they have regarding gifted students and those who underachieve. This research outlines various interlocking factors that contribute to underachievement that should be addressed by the instructional programs for gifted students. This research supports educators confronting their own perceptions and misconceptions that function as a barrier to addressing underachievement in gifted students.

None of the data found in this research displays a negative effect on students who have been placed in gifted education programs. In fact, it supports data that indicate gifted education programs have improved over the past several years and have been refined to address the ever-changing needs of the gifted student. The research presented

in this study can be used when pondering ways to continue to refine instructional programs for the gifted. Finally, it can be used by administrators when making decisions about instructional coaching of teachers, academic advisement of gifted students, professional development for educators of the gifted, and instructional design of gifted programs that will yield improvements for both underachieving and overachieving gifted students.

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## Appendix

## Modified School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised (Draft)

**1. Number (Anonymous for each participant)****Administrators perceptions of gifted underachievers' attitudes toward their school**

- 2. Underachieving gifted students find their classes interesting.
- 5. This school is a good match for underachieving gifted students.
- 9. Underachieving gifted students like this school.
- 14. Underachieving gifted students are glad that they attend this school.
- 16. Underachieving gifted students believe this is a good school.
- 19. Underachieving gifted students want to do their best in this school.
- 20. Underachieving gifted students believe this school is easy for them.
- 30. Underachieving gifted students are proud of this school.
- 32. Underachieving gifted students believe it's important to get good grades in school.
- 34. Underachieving gifted students want to do their best in this school.
- 35. Underachieving gifted students believe it is important for them to do well in this school.
- 39. Underachieving gifted students like their classes.

**Administrators perceptions of gifted underachievers' academic self-perceptions**

- 3. Underachieving gifted students believe they concentrate on their schoolwork.
- 4. Underachieving gifted students use a variety of strategies to learn new material.
- 6. Underachieving gifted students believe they are intelligent.
- 7. Underachieving gifted students believe they have the ability to learn new ideas quickly in school.
- 13. Underachieving gifted students believe they are smart in school.
- 17. Underachieving gifted students believe they work hard at this school.
- 25. Underachieving gifted students can grasp complex concepts in this school.
- 26. Underachieving gifted students are good at learning new things in this school.
- 29. Underachieving gifted students believe they are capable of getting straight A's.
- 38. Underachieving gifted students believe they are responsible students.

**Administrators perceptions of gifted underachievers' motivation/self-regulation**

- 8. Underachieving gifted students believe they put a lot of effort into their schoolwork.
- 11. Underachieving gifted students complete their schoolwork regularly.
- 12. Underachieving gifted students check their assignments before turning them in.
- 18. Underachieving gifted students believe they are self-motivated to do their schoolwork.

23. Underachieving gifted students spend a lot of time on their schoolwork.
31. Underachieving gifted students complete their schoolwork regularly.
33. Underachieving gifted students are organized about their schoolwork.

**Administrators perceptions of gifted underachievers' attitudes toward their teachers**

10. Underachieving gifted students relate well to their teachers.
21. Underachieving gifted students like their teachers.
22. Underachieving gifted students believe the teachers care about them at this school.
27. Teachers make learning interesting for underachieving gifted students.
36. Underachieving gifted students complete their schoolwork regularly.
37. Underachieving gifted students believe that most of the teachers at this school are good teachers.

**Administrators perceptions of gifted underachievers' goal valuation**

15. Underachieving gifted students want to get good grades at school.
24. Underachieving gifted students believe that doing well in this school is important for their future career goals.
28. Doing well in this school is one of the goals for underachieving gifted students.

**Each question on the web-based survey will have the following Likert Scale options:**

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Slightly disagree
4. Neither agree nor disagree
5. Slightly agree
6. Agree
7. Strongly agree