

A Case Study of Minority and Low-SES Gifted Students' Perceptions of the Effects of a Gifted  
Resource Specialist

BY

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the experiences of 9 minority and low socioeconomic status [low-SES] gifted high school graduates from a district which provided additional support beyond a counselor for its high school gifted students. The additional support was a Gifted Resource Specialist at each school; their interactions with the graduates from a student perspective provided the data to answer the research question, “What impact, if any, has the presence of a gifted resource specialist had upon the high school experience and persistence to graduation for minority and low-SES gifted adolescents?”

The data were gathered through in-depth interviews which were recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed for patterns. The patterns became the prevalent themes for discussion in the findings and analysis.

Three major findings emerged:

- The gifted minority and low-SES students who participated in the study graduated and gave the Gifted Resource Specialist credit for helping them do so.
- The students reported choosing a more difficult diploma, given options, than they would have, had they not had access to a gifted resource specialist.
- The Gifted Resource Specialist helped the students identify, apply to, secure financial resources and get accepted at more selective colleges and universities than they might have otherwise applied to.

The findings of this research are supported by Theories of Cultural and Social Capital as a driving force in academic excellence; the main role of the Gifted Resource Specialist was to provide the gifted students interviewed with the necessary knowledge to apply to and fill out financial aid forms for a selective college or university. This research is of particular importance to district-level decision makers, school administrators, and counselors because the research

supports the special needs of gifted minority and low socioeconomic status students and the role of a dedicated resource specialist above and beyond that of a high school counselor. High school gifted students, particularly those from minority and low-SES backgrounds, continue to benefit from additional supports.

## Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to have completed this dissertation and accompanying research without the commitment and sacrifice of several individuals important in my life.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

Research on the gifted and talented cites the need for some sort of counseling and advisory program, by a trained individual, as being critical to the academic and social / emotional needs of high school gifted students (Colangelo, 1991; Fisher, 1981; Kerr, 1996; Shoffner and Newsome, 2001; Moon, 2002; Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Woolcock, 1962). Despite the research identifying the need for special counseling to ensure psychosocial, academic, and career preparation of gifted high school students, one of the following scenarios predominates at the secondary level: none, a counselor is assigned to deal with the gifted but lacks specialized training, or a counselor is assigned that has limited training on dealing with gifted individuals. This absence of counseling services extending beyond guidance for college is alarming (Vanderbrook, 2006).

### Purpose of Study

Even when a school does have a specialist assigned to assist the gifted high school students there is little research from the perspective of students about what these specialists contribute to the students' success in high school and beyond. The purpose of this study is to show what impact the support of a Gifted Resource Specialist had on the nine minority and low socioeconomic status [low-SES] students who participated in this study. This research is important for two reasons:

- Little research exists that addresses the perspectives of gifted students and their experiences.
- This study will seek to fill the gap in knowledge about the role of the specialist.

This study, through a series of in-depth interviews, answers the question, “What impact, if any, has the presence of a gifted resource specialist had upon the high school experience and persistence to graduation for minority and low-SES gifted adolescents?”

## **Frustration Among Gifted Students**

In a *Time* (2004) magazine article, Jan Davidson, co-author of *Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds*, is quoted as saying, “When we ask exceptional children about their main obstacle, they almost always say it’s their school. Their school makes them put in seat time, and they can’t learn at their own ability level” (pg. 57). Cross, Cassady and Miller (2006) write of a rage that exists in gifted students. Not only may rage be created from the frustration of boredom, lack of challenge, and lack of understanding by school officials of their uniquenesses, but also by the mixed messages received from society toward gifted students. These messages include the claims of giftedness not existing, giftedness not being important, and the widely held notion of gifted students already being advantaged and not need needing any additional support. Research tells us that gifted students do need additional support (Aronson, 2002; Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Baker, 1995; Beacham, 1980; Casey & Shore, 2000; Colangelo, 1991; Cross, Cassady, & Miller, 2006; Ford, 2003; Greene, 2003; Greene, 2006; Lee & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006; Moon, 2002; Neihart, 1999; Robinson, 2003; Russo, Harris, & Ford, 1996; Ryan, 1999, Sadowski, 1987, Sands & Howard-Hamilton, 1994; Yoo & Moon, 2006).

## **Need for Additional Support**

Some researchers (Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Kerr, 1994 in Vanderbrook, 2006) provide reasons for the need for this specialized counseling. These reasons include: denial of abilities by the student which result in underachievement, perfectionism, irrational fears of failure, and peer pressure not to excel which appears to have the greatest impact upon girls (Kerr, 1994). Those

gifted students who tend to be perfectionists may be impacted to such a degree that their creativity and willingness to tackle new challenges is stifled. For those gifted students who may succumb to the peer pressure not to excel academically, this may have lifelong repercussions.

Researchers who have studied gifted dropouts found several common characteristics among the group including: the evidence of a lack of counseling in high school (Sadowski, 1987), withdrawal and depression because of unmet needs and unaddressed feelings (Betts & Neihart, 1988), and feelings of having no advocate within the school system who understood them (Hansen & Toso, 2007). Almost 60% of gifted students who drop out do so during their freshman or sophomore years so intervention efforts would be best placed at these grades (Stephenson, 1985). Cordy (1993, cited in Renzulli and Park, 2000) reported, "The presence of a caring adult, a supportive peer group, alternative educational program, academic success, motivation to attend postsecondary educational institutions, and participation in fundamental religious groups were reasons at-risk students chose to stay in school rather than drop out" (pg. 263).

For these reasons, researchers (Fisher, 1981; Kerr, 1996; Moon, 2002; Shoffner and Newsome, 2001; Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Woolcock, 1962) agree that gifted children should have access to a diversified counseling program by trained individuals knowledgeable in working with the gifted which includes: affective, career, and academic concerns (Moon, 2002). These specially trained individuals will have the knowledge to assist those gifted students who have magnified personality traits.

The current literature about the special supports needed by gifted students is varied; however, the one thing that is evident is the need for additional support by individuals trained in dealing with the idiosyncrasies of gifted students. The lack of supports for gifted students at the high school level may have long-lasting implications.

## Extent of Problem

Moon (2002) argues that sub groups within the gifted population potentially in need of the most extensive counseling and support are those who underachieve, gays, lesbians, highly gifted, minority and low-SES populations. Renzulli and Park (2000) examined gifted dropouts, and identified the need for special counseling services for minority and low-SES gifted students. This is noted as important considering the fact that nearly half of the gifted dropouts in their study were in the lower SES quartile and 10% were black, which is high because their representation in the gifted population is low.

In high school, the only programming afforded gifted students in many instances is limited solely to Advanced Placement [AP] and International Baccalaureate [IB] programs (Hertberg-Davis and Callahan, 2008), which does not support research that gifted students are best served by a broad range of services, including services that address the needs of gifted students beyond the higher level instruction provided in IB and AP programs (Landrum, Callahan and Shaklee, 2001; Landrum and Shaklee, 1999; Hertberg-Davis and Callahan, 2009).

The stakes for gifted students from minority and low-SES groups are high, specifically the lack of access to gifted programs and supports to succeed. This leads to a long-term impact upon the social and economic well-being (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009) of these groups of students because they have not had the equity of advantage which is heaped upon those who participate in AP and IB programs, including but not limited to: weighed grade point averages, interaction with intellectual peers, financial savings of college, better preparation for college, and the self-knowledge that one can succeed at a higher level. According to data compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics ([http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08\\_226.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_226.asp)), between 2000 and 2007, an average of 65% of the total undergraduate college population were white students while the minority student

population ranged from 28% to 32%. The enrollment of minority students in colleges / universities has remained low since data was first recorded in 1976 and their enrollment only accounted for 15% of the total enrollment. The enrollment of Blacks (13%) and Hispanics (11%) reached their highest percentage of total enrollment in 2007. The enrollment of low-SES students was also low as of 2004 ([http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/analysis/sa\\_table.asp?tableID=1056](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/analysis/sa_table.asp?tableID=1056)), and accounted for only 15% of the total post secondary enrollment in all forms of higher education.

The lower than average identification rate of gifted minority and low-SES students, combined with the dismal admission rate of minority students to higher education, as documented by the National Center for Education Statistics, has long-term repercussions for minority and low-SES students in terms of earnings power and breaking the cycle of poverty. Although efforts have been made in some instances to better serve these groups of students, there is still room for improvement. One effort aimed at improving the services to all high school gifted students, including minority and low-SES gifted students, is the addition of a Gifted Resource Specialist in one district's high schools.

### **The Gifted Resource Specialist at Maple Grove Schools**

In 2005 Maple Grove School District (pseudonym), a large suburban school district with approximately 17,000 students, introduced Gifted Resource Specialists [GRS] at the district's three high schools. Students in Maple Grove high schools have four diploma options, from highest to lowest requirements, including: International Baccalaureate, honors, college preparatory and the basic high school diploma. Although the literature reveals various definitions of giftedness, Maple Grove's gifted program is for the academically gifted with academic achievement and an intelligence quotient [IQ] at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher.

Cross, Cassady and Miller (2006), researchers who have collected data on more than 15,000 gifted students, has concluded that gifted students in large suburban districts tend to mold

themselves into the stereotypical gifted students. Some students are not able to handle the pressure of conforming to a personality that they are expected to be, rather than who they really are, and may lash out or drop out. Cross, Cassady and Miller (2006), quote one gifted student: "...I could, on some level, understand these kids in Colorado, the killers...that hatred grows...especially when you come to see that you're hated only because you are smart..." (pg. 125). Aside from the research supporting the need for specialized counseling for gifted students there appeared to be no incentive. In fact, there were three disincentives for the creation of these positions: monetary cutbacks from the state, the trends of other districts nationally to reallocate funds to remedial programs fearing financial sanctions from No Child Left Behind [NCLB] (Golden, 2004), and general fiscal tightness (Matthews and Smythe, 2000).

The first disincentive: In the era of NCLB, the gifted appear to be left behind with much attention and resources being placed on remedial, special education and English language learners. Despite this fact, many school districts write of meeting the needs of every child or maximizing each child's potential. Yet one has to wonder if this is rhetoric considering the penalties for those districts which fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP] and the nonexistence of incentives to further develop the academic abilities and talents of gifted adolescents.... Gentry (2006) said

Little exists in the act [NCLB] to encourage schools, as they are held accountable to a throng of unfunded requirements, to develop individual differences, creative thinking, innovation, or individual potentials, some of the very things in our public education system that, in the past, have helped to make ours a great nation. (pg. 24)

The second disincentive: Maple Grove School District is located in a state that changed its funding configuration for K-12 gifted education the same year it had created these new GRS positions. In the new system, the gifted funding which in the past had been separate was folded

into the district's base amount of state aid, and would be phased-in over a seven-year period. During the phase-in period, a financial penalty exists for any district that services an enrollment of 20% fewer gifted students than it did in 2005-2006. A district could choose to reduce services in an effort to save money and not be negatively impacted, provided it does not serve 20% fewer students. Essentially, there is no incentive or financial support to expand gifted programming, only to maintain current programming near the 2005-2006 level. During 2005-2006 school year Maple Grove School District had identified about 1100 students as academically gifted throughout all of its schools.

The third disincentive: The State's Standard Program contained a standard in Differentiated Instruction describing the types of programs and services schools were expected to provide, including services at all levels. Before the inception of the GRS, the district was already fulfilling its obligation for meeting the needs of the gifted by offering both Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs which fulfilled the state expectation for gifted services. For this reason, coupled with the two other disincentives, lack of financial incentive from the state and federal governments, it seems unusual that a district would expand its gifted program and add a GRS at each of the district's three high schools.

### **Addition of the Gifted Resource Specialist**

When the GRS was added to the district's high schools, it was done in response to concerns expressed by the parents of some gifted children. These parents believed that when their children entered high school they were not receiving appropriate gifted services. After a year of discussions within the district, some of which included the parents, a recommendation was made in Fall 2004 to make the high school gifted program a priority in 2005-2006. Prior to this the only offerings for the gifted were the AP, IB, and college-credit programs. In April 2005, the addition of

a GRS position at each of the three high schools was approved starting with the 2005-2006 school year. The cost of salary and benefits for these three positions was \$182,857. The three teachers combined served a total of 219 identified gifted high school students. Today (2010) each GRS serves an average of 119 students.

### **Functions of the Gifted Resource Specialist**

According to the district job description, some of the duties of the GRS are:

- provide specialized instruction and coordinate support services for identified gifted students,
- assist with advanced abilities programs in the high schools,
- develop a personal education plan for each gifted student,
- assist with class placement during enrollment,
- direct instruction of individuals and small groups of gifted students when needed,
- serve as an advisor and assist identified gifted students with social and emotional needs,
- assist the parents of identified gifted students to ensure success in high school,
- develop a bridge of support systems for minority and low-SES students in gifted programs,
- identify targeted services to meet the social and emotional needs of gifted students,
- serve as a post secondary resource for students interested in highly selective universities, and

- assist identified gifted students in the transitioning process for post graduate career preparation.

Although the GRS performs many of the functions of a traditional counselor, the GRS was not meant to replace the school counselor. He/she also has teaching experience, training and certification in gifted education. An individual profile is maintained by the GRS for each student and is updated on an annual basis. The profile is part of a larger file which has been maintained by the gifted teacher from the point at which a child is first identified as gifted. Within this file is information such as learning styles, interest inventories, course recommendations, student strengths / weaknesses, personal goals, career interest inventories, community service, clubs / organizations, and college / university interests. Several times throughout the year the GRS meets with the gifted students individually and in small groups with course selection and diploma option being a part of these discussions. In addition to this, each of the GRSs maintains an open-door policy for students who might be in immediate need. The GRS also serves as the building specialist on highly selective universities and arranges site level visits for these schools in collaboration with parents / gifted students. In addition to the student component of the GRS's responsibilities, he or she also educates the parents on the nature and needs of gifted children. At the high school level, this involves offering parents workshops on such topics as: social / emotional needs of the gifted student, diploma options, college preparation, financial aid, college essays, etc.

The GRS at each high school serves approximately 119 identified gifted students, whereas the traditional school counselor, who had been serving the gifted students prior to the GRS, serves more than 400 students. The lower ratio of student to GRS frees up time for trust and respect to develop between the gifted student and the GRS (Vanderhook, 2006). Counselors, unlike the GRS, are not required to have specialized training in dealing with gifted students, nor have teaching experience with gifted students.

At the conclusion of this school year (2010), Maple Grove high schools will have had two cohorts of graduates, each of which has had four years of support by a GRS. In the first cohort of students, there were 93 identified gifted students of which 89 graduated. Among these 89 students 34 (38 %) were from minority and low-SES populations of students. Over this four-year period the district high schools had an average of 397 identified gifted students per year and a total of nearly 1500 gifted students at all levels. The high school general population consisted of an minority and low-SES population of approximately 36 % over this same four-year period. From this same group of 89 gifted graduates, the following diplomas were earned by gifted graduates and by minority and low-SES gifted populations.

Table 1

*Maple Grove Cohort One: Diplomas Earned*

Type of Diploma	Gifted	Minority and Low-SES	Gifted	Minority and Low-SES
		Gifted	(%)	Gifted (%)
International Baccalaureate	7	4	8%	12%
Honors	24	11	27%	32%
College Preparatory	36	10	40%	29%
District Diploma	22	9	25%	27%
Total	89	34	100%	100%

The percentage of gifted students choosing the honors diploma has consistently increased from 10% to 27% since the addition of the GRS at each high school.

### **Specific Research Questions**

This study sought to answer three specific research questions:

1. How or what role do students perceive the GRS having served in their high school experience?
2. What relationship do the students see between the presence of the GRS and,
  - a. their persistence to graduation,
  - b. their choice of diploma option, and
  - c. their post-high school activities?
3. What impact does the presence of a GRS have upon the diploma choice (International Baccalaureate, Honors, College Prep or Regular) for minority and low-SES populations of gifted students?

### **Significance of the Research**

The findings of this research will contribute to the fields of school administration of special services, gifted education, counseling, and staffing, by examining the efficacy of one district's administrative response to the specialized needs of its high school gifted students. This research will contribute to these areas in five ways.

First, Vanderbrook (2006) wrote, "Much of the research on gifted students neglects to examine the students' perceptions of their high school experiences" (pg. 5). This study seeks to understand the role of the GRS from the perspective of the students.

Second, Callahan (2008) said, "The development of services and curriculum for gifted students of high school age has been relatively neglected...little research... on the few options that do exist" (pg. 199). This research specifically targets high school graduates from one cohort as recommended by Willett and Singer (1991). This research fills a void in the current research base because little is known about high school minority and low-SES gifted populations in schools where there is a support system in place specifically trained to meet their needs. Hansen and Toso (Fall,

2007) wrote that as gifted students progressed into high school they felt as though they had no advocate in the school and some experienced emotional turmoil. This study addresses this void in the research by examining the support system of a GRS with minority and low-SES gifted populations.

Third, in Maple Grove School District, the overall graduation rate has declined since 2005, dropping from 89.6% to 81.7% in 2009. However, the graduation rate for gifted students since the inception of the GRS has fluctuated between 99% and 94%. In the three years prior to the addition of the GRS, the graduation rate for gifted students averaged 88.7%. This study looked at the relation of the GRS to graduation rate for minority and low-SES gifted high school students.

Fourth, as an administrator or a staffing manager, an important consideration is the cost of the additional staff. This study examines the impact of such a position on minority and low-SES populations in consideration of the costs to meet the specialized counseling and programming needs of the gifted high school student. Four years after the addition of this position, the salary and benefits costs have risen from \$182,857 to \$289,467. However, it is important to note that one position was added by the district when a new high school was opened.

Fifth, for this district itself this study revealed how a GRS in high schools provides a needed support system for minority and low-SES populations of gifted students. Additionally, this piece of information is important to the field of educational administration and human resources because current programming for gifted students at the high school level is predominately limited to AP and IB programs, both of which have been shown not to constitute a comprehensive gifted program (Landrum and Shaklee, 1999; Landrum, Callahan and Shaklee, 2001; Hertberg-Davis and Callahan, 2008). Overall, the research will help to provide a research base for policy makers and district-level decision makers in times of tight budgets and increased mandates behind NCLB.

The research question, “What impact, if any, has the presence of a gifted resource specialist had upon the high school experience and persistence to graduation for minority and low-SES gifted adolescents?” is answered through nine in-depth interviews with identified gifted graduates who chose to participate in this study. Chapter two of the dissertation is a review of literature including: chronological and varied definitions of giftedness, special counseling needs of the gifted, the impact of race and ethnicity, dropouts among the gifted, and the special training needed by those who work with the gifted. Chapter three explains the selection of participants, data collection, data organization, validity, data analysis, reporting of findings, ethical considerations, and my role in this research. Chapter four presents a biographical sketch of each of the graduates. The biographical sketches not only detail the graduates, but also his / her family structure. Chapter five reports the analysis of the nine interviews. Chapter six concludes the main body of the research with answers to each of the particular research questions. The emerging themes from the interviews are summarized and are presented in relationship to the review of literature. Although the theoretical framework for this research was not clear at the beginning, it did emerge and was helpful in explaining the role of the GRS. The Theories of Social and Cultural Capital are used ex post facto to explain how the Gifted Resource Specialists supported the graduates. The limitations of the research are also presented in this section. Chapter six in explaining the role of the GRS also includes implications for practice, implications for future research, references, and all appendices referred to in the dissertation.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

A significant body of research supports the fact that gifted students are a diverse group with diverse needs (Clark, 1992; Gandara, 2005; Neihart, Reis, Robinson & Moon, 2002; Olenchak and Reis, 2002; Ford, 2004), therefore their needs are best met through a broad range of services (Landrum, Callahan and Shaklee, 2001; Landrum and Shaklee, 1999).

Although there is a bounty of research about gifted education dating back to the middle 1940's, this review and the literature base related to this particular study were predominately gathered from the 1970's to present. The research is organized beginning with the definitions of giftedness, followed by an explanation of the special needs of the gifted, the role of race and ethnicity for minority and low-SES gifted adolescents, research about dropouts among the gifted, the special counseling needs of the gifted, the specialized training needs for gifted professionals, and gifted resource specialists.

#### **Giftedness Defined**

This review of literature begins with a look at the various definitions for giftedness, which in itself presents the greatest challenge for identifying and servicing the needs of the gifted students (Lajoie and Shore, 1981; Woods, 1995). Prior to the 1950's most viewed gifted students as those who excelled academically. However, by the 1950's multifaceted models of intelligence from Guilford, DeHann and Kough (Matthews, 2004) began to emerge which ultimately led to broader and more inclusive definitions of giftedness. Although there were various definitions for giftedness, there was not one single agreed upon definition prior to the 1970's. Even today, a commonly held belief in primary and secondary schools is that gifted children are only those who excel academically because of their great intellectual ability.

## **Varied Abilities**

Prior to 1972, there was no federal definition of giftedness. In 1972 Sydney Marland, United States Commissioner of Education, published the first federal definition of giftedness which was multidimensional beyond intellectual abilities and included students who excelled in areas such as: creative or productive thinking, leadership, visual and performing arts, and athletic ability.

In the 1980's, researchers Sternberg (1986) and Gardner (1983) expanded the most commonly held definitions of giftedness beyond intellectual ability and developed new theories of what it means to be gifted. Other researchers (Renzulli, 1978; Tannenbaum, 1986; Feldhusen, 1986; Gagne, 1995) mirrored these more encompassing definitions by espousing that giftedness was the interaction of both intellectual and non intellectual abilities with some (Gagne, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen, 1997; Pirtto, 1994; Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006) going so far as to say that these non intellectual characteristics should be considered as different domains. These expanded definitions of giftedness are more in line with the present day talent search models employed by regional talent identification programs. Tolan (1994), Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006), assert that present definitions need reconsideration with less consideration being given to external characteristics such as artistic talent and academic success, and more consideration being given to internal characteristics such as: assertiveness, emotional sensitivity, and creativity.

In 1993, the United States Department of Education further expanded the definition of what it means to be gifted:

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 capacity

in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (pg. 19).

## **Leadership**

Sternberg (2005) believes that leadership abilities and demonstration of such should be a consideration in determining one's true giftedness. Sternberg's Wisdom Intelligence Creativity Synthesized theory proposes that leaders "use creativity to generate ideas, intelligence to analyze and implement the ideas, and wisdom to consider how their ideas will affect individuals and the world" (Sternberg in Perrone et.al, 2007).

## **Adult Giftedness**

Perrone (et.al, 2007) writes, "An extensive review of literature revealed no existing quantitative measures of adult giftedness with psychometric properties." As a result, Perrone and a research team sought to analyze Silverman's Adult Giftedness Scale (Silverman, 1997) for psychometric properties by empanelling a group of adult participants. Participants were asked open ended questions and allowed to define giftedness. Although they defined giftedness in a variety of ways, the common theme was *those who can learn quickly and have great knowledge*. This seems to mirror most of the widely held definitions of giftedness.

## **State-Level Definitions**

Although there is a federal definition of giftedness, states are free to develop their own definitions. In about 40% of state definitions of giftedness, leadership is now included (Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). The State of Missouri defines gifted children in Section 162.675. RSMo, as "those children who exhibit precocious development of mental capacity and learning potential as

determined by competent professional evaluation to the extent that continued educational growth and stimulation could best be served by an academic environment beyond that offered through a standard grade level curriculum." Within this same state, there are 551 school districts, each of which may have their own definition, if they have one at all. For those districts that do have a gifted program approved by the State of Missouri, each is free to have its own admissions criteria for the program. Therefore, a student identified as gifted in one district may not be in another due to these variations.

Although there is no agreed upon definition of giftedness except at the federal level, there are some commonalities amongst state definitions. Some definitions include the artistically talented while others exclude this segment of the population attributing giftedness only to those who outperform their peers academically, if isolated to school populations. General consensus amongst experts are that students who score in the top 3-5% of those who take standardized tests or IQ examinations (Cloud and Thornburg, 2004; Matthews, 2006) are gifted.

### **Special Needs of the Gifted**

Tolan (1994), whose research has looked at the challenges faced by gifted adults, asserts that most gifted individuals are identified during their childhood years when their abilities overshadow those of their peers. As they mature they do not lose their giftedness; their uniquenesses often go unnoticed unless they invent something or win a major award. They do however, face obstacles. They may experience boredom, dissatisfaction with life / career and isolation. While some are quite successful, others may be less than such because their strengths may not be appreciated in their particular career field.

## **Social Balance**

Matthews and Kitchen (2007) studied school-within-a school gifted programs to examine the perceptions of students and teachers in public secondary schools. They found an apparent conflict between meeting the special learning needs of gifted students and promoting social equity. Gifted students have special needs that cannot be met without differentiating. "At the same time however, these students must coexist with others, and it is best for everyone if the coexistence is experienced as mutually beneficial rather than as antagonistic and elitist." (pg. 256) VanTassel-Baska (1996, in Swiatek 2007) stated that the more gifted a student is, the greater the need for an individual array of services to meet his / her need.

## **Gender Specific**

Vanderbrook (2006) says that helping gifted girls understand the steps in career planning for the future can make a significant improvement in their lives. Having the knowledge to work with gifted girls can have long-term implications for their futures because gender differences have been found in gifted adults (Perrone, et. al, 2007). Reis (1998) wrote, "Women are responsible for 75% of family care-giving in the United States (pg. 28). Perrone, et. al. (2007) says that typically life roles such as parenting and contributing to housework are not emphasized for men; however, women are well aware of the many expectations that society has for their performance in multiple life roles. Women may perceive themselves as less than gifted if they are unable to excel in all of these areas.

## **Diversified Programming**

Tolan (in Perrone et. al., 2007) reported that when gifted individuals have an opportunity to interact with other gifted individuals, be it at work or in social situations, they experience a sense of belonging because of their like-mindedness. Therefore, within a school system gifted children

benefit from the interactions with their gifted peers. Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius, (2006) wrote that while it seems that gifted students may reach high levels of moral and leadership development, there must be curricular interventions and special programs in place to maximize these learning opportunities. Without such opportunities, these students may not be able to take the right actions or make appropriate decisions at the correct time when faced with a dilemma. A study conducted at the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary revealed, “even with minimal curricular intervention, minority and low-income students benefit from advanced curricula and instructional strategies that challenge them” (Swanson, 2006, pg. 11).

### **Adulthood**

Research regarding gifted adults is important because it can help those who plan for and work with the gifted adolescent to better prepare them for adulthood. Jacobsen (1999) identified several positive aspects of being a gifted adult: advanced problem-solving, high level of energy, enjoyment of debates and discussions, multiple interests, driven to certain interests, and insightfulness. The negative aspects often experienced by gifted adults include: critical of self, idealism, high standard for self and others, and perfectionism.

## **Role of Race and Ethnicity for Minority and Low-SES Gifted Students**

### **Identification of Students**

Despite the fact that giftedness can be found amongst all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups (Bonner and Jennings, 2007; Delpit, 1995, Ford et al., 1999; Sternberg, 2007), Ford (2003) and Robinson (2003) found that minority students are underrepresented in gifted programs. Other researchers (Baldwin, 1985 ; Chinn and Hughes, 1987) have also expressed concerns about the low numbers of Native Americans, Hispanics and African American students represented in gifted programming. “Different cultures have different conceptions of what it means to be gifted. But in

identifying children as gifted, we often use only our own conception, ignoring the cultural context in which the children grew up” (Sternberg, 2007, pg. 160).

In 1995, Ford described gifted and talented programs as “the most segregated programs in the United States” (pg. 52). Borland (2003) when speaking of a school-within-a-school gifted program in an urban district wrote that an observer could simply look at the make up a class and determine if it was a gifted classroom or a regular classroom. Some researchers, including Sapon-Shevin (1994) say that gifted programs in urban districts serve as a means by which to prevent white flight, to the exclusion of minority students, while others (Ford, 2003) view gifted education as “rife with inequities, particularly with regard to providing equitable educational opportunities for students of color” (pg. 143). One team of researchers (Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown, 2008) wrote: “Despite our best efforts at expanding the definition of giftedness to include several categories and criteria in the identification process, we continue to see a high degree of underrepresent[ation among African American males...” (pg. 1) Swanson (Winter, 2006) said, “Teachers often act as the gatekeepers for gifted programs, so their attitudes and views of children are key to why some gifted youngsters are not entering ‘the gate’” (pg. 11). Teachers’ interactions with students are also an impacting factor (Weinstein, 2002).

### **Impact of Social / Cultural Identity**

Several researchers (Ogbu, 1989; McWhorter, 2000; Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman, 2002; Aronson, 2002) have proposed theories which assert social identities can have a detrimental effect on academic achievement of minority and low-SES groups. Support for these theories in school-aged populations can be found in empirical research (Arroyo and Zigler, 1995; McKown and Weinstein, 2002, 2003). Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman (2002) propose a “deficit” view as being a barrier to the increased numbers of African American students being identified for gifted

programs. They explain that some believe these students may not have what it takes to be gifted. Grantham (2002) interviewed Dr. Mary M. Frasier, a well-known African American educator who specialized in the area of gifted education at the University of Georgia who said:

Things like poor kids and gifted programs just don't go together. I mean, I think that people in their heart of hearts really think that when kids are poor they can't possibly perform at the level of kids that are advantaged because they haven't had certain kinds of advantages in their home. There is such a cause-effect relationship in gifted programs that create barriers, you know, I call them my list of prerequisites to being gifted. You must have two parents; they must be college educated. You must be White. You must be in the suburbs. I know this sounds a little bit face[i]tious[sic], but if you look at the enrollment in gifted programs, it's not face[i]tious[sic]. And any time you have those factors missing, then it is very difficult for people to grasp this whole issue of giftedness in other groups. (pg. 50)

Beliefs such as those stated by Frasier lead to under identification of gifted students from minority groups resulting in unrealized potential. According to Howard (2003), "Some researchers posit that the dissonance that exists between school and student [home] culture is the primary reason for the academic underachievement and social maladjustment of racially diverse students" (pg. 6). Prior to Howard, Bonner (2001) said: "In the school setting, students are expected to achieve and perform at levels commensurate with their gifted...designation. At home, students are expected to act in a manner that conforms to their environment and social climate" (pg. 651). The African American male "becomes caught in the middle...not 'real enough' and 'too smart' to be part of the home community and not 'cultured enough' and 'too foreign' to be part of the mainstream" (Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown, 2008, pg. 5). The same researchers wrote: "For the

African American male student, the secondary context is a time in which giftedness should be cultivated and honed for the critical next step in the educational journey—higher education” (pg. 4).

### **Peer Influence**

Peer influence is a significant factor in the underachievement of highly able students and often times responsible for the lower enrollment of gifted students in gifted programs as they progress through school (Reis and Callahan, 1996). This phenomenon is magnified within certain minority and low-SES populations. Some researchers (Ogbu, 1989; Ogbu and Simons, 1998) believe that minorities, excluding Asians, have an identity that is opposite the norm of society, including the views related to schooling, which leads to their underachievement and desire to achieve. Ogbu (1989) asserts that minorities such as African Americans who have a strong identity related to their ethnic group may develop an oppositional frame to things such as schooling and other things accepted by the majority culture. McWhorter (2000) goes so far as to describe African Americans as having “separatist and anti-intellectual attitudes” (pg. 24) and “...to the extent that these contentions are accurate, academically talented students from groups whose societal academic stereotype is negative are most at risk of underperforming” (Worrell, 2007, pg. 24).

### **Advanced Program Representation**

As students move on into high school, the only programming afforded gifted students is in many instances limited solely to AP and IB programs. (Davis and Callahan, 2008) This limited programming would not support research which clearly indicates that gifted students are best served by a broad range of services (Landrum, Callahan and Shaklee, 2001; Landrum and Shaklee, 1999). As Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008) say, “AP and IB courses on their own do

not constitute comprehensive secondary gifted programs...options that address the needs of groups of gifted students beyond those who fit the 'AP and IB mold" (pgs. 212-213).

Just as the low-SES and minority students are underrepresented in gifted programming, so too are they underrepresented in these [AP and IB] programs. "One AP student summed up the stakes students from populations traditionally underrepresented in AP and IB courses attached to these courses; 'AP represents a better future, a chance to succeed so that your dreams can come true (student focus group interview.)'" (Hertberg-Davis and Callahan, 2008, pg.209) Those with the most at stake appear to be the most underrepresented. This leads to long-term impact upon these groups of students because they have not had the equity of advantage which is heaped upon those who participate in AP and IB programs, including but not limited to: weighed grade point averages, interaction with intellectual peers, financial savings of college, better preparation for college, and the self-knowledge that one can succeed at a higher level.

## **Dropouts Among Gifted Students**

### **Dropout Calculation**

The method of study for gifted students who are potential dropouts and those who actually do drop out is up for debate in the research with some (Willett and Singer, 1991) believing that researchers should follow a single cohort of gifted students over several years, instead of studying several cohorts for just one year. The difficulty in studying dropouts among the gifted stems from two major factors: the definitions of gifted and the methods (definitions) by which dropouts are calculated. The most commonly accepted methods of dropout calculation are the event rate count, the status rate count and the cohort count. The event rate counts students who leave high school each year as compared to other years. In some instances, the same student could be counted more than once if he/she comes and goes from school or changes schools. The State of North

Carolina reports dropouts in this manner. The status rate yields a proportion of all adolescents in a given population who have not graduated or are not enrolled in high school at a given point in time. The cohort rate is the number of dropouts from a given group of adolescents over a specified period of time. In four year high schools, it is generally over a four-year period. The State of Missouri used a cohort persistence model through the 2009 school year. Gifted students who left high school prior to the end of the four years from which they began to attend high school would have been considered dropouts. Those who left early to attend college or who left one school to attend another without the school knowing their whereabouts would have been considered dropouts.

### **Concerns with Dropout Calculation**

In reviewing the literature regarding high school dropouts who may be gifted or are identified as gifted, the 1972 Marland report is frequently mentioned, both for the fact that it provides a number for the dropout question and it serves as a foundation for later studies of gifted dropouts. According to this report, 3-4% of the total population studied who dropped out, had an IQ of 120 or above. This loss accounts for 17.6% among the gifted. Since the issuance of this report the 17.6% has been interpreted in a variety of ways which has led to much discourse among researchers in this area. According to Martinson (1972, cited in Irvine, 1987), "Unfortunately this figure has attracted much attention. Even more unfortunately, that figure has been misinterpreted as the percent of dropouts who are gifted, rather than the percentage of gifted who dropout." (pg. 79) The study was also limited to students in Iowa around 1958. In more recent times the figure has varied from 17 to 20%, depending on the study in which it was used (Solorzano, 1983; Ballard, 1984; Rimm, 1995; Robertson, 1991). Irvine (1987) said that such a percentage "defies mathematical logic. If the dropout rate for all students is as low as 28% (lower than many

estimates) and 18% of those are gifted, then *all* gifted students are dropping out” (pg. 79). In 2000, Renzulli and Park wrote “only limited research has been devoted to gifted or high-ability dropouts (Robertson, 1991; Sadowski, 1987; Stephenson, 1958)” (pg. 261). Robertson reports the number of gifted and talented dropouts between 18 and 25%. These variations in the number of gifted students who actually drop out and are at risk of dropping out have the variance of definitions as one factor in their accuracy. The overall percentage of students who were not enrolled in high school and had not completed high school in 1996 dropped to 11.1%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. This would also cause the number of gifted dropouts to decline, considering they are portion of this percentage.

### **Dropout Identification and Prevention**

Renzulli and Park (2000) looked at gifted dropouts to determine who they are and why they drop out. In their study, they mentioned several issues which make it challenging to accurately study dropouts of gifted students. Availability of longitudinal data is sparse and difficult to obtain (Robertson, 1981): the process of dropping out (Kunkel and Pittman, 1991) and the definition of dropping out vary across state and district lines (Woods, 1995).

Renzulli and Park (2000) concluded that schools and teachers should communicate closely with parents and target dropout prevention to minority and economically disadvantaged gifted adolescents who are potential dropouts. This conclusion appears easily arrived at considering the fact that various factors impact a student’s decision to dropout, including: gender, race, socioeconomic status, family background and personal problems (Young and Reich, 1974; Beacham, 1980; Noth and O’Neill, 1981). Other researchers ( Schwartz, 2002; Suh and Suh, 2006; Hansen and Toso, 2007) also reported on the impact of personal, family, social and school

variables in the gifted adolescents decision to dropout and Gonzalez (2002) reported Hispanic gifted students as being the most at risk of dropping out, followed by African Americans.

### **Impact of Counseling Services**

Sadowski's(1987) study found several characteristics in a case study of gifted high school dropouts, one of which was the evidence of a lack of counseling in high school. Betts and Neihart (1988) developed profiles of the gifted dropout and the common theme was one of withdrawal and depression because of unmet needs and unaddressed feelings. Hansen and Toso (2007) found that gifted students who chose to drop out did so because they felt they had no advocate within the school system who understood them.

### **Impact of Intervention Efforts**

According to Stephenson's (1985) study, intervention efforts at saving the gifted from potential dropout status are best targeted at freshmen and sophomore students because almost 60% of the dropping out took place during these high school years. Other researchers (Coley, 1995; Drapela, 2006) would disagree with this conclusion based upon their research, which concluded that efforts at warding off dropouts in ninth grade or later had little effect on whether or not the students ultimately decided to leave school. Hensen and Toso (2007) wrote, "...intervention in high school most often is too late" (pg. 41). Cordy (1993, cited in Renzulli and Park, 2000) reported,

The presence of a caring adult, a supportive peer group, alternative educational program, academic success, motivation to attend postsecondary educational institutions, and participation in fundamental religious groups were reasons at-risk students chose to stay in school rather than drop out. (pg. 263)

## **Impact of School Structure**

In a Time (2004) magazine article, Jan Davidson, co-author of *Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds*, is quoted as saying, "When we ask exceptional children about their main obstacle, they almost always say it's their school. Their school makes them put in seat time, and they can't learn at their own ability level" (pg. 57). This quote was in response to a question in a 2000 study for *Gifted Child Quarterly* by Joseph Renzulli and Sunghee Park in which 5% of 3,520 gifted children who dropped out did so after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Comparatively speaking, they report the number of non-gifted kids who dropout as 5.2%. Nicolas Colangelo, Director of the Belin Blanc Center for Gifted Education reported in 2002 that nearly 25% of the 87,000 students who took the SAT in 8th grade, score at the same level of senior high school students who are just entering college. Therefore, the typical school curriculum entering high school is already well below their needs.

## **Counseling Needs of the Gifted**

### **Social and Cultural**

A strong counseling and advisement program is important to the long-term development of gifted children. In a previously cited study published by *Gifted Child Quarterly* (2000) researchers looked at gifted dropouts and concluded that there was a need for special counseling services for minority and low-SES gifted students. This is noted as important considering the fact that nearly half of the gifted dropouts in this study were in lower SES quartile. The number of blacks (10%) was also high considering their representation amongst the full sample. Transitional periods in a gifted student's life, including moves between schools such as middle to high school or between gifted programs with different expectations, are periods of time when specialized counseling is needed (Moon, 2002). Further, Moon speaks of the sub groups within the gifted population in need

of potentially the most extensive counseling and support such as those who underachieve, gays, lesbians, highly gifted, and minority and low-SES populations.

### **Sensitivities**

Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) studied 200 gifted high school students to learn more about their emotional intelligence, moral judgment and leadership. The results showed the gifted students to be lower on stress management and impulse control than the normative group of students. This conclusion was supported by large effect sizes (male  $d = -1.00$ , female  $d = -1.27$ ) which showed the gifted students were more easily upset, and were not good at controlling their impulses toward anger. Another conclusion of this study was that academically gifted students are more morally sensitive and advanced in their reasoning than their peers; therefore, the additional supports of a trained counselor to address these needs would be beneficial.

### **Gender Differences**

Kline and Short (1991) studied gifted female adolescents grades 1-12 and found that as these girls grew up, their self-esteem declined and their perfectionist tendencies increased, making them more vulnerable to eating disorders, substance abuse and depression (Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate, 1990; Kline and Short, 1991). Clark (1983) studied the transitions of gifted girls throughout their school aged years and their ability to adapt to these transitions, finding that girls had to slowly adjust to the expectations of traditional female roles and slowly suppress their intellectual abilities because of society's message that beauty is valued over intelligence (Ryan, 1999). "As the true self is lost, the gifted individual may experience an increase in poor coping skills, depression, guilt, and learned helplessness" (Sands and Howard-Hamilton, 1994 in Ryan, 1999, pg. 14).

## Beyond Career Guidance

The counseling component at the secondary level should not just be limited to career development, but also the social/emotional needs of these gifted students (Colangelo, 1991; Fisher, 1981; Kerr, 1996; Shoffner and Newsome, 2001; Moon, 2002; Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Woolcock, 1962) and interactions with peers (Moon, 2002). "...[T]he absence of counseling services extending beyond guidance for college remains disconcerting" (Vanderbrook, 2006, pg. 139). Some researchers (Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Kerr, 1994) as written in Vanderbrook (2006), provide reasons for the need for this specialized counseling,

- First, some gifted children and adolescents deny their abilities and become underachieving students.
- Second, some gifted children need assistance understanding that not everyone has the same intellectual abilities.
- Third, many students face the issue of perfectionism and a fear of failure which stifles creativity, as well as intellectualism. The long-term impact is the inability to accept challenges to grow academically, emotionally, and intellectually.
- Fourth, pressures from age-group peers and society can work against intellectually gifted students because of popular culture values which may be different than their own desire for academic excellence. Research indicates that gifted girls are most susceptible to such influence due to the intensity of peer pressure from other female adolescents.

In concluding the Perrone et. al. study (2007) it is written, "Knowing the factors that impact adults' self-perceptions of giftedness may allow counselors to develop interventions that help...to correct misconceptions and maintain accurate self perceptions" (pg. 259).

[Therefore], “Fewer students per counselor would free up time to develop trust and respect between counselors and students...[those who work with the gifted] should be required to be endorsed or otherwise certified in gifted education” (Vanderbrook, 2006, pg. 142).

## **Training Needs for Gifted Professionals**

### **Diversity and Personality**

Researchers (Fisher, 1981; Kerr, 1996; Moon, 2002; Shoffner and Newsome, 2001; Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Woolcock, 1962) agree that gifted children should have access to a diversified counseling program which includes: affective, career, and academic concerns special to gifted students. Specially trained counselors who work with the gifted can intervene with underachievement, perfectionism (Moon 2002), and other personality traits which are often magnified in gifted adolescents. Perrone et al (2007) believe that giftedness generally elicits positive images; however, there are some negative realms of giftedness which need better understanding by individuals who work with gifted children. They write, “Educators and counselors can benefit from learning more about how giftedness impacts individuals throughout their lives” (pg. 259). Woolcock (1962) believes that those who teach the gifted have some of the same personality traits as those they work with; in fact, teachers of the gifted who are gifted themselves can better relate to the academic and affective needs of their students. “Notably, teachers with whom the students most identified exhibited characteristics similar to the characteristics that the students possessed...knew that the participants needed understanding...” (Vanderbrook, 2006, pg. 136).

In a 2003 study (Flowers, Milner, and Moore) looked at African-American high-school students in gifted education programs and noted “teachers and school counselors need to improve

their level of cultural awareness, and make their behaviors and teaching styles congruent with those of the population they serve..." (cited in Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown, 2008, pg. 7).

### **Gender Differences**

Ryan (1999) wrote, "another vital piece of working effectively with this population [gifted females] is having the necessary knowledge base of the particular issues and their unique effects on the gifted" (pg. 15). She goes on to say, "It is unfortunate that, when most counselors think of the gifted population (if they do at all), they labor under the fallacy that these youths have their worlds under complete control, suffer from few personal traumas, and do not need special attention or counseling" (pg. 15). Other researchers (Kline and Meckstroth, 1985, cited in Strip, Swassing, and Kidder, 1991) say that the opposite is true. They wrote, "Giftedness does not preclude the possibility that adolescents will experience serious emotional trauma" (pg. 124). Ryan (1999) concludes that general school counselors "tend to have little knowledge of this [gifted females] population, their problems, or their needs" (pg.17).

A 1998 study by Sally Reis suggested that gifted females have a general lack of knowledge about how to prepare for careers. In her study of several young gifted high school girls, limited knowledge existed amongst the group about how to become a desired professional such as a scientist, doctor, lawyer, etc... In Vanderbrook's (2006) study, gifted females and their perceptions regarding their experiences in AP and IB programs was reported; the participants said their counselors did not address their emotional needs. They reported having no conversations with their counselors "regarding their present or future lives" (pg. 15). "Researchers have suggested that the best way to combat girls' lack of understanding about their futures is to discuss the issue with them" (Vanderbrook, 2006). According to Shoffner and Newsome (2001) gifted

females are driven toward a desire for identity, intimacy, and achievement sooner than their non-gifted peers.

## **Depression**

Cross, Cassady, and Miller (2006) studied suicide ideation and personality characteristics among gifted adolescents. They believe knowing the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) is valuable for those charged with working with gifted adolescents. This information is helpful for group dynamics; matching students, teachers, and advisors (Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown, 2008); and predicting how students might respond under certain circumstances. This could be helpful in reducing the often self-imposed stressors of the gifted adolescent. Baker (1995, as cited in Cross, Cassady, and Miller, 2006, pg. 297)

...[E]ducators of the gifted should be alerted that approximately 10% of their students may be suffering from clinically significant levels of depression. This finding supports the need for the faculty to receive training in recognizing and intervening with depressed students in their classrooms....[G]ifted students, like their average age peers, could benefit from preventive affective education or from support to understand their affective development and to cope with stressors and psychological distress. Given the incidence of depressive symptomatology in adolescents, school-based curricula seem warranted to address the mental health needs of high school students. (pg. 223)According to Schmitz and Galbraith, 1985 (cited in Ryan, 1999, pg. 17), "To remedy some of these gaps in services, professionals with a background in gifted services should be sought out to consult with ...professionals who are dealing with this population."

## **Gifted Resource Specialists**

### **Limited Usage**

In reviewing the literature, no research could be found that specifically mentioned gifted resource specialists. One reference could be found where gifted education specialists were specifically mentioned. This was by researcher Nancy B. Hertzog in 1998. Hertzog worked with a particular district as an advisor during its transformation from a pullout gifted program to an integrated gifted program. In doing so, the district reviewed the way that it viewed its gifted education specialists. These particular specialists served children in grades K-12, and according to Hertzog, the specialist worked with teachers to identify the strengths and talents of students to provide appropriate experiences. The role of the specialist was also one of advocacy and education of parents, teachers, students, and community members about the special needs of gifted students through a series of special forums where participants would meet, discuss, and articulate their views to maintain an understanding of the philosophy of this particular gifted program. The gifted education specialist also worked to serve those students whose needs were not being met by the general curriculum. The focus shifted from serving students who have been arbitrarily identified as gifted, to serving students who were not being challenged in the regular classroom. The specialist assisted other educators in developing special programming for gifted students which meant meeting with teachers to review individual students. Additionally, the specialist provided information about enrichment opportunities to meet the needs of gifted students.

### **Role of the Specialist**

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Gifted Guidelines Manual and Administrative Procedures, places those who work with gifted children into one of

several categories. One such model is the Gifted Resource Teacher (GRT). This teacher works with students and teachers on a flexible schedule.

This position is for grades 9-12 only. This teacher provides services that are designed to meet the academic and affective needs of identified gifted 9-12 grade students. School districts will be allowed a minimum of 150 minutes of teacher's instructional time spent exclusively with identified gifted 9-12 grade students in one or more of the following approved activities:

- direct instruction of individuals or small groups of identified gifted students
- services targeting the social/emotional needs of identified gifted students
- establishing job shadowing and mentoring opportunities
- selection/planning/scheduling of college entrance exam(s)
- researching/planning/scheduling educational options such as dual credit courses, distance learning, correspondence courses, and schedule planning
- assisting with post-secondary school research/selection, admissions procedures, and completing scholarship applications
- monitoring identified students' progress in any of the above activities
- working with regular classroom teachers and modifying regular classroom curriculum to meet the needs of identified gifted students. (pg. 13)

VanTassel-Baska (unknown) writes that schools need differentiated practices at all levels for gifted learners...“access to advanced opportunities outside of school is a facilitative role for schools to perform on behalf of their...gifted learners” (pg. 91). Other activities outside of school include internships, mentorships, enrichment opportunities, special interest seminars, (Davis and Callahan, 2008) social interests, (Callahan and Kyburg, 2005) and community service.

In reviewing the literature about gifted students and their needs it became readily apparent that they often face special challenges much like other special populations of students identified specifically by NCLB. There seems to be a unanimous consensus among researchers about the special needs of the gifted being unmet, regardless of how giftedness is defined, or only being met to a very limited degree once they reach high school. Within the gifted high school population, those students already traditionally underrepresented in gifted programs face even greater obstacles to long-term success and the attainment of their fullest potential given the limited number of administrative responses to their specialized needs to date.

## Chapter Three

### Methods

#### Introduction to Methods

The focus of this research was on gifted graduate perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of them. The research questions were such that individual perceptions are being reported with limited baseline numerical data; therefore, rich, vivid qualitative reporting could best get at the perceptions of the students. According to Creswell (2003), "One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory. This means that not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas" (pg. 30). Berg (2004) adds, "...certain experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers" (pg. 3). Such is the case with gifted students from minority and low-SES groups. Little is known about their actual experiences; therefore the following three research questions have been addressed.

1. How or what role do students perceive the GRS having served in their high school experience?
2. What relationship do the students see between the presence of the GRS and,
  - a. their persistence to graduation,
  - b. their choice of diploma option, and
  - c. their post-high school activities?
3. What impact does the presence of a GRS have upon the diploma choice (International Baccalaureate, Honors, College Prep or Regular) for minority and low-SES populations of gifted students?

## **Data Sources**

General data sources included sole source records maintained by the gifted program coordinator, district demographic records, and state report cards. The records maintained by the coordinator were used to identify qualifying students and determine overall program numbers related to participation rate, graduation rate, type of diploma earned, and contact information. Interviews were conducted with gifted graduates from minority and low-SES populations who were in the first cohort. The process of interviewing these graduates was the most effective method to understand the impact of the GRSs upon the lives of these students and it allowed for an exploration of their particular perceptions, thus providing a maximum opportunity for two way communication (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, pg. 554).

## **Study Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used with a predetermined set of criteria required to investigate the research question (Patton, 1990). The criteria used for graduate selection were 1) a 2009 identified gifted graduate from one of the three high schools in the study school district, and 2) member of a minority or low-SES group including African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, or low-SES. Lunch status was used as a determinant of SES status; specifically those students who qualified for free or reduced lunch under federal guidelines met the definition of low-SES. There were 34 students meeting these criteria, making up 39% of the district's cohort one gifted graduates, and therefore eligible to be interviewed for the study. The Human Subjects Application was approved (Appendix A). A review of birthdates showed none of the potential interviewees were under the age of 18; therefore, parental consent to participate was not necessary.

Each of the qualifying graduates was contacted via regular mail with a letter explaining the details of the study. The letter detailed response information (Appendix B). Follow-up telephone calls were made about 2 weeks after the initial mailing to those who did not respond to determine their interest in participation. When contacting the potential interviewees, I introduced myself and asked if the letter was received. I explained how the graduate would be able to help with the research, and then asked for a time and place it would be convenient for me to interview them. For some of the graduates, this involved a telephone interview (Appendix C). For those who still did not want to be interviewed, I provided contact information should they change their mind. Table 2 shows the breakdown of participants by ethnicity and SES.

Table 2

*Participant Ethnicity and SES Status*

Ethnicity	Eligible Participants	Actual Participants	Free/Reduced Lunch
Asian	4	1	1
Black	4	1	1
Caucasian (low-SES)	14	3	3
Hispanic	6	4	4
Indian	1	0	0
Total	29	9	9

## **Interview Protocol and Data Collection**

Data were collected from the Fall of 2009 through the Winter of 2010. Qualified participants who responded to the initial inquiry or agreed to take part following telephone contact

took part in semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (see Appendix D for interview protocol) which allowed participants to expand upon their own perceptions of reality (Seidman, 1998). To begin the interview I placed the graduate at ease by chatting (Berg and Glassner, 1979) about those things we might have in common. By speaking about non-study related topics, this put the graduate at ease so that we could begin the interview (Berg, pg. 105). As each of the interviews began, I reviewed the purpose of the research, and asked the graduate if he/she had any questions. I also told each of the graduates that they could stop me at any time to ask a question or ask for clarification of a question. The Informed Notice of Consent Acknowledgement was discussed with the graduate. The graduates signed the Informed Notice of Consent Acknowledgement (Appendix B) and were told that notes were being taken and the conversation was being recorded. Their names were removed along with all other identifying information. The participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used when quoting a graduate. Finally, they were told that they could receive a typed copy of the transcript for their final comment.

During the interview it was important to acknowledge the contributions of the information being provided by verbal clues showing that I had heard what was being said. This included something as simple as a nod of the head. Echoing was also used. Echoing (Berg, 2004) is another method by which an interviewer can lend credence to what is being said by saying such things as, "I know how you feel," or "I understand your point of view."

The interview protocol (Appendix D) contained essential questions (es), probing questions (p), and extra questions (e) (Berg, pg. 85-86). The essential questions focused on the gifted student perspective of the administration's response to their needs and the impact of the GRS upon graduation and life beyond graduation. The probing questions got at the affective side of the impact of the GRS upon the students. The extra questions tended to focus on the same areas as the essential questions; however they are worded a bit differently so as to check for consistency in

answers. The next to last question, was meant to bring the graduate full circle to the beginning and thinking about “Without my GRS I.....” The final question allowed district administration to know if the graduates believe money was well spent by placing the GRSs in the high schools. The interview questions contained in the protocol were asked; however, the interview format remained flexible and allowed for expansion upon topics being discussed and introduced new topics as they become readily apparent as possibly relating to the study (Payne, 1999). At the conclusion of the study, the graduate was given an opportunity to share any additional thoughts, provide comments or ask questions.

Every effort was made to conduct all interviews face-to face, except when it was geographically undesirable to do so, in which case a telephone interview was conducted. The face-to-face interviews took place at a date, time and location comfortable to the graduate so that he/she felt comfortable in talking and did not feel embarrassed by others who might be watching or who may have overheard. Those graduates who had a phone interview were read an Oral Informed Notice of Consent approved by the Committee for Human Subjects (Appendix C).

No more than two interviews were intentionally scheduled per day, with at least two hours break between interviews to review the notes, log additional comments, and begin to note any emerging themes. During the interview, data were collected in two ways: note taking and recording. The interviews were digitally recorded using a Sony ICD-UX71 digital voice recorder. Individual files were maintained on the recorder in MP3 format until they were transferred to the computer. Once the audio file was transferred to the computer it was saved in a master interview file and given a name indicating the interview number and the pseudonym of the graduate.

The notes taken during each interview were helpful in guiding me to other areas related to the study which I wanted to further explore. Additionally, this provided an opportunity for me to note any particular trends or themes which might be emerging. Once transferred to the computer,

the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, to enhance the validity. Transcription was accomplished with the aid of Dragon Naturally Speaking 10 and a Sony Digital Voice Recorder Transcribing kit. The transcripts of the interviews provided material which was referred to at a later time. To control for bias and ensure accuracy, member checks were completed with each of the participants via email (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Graduates were asked to respond if they believed something was inaccurate or misinterpreted. This also provided graduates an opportunity to elaborate further upon any of the questions asked. Three of the graduates did not respond.

Prior to each interview a folder was made for each participant. The outside of the folder was labeled with the pseudonym of the graduate, the interview number and a code to identify the school. Within each folder was the signed Notice of Informed Consent or the Oral Notice of Consent with the date it was read, the Interview Protocol with notes taken during the interview, the typed transcript of the interview which had been coded, a code summary sheet for the interview, additional notes and observations, an interview synopsis and profile, and the verification of transcript review. Each individual folder was kept in a secure location.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis procedures and limited descriptive statistical procedures were employed for this research. The descriptive statistics were organized into several Excel tables, some of which are presented in the final report while others were used strictly for organizational purposes.

The interviews were analyzed to identify any patterns and code the responses (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). The coding of the responses allowed for better organization and analysis of the information collected. The codes /subcodes were created during the process of transcript development, and they were reviewed based upon the frequency of occurrence and in relationship

to the research questions. As the responses to the interview questions were analyzed, the emerging themes were clustered and presented in numerical tables as well. For example, general perceptions of the role of the GRS emerged and these were presented along with the numerical frequency of each.

The purpose of this analysis was to provide general background information about one district's administrative response to the special needs of minority and low-SES gifted high school students, identify trends since the addition of the GRSs, and identify emerging themes from the interviews in an effort to answer the research question and sub questions. Data analysis occurred in three distinct phases: beginning, middle, and culminating.

### **Beginning data analysis**

The data for Maple Grove School District were analyzed simultaneously with the collection of data, the writing up of interviews, and the verification of the transcribed interviews, a procedure which was supported in research by Merriam (1988), Rubin and Rubin (1995), and Rossman & Rallis (1998) who believe that data collection and analysis are best done simultaneously. Rubin and Rubin (1995) wrote,

After completing each interview and then again after finishing a larger group of interviews, you examine the data you have heard, pull out the concepts and themes that describe the world of the interviewees, and decide which areas should be examined in more detail.

This preliminary analysis tells you how to redesign your questions to focus in on central themes as you continue interviewing" (pg. 226).

By using a simultaneous approach to data collection at the beginning stages of analysis as put forward by Rubin and Rubin (1995), I was able to notice those themes which emerged and sought confirmation as the interviews progressed. This provided an opportunity to reword any

questions for deeper understanding. During this stage the field notes, tapes and transcripts were maintained in folders in chronological order (Merriam, 1988) and by interview number. Ultimately, the data gathered allowed me to systematically make an interpretation to answer the research questions by: describing individual situations, developing themes, drawing conclusions about meanings, deciding if any lessons were learned, and posing possible questions unanswered.

### **Middle data analysis**

At the culmination of the interviews I read through all of the data, transcripts and field notes to review and obtain a “general sense” (Creswell, 2003, pg. 191) of the information. This allowed me to think about the overall meanings and how they fit together. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) stated that during this process you can see what findings actually emerge from the data. In reviewing, notes I added to those which were made in the beginning stage of data collections and analysis. It was during this stage that the content of the interviews were analyzed and the coding of themes began to further emerge and were placed on the transcripts and notes.

Coding “is the process of grouping interviewees’ responses into categories that bring together similar ideas, concepts, or themes you have discovered, or steps or stages in a process” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, pg. 238) so that overall themes may be depicted. The codes and themes reported in the findings (Appendix E) reflect the audience for which the research was primarily intended, in this case, school administrators. Strauss (1987) states that these broad categories may be determined both deductively and inductively; however, he did suggest four basic guidelines when coding the interview data:

1. ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions,
2. analyze the data minutely,
3. frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical note, and

4. never assume the analytic relevance of any traditional variable such as age, sex, social class, and so forth until the data show it to be relevant (pg. 30).

The first guideline, asking consistent questions of the data, requires that when reviewing the data the researcher must keep in mind the focus of the study and search for those things which help to answer the research questions. This is not to say however, that the data be manipulated in such a way as to address the questions. It may very well be that it becomes difficult to clearly answer the research questions; however, there may be other interesting findings which will still be of importance; therefore, an unintended outcome for the desired audience. In this particular research there were findings directly related to the cost which did not necessarily address the research questions, but did provide useful information for the intended audience, school administrators.

According to the second guideline, analyze the data minutely, Strauss (1987) believed it was better to have more codes than may be necessary later in the analysis. Berg (2004) compares this to a “funnel” (pg. 279). He goes on to write that in the findings, “You begin with a wide opening, a broad statement; narrow the statement throughout the body by offering substantial backing; and finally, at the small end of the funnel, present a refined, tightly stated conclusion. In the case of coding, the wide end represents the inclusion of many categories, ....These are coded minutely during open coding. Later, this effort ensures extensive theoretical coverage that will be thoroughly grounded.”

One interview, pilot interview number one and the data associated with it served as the basis to begin a process of coding. The main themes which appeared to be relevant and have some relationship to the research question were noted on a separate page for each question. Two or three more interviews were reviewed with the same process being repeated. The major themes which developed amongst the interviews were used to develop the first codes. Some themes and

ideas met the definitions of one or more codes. Colors and symbols were used for coding the major themes and were explained in detail during the final presentation of findings. The symbols and colors developed to this point were then placed on the transcripts just reviewed. The process of reviewing and coding continued for the remaining interviews. New codes were added as needed to the later interviews and the earlier ones as something new surfaced. According to Berg (2004), “A common rule of thumb is that a minimum of three occurrences of something can be considered a pattern” (pg. 287) His rationale for this is that “once is an accident, twice is a coincidence, and three times moves beyond mere chance in a pattern” (Berg, 2004, pg. 287). In some instances this necessitated recoding previously coded data to better fit into a new category. This was consistent with Strauss’s (1987) third guideline which calls for the frequent interruption of coding to write theoretical notes. This provided an opportunity to jot down additional thoughts during the process of review which may have been later forgotten, if not written down. Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain this process of coding and review as “discovering connections between the themes” (pg. 227).

A coding tally sheet was used in the analysis of each interview. As the transcript was reviewed particular portions of the transcript were marked and assigned a code. For each code marked on a transcript a tally mark was made on the coding sheet, and the page number was listed as a reference for reporting in the findings and analysis portions of the research.

Once all of the interviews and field notes had been coded, photocopies were made of each one. Photocopies were then cut apart with the separate sections being physically placed on a large table into categories. This provided a visual of how the different parts of different interviews when placed in the same category provided a large picture of a whole category. Because the interviews were typed, this same separation of the data into the various categories denoted by the codes occurred on the computer.

## **Culminating data analysis**

The culminating stage of the data analysis involved making an “interpretation or meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2003, pg. 194) by comparing information within the coded categories and between the categories. This stage answered the research question and the sub questions, and compared the findings with information gathered from the literature. It may confirm past research or it may suppose a different conclusion including an unintended outcome which proves useful to the intended audience. Rich, vivid descriptions taken directly from the interviews themselves were used to support interpretations derived from the interviews and in answering the research questions.

## **Validity**

Determining the validity of a qualitative study is much different from a quantitative study. “First and foremost, the researcher seeks believability, based on coherence, insight and instrumental utility” (Eisner, 1991 in Creswell, 2003, pg. 199) “and trustworthiness through a process of verification...” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Creswell, 2003, pg. 199) According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), the credibility of a qualitative work may be determined by its transparency, consistency, and communicability. Therefore, the interview, reporting of data, and analysis have been designed to meet these standards. Two pilot interviews were conducted with the interview protocol to determine the usefulness of questions in gathering vivid descriptions related to the research questions, and determining the appropriate ordering of questions. Both of these interviews are profiled in chapter four because the participants met the criteria for participation and responses gathered yielded useful information. Following the first interview, it was determined that responses to the early questions often contained so much information that later questions were answered. Therefore, to avoid frustration created by the duplication of questions in later

interviews, some questions were marked off as being answered during a response to an earlier question. Therefore, the ordering of questions in later interviews was not so rigidly ordered because in some instances more than one question might be answered with the asking of just one.

### **Transparency**

The final publication of this study clearly demonstrates the process by which participants were chosen, data collected and data analyzed. From this, any readers will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the research, along with any potential limitations and biases of the researcher. The interviews were transcribed, and then verified by the graduate participants to ensure accuracy. The marked-up transcripts were maintained along with notes to explain the coding and categories used. Field notes with my personal comments and thoughts accompany each transcript. The interview protocol sheets have been kept with all other information for the interview in each graduate's personal folder. A detailed log of the interview processes has been maintained. The log contains notes with the timeline of the research process, telephone calls, interview schedules, general field notes, and potential changes in the research along with an explanation for each.

### **Consistency**

The final report notes any general inconsistencies in the findings (Chapter 5). Because this research dealt with individual perceptions, it was not always possible, nor was it wise to eliminate inconsistencies between interviews. However, the research does point out these inconsistencies and attempts to provide an explanation for their occurrence. By presenting these divergent findings in the final report, the credibility of the overall process was increased. "Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader" (Creswell, 2003, pg. 196).

Inconsistencies which occurred during the same interview were gently pointed out during a rewording of the question to gain further clarification.

### **Communicability**

The format of the interviews was designed in such a manner as to gain rich, vivid descriptions of the graduates' perceptions of their GRS and the impact of this person upon their high school experience and beyond. The use of thick descriptions "...may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experience" (Creswell, 2003, pg. 196). The abundance of interview data presented in the final data analysis should convince readers that the experiences are real and lived by the graduates.

In addition to meeting the standards of transparency, consistency and communicability, member-checking was used.

### **Reporting the Findings**

During extensive interviews with nine gifted students from minority and low-SES populations of gifted students, the graduates responded to a series of questions that guided them through their high school experience from 9-12 grade, their transition to life beyond high school, and their current endeavors. Essentially, the findings cover early high school years in terms of the gifted graduate interactions with the counselor and GRS, the role these individuals played in diploma choice, the transition beyond high school, and an overall reflection by the graduates of their high school gifted experience. The findings are reported in the same chronological manner in which they were gathered with subheadings throughout the findings, and ultimately bring the interview full circle by addressing the impact of the GRS on the entire experience of the gifted graduate. The latter was accomplished through the completion of one statement which asked the

graduate to reflect upon how his or her life might have been different had he or she not had access to the GRS.

The codes on the transcripts fell into one or more of seven categories (Appendix E). The frequency of the codes were tallied and then placed in a table to show the overall frequency by larger category. For example, as shown in Table Three below, there were 101 references by the nine graduates to their affective needs positively being met by their GRS.

Table 3

*Frequency of Responses by Category*

Category	Frequency of Response to this Domain
High School Issues	37
High School Counselor	43
Affective Needs	101
Knowledge of Giftedness	52
Diploma Selection	29
Scholarships & Financial Aid	117
College Selection	81

All categories are positive references to each graduate's GRS, with the exception of the counselor category which includes both positive and negative interactions with the assigned counselor. Any discrepancies to the positive interactions are specifically noted in the findings.

The findings are then summarized in the analysis (Chapter 6) in relationship to the literature reviewed and in response to the research questions. The final portion of the reporting involved an evaluation of the data compiled through "naturalistic generalization" as opposed to

“formal generalization” (Eisner, 1998, pg. 103). The goal of this method of reporting was not to generalize to a larger population since the selection of participants was not random, but rather intentional; however, when faced with a similar situation a school district decision-maker will have some informed knowledge as to potential consequences should a GRS be placed in a high school to meet the needs of gifted adolescents.

The research concludes with an acknowledgment and explanation of the limitations of the study. Not only have the implications for practice of the lessons learned from the research been explored, but also any possibility for further research stemming from this study have been addressed.

## **Ethical Issues**

The researcher has the ethical obligations to protect the interviewees from harm that might result from participation in the study so as “...to acquire and disseminate trustworthy information in ways that cause no harm to those being studied” (Rubin, 1983 in Rubin and Rubin, 1995, pg. 93). This entire study rested upon the quality and richness of the information obtained in the interviews; therefore participants were not actively engaged in the interview until it was obvious they felt comfortable talking openly.

An application for approval of the research was submitted to the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Institutional Review Board for Research Using Human Subjects at the University of Kansas with assurance of the same confidentiality previously mentioned. No interview began until approval had been granted (Appendix A).

An informed consent statement was signed by each interviewee, or read to them (Appendix C) to ensure them of the highest level of ethical consideration, pointing out possible

benefits and risks by their involvement in the study, and acknowledging that they agreed to participate freely in the study.

To determine which students met the criteria for participation in the study, the confidential student records maintained by the gifted program coordinator were accessed only for the purpose of determining eligibility and mailing interview information to the students. This information was not and will not be communicated or shared in any manner with anyone. At no point, has any student been identified by name, nor has any piece of demographic information been presented in such a manner as to potentially identify the student or district.

### **Researcher's Role**

For the past three years I have had the opportunity to work with a group of parents of gifted children who are very passionate about public education and services for gifted children. Although the parents I have worked with are not the ones who initially advocated for expanded gifted programming in the high schools which resulted in the addition of the GRS positions in Maple Grove Schools, they are firm believers in the importance and work of Gifted Resource Specialists for high school gifted students. As a district-level administrator it is a regular battle to justify the resources going to gifted education on one hand, and at the same time satisfy parents who on the other hand believe their gifted children are still not getting enough to meet their unique learning needs.

As I entered into this study, I did so with some pre-conceived ideas and budgetary expectations which influenced my desire to conduct this study. The GRS at each high school is a very dedicated lady with a passion for helping gifted children reach their maximum potential; however, each is sometimes scrutinized by co-workers and administration as to her usefulness in the grand scheme of things. Some view the gifted students and the GRS as already having some

advantages because the student to GRS ratio is lower than the counselor to student and some student to classroom teacher ratios. I have had the opportunity to interact with each GRS and some of their parents, so I become frustrated with any criticism of them. I know the excellent work that each does and feel compelled to protect this position. However, despite my support for each GRS and her role in the school, as an administrator, I can not help but wonder if it is a wise use of funds during financially tight times to continue expending this extra money when each gifted student already has a counselor.

Therefore, I believe that the financial costs of these positions should be weighed against the special needs of minority and low-SES populations of these students as a means to further justify their existence; or, serve as a lesson for other districts that might consider the GRS as a possible method to meet the needs of gifted minority and low-SES populations at the high school level. The introduction of Gifted Resource Specialist (GRS) may provide this needed counseling and special programming at the high school level.

## Chapter Four

### Graduate Biographies

Nine graduates who met the research criteria chose to participate in interviews. To protect the participants from identification, each was assigned a pseudonym and an interview number. The interview number does not reflect the order in which the interviews occurred due to complications which necessitated some interviews being rescheduled. A biographical sketch of each of the participants has been provided in this section. It is important to note that there were variances in the quantity of personal information that each of the graduates was willing to disclose. Although each spoke openly about their high school experiences in the gifted program, this level of candor and openness was reserved by some graduates when speaking of their family situation.

#### **Pilot Interview #1—Venus**

Venus, a 19 year old Hispanic girl, was in the district's gifted program for nine years. She was proud to say that she graduated with a honor's diploma, despite having been raised in a difficult and economically deprived home. Her mother often worked long hours to support the family and worked very hard to take care of the kids. Although her mother was not able to attend college, Venus always had aspirations of doing so. Venus has a great love of art; she is also a very talented artist. She felt as though she could make it in life on her artistic talents due in part to the encouragement of her art teachers; however, her mother does not support her artistic interests. In addition to art, Venus also enjoys creative writing. Her mother does not support her interests in this area either. Venus's mother believes that she "just needs to get a good job so that she can take care of herself when she gets out of high school"; she thinks all of Venus's talk of art and creative writing are just a waste of time. Venus believes that her mother does not really support

her in the things she wants to do. Venus thinks it is because her mother did not have an opportunity to do the things that she wanted to do when she was growing up. According to Venus, this disagreement about her future led to frequent unpleasant verbal exchanges with her mother. Venus has no contact with her father because of incarceration. Despite her mother's lack of support, Venus attends a more selective Tier One research university ranked in the top 100, and is majoring in art and English. Next year, she plans to continue studies at the same university, and in five years she sees herself with a good job where she can write and create art. For her, this would be the "perfect life."

### **Pilot Interview #2— Samuel**

Samuel, an 18 year old Caucasian male, was identified for the gifted program when he was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. He has two parents, a mom and a step-dad. He also has a younger brother. His parents place a high priority on education. Neither one of his parents make much money so that is why he received free or reduced lunch throughout school. In high school he was involved with sports, science and math. He has played baseball, football and basketball since he was young. Baseball and football were his favorites, but he played baseball the most. Physically, he was shorter and smaller than the average football or basketball player so that is why he stuck primarily with baseball. He is about 5' 6", brown hair and he sometimes wears glasses for reading. He is very social and according to him the girls always liked him and told him he was cute. In school he was seen as a jock but also fit in with the geeks. He had many friends and was very popular. He considered himself very positive and he said that people would ask him why he was always smiling. He was in several science clubs and National Honor Society. He considered himself a preppy dresser but did note that most of his clothes were not new; they were either hand-me-downs or things his mother had found. He liked to wear jeans, khakis, sports shirts like t shirts and

jerseys, tennis shoes, polo shirts. Upon graduation from high school with honors, he now attends a selective Tier One research university ranked in the top 100 located in the Southwest United States. He is majoring in biology or biomedical sciences. Initially, Samuel had a great desire to go to the Boston College 7 year medical program. However, he had gotten so wrapped up in outside activities in high school that he missed the deadline for applications.

### **Interview #1— Kim**

Kim is an 18 year old, small-framed, Asian girl. She was identified for the gifted program when she was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Upon entering high school Kim knew what she wanted to do in life; however, this often conflicted with the plans that her parents had for her. Kim's parents both emigrated from Asia. Her father earned an advanced degree from his home country university, and her mother completed the equivalent of high school. In Kim's opinion, they both make a "decent" income. Her mother, the dominant figure in the family expected Kim to stay at a college near home for financial reasons and major in some area of science. However, Kim desired to go away to school and major in something other than science. This disconnect between Kim's desires and those of her parents led to frequent disagreements which were very upsetting to Kim and impacted her school life. Kim described herself as someone who was able to get what she wanted but does not believe in stepping on anyone to get what she wants. She sees herself as being fair, so therefore she could not be seen as being too competitive, because sometimes to be competitive and get what you want you have to step on someone. She has a love of music and plays an instrument. She also enjoys participation in some sports, although she does not play at college. Aside from her mother and father, Kim only once mentioned a sibling, and seemed uneasy to provide further details. Despite the frequent conflicts between Kim and her parents, Kim graduated from high school with honors. She attends a more selective Tier One research university ranked in

the top 100 located in the Midwest. Kim's parents were not financially able to support her attending this school; however, with the help of her GRS she was able to receive a "small grant" and a scholarship which completely covered her tuition, room, and board. She is majoring in history. She plans to continue her studies at the same university next year and continue her involvement in an on-campus military organization, despite her parents' objections. In five years, she hopes to be a military officer. Throughout the interview Kim spoke softly and deliberately as if she were considering each word. When we spoke of those things in the affective domain Kim was quite forthright with the details. However, where academic matters were concerned Kim provided few details, despite prompts.

## **Interview #2— Derek**

Derek is an 18 year old African-American male approximately 6 feet or taller. He was well-mannered; and when we first met he extended his hand to shake my hand, he introduced himself, and said he was pleased to meet me. He wore slacks, a green dress shirt, and a tie. Derek was identified as being academically gifted when he was in the fifth grade through an interesting series of events including a mathematics competition with the principal, in which Derek was victorious. The principal, convinced that "there might be something there," spoke with his mother. As he progressed into high school, Derek made some unwise choices, including the association with peers who were a negative influence. It was these unwise choices which caused him not to earn an honor's diploma, despite accepting the challenge of AP classes. Throughout high school he was involved with sports and had a great love of baseball. Within Derek's family, there were mixed messages about the importance of education. One side of his family had several well-educated individuals, yet some of his closest family members, including his sisters, struggled to make it through high school. Despite these obstacles, Derek currently attends a Tier One University

located in the Midwest. The university is ranked in the top 20 among master's universities. He was proud that he took 18 credit hours his first semester and completed it with a 3.8 GPA. Derek plans to continue on at the same university next year, and in five years sees himself in medical school. In a telephone conversation prior to our interview, Derek shared that he would be meeting with the air force to see what they might have to offer him. Although he had no real interest in the Air Force, he felt that by meeting with them he was keeping all options available.

### **Interview #3— Mateo**

Mateo is an 18 year old Hispanic male who is fluent in Spanish, English and one other language. His family emigrated from Latin America and his first language is Spanish. He has a relatively large family consisting of a mother, stepfather, two sisters and three brothers. He was very firm in his tone when he told me that he does not like government, and he believes in helping the poor. The chattering of young children was present throughout his home but did not break his concentration. He was first identified for the gifted program when he was in the early primary grades. In high school he participated in the International Baccalaureate Program and earned an honors diploma. He now attends a Tier One university on the West Coast that is ranked in the top 10. He is majoring in history. When he is not in school he works. Next year he plans to apply to an overseas program because his minor is chemistry and it can include an overseas study component. In five years he sees himself either teaching abroad or being in medical school. Mateo enjoys the idea of global community service and has investigated opportunities through his university to spend time constructing schools in Central and South America.

### **Interview #4— Pierce**

Pierce is a 19 year old Caucasian male who qualified for free or reduced lunch since his first year of junior high. He was identified for the gifted program when he was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Pierce

described himself as a self-acknowledged geek complete with glasses. He is about 6 feet tall, slender build, with brown, blond hair. He likes to wear jeans and t-shirts with political or environmental things on them. He does not see the need of putting time into such things as “working out” or worrying about his clothes or what he looks like; he thinks it is more important to work the mind. He does not take life too seriously and usually is not in a hurry to do things. His mom describes him as a mess and his room at home is pretty much chaos. He loves science and math and spends a great deal of time with it doing such things as reading, watching science programs, self-created experiments, on-line science challenges with other nerds, science things in high school, and just experimenting with things. He enjoys video games specifically because he is interested in the design behind them, but not so much the game. He also thinks it is important for people who are really intelligent to help those who are less intelligent such as people with disabilities. He has one older and one younger brother; they all live with his mom who does cleaning for other people. His older brother is not gifted and did not finish school. They do not get along and his older brother has always bullied him and called him names. He earned an honors diploma, for which he was very proud. Throughout high school Pierce considered himself to be “socially awkward” and a “nerd who felt comfort with other nerds.” His mother worked two jobs most of the time and his father was in-and-out. Pierce attends a Tier One University, ranked in the top 20, located in the southern United States. He is double majoring in physics and chemistry. Next year Pierce plans to continue his studies at the same university. In five years he said, “I see myself doing some sort of research in a lab (laugh, laugh)...medical research, maybe with genetics or the development of some sort of prosthetic device... who knows, maybe a Nobel Prize some day.” Throughout the interview he spoke slowly and seemed well thought out. His tone of speech was spoken with conviction in his words.

## **Interview #5— Amber**

Amber is an 18 year old Caucasian female. She was identified for the gifted program in elementary school. For a number of years, she had qualified for free or reduced lunch. Amber considered herself a very friendly and outgoing person, who had great compassion and concern for others. She loves community service and finds it to be a very beneficial part of her life. She felt great personal reward when she was able to help others. She considered herself very mature and had a great sense of direction as to where she saw herself going in life. Physically, she is 5'7", has dark hair and a small to medium build. She is not so concerned with fashion, but more so with comfort and value. She does not take great stock in the opinion of others in regards to her physical appearance, because she knows that one must be happy with him or herself first. Amber occupies her time by attending college full-time at a more selective Tier Three Liberal Arts College in the Midwest. She was able to afford this college due to a combination of scholarships and grants. Amber's total yearly expenses, including tuition, room and board total \$31,000 dollars. Her total financial aid package is \$32,450. She is majoring in business administration, with a focus in banking and finance. She also works part-time on campus, not out of necessity, but because of an interest in the area where she works. She has been able to secure some work in her area of interest. Next year Amber plans to continue her studies at the same college. In five years, she seems a bit unsure as to where she might see herself. Hopefully, she said, "doing financial related things. Give or take the economy of course." Amber was very articulate and was thoughtful, as evidenced by her pause prior to speaking. The tone of her voice made it evident that she was carefully considering her words. She also described herself as being a person who was highly organized and able to carefully manage her time. She shared with me that because her parents were divorced she was often shuttled from one home to the other and found that with this

happening she had to be organized in her personal belongings, her time, and her school. Her family also includes four siblings and a stepfather. Amber's biological parents are both unemployed, one "due to the economy" and the other due to a disability. Her stepfather, a trucker, is frequently gone. Her father has a college degree, and her mother and stepfather have completed some college. She was friendly, upbeat, and seemed to really enjoy talking. She did not seem at all uncomfortable, and readily conversed.

### **Interview #6— Becca**

Becca is a 19 year old Caucasian female who was identified for the gifted program in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. As long as she could remember she qualified for free lunch. Despite this, and other hard times in school, she was proud that she graduated from high school with honors. She considers herself to be a friendly person and she has friends of all ethnicities. She considers her family to be very important and mentioned them several times throughout interview. Her family consists of married parents and two siblings, one older and one younger. The older sibling did not complete high school and became a parent at a young age. Becca said with much emphasis that religion is also very important in her life and she attends church each week "without fail." Becca attends Tier One Research University, ranked in the Top 20, located in the Southeastern United States. Becca is double majoring in an area of science and music. Next year she plans to continue her studies at the same school. In five years, she hopes to be in graduate school. As for graduate school, at this time she has an interest in physical therapy and "whatever doesn't require chemistry." Becca believes that the college she attends has given her a whole new life and has definitely changed the way she looks at things. She believes that now she is being challenged academically resulting in a "whole new perspective." Becca views herself as an "average kid" with a very positive attitude despite many challenges in life for both her and her family. She said that even though they have

always lived below the poverty line, she does not think of it that way, "I have always had a roof over my head, food, clothes; I have always had everything I ever needed, and even most things that I wanted. I have had to work all through high school." She believes that because she has had her share of hardships she can "empathize" with other people. As Becca spoke, the emotion of hardship in her voice about the challenges she has faced in life was evident. Despite these hardships she did not make excuses and was grateful for what she did have. It was also apparent how much she valued others and the things they have done for her. She spoke openly, honestly and candidly about her experiences. At times it seemed almost as though she felt a sense of pride that someone was taking the time to find out her views about high school gifted programming and what the school district had done to help gifted students. Toward the end of the interview, she touched on the differences in the type of intellect and how these differences need to be recognized and nurtured.

### **Interview #7— Martina**

Martina is an 18 year old female of lower socio-economic status. She considers herself to be Hispanic; however, only one parent is Hispanic. She had been in the gifted program since first grade and had always qualified for free or reduced lunch in school. She told me that she came from a low income family but wasn't necessarily viewed that way at school because she hid it well. She participated in almost every sport possible so students and teachers associated her with athletics. Because of her association with sports, she said most of the kids other than those already in the gifted program did not know her academic side. At times she could be a teacher's pet because she was sociable, followed the rules and made good grades. When summarizing her personality, she said she was fun and sarcastic, "I love to make people laugh." As for her family structure, her parents are married and she has two older siblings. They live in a home the father

constructed many years ago on the outskirts of her city which she described as “country.” She has a very large extended family. Her mom is a stay-at-home mom and her dad is a maintenance man. She never really thought she could go to a big school because they couldn’t afford it. She felt that she needed to play a sport to fund her college education. Upon graduation from high school she earned a college preparatory diploma because early on she did not want to put forth the extra effort to earn a higher diploma. While in high school she tried to follow her mother’s direction and find someone that she could always go to when she needed assistance. Martina is a full time college student at a small private college in the very upper Midwest, where she said the weather is very cold... “Absolutely freezing.” She is majoring in psychology; however, the tone of her voice did not sound as though she was comfortable with his decision. Next year Martina plans to continue her studies at the same college. In five years, she sees herself in graduate school pursuing a degree in counseling. She did clarify that this would not be school-based counseling but more so therapy. Throughout the interview I noticed that she spoke very slowly. She generally paused before answering each question. At times she seemed unsure what to say as evidenced by the frequent use of “umh.” When asked to describe herself and even prompted to give a physical description she still reverted to descriptions of her personality.

## Chapter Five

### Findings

#### Introduction to Findings

The findings contained in this chapter cover early high school years in terms of the gifted graduate interactions with the counselor and GRS, the role these individuals played in diploma choice, the transition beyond high school, and an overall reflection by the graduates of their high school gifted experience. The findings are reported in the same chronological manner in which they were gathered with subheadings throughout the findings, and ultimately bring the interview full circle by addressing the impact of the GRS on the entire experience of the gifted graduate. The latter was accomplished through the completion of one statement which asked the graduate to reflect upon how his or her life might have been different had he or she not had access to the GRS.

The gifted graduates represented three different high schools, each with a different GRS. Although there were three different GRSs, all women, similar themes were reported by the graduates, essentially their needs were met in terms of day-to-day affective needs and preparation for post-high school activities.

#### Early Impressions of the GRS

Graduates were asked to respond to one statement and answer four questions, all of which were to provide insight into the first encounter and early impressions of the GRS. The statement and questions included:

- Tell me about when you first met your GRS.
- What did you think when you first met your GRS?
- In what ways did you think she would be helpful to you?
- How did you feel about having an advocate just for gifted students in high school?

All of the graduates were able to recall when they first met their GRS. Seven of them reported having met her during their freshman year, and the other two during the sophomore year. Derek said, "I knew that there was someone for gifted students my freshman year going in before high school, but when I was in ninth and 10<sup>th</sup> grade I really was not focused on school. I was hanging out with the wrong people. I didn't take advantage of any of those resources until my junior year when I had my head on straight." Amber acknowledged that she had arrived after the start of her freshman year so she did not have the GRS introduction early as the others had done. In all instances except Derek, the first meeting was initiated by the GRS, in a small group, as a way of getting to know their caseload. Derek, however, during his sophomore year sought guidance from his counselor and was directed to his GRS for assistance.

Regardless of the time of the first meeting, all graduates reported positive feelings in response to this first meeting. When Martina was asked about her first impression she said, "She was super nice and it was really like my mom always told me, that I needed to find someone who I like could go to, umh, to help me with scholarships and stuff so I was really glad that I had someone there." Pierce recalled his feelings toward this first meeting when he said, "She seemed quite knowledgeable and really nice. I was sort of quiet back then and what you might say 'socially awkward' but she was easy to talk to so it was really no big deal." Samuel already knew his GRS from when he had been assigned to her in an elementary gifted program. However, he found it really strange that she was now in high school. For some, the positive feelings from the first meeting lingered and made a lasting impression. Becca said, "One of my most memorable [moments] was my first meeting with her. It just, that initial meeting it impressed me so much that even though she was so busy with all of the other juniors and seniors getting to college, ..., she had so many kids, yet she still took the time to get to know me. That really impressed me."

The graduates were also asked to share what each thought when they first met their GRS and in what ways they thought the GRS might be helpful. Because this was a new format for gifted services for these graduates, they really were not sure what to expect from the GRS based solely upon the first meeting. For example, Samuel remembered his GRS when she taught elementary school, so he could not imagine her doing anything with high school so this led to his uncertainty. He said, "I guess I figured she would help me get ready for college and find things for me to do related to my areas of interest." Mateo stumbled with his words as he responded to this portion of the interview, he simply said, "She talked a lot about scholarship opportunities and such. I knew she had a lot of connections. I knew she would be able to help me in ways that a regular high school counselor would not be able to do." I asked him to provide examples of ways she would be able to help and the counselor would not. He was unable to provide any. Becca, too, mentioned help in going to college, as well as the benefits she would now qualify for as a result of being on free or reduced lunch. She said, "I knew now I could just go to her for helpful things and like when I was having a difficult time I could go and talk to her if I needed to." Martina thought that her GRS would be able to help with "anything" because she was like an additional counselor but she knew gifted kids. She also said that her GRS would be able to help if she was having trouble with a teacher. Additionally, like Mateo and Becca, she thought that her GRS would help her find scholarships and get into college.

Pierce, unlike the others, did not see his GRS early on as an aid to college and scholarships. He saw her and her office more as a safe-haven from "teacher frustration." According to Pierce, teacher frustration was "...when the teachers get tired of you knowing everything and correcting them, or when you need help and they say things like 'Wow \_\_\_ doesn't know it. It must be hard, cause gifted kids usually know everything.' It's not my frustration with

them; it is their frustration with 'gifted' kids and their sarcasm toward us." Venus provided the most thorough answer of ways in which she thought the GRS might be helpful to her. She said,

I really was not sure at that time because we really did not know a lot about high school, but I remember she gave us her e-mail and told us that if we have questions we could e-mail her and she really seemed like she meant it. It did not seem like she was just saying that because it was something that she had to say. She seemed like she really did want to help us if we need help with something...

Derek was the only graduate who was not able to provide some insight into the early expectations of the GRS by the gifted students. He attributed this to his negative associations early in high school.

### **Importance of the Gifted Advocate**

Not only did students have some early impressions about how the GRS would help them, but they also had some opinions about having an advocate exclusively for gifted students in high school. All graduates except Samuel, who did not recall if he had an opinion one way or the other, felt this was a good thing to have an advocate for gifted children. Becca described it as nice by saying, "I thought it was pretty awesome just to know that someone wanted to take the time to get to know me because that school was pretty big and the gifted programs before we always had a little group and then when you would get to high school you would just be thrown in with everybody." She believed there were at least 1,000 students. Amber expressed similar sentiments when she said, "I honestly thought it was really you know a good thing, I know of some schools they do not have someone who works specifically with the gifted kids and that can be really difficult for them. So having someone that we can seek out for our particular learning needs and questions is really nice." Pierce expressed a sense of comfort when he found out about the GRS, "I had sort

of worried about high school since there was not a gifted class anymore. A lot of us [gifted students] are nerds so when we would get together we felt a bit of comfort with each other.”

Simplicity was a summation of Mateo’s thoughts toward having an advocate in the GRS just for gifted students. He said, “It made the whole process easier. I am more confident about what I was doing because I knew that there was someone I could go to and I felt like I wasn’t just like anybody else in the school.” Martina provided the most extensive insight into the feelings of having a high school advocate for gifted students:

It was (long pause) I can’t , I don’t know. I just felt like umh..like I was finally getting recognized because all through like elementary and middle school we had a gifted class ...we had a...specific teacher, but...if you said you were in the gifted program everyone was like, ‘Oh you are smart.’ You really did not get anything else, you just went to class... no one was there encouraging you and telling you you could do it and you are going to be successful...and like all this stuff. So, when they finally brought someone to help you through the process [navigating high school] you felt like you were getting recognized and you had done something.

## **Interactions with their GRS**

Following the gifted students’ first meeting with their GRS each had other occasions to interact their GRS, although the purpose and frequency varied. Each was asked to summarize the frequency of meetings with their GRS, who initiated these meetings, and the purpose of these meetings beyond their first meeting. Mateo had the fewest interactions with his GRS. When asked to explain this he simply explained it away as him being in the IB program and the support that existed within it. He estimated that he only met with his GRS four times throughout high school, and he initiated those meetings. He did say, however, that these meetings were in response to

information that his GRS had distributed to gifted students and their parents. Some of the information he found beneficial, so he went to her for more information. Later in the interview he contradicted his earlier statement that he had only met with his GRS four times when he said, "I also talked to her when I needed help with AP. So that is also when I talked to her."

The other graduates met with their GRS on a regular basis and with increasing frequency as they progressed through high school. Early on most of the graduates reported the meetings being initiated primarily by the GRS; however, this shifted as they progressed in the upper grades with them initiating most of the meetings in response to information they had been given by their GRS. According to Becca,

... she had formalish meetings every year to, just to check back with us, but it was basically 50% her and 50% me. It was pretty informal. She was like the only counselor at our high school who was really able to work with me and help me get into college...most of the meetings were pretty informal. Many of them were college related and scholarship related. She would say, here, fill this out, you need to do this, or just to check up with me on school, my classes how I was doing, or clubs I was involved in and I thought it was more personal. I went through some really tough things in high school and she was always there to let me talk to her.

Venus, like Becca, mentioned the meetings between her and her GRS being initiated about 50-50 by each other. The theme of college preparation was evident in her response,

...it's time to start writing essays for college applications; she had some writing workshops to help us...then we get together and brainstorm...then we would go and do some work... then we would get back together with her and she would proof them. So in this case she was bringing information to us that we were getting back in touch with her...the purpose of these meetings was to ensure that we were on track for a successful high school

experiences, smooth transition to college, and had everything we needed to be most prepared for college.

Just as Mateo had said, Venus also mentioned the meetings her GRS had for parents to help understand their role in the college preparation process. She said, "...[the GRS] meetings with our parents to let them know what they needed to be doing to help us such as when to apply for financial aid and what types of financial aid were available." Overall, Venus had contact with her GRS, "...at least one or two times a month when I was in ninth grade and then in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and especially a lot more in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade I started meeting with her or talking with her several times per month."

Venus was asked to explain in more detail what she meant when she said she was "talking" with her GRS. She said, "What I mean when I say talking with her...those times when I would e-mail her and she would e-mail me back...sometimes ideas come to me in the middle of the night and if I don't do something with them I forget them right away so I was entering e-mail with a question or just something I wanted to tell her. Sometimes a friend and I would also meet with her, or she would meet with a small group of us, or even a whole grade level of us."

Pierce, like Becca, mentioned the frequency of meetings with his GRS as progressing throughout high school and the "mellow" nature of the meetings. And again, like Becca, Pierce said, "... she was the only one who really quickly understood and appreciated me. She did what a counselor should have done...When we met we would talk about my family, school things, girls and life beyond high school. By schools things, I mean often college things and scholarships."

Martina, unlike the other graduates, did not consider the meetings as being equally initiated. She thought that the first few were initiated by her GRS and after that she believed that she initiated them all. She initiated them because she either needed some assistance, or she was following up on some information that she had received from her GRS. According to Martina, you

could stop by her GRS's office whenever you needed to do so. If she was not available then you could leave a note and she would get back in touch with you. Kim's story, although at a different school, was similar. She believed that her GRS had an open-door policy and if she was not available you simply left a note and she would get back in touch with you.

Samuel provided the most extensive insight into the meetings that followed the initial meeting with his GRS:

During my freshman and first half of my sophomore year we met about once a month or every two months. It was usually initiated by her and it was just to see how I was doing. We would meet in the middle of winter and also talk about enrollment of classes for the next year...During my junior and senior year we would meet for at least a few minutes each week. The further I got in school the longer the meetings were. Some of them she started and others I started, about 50-50. Sometimes we would just talk in the hall and sometimes I would actually go to her office. She also had larger group meeting on topics that were just for gifted students such as peer issues and conflict resolution with teachers. We would talk about the type of classes I needed to take so that I could be prepared for college and it would look good on my transcript. We also talked a lot about scholarships and she helped me to apply for several that I did not even know about. Some of them worked out for me.

Derek described his feelings toward his GRS as her being "almost like a mother." Although the other graduates spoke fondly of their GRS, this was the first comparison to a mother so I questioned him for further understanding. He said, "I know she wanted me to stretch myself...I was unmotivated but she really tried." Derek also mentioned working together with his GRS, rather than his counselor to choose classes, which was a bit unconventional. I asked him what he felt that his GRS could do to help him pick his classes that his counselor could not do. He replied,

She would break it down more. She would go on a more personal level. She would take the time to really talk to us and get to know us. The counselors had so many kids to deal with it was just like get it done. They didn't really seem to get to know you. She knew you better. She would say, 'Oh this teacher would be better suited for your needs. I think you'll do better with this teacher.' She would break it down a lot better than what our counselors would do, and she would take the time to talk with us. Our counselor was kind of like, you know, just get in and get it done. The counselors had more kids to see and they really didn't have the time for us. But with her...was more like she would spend the time with us whenever we needed to see her even if that was her personal time. She put in the extra time with us...However many students, she had time. It really [was] not an issue with her.

### **Role of the High School Counselor**

Several of the things the graduates mentioned as services provided by their GRS were things which would typically fall under the purview of a high school counselor. To obtain a better understanding of what role the GRS played in comparison to their counselor, each graduate was asked to describe the frequency and purpose of their meetings with their high school counselor. I had already come to learn that the GRS did not replace the high school counselor. Additionally, each was also asked to compare the GRS and counselor meetings in terms of usefulness for their individual needs as a gifted student.

Generally, the graduates reported meeting with their counselor significantly fewer times that they met with their GRS. In fact, Samuel saw even the minimal necessity of meeting with his counselor as simply a "bureaucratic obligation." The tone of his voice was one of anger as he spoke of his relationship to his counselor. He said, in response to the annual meetings with his counselor, "...I did have to choose my classes for the next year, the counselor never really tried to

push me, it was just get in and get out, take just the minimum... There was really no true 'counseling' in the strongest sense of the word." Samuel then went on to compare the counseling meetings with the meetings he had with his GRS. As he began to speak, there was an immediate calmness in the tone of his voice almost as if he was at peace. He said,

My Gifted Resource Specialist did, in my opinion, what the counselor should be doing. She knew my potential, and even though I was smart, I still needed guidance on which classes were best for my future preparation and she provided this...when I met with my Gifted Resource Specialist, it was real "counseling" from someone who understood what it was like to be gifted and knew me as an individual. Several words could be used to describe my meetings with her: worthwhile, meaningful, self gratifying, inspirational, and purposeful.

Samuel made it very clear during the interview that he avoided interactions with his counselor and only met with her whenever he was expected to do so.

Pierce, who attended a different school, expressed similar frustration when speaking of the meetings with his counselor. In fact, he too used the word "bureaucrat" when speaking of those who expected him to meet with his assigned counselor. He described his counselor as an older man who was "always busy, or had to deal with someone who had a 'real problem'," thus negating the significance of his needs. However, he went on to say, "My Gifted Resource Specialist was always there and made the time for me, but with my counselor it was like I was a person who did not really deserve counseling services because I was gifted and would be fine...or at least that is what I have heard all through school."

Derek, like Pierce found his counselor to be short on time and "not very nice," whereas his GRS did "whatever was needed. Whether it cut into her personal time..." A general trend appeared to be emerging in the responses, so I asked Derek why he believed that perhaps the

counselors seemed short on time. He attributed it to the larger number of students that the counselors deal with and the lack of understanding of giftedness. Specifically, the affective needs of gifted students. Not only Derek, but also Venus, Martina and Becca mentioned the shortness of time from the counselors due to the large caseload and the lack of understanding about gifted students. Venus said that her counselor even reminded her about the number of students assigned to her.

Becca felt that her feelings were often negated when she went to see her counselor, much like Pierce. She said, “she [counselor] seemed to think like I was a good kid. I knew what I was doing. I did not need any help; so she did not spend a lot of time with me. She was more concerned with other kids.” When asked to compare the meetings she had with her counselor to her meetings with her GRS, she said, “...[GRS] understood that even though I was a good kid and I was taking all of the right classes I still had a lot of questions. And, I still needed help thinking of colleges and that kind of stuff.” Overall, Becca saw her counselor about seven times in high school in comparison to her GRS that she saw every week, during her junior year alone.

Martina’s meetings with her counselor were much like what the others reported in that they were primarily to schedule classes. She described it this way,

I met with my counselor once a year. Maybe twice a year... you would sit down for 10-15 minutes. She would ask you what classes you want to take...she would put it into the computer...and that was pretty much the end of it ... My counselor didn’t seem that concerned in what I wanted to do...where I wanted to go to college. She basically, just it seemed to me, she just wanted to do her job and get out of there. She just wanted to sign me up for classes and not concerned about what my future was or didn’t encourage me....

Martina, like the others was allowed an opportunity to compare her counseling meetings with her GRS meetings, to which she said, “Extremely different. My gifted resource specialist, she was very encouraging and very optimistic about what she wanted me to do and definitely motivated me.”

Mateo and Amber had the most positive views of their counselor. Mateo said his counselor was “very nice” as was his GRS. Amber felt that the meetings with her GRS were more “productive” than those with her counselor. She attributed this to her GRS having a “better perception” and an understanding of what gifted kids need, just as Derek had described.

### **Special Assistance Provided by the GRS**

The graduates shared stories of the ways in which they thought the GRS would be helpful to them in various situations, and in multiple instances this was proven to be the reality, especially where advisement of course selection and college preparation were concerned. Aside from these things, they were asked to recall specific occasions when they sought the exclusive assistance of their GRS. Most reported having numerous episodes, except Mateo. Mateo was unable to recall any situations in which he specifically sought the exclusive help of his GRS. Despite the ability to provide multiple examples, I requested that they provide very specific details of no more than two instances.

Pierce remembered a situation back during his freshman year of high school. He wanted to take an AP class; however, freshmen were not allowed to take AP classes. He went to his GRS and she advocated on his behalf.

To me this was really unfair, forcing me to sit in a class with students whose intellectual capacity was far below mine, plus I already knew the material. I had gone to a summer camp for gifted kids in science where we could take college credit classes. I had also made all A's in honors classes in middle school and was in the Duke program in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

So, I knew I could handle the material. She fought for the right for me to take a class where I could be challenged. In the end, my score on the AP exam was higher than the juniors' and seniors'," said Pierce.

Pierce was able to provide other examples, but in his mind this was pivotal to his future interactions with his GRS. Like Pierce, one of the times that Becca needed the assistance of her GRS was when she was a sophomore. She described a class similar to study hall that she had been scheduled into the prior year. She said the class was, "[a] waste of my time." Her GRS, like Pierce's, advocated on her behalf to enroll in a more challenging class.

Other graduates, such as Kim, sought the assistance of their GRS in their junior or senior year. Kim ran for a student election and did not win. After speaking with multiple students who had voted for her, she believed that there had been some problem with the election. She recalled the emotions of the day and the toll it had taken on her. She took her concerns to her GRS, who then worked with the faculty sponsor to verify the election. It was later determined that she should have been elected. Kim felt that had it not been for the efforts of her GRS, her years of contribution to this activity would have been in vain and she would not have eventually been placed in the office. Like Kim, Samuel needed the assistance of his GRS to intervene when there was a problem with a teacher. According to Samuel, "A couple of the times she helped me out when I had a problem with a teacher. It seemed that the regular teachers made some assumptions about gifted kids. Like just because we are smart they think that we already know everything and they seem shocked if we do not get everything perfect and ask questions."

Derek and Kim shared examples of how their GRS intervened on issues involving their parents. Derek said his GRS helped him a couple of times like with his Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA] paperwork. He said,

She [GRS] was there. She helped me out when my dad wouldn't give me my tax information because he didn't think that was safe. She got on the phone with my dad and said like 'hey your son really needs this information to be able to proceed in the college, he needs this information.' I really did not know what to do about this and...[GRS] was the one who really took the initiative and helped a little bit...It really worked. He gave us the information we needed to be able to complete the form. It was just the way she wanted it to go. We got all the information...the form filled out and we got it in on-time.

Of all of the graduates, Venus spoke at the greatest length about the times she specifically sought the assistance of her GRS. She was hard pressed to provide only one or two examples, so she chose to categorize all of the times she needed the assistance of her GRS. Venus explained it this way,

The times that I specifically sought out the assistance of my GRS would fall into several different categories. One of those would be when she had sent out information to the gifted students about something that would be of interest to us. ...For example, I really like art so sometimes she had information available for us about art contests....When there was something not right at school and the administrators were too busy or the counselors were too busy and they just tell me that I need to make an appointment. She seemed to always have the time or find the time so this is when I would go to her. This is not to say that I didn't think that I shouldn't have gone to her first it is just that there seemed to be a chain of command in our building. If you stepped out of his chain of command you were always reminded of what the rules were and that you were not following the rules. So, I did it more so just to follow the rules. It seemed like some of the administrators and counselors were jealous of her because she really produced results with the students and she could relate to them.

Venus also spoke of the emotional void in her life due to the clash between her goals in life and things her mother desired for her. Several times she mentioned having problems at home and being able to find comfort in talking her with GRS about the issues. At one point, she sounded almost as if she were about to cry. I asked her to tell me more about the comfort she found in talking with her GRS. She said,

Well, my mother works very hard to take care of the kids in my family and she did not go to college, but I would like to go to college. I love art and I am very good at art. My art teachers have been encouraging me to go to college because they say I have a lot of potential as an artist. I also enjoy creative writing. I have done well in my English classes. But my mother, she thinks that this is all a waste of time. She thinks that I just need to get a good job so that I can take care of myself when I get out of high school. She doesn't really support me in the things I want to do; I think it is because she did not have an opportunity to do the things that she wanted to do when she was growing up. So sometimes my mother and I have these big arguments, and I don't feel like I have a support system at home to help you be successful. I have no contact with my father because he is in prison... So whenever this sort of thing happens I know that I can always go to Miss....She will give me some guidance on what it is I can do to be able to go to college without the support of my family. She also is able to talk through with me how to handle these sorts of situations with my mother better. She has even spoken to my mother and told her about what great potential I have at both art and writing. I think that someday I would like to be able to write and illustrate books. Miss... has worked with me and my mother to show us how I can go to college without it being a financial burden on my family.

## Impact of the GRS on Diploma Choice

The graduates in this study had several different types of high school diplomas available to them. One or more of the diplomas required that students do certain things beginning as early as the freshman year. Students and their families could find out about the different types of diplomas available, and the requirements for each, by several different modes of communication including: brochure, website, teachers, and high school counselors. In general, students in this district might have planned to earn a particular type of diploma, but later change their mind. For this study, it was important to find out what type of diploma the graduates earned, and the influence, if any, of the GRS upon the chosen diploma.

Mateo, unlike the other graduates, clearly stated that his GRS had no influence upon his choice of diploma. He said that he knew going into high school he would earn an IB diploma. He was drawn to the international nature of the program because of his family background. What I found really interesting was that he never discussed his choice of diploma with his GRS. He stated emphatically that he believes, "If she had her way I would not have done the IB diploma...Maybe in some way she saw the IB program as an elitist program..." Martina, like Mateo, entered high school with a mindset of the type of diploma she wanted to earn. However, unlike Mateo, she discussed her interest with her GRS. In doing so, she found that her GRS thought she was selling herself short and should earn a more challenging diploma. Martina said that her GRS told her that even though she was not choosing a more difficult diploma, she should at least take advanced classes so that her transcript would reflect her true ability and she would be better prepared for college. Kim, like Martina and Mateo, went into high school sure of which type of diploma she would like to earn. However, unlike Martina, after meeting with her GRS she decided to earn a more difficult diploma. She came to this decision at the end of the sophomore

year. Kim said, "... [GRS] was the one who convinced me that I was putting in so much effort...the service hours...extra classes...and I had already taken many of the required classes. She said I would then have an honors diploma rather than regular diploma."

While Mateo, Martina, and Kim primarily made their diploma decision on their own, the other graduates attribute their diploma decision largely or solely to the influences of their GRS. For example, Samuel and Becca said that they were given no other choice of a diploma except the honors diploma. Becca said, "She was like oh no, you are not going to give up. You are just sucking it up and doing it all. So, she kind of pushed me to graduate with honors and did not leave me with any other real options." Becca said that she was glad that she was pushed, because now...understands that it was in her best interests and she now feels well prepared for college. Samuel attended a different school but reported a similar interaction,

The first time she met with us she did not tell us that we had diploma options. She just told us that she would be working with us to help us complete the requirements of the honors diploma. So, as far as I knew this was what gifted kids did. Looking back...I think, she probably felt this was what we should do and so there really was no need to tell us about anything else.

In retrospect, he said this was a good thing because,

With this type of diploma we had to do community service and have a work experience... she really worked with us to find things that we were interested in. I do a lot of sports so I was able to do some work with some kids at a special camp; a camp for kids that have disabilities. This was really meaningful for me and really helped me to see how good I have it. I kept on doing work...even after I had done my...hours. I am going to try and volunteer again this summer if I can work it out.

Pierce and Venus chose to earn an honors diploma on their own without the encouragement of the GRS; however, they credit their choice of diploma to information provided to them by their GRS. Pierce first found out about the honors program when he was a freshman. He said that he had never heard about it until he met with his GRS. He said that one of the things that really grabbed his attention about the program was that he could take an internship class and work with someone who had a career similar to his interests. He recalled, "She told me that when I was a junior and wanted to do an internship I might be able to work in a lab or with some engineers. So I knew I needed to do this diploma if I wanted to do the internship." Pierce later came to realize that the class was open to all students, not just those in the honor's program. He confronted her about this and, "...she kind of laughed and said she knew what my potential was so she pushed me. She was afraid I might drop out from boredom...and she did not want that to happen. She told me I was one of her kids and she was not going to have any dropouts." Pierce said this really made him feel good.

Venus, in describing her honors diploma choice and the influences behind it said, "she [GRS] was definitely the driving influence...without her I would never have known about it and I probably would not have taken the advanced placement and the college credit classes that I did. She knew what to do for me as a gifted student... and took it on as her personal mission to see that I was successful." Venus's words were so powerfully spoken that I ask her to provide more details about her interactions with her GRS as it related to her diploma choice.

... she told us about the different types of diploma options. I remember her telling us about the honors diploma and how it would help to prepare us for college. I always knew that I wanted to go to college but my mother was not supportive of this so if I wanted to go I knew that I would have to find the money to be able to go...told us that not only would this diploma help prepare us for college but we would also be taking rigorous courses and this

would look good on our diploma so that we can get into college. She told us that our grade point average was important but colleges also looked at the title [of]classes we took and whether they were hard or easy classes. The honors diploma requires us to take hard classes that really challenge us. With this diploma we also had to do community service and an internship. I really did not know a lot about community service except what we had done with [NJHS]...internship...she would be working with us to find internships with companies that closely matched what our career interests were... I think now looking back that if [GRS] had not come out and talk to us about the different diplomas I probably would have not taken the honors diploma program. I probably would have just picked the basic diploma and worked while I was in high school because my mother was not really pushing me to go to college, and I knew that if I wanted to go to college I had to have some money so I probably would've tried to work to earn this money. My mother is not really the type of mother that is really involved with school so if she knew about the diploma option she might not have told me. I think that the counselors in the high school were too busy to really talk to each of the kids so I probably would not have known about it....also helped me to find an internship...At my internship I was able to work with professional artists. They were very pleased with my work so now I can work with them in the summer and be paid. I might even have a job with them when I graduate.

### **GRS'S Role in the High School Experience**

The graduates were asked to provide a summary of what they believed the overall role of the GRS was in their high school experience. All graduates except Mateo, who could provide no description of the GRS role, described the role of the GRS in their high school experience ranging from traditional guidance counselor type things to helping with the more affective side of their

giftedness. Derek said, "More guidance counseling than anything else." Martina, when asked responded, "...she was definitely my academic advisor...she was a really good role model to look up to...I don't know, she was a good friend. Like I felt like I was going to ask my friend stuff like this and not so much a teacher or a counselor even though she still had that status over me." Kim said, "...basically was kind of like my go to person if I really needed to talk about anything. No matter how busy she was...always found the time to listen."

Four of the graduates, despite being at different schools, spoke of the emotional connections they made with their GRS and how this helped them in high school and beyond.

Becca described the role of her GRS when she said,

I don't think I would have gotten through high school to the degree. I am going to a really awesome university, [Southeastern] University and so I don't think I would be going where I am going without [GRS]. She played a huge role keeping me sane. I had a lot of problems with the school district and how classes were. I get bored really easily and that was another one of my problems that classes were just so boring and easy. Even like the quote difficult ones. She just kind of, she helped me like, realize that I have to jump through these little hoops to get to something good.

Pierce described how his GRS helped him socially mature and learn to interact better with others who might not be at the same intellectual level. He said,

I guess I have to face facts that I may not be in a lab my whole life only interacting with other science geeks like myself. Sometimes we do have to wander out and interact with other humans (laugh, laugh) even though they might be beneath us. She helped me to feel more at ease by having some things that gifted kids could do together and we could still see that we are not all the stereotypical nerd, or at least some of them are not. But at least this way we would still be with others who could carry on an intelligent conversation.

Sometimes there were also non-gifted kids there. So, we had chance to get together almost within our comfort zone so it was not so awkward. She also pushed me at times and did not allow me to be lazy and quit in things other than math and science. She had great intellect and insight into the gifted mind so she was able to relate.

Pierce also mentioned a void in his family life when he said, "I hesitate to say this, but this [GRS] was almost like a mom at school, where my mom was always really busy at home and work."

Samuel gave a very long and detailed response about the role of the GRS in his high school experience. He included such things as: assistance with scholarships, contests, meetings for the parents to know about what gifted children needed to prepare for college, and financial aid workshops for us and our parents. He said, "I guess you might say she gave me opportunities I might not have known about or taken advantage of without her encouragement and persistence."

Venus gave one of the most emotional answers as evidenced in the tone of her voice. One of the most memorable things she said was,

...For us gifted kids... she was someone that we could go to and she could identify with us. I have to admit that some of us are really different and do not have a lot of friends and some teachers think we are strange. But we could go to her, and we were never judged or criticized for who we were. We felt comfortable talking to her when we needed help with things at school, or if we had issues in our personal lives...in some ways, she was like a parent because she was older than us. But unlike a parent, she seemed to remain neutral. She could talk to us like a parent, but she could also identify with what we were going through as students. She was also a little different like we were, and I think maybe she was a gifted student when she was in school herself. So, I think this made it easier for her to be able to talk with us and identify with us. What I mean, when I say that she was like a parent, was that she had the adult perspective on things and she can help us do the things

that we needed to prepare for college and prepare for life, that she could do it in such a way that we understood and were willing to listen to her.

## **Role of Non-GRS Support Systems**

A pattern seemed to be emerging that the GRS was one of the most important school personnel in the lives of the gifted graduates. However, to assume this was the only influential person would be premature. Each of the graduates was also given an opportunity to tell about any other person(s) who played an important role or were supportive of them in high school. Only five of the graduates were able to provide examples, regardless of their school.

Samuel said that his AP teachers were helpful, but their help was limited specifically to their class and this only happened during his junior and senior years. Advanced Placement teachers were also spoken of favorably by Amber and Venus. These two graduates also mentioned their college credit teachers. Venus said, "At times the...college credit teachers and the AP teachers were helpful, but that was only when you had a particular situation. It wasn't as though they were generally helpful all the time when you needed someone to go to on a consistent basis."

Derek spoke favorably of a genetics teacher during his junior year of high school and described her as, "absolutely fantastic." I asked him to describe the things about her that made him describe her with such strong words, and he said, "She pushed a lot. She pushed really hard. She made sure I got my stuff done because I guess she knew what I was capable of doing. She always knew if someone seemed lazy, or not motivated. She expected a lot from me." He then went on to say again, "... [genetics teacher] is awesome."

Becca spoke of her literature teacher her senior year and said, "She had what she called her smart kids doing the...classes...She pushed us and pushed us...She was always there and

she also knew me pretty well. She wrote me some scholarship recommendations. We talked and...we still talk. She was also very supportive.”

### **Role of the GRS in Transition Activities**

One of the job responsibilities of the GRS was to help gifted students prepare for post-secondary education. All of the graduates mentioned one or more ways that their GRS has helped them become more aware of what was needed to be prepared for college. It was very important for this research to gain a better understanding of the specific things the GRS's had done to help the graduates transition to life beyond high school. All of the graduates except Mateo were able to provide very concrete examples of the ways that the GRS had helped them transition to life beyond high school. Because they are all attending college, the answers all related to preparation for college in some form or fashion.

Four of the graduates spoke primarily of the GRS's work with financial resources making it possible for them to go to an excellent and very expensive college or university. Amber said, “She knew a lot about different types of aid packages, places to look for scholarships, she helped me find scholarships and she kind of helped with the FAFSA process. So, she was very, she played a very key role in the financial aid aspect of applying to college.” Martina described her GRS's assistance with the financial aspect of college when she said, “She really brought me on to a lot [scholarships] that I had not seen due to my heritage and also my economic status. She told me that I needed to fill out the FAFSA and told me that I needed to do it right away when she found out I hadn't done it. She didn't help me through the process necessarily, but she followed up and asked me if I had done it.”

Pierce's description of the role his GRS played in the financial aspect of college was almost one of a surrogate parent. He described it like this,

Money is always a concern for my folks. My mom works two jobs most of the time and my dad is in and out. So, when she [GRS] found out I got free lunch she told me about all the things other kids did but she let me know that I would not have to pay for them. We talked a lot about the types of things I liked and then she helped me research which universities had the best programs for me. When it came time to do the FAFSA form and Questbridge she helped me fill it out and she talked to my mom and got all of the information she needed from her. My mom could not take time off of work to mess with it and we did not have a computer at home. So, she basically helped me get in to college and get the money for it. When I made it in to college she was really happy...

Becca, like Pierce, spoke very emotionally about how the GRS had stepped in at time of need to help her garner the resources to attend a college of her choice. One example Becca gave was, "I knew that I did not have to worry about money for any of the testing that I had like the PSAT, the SAT, the ACT, and college applications fees. She like, sought me out and made sure that I understood that I did not have to pay for these things which was a huge relief for me." Becca spoke of several hardships throughout her life both during and prior to high school. During high school her GRS helped her to apply for several scholarships. Many of these scholarships asked about her family situation. For her it was very difficult to speak of some of her experiences; however, her GRS kept encouraging her and saying, "[Becca], you can do it." At times her grades were not the best because of what was happening in her family. She said her GRS, "...facilitated and helped with some...teachers why my grades were a little it shaky and she would just let me talk to her and tell her what I needed to and she just kept handing me scholarship applications and telling me I had to fill them out. Fill em out, fill em out, fill em out."

Two of the graduates spoke of the GRS's influence upon high school course selection and how this had helped them have a smooth transition to college with a successful first semester. Kim

said, “senior year...help us find scholarships...help us with college applications...She would also...help us with things we did not know how to do. She was really like, I guess mom-like in that aspect. She was really persistent and would say things like ‘have you filled out that scholarship yet?’ She made sure we got it done and had it in on time....” Martina said, “She really helped me with class selection...advised me to pick some hard classes so that I was ready for college when I got there and ready for the work load....”

Four of the graduates spoke of the general all around knowledge that the GRS was able to give them related to preparation for and the overall college experience. Samuel spoke with emotion as he described how his GRS “took the time to really get to know me.” He said,

She would meet with me on a regular basis to make sure that, that I was doing okay in my classes. If there was a problem she helped me to work it out. When I was trying to choose a college, we looked [at] different ones that had what, or could offer what I wanted to get a degree in. Then, we would look at the cost of them and try to figure out a way that I could afford to go there. Sometimes she would be direct and just tell me that I probably would not be able to afford what I wanted, but we would give it a try. We would also look at scholarships that were not specific to the school where I wanted to go and she would help me apply for them. Oh, and the FAFSA....wow, I had heard about this but really did not pay too much attention to the deadlines and I almost missed them if it had not been for her.

Derek, like Samuel, described how she “walked me through” paperwork. She also shared with him what to expect in college, in terms of rigor, and what professors might be like. He said she, “Pretty much just told me not to give up on things.” When he did get letters of acceptance from colleges he said we, “read them together and she would share in the joy...” Amber said

nearly the same thing as Derek, but slightly differently. She said, in response to what her GRS did to help her transition beyond high school,

She had just a lot of really good information and helpful tips about...what was expected in college...she had a lot of really good information about the kinds of colleges I was looking at so that was really helpful. She was very upfront and honest about expectations, college professors tend to expect a higher quality of work than most high school teachers do and there are fewer grades going into the grade book so there are fewer grades, and just that kind of thing, little helpful hints that you do not realize when you are in high school.

Venus gave a very extensive response to a number of things that she believed her GRS did that helped her successfully transition beyond high school. Her response encapsulates the sentiments of the other graduates, except Mateo.

She advised us on which classes to take so that we would be best prepared for college. She never assumed that any of us would do anything less than college. She had the highest aspirations for all of us and she thought [it] was her job to help us prepare to be the most successful we could be in high school and beyond. Not only did she tell us which classes we should take to be prepared for...college, but she also told us why we should take each of those classes and what they would do to help us. It wasn't like she was just telling us to take something and not explaining to us...why it was important for us to take the class. She also stayed after us to make sure that we did the things that we should be doing. In this way she was like the parent. She watched after us...kept us focused on the right track. We may be really smart kids or gifted as some people call us...we still need a sense of direction and help from people who will help us follow through...she also helped us keep organized and meet deadlines...there was so much paperwork due to get ready for college and she was very helpful in keeping us organized in meeting those deadlines.

For example, she helped us with our college essays and helped proof those and talked with us about them so that we presented the best product for college. She also helped us complete our FAFSA paperwork and spoke with our parents so that they knew what part they had to play in the process.

## **Post High School Activities and the Role of the GRS**

Each of the graduates was accepted by several colleges and universities. All of them reported great satisfaction with the college or university they are attending, so much so that each plans to continue their studies at the same place next year. When each was asked about the influence of the GRS on their choice of school and major, the answers varied from no impact to sole responsibility for the choice of school resting with the GRS. Mateo was the only graduate who clearly stated that the GRS had no influence on his choice of school or major. Although he plans to stay at the same west coast university next year, he would like to spend a year abroad through his school's study abroad program. In five years, he sees himself being in medical school.

Martina, like Mateo, gave little credence to the idea that her GRS might have influenced her post high school decision and major. She did say, in regard to the role of the GRS in her college decision,

I wanted to go where I could still play and get a good education. And, she more worried about my education because she clear and plainly stated you are not always going to have [sport] in your life and if something happens where you get hurt you still want to be somewhere you are getting a good education and people are there to help you... once I did find the college I wanted to go to she checked it out...

The choice of a major for Martina was not affected by her GRS. However, her GRS felt like her degree was very limiting so she spoke with Martina about the importance of a minor, something

which Martina said she never would have known. She will minor in something, but that is yet to be decided.

The six other graduates attribute the choice of a college or university to the GRS for a variety of reasons, including: financial aid assistance to be able to attend a particular school, assistance with reviewing schools of interest, informing them about available schools, helping them to complete the paperwork to get into a school, assistance with essays, and talking with them through the final decision from those schools that accepted them. Derek, when asked why he had chosen...explained,

She showed me what the school was. She pointed out some of their better aspects, it's like she knows the schools from a more educated standpoint. The level of their math program, where their med program was...There were a lot of schools that I was interested in before I talked to her because I had been accepted to several schools. I looked to ...because it was close to home and has a good med program and other was... and...Others are places for...because that's what I do I play.... We got acceptance letters for many schools I applied to...She told me that if I wanted to stay close to home and go to a good school...then a good medical school I should go to.... And then I visited and I really liked it. It was just like another high school with walks in-between classes.

Amber had known for several years what she wanted to study in college. She also had in her mind that she wanted to attend a small private college; however, she did not know where to begin searching for a school that matched her interests. This is where her GRS came into play. According to Amber, "she was definitely very supportive in my choice of pursuing the small private college setting so she kind of pointed me in educational places like...or special colleges or universities. She helped me find smaller colleges that would have fit my kind of desires."

Becca, like Pierce and Kim, gave full credit for her chosen post secondary school to her GRS. Becca said,

She basically encouraged me to go any place out of state. I was accepted to [Southeastern University]. I was seriously considering it...she basically pushed me that I needed to get out of my family situation I was in and get away and go to college so she just supported me but also let me...She just wanted to make sure that I was happy where I was at. I was accepted at [Southeastern University] and they gave me a lot of money to go there. So, that played a huge role.

Samuel credits his ability to be at *any* school to his GRS. He had a school that he was more interested in attending than the one he is at. However, he did not meet some deadlines, so had it not been for his GRS, he might not even be in school. He told it like this.

She actually kind of saved the day for me. I had really wanted to go to the Boston College 6, well maybe 7 year medical program. I had the scores where I am sure I would have been accepted, but I got wrapped up in so many other things that I missed the deadlines. [GRS] had always told me to have several backup plans, but I was kind of stubborn and really did not always hear, at least I didn't want to hear this. Fortunately, she had pushed me to, so much that I had other applications in and this [current school] was one of them. I had an interest in the University of [Southwestern University] but it was not my top choice. I would have to say that I would not be here now if it were not for her. I would probably still be in [hometown].

I then asked him how he felt about this particular school since it was not his first choice and he said, "I love it here. I will be able to play baseball here, which I don't think I could have done in Boston. The weather is also great..."

Samuel was the only graduate who gave some credit to his GRS for his choice of major. He has always had an interest in science and his GRS helped him look at careers where he could pursue his interests. In five years he sees himself in medical school or some type of scientific research.

Venus attributes her early success in college, choice of a college, and follow-through on a major in her area of interest to her GRS. In respect to her early success in college she said,

This semester I have taken 18 college credit hours, but some of them are classes that should be taken during my sophomore year. Because...really pushed us many of the gifted students were able to get college credit classes and advanced placement classes before we left high school. This meant that we were able to start college a little bit ahead of everyone else. Looking back upon this I think that I would've taken some of these classes but not all of them, had [GRS] really not pushed us. This was a good thing that she did, because some of us even though we were bright still had a tendency to be lazy at times and not work as hard as we can because things always came easily for us. I think that [GRS] knew this, in some of us, so this is why she pushed us so hard. The reason I say this is a good thing is because I feel like her pushing us when we were in high school really helped her prepare us for college.

As previously discussed, Venus knew that she had potential as an artist and wanted to pursue art in college. However, due to a lack of a supportive home structure, her being able to make it to college to study art was an uphill battle. However, Venus felt that her GRS made a difference for her by helping her through the college selection process. She said,

I was really unsure how to pick a college for what I wanted to study so [GRS] and I talked about different schools and she helped me look at what each of them offered. Financial aid was going to be very important for me because I knew that my mother did not have the

money to send me to college...[GRS] was able to help me find the money for college and help me fill out the paperwork and follow through to see that I got into college. I remember that when I got my letter of acceptance how happy I was and [GRS] also shared his excitement, almost as if she was my mother. So I would have to say that she had a big impact upon this college where I'm attending now. Because she was the one who really helped me understand what I needed to do so that I can get into the school and get the money I needed to attend school here.

Venus expressed great satisfaction about where she attends school. She also told me about her summer employment / internship at an advertising agency which first began as a job experience that her GRS helped her locate in high school. She hopes to someday be working for such an agency and also continuing with her creative writing.

### **Memorable Conversations**

Five of the graduates were able to share distinctly memorable conversations with their GRS, three did not provide specifics but alluded to the overall beneficial nature of all conversations with their GRS, and one could provide no specific conversations. Pierce was one of the graduates who spoke of the general beneficial nature of the conversations. He said,

It was more all of the things...all of the times she talked to me. So, I guess it was all of the conversations we had about choosing a college and the time we spent reviewing them. It obviously impacted...would not be here...she helped me to find the money to go to school; I probably would not even be in college. Well, actually I probably would be, but I would also have to be working and it might take me forever to graduate or I might not end up finishing.

Kim, like Pierce, spoke of the general nature of all conversations she had with her GRS and the impact they had upon her life. Unlike Pierce, however, Kim's conversations with her GRS tended to support her emotional needs. As previously written, Kim was involved in a great struggle with her parents over their more traditional ideals of what she should do after high school. This led to many disagreements which sent Kim to school very upset. Kim also felt as though nothing she ever did was good enough for her mother. She found emotional support in her GRS through her words and support for Kim's interests. She said her GRS told her, "you need to do what you want to do because in the end this is all for you. You need to make your mom see that she can't control you like this because she is making you live her dreams she was not able to do when she was young. She told me that I had to stand up for what I wanted because in situations like this, I can't let her [mom] walk all over me." Venus also found emotional support in her GRS that was missing with her own mother. She said,

I just remember that things were often very difficult with my mother and she [GRS] was always there as a sounding board whenever I needed her to be. She seemed to understand my feelings but she was also able to explain things to me from my mother's perspective. I think that when I would try to talk to my mother we both tended to be a bit closed minded as to the other's perspective. Whereas with my gifted teacher it provided a new setting with a neutral party where I could share my feelings openly and feel like I was being heard. In conclusion, I do not really think that there was just one memorable conversation with her; it was more a series of conversations related to my own personal struggles.

The remaining graduates, Martina, Becca and Derek each vividly recalled very specific memorable conversations. Becca described a senior year conversation when she said,

Senior year when I was filling out the QuestBridge application form I was stuck...just started talking about what I wanted to do and I was truly down and just like I am not going to get into a good college...my test scores are not that and she just talked to me and let me know that I was real special...and I deserved it.... She would say we are going to get you into a good college...do not worry. It might not be...it might not be...it might be..she was like we are going to get you into a good college where you can get away from your family. And I just thought that was what I needed to hear at the time. So, it was good to know that she just believed in me enough.

Now having heard this I was curious how this had affected her life, so I asked her about this, and she said,

She just believed in me enough. I think it definitely impacted my life just knowing that in high school I had someone...I would not have gone to a university like... or even away from home if it hadn't been for her telling me that I could do it and I needed to do it... going to...has changed my life. I have basically a whole new life down there. It has definitely changed the way I look at things cause now I am being challenged academically. It has given me a whole new perspective.

One of Martina's most memorable conversations was her first conversation with her GRS. She said that her GRS pulled some of the gifted kids together and told them that she was there to help and we were welcome to come and see her anytime that we needed. She then saw that her GRS followed through on her promises so she knew that this conversation was memorable and left a lasting impression. Derek's most memorable conversation, like Becca's, occurred during his senior year. He said,

... when we were thinking about going to college and we were talking all the different aspects of my family in regards to school and how many doctors are on one side...how my

sisters are not going to college...She kind of talked me through everything and said really you have a lot of options. You did well on your ACT. You have great recommendations. It's just conversation about more or less transitioning from high school to college and how it's going to impact my life and my future. It was awesome.

## **Without the GRS**

Each of the graduates, with the exception of Mateo, had given several examples and detailed descriptions of how their GRS had not only helped them during their four years of high school, but also how they had helped them transition to post secondary education. As the interviews were nearing completion, each of the graduates was asked to complete the statement, "Without my GRS I..." Derek basically said we would not even be in college. He said, "...would probably still be filling out paperwork, FAFSA paperwork...getting my applications done to get into college, getting my college essays done; I would still be filling out paperwork if it were not for her, or have a ton of student loans." Pierce said that without his GRS he, "would probably be working as a mechanic or something somewhere because that is the closest I could get to physics with no money. Seriously, without my GRS I would not be at...with a great financial aid package." Kim, when completing the same statement said, "would not be where I am today." I asked her to project where she thinks she might be rather than her current university. She said, "I would probably be at...not majoring in biology...not exactly pleased with where I had made it in life because I wouldn't have been able to go to...because I wouldn't have gotten all of the scholarship money she was able to dig up for me." Venus also felt that she would not be in college, or if she was, perhaps it would be a community college. Pierce responded very eloquently when he said, "Without my Gifted Resource Specialist I would not be at a school I love, and playing baseball, not worrying about whether or not I have enough money to be in college, and knowing that I can make a

difference in the world by meeting timelines and using my intellect wisely to help others.” Becca and Martina gave the simplest of responses. Martina said, “...would not have felt as, would not have felt I had an advisor in high school.” Becca said, “...would not have graduated with honors from...and would not be going to...”

## **Viewpoints on the Cost of the GRS**

Every graduate who participated in this study was able to provide some opinion about the wisdom of allocating financial resources to create the Gifted Resource Specialist positions. Each was asked the question, “In your opinion, was money well spent by adding the GRS when non-gifted students did not have the opportunity to access someone other than their counselor? Explain.” All of them agreed that the money was well spent and the positions were necessary. Each of them gave lengthy answers except Amber, who simply said, “I think that it is money well spent; however, I do feel that perhaps getting a few more counselors for regular students would be a good plan...kind of even out the playing field a bit.” Martina, like Amber, gave a brief answer when she said, “The money was well spent because of the opportunities that the gifted students had...I think gifted students...were probably going to be a little more successful in college and less likely to drop out...a lot of people look at who graduates from what high school and where they continue their education...”

Pierce, Becca, Samuel and Venus gave the most extensive and detailed answers to justify why they believed that funds were wisely spent by the district when they created the Gifted Resource Specialist positions. Pierce said,

... it is hard to put a value on helping others and helping really smart kids to reach their potential...If you don't really consider the cost and just consider whether or not the Gifted Resource position is important, I would say that is not only important but necessary. We

are really different than average kids or those who have learning problems. We are intelligent, but we also have some awkward social issues and we need help working through them. Other students will try to use us for our intelligence to help them, but when it comes to activities they may not want to be associated with us. The gifted kids though, we identify with each other and she provided opportunities for us to get together. It kept us mentally sane. As for our intelligence, we still need to be taught even though many teachers think that since we are gifted we are already smart and do not need to be taught. Sometimes when I would have issues with teachers she would intervene. For example, in one class I had to sit through all of the lectures, do all of the work, and take the tests. I got perfect scores on all exams so it was very frustrating for me to waste my time in the class when I already knew the information. I then started ditching class which became a problem. The teacher was going to fail me because I was not doing the work. But, why should I do something I already knew. It was a waste of my time. So, she went and talked with the teacher and explained what it is like for gifted kids and how I was frustrated and felt like my time was being wasted. She got the teacher to test me before each new thing and if I knew the information I could move forward at my own [rate]. It also gave me a chance to do some independent research on something that interested me. For me...this position is necessary.

Becca gave a very emotional response to this question. Before I could barely finish completing the question, she said,

Yes, I feel very strongly that the gifted resource specialist at the high school level is a very, very important part of high school... people that do not understand the difference between two different kinds of intellect...there are smart kids taking challenging classes and graduating with honors and then there are the gifted smart kids. We are just viewed as

smart and most gifted kids are self motivated...counselors are just like, well, they do not need any help...it is really important for someone to understand that even though we are gifted and quote smart...that we still need someone who takes us just as seriously as someone who is failing high school. So, I think that was really important for people to have that resource [GRS] to go to regularly...counselors do not always have the same type of understanding of gifted kids...regular counselors can help them [average students] achieve those goals...going to [state university] the regular counselors can help with that a lot. But for gifted kids there are a lot of other things that go into it I think, especially like in underachievement. I was so bored in high school that I did not want to take some of the tough classes...I did not want to get involved in clubs...I did not want to do a lot of the stuff because I was bored. But having a gifted resource specialist there who kind of said you need to do this, it is for your own good, and did not let me get away with not doing things really helped.

Samuel's response was similar to Becca's in that he mentioned the need for pushing and continued learning from the GRS, something that he believed most teachers and administrators thought gifted kids did not need. He said,

Although we are good students and made good grades, things always came easy of us. [She] forced us to push ourselves and accept challenges willingly that would better prepare us for the future. She taught us the importance of meeting expectations but allowed us to make mistakes along the way knowing that she was there to support and encourage us. I had always heard in school how gifted kids would solve the problems of the future and we were the great minds, but it seems like at times teachers and administrators did not give us those things we needed to reach our potential and be those great problem solvers they said we would be...[GRS] was not like this. She understood the gifted student and our

needs. She worked to meet those needs. She saw to it that our needs were met as best as she could in a bureaucracy and fought for our rights to learn and not be patronized as 'gifted' kids. She was the one person we could always go to who accepted [us] for who we were including our little idiosyncrasies and tried to develop us.

Throughout the series of interviews, Venus consistently gave the most extensive answers to all questions that were asked, resulting in the longest interview. When asked her opinion about the money spent to create the GRS positions, she speak spoke at length about her family situation and how her GRS was almost a savior for her. She said,

I come from a home where I have really not known my father and my mother has always had to work very hard to take care of us. Society assumes that Hispanic people will not go to college and they will just work for other people such as cleaning, babysitting, and so on. I think my mother is very intelligent but she did not have the same opportunities in life or get to go to college as I have. I think that deep in her heart she really believes education is important, but she also realizes that she does not have the money to help me realize my dreams. All through school I was always told that I was really smart and I can do whatever it is that I wanted to do in life. But I knew that for me to go to college it would always be an uphill battle because my mother did not have the money to send me there. Being a gifted student at times can be very difficult; some of the other students pick on you because you're different. Or, you seem to know things that they do not know. Some teachers think that just because you're gifted you will learn everything on your own and you'll be just fine on your own. There so many kids that really don't get it and are not learning that those of us who do get it are really left out some times and the teachers would expect us to teach the other kids because they would say things like well you already get it so we need you to help whoever over here that doesn't get it. So, in some ways they were really limiting our

potential. Fortunately, I was identified early and put in the gifted program. So I could always count on having at least one teacher who understood me and would really push me to try to do my personal best. But when I got to high school and we no longer had gifted classes at least there was someone who understood the gifted students and was like us and could really work with us. Looking back, now I am so thankful that we had the gifted resource specialist at our high schools. This was someone who understood us, would push us to be our best and spent any amount of time necessary with us to help us be successful. I come from a community where great things in education are not expected of us. We see so many people that are Hispanic that are not doing well. I think it's generally assumed that all of us are like that. I for one am not like that. I have great aspirations for myself in life and I can only say thanks because there was someone in high school who could help me to work to realize my potential. So for me the money was well spent, because I think that if I had not had this person to work with me I would not have had the opportunities I now have available to me. The counselors were not someone who was able to help me realize my potential. I still keep in contact with...and she is someone that I know that I can still call on for assistance when it's needed. She also seems to really enjoy sharing in my success and she seems to have taken a personal interest in seeing that I do well. I know from talking with some of my friends that she has the same feelings toward others and she sees it as a personal mission to help all the gifted students reach their full potential in whatever manner that may be.

### **Final Thoughts From the Graduates**

Although each of the graduates had an opportunity to discuss at length their high school and post high school experiences, it was important to provide them with an opportunity to share

anything that they believed the interviews did not cover. Not all of the graduates had additional things they chose to add to the interview. Martina kept it short when she said: "I really appreciated having someone I could talk to and I felt comfortable going to in school solely beside a teacher. I think having a gifted resource...advisor is really beneficial to the school." Becca felt like more people needed to understand and be educated about the needs of gifted students. She said,

I think one of the biggest things I guess I would like to share is the district administrator response to the special needs. I felt like in elementary school and middle school the gifted program was a big part of school. In elementary school we went to a different school and had two days with other gifted kids and we could be challenged. Middle school we had a class, and then we get to high school and there was really not much for us until we had a gifted resource specialist. I think that it is really important but sometimes administrators do not see the real impact of it because they think that the gifted kids are just doing what we should be doing. They are like why do they need someone to tell them to do what they already know they need to do. That is not always the case. I have seen a lot of gifted kids who have not excelled. The gifted resource specialist would even help those who were not in the program. I think it is really important to have a counselor there for gifted kids who is really accessible and really willing to help them. Not even to help them, just to listen to them 'cause high school poses a lot of interesting challenges for gifted kids, academically speaking, because a lot of the classes do not challenge us enough and it is a lot of busy work. So at times it is difficult to push yourself to do the busy work when you are bored with it or do not see that shiny thing in the end that you are working for like college or scholarships. So, I think it is really important that the administrators can see that this is really an important part for gifted kids.

Samuel and Venus mentioned reports in the news about the poor economy and how this impacted schools. They have even heard about how some districts are reducing or eliminating services for gifted students. They said that they understood what it was like to have financial strain based upon their own home experiences; however, they still felt that programs for the gifted were an important part of schooling. Samuel said,

I hope that districts will continue to offer programs for gifted students. We are different; we do learn differently than many average kids you might say, so we have some different needs just like students who are learning English or who have learning difficulties. I think everyone assumes that we are already bright so that gives us more than others automatically so we should not be getting any special services. I disagree with this. If we are to solve the problems of the future, such as cures for diseases and more efficient energy sources, then we must be given the instructors who can teach us and help us develop to our maximum potential. We also need people like the Gifted Resource Specialists to guide us toward these resources and learning opportunities which exist beyond the walls of our high schools.

Venus spoke to the need for gifted programming, and its impact upon minority and low-SES groups within the gifted population, when she said:

...school districts are really having financial difficulties...when money is tight, sometimes districts have to make tough decisions and eliminate some positions. I can only say that I hope that they protect the position of the gifted teachers of the high schools...this is a great person who has really helped the gifted students and I only hope that the district will take the time to find out what a value this person is and to find out how important this person is in the lives of gifted students. They only need ask the students, because for students such as myself, this may make the difference between dropping out of high

school and going to college or not going to college. In the news we hear that it's very important for people to be bilingual now days. I am bilingual and I am intelligent, but without the necessary resources and support to help me and help other students who are in similar situations we cannot reach our potential as citizens.

## **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this research which studied nine minority and low-SES graduates of a gifted program with a special high school support system clearly showed that the presence of the GRS significantly impacted their lives and answered the question, "What impact, if any, has the presence of a gifted resource specialist had upon the high school experience and persistence to graduation for minority and low-SES gifted adolescents?" Eight of the nine graduates consistently reported their high school experience being one of support, dependability and nurturing by the GRS. This translated into feelings of their affective needs being met to such a degree that post-secondary education became a comfortable reality for each of them. Additionally, as revealed in the interviews, each of the graduates except one attributes their successful graduation and transitioning to higher education as largely due to the efforts of their GRS. While the program has been costly in terms of salary and benefits, the loss of potential earnings and contributions to society perhaps would have been greater had each of these graduates not had the support to develop to their fullest potential.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion and Conclusion

Many researchers agree that gifted students are unique, and therefore have unique learning needs. Researchers over the years have supported the need for a differentiated learning environment for gifted children (VanTassel-Baska, 1996; Landrum, Callahan and Shaklee, 2001; Landrum and Shaklee, 1999; Davidson, 2004). Despite the large amount of research and instructional books available on how to educate the gifted student, there is much less about how to differentiate counseling services for gifted students (Colangelo, 2003; Moon and Hall, 1998), particularly for students from underrepresented groups. This seems to run contrary to the research by leading clinicians such as Moon et al. (1997) and Rimm (2003) which supports the need for differentiated counseling of gifted students. Most of the existing models for counseling gifted students, as found in the literature, are of a clinical nature and not the nature of traditional guidance counseling which exists in high schools. The models which do exist for use in schools' would be considered guidance models because they are generally implemented through the schools guidance and counseling program. The weakness of the guidance model is due to the predominant current scenario for counseling of gifted students at the secondary level which is: none, a counselor is assigned to deal with the gifted but lacks specialized training, or a counselor is assigned that has limited training on dealing with gifted individuals. In some instances, a more expansive guidance model may be implemented as a part of a gifted program, as was the case with this research. This resulted in the gifted students having advisement from their GRS with a ratio of 1:100 (approximately), whereas the ratio of student to counselor was roughly 1:400 (or more) in this particular district. This ratio made it hard for the counselors to serve anyone well.

The Gifted Resource Specialists, which were the focus of this research from a student perspective, followed a developmental approach recommended by some experts in the field of gifted education (Colangelo, 2003; Colangelo and Assouline, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, 1998) and supported current research which suggests special counseling by trained professionals dealing with the gifted is needed for gifted students' psychosocial, academic, and career preparation on an annual basis (Colanangelo, 2003; Greene, 2003; Jackson and Snow, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, unknown).

While research exists to support the special training needs of counselors who deal with gifted students, especially those from minority and low-SES populations, what the research does little to detail is the role these special counselors play in a secondary setting and their importance in the lives of these students. As a result, this research sought to answer the question, "What impact, if any, has the presence of a gifted resource specialist had upon the high school experience and persistence to graduation for minority and low-SES gifted adolescents?" Three specific research questions are addressed in this summary of findings, as well as the theoretical support for this research, in relationship to the literature reviewed. The questions were:

1. How or what role do students perceive the GRS having served in their high school experience?
2. What relationship do the students see between the presence of the GRS and,
  - a. their persistence to graduation,
  - b. their choice of diploma option, and
  - c. their post-high school activities?
3. What impact does the presence of a GRS have upon the diploma choice (International Baccalaureate, Honors, College Prep or Regular) for minority and low-SES populations of gifted students?

Table four provides a summary of the findings. As revealed in table four, those areas in which the graduates frequently reported the GRS meeting their needs were in those areas which research supported there being the greatest needs for gifted students. To be able to fulfill the career preparation needs, the graduates had to know that they had the financial means to pursue their career interests; hence, the frequency of this being mentioned in the interviews. Not only did the graduates need the necessary financial support to fund their career aspirations, it was frequently cited throughout all interviews except one that the GRS served as an emotional support in locating / securing funding (affective needs 101) and as an advisor in college selection (81). These three top response categories, as shown in table four are directly in alignment with the research supporting the need for annual preparation by a trained individual in the areas of psychosocial, academic and career preparation.

**Table Four**

*Frequency of Responses by Graduate and Category*

Graduate	Venus	Samuel	Kim	Derek	Mateo	Pierce	Amber	Becca	Martina	Totals
Category	Frequency of Response to Each Domain by Graduate									
High School Issues	5	4	2	11	3	4	2	3	3	37
High School Counselor	10	6	10	5	1	4	1	2	4	43
Affective Needs	16	10	8	14	3	12	11	17	10	101
Knowledge of Giftedness	15	6	1	12	2	9	2	5	0	52
Diploma Selection	6	8	6	2	0	3	0	3	1	29
Scholarships & Financial Aid	19	21	6	24	3	9	9	10	16	117
College Selection	14	15	4	16	0	7	11	9	5	81

## **How or what role do students perceive the GRS having served in their high school experience?**

All of the graduates with one exception reported the GRS as having played a major role in their high school experience, persistence to graduation, and beyond. This was contrary to the role of their high school counselor who they felt did not adequately address their needs. As shown in Table Four, there were a total of 43 references to the counselor during the interviews; however, only two of these comments were positive and limited to language such as, “seemed very nice” or “she seemed to want to help but never had the time.” This negative impression of the counselor was due in part to the large caseload as acknowledged by the graduates. Additionally, several graduates reported their counselors feeling that they did not need assistance because they were gifted. This is consistent with Ryan’s (1999) research:

It is unfortunate that, when most counselors think of the gifted population (if they do at all), they labor under the fallacy that these youths have their worlds under complete control, suffer from few personal traumas, and do not need special attention or counseling (pg. 15).

In the remaining six categories, the comments were directly related to the GRS and were positively worded, such as: “understood,” “appreciated,” “was always there for me,” “accepted me,” “knew what it was like to be gifted,” “really supported,” and “encouraged me.” These types of responses were not surprising, given the high caseloads of the counselors and the generally negative views of the counselors by the graduates. The lower GRS to student ratio may be one explanation for these differences. The lower ratio of student to GRS, is supported by research which said, “Fewer students per counselor would free up time to develop trust and respect between counselors and students...should be required to be endorsed or otherwise certified in gifted education” (Vanderbrook, 2006, pg. 142).

The graduates frequently mentioned that one of the ways the GRS greatly impacted their high school experience was in the skill of the GRS in understanding their giftedness and providing activities where the gifted students would have an opportunity to not only interact with their intellectual peers, but also with non-gifted students (affective needs, 101; knowledge of giftedness, 52). As noted by Matthews and Kitchen (2007), "...these [gifted] students must coexist with others, and it is best for everyone if the coexistence is experienced as mutually beneficial rather than as antagonistic and elitist" (pg. 256). Even though these events might bring together the gifted and non-gifted, the presence of gifted peers provided the sense of, "...belongingness and excitement of interacting with like-minded others" (Tolan in Perrone et. al., 2007, pg. 259.) The social / emotional support and the interactions with peers, as provided by the GRS were consistent with the research recommendations (Colangelo, 1991; Fisher, 1981; Kerr, 1996; Shoffner and Newsome, 2001; Moon, 2002; Tuttle and Becker, 1980; Woolcock, 1962).

The assistance provided by the GRS in securing scholarships and financial aid was mentioned 16 times more than the GRS having met some affective needs during the graduates' high school experience. It is important to note that the references to scholarships and financial aid were quite detailed and included a chronological recollection from the point of the students learning that something such as free / reduced lunch could help with the finances of preparing for college (i.e. reduced testing fees for ACT, etc...) all the way through their current financial status. The students as a whole expressed anxiety and worry about whether or not they could pursue their career aspirations for higher education due to their family's financial status and qualifying for free/reduced lunches throughout high school. These worries led to the need for emotional support which was found in the GRS; hence, once again their affective needs were met. In all instances, the GRS was able to introduce the students to different forms of financial aid, help them through the process of the paperwork, and successfully obtain aid for all of them so that they could attend

the college of their choice. Although this process began in high school, it helped them to get to where they are today. Therefore, they considered this a large part of their high school experience. All graduates but one attributed the actions of their GRS during high school to alleviating their worries about the possibility of higher education. One of the graduates saw his GRS and one other person as helping him through this process, so he also acknowledged the role of this other person as well.

### **What relationship do the students see between the presence of the GRS and their persistence to graduation?**

These graduates were gifted, but were considered as underrepresented gifted because of lunch status and / or ethnicity. According to Renzulli and Park (2000), the gifted graduates in these categories are most in need of additional support by trained individuals because of the potential for dropping out. In the study by Renzulli and Park, which examined gifted dropouts, these populations were most at risk. As a whole, gifted students who drop out frequently cite boredom as a factor. The graduates in this particular study occasionally mentioned boredom in coursework and the lack of familial support; however, they also spoke of the GRS as being able to provide guidance in choosing courses / instructors and assistance in changing to a more challenging course. This is consistent with research by Swanson (2006, pg. 11) who noted that, “even with minimal curricular intervention, minority and low-income students benefit from advanced curricula and instructional strategies that challenge them.”

Some researchers (Ogbu, 1989; Ogbu and Simons, 1998) believe that minorities, excluding Asians, have an identity that is opposite the norm of society, including the views related to schooling, which leads to their underachievement and desire to achieve. Ogbu (1989) asserts that minorities such as African Americans who have a strong identity related to their ethnic group

may develop an oppositional frame to things such as schooling and other things accepted by the majority culture. McWhorter (2000) goes so far as to describe African Americans as having “separatist and anti-intellectual attitudes” (pg. 24). Worrell (2007) wrote, “...to the extent that these contentions are accurate, academically talented students from groups whose societal academic stereotype is negative are most at risk of underperforming” (pg. 24). This type of anti-intellectual attitude was found in the homes of at least two of the graduates. One of these two was also faced with the prospect and belief that many in her culture do not value education; therefore she should not set her aspirations so high. Fortunately, the GRS consistently reinforced to her that she could do anything she wanted with the right support to overcome these obstacles. She credits her GRS with changing her world-view.

For another one of the graduates, the GRS was able to step in at this critical juncture to help him overcome the obstacles between home, friends and school which were keeping him from being successful. The graduate acknowledged the negative peer pressure which derailed his success during the freshman and sophomores years; however, he did credit his GRS with having maintained a “positive” and “motivational” attitude where he was concerned which ultimately contributed to his graduation. The other racial minorities provided similar accounts of the same type of experience, with the exception of one.

One of the functions of the GRS was to ensure the graduation of gifted students. In reviewing the literature it was not clear that one particular thing contributed to the propensity of gifted students to drop out of high school. Several researchers believe that various factors affect a student’s decision to drop out of school including: gender, race, socioeconomic status, family background and personal problems (Young and Reich, 1974; Beacham, 1980; Noth and O’Neill, 1981). All of the graduates acknowledged one or more of these factors as impacting their schooling, except gender. Each of the graduates except one reported the GRS as being someone

that they could always go to, made the time for them, and provided them with the necessary support and resources to deal with family issues and financial issues which impacted them in high school and their ability to get to college. Other researchers ( Schwartz, 2002; Suh and Suh, 2006; Hansen and Toso, 2007) also reported on the impact of personal, family, social and school variables in the gifted adolescents' decision to drop out. As previously noted, each of the graduates felt that the GRS was a predictable source of emotional support, thus none ever reported feeling the need to drop out.

Sadowski's (1987) study found several characteristics in a case study of gifted high school dropouts, one of which was the evidence of a lack of counseling in high school. Betts and Neihart (1988) developed profiles of the gifted dropout and the common theme was one of withdrawal and depression because of unmet needs and unaddressed feelings. Hansen and Toso (2007) found that gifted students who chose to drop out did so because they felt they had no advocate within the school system. Further, they did not feel that anyone in power understood them. Unlike the students in each of these previous studies, none of the graduates in this study reported feelings of wanting to drop out in high school, even though each did experience more than one of the factors known to contribute to gifted students dropping out. This can clearly be connected to the presence of the GRS. Each GRS was able to fill the void of unmet needs, unaddressed feelings, advocacy, and understanding of the needs of gifted students. As shown in Table Four, all graduates except one frequently cited examples of their affective needs being met (101), their GRS advocating for their high school needs (37), and the GRS's knowledge of giftedness (52). These findings are consistent with what has been cited in literature as being essential to preventing gifted students from dropping out. Cordy (1993, cited in Renzulli and Park, 2000) reported, "The presence of a caring adult, a supportive peer group...motivation to attend postsecondary educational institutions,

and participation in...groups were reasons at-risk students chose to stay in school rather than drop out” (pg. 263).

**What relationship do the students see between the presence of the GRS and their curricular / diploma choices?**

Based solely upon the graduates in this study, it would be correct to conclude that the presence of a GRS in high schools had an impact upon curricular choice and diploma pursued by minority and low-SES populations of gifted students. The effect of the GRS was to upgrade the diploma sought by the graduates. As shown in Table Five, seven of them chose the honors diploma path and two chose the college preparatory path.

Table 5

*Types of Diplomas Earned*

Graduate	College			
	IB	Honors	Prep	Regular
Venus		x		
Samuel		x		
Kim		x		
Derek			x	
Mateo	x	x		
Pierce		x		
Amber		x		
Becca		x		
Martina			x	

Six of the seven acknowledged the GRS as being the driving force in their chosen diploma being earned. Each of the six stated that had it not been for the information about the honors diploma provided to them by the GRS, they would not have earned the honors diploma. While the two non-honors graduates did not acknowledge the GRS having directed them toward the College Prep diploma, they did acknowledge that the GRS had tried to get them to pursue the honors diploma. One of the two felt that it was too late to change his junior year, and the other simply said that she did not want to work that hard. Table Four notes 29 different occasions when the choice of a diploma was attributed to the GRS. As previously noted, six of the nine chose the diploma strictly because of the GRS, and in each case raised their sights.

While two ultimately did not pursue or earn an honors diploma, each of the two believes they were better prepared for college because of the encouragement and support of the GRS to challenge themselves with more difficult course choices. Each of these two also stated that had it not been for the encouragement of the GRS to pursue more difficult classes they would have been bored in school. The responses of these two graduates were consistent with a research study conducted at William and Mary. The study showed “even with minimal curricular intervention, minority and low-income students benefit from advanced curricula and instructional strategies that challenge them” (Swanson, 2006, pg. 11).

One of the graduates stated that at one time he was bored, believed he had already mastered the information, and chose to skip classes. Davidson (2004) wrote, “When we ask exceptional children about their main obstacle, they almost always say it’s their school. Their school makes them put in seat time, and they can’t learn at their own ability level” (pg. 57). In this particular instance, the GRS was instrumental in working with the classroom teacher to maximize seat time to this student’s advantage. The teacher changed the expectations and level of work so that he was no longer bored. This resulted in him attending school on a regular basis. Another

student said that at the urging of her GRS, she chose the classes often reserved for honors students to take so that she would be prepared for college. She had initially chosen the easier path because she felt she would never have the money to go to college. One graduate who felt it was too late to change diploma programs during his junior year also acknowledged the role of the GRS in his decision to take more difficult classes to be better prepared for college and her role in helping him to negate negative peer pressures his freshman and sophomore years.

### **What relationship do the students see between the presence of the GRS and their post-high school activities?**

Eight of the nine graduates directly attribute the actions of their GRS with their present enrollment in a college where they feel challenged and satisfied in their intellectual endeavors. Seven of the nine graduates attend prestigious Tier One Universities, four of which are ranked nationally as number 20 or higher. The two remaining students attend non-ranked Liberal Arts colleges. The assistance to obtain financial aid and scholarships with the help of the GRS was what made it possible for all eight to attend the school they are currently at, and plan to enroll in next year. A total of 117 references were made in the interviews to scholarships and financial aid. The choice of a college was not left entirely up to the GRS; however, in eight of nine instances, the final college chosen was discussed with the GRS. In each of the instances, the GRS provided the graduates with vital information about the school so that they could make an educated and informed decision. It was the GRS who also ensured that for the eight all of the necessary paperwork was completed for the college and submitted by the deadlines.

At the time the GRS was added at the high schools there was no financial incentive for doing so. It was important to determine whether the graduates felt that money was well spent to provide a service just for them that non-gifted students did not have. All nine of the graduates

believed it was a vital position to have for gifted students. None of the students were aware of the actual cost; however, each expressed in one way or another that it was hard to place a value on adequately preparing someone to be successful in life and reach their maximum potential, as they felt society expected from gifted students. Each believed that not only did they feel that this position was vital, but also their gifted friends, if asked, would feel the same way. This finding would be consistent with the literature of Marland (1972) who said gifted children are capable of high performance and therefore require differentiated programming. All students cited lack of understanding of giftedness as one of the reasons this person was necessary, regardless of cost.

### **Theoretical Support**

At the onset of this research the theoretical framework was not clear. However, as the interviews with the graduates began to unfold it became abundantly clear that what the GRS's were able to relate to the graduates at an affective level resulted in a strong commitment to post-secondary transition at a top-notch school. The much intertwined Theories of Cultural Capital and Social Capital explain what had occurred with the graduates in this research study. This study, similar to others (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Perna, 2000; Wells, 2008) recognized the connected nature of these two theories; therefore, many of the attributes of the GRSs did not neatly fit into one type of capital more clearly than the other. However, this study, like the one by Wells (2008) showed that social and cultural capital have a positive effect on student persistence in post-secondary education. The findings of this research were consistent with the theories of Cultural and Social Capital, as well as the research of Berger (2000) which was, "students with higher levels of cultural capital are more likely to persist, across all types of institutions, than students with less access to cultural capital" (p. 114). Further, Berger went on to say, "Students with higher levels of cultural capital are most likely to persist at institutions with correspondingly high levels of

organizational cultural capital” (2000, p. 115.) Community colleges would not be considered institutions with high organizational cultural capital (Berger, 2000).

Cultural capital are non-financial assets which a person possesses in varying degrees. Cultural Capital was first introduced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in the 1960's to explain why disparities in education attainment by children from different social classes could not be particularly limited to economics. He believed, "...above and beyond economic factors, cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the family are fundamentally important to school success" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p.14). Bourdieu believed that because cultural capital acquired through heritage was not equally distributed in society, some children would have distinct advantages. Further, he believed that these advantages translated into a method by which schools could be evaluated, which favored some children over others (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, cultural capital in schools plays a key role in the reproduction of educational inequality.

Social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) includes, "the social and personal connections or networks that people capitalize on for interpersonal assistance and personal gain, which for youths are often developed in schools in addition to the home" (Wells, 2008, p. 29). Ellwood and Kane (2000) and Perna (2000) suggested that information resources, a component of social capital, were one of the items which affected post-secondary persistence. Limited access to information and a lack of understanding of college choice may disadvantage certain students (Hill, 2008), and these differences in information resources may partially explain disparities in college enrollment among low-income, Black, and Hispanic students (Perna, 2006). In this particular study, the GRSs served to provide informational resources (financial and academic) which later influenced post-secondary persistence.

In societies with a formal system of education, cultural capital becomes a big part of the educational system. As colleges and universities award degrees, certain values are assigned to

these degrees on the market. So, graduates with a degree from the same school may have more or less value compared to a degree from another school based solely upon the cultural value of a particular institution. Bourdieu believed non-dominant groups possessed less cultural capital; therefore, the educational systems tended to channel students to schools which reflected their origins, from the most to the least privileged. In this particular study, the GRS acted as a mechanism to provide the social and cultural capital necessary to change the channeling of graduates toward schools which, under normal circumstances, would not have been attainable due to economics and/or heritage. "The greater an individual's cultural capital, the greater his or her advantage in procuring additional capital that will benefit family members" (Lee & Bowen, 2006), just as less cultural capital would limit resource acquisition.

In 1986, Bourdieu went on to write about and further identify within the Theory of Cultural Capital three different types of capital: Embodied, Objectified and Institutionalized. The GRSs in this particular study provided the graduates with academic knowledge which ultimately led to their acquisition of institutionalized cultural capital as evidenced by their admission to selective colleges and universities. According to Robinson and Garnier (1986, p. 147), "the level of education obtained is nothing more than cultural capital." Early on, the GRSs acted to identify those impediments to success for each of the students and sought to remove the impediments. By doing so, they increased the students' chances of success and created in them the knowledge to remove future impediments on their own as a result of new cultural and social capital obtained from their GRS. One of the most important aspects of cultural and social capital the GRSs were able to provide was the knowledge of sources and social structures to locate financial aid, be it scholarships, grants, or loans. According to several researchers (Bettinger, 2004; Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; St. John, 1990) financial factors such as books, tuition and housing have been shown to affect persistence in postsecondary education especially for low-SES

students. The graduates developed a trusting relationship with their GRS which made them “...more inclined to internalize high expectations and benefit from postsecondary support than those in instances where trust is lacking” (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). For each of the graduates, the GRS was creating was a college-going support system through the creation of cultural and social capital.

## **Limitations**

Despite the importance of this research and the useful information gathered as a result, it was not without limitations. The sample size, both in number of students and schools, was small considering the national norms for minority and low-SES populations in gifted programs and the varying definitions of giftedness. As shown in Table Two, of those graduates meeting the criteria for participation it was difficult to get more than the final number to actually participate for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: unable to reach an individual because there was change in contact information, cancelations that were never rescheduled due to a major winter storm, not interested in participating, bias toward the university which had granted permission for the research, and time constraints.

A second limitation was that the study only included the interview results of graduates who chose to participate and be voluntarily interviewed. Students in other grade levels may have had pertinent information to report regarding the GRS in his/her high school, but were not included because of the focus upon areas for which only a graduate would have had knowledge.

A third limitation may have been the number of years that the participants would have already been served within a gifted program that included a support system for affective needs. Those students who were identified early-on in school would have already had the benefits of the supports afforded students in the gifted program for several years. In this particular study, the

graduates had an average of eight years of support through the gifted program prior to reaching high school.

A fourth limitation of the study was that it focused specifically upon minority and low-SES populations. However, research tells us that gifted students in general are in need of specialized counseling at the high school level. The comprehensiveness of the research might have been better had it not been narrowly focused.

A final limitation of the study was that the data was collected over a few months rather than four years so it was dependent upon the students' most vivid memories.

### **Implications for Application**

This study has supported the research documenting the need for expanded counseling for gifted high school students. Although it was not the purpose of this study, it did verify that the GRS provided support that is necessary but not provided elsewhere for minority and low-SES gifted students. Additionally, although not a purpose of these study, affirmed the disparities as reported in research which exist in the cultural and social capital necessary for minority and low-SES populations of students to successfully matriculate to post-secondary education. Despite this fact, with an appropriate intervention, as was the case with the addition of the GRSs, the gap in disparity can be narrowed so that students can successfully persist to graduation and postsecondary education. Each graduate in this study noted the importance of the support of their GRS in helping them to successfully enter a highly ranked college or university.

This study has produced several important findings which will be beneficial to school district administrators who are charged with the planning of guidance and counseling for high school gifted students. Although the financial cost of such a program must always be a consideration, it should not be the only consideration. During the interviews the graduates made it

perfectly clear that for them it was very important to be understood and to be heard. Administrators involved in planning would be wise to consult with the persons most affected by planning decisions, be they financially based or not. Graduates should also be consulted when evaluating such programs to determine their value.

This study showed that social and cultural capital can be cultivated in students given the right program. The graduates in the study repeatedly spoke of the information in resources they obtained from their GRS which made them academically prepared and financially able to enter postsecondary education. The ultimate benefit was the graduation and matriculation to highly ranked colleges and universities as a result of this newly developed capital. This study has now left the door open for a more extensive study which tracks the graduates on through college.

This study supported current research which revealed that the student-counselor ratio for gifted students is best when the ratio is lower. In the case of the graduates in this study, the lower ratio with the GRS as compared to their guidance counselor allowed for a close relationship to be developed. District administrators can use the data gathered in this research to improve counseling opportunities for all students, especially those from minority and low- SES groups. The resulting opportunities may very well carry over to non-gifted students.

The students in this study were fortunate to have had the additional support of the GRS which proved beneficial for each of them. However, one cannot help but wonder if such additional support does not create an unfair advantage for students who are already viewed by some as having the extra advantage of increased intellect. Additionally, had it not been for the political nature of the parents representing some gifted students, the addition of the GRS to each high school might not have even occurred. The additional Social and Cultural Capital which was afforded the students in this study would well serve all minority and low-SES students, not just those who had the fortunate nature of being identified as gifted in Maple Grove Schools.

In school districts throughout the United States, financial difficulties are forcing a reduction in faculty and staff. The challenge to providing additional support to high school gifted students will be financial. In the event that the district determines that it can no longer financially support the GRS positions, it will be important to find alternative ways to meet the needs of these students. One possible way to meet this need would be by providing professional development about the nature and needs of gifted students to the counselors, teachers and administrators. Although this would not provide the lower student to adult ratio as recommended in the research, it would provide knowledge that many educators do not currently possess. Another possible way to meet the additional support needs of minority and low-SES gifted students would be to partner with a college, university or community organization to provide mentoring opportunities for the students.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Although this study adds to the sparse research base on the impact of special interventions for minority and low-SES populations of high school gifted students, it has not shown a definitive solution for the counseling needs of minority and low-SES high school gifted students. The study does add to the present body of research for school administrators as they plan for the high school programming of gifted students. While this study has not been able to address all possible variables that affect persistence to postsecondary education it has laid the foundation for future research in several ways.

The second implication stemming from this research is that it lays the foundation for a more in-depth study about the impact of created social and cultural capital in gifted high school students from minority and low-SES populations. Such a study could be expanded to include a larger population of students. It is not only enough to ensure that the students pursue postsecondary education, but also that they complete a degree. Therefore, the study should follow

the students from high school through college. This would document the long-term effectiveness of the high school interventions.

The third implication stemming from this research suggests the need for a cost-benefit analysis of such a program. The challenge is in providing a program to meet the special needs of minority and low-SES students to successfully be able to persist to postsecondary education, yet still justify the cost to those who may not reap the benefits of such a program. During tight budget times, this will prove to be a bigger challenge. Therefore, as a researcher I believe it important to consider the potential long-term loss in earning power should such graduates not be supported in such a way as to reach their maximum potential.

High schools are evaluated based upon the number of students they graduate and universities are dependent upon students to maintain their livelihood. Perhaps a unification of purpose would be best for these students when planning programs and services to meet their needs. Such unification in planning programs and services for minority and low-SES high school gifted students would serve as an alternative way to provide the necessary social and cultural capital for high school graduation and continuation to postsecondary education. This partnership could prove mutually beneficial for the gifted student, the high school and the college / university.

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12/2/2009  
HSCL #18390

Sherry Samples  
7806 NE 122 Terrace  
Kansas City, MO 64167

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) has received your response to its expedited review of your research project

18390 Samples/Twombly (ELPS) Persistence to Graduation and Beyond: A Qualitative Case Study  
Examining One District's Administrative Response to the Specialized Counseling Needs of  
Underrepresented Populations of Gifted Students

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form(s) sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc/hsp\\_tutorial/000.shtml](http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc/hsp_tutorial/000.shtml).
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

David Hann  
Coordinator Emeritus  
Human Subjects Committee Lawrence

cc: Susan Twombly

Human Subjects Committee Lawrence  
Youngberg Hall | 2385 Irving Hill Road | Lawrence, KS 66045 | (785) 864-7429 | Fax (785) 864-5049 | [www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc](http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc)

**Informed Consent Letter**

**Gifted Student Perceptions of Persistence to Graduation Study**

Date

Name

Address

City, State Zip Code

RE: Gifted Student Perceptions Interview

Dear XX:

Congratulations on your recent graduation from a state-approved gifted program! This letter is requesting your participation in an interview as a part of a research study for a doctoral dissertation through the University of Kansas. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the gifted resource specialist and the perceptions of gifted students in regard to their gifted resource specialist.

The interview is designed to provide qualitative data regarding district administrations' response to the special needs of gifted high school students and your perceptions of the gifted resource specialist's role: in your high school experience, persistence to graduation, diploma option choice, and post high school activities. The results of the interview will contribute largely to the overall research and provide a rich description of the perceptions of underrepresented gifted students in a program where special support systems exist. These results and the culminating research will be beneficial to school district administrators, educators, parents, and the public. The data will provide a baseline for future study examining administrative responses to the special needs of gifted students at the high school level.

There is no cost to participate in the interview, only your time. You may coordinate with me a time and location that is convenient for you to be interviewed. The interviews will be digitally recorded to ensure accuracy. The answers to your questions will be strictly confidential and your name will not be used in the final work. Any quotes which might be used will be assigned a fictitious name so that you may not be identified. As well, your former high school and district will not be named. A final copy of the research will be available to you, upon request.

I hope that you will take the time to be a part of this very important research, for which very little research currently exists. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu). Please contact me, as noted below, so that we may arrange a time and location for you to be interviewed.

Questions or comments should be sent to the following:

Sherry L. Samples  
7806 NE 122 Terrace  
Kansas City, MO 64167  
816-415-2711

Dr. Susan Twombly  
University of Kansas  
Joseph R. Pearson Hall, room 418  
1122 West Campus Road

[machka\\_sherry@yahoo.com](mailto:machka_sherry@yahoo.com)

Lawrence, KS 66045-3101

785-864-9721

[stwombly@ku.edu](mailto:stwombly@ku.edu)

Thank you for your contribution to this research project. I appreciate your time and look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,  
Sherry L. Samples

By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older and give my permission to digitally record this interview. My signature below also acknowledges that I have received a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus, University of Kansas. Approval expires one year from 12/2/2009. HSCL #18390
---

### Oral Consent Procedure

#### Gifted Student Perceptions of Persistence to Graduation Study

Hello, my name is Sherry Samples. As a graduate student in the University of Kansas's Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, I am conducting a research project with the purpose of examining a school district's administrative response to the specialized counseling needs of gifted high school students.

I would like to obtain your views on the role of a gifted resource specialist and the perceptions of gifted students in regard to their gifted resource specialist. There is no cost to participate in the interview, only your time. Interviews will be digitally recorded to ensure accuracy. The answers to your questions will be strictly confidential and your name will not be used in the final work. Any quotes which might be used will be assigned a fictitious name so that you may not be identified. As well, your former high school and district will not be named. A final copy of the research will be available to you, upon request.

You have no obligation to participate and you may discontinue your involvement at any time.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old.

Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Susan Twombly at the School of Education ([stwombly@ku.edu](mailto:stwombly@ku.edu)). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

I hope that you will take the time to be a part of this very important research, for which very little research currently exists.

Do you have any questions?

Are you willing to participate in the interview?

(If no, thank them for their time. If yes, but not at this time, arrange a mutually agreeable time to call back. My contact information will also be provided. If yes, at this time, the following information will be provided prior to the start of the formal questioning.)

**The interview is designed to provide qualitative data regarding district administrations' response to the special needs of gifted high school students and**

**your perceptions of the gifted resource specialist's role: in your high experience, persistence to graduation, diploma option choice, and post high school activities. The results of the interview will contribute largely to the overall research and provide a rich description of the perceptions of underrepresented gifted students in a program where special support systems exist. These results and the culminating research will be beneficial to school district administrators, educators, parents, and the public. The data will provide a baseline for future study examining administrative responses to the special needs of gifted students at the high school level.**

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Protocol

#### **Section One: Participant Eligibility Verification**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Graduation Year \_\_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_\_ Years with GRS Access \_\_\_\_\_  
Years in the Gifted Program \_\_\_\_\_  
Qualifying Criteria (circle one): ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_ and/ or SES \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section Two: General Information**

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time \_\_\_\_\_ End Time \_\_\_\_\_  
Location \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of diploma earned \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section Three: Specific Questions**

##### **(early high school)**

- (p)1. Tell me about when you first met your GRS.
- (p)What did you think when you first met your GRS?
- (p)In what ways did you think she would be helpful to you?
- (es)How did you feel about having an advocate just for gifted students in high school?

##### **(mid high school)**

- (es)2. Thinking back to your first year of high school, following your first meeting with your GRS, who initiated most of the meetings that came thereafter? What was the purpose of these meetings?
- (es)3. Over the next four years, how often and in what format did you meet with your GRS? Your counselor?

(p)Overall, compare the meetings you had between your GRS and your counselor.

(es)4. Tell me about those times when you specifically sought out the assistance of your GRS.

(es)5. How did the GRS help you with your diploma selection?

***(late high school)***

(p)6. What role did the GRS play in your high school experience?

(es)7. What kinds of things did the GRS do to help you graduate and transition to your next endeavor?

***(post high school)***

(es)8. Now that you are not in high school, how to you occupy your time? What impact did the GRS have upon this decisions (these decisions)?

(p)What are your plans for next year?

(p)Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

(p)9. Share with me one or more of your most memorable conversations with your GRS and the impact these conversations had upon your life.

(t)10. Please complete the following statement: **“Without my GRS I.....”**

(p)11. In your opinion, was money well spent by adding the GRS when non-gifted students did not have the opportunity to access someone other than their counselor? Explain.

***Section Four: Additional Participant Thoughts, Comments and Questions***

## APPENDIX E

### List of Categories and Codes

1	High School Issues	
2	High School Counselor	
	Positive	+
	Negative	-
3	Affective Needs	
4	Knowledge of Giftedness	
5	Diploma Selection	
	Diploma Requirements	R
6	Scholarships and Financial Aid	
	Deadlines	D
	Requirements	R
	Paperwork	P
	Money Received	\$
7	College Selection	
	Review of Colleges	Re
	Requirements	R
	Major	M

#### Sub-categories

D	deadlines
P	paperwork
R	requirements
Re	review
+	positive
-	negative
\$	money