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**EXAMINING REPRESENTATION OF GIFTED STUDENTS IN AN  
URBAN GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAM THROUGH  
THE LENS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY  
AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT  
LEADERSHIP**

by

Zakisha N. Brown, B.A., M. Ed.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

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We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared by

**Zakisha N. Brown, B.A., M. Ed.**

entitled **Examining Representation of Gifted Students in an Urban Gifted**

**Education Program Through the Lens of Social Capital Theory and Culturally**

**Relevant Leadership**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership Concentration**

*Bryan McCoy*

Bryan McCoy

Supervisor of Dissertation Research

*Don Schillinger*

Don Schillinger

Head of Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership

**Doctoral Committee Members:**

Patsy Hughey

Richard Shrubbs

**Approved:**

*Don Schillinger*

Don Schillinger

Dean of Education

**Approved:**

*Ramu Ramachandran*

Ramu Ramachandran

Dean of the Graduate School

## **ABSTRACT**

Gifted education has been permeated with discrepancies in representation since its inception. Despite efforts to minimize the gifted gap, under identification of minority groups continues. A gifted student's social capital and a school district's execution of culturally relevant leadership may impact underrepresentation. Therefore, an instrumental case study was implemented to understand, through a social capital and culturally relevant leadership lens, how gifted policy impacts representation of students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. Gifted identification relies heavily on teacher recommendations, which is why it is essential to understand educators' perceptions of giftedness when investigating underrepresentation. Twenty educators were surveyed, and twenty-two educators and leaders were interviewed to explore perceptions of giftedness and the district's current gifted education program.

Educators' and educational leaders' perceptions of giftedness are similar; however, educators acknowledge more need for the social and emotional development of gifted students. Educators and leaders perceive social capital to be an essential component for identification. Elements of culturally relevant leadership are present; nevertheless, a better understanding of the gifted education program is necessary for educational leaders to challenge underrepresentation and induce change in the gifted education program. Educators and leaders at the secondary level do not prioritize gifted

education, though they understand the importance of meeting gifted students' educational needs. Additionally, educators and leaders acknowledge the need for policy reform.

Results indicate that implementing the following could lead to an increase in identification: provide professional development on gifted characteristics and the gifted identification process; implement forms of culturally relevant leadership; incorporate an equity policy and scrutinize gifted numbers.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to all of my family and close friends. To my son, Chris, thank you for inspiring me to be a better person, and thank you for being the one I can always go to for guaranteed laughs. I love you like no other. Mom, thank you for being my rock and for all of your wisdom and guidance throughout the years. I am grateful for the encouragement and support throughout this journey. “Daddy Pooh,” thank you for always treating me like your precious little angel no matter how old I get. I am so fortunate to have you in my life for motivation, for the talks about absolutely anything, and for your infectious smiles. To my sister, Sonja, thank you for being a shining light in my life and for being the life of every party. You are truly one of a kind. To my best friend, Ty, thank you for being my bestie since middle school and for going through this journey with me. Thank you for making me realize we are accomplishing a major feat. Kendra, thank you for being my travel buddy, especially during times when I needed to de-stress. Thank you for seeing qualities in me that I did not see myself.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Though the average student spends no more than approximately 20 percent of their life in school, the disparities that many Black and Hispanic students face in their homes, neighborhoods, and their peer environments continue throughout school and into their adult lives (Caucutt et al., 2017; Condrón et al., 2013; Downey et al., 2009; Minor et al., 2015). These inequalities lead to gaps in achievement, and on average, White students score approximately 1.5 to 2 grade levels higher than Black students in the average school district. Educational leaders are faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of ensuring that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed (Finnigan & Daly, 2012; Minor et al., 2015; Zirkel & Pollack, 2016).

Research shows that Black and Hispanic gifted students are often overlooked for gifted nomination because of preconceived notions regarding giftedness and because of Black and Hispanic students' limited access to educational resources (Ford, 2014a, 2014b, 2015).

Gifted identification relies heavily on educators' knowledge and understanding of giftedness. Because perceptions of giftedness often contain preconceived notions, it is essential to analyze educators' perceptions concerning disparities in gifted identification (Frasier et al., 1995; McCluskey, 2017; Russell, 2018; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

Black students are the most underrepresented in gifted education, followed by Hispanic students (Frasier et al., 1995; McCluskey, 2017; Russell, 2018; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). This is largely based on the discrepant reliance on standardized testing, teacher nominations, educators' biases, and preconceived notions surrounding giftedness (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b). Educational leaders must adapt culturally relevant practices that give every student a fair opportunity for inclusion in gifted education to enhance equity in gifted identification (Horsford et al., 2011; McCluskey, 2017; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017).

The current study aimed to explore how Social Capital Theory, Culturally Relevant Leadership, and classroom educators' perceptions of giftedness may or may not contribute to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic student populations.

### **Background of the Problem**

Giftedness is a complex concept to define and has been at the center of controversies surrounding equity in identification since the inception of gifted identification in the early 18th century (Crane, 2021; Lawrence & Glenn, 1994). Standardized tests tend to contain cultural biases, and many low socioeconomic and Black and Hispanic students go overlooked because of educators' implicit biases regarding elitism and preconceived notions of giftedness (Lawrence & Glenn, 1994; Shippen et al., 2009; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

Schroth and Helfer (2008) examined perceptions of the gifted identification process and found that gifted specialists perceived standardized tests to be the most important factor in gifted identification and peer and parent nominations to be the least important. Marland (1972), however, acknowledged that giftedness covers areas of

aptitude, general intelligence, creativity, leadership potential, and visual or performing arts— none of which can be determined in a standardized test. Conversely, educators noted educator nominations as the most important factor in gifted identification. Several researchers have indicated that educators harbor implicit biases and preconceived notions about giftedness, which may acutely impact representation of certain groups that often go overlooked because they do not display what may be deemed as typical gifted characteristics (Ford, 2015; Mayes & Moore, 2016; Mun et al., 2020; Russell, 2018; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Black and Hispanic population in the U.S. is steadily increasing; however, Blacks and Hispanics continue to be heavily underrepresented in gifted education by as much as 46% (Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Roulston, 2010; Shippen et al., 2009; U. S. Census Bureau, 2020). Furthermore, Blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented in special education by as much as 21%. Educators are more apt to refer students to special education when there are personality clashes or misunderstandings of cultural characteristics (Mayes & Moore, 2016).

Efforts have been made to increase representation of Black and Hispanic groups, yet there is still a drastic difference between representation of nonminority students and representation of Black and Hispanic students (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Roulston, 2010; Shippen et al., 2009). Through policy implementation and intervention strategies, educational leaders have tried to minimize the disparities in the gifted gap; however, to minimal avail (Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Roulston, 2010; Shippen et al., 2009).



Research has addressed threats to closing the gap, such as segregation, income, and stereotype threat (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Caucutt et al., 2017; Condrón et al., 2013), but more research needs to be implemented to make lasting changes that maintain equity in gifted programs.

In response to the ongoing dilemma of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic groups, I have utilized an instrumental case study design to investigate how social capital and culturally relevant leadership contribute to identification practices. The current study will allow researchers to gain insight that could potentially induce equitable practices in gifted education in school districts that may have underrepresented groups. The current study adds to the body of research needed for policy reform.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The current study contributes to the body of research by scrutinizing practices in the gifted identification process and may potentially enhance equitable practices in gifted identification. The purpose of the current study is to understand, through a social capital and culturally relevant leadership lens, how gifted policy impacts representation of students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. I used an instrumental case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific case. I used a quantitative survey to understand educators' perceptions regarding giftedness across the entire school district. With a better understanding of how social capital impacts identification and how culturally relevant practices can enhance representation of underrepresented groups, equity in gifted identification could potentially be enhanced (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; McCluskey, 2017).

### **Significance of Study**

Previous research supports the literature in the current study regarding underrepresentation in gifted education and explains how relationship inadequacies in social capital can lead to that underrepresentation. Additionally, previous research supports the notion that culturally relevant leadership can enhance equity in gifted identification (Bartee, 2019; Ford, 2006, 2011; Galindo et al., 2017). The results of the current study could lead to reform in policy in gifted identification and augment research in gifted education.

### **Methods and Research Questions**

The current study aimed to analyze how social capital and culturally relevant leadership impact gifted identification equity for underrepresented students. In the first initial phase of the research design, I created an instrument to analyze the educational leaders' and educators' perceptions of giftedness. I then executed purposive sampling to implement face-to-face interviews. The research design of the current study aimed to gain a thorough understanding of educator and academic leader perspectives regarding gifted identification in K-12 schools.

1. How does students' social capital impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?
2. What characteristics of culturally relevant leadership—if any—are present in the gifted identification process, and how do they impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?

3. How does policy regarding gifted screening and identification impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership Theory serve as the framework for the current study; concepts from theorists Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) for Social Capital Theory and Horsford et al. (2011) for Culturally Relevant Leadership are the focal points. Their frameworks reinforce researched approaches that coincide with educational leaders' efforts to enhance equity in educational entities (Galindo et al., 2017; Horvat et al., 2003; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021). I selected Social Capital Theory to support a possible root cause for underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education (Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017; Horvat et al., 2003), while I chose Culturally Relevant Leadership to provide a method of enhancing equity in the gifted identification process (Khalifa et al., 2016; McCluskey, 2017; Mun et al., 2020, 2021; Washington, 2021).

#### **Social Capital Theory**

Loury (1977) was one of the first researchers to acknowledge a relationship between one's social background and overall personal development. Though Loury (1977) analyzed disparities in personal development largely from an economic standpoint, connections can also be made between one's "social capital" and educational achievement (Acar, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Dufur et al., 2013). Hanifan (1916) was the first to use the term social capital and defined it as social interactions

among individuals and families. Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as social relationships that lead to attaining beneficial resources, such as a higher education, skills, employment, etc. (p.241). Coleman (1988), on the other hand, defined social capital as social structures that make structured activities easier for certain individuals. Bourdieu (1986) more specifically differentiated three different forms of capital: economic capital, which takes the form of property rights; cultural capital, which takes the form of educational attainment; and social capital, which are social connections that lead to prestigious titles. Coleman (1988) emphasized the practical aspects of social connections while Bourdieu (1986) emphasized the inequalities that stem from social capital.

Ford (2006, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) reinforces the notion that social inequalities lead to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education.

Meaningful connections with educators and family members who serve as bridges for access to educational resources lead to an increase in identification of Black and Hispanic students (Ford, 2006, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Galindo et al., 2017). Nonminority students continue to primarily dominate gifted education because Blacks and Hispanics are lacking in access to educational resources, are segregated in terms of social networks, and are inhibited by the deficit thinking of educators and educational leaders (Bartee, 2019; Ford, 2006, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Mun et al., 2020).

### **Culturally Relevant Leadership**

Cazden and Leggett (1976) first discussed “culturally responsive” to describe effective interactions between educators and students from diverse backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the term “culturally relevant pedagogy” as a theoretical model to embrace students’ cultural aspects and emphasize student achievement, challenging

social inequalities. From there, several researchers have studied and analyzed variations of culturally relevant/responsive leadership (Horsford et al., 2011; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021).

Origins of deficit thinking related to giftedness can be traced back to the early 20th century when Terman (1916) revised Alfred Binet's and Theodore Simon's IQ (Intelligence Quotient) tests, developed to identify academically weak students and are still used today to identify highly intelligent individuals (Crane, 2021; Terman, 1916, 1961). Terman (1916, 1961) equated high IQ with intelligence, and in 1921, he initiated an experiment known as the Genetic Studies of Genius in which he more than 1500 people born between 1900 and 1925—majority White middle class individuals and disproportionately male (Terman, 1916, 1961). In the experiment, Black individuals made up two percent of the population of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Alameda, Oakland and Berkeley and comprised three-tenths of the one percent of the gifted group, which were two cases—both half White (Terman, 1916, 1961). Terman stated that gifted children could come from any social background but believed that nonminorities were inherently more intelligent than Blacks and Hispanics (Beauvais, 2016; Brookwood, 2016; Warne, 2019). Gifted identification has relied heavily on standardized intelligence assessments, and beliefs of superiority, despite the imperfections permeating the process, fuel identification (Crane, 2021; Ford, 2015; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010; Lakin, 2016; McCluskey, 2017; Morgan, 2020).

Culturally relevant leadership can help impede deficit thinking regarding culturally relevant students and cultural biases that continue to exist within standardized

testing, gifted education, and its identification process (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020, 2021; Owen et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

A framework of Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership helps explain a root cause for underrepresentation and a theory that allows for minimized underrepresentation. Though Bourdieu first thoroughly examined social capital, Coleman's approach to social capital is more widely accepted. For the purpose of the current study, however, both theorists utilized the concepts to show that Social Capital Theory can help explain why children who do not possess social capital (a structured family environment or social connections from family, friends, and educators who have access to certain resources) do not attain specific educational resources, such as gifted education or advanced academic programs.

For several years, researchers have addressed concerns about disparities in achievement among Black and Hispanic students (Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally Relevant/Responsive Leadership involves educational leaders embracing the values, beliefs, and needs of Black and Hispanic students as well as leading educators to also embrace the values, beliefs, and needs of Black and Hispanic students, leading to an increase in identification of Black and Hispanic students (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; McCluskey, 2017; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017). Therefore, Culturally Relevant Leadership Theory can help explain methods that can increase identification of Black and Hispanic students that may enhance equity in gifted identification practices overall

(Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; McCluskey, 2017; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021).

I selected two topics that reinforce and substantiate the chosen theoretical concepts so that I could further understand Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership: gifted identification; underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education, and two subtopics: contributing factors of the gifted gap; minimizing the gifted gap. The current study explains how social connections impact representation of Black and Hispanic students who overwhelmingly do not have the level of social connections that lead to access to advanced educational programs and other educational resources (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Horvat et al., 2003; Orr, 1999).

In addition, the current study examines how the implementation of culturally relevant leadership practices may lead to educators and educational leaders embracing and understanding the needs of Black and Hispanic students, which may also lead to an increase in identification of Black and Hispanic students (Horsford et al., 2011; McCluskey, 2017; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017).

### **Researcher Positionality**

I am currently employed as an educator of gifted students at a secondary school in a diverse school district. My experience as an educator in a gifted program in a diverse school district primarily represented by nonminorities sparked my interest in evaluating the practices of gifted identification. The gifted education program's percentage should be equal representation of the district population. Because Black and Hispanic students are primarily underrepresented in gifted education, I wanted to understand the root cause and how specific factors contribute to underrepresentation. The survey instrument,

document analysis, and interviews provided valuable data concerning underrepresentation and its contributing factors.

My personal experience and knowledge opened up my eyes to an understanding of how social circles and status can impact one's access to resources and how culturally relevant leadership practices can impede inequitable practices in gifted identification processes; therefore, I chose the Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Framework to understand how social capital can affect access to educational resources and how culturally relevant practices can enhance equity in gifted identification practices. Bourdieu created Social Capital Theory in 1986 to explain how class can lead to certain advancements and benefits (Bartee, 2019; Bourdieu, 1986; Häuberer, 2011). Culturally Relevant Leadership is a derivative of Culturally Responsive Leadership and aims to enhance culturally attentive practices in educational leadership that trickle down to educators to ensure that the needs of Black and Hispanic students are met (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017).

### **Limitations**

The current study only examines gifted education programs in nearby school districts in the southern region of the United States, minimizing generalizability of results. Results are supported with theoretical data to help reduce that limitation. Other limitations include the following:

- Inadequate explication of results: Data on underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students can cause the results to be muddled if terms are not clearly defined to minimize this threat, terms have clear definitions and align with previous research.



- Low statistical power: Because I sent the survey out to schools for leaders and educators to complete voluntarily, and because I sent the survey to someone in administration with the hopes of the survey being sent to the entire staff, there was a minimal number of responses. I emailed the survey to the entire school faculty and followed up with administration about implementing the survey to minimize this threat.
- Participants do not understand the intent (purpose) of the intervention: With the implementation of the survey, educators and educational leaders may not have clearly understood the purpose of the current study, which may have led them to not respond to the survey at all or not taking the survey seriously—therefore, not answering honestly. To minimize this threat, I provided additional information explaining the purpose of the survey.

### **Delimitations**

The current study is delimited to gifted education in a diverse school district in the southern region of the United States. The primary focus is the representation of underrepresented groups in gifted education. The delimitations are purposeful, aiming to examine the identification practices of a school district selected through purposive sampling.

### **Definitions of Key Concepts**

1. Black and Hispanic: individuals with different cultures, societies, races, languages, socioeconomic statuses, or ethnicities (Ford, 2015; Mun et al., 2016, 2020, 2021).
2. Underrepresentation: the lack of diversity in a program or entity.  
Underrepresentation in gifted education can be calculated by comparing the percentage of a specific racial group to the rate of the racial group in an overall general education population (Ford, 2014a, 2014b, 2015).
3. Gifted: exhibiting the advanced ability or potential to exceed in critical thinking, problem-solving, and aptitude that surpasses individuals in the same peer group (Javits, 1988).
4. Gifted identification: the process of nominating a student for gifted education based on observational data of advanced ability; of implementing phases of gifted assessments to determine one's giftedness; and of placing a student in gifted education (Javits, 1988).
5. Social Capital: relationships that allow a society to operate sufficiently.  
Social capital is a way to measure the value of tangible and intangible items acquired from types of relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).
6. Social Capital Theory: the supposition that one's ability to acquire resources stems from one's social connections (family, friends, educators, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).

7. Culturally Relevant (Responsive) Leadership: leadership that involves embracing a variety of cultures and creating an all-inclusive educational environment that supports cultures through cultural celebrations, rigorous curriculum, high expectations for every student, community involvement, etc. (Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017).
8. Urban school district: School system with a high enrollment rate in a large, densely populated area with a diverse population. Urban schools serve more significant numbers of low-income students. On average, urban school students have lower achievement scores (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017).
9. Diverse: the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc. (Moore et al., 2020)

### **Summary and Transition**

It is essential to continue to investigate contributing factors of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education so that educational leaders can be better equipped to combat inequities in the education system (Ford & Trotman, 2001; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017). Understanding the impact of social capital and culturally relevant leadership on gifted identification would bring about a better understanding of what leaders can do to minimize the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students. Factors such as low socioeconomic status, segregation, and stereotype threat should be taken into

consideration. Circumstances such as these are inexorable; therefore, educational leaders need to utilize tangible methods to invoke change and increase identification of underrepresented groups (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Crabtree et al., 2019; Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; McCluskey, 2017). The following section discusses the review of pertinent literature that includes the theoretical framework–Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership–and the following pathways: (1) Gifted Identification; and (2) Underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic Students in Gifted Education. Subtopics, Factors of the Gifted Gap and Minimizing the Gap, are included under the second pathway.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the current study was to understand, through a social capital and culturally relevant leadership lens, how gifted policy impacts representation of students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. The research aimed to investigate the gifted identification process and perceptions of stakeholders in the gifted education program in a diverse district. This research is necessary because inequities remain prevalent in gifted education despite attempts to combat them (Borland, 1996; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Crabtree et al., 2019; Crane, 2021; Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford, 2006; Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2011; Jolly, 2009; Mun et al., 2021). The research pathways chosen to support this research include (1) Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership as the theoretical foundation; (2) Gifted Identification; and (3) Underrepresentation in gifted education, which includes subtopics (a) Contributing Factors to the Gifted Gap; and (b) Minimizing the Gap. This review focuses on aspects of gifted identification that contribute to underrepresentation of specific groups and methods for increasing representation of those groups.

Implementing a comprehensive literature review requires a thorough analysis of several peer-reviewed articles. With institutional access, I used EBSCO, a provider of research databases containing e-journals and peer-reviewed articles, to search for articles on my research topic. *Social Capital Theory, Culturally Relevant Leadership, gifted*

*identification, underrepresentation in gifted education, and gifted gap.* Various related terms were combined to access more articles related to my research topic.

First, I researched the history of Social Capital Theory. Bourdieu's *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* provided foundational information regarding social networking and its various benefits. I used the following terms to locate articles on Social Capital Theory: *Social Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory in Education, and Social Capital Theory and gifted.* I limited the search to full-text peer-reviewed journals published after 2000.

Next, I used search terms *Culturally Relevant Leadership and Culturally Relevant Leadership and gifted education* to better understand culturally relevant leadership as it is one method that can enhance equitable gifted identification practices (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017). I limited the search to full-text peer-reviewed articles published after 2000.

Next, I implemented a search for articles on the first research topic: gifted identification. I used search terms *gifted identification* and *gifted screening.* I limited the search to full-text peer-reviewed articles published after 2000. The search resulted in articles discussing gifted identification practices and teachers' perceptions regarding Black and Hispanic students as teachers have a significant role in identification.

I then implemented a search for articles on my second research topic: underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students. I used search terms *underrepresentation in gifted education* to find articles on this topic. I limited the search to full-text peer-reviewed journals published after 2000. The chosen articles discussed systemic reviews on underrepresented groups in gifted education. I delved further into

factors contributing to underrepresentation of gifted groups and created subtopics: contributing factors of the gifted gap and minimizing the gap. I used search terms *gifted gap*, *achievement gap*, and *achievement gap in gifted education* to find articles on contributing factors to the gifted gap. I limited the search to full-text peer-reviewed articles published after 2000.

It is essential to understand the theoretical framework that supports the research. Social Capital Theory, discussed below) is chosen as a component of the theoretical framework because it can help explain the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education programs (Bartee, 2019; Galindo et al., 2017; Häuberer, 2011). I determined that Social Capital Theory would be an appropriate theoretical framework to further understand how social connections (familial, educational, and peer) contribute to gifted identification.

### **Social Capital Theory**

One lingering obstacle impeding equity in the education system is the lack of resources (Caucutt et al., 2017; Condrón et al., 2013; Minor et al., 2015). Social Capital Theory explains the relationship between social connections and retrieval of resources, such as educational opportunities, positions of power, skills, and knowledge, which may also explain the lack of resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Dufur et al., 2013; Häuberer, 2011; Orr, 1999). Individuals who acquire and maintain social networks with a wide array of people and are also sought after for their social connections obtain more knowledge, skills, education, and opportunities that individuals devoid of those social connections do not (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Häuberer, 2011; Orr, 1999).

Furthermore, intragroup social capital focuses on improving opportunities for specific ethnic groups, while intergroup social capital involves networking across racial and ethnic groups (Orr, 1999). Intergroup social capital is a pivotal component of minimizing segregation of communities and disseminating resources across groups (Galindo et al., 2017; Orr, 1999). Social disparities impact how people view others based on race, income, race, gender, and language, and racial disparities stem from class systems in social settings between ethnic groups (Condrón et al., 2013; Ford, 2014a, 2014b).

Woolcock (1998) distinguishes three types of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding social capital refers to ties made between like-minded people in similar situations, such as friends, family, or neighbors. Bridging refers to connections between dissimilar people in similar situations, such as coworkers or new friends. Lastly, linking refers to connections between dissimilar people in dissimilar situations that require reaching outside of the community to obtain.

Bourdieu (1986), when discussing specific aspects of social capital, explained that certain social connections can lead to “titles of nobility.” As Bourdieu (1986) explained, these titles and resources are not necessarily pursued but gained through those connections, which can lead to lasting beneficial effects.

Coleman (1988) discussed different forms of social capital conducive to obtaining valuable resources. Obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures is one form of social capital that involves the expectation that an action performed by a trusted individual will be reciprocated in the future. The second form of social capital that Coleman (1988) explains is information channels, which involve receiving information



from a trusted source that can lead to action. For example, one may be informed of a news event through a friend or a family member instead of viewing the news source directly. Norms and effective sanctions are the third form of social capital that Coleman (1988) and involves norms that abandon selfish motives and work towards collective objectives, which lead to strengthening communities.

Social capital theory, in an educational context, incorporates the concept that leaders, teachers, students, and parents benefit from networks within an educational system; therefore, schools perform as a source of social capital because of the resources exchanged between students, teachers, parents, and educational leaders (Bartee, 2019; Ford, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017). Educational resources are obtainable to students who can utilize educators and educational leaders as social capital (Bartee, 2019). Dufur et al., (2013) differentiated the impact of social capital from family and social capital from school on student achievement and argued that the stronger the social connections, the greater the resources that children acquire. Dufur et al. concluded that familial social capital is more likely to lead to student achievement. As communities have become more segregated and less connected, the onus of providing social capital to less fortunate students is on educational leaders who must bridge the gap between community members and the school they serve (Bartee, 2019). Disparities in social capital lead to benefits for individuals based on the people they know and not their knowledge or efforts; and as the dynamics of social networks of the Black and Hispanic are vastly different, for example, many Black and Hispanic individuals do not benefit from the conventional social gain and status (Bartee, 2019).

Students in high-income households have the advantage of having access to a wide variety of educational resources, and middle-class parents are much more likely to invest in a wide array of activities that promote academic development (Caucutt et al., 2017; Dufur et al., 2013; Ford, 2014a). Education provides social capital for students, impacting their futures (Galindo et al., 2017; Phoenix, 2002; Sapon-Shevin, 1996). Gifted education programs tend to be oversaturated with non-minorities of high social statuses (Borland, 1996; Ford, 2014a; Sapon-Shevin, 1996). Social inequalities also lead to presumed academic inadequacies of Black and Hispanic students (Ford, 2014a). Ford (2014a) lists three forms of prejudice related to social inequities that result in the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic gifted students: antilocution—which includes racial and ethnic jokes, slurs, name calling, and microaggressive terms; avoidance—which involves individuals or groups isolating themselves from specific groups; discrimination—which involves the refusal of rights to certain individuals. Avoidance, segregation, and discrimination result in underrepresentation of Neglecting to identify or refer students for gifted screening and services is a form of discrimination (Borland, 1996; Ford, 2014a; Sapon-Shevin, 1996).

Galindo et al., (2017) explored social capital in a full-service community school which provides a qualitative methodological example of how social capital is analyzed in an educational context, which contributes to an overall understanding of Social Capital Theory in regards to students' access to educational resources (Galindo et al., 2017; Häuberer, 2011; Horvat et al., 2003).

Galindo et al. (2017) explored ways in which schools can be utilized as sources of social capital. Galindo et al. investigated three schools—in a large urban school

district—chosen through purposive sampling. The district has about 84,000 students—85.5% Black; 8% White; and 4.5% Hispanic. Galindo et al. conducted twenty-eight semi-structured interviews. Galindo et al. concluded that social capital is a major component of resources being exchanged between stakeholders. An interrelationship between social capital and student achievement has been found, one that surpasses the relationship between socioeconomic status or race and student achievement (Ford, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017; Putnam, 2000). Community involvement is an essential aspect of incorporating specific services into the curriculum. The principal, teachers, and other staff members were deemed sources of social capital, and participants viewed educational leaders in a positive manner because of community engagement. Black and Hispanic participants expressed feeling invisible and having incommensurate access to resources.

Limitations include the lack of participant representation due to the fact that Galindo et al. only highly involved parents, so the perceptions of parents who may not have been able to attend events are not included (Galindo et al., 2017). Also, Galindo et al. (2017) focus mainly on relationships between students and families of color, and a more thorough analysis of White families may help better understand social capital within diverse communities.

Horvat et al. (2003) discussed below provides valuable information on class differences and their connections to social capital, which significantly impacts students' retrieval of educational resources. The results of the investigation enhance the understanding that social capital impacts access to educational resources and programs (Galindo et al., 2017; Häuberer, 2011; Horvat et al., 2003).

Horvat et al. (2003) focused on parent networks as an essential source of social capital to determine its impact on a student's educational experiences. Horvat et al. incorporated interviews with and observations of 88 fourth grade students and their families. Horvat et al. found that social networks varied greatly by social class. Middle-class parents were more likely to include professionals in their social networks than low-income families. Almost all middle-class families reported knowing a teacher, while less than half of low-income families reported knowing a teacher. Middle-class families were much more active in addressing special education programs. Horvat et al. discussed one middle-class Black family who had a daughter whose teacher suggested she get tested for their gifted program. The family got their daughter tested from that suggestion from a nonminority teacher who runs their gifted program. That social network led to the daughter getting tested. Working class parents, however, lacked social networks and did not feel compelled to request or fight for services. Horvat et al. (2003) concluded that mere social networks are not of significance but the resources that are gained from the networks.

Social capital is the idea that an individual's social connections to family, peers, and educational stakeholders are beneficial assets, which can lead to the acquisition of advantageous resources or could be a detriment to individuals who lack social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Galindo et al., 2017; Horvat et al., 2003). The chosen articles provided valuable information on social capital and its impact on students' access to educational resources. Galindo et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between social capital and student achievement and to analyze how teachers, educational leaders, and parents serve as social capital for students which can affect students' success and

access to advanced programs. Horvat et al. (2003) discussed class differences and detailed characteristics of members from specific classes, which can lead to favorable (gifted nominations, professional connections, etc.) or unfavorable (being overlooked for certain programs, lacking legal knowledge and connections, etc.) results.

One way to combat limited access to resources due to limited social networks and to enhance equity in gifted identification and services is to implement culturally relevant leadership (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017). Culturally Relevant Leadership is the second component of the theoretical framework for the current study which supports research on enhancing equity in gifted education practices; along with understanding possible causes of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students, Culturally Relevant Leadership may further an understanding on how to combat inequity in gifted identification practices; therefore.

### **Culturally Relevant Leadership**

Culturally relevant leadership focuses on gaining a knowledge and understanding of diversity, acquiring the skills necessary to promote and embrace diversity, and inducing change in an organization based on the objective of achieving cultural competence (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021). Culturally relevant leaders aim to meet students' academic needs through cultural inclusion, emphasize high expectations and student achievement, empower students to challenge inequities, and incorporate students' cultural knowledge and values in the curriculum (Horsford et al., 2011; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020). Additionally, culturally relevant leaders maintain connections with people in the community and provide professional development opportunities for

educators to ensure that educators meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black and Hispanic students (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020).

According to Horsford et al., (2011), a culturally competent teacher who embraces and values students' cultures delivers content in a way that is relevant and meaningful to students and not in a way that portrays one race as better than the other. Culturally relevant teachers *(a) hold high self-esteem and high regard for others; (b) see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same; (c) see teaching as an art and themselves as artists; (d) help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities; (e) believe that all students can succeed; and (f) see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students.*

Previously listed are best culturally relevant practices for teachers to implement in the classroom, and the following are best practices for educational leaders to implement. Washington (2021) analyzed the best practices of culturally relevant leadership, which can impede discrepancies in representation of Black and Hispanic gifted students (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021).

Washington (2021) investigated best practices of culturally relevant leadership and centered research questions around best practices for culturally relevant leadership to develop the qualitative multiple-case study.

Washington (2021) randomly selected four educational administrators in California with significant success in teaching and administration. Three features that were present amongst all four educational leaders included: (1) positive relationships

with the local community; (2) principal or administrative mentoring programs; and (3) shared decision making. The culturally relevant framework depends on educational leaders' self-reflective practices and acknowledgement of biases. Washington (2021) implemented four semi-structured interviews and non-participatory field observations to collect pertinent data. Washington (2021) concluded from the research that when educational leaders recognize the culture of their students, teachers, and staff, it enhances self-esteem and motivation. When leaders and educators put more attention into the overall educational experience instead of pushing the content, this provides more opportunities for students to express themselves and for the educational experience to be more meaningful. Involving students in the decision-making process builds trust between educational leaders and students, improves students' critical thinking skills and provides educational leaders with perspectives on student thinking. Washington (2021) recommended educational leaders implement diversity training and cultural competence assessments.

Mun et al. (2020) also discussed best practices of culturally relevant leadership but executed a systematic literature review to emphasize the detriment of non-culturally relevant practices and the significance of administering culturally relevant leadership. The examination of best practices contributes to the understanding of culturally relevant leadership and its elements that can lead to an increase of Black and Hispanic students (Mun et al., 2020).

Mun et al. (2020) reviewed leadership on leadership, systemic reform, and gifted identification and services for Black and Hispanic students. Mun et al. (2020) identified five themes in the literature: *systemic bias; equity and excellence; deficit thinking; hiring*

*practices, training, and professional development; and parent and community networks.*

Mun et al. used political context, a pedagogical approach, a personal journey, and a professional duty to serve as the foundation. The political context entails policies that may contribute to equitable practices. The pedagogical approach involves combating disparate themes that are prevalent in educational environments and curriculum and incorporating “antiracist” messages instead. A personal journey consists of educational leaders guiding followers in their efforts to embrace cultures. An educational leader’s “professional duty” is to value diversity and center decisions around cultural competence.

From the review, Mun et al. (2020) found that systemic bias prevented Black and Hispanic groups from experiencing equitable educational practices and access to resources. Culturally relevant leaders emphasize “equity and excellence” and strive to ensure cultural competence and equal access to efficient educational experiences for students of all races and backgrounds. “Deficit thinking” centers on what students lack instead of focusing on what students excel at. Improved hiring practices—hiring Black and Hispanic applicants— and professional developments would, in turn, improve gifted education for Black and Hispanic students (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Mun et al., 2016, 2020). Culturally relevant teachers would be more likely to refer and identify Black and Hispanic students. Lack of community outreach and parent understanding of gifted programs contributes to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education programs. Mun et al. (2020) reinforce the importance of implementing culturally relevant leadership in gifted education to improve its overall practices.

Ezzani et al. (2021) utilize policy and practice regarding gifted education as the emphasis of gifted identification, and culturally relevant leadership is the focal point.



Ezzani et al. examine the effect of culturally relevant practices on gifted identification, which contributes to the notion that culturally relevant practices are essential in increasing the representation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020; Washington, 2021).

Ezzani et al. (2021) used the culturally relevant framework to explore the impact of cultural competence implementation across the district on identification of and services for Black and Hispanic gifted students. The underrepresentation of CLED students results from misapplication of and heavy dependency on cognitive assessments (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2015). For gifted identification processes to maintain equity, policies and procedures must be culturally relevant. Culturally relevant leadership ensures that pedagogies and educational practices are culturally relevant to students' lives (Ezzani et al., 2021). The culturally relevant framework contains four elements: a political context, a pedagogical approach, a personal journey, and a professional duty. Through pedagogy, students should build knowledge, skills, and a sense of cultural identity. Culturally relevant leaders can help shift the culturally deficient beliefs of educators and guide them to achieve cultural competence. Educational leaders should take on the responsibility of steering educators in the direction of appreciating cultures.

Using qualitative methods, Ezzani et al. (2021), using qualitative methods, collected data from 119 district leaders, principals, teachers, and parents in a large, diverse school district during the 2014-2015 school year. District leaders initiated a policy that required demographic-based proportionality identification for gifted students. There was also a cultural competence goal across the district. Three themes were derived

from the findings of the research: district advocacy, communication pathways, and conceptions of giftedness. District advocacy consists of leaders' efforts to receive support for culturally relevant reform. Communication pathways involving how information and skills were communicated throughout the district, occurred through professional developments and ways of dealing with resistance. Ezzani et al. (2021) differentiated gifted students and high achievers to understand conceptions of giftedness and know that gifted students are not necessarily high achievers. This parochial mentality leads to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students.

Ezzani et al. (2021) recommend district leaders align district policies with federal policies on gifted identification of Black and Hispanic students; set forth an equity policy to ensure identification of Black and Hispanic groups; implement equity audits; provide professional learning opportunities. Ezzani et al. (2021) noted lack of generalizability as a limitation; however, Ezzani et al. (2021) emphasized the insight gained that developed a theoretical generalization. More research is needed to explore culturally responsive professional development that would be most conducive to an overall culturally competent educational environment.

Gifted identification practices must first be understood to comprehend the significance of the impact of social capital on gifted identification processes and to understand how culturally relevant leadership can help rectify the inequities ubiquitously present in gifted education (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020; Washington, 2021).

Culturally relevant leadership seeks to embrace cultures of each student, emphasize high expectations and student achievement, incorporate cultural values of Black and Hispanic students into the curriculum, and provide leadership opportunities for

students to challenge disparities (Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020). The selected articles for this element of the theoretical foundation provide insight into its fundamental aspects, how it can be implemented effectively, and how culturally relevant leadership can transform results of Black and Hispanic students (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020; Washington, 2021). Washington (2021) investigated the best culturally relevant practices and concluded that positive relationships, mentoring programs, and shared decision-making were prevalent amongst the most effective leaders. Washington (2021) reinforced the notion that leaders' acknowledgment of students' culture enhances students' self-esteem and motivation. Mun et al., (2020) utilized a systemic literature review to scrutinize qualities of culturally relevant leadership and found five themes in the literature that aligned with or inhibited culturally relevant practices: systemic bias, equity and excellence, deficit thinking; hiring practices, training, and professional development; and parent and community networks. Ezzani et al., (2021) examined the impact of cultural competence on the identification of and services for gifted students, and the findings suggested that culturally relevant practice can greatly enhance equity in the gifted identification process. The findings conclude that culturally relevant practices are pivotal in minimizing disparities in education overall and gifted identification (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020; Washington, 2021).

Social Capital Theory helps develop the assumption that from social connections, certain resources—including educational resources—are attainable (Galindo et al., 2017; Horvat et al., 2003). Educational leaders, teachers, parents, and peers provide social capital, and those with an abundance of social capital have access to many more advantageous resources. Because gifted education is somewhat of a “secret society,”

oftentimes, only members of what may be deemed as elite groups may be accepted (Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017; Horvat et al., 2003). Gifted identification relies heavily on teacher referrals, and because teachers are more well-versed and accessible to gifted education programs, they serve as social capital for students under educators' observation. If a teacher perceives a student as gifted, that connection could potentially lead to a nomination for gifted screening (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Horvat et al., 2003; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Exposure is a key component to accelerated/enrichment programs (Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2004). Many students who have the potential to excel academically perform poorly because their parents, peers, teachers, or parents do not strive to maximize that potential (Frasier et al., 1995; Horvat et al., 2003; Phoenix, 2002). Connections make a substantial difference, and in many occurrences, it is not about what you know but who you know (Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017). Many teachers' children are identified as gifted, which contributes to the notion that parents can serve as social capital, and their children can benefit academically because of that (Bartee, 2019; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Horvat et al., 2003).

Middle- and upper-class families usually have social connections with professionals and people in leadership positions who can actualize their aspirations (Bartee, 2019; Horvat et al., 2003). Lower-class families are far less likely than upper-class families to have social connections with people in leadership positions and are either overlooked for advanced opportunities or are simply reactive, accepting what has been offered to them because they either feel undeserving or unknowledgeable about specific systems. Lower-class families do not possess a consequential level of social

capital, which impedes their ability to have access to many educational resources and opportunities, and because poverty disparately impacts Black and Hispanic students, their limited access to social capital could disparately impede their access to gifted education as well (Ford et al., 2008; Horvat et al., 2003). Assumptions derived from Culturally Relevant Leadership include the following: (1) Leaders who execute culturally relevant leadership can make a monumental impact on students' educational experiences; (2) Culturally relevant leadership can improve gifted identification practices, which can help improve representation of underrepresented groups; (3) Culturally relevant leadership utilizes all-inclusive means for encompassing and appreciating diversity in an educational environment; (4) Culturally relevant leaders have the power to make impactful changes in educators' beliefs as well, which can greatly minimize disparities in the gifted identification process as teachers' perceptions are highly relied upon. (5) Establishing an understanding of cultures and diversity is absolutely necessary for enhancing equitable practices in gifted identification (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021).

It is essential to begin with a general understanding of what gifted identification entails and how discrepant practices in gifted identification can lead to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic gifted students to obtain a comprehensive understanding of inequitable practices in gifted identification (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford & King, 2014; Schroth & Helfer, 2008). The first pathway, gifted identification, encompasses best practices, aspects of underrepresentation related to gifted identification, educators' perceptions of hindrances of gifted identification of economically disadvantaged students, and educators' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students.

## **Gifted Identification**

In 1868, William Torrey Harris started the first known gifted program which provided students with an opportunity to accelerate their courses, depending on their academic performance (Jolly, 2009). The first school for gifted children opened in 1901 in Massachusetts.

The gifted identification process is a crucial component of gifted education and involves a multi-step process of nomination, an initial phase of assessment screening, and a final IQ assessment (Ezzani et al., 2021; Schroth & Helfer, 2008; Washington, 2021). Students who become a part of gifted education are typically referred by a parent or teacher prior to the screening/assessment procedure, which Schroth and Helfer (2008) found was perceived as an ineffective method of gifted identification.

Schroth and Helfer (2008) sought to understand the impact of educational leaders' and educators' perceptions on gifted identification; therefore, it is essential to understand the components of gifted identification and how previously mentioned perceptions play a role. This section compiles articles that detail the gifted identification process and factors relating to the identification process that contribute to the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education. After a thorough search for recent articles pertaining to gifted identification, Schroth and Helfer deemed six articles to be most pertinent to examine perceptions of gifted identification. Schroth and Helfer included studies regarding educators' perceptions regarding giftedness and Black and Hispanic students since educators' perceptions greatly impact the gifted identification process. Schroth and Helfer concluded from their systemic review that misconceptions surrounding Black and Hispanic and low-income students, bilingual characteristics, and giftedness lead to

disparities in gifted education. Schroth and Helfer presented information conceptually beginning with overall identification practices, advancing towards educators' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students, and ending with recommendations for reform in gifted identification.

Mun et al. (2016) discussed best practices in gifted identification and how implicit biases can lead to discrepancies in identification of Black and Hispanic gifted students (Ford & King, 2014; Mun et al., 2016; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013), both of which are essential in providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem for the current study.

Mun et al. analyzed 45 empirical and theoretical articles and categorized the articles under the following themes: nomination, screening/assessment, services, and identification models. Identification processes for most schools involve cognitive assessments, standardized test scores, and referrals from parents, teachers, or students. Identification of Black and Hispanic and low income students tends to be significantly lower than nonminority and high income students (Ford & King, 2014; Mun et al., 2016; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). One reason for the discrepancy is bias associated with beliefs of ability based on cultural and socioeconomic background.

The initial phase of the gifted identification process is referral, and the analysis of Mun et al. concluded that teachers make the most referrals. Teachers have the ability to view students' progress and potential to apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills; however, their implicit biases and perceptions of giftedness may impact their decisions to refer Black and Hispanic or low-income students. Mun et al. (2016) incorporate applicable information and synopsis data from a plethora of articles.

Recommendations for identifying and serving English-learning gifted students include acknowledging that giftedness exists in all races, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses; focus attention on students' strengths instead of focusing on areas of weakness; acknowledge that standardized testing may hinder identification of language learners because of language barriers and cultural bias; consider alternate assessments, such as the nonverbal ability tests or universal screening; and offer more or take part in professional developments pertaining to identification.

Mun et al. (2020) analyzed practices of identifying English learners in gifted education, which is an essential component in understanding the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education (Mun et al., 2020).

Mun et al. (2020) analyzed theoretical and empirical articles to examine underrepresentation of English learners in gifted programs. Mun et al. categorize data from the article using the four following themes: nomination, screening/assessment, services, and identification models. EL students who are referred for screening may struggle with testing, and the scores have shown to be correlated with limited opportunities to learn, socioeconomic status, and parents' education level.

Mun et al. (2021) examined articles from 1974 to 2018 and implemented a coding process to identify themes that coincided with the research purpose and questions. Under the theme of nomination, eight empirical articles and one theoretical paper connected teachers' perceptions to gifted identification and services. Two empirical articles found that teachers' perceptions of language barriers and weight they placed on standardized testing prevented some gifted EL students from being identified. Mun et al. revealed that beliefs can be changed with training. Under screening/assessment, Mun et al. found that



EL students struggle with cognitive assessments because of their cultural background and language barriers. This has led to considerations for evaluating other forms of assessment for EL students, such as nonverbal assessments. Two empirical articles revealed that there were misconceptions about language barriers due to a lack of understanding surrounding the complexities of bilingualism. Under services, 12 articles mentioned that instruction must be modified to accommodate the needs of EL students. Findings show that gifted EL students are aware of their abilities. Under identification models, findings show that successful identification models consist of school staff and parental involvement. Because teachers tend to be biased in their referrals and often refer students based on their own ideals and standards of giftedness, many EL students go unreferred.

Mun et al. (2016) suggested GT screeners focus on “domain-specific” qualities so that students who are limited in English can have opportunities to thrive in other subject areas. Mun et al. (2016) acknowledge that pertinent articles may not have been included. Mun et al. was very informative and provided relevant information on identification methods and how educators’ perceptions affect representation of Black and Hispanic students.

Frasier et al. (1995), as discussed below, analyze how educators perceive the underrepresentation of students from low socioeconomic households. Because gifted identification relies so heavily on teacher referrals, it is essential to analyze teachers’ perceptions in relation to the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education because biases, personal beliefs, and perceptions of giftedness can vastly impact the identification of Black and Hispanic students (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Mun et al., 2016; Russell, 2018).

Using a survey, Frasier et al. (1995) investigated teachers' perceptions pertaining to the identification of gifted EL students and those from economically low socioeconomic households; Frasier et al. (1995) implemented the survey to teachers in 14 schools, and 750 responded. The survey, entitled "Why Do We Identify So Few Children from Economically Disadvantaged (ED) and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Backgrounds?" was a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5 ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). According to Frasier et al. (1995), two barriers hindered identification: test bias and teachers' insufficiency to discern aptitude of students from certain groups. Moderate barriers identified from the responses include limited English competency, variations in language experiences, students' home life, confined selection processes, and teacher bias. Minor barriers identified are beliefs that certain groups do not find value in gifted education, teachers' concerns that the quality of gifted programs plummet when Black and Hispanic or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds enter the program, and beliefs about Black and Hispanic students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Frasier et al. (1995) provide implications for creating professional development programs, which include: (1) Educate teachers about the use of tests; (2) Equip teachers with information to provide students that extend beyond information on tests; (3) Educate teachers on giftedness, what it means, and how it may be exhibited in different cultural contexts; (4) Incorporate information about family dynamics of low socioeconomic homes and individuals with limited English proficiency; (5) Reconceptualize referral checklists to help parents of low socioeconomic households or limited English

proficiency understand; (6) Assist teachers with understanding their role in gifted identification, which goes beyond merely providing a list of names.

Though Frasier's discussion of gifted identification is prior to the current study's delimited time frame of 2000 - 2021, Frasier included information that is particularly relevant to present-day concerns surrounding gifted identification, which is useful in developing an understanding of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic gifted students (Frasier et al., 1995).

Szymanski and Shaff (2013) analyze teachers' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students specifically, and because, as previously mentioned, gifted identification greatly depends on teachers' nominations, it is crucial to gain an understanding of how teachers' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students can impact representation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education (Ford et al., 2008; Ford & King, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013).

Furthermore, Szymanski and Shaff (2013) investigated one school district with majority Hispanic students and majority White teachers to examine teachers' perceptions about their training for teaching in multicultural environments and for teaching gifted Hispanic students. Teachers who are not culturally competent may feel that racially diverse students are incapable of high achievement (Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2011; Ford & King, 2014; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Educators who do not understand giftedness may not understand the value of gifted services, which in turn, can obstruct the educational experiences of gifted students. Five percent of the district population were identified as gifted.

Szymanski and Shaff (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews and developed three themes from the results: (1) There is a discrepancy in how teachers are trained to teach diverse, low income, and/or gifted students; (2) teachers rely on their own ideals when they are not properly trained to identify and serve gifted students; and (3) teachers anticipate diverse students experiencing barriers in gifted programs. None of the participants viewed the lack of teacher training in giftedness as a barrier to gifted identification though each participant admitted to not receiving much training on giftedness.

Szymanski and Shaff (2013) discussed limitations which include the inability to generalize based on composing interviews for a certain time and place; teachers' perceptions of diverse gifted students may have changed over time, which would mean the findings may no longer be relevant to the teachers at this time; participants only consisted of 2nd and 3rd grade teachers; therefore, findings may have been much different had other grades been included. Szymanski and Shaff recommended strengthening gifted programming by incorporating ELL and gifted training and combining that with training to work with gifted Hispanic students in particular.

Szymanski and Shaff (2013) reinforced the notion that minimized awareness and understanding of cultural characteristics can impede equity in gifted identification because implicit biases hinder nomination of Black and Hispanic students.

While equality may seem like the ideal method for improving representation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education, Ford (2015) demonstrates how promoting equality can actually be detrimental to the educational experiences of Black and Hispanic

students. Ford provides insight on aspects of inadequate social capital and heavy reliance on teacher referrals that can impede equity in gifted identification practices (Ford, 2015).

Ford discussed two districts—one that promoted equality and the other that promoted equity. In the district labeled Equality district, underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics is an issue and may be the result of disparities in identification and policies for gifted education. In this same district, identification of gifted students relies on teacher referrals, and the district acknowledged that Blacks and Hispanics are under-referred and that high income parents over-refer their children, while parents with “less social capital” under-refer their children. Equity District, on the other hand, takes into account student backgrounds. Teacher input is encouraged but not are not used as referrals. Equity District adopted universal screening for all first-grade students. Equity District looks at students with an IQ of 110, has the option to replace the traditional test for low-income and/or students with limited English-speaking ability, and has goals to target underrepresented groups.

Ford (2015) recommends educational leaders and researchers use the equity formula to calculate the percentage of underrepresentation, incorporating the 20% allowance. Once underrepresentation has been calculated, educational leaders should analyze identification and services to determine what changes need to be made based on current inequitable practices. Other recommendations include universal screening, incorporating nonverbal messages in testing, contacting parents of underrepresented groups, and providing gifted education training and culturally responsive training to educators.

Improving identification of Black and Hispanic students begins with system reform (Mun et al., 2016, 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021), which Mun et al. (2021) entail.

Mun et al. (2021) examined how gifted coordinators' and teacher leaders' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students impact gifted identification and gifted services. Mun et al. (2021) evaluated an initiative that focused on equity in identification and gifted services. Mun et al. (2021) used systemic change as their foundation and explained that an absence of solidarity in the school system leads to inequities in education. Racism, cultural deficiency views, limited access to resources, biased testing, and a lack of cultural competency professional development have been listed as factors that contribute to the achievement gap (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Mun et al., 2021). Mun et al. (2021) delineated how systemic capacity, as it pertains to gifted education, should incorporate instructional leadership—curriculum planning, teaching strategies, identification, monitoring processes; an evaluation and refinement of policies and procedures; policy clarity; and an equity focus.

Mun et al. (2021) executed 10 district-level and school-level focus group interviews of 61 participants during the 2014-2015 school year. The school district implemented an audit and found that 48% of the district population are White but make up 54% of the gifted population; Hispanics and Blacks make up 38% of the population but make up 22% of the gifted population; and Asian students make up 13% of the population but make up 23% of the gifted population. One of the GT coordinators acknowledged disparities in the identification process, only identifying students who were the “best at everything,” and they adhered strongly to the cutoff scores. The

participants engaged in reflective practices that helped them process their perceptions of cultural differences in gifted education, which participants stated were helpful though the training may not change anything. Perceptions of giftedness, as participants detailed, shifted from the stereotypical high-achieving idea of giftedness to more inherent abilities such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and cognitive ability. Teachers acknowledged that students' hardships may prevent their true ability from being exhibited and stated that because their abilities are not displayed in ways that are traditionally or stereotypically perceived as giftedness, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds may not be identified.

Mun et al. (2016) listed procedures implemented to combat inequities ridden in the identification process, which include the district performing universal screening for kindergarteners; teachers taking into consideration the "whole" child instead of solely cutoff scores. Mun et al. (2016) discussed the following limitations: participant selection may have been based on already established positive relationships, and member checks occurred with one coordinator due to attrition. Triangulation of data and the detailed overview contributed to the credibility and value of the results.

Mun et al. (2021) recommend analyzing student data and demographics to determine gifted identification within certain groups, assessing perceptions of giftedness before and after professional developments, appraising culturally responsive professional development to determine impact on principals and teachers, and including responses from students, parents, and principals to get a variation of perspectives. Mun et al. (2021) recommend that policy makers create an equity policy that centers around "closing the

identity gap,” implementing universal screening, and providing culturally responsive professional development in which self-reflection is incorporated.

The previously reviewed articles are valuable and relevant to the research problem of the research, which sought to understand how educational leaders’ and educators’ perceptions of giftedness impact the representation of Black and Hispanic students. The gifted identification process involves parent, teacher, or student nomination; however, teacher refer the majority of students who are referred for gifted education, which can lead to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic gifted students because educators may not refer Black and Hispanic students whose gifted characteristics may not coincide with teachers’ perceptions of giftedness, beliefs, or ideals (Ford, 2015; Frasier et al., 1995; Mun et al., 2016, 2020, 2021). Several researchers indicated that teachers’ perceptions of Black and Hispanic and low income students inhibit their representation in gifted education (Frasier et al., 1995; Mun et al., 2016; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). Heavy dependence on standardized tests is another contributing factor to the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education, and to combat under identification due to language barriers, nonverbal identification screening tests are recommended (Ford, 2015; Mayes & Moore, 2016; Mun et al., 2016, 2020).

It is pivotal to analyze aspects of underrepresentation in gifted education to fully understand root causes of underrepresentation in gifted education (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). The next pathway centers around the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education and its contributing factors.



## **Underrepresentation in Gifted Education Programs**

A multitude of studies have been implemented to understand the root cause of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic gifted students (Borland, 1996; Card & Giuliano, 2016; Crabtree et al., 2019; Crane, 2021; Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford, 2006; Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2011; Jolly, 2009; Mun et al., 2021). This section comprises several articles that investigate how biases and preconceived notions hinder the identification of significant percentages of Black and Hispanic and low income students. Three analytical articles and one quantitative article specifically pertaining to underrepresented groups in gifted education are included. I analyzed three quantitative articles and four literature reviews to better understand root causes of gaps in achievement. Finally, for the current study, I analyzed three quantitative articles to incorporate methods such as universal screening and other advanced programs that can help minimize gaps in achievement. Articles are organized conceptually, first discussing overarching factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students, then highlighting factors that contribute to the overall gap in achievement, and ending with methods for minimizing that gap and combatting “deficit thinking.”

Ford (2014a) analyzes underrepresentation from the lens of social inequalities, elitism, and colorblindness, all of which align with concepts of Social Capital Theory (Bartee, 2019; Galindo et al., 2017; Häuberer, 2011), which is beneficial for the understanding of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students.

Ford (2014a) investigated the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education programs from the lens of elitism, color blindness, and social

inequality. Ford discussed national trends of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education from 1998-2006.

Some of the questions covered in the analysis include “When is underrepresentation significant?” “How severe must underrepresentation be to make changes?” and “How severe must underrepresentation be before it is discriminatory?”

According to the data, 17% of Blacks in 2006 made up the population of public schools, but only 9.15% of Blacks were in gifted education during that time, which equated to about 46.6% underrepresentation. Also in 2006, Hispanics represented approximately 20.41% of the population of public schools but represented about 12.79% of gifted education—37.3% underrepresentation. An equitable percentage representative of national gifted programs is 13.6% for Blacks and 16% for Hispanics.

Ford (2014b) explains how social inequality leads to inequities in education and actions like antilocution, avoidance, and discrimination. Antilocution is a form of prejudice to another group through verbal and nonverbal messages, and in relation to gifted education, include statements that minimize a person’s level of intelligence based on race or background or perpetuate negative messages about the inclusion of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education. Ford (2014b) listed examples of avoidance, such as non-minority families moving to areas or placing their children in schools of fewer Black and Hispanic people out of concerns for lack of quality. Another example of avoidance provided is Black and Hispanic parents not wanting to place their children in predominantly non-minority gifted programs out of concern for seclusion. Ford (2014b) speaks on discrimination consisting of teachers not testing bilingual students in their primary language or not referring Black and Hispanic students for gifted screening.

Elitism, as mentioned in the article, fuels inequality ridden in gifted education programs, as certain groups receive favorable treatment based on perceived abilities, background, or financial resources. Gifted education programs tend to be highly populated with non-minority and students who come from high-income households. Ford touches on color blindness as a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education. Because, according to Ford (2014a) educators and educational leaders trivialize cultural diversity in educational practices, Black and Hispanic students are not screened, identified, or educationally accommodated on an equitable basis.

Some of the recommendations for educators and education leaders that Ford (2014a) discusses to increase representation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education include the following: Examine equity and underrepresentation in the school district; examine and strengthen educators' preparation in gifted education; examine and impair educators' cultural/multicultural preparation; enhance representation of Hispanic and Black educators.

Ford provides a thorough analysis of contributing factors of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education and an enumeration of recommendations for educational leaders. The does not, however, include recommendations for further research or incorporate limitations.

Ford (2014b) reinforces the notion that disparities in social connections and implicit biases contribute to inconsistencies in representation of Black and Hispanic groups (Bartee, 2019; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017).

Ford (2014b) explored social inequality, deficit thinking, and colorblindness as contributing factors to segregated gifted programs. Ford utilizes the Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI) to determine the underrepresentation percentage for Black and Hispanic gifted students and reiterates that the percentage of specific groups in the gifted education population should be of equal representation to the general education population, providing the example that if the black population of a school district is 65%, the gifted education population should also consist of 65% of Black students. Ford shared the equity index (EI) method to determine whether or not underrepresentation is “beyond statistical chance,” meaning underrepresentation is a result of human error or discriminatory practices. Blacks are persistently the most underrepresented group in gifted education, and though the discrepancy in identification is not as critical, Hispanics are largely underrepresented in gifted education as well (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014b; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). Ford offered the recommendation that educational leaders need to purposefully advocate for underrepresented groups. The EI method goes beyond the RDCI method and utilizes the threshold of 20% to provide insight into whether or not underrepresentation is based on human error and/or discriminatory practices. The percentage of Blacks should be increased from 10% to 15.2%, and Hispanic representation should increase from 16% to 20% to enhance equity in gifted representation (Ford, 2014b).

Ford examined social inequality to explain how its aspects perpetuate “deficit thinking” and how it branches off into antilocution, avoidance, and discrimination. Antilocution, as mentioned previously, consists of prejudiced verbal and nonverbal messages. Discrimination can be fortuitous but can have the same detrimental impact,

such as many Blacks and Hispanics being unidentified, which means they are not receiving gifted instruction and resources to which they are entitled. White privilege is included in deficit thinking and, as Ford declared, is prevalent in gifted education through the disproportionate number of nonminority educators, the fact that identification instruments are created and implemented by nonminorities, and the notion that the majority of students in gifted programs are nonminorities and from high income households.

Some of the recommendations that Ford offered include the following: Analyze data for representation information; set equity goals; collect data on experiences of gifted Black and Hispanic students; analyze and improve educators' preparation for gifted programs; provide cultural training for educators. Ford supported generalizations pertaining to contributing factors to the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education. Ford and King (2014) discuss underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic groups from a legal aspect and explains how implicit biases inhibit equity in gifted identification.

Ford and King (2014) applied the Brown vs. Board of Education as the "legal foundation" to examine the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted education. Ford and King synopsized definitions of gifted education with implications regarding references to culture. Furthermore, Ford and King highlighted the phrase "potentially gifted" as more culturally responsive because of the encompassing notion that although students may not have demonstrated their gifts, that is not an indication that they are not gifted. Those gifts may be developed with time and attention. Ford and King explained

that not acknowledging “potentially gifted” students leads to underrepresentation and inequities in gifted education.

Intentiveness should be executed in identifying underrepresented groups, and efforts should be made to improve gifted services (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010; Javits, 1988). Significant research and professional development should be implemented to identify and serve gifted students as well as analyze gifted education as a whole and make necessary changes to generate equity. Javits (1988) institutes implementing variations in gifted services including summer programs, mentoring, service learning, business development, cooperative learning, and peer tutoring. Javits suggests incorporating challenging coursework for students who may not have access to challenging resources otherwise.

Underrepresentation continues because teachers and policymakers capitulate to the current standards (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b). The U.S. population is vastly growing ethnically and culturally, and by 2060, 32% of the U.S. population is projected to be a race other than White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Ford and King (2014) recommend multicultural training for educators to improve equity in identification and to help educators identify how culture impacts teaching, learning, testing and interacting in a classroom setting. Educators who are culturally incompetent risk obstructing the educational experiences of Black and Hispanic students. Educators and policymakers must refrain from capitulating to the status quo, contributing to discriminatory practices in the identification process—deliberate or accidental, and accepting inequities in gifted education, and instead begin working towards

desegregating gifted education to adhere to the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Ford & King, 2014).

As previously stated, referrals of gifted students are at the teachers' discretion, and because of personal ideals, perceptions, and variations in cultural competence, Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be identified by members of their own race (Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Russell, 2018).

Grissom and Redding (2016) investigated factors of gifted identification and found that Black students are less likely to be identified for gifted services, especially taking into account socioeconomic factors and school features. Grissom and Redding also analyzed the role of teacher discretion in gifted identification and found that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be referred to gifted programs by Black and Hispanic teachers. The data collected consists of over 21 thousand kindergarteners from a nationally representative sample in 1998-1999. However, from that sample between 33% and 38% have no gifted programs, so the sample included 10,640 kindergarteners, 9,120 first graders, 8,250 third graders, and 7,000 fifth graders. Ninety-one percent of teachers are nonminority, so the likelihood of a student of any race having a nonminority teacher is very high, which makes the likelihood of Black students being identified for gifted services much lower. One alternate possibility is that people interact differently and more comfortably with members of their own race and may feel more comfortable asking someone of their race about giftedness and gifted identification.

Limitations that Grissom and Redding (2016) discuss include absence of data consisting of teacher identification and referral behaviors; unobserved aspects of the data may cause results to have bias; and student aptitude is not included in the data. Grissom

and Redding (2016) suggest future researchers include data from a more accurate gifted identification process and implement qualitative data to capture parents' perceptions of the gifted identification process and factors that might affect gifted identification.

Ford (2014a) and (2014b) thoroughly examined the severity of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education by applying the RDCI method to determine the underrepresentation of specific groups, and Ford (2014b) applied the EI method to determine whether human error or bias caused underrepresentation. Both articles scrutinized underrepresentation from the theoretical standpoint of social inequality and "deficit thinking" which both coincide with the current study's theoretical viewpoint that Social Capital Theory and a lack of culturally relevant practices can explain underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education. Ford and King demonstrated the significance of promoting equity over equality and added that culturally responsive terms like "potentially gifted" are inclusive and leads to identification of students who possess gifted potential. The recommendation of Ford and King that educational leaders should take part in multicultural training coincides with the current study's theoretical framework of Culturally Relevant Leadership and how its practices can lead to impactful change in gifted identification. Grissom and Redding investigated the likelihood of a nonminority teacher identifying Black and Hispanic students and concluded that Black and Hispanic students are much more likely to be identified by Black and Hispanic teachers because they have a better understanding of cultural characteristics. The articles for this pathway enhance the notion that factors of underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students include social



inequality, implicit bias of educators and educational leaders, and a lack of cultural awareness (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Grissom & Redding, 2016).

The following section discusses factors that contribute to the gifted achievement gap. To have a comprehensive understanding of underrepresentation in gifted education and combat disparate practices in gifted identification, it is essential to examine perceptions of Black and Hispanic groups that affect underrepresentation.

### **Contributing Factors of the Gifted Gap**

Gaps in gifted education contribute to the overarching achievement gap, and to help minimize the gap, it is crucial for educational leaders to recognize the contributing factors to the gap in achievement (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Condrón et al., 2013; Mun et al., 2016, 2020, 2021). Research is limited on gaps in gifted education; however, a myriad of studies have been implemented to understand root causes for gaps in education, which also contribute to gaps in gifted education (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Condrón et al., 2013; Crabtree et al., 2019; Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford et al., 2008; Mun et al., 2016, 2020, 2021).

Ford et al. (2008) analyze Black students' perceptions of stereotypes and underperformance of Black students, which is helpful in understanding contributing factors of the gifted gap outside of educational leaders' and teachers' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Condrón et al., 2013; Crabtree et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2008).

Ford et al. (2008) focus on persistent gaps in achievement and discuss how underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic gifted students play a significant role. Ford et al. (2008) enumerate the 14 elements related to the achievement gap that are categorized

as school influences and before- and after-school influences. Some factors that are school related include less qualified teachers, less access to educational resources, lack of rigor, and inadequate safety. Pertinent factors that occur outside of school include less family involvement, parents not reading to their children, children spending several hours watching television. Ford et al. (2008) also include social factors that contribute to the achievement gap, such as the perception of “acting white”—making good grades and speaking properly.

Ford et al. (2008) cover several overarching questions: *How do Black students who have been identified as gifted achieve compared to their White counterparts? What can we learn about the achievement gap and underrepresentation from studying Black students who have been identified as gifted? How do gifted Black students view the terms acting Black and acting White? How is acting White similar to or different from acting Black, according to gifted Black students?*

The four theories that emerged from the results are oppositional attitude, acting white, attitude-achievement paradox, and stereotype threat to explain the underperformance of Black students. The attitude-achievement paradox is the belief that education is essential despite the low effort put forth to achieve, which results in some Black students thinking that education may lead to success for some but not others—primarily Blacks, based on circumstances (Downey et al., 2009; Ford et al., 2008; Mickelson, 1990). Ford et al. (2008) discuss the theory of voluntary and involuntary immigration as an explanation for the resistance. This theory elaborates on the idea that because immigrants voluntarily came to the United States, they have a more positive attitude about what the U.S. has to offer, while Blacks, who have entered the U.S.

involuntarily, may reject conformity to U.S. customs and traditions. Ford et al. (2008) used the concept of “acting white” as a contributing factor to both the achievement gap and the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education, explaining that because making good grades and taking advanced classes is deemed as acting white, many Black and Hispanic students avoid taking part in gifted programs and Advanced Placement classes which are deemed primarily white programs; students who take fewer or no AP classes have limited college opportunities, which further contributes to the achievement gap. Ford et al. (2008) discuss the stereotype threat to explain how Black and Hispanic students’ internalized negative perceptions of low intellectual ability lead to low performance.

Sixty-six percent reported knowing someone who was teased for doing well in school; 42% said that they have been teased for doing well; Ford et al. (2008) categorized responses for open-ended responses on acting white into four themes—language, intelligence, behavior, and attitude; and the majority of students stated that they do not perform well because of peer pressure and the fear of being ridiculed for their achievements.

The recommendations Ford et al. (2008) offer for gifted educators include promoting an achievement mindset, helping students understand the connection between effort and success, and incorporating a multicultural curriculum to help improve Black and Hispanic students’ self-image. Ford et al. (2008) offer recommendations for families that include supporting, leading, being a positive example, and monitoring children’s time on the internet and social media.

Ford et al. (2008) presented information that was very insightful and informative, providing valuable information on Black students' experience in gifted education and how others' perceptions of them impact achievement.

In addition to detrimental perceptions regarding self-image that Ford et al. (2008) investigate, Appel and Kronberger (2012) establish their theoretical and conceptual framework on the stereotype by introducing the topic with their focus of the review, defining stereotype threat, discussing current debates surrounding stereotype threat, and delineating the stereotype threat in performance and test taking.

Appel and Kronberger (2012) analyzed stereotype threat and its impact on student achievement, which offers an answer for the question that is posed: To what degree does stereotype threat affect students during the learning process in comparison to test-taking? Appel and Kronberger provide additional support for contributing factors of the achievement gap and, more specifically, focus on how "stereotype threat" can impact student performance.

The foundation of their research revolves around the definition of stereotype threat: the feeling of discomfort during an evaluation for those within a group that is negatively stereotyped.

The social identity threat, as Appel and Kronberger mentioned, arises in situations that exhibit some sort of animosity towards one's group or low group status. Some commentary on the debates criticize some results indicating that students who underachieved in test-taking situations did not have a gap in ability but a gap in performance. Members of ethnic Black and Hispanic groups are often perceived as less intelligent; therefore, in test-taking situations, members of the stereotyped groups may

sometimes not perform to their maximum abilities because of the pressure not to fail. Another debate topic presented in the article is the notion that standardized test scores are not an indication of students' true ability because of the stereotype threat. According to Appel and Kronberger, students having to enter demographic details prior to a test could invoke stereotype threat. When a person's self-perception is interconnected to the perception of a group, when a person's self-perception is connected to capacity, and when that capacity is negatively connected to the in-group, a stereotype threat is probable. As a result, some members of negatively associated groups will distance or disassociate themselves from the negatively stereotyped group.

When reminded of the negative stereotype, participants performed worse in test-taking situations. Appel and Kronberger (2012) presented the three stages of the stereotype threat: (1) Disidentification due to the stereotype threat (2) Stereotype during preparation and learning (3) Stereotype during test taking.

Appel and Kronberger (2012) stated that evidence pertaining to the connection between the stereotype and learning is limited; only four of the articles in the review discussed preparation and learning with an inclusion of empirical evidence. Appel and Kronberger (2012) also mention that interest in the topic of stereotype threat, in general, is limited. Appel and Kronberger (2012) added that future research may suggest additional paths and feedback loops to the model presented.

Much of the article focused on the stereotype threat of women as it pertains to STEM, but the article does contain articles involving blacks and their underperformance due to the stereotype threat and other valuable information.

Equally important, researchers have reported low income as a contributing factor to the achievement gap (Caucutt et al., 2017; Crabtree et al., 2019; Wyner et al., 2007). Crabtree et al. (2019) discuss how low socioeconomic status hinders students from gaining access to certain educational programs.

Crabtree et al. (2019) utilize a critical systems theoretical framework to investigate the underrepresentation of low income students and Black and Hispanic students in gifted education and how the economy impacts representation. Systems theory encompasses the notion that communities and school systems are interconnected and dependent on the other.

Crabtree et al. (2019) investigated a school district of about 149,000 students—39.6% Black or 22.3% Latino—in a large metropolitan area. Crabtree et al. (2019) found a strong negative correlation between low socioeconomic status and gifted education services. Though 18% of low poverty students are Black or Hispanic, only 6% are receiving gifted education services. Teachers who are certified specialists in gifted education do not provide accelerated services to students who are not identified, and teachers in high poverty schools are less likely to be knowledgeable about gifted services because of lack of training and experience. Crabtree et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of undertaking the gifted gap to future opportunities related to STEM. Students who participate in gifted education programs have increased self-confidence and critical thinking skills.

Crabtree et al. (2019) presented the limitations that the results are not generalizable because they comprise one school district, include data for 2015-2016, and provide little information on how gifted education supports STEM education.

Recommendations for future research include training teachers to be better equipped to identify and serve gifted students; researching how school choice affects access to gifted programs; understanding the relationship between disparities in staff disparities and low-income students' access to gifted programs.

Caucutt et al. (2017) provide further analysis on the relationship between poverty and student achievement and access to resources. Caucutt et al. established their theoretical framework with their focus on four leading mechanisms used to illustrate “early investments” and achievement gaps in relation to family earnings. Caucutt et al. explained that a child’s cognitive ability may coincide with his or her parents’ intellectual abilities; parents may put more time and money in educational resources than parents with low incomes. Caucutt et al. (2017) utilized the framework of the four mechanisms and organized the data by documenting differences in childhood achievement and educational contribution levels by family income. Their focal point was to understand why parents of low socioeconomic status invest so little in their children compared to parents of high socioeconomic status.

The key findings that Caucutt et al. (2017) detailed include the following:

- (1) Children from high socioeconomic backgrounds had math and reading scores that were more than half a standard deviation that children from low socioeconomic households.
- (2) Mothers with high earnings were more than 50 percent more likely to read to their children several times a week compared to mothers with low earnings.
- (3) Children from high socioeconomic households were more likely to be enrolled in extracurricular activities.
- (4) Earning an added \$1000 increases math and reading scores by six percent.

Caucutt et al. (2017) effectively explain the negative and positive correlations of the research problem and present several limitations in their research article. The research shows a positive correlation between income and child contributions but does not explain why changes in income lead to changes in child contributions and achievement. Caucutt et al. (2017) also do not model the possibility that changes in income might lead to changes in information which might lead to changes in “investment” behavior.

The recommendations for future research that Caucutt et al. (2017) offer are to utilize the presented data on types of relationships discussed in the research to help with identification of models that incorporate a variety of mechanisms. Caucutt et al. (2017) asked why poor children perform so poorly and sought to answer the question of why poor families invest so little in their children; however, the question is not definitively answered, aside from the obvious—poor families cannot afford tutoring, computers, extracurricular activities, etc. Caucutt et al. (2017) do, however, emphasize that economically disadvantaged parents do not put as much money into their children’s education, which can explain why poor students do not perform as well as students from higher income families.

Wyner et al. (2007) adds to the body of knowledge pertaining to poverty and student achievement and, more specifically, focuses on high-achieving low income students and reasons for low performance.

Wyner et al. (2007) reported that high-achieving students from low-income households perform progressively worse over the years compared to their beginning years. Roughly three million school-aged children live below the poverty line and rank at the top 25% academically. By the time high achievers enter the fifth grade, only 56% of



high achievers retain their status as high achievers. High-achieving low-income students drop out of school at a rate that is twice as high as high income students. High-achieving low-income students are less likely to attend selective colleges—possibly because of costs—and less likely to graduate from college. Wyner et al. gathered that the talents of high-achieving low-income students are “under nurtured,” and that is what leads to inadequate performance during the later years.

Wyner et al. (2007) suggested that, since low-income high-achieving students make up a significant number in the population and thus, are needed in society, educators and leaders should maximize the potential of high-achieving low-income students to work towards closing the achievement gap.

Since gifted programs are rooted in elitism, many groups are ostracized from accelerated educational programs, whether it be from self-ostracization or exclusion, and Black students are often in more restrictive educational environments, often segregated from their White peers, which leads Black students to doubt their abilities (Condrón et al., 2013; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Mayes & Moore, 2016). Condrón et al. (2013) discuss how racial segregation, whether intentional or accidental, leads to gaps in achievement.

The theoretical and conceptual framework of Condrón et al. (2013) centers around segregation, how it contributes to the black/white achievement gap, and how different forms of segregation—black/white dissimilarities, exposure of blacks to whites, exposure of blacks to other Black and Hispanic students, and black student isolation— influence the level of increase of the gap. Their framework organized theoretical content based on dissimilarities and types of segregation previously mentioned. Their results demonstrated that due to the lack of resources, qualified teachers, and funding, segregated schools

containing predominantly Black students tend to be more disadvantaged. Schools with predominantly White students, however, have more access to resources, qualified teachers, and funding, which increases students' chances of achieving. Condron et al. include that Black students live amongst other students with fewer resources, and White students surround themselves with other White students in their neighborhoods who have access to more family income-driven resources. Condron et al. add that students in predominantly black schools are a liability to one another, while White students in predominantly white schools are an asset to one another.

Condron et al. added that the achievement gap creates a roadblock in economic equality as well. Condron et al. asked why Black students on average achieve at lower levels than White students. Condron et al. utilized a longitudinal approach to investigate the problem of the impact of segregation on the black/white achievement gap. Most of the findings of Condron et al. supported their hypotheses and concluded that emphasis on differences in Blacks and Whites increase the gap in achievement; isolation of Black students contributes to the achievement gap; more exposure of Black students to White students decreases the achievement gap, and, counter to the prediction, exposure of Black students to other Black and Hispanic students did not increase the achievement gap.

Limitations that Condron et al. address include that the exposure index does not truly measure segregation like dissimilarity does because proportions of the population of subgroups affect exposure index. Condron et al. also mention limitations in literature: Research on the topic of segregation and the achievement gap is insignificant. Another limitation is that one data source—state-level NAEP—did not begin until 1992, which obstructs an investigator's ability to answer the question of whether or not the stalled

progress of minimizing the achievement gap was a direct result of the downtrend of desegregation efforts in the early 90s.

Condrón et al. recommended that future investigators utilize an all-inclusive method for measuring the effects of different forms of segregation on the achievement gap and provide a clear understanding of how dissimilarity, exposure, and isolation shape the black/white achievement gap and the gaps between other racial groups.

Condrón et al. provided valuable insight on a contribution to the achievement gap and mentioned that the topic itself is understudied. Segregation should be taken into consideration as a possible roadblock to closing the gap; however, some of the statements about how exposure of Black students to White students were somewhat farfetched. Though Condrón et al. did draw a minor connection to the fact that White students have access to better funding, household income, and qualified teachers, some of the research pertaining to exactly how or why exposure of Black students to White students decreases the achievement gap was lacking.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the gifted gap which also impact the overall achievement gap (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Caucutt et al., 2017; Condrón et al., 2013; Crabtree et al., 2019; Wyner et al., 2007). The principal factor is socioeconomic status (Caucutt et al., 2017; Condrón et al., 2013; Crabtree et al., 2019; Wyner et al., 2007). Lack of resources tends to hinder low income students from having access to educational resources. Social capital theory is another contributing factor; because having certain social connections lead to access to resources, knowledge, and skills, many low-income students who lack social capital are at a disadvantage as it

pertains to having access to enrichment programs that are disparately saturated with high income non-minority (Bartee, 2019; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017).

Stereotype threat and perceived incapacibilities contribute to Black and Hispanic students' perceptions that they are not as intelligent or suitable for gifted programs (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Ford et al., 2008; Mayes & Moore, 2016). Ford et al. (2008) analyzed Black students' perceptions of social inequalities, peer pressure, and stereotype threat—focusing on influences Black students encounter before and after school, all of which help develop an understanding of how social capital factors into the gifted gap. Appel and Kronberger (2012) examined how stereotype threat affects achievement and concluded that groups that have negative perceptions of inadequacies due to their attachment to a negatively stereotyped group, do not perform well in test-taking situations. Those negative perceptions of themselves impede performance, which is why gifted identification should not be heavily reliant on standardized testing (Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Mayes & Moore, 2016).

Crabtree et al. (2019) supported the notion that low-income students are less likely to be identified for gifted education, which, again, aligns with the concept that social capital leads to the possession of educational resources, and because high-poverty students are less likely to be connected to social circles that are associated with gifted education, they are less likely to have access to advanced educational resources. Caucutt et al. (2017) argued that parents in low-income households invest far less in their children's education (books, tutoring, enrichment programs) than parents in high-income households, which leads to inadequate achievement and access to advanced educational resources. Wyner et al. (2007) focused on low-income high-achieving students and

concluded that they are more likely to drop out and less likely to be identified for gifted programs because their potential is not maximized, and because they are less likely to be identified for gifted programs. Condrón et al. (2013) examined how segregation can lead to a lack of resources, again, aligning with Social Capital Theory in that access to certain social groups can lead to access to advantageous resources.

When analyzing the myriad of factors that impact the gifted gap, it is essential to then strive towards minimizing the gap (Lakin, 2016; Morgan, 2020; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2004). For this reason, articles pertaining to minimizing the gap are included in this review. Below are three articles that focus on enrichment programs that have been created as culturally-inclusive methods for minimizing the gap.

### **Minimizing the Gifted Gap**

A variety of studies have focused on methods for minimizing the gap in gifted identification, which is essential in the effort to enhance equity in gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Morgan, 2020; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2004). Efforts have included accelerated programs and universal screening. With universal screening, teacher recommendations are not the focal point, and instead, every student in a specific grade is screened for gifted education, which led to a significant increase in identification of Black and Hispanic students.

The first article discussed below focuses on gifted programs that may be useful in minimizing the gifted gap and focuses on methods used for the increase in identification of Black and Hispanic gifted students (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2004).

Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2004) examined the effect of an intervention program—EXCITE—on the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted

education. Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2004) examined a high school in a large suburban area and a population of approximately 46% White, 44% Black, 7% Latino, and 2.5% Asian. Only 5% of Black and Hispanic students are in advanced placement courses. The makers created EXCITE to address the gap in achievement and contributing factors of the achievement gap, such as peer pressure, peer support, family support, and access to educational resources.

Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2004) included student selection criteria for the program: member of an underrepresented group, high achievement levels and ability to problem-solve, ability to work beyond current level, high curiosity and interest in learning math and science, and family background of minimal education. Students were not selected on the basis of socioeconomic status because of research showing that low achievement is prevalent in all socioeconomic statuses. EXCITE incorporates parent meetings throughout the year, and families are invited to attend workshops to enhance parent and family support. High school students are utilized as helpers and groups for the program are clustered to increase peer support. The program also offers a variety of enrichment courses in areas of math and science. Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2004) reported a retention rate of 80% for students enrolled in the program, and no students who were dropped from the program were dropped because of poor performance. Teachers evaluate students' performance and detailed strengths and weaknesses exhibited. The majority of teachers reported perceptions of strong interest in the program. The program resulted in a 300% increase in minority qualifications for the advanced math program in the area. Approximately 80% of students earned A's and B's in math, and 70% earned A's and B's in science.

Some of the limitations Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2004) mentioned include lack of performance data prior to EXCITE and a control and comparison group; therefore, the results cannot eliminate other factors for the positive outcomes.

The following two articles focus on universal screening, which has been some districts' methods for incorporating culturally relevant methods for increasing identification of Black and Hispanic students. The first article provides a general understanding of the significant impact universal screening had on the identification of Black and Hispanic students (Card & Giuliano, 2016).

Card and Giuliano (2016) investigated a large urban school district that recently implemented universal screening for second graders to investigate the disparities in the identification of Black and Hispanic and low-income gifted students. All second graders in the district underwent the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT). Teachers administer the test, which takes less than an hour to complete, in the classroom. Parents and teachers could still refer students; therefore, the goal of the test was to increase referrals for underrepresented groups.

Card and Giuliano's (2016) analysis concluded that universal screening resulted in a significant increase of student identification; there was a disparate amount of poor, Black, Hispanic students who were more likely to have parents who speak English primarily; the IQ scores from universal screening were comparative to the IQ scores of students identified using the old system, and newly identified students scored noticeably above the "eligibility threshold," confirming that high ability students from low income households go unnoticed under the referral system. Card and Giuliano (2016) derived from findings that an inadequate referral system failing to identify high ability students

from low income households caused the gifted identification gap. Card and Giuliano (2016) questioned whether underrepresentation is a result of the inability to identify gifted students from all backgrounds.

The article below reinforces the concept that universal screening can help enhance equitable gifted identification practices and provides further insight into how social capital, socioeconomic status, and representation of Black and Hispanic teachers can greatly impact representation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education (Morgan, 2020).

In addition, Morgan (2020) centers on universal screening and how it can improve representation of high-achieving low-income students of color. When students with high abilities are not provided with services and accommodations to meet their intellectual needs, they often perform poorly and rebel in school, which leads to limited options in higher education (Ford, 2011, 2015; Morgan, 2020). The stimulation that gifted programs potentially provide could greatly minimize poor performance and rebellion for students with high abilities (Morgan, 2020). Many low income high-ability students go unidentified and endure instruction that lacks enriching experiences due to a lack of understanding of gifted characteristics.

Disparities in wealth, a shortage of Black and Hispanic teachers, inadequate methods for identification of low-income gifted students, and harsh living conditions are all contributing factors of the under identification of Black and Hispanic students (Morgan, 2020). Wealthy families can afford IQ tests and are more likely to have their children take an IQ test. If a child is screened for gifted education and is deemed ineligible, wealthy families are more likely to appeal the results in that reassessment fees



can be exorbitant for low income families and because Black and Hispanic students are less familiar with how the system works. Black and Hispanic families also have less social capital, which prevents them from accessing many of the resources White families have gained through their connections. Having so few Black and Hispanic teachers is a factor of under identification of Black and Hispanic students since teachers are more likely to refer students who look like them to the gifted program. Grissom and Redding (2016) examined the role of teacher discretion in relation to gifted referrals and identification and found that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be referred to gifted programs when they have a Black or Hispanic teacher being that Black and Hispanic teachers are more cognizant of cultural characteristics of Black and Hispanic students. Many referrals are based primarily on high achievement tests, which are an insufficient method for identifying gifted students (Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Morgan, 2020). Morgan (2020) referred to impactless home environments in which children are not read to, given proper nutrition, or cared for sufficiently as harsh living conditions and suggested that educators consider outside factors as impediments to academic achievement and refrain from “deficient thinking”—the belief that language or culture is an indication of mediocrity instead of factors of outside influence. Parent and teacher referrals in the identification process can lead to bias results (Ford, 2015; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Morgan, 2020).

Universal screening is designed to screen all students of a certain age for gifted; therefore, it would reduce bias in gifted identification significantly (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Lakin, 2016; Morgan, 2020). Universal screening increased identification of Hispanic students by 130% and of Black students by 80%, which confirms teachers and

parents may not be properly equipped to identify the learning potential of low-income and Black and Hispanic gifted students (Morgan, 2020). The practicality of the test, however, may be of concern when considering implementation in some districts due to universal screening costs and impracticality of executing each test. Morgan (2020) recommends incorporating a low cutoff score and “high nomination validity” to improve equity in the gifted identification process.

Morgan provided information that was very enlightening and reinforces ideas of how social capital can lead to advantageous resources for individuals in high-income households but inhibit access for individuals from low-income households.

While Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2004) discussed the EXCITE program to recruit and retain more Black and Hispanic students, universal screening is one recurring concept that researchers have concluded may make a noteworthy impact on the representation of the underrepresented groups in gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Morgan, 2020; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2004). Universal screening made a 130% increase in identification for Hispanic gifted students and an 80% increase in the identification of Black gifted students. Funding and feasibility of universal screening is still a hindrance for many districts, however (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Morgan, 2020). Morgan (2020) profoundly emphasized the impact of social capital on students’ access to gifted programs and dissected ways in which social capital can impact students’ access to gifted education programs.

### **Conclusions**

Social Capital Theory is utilized as a foundation for the current study for the purpose of explaining how a lack of resources contributes to the underrepresentation of

Black and Hispanic students in gifted education as much of gifted identification is about “who you know” and not necessarily “what you know” (Bartee, 2019; Galindo et al., 2017; Häuberer, 2011; Washington, 2021). Many teachers’ children are identified for gifted programs, which serves as an example of how social capital can lead to certain benefits and access to resources that those without social capital cannot access (Hopkins & Garrett, 2010; Horvat et al., 2003; Phoenix, 2002). Culturally relevant leadership serves as a theoretical foundation for the current study to show that embedded culturally relevant leadership can combat disparities in gifted education and help minimize the gifted gap (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017).

Previous research has indicated that inequities within gifted education services are a result of “deficit thinking,” biases—whether intentional or unintentional, and educators’ perceptions of giftedness (Ford et al., 2008; Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014a, 2014b; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Russell, 2018). Culturally relevant leadership can help leaders and educators embrace diversity and incorporate culture into their daily practices, leading to an increase in access to educational resources and more meaningful educational experiences for Black and Hispanic students (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2016, 2020, 2021; Owen et al., 2017). Teachers’ perceptions of giftedness and Black and Hispanic students can greatly impact identification of Black and Hispanic students (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Russell, 2018; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013); therefore, universal screening which provides gifted screening for every student in a specific grade, can greatly increase representation of Black and Hispanic students (Ford & King, 2014; Lakin, 2016; Morgan, 2020).

Other factors that impact the achievement and gifted gap include socioeconomic status, segregation and the notion that advanced academic programs are primarily designated for nonminorities, and stereotype threat pertaining to negative perceptions regarding intelligence (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Caucutt et al., 2017; Crabtree et al., 2019; Ford & King, 2014; Wyner et al., 2007).

The body of research proves that much has been done to examine the gifted gap and factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education, yet, because of the complexities surrounding the research problem, much more needs to be done to reach a satisfactory solution (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Caucutt et al., 2017; Crabtree et al., 2019; Ford & King, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Wyner et al., 2007). The next chapter discussed the methodological approach and research design for the current study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the current study is to understand, through a social capital and culturally relevant leadership lens, how gifted policy impacts representation of students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. I implemented an instrumental case study to execute an in-depth examination of the research problem. An instrumental case study method allowed for in-depth understanding of a specific case. A quantitative survey provided breadth to understand the perceptions of educators and educational leaders across the district.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the current study:

1. How does students' social capital impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?
2. What characteristics of culturally relevant leadership—if any— are present in the gifted identification process, and how do they impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?

3. How does policy regarding gifted screening and identification impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social Capital Theory comprises concepts that lead to understanding the relationships between social relationships and the accumulation of human capital (Galindo et al., 2017; Gannon & Roberts, 2020; Woolcock, 1998). Social capital suggests that social relationships lead to the obtainment of certain resources. Schools are viewed as social capital for students and parents because of the opportunity to exchange resources and because of the notion that educators share resources to parents and students to help them navigate educational establishments (Galindo et al., 2017; Gannon & Roberts, 2020; Woolcock, 1998). However, social capital can lead to inequities in resources and educational opportunities in diverse populations. Socioeconomic background, religion, race, language, and immigration status affect one's social capital and access to resources. Types of social capital include the following: (1) bonding social capital—relations within homogenous groups, (2) bridging social capital—relationships within or between homogenous groups, (3) linking social capital—relationships between people or groups at different hierarchical levels (Woolcock, 1998). These relationships impact students' ability to access resources at varying hierarchical levels (Ezzani et al., 2021; Galindo et al., 2017; Schuller & Theisens, 2010). Social capital may affect students' access to or knowledge of enrichment opportunities such as a gifted education program.

Culturally relevant leaders provide culturally relevant educational experiences for students to meet their unique educational needs (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020, 2021; Owen et al., 2017). Culturally relevant leaders understand how policies are created and implemented and how they contribute to or impede inequities in education. Culturally relevant leaders guide educators to embrace students' cultures and thereby provide meaningful educational experiences for students (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020, 2021; Owen et al., 2017). Culturally relevant educators empower students through access and exposure to culturally relevant resources. Educational leaders need to reflect on their own cultural values and knowledge to be culturally relevant (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; Washington, 2021). The National Association for Gifted Children supports the need for educators to incorporate culturally relevant curriculum, which extends to the importance of educational leaders and educators adhering to culturally relevant practices in the gifted identification process (Ezzani et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2020, 2021; Owen et al., 2017).

### **Summary**

Social Capital Theory provides a basis for understanding contributive factors of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted education program. Culturally relevant leaders may help increase the representation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted program because they adhere to the cultural needs of students and can guide educators to gain a better understanding and respect for students' cultures.

### **Research Design**

The instrumental case study research design examined the cultural views and practices regarding the gifted identification process and educational leaders' and

educators' perspectives of Black and Hispanic students in relation to giftedness and their perspectives of the gifted identification process. A case study using an interpretivist approach is the most appropriate method of research because it helps provide in depth data on participants' perceptions of Black and Hispanic students in relation to giftedness. Case studies help researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of an organization, event, or phenomenon while depending on the perceptions of participants and stakeholders (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Gibbert et al., 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the current study, a case study, including document analysis and interviews, comprehensively conveyed perceptions of educators and educational leaders.

### **Survey**

Surveys are often used in social research for the purpose of aggregating data from a large sample in a short period of time (Check & Schutt, 2012; Dillman et al., 2014). Surveys can be both quantitative, providing numerically rated items or qualitative, asking open-ended questions. A researcher-created instrument incorporated responses that could accurately reflect the perceptions of the school district and provide a breadth of information, leading to a thorough understanding of the values, beliefs, and attitudes of stakeholders in gifted education. The instrument design ensured that each item in the instrument aligns with the research questions and included both Likert-type and open-ended questions.

### **Case Study**

Case studies are ideal for researchers who desire to identify pivotal issues of a case and provide details about participants and their perspectives, organizations, and cultural aspects of entities (Gibbert et al., 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).



For the current study, I investigated the gifted identification process of a local school district along with the perceptions of educational leaders and educators. Interpretive case studies analyze data to develop conceptual categories and discuss possible relationships between variables (Mendaglio, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).

Instrumental case studies involve researchers examining cases to provide insight and to build theory (Mendaglio, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). I employed instrumental methods, working towards building theory and analytical generalizations pertaining to gifted identification. An interpretivist approach allowed theories to emerge through direct observations and detailed data. The single case study implemented for the current study allowed familiarization with the participants and program being explored. Interviews, observations, documents, and surveys assisted in conceptualizing the participants' perceptions and in coding to ensure that common themes align with the research questions. I conducted interviews and document analysis. The selected case study design is the most appropriate method for retrieving pertinent information involving contributive factors of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted program. The results from the case study allowed me to discern central issues regarding gifted identification, ascertain detailed perspectives of stakeholders involved in the gifted identification process, examine the case utilizing theoretical concepts, and make suggestions that can lead to noteworthy change.

### **Summary**

The current study sought to understand contributing factors of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted education program and centers around the perceptions of educational leaders and educators regarding giftedness

and the gifted identification process. To gather pertinent information to understand those perceptions and contributing factors, I implemented a researcher-created survey in a diverse school district with a gifted education program. I sent the survey to educators at a secondary school after gaining permission from the principal. The responses helped locate informants for interviews. The current study comprised interview data, direct observational data, and document analysis.

### **Sample Selection**

Purposive sampling, a type of nonprobability sampling, involves honing in on a specific phenomenon and selecting members with a purpose (Francis et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Trochim, 2020). The demographics of Union School District align with the criteria for the current study: a district with a diverse population and a gifted education program in public education schools. Purposive sampling made the research process conducive for gaining a comprehensive understanding of (1) the gifted education program in a diverse school district (2) the policies regarding gifted identification (3) the perceptions of educational leaders and educators regarding giftedness, and (4) the identification process.

### **Context**

Union District is located in an urban area in the southern region of the United States and comprises 34 schools—18 preschools, 22 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, and 7 high schools. There are approximately 22,431 students. In the district, 52% of students are male, and 48% of students are female. Furthermore, 54.7% are White; 29.3% are Black; 10.4% are Hispanic; 3.4% are two or more races; 1.7% are Asian; 0.3%

are American Indian; and 0.2% are Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Students on free or reduced lunch make up 30.1% of the district's population, and 3.9% of students are English language learners.

The gifted program in Union District consists of 561 students: 57% are male; 42.7% are female; 78.9% are White; 8.1% are Black; 3.9% are Hispanic; 3.3% are Asian; 4.8% are two or more races; less than 1% are American Indian or Native Hawaiian. Additionally, 42% are economically disadvantaged.

### **Survey Participants**

A scaled instrument helped with site identification and measured social capital of gifted students as well as attitudes, beliefs, and values of educational leaders, educators, and gifted students regarding the identification of gifted students. I interviewed educational leaders at the school level—principals and assistant principals—from schools in a diverse school district, the Gifted and Talented Coordinators in the district. I emailed the researcher-created surveys to educators in the district and interviewed them on a voluntary basis. I contacted secondary Counselors, especially those on the School Building Level Committee (SBLC), to participate in the survey and interview. I obtained permission from the principal to send a schoolwide email to the educators at the secondary school.

### **Interview Participants**

For the initial planning phase, I invited potential informants at each school in the district to participate in the survey through purposive sampling. At the end of the survey, I asked participants if they would be willing to take part in an interview, and purposive sampling helped make selections from willing participants to be interviewed. I invited

each of the principals, assistant principals, and SBLC counselors of each school to participate in an interview.

### **Summary**

The sample selection involved creating a scaled instrument to help with site identification and assess educators' attitudes, beliefs, and values pertaining to the identification of gifted students. I chose the school districts based on location, student diversity, and the presence of a gifted education program. I utilized purposive sampling to select participants for the survey, and the results from the survey assisted in identifying potential informants for interviews.

### **Data Collection**

Data includes a researcher-created survey, semi-structured and structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis.

### **Survey**

A pilot study in one secondary school helped determine the effectiveness of survey and interview questions. Twenty secondary educators responded to the survey, and the responses led to the decision to conduct interviews to receive more in-depth information on perceptions. The survey instrument produced a copious amount of data and provided a breadth of understanding of perceptions regarding gifted identification, perceptions that may affect representation of gifted students and determine the degree to which educational leaders and educators find value in the representation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted education program. The survey includes Likert Scale items and open-ended questions. The responses from the survey assisted in identifying informants for interviews and in modifying questions and methods to gain more insight.

## **Interviews**

Research interviews are structured conversations utilizing questions connected to the research problem (Francis et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). Interviews provide a method of collecting detailed perspectives and opinions related to the research problem. Person-to-person interviews are widely used; however, group interviews may be implemented. In highly structured, or standardized interviews, the questions are prepared ahead of time, are asked in a specific order, and may be an oral form of a written survey. The semi-structured interview includes a list of structured and less structured questions, but the questions can be used flexibly and in no specific order. Unstructured interviews may incorporate open-ended questions in a conversational format. A focus group interview is a way to collect data from a group that has knowledge on a topic and to gather data from an interactive discussion. Synchronous and asynchronous online interviews are options depending on need and convenience (Francis et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).

Both semi-structured and unstructured interviews were implemented to create a flexible approach and conversational opportunity for educational leaders and educators to share their opinions and perspectives concerning giftedness and the gifted identification process. This structure of interview is chosen so that questions can be formulated for a potentially later focus group interview. I implemented the neo-positivist approach to interviewing — reducing bias through “quality data and valid findings” (Roulston, 2010) — to enhance the validity of findings and to capture educational leaders’, educators’, and students’ values and beliefs regarding gifted identifications.

## **Document Analysis**

Document analysis consists of the gifted policy for the district, in addition to sources used for screening, identification, and data regarding the demographics, population, and percentages of gifted students in the school district. Types of documents to be analyzed include public level policy documents, district handbooks, school level handbooks, educator handbooks, local news sources, other media related to identification, and publicly available data sets.

## **Summary**

The data collection process comprises the implementation of surveys to educational leaders, educators, and gifted students in a district containing a diverse population and a gifted education program. I implemented document analysis of policy, handbooks (district, educator, and school), gifted-related media, and local news sources.

## **Data Analysis**

The Constant Comparative Method is the process of comparing items to find commonalities in the data (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Boeije, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The Constant Comparative Method involves coding data relevant to the research questions and placing them in categories, identifying patterns, and modifying patterns as new data is gathered. The data analysis process was iterative and occurred concurrently to the data collection process, through note taking, data comparisons, and conceptualizing data for common themes as data is collected and organized. I executed an inductive and comparative method—a research procedure that entails comparing statements, groups, situations, or cultures to find commonalities (Francis et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).

During the data analysis process, I recorded and transcribed interviews. I conducted some interviews face-to-face with an audio recorder, and some interviews using the automated recorder on Zoom. I conducted and transcribed face-to-face interviews manually, and I used an online transcription service to transcribe Zoom interviews. I thoroughly reviewed and corrected the transcriptions. I then emailed transcriptions to participants for member checking.

I analyzed survey and interview responses to retract pertinent statements that aligned with research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of research occurs when there is rigor in the execution, and methods are employed in an ethical manner (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Mendaglio, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Research with qualitative aspects establish validity and reliability through thorough descriptions of people in action and comprehensive details to show the findings are coherent, while research with quantitative aspects execute procedures that contain numerical data that help generalize findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taherdoost, n.d.).

### **Survey Validity and Reliability**

A survey has face validity if the questions, from the viewpoint of respondents, measures what it is supposed to measure in terms of having readability, consistency of formatting and style, and feasibility (Taherdoost, n.d.). A survey has content validity if it has been verified and includes questions that encompass every aspect of what is being measured. The questions in the survey were concise and directly aligned with the research questions. Research experts evaluated the survey to establish content validity

(Taherdoost, n.d.). A survey has reliability if the test can be repeated and achieve the same results (Taherdoost, n.d.). I alpha and beta tested the survey to establish reliability.

### **Trustworthiness**

Because external validity cannot be quantified, and case studies do not account for statistical generalizations, the results of the investigation helped establish analytical generalizations, which is the idea of generalizing to theory as opposed to populations (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Mendaglio, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers should ensure transferability, which involves supplying documentation that the results can be applied to other situations, times, and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I implemented member checks with interviewees for the purpose of certifying internal validity, substantiating perspectives, findings, and interpretations. Adequate engagement in data collection was employed, which involves spending an extensive amount of time collecting, spending time with data, and looking for variations in data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I recorded interviews and implemented regular meetings with the research team to improve validity and reliability.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation is a method used to improve the validity and reliability and substantiate data in qualitative studies; triangulation combines theories, methods, or observers to certify the extent to which the results reflect ideas or concepts being examined (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). Triangulation protocols include the following: data source triangulation—the incorporation of a variety of resources, investigator triangulation—the utilization of other researchers observing the research, theory triangulation—the inclusion of different interpretations, and



methodological triangulation—the application of different methods to gather data (interview, observation, documents, focus groups, etc.). (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995). I employed triangulation of data sources, types, methods, and theories by implementing surveys, interviews, and documents, by consolidating with a research team, by incorporating different theories (Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership), and by incorporating perspectives of educational leaders at the district and school level and educators.

### **Naturalistic Generalizations**

Naturalistic generalizations entail drawing conclusions from personal experiences or observations that are so detailed, the reader or outside person feels as though he or she experienced directly, and researchers should provide sufficient details to lead readers to establish naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995). Implementing the following list helped enhance naturalistic generalizations: incorporating information of which readers have prior knowledge, providing raw data so that readers have their own interpretations, plainly describing the methodological process of the case, providing background information and other available sources, providing readers with responses from data sources, and stressing what may have been seen or not seen (Stake, 1995). A thorough account of each step and detail is delineated.

### **Summary**

A research team enhanced trustworthiness by evaluating the survey to ensure the survey has feasibility, readability, consistency, and questions that directly align with the research questions. Member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, recorded interviews, and detailed observations were integrated. Triangulation of data types,

sources, theories, and perspectives occurred, and to amplify naturalistic generalizations, each step of the research process is delineated assiduously.

### **Researcher Positionality**

My role for the current study is to describe the research from an emic perspective—collecting data and perspectives of participants through direct observation— and to utilize components of both qualitative and quantitative methods that strengthened findings to gain a better understanding of the research problem.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations exist within the current study and are discussed as follows. Because the site selection is based on location of convenience, selection bias is one limitation. The sample size may make it difficult to generalize to a larger population; however, I administered and justified purposive sampling based on the criteria of the site and population. It is difficult to generalize from a single case study, and to overcome this limitation, findings are aligned with theoretical concepts, and the opportunity for naturalistic generalization is emphasized by presenting comprehensive data. Self-reported data may lead to bias in interpretations; therefore, I incorporated a research team to analyze data and confirm common themes; I implemented member checks with interviewees to validate findings and interpretations and triangulated data to enhance consistency. Another limitation is the possibility of not retrieving the expected number of responses from the survey. I sent reminders to potential respondents to minimize this limitation.

## **Delimitations**

The criteria for the site selection and literature review are students/schools with diversity. The current study is limited to gifted students within urban populations. The identification process for many students begins in elementary, and some literature may cover elementary-age students. Topics included in the literature review include contributing factors of the achievement gap, culturally relevant leadership as it relates to gifted identification, systemic capacity as it relates to gifted identification, and perceptions of educational leaders and educators that may affect identification of gifted students.

Because the interest is in understanding the perspectives of educators and educational leaders regarding giftedness and the gifted identification process in education, I excluded the following from participating in surveys and interviews: students, non-educators, custodians, and parents.

## **Values**

I am an educator of gifted high school students. I chose the focus of the current study because of curiosity, expertise as an educator of gifted students, and desire to improve standards in the gifted identification process to be representative of the diverse population. I hold a multitude of values regarding gifted education, gifted identification, and the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted education program. (1) I value equity in education and equal resources for all students. (2) I value heuristic educational experiences for students in and out of gifted classrooms. (3) I value educators equipping gifted students with the tools to be productive members of society. (4) I value educators providing opportunities for students to explore and hone in on

creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. (5) I value educational leaders and educators having an understanding of the characteristics of giftedness (6) I value cooperation between educational leaders and educators to meet the needs of gifted students. (7) I value the social and emotional development of gifted students and understand the importance of adhering to the social and emotional needs of gifted students. (8) I value equity and consistency in the identification of gifted students. (9) I value effort in attaining a gifted population that is representative of the demographics of the school population.

### **Summary**

I implemented an instrumental case study design and uncovered how the procedures of the gifted identification process affect the representation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted education program, the perceptions of educational leaders and educators and how those perceptions affect the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in the gifted education program. The chapter includes the research design, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis process. Methods for enhancing credibility and trustworthiness are detailed. Limitations of sample selection and size, generalization, and potential bias are discussed with alternatives to minimize the limitations. Delimitations are described, detailing the population and unit analysis to which the results are limited.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of the study was to understand, through a social capital and culturally relevant leadership lens, how gifted policy impacts representation of students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How does students' social capital impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?
2. What characteristics of culturally relevant leadership—if any—are present in the gifted identification process, and how do they impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?
3. How does policy regarding gifted screening and identification impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?

I examined educators' and educational leaders' perceptions of giftedness and how those perceptions impact representation of gifted students; therefore, interview data provided valuable information. Other sources of data include the district's policy manual, pupil progression plan, District Improvement Plan, and student enrollment.

Four themes emerged from this analysis. A data analysis process took place to code responses as support for each theme. Surveys, interviews, and document analysis enhanced triangulation of data. In addition, the inclusion of perspectives from participants in different roles, varying grade levels, and different institutions enhanced triangulation.

Participant data from the survey and interviews are presented in the interpretation of results and key themes that emerged from the data. Participants were assigned initials and randomly assigned numbers in an effort to maintain confidentiality. I used the letter “P” to identify principals, “E” to identify educators, “S” to identify survey responses, “GC” to identify gifted coordinators, “AP” to identify advanced placement, “GS” to identify gifted screeners, and “GD” to describe gifted diagnosticians. I used “EL”, “MS”, and “HS” to distinguish between elementary, middle school, and high school. The detail of the participant responses is intended to provide naturalistic generalizations for the reader.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The findings of the current study identified four themes:

1. Parents and educators actively engage with students, evince social capital for gifted students, and are essential components for identification.
2. Aspects of culturally relevant leadership are present; however, a better understanding of the gifted education program is necessary for educational leaders to challenge underrepresentation and induce change in the gifted education program.

3. Much of the identification process depends on parent or educator recommendations; therefore, if parents or educators are unfamiliar with gifted characteristics or the gifted education program, it will impact identification.
4. Educators and educational leaders believe that the gifted policy should be reformed to identify more gifted students.

Each theme is supported with evidence from the current study's findings, which is shown in the following section.

### **Theme 1**

Educational leaders and educators generally believe that parents are resources for exposure to concepts that help with cognitive development in children; activities such as reading to children, introducing them to art and music, and teaching them shapes, numbers, and colors—participants acknowledged—increase children's cognitive abilities and the likelihood that they will be identified for gifted education. One elementary school educator detailed the impact of parents exposing their children to academic concepts early in child development:

I think the kids that come from homes where the parents, maybe are more educated because they've been through more college—regardless of race or color or religion or whatever—I think that where the children are read to, where they are talked to, where they have conversations, where they can experience going on vacations and going on trips and that kind of thing. I do think it develops them more, and they are going to have a better vocabulary; and people aren't going to say, "Oh, this John might be gifted." Whereas somebody that hasn't been exposed to that type of vocabulary or those types of

experiences is not going to have the vocabulary and not going to have the experiences to express themselves (ELE3).

Another elementary educator elaborated on the impact of exposure by saying, “I think you’re born gifted, but your exposure is what’s going to make you be able to, I guess, enhance your giftedness” (ELE).

Additionally, participants believe that giftedness is demonstrated differently in different economic groups, and low socioeconomic status may impact gifted students’ exposure to concepts. One middle school educator elaborated on how children in low socioeconomic households may be affected by their lack of exposure and stated,

Well, different kids in low socioeconomic areas– I think they have not had the experiences. They are not familiar with the kinds of questions that are on the test. So it is kind of hard for them to shine a little bit more because I noticed in my classes, different ones that come from various areas, there is a difference because of experience; they are still really smart and on some of the things that you do, like the challenges and the puzzle type things, they can grasp it really quickly, but talking to them, maybe not. So they do not have a frame of reference for some of those things (MSE).

Educators and leaders acknowledged that students’ exposure to concepts may hinder or contribute to the identification of gifted students and overwhelmingly agree that students’ socioeconomic background can greatly impact students’ exposure to concepts which, in turn, may hinder identification. One middle school educator expounding on this by stating:

A kid who’s in an impoverished environment might really be very bright, but they are not, it is not stimulating their thinking. Their learning is not stimulating. I mean, think



about it, the kid that grows up without books in the house and, you know, it happens. So how could their giftedness at some point come out? (MSE).

Overall, despite participants' acknowledgement that socioeconomic status may impede identification, they do believe that family support can affect identification. One high school educator detailed a gifted student who came from a low socioeconomic household and explained,

Even though they are lower socioeconomic, they have good family support to encourage that. And I think that sometimes those parents may do that for their children as a way out of the socioeconomic situation, but I also see the flip side of that, where they do not have the support, so they get discouraged and do not pursue it. (HSE2)

Some educators and leaders noted that educators' children are often identified as gifted. One gifted coordinator in particular explained how much of an impact educators have on identification:

Look at the number of educators' kids we have in gifted programs. Why do you think we have such a high number? Think of all the kids you teach, how many have educators as parents, because educators know what they are going to be tested on. Are they truly gifted, or are they high achievers? (GC)

All educators and leaders suggested that a support system for students is an essential component of their success. One high school educator stated, "We all need a leg up" (HSE), and an elementary school educator explained that without people in place to provide helpful resources, it will be much more difficult for students to be identified.

If you have never had those experiences, it is going to be very difficult to pass those screenings and the tasks, because we're not using nonverbal tests. (ELE2)

Another high school educator spoke on the detriment of gifted students not having resources in place to help with identification:

There are gifted kids who have parents who have no idea how to even begin to address their giftedness at all. So then you hope the educator steps in, but an educator's only got so many hours in a day, you know, and when you have got to do guidebooks or whatever you have got to do, you may not have time to do that. That means that the strong, that leaves all those kids who do not have great home lives or who do not have parents who are home or who know what to do, it leaves them in the lurch (HSE2).

Educators believe that if parents are uninformed about gifted education, they are less likely to advocate for gifted identification for their children. One elementary educator stated, "I think parents play a big part of it as well, but sometimes parents do not know if their child is gifted...because they think, 'Oh, everybody thinks their kid is smart'" (ELE). One high school educator explained that although "some parents are truly aware of their children's giftedness; some parents think their children are gifted when they are just not; they are just high achieving students" (HSE2). Another high school educator emphasized the importance of being informed about gifted education by explaining:

If an educator does not know much about the gifted program; if you're not teaching at the high school; if you do not know much about it, and you do not have an educator that teaches advanced classes, nobody's probably giving you a lot of encouragement to get into the gifted program (HSE3).

Educators and leaders shared that when parents and educators are informed about gifted education, they are more likely to advocate for gifted services for their children

and/or students. One high school educator detailed a personal experience of her child being identified for gifted education.

The educator explained:

Thankfully it was a gifted educator that was doing the actual testing process for him (my son) because...she told me on the first screening because he didn't have that spike in any one specific area, that he really should not have qualified for the [gifted] program, but she also knew incoming being gifted herself and coming from a family where her brother was gifted. So she knew a lot and she had been very well-versed and educated in gifted children. She knew by having a conversation with him. She's like, there's more to this kid than what these numbers on this paper are saying. And so, she kind of went to bat for him with the supervisor. And they did a different test on him. And in that situation, he did qualify (HSE2).

A diagnostician explained how some parents advocate for their children's gifted services by going "outside of the school system to get their kids evaluated and bring those results in" (GD). Other parents, the participant explained, have to "help put them (their gifted children) on the radar" in situations with "a student that you wouldn't assume, a quiet student— kind of an unassuming student, that the educator needs a little bit more." Another elementary educator explained the importance of parental involvement in gifted education:

I think parents who were involved get more services too. So, if they are pushing for it. It is probably going to happen. Whereas a parent who has like the six kids or parents who do not speak English, they do not know any better. They are not

going to get the services they need because of the home environment, even though it is not a bad home environment (ELE2).

Educators acknowledged that students are less likely to be identified for gifted education if they are in environments in which educators are not trained to identify gifted characteristics. One elementary school educator stated that students “need more exposure to those classes or educators need to be trained better or there needs to be more aimed at different schools so that they have a chance to, to have that (ELE). A middle school educator explained that lack of training can lead to some students being overlooked and added, “It is not that they (educators) do not care. Sometimes they do not know, and sometimes they do not recognize giftedness” (MSE).

Some educators indicated that word of mouth is often a determining factor on whether or not a student is recommended for gifted education and went on to explain that parents or students are unfamiliar with gifted education, other connections can lead to referrals for gifted education; however, in areas where gifted education is not as prevalent, those connections are lacking. One high school educator stated:

You have got the parents that, for the most part, know about it, or they hear about it from their friends or something, but in some of the other schools where there aren't a lot of students or gifted students, people just do not know about it (HSE).

Some educators and educational leaders believe that students' peers impact giftedness to some capacity. Educators detailed personal experiences of students who interacted regularly with other gifted students, and one elementary school educator described her child's peer group and stated:

With my oldest child, I know several of his friends are gifted kids also, or they are all, they all excel academically. They are all very involved. I mean, I can just relate it to what I am seeing from him. Other than that, I have just been with little kids. And so, I mean, with the little kids, they just do not care. They all play together. They, you know, I do not think it matters to them. (ELE4)

A gifted coordinator pulled from experience as a gifted education educator and utilized a popular story to explain the connection with peers:

You heard the story, the pink monkey, the whole legend of the pink monkey. We find each other. Their peer group is going to influence that, you know. (GC)

Educators' and educational leaders' perspectives on siblings' giftedness impacting one's giftedness vary. One high school educator believes that "There are so many children that we've seen that their siblings are gifted. There has to be some connection there" (HSE), but other Educators and leaders noted that, although there may be many gifted students who have gifted siblings, there is not necessarily a connection there. A gifted coordinator explained:

Statistics show that the most likely students, you know, in a family to be gifted is the eldest, and the least likely is the youngest because parents are lax or what have you. Your oldest because your oldest is a rule follower, usually, and they test well. I have taught several sets of twins where I only had one of the twins and some have been identical and some have been fraternal, but I have only had one of the twins. The other kids are usually honor students, too, but there's that little spark of something different that is identified as gifted. Definitely giftedness runs in a family. I do not think that every

sibling has that little spark of something extra, and I do not think just because one sibling is, they all are (GC).

Furthermore, an elementary educator responded, incorporating personal experience of teaching several gifted siblings but reiterated gifted students' home environment playing a significant role in identification, stating:

If a brother is gifted, then the sister, I am like, yes, that is probably a gifted child. I have seen a lot of siblings. I mean, at one time I had a family of five, and there were four gifted. So, I do think some of it can be a genetic thing. However, I do think that home environment definitely has an impact because of just vocabulary and exposure to different things in society and situations, or, you know, conversations that the child may have with the mom to make them think more in depth about a situation (ELE2).

## **Theme 2**

Aspects of culturally relevant leadership are present. Educational leaders understand that educators need to be trained to effectively address underrepresentation in gifted education. Educational leaders generally show support for diverse needs and acknowledge that some gifted students are overlooked for the gifted program for various reasons. One high school principal stated:

I would be willing to bet that there's more gifted out there, but either they've fallen through the cracks, or there are some parents that do not want to pursue. We have some students who are low socioeconomic background, and their parents do not know the talent pool or the level of just how smart their student is; therefore, they are sitting there wondering, 'Why is my kid struggling in school.'

Well may because, not because he does not get it or she does not get it. Maybe she's just bored (HSP).

A high school assistant principal echoed that sentiment and added that training could be a factor:

I believe there could be students who are overlooked in the initial testing process due to behaviors or not knowing the students well enough. Educators should be provided professional development about gifted students so they can become familiar with characteristics of gifted students. I believe this will promote educators to turn in students' names to begin the testing process (HSAP).

Similarly, another high school assistant principal discussed how the district as a whole is not familiar with the gifted education program and attributed that to underrepresentation of certain groups, citing:

No, [Everyone who should be in gifted education is not.] The gifted program in our parish could expand greatly if all stakeholders were made aware that these programs exist in our parish (HSAP3).

Educational leaders at the school level do view the gifted education program as valuable though several, admittedly, are somewhat unfamiliar with the gifted education program in the district. One high school assistant principal reflected on his experience with gifted education and expressed:

If I knew more about the program, maybe I would have something to complain about, but I think it'd be, in a perfect world, if we could put more emphasis on the middle school and elementary to maybe identify more kids that maybe have the ability to be in the gifted program (HSAP2).

Overall, educational leaders described essential functions of gifted education and fragments of the identification process. Gifted education is understood to be a small population in the district that is generally perceived positively by educational leaders. A high school principal indicated that gifted students are not usually the ones who “cause discipline problems. These are the kids that everybody wishes they could teach because they are like sponges. You teach them this concept; they are going to do it the way you want to do it, and probably at times, we can learn from some of these kids because these educators are sponges as well” (HSP). Leaders expressed that there should be a more in-depth screening process to identify gifted students who may be overlooked for one reason or another. A high school assistant principal expressed value of the program by noting suggestions for equitable representation:

I believe the most important aspect of the program that should be monitored is the number of students being tested, who are being tested, and the test administrators should rotate to different schools. We want to ensure all schools are assessing a part of their student population and giving opportunities for students to qualify for the program (HSAP).

Culturally relevant leadership involves leaders taking on the responsibility of identifying gifted students and communicating with parents and students. Participants understand the importance of connecting with students and parents to enhance awareness of available programs. One elementary school principal expressed:

I think it is the responsibility of the school system to identify gifted students and have those students tested. All parents might not know of the opportunities that



are available for students, and I think it is essential that we as educators inform parents (ELP).

Several educators intimated the significance of educational leaders supporting and encouraging the identification of gifted students. One high school educator emphasized this by stating that it should “start with the principal” or leader who values the program and wants students to be recognized in the parish. The high school principal added, “Once leaders show that the program is valuable and should be respected, that will help with identification” (HSP4)

Additionally, Educational leaders demonstrated culturally relevant leadership through their recognition of training on gifted characteristics and identification as an essential component of equitable identification. An elementary school principal stated that, “it is essential to train educators to identify gifted students to ensure that all students who are gifted have the opportunity to participate in this program” (ELP), and other educators and leaders revealed that educators have a genuine concern for students’ success but simply cannot advocate for gifted students if they are not trained to do so. One middle school educator asserted:

Unfortunately, most educators aren’t trained enough to be the advocate they need to be. And there’s not ever a lot of people on campus who know how to give the screening. The educators used to be able to go and do the screenings and help out the schools, and they’ve taken that away for whatever reason, and the district refuses to screen more because they say that is a school level issue. So I just think that nobody has the time (MSE2).

A gifted screener contributes to this notion by explaining how perceptions of giftedness and a lack of training can lead to gifted students being overlooked for gifted education programs. The gifted screener notes:

I think that the average person would say that gifted people are high achievers, and that is not gifted. So to me the problem is how to recognize who these children might be so that they can be screened at an early age and have the opportunity to reap the benefits of these special courses that a Parish or other districts offer (GS).

Additionally, the gifted screener suggests what characteristics to keep in mind when referring students for gifted education.

Then also, more education for the educators as in this is what to look for. Do not look for the kid that has a hundred in your class. Do not necessarily look for the kid that made an advanced in 8th grade English. Look for the kid that can create something for an assignment that you never even conceived of. Look for the kid that can help other kids when you seem to be missing what they need to fill in the gaps of their education (GS).

Educators and leaders implicated that when aspects of culturally relevant leadership are present, underrepresented groups are much more likely to increase in gifted education. One school district in particular strives to identify gifted students from varying backgrounds, utilize universal screening methods for identification, and consider unconventional characteristics, such as acting out, as a sign of giftedness. A gifted diagnostician stated:

I know the particular schools that I work at, they work really hard to try to find the kids, no matter what background they come from to get, you know, they want

to have those kids identified and have them placed in gifted programs. It is a good thing for the school. You know, it is a, it is a huge draw for a school to have a nice gifted program. That is very popular (GD).

### **Theme 3**

Educator recommendations are perceived as crucial elements of gifted identification; therefore, perceptions of giftedness are the driving force for recommendations. Some educators revealed that they are unsure of what qualities to consider when referring students or do not refer students for gifted education at all. At the secondary level, some educators believe that gifted identification should primarily occur during elementary school, and if students have not already been identified by the time they reach high school, it is because they do not or would not qualify for gifted services. Other educators, when deciding whether or not to refer students for gifted identification, consider academic achievements. One educator survey respondent stated the following:

Test scores seem to be the biggest factor that many use to decide if they should refer, which I do not agree with; I agree with it being a factor/consideration, but I also think it should be those students who demonstrate high critical thinking skills in the classroom (SE3).

Educators made associations with social capital in addition to academic qualities when deciding whether or not to refer students for gifted education. Some educators stated that they observe how students interact with their peers and what their educators say about them. An educator survey respondent stated:

I refer students to be evaluated for gifted education for a variety of reasons. If a student does not seem to fit in with his or her peers but relates better to adults or

has deeper, more meaningful conversations with adults than with his or her peers, I begin to look more closely at this student for other traits that might suggest giftedness. I also look at quiet students who always seem to catch on quickly or finish early to be able to work on an art project or perhaps to read a book. Often, it is also students who underachieve and/or are difficult to engage (SE5).

Despite some educators' uncertainty of characteristics to consider when recommending students for gifted education, most educators do feel prepared to adequately serve gifted students. One gifted education survey respondent mentioned that the training in preparation for regular education teaching was similar to that of gifted education and added that "the theories and knowledge from college course work were definitely a good foundation, but real world experience taught much more than any course" (SE3). One educator asserted that being gifted contributes to feeling prepared, and another educator indicated that teaching a higher level course aids preparation. Moreover, an educator survey respondent noted the experience gained from teaching gifted students:

I feel very prepared to serve gifted students and find that they offer much more to furthering my own understanding of the subjects I teach (SE4).

### ***Perceptions of Giftedness***

Giftedness is perceived as a unique quality that gifted individuals possess. Educators and leaders reflected on personal experiences with giftedness, and their perceptions of giftedness are divergent. Some educators and leaders believe that gifted individuals are unique and stand out in some way, whether it be in their unique style of

dress, vocabulary, creativity, social interactions, or their ability to think “outside the box”. One educator survey respondent had this to say about giftedness:

Gifted means not fitting the norm/mean/average. The person will think outside the box, not necessarily be linear in their thinking. They may approach problems in an entirely different way than the majority. They will many times not fit into the classroom behavior and social aspects. Why be bothered by all of the other “stupid” people around them? They may be slightly “criminal” because they may feel so superior that to take an advantage of the weaker/stupider is not bad...the others are just stupid...of course, it can go in the entire other direction but they have to develop empathy for the others (SE8).

One middle school educator synopsis giftedness by incorporating characteristics that stand out in the classroom at the beginning of the school year, and had this to say:

Someone who is able to, I say, see beyond school-related subjects or the world in general but just someone who is able to process things differently than the average person might be able to process them, whether that is in a good way or a bad way. There’s a spectrum of giftedness, to see who catches onto those the first few weeks of school with conversations, as I introduce the first unit– the ones who have the in depth answers, the ones who seem to be giving me more than what I am expecting to get from a sixth grader and things like that. My kids who are in my room for behavior issues, I always look at them first from like gifted related (MSE2).

One gifted coordinator has what may be deemed an unorthodox way of understanding giftedness, distinguishing high achievers from truly gifted students and stated:

Are they pleasers? Are they truly that kid who drives you Bat crazy. They get chosen to be tested, right? More the rule followers. Now, your kid out there eating glue and chasing a bee around the room is not going to get qualified, get recognized to be tested. And that is probably your highest, gifted kid in the room (GC).

An educator survey respondent acknowledged that giftedness is exhibited differently from one gifted individual to the next and explained:

Gifted means so many things. It manifests differently in different people. Some gifted people are deeply emotional people and feel very strongly that fairness be implemented in all areas of life. These gifted students staunchly defend the underprivileged or marginalized groups in society. Other people's giftedness manifests through creativity. Some gifted individuals are academically advanced. One thing they all seem to have in common is the ability to think about life through a different lens, be it social issues, the arts, or academics (SE3).

Several educational leaders perceive giftedness as a natural ability with which gifted students are born. Educators and leaders incorporated exceptionalities in their perceptions of giftedness, and a high school assistant principal explained that gifted students have "exceptional intelligence compared to other kids their age" (HSAP3). Gifted individuals are able to understand concepts at a faster rate than their peers and are able to carry on vocabulary-enriched conversations.

Most educators and leaders expressed that they perceived giftedness as an ability to implement advanced thinking. A few educators mentioned gifted students having a high IQ. One survey respondent educator described giftedness as a “level of cognitive thinking that exceeds standard expectations” (SE2). To reinforce this notion, another survey respondent educator stated:

Being gifted means that one can analyze and process at an above-average rate for one’s age. A gifted student in fourth grade may be able to read and comprehend at a ninth-grade level, for instance. Gifted students are able to comprehend, analyze, and articulate problems in a better way than regular students (SE5).

One high school principal expounded on his personal experiences with gifted individuals and mentioned:

They are so much further advanced in the way they think. You know the old saying of sixteen going on thirty. These kids literally are thinking so far advanced. I had a fifteen-year-old graduating with me because I guess they just started him early. What most of us struggled with, he didn’t (HSP).

Educators and leaders perceive gifted students to be individuals who desire to be challenged. Responses from educational leaders touched on students’ ownership of learning and inquisitive nature. Educators and leaders expressed that gifted students challenge their educators. One high school principal declared:

I think from an educator standpoint or an educator standpoint, you have got to be willing to humble yourself and say, “I do not know the answer to your question and, but let’s find it,” because they do have good questions. They usually are very

inquisitive, and I have always enjoyed teaching and being around gifted students just because of that inquisitive nature that they usually have (HSP4).

Educators did acknowledge that there are common misconceptions associated with giftedness. Many people believe that gifted students make straight A's or are always well-behaved. One middle school educator declared:

I feel like kids can be gifted in so many different ways. I feel like the perception is that your kids need to be making straight A's, and if your kid is a really strong reader, well then, they are obviously gifted. That is not always the case because a lot of times you have kids—it is almost more of the kids who are the quirky, you know, who may be making C's are not completely on the track that we think that a gifted kid should be on or the perception that gifted kids should be on. A lot of times, those are the kids who are truly gifted (MSE2).

Some educational leaders discussed their experiences with gifted students and perceived gifted students as “all in” or disengaged. One middle school assistant principal claimed:

Those that were engaged were incredible kids. They elevated our lessons. They made each day in class an even more exciting adventure for me as an educator. I was challenged by new questions, new insights, things of that nature. And then there was the opposite, the kids that were only interested in the gifted program and where their interests lie, and they were disconnected a lot of times in their core classes. In the middle school level, we have some kids that are incredibly smart, incredibly talented but disconnected from their grades and in their regular education classroom. And then there are those that you just see shine. I mean,



they are a bright star, and you see them in that light as well. So, it is kind of a strange mix. You get either one or the other, but there's so rare the one in between (MSAP).

A high school assistant principal described a similar experience with gifted students and stated:

I can remember a couple of kids that were super smart, knew everything about everything, but just never—and these were just these couple of kids. I have had some other experiences, too, but they just did not apply themselves, almost as if they were bored. I can remember a teacher coming down, one of the [gifted] teachers asked, 'Can you come help me with so and so? Can you motivate him,' and so I am like, 'What's the problem?' 'He just does not want to do much of anything.' So after getting to know this kid a little bit, it came across to me, it seems he's just a little bit bored. Maybe the work was not challenging enough. And so that was the perception I got from that person. And then on the other side of it, on the more positive side, a friend of mine—their kid is in the gifted program, and they just talk about how well she's doing in it and how she's achieving great things in the classroom, and small setting, loves the small setting and the [gifted] program (HSAP2).

### ***Perceptions of Underrepresentation***

Educators described perceptions of underrepresentation and made correlations between perceptions of giftedness and underrepresentation in gifted education. Some educators explained how perceptions of giftedness could, in fact, be a hindrance to gifted identification. A gifted coordinator acknowledged that there is a perception of gifted

education that leads to a “definite struggle within actual schools because gifted programs are seen as elitist” (GC). One high school educator described representation of gifted students in nearby elementary schools and explained:

The elementary school, which we serve, only one child in the entire school is identified, one child. There is no one at xxx elementary who’s been identified. Now that seems perplexing to me that you have this many at xxx elementary or this many at xxx elementary or this many at xxx elementary or this many at xxx elementary. And really [this student] is the only guy coming from xxx elementary? Really? That is it? So I think, definitely, it goes with people’s perception of what giftedness is (HSE2).

An elementary educator expressed how factors of socioeconomic status can seep into aspects of education and prevent gifted identification. The educator expressed:

If you’re in survival mode, how are you at your best, say academically or in your best mental capacity, if you’re in survival mode? I actually had kids tell me, you know, we sleep in the back. We all have to sleep in the back of the house because we do not know if they are going to start shooting tonight, you know, and that just tears my heart out. So who’s going to even think that child is gifted, whether they are or not? (ELE4).

A high school educator addressed under identification at a school level that is primarily low socioeconomic and explained:

So, they are like, well, you know, we’re trying, we’re an F school, we’re trying to pull ourselves up, we’re trying to teach most of these kids to read. The last thing they think about is, oh, let me test some for gifted (HSE2).

Several educators, in addition, described gifted students as misunderstood, which leads to a variety of difficulties for gifted students. Educators explained that gifted students tend to struggle with blending in socially or with being different and how that may impact them academically. A survey respondent educator claimed that “some students may not express their true potential because that would mean separating themselves from their group of friends or separating themselves as “different” (SE). Gifted students may perform below their abilities to avoid those stigmas associated with giftedness. Another high school educator indicated this sentiment by explaining the following:

The biggest struggle facing gifted students is misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding leads them to social problems with their peer group, but it also has been leading to an increased occurrence of defunding and shuttering gifted education programs across the country (HSE5).

One high school assistant principal considered why many gifted students have not been identified, recollected an encounter with a former student, and stated:

He understood theories and would expand on them with other ideas and thoughts and what ifs but was never identified as gifted. He would have tested in, but he never answered the questions, so when they would come and ask stuff, he would just drift off. He was never attentive during the testing period of it (HSAP3).

Educators’ responses reinforced—as a contributing factor for underrepresentation—the view that gifted students and parents are not interested in pursuing gifted education, especially once they enter high school. Educators and leaders mentioned test anxiety as another contributing factor, and some educators and leaders explained how children may

be gifted but may simply not test well. Educators mentioned intimidating testing environments as one reason, lack of exposure to concepts, and uncertainty of the testing procedures and gifted program. An elementary principal added:

It is very difficult to measure giftedness at a young age. A student may not have been introduced to mathematical concepts yet but could easily do the work if shown once. Young students may be shy in visiting with someone that they do not know and have difficulty expressing their understanding during testing (ELP).

A gifted diagnostician shared views about how difficult the testing process can be for parents and students and expressed:

Like the screening process, you have to be able to pass the test, and some kids may not test well, and they may be gifted. Maybe they just do not test well or they do not understand or they are anxious. You know, you're just dealing with humans, you're dealing with tiny humans. As a parent myself, I can understand that frustration, but it is just very cut and dry. You make it or you do not, you know? And sometimes there are factors and some kids sometimes won't make it on their first test. They'll get tested a year later and they do better. It is such a—it is very confusing. It can be very confusing because a lot of it is, it just all kind of depends on how you test (GD).

Preconceived notions about gifted education may hinder some students from taking part in the gifted education program. Educational leaders, particularly, explained how some students do not want the label of gifted because they do not want to be considered different. One gifted screener had this to say about students who are in the gifted program but lose fervor for the gifted program during the later years:

I know that there are kids that are tested very young, and I do not know if their academic appetite has plateaued, or they are just burnt out. I do see kids that are labeled as [gifted], and they are not being successful in school, and I wonder if they are purposely doing that because they do not want more on their plates. I have a nephew who was screened in Houston, and he failed every single battery; and when my sister-in-law and brother asked him, he said, 'I do not want more work.' So I question—I do not necessarily think that they shouldn't be in there any longer. I do not think they need to be rescreened every year, but I do wonder if after nine years... are they burnt out or at the point where they are like, 'I would rather play football. I would rather be a cheerleader, and I would rather have a social life and a job, and I do not want to be assigned an extra assignment from a teacher when I am already doing my AP Gov and my algebra II,' and that forth. So, is it skill or is it will? (GS).

Poor grades are said to be mistaken as nongifted, and one high school principal discussed how many gifted students go unidentified because they do not "fit in a box, and they may be talented in areas that are not really identified and are gifted in areas that are not really defined within the educational setting, traditional educational setting (HSP4)." Other educational leaders contribute to this idea and add that the test is geared towards those who conform. One gifted coordinator asserted:

Louisiana's notoriously difficult to qualify for gifted. We have some of the toughest standards in the country, which is very amusing to people when they get here. With all standardized testing, we have geared those tests for one demographic, and often it is also gender biased as well (GC).

Some recommendations, according to some educators, do not have follow through. One middle school educator explained that many of the students who get referred for gifted education are not even tested. A middle school educator mentioned:

I usually give a big list at the beginning of the year after a couple of weeks of seeing students. but what I have found is that those are not being screened, even when I referred them; even being somebody coming from gifted where I should be a trusted source, those students are not even being screened at the school level, much less moving on to the actual phase of getting into the services. (MSE)

ELL students' language gap may hinder gifted identification, perhaps, as a result of their "inability" to demonstrate their giftedness. A gifted coordinator explained that because overall instruction is in English, ELL students end up being at a disadvantage since that giftedness must be communicated in English but added that "gifted should be different; it is not the same as regular instruction" (GC). An elementary educator enumerated that ELL students' inability to demonstrate certain standards of intelligence, their giftedness is difficult to classify, and the educator shared a story of an ELL student who was never identified as gifted:

We have a little girl who just finished fifth grade that came in in third grade, speaking zero English. And she was on seventh grade level when she left this year. I mean, brilliant. so, she was already brilliant in Spanish, and for her to learn English that quickly and get on that level... I put her name through, but did not get identified (ELE).

A diagnostician expressed that ELL students can be more easily identified with nonverbal tests, which minimize the problem of language gaps hindering identification. A gifted coordinator intimated the impact of underrepresentation stating:

This is not a representation of what we actually have here. Not only are the kids who are excluded because of that hurt by it, I think the children who make it and are kept from having experiences with kids of different backgrounds, they are missing out, too. All that comes down to gender, race, socioeconomic ethnicity—all of that plays into it (GC).

Largely, educators and educational leaders emphasized that the deficiencies in identification are not intentional. One high school educator affirmed:

There are no alternative motives behind it. It is just that people aren't aware of it. Really you have to be proactive...encourage the kids, kind of let the teachers know about the program. You know, you have to kind of sell the program (HSE).

#### **Theme 4**

Understanding the current gifted education policy is a vital component of understanding and implementing changes that need to be made to the policy. The current study sought to answer Research Question 3: *How does gifted policy impact representation of gifted students in an urban school district?* The Louisiana Believes Department of Education website provides an overview of the gifted policy which states that parents or regular education teachers may request an evaluation for a student, and the education agency determines the screening procedures before orchestrating the stated mandated achievement test (Louisiana Department of Education, 2021). The overview also provides information on the curriculum for gifted and talented students which states

that students identified as gifted will be provided with challenging curricula tailored to students' individual needs. In addition, the curriculum should prioritize enrichment, acceleration, higher level thinking skills, more complexity in regular education, and multi-disciplinary content.

Educational leaders' and educators' understanding of gifted policy also enhances equitable practices. Educators, overall, had a general understanding of gifted policy. Some educators expressed aspects of the gifted program that are advantageous to gifted students: dual enrollment courses, college courses, small class sizes, and opportunities for leadership and growth; while other educators admitted that they do not know much about the gifted education program in their district.

### ***Gifted Education Policy***

The gifted education policy for Union District contains the definition of giftedness, procedures for screening, criteria for eligibility, procedures for evaluation, qualifying matrix points, and reevaluation. Gifted children, according to the policy, are “those who demonstrate abilities that give evidence of high performance in academic and intellectual aptitude” (Pupil Appraisal, 2017). Procedures for screening include the following:

- Sensory screening shall be conducted whenever vision or hearing problems are suspected.
- Each LEA shall develop and implement procedures for screening students suspected of being gifted. The screening criteria shall not exceed the criteria for eligibility.



- At least two regular school staff members such as the principal/designee, teachers, counselors, pupil appraisal personnel, or other professional staff shall conduct a review of the screening information with the student's teacher. If the student meets the screening criteria, the student shall be evaluated. If the student does not meet the screening criteria, he/she should be exposed to activities that enhance skills and increase knowledge.

For grades 1-12, one of the following criteria must be met:

- The student shall obtain a score of at least two standard deviations above the mean on an individually or group administered test of intellectual abilities appropriately standardized on students of this age and administered by a certified school psychologist or licensed psychologist; or
- The student shall obtain a score of at least seven when scores are entered into the cells of the Standard Matrix, at least two points of which is earned on the test of intellectual abilities; or
- The student shall obtain a score of at least six when scores are entered into the cells of the Standard Matrix, and a recommendation for classification as gifted is made by pupil appraisal personnel who conducted the evaluation of the student in accordance with the evaluation procedures.

Methods of evaluation include a statement that all tests and procedures used during the evaluation process shall be "standardized, non-discriminatory, and appropriate for the cultural background of the students being evaluated." The statement goes on to

state that standardized tests do not typically take into account a student's poverty, cultural difference, or lack of opportunity to learn; therefore, it is vital for pupil appraisal to thoughtfully consider those factors if a student is believed to be gifted. Noteworthy discrepancies between the results and students' normal behaviors and abilities should be conveyed in the evaluation report, and the classification of a student's giftedness should be based on an in-depth evaluation of the student's abilities. The evaluation process includes the following procedures for grades 1-12:

- An assessment of intellectual abilities by a licensed or certified psychologist using nondiscriminatory procedures.
- Additional assessments in math and reading by a qualified pupil appraisal personnel. District-wide test scores and screening scores cannot be used in the Standard Matrix.
- An interview with the student's parent(s) by a school social worker or qualified personnel
- An interview with the student's teacher(s)
- Students who score at least six matrix points will undergo further evaluation by pupil personnel which will include the following:
  - The student's educational performance and screening data with the student's teacher
  - Observation of the student's behavior and Performance on screening tests on intelligence, aptitude, achievement, problem-solving, or creativity.

Lastly, the policy states that there is a mandatory triennial reevaluation in which a review of the student's IEP and progress takes place.

### ***Media Source***

Union District released a district-wide informational video in which the district assistant superintendent and public relations liaison for the district provided information on the gifted education program. The video displays elementary and middle school students interacting and demonstrating what they have recently learned about special effects. At one point in the video, the assistant superintendent took notice of one student's demonstration of leadership skills. Both the superintendent and liaison advertise the program and provide explanations on how students can be a part of the program. To provide the viewers with further information on what the gifted program offers, the hosts incorporated the supervisor of the gifted program and a gifted coordinator. The gifted coordinator explained:

The gifted program is for students who have been identified as academically advanced in a way. They put information together; they are out of the box thinkers—critical and creative thinkers, and here, it is how they analyze; it is how they respond to things. It is beyond grades.

The supervisor of the gifted program incorporated information on qualifications of giftedness and stated the following:

Grades do not determine eligibility. To be gifted, there is a whole other process to that, and an aptitude test is given, a separate math test, a separate reading test is given, other than our standardized test that the kids take each year. Anyone can

refer a student. A student can refer themselves to be screened for the gifted program.

The assistant superintendent follows up with the statement that a student can be tested in the gifted education program at any point of their academic career, and the assistant superintendent explains that anyone can be screened and should contact the school counselor if interested.

### ***Policy Reform***

The gifted policy heavily relies on educators advocating for gifted students; however, perceptions of educators' role in gifted education varied amongst educators. Many educators feel that teachers are an essential aspect of gifted identification. Several educators stated that, because teachers spend so much time with students in the classroom, they are more cognizant of their educational needs. One elementary educator stated that teachers "pick up on certain criteria that, usually gifted programs require and just watch them develop through their lessons" (ELE2). A high school survey respondent educator added that educators have a better understanding of gifted students and their needs and explained:

Having a teacher advocate for them can make a world of difference and even help them be identified sooner (SE7).

Some educators, however, believe that teachers are not the most important advocates for gifted students and their needs. Some educators feel that parents are or should be the most important advocates for their gifted children. One survey respondent educator said the following:

Parents should be the biggest advocates for their students in every aspect of the educational process, not just for gifted students. Teachers need to understand and prepare material to meet the needs of these students (SE2).

Giftedness, according to educators and leaders, extends beyond what the district acknowledges. Some educational leaders expressed that they would like to see giftedness more broadly defined to include students gifted in a variety of areas. One high school assistant principal said:

There may be a student extremely gifted in mathematics but not as much in ELA, but they wouldn't qualify. I think gifted could be specific to different areas of education and life skills. Someone may be extremely intelligent in electronics and be able to fix anything but may not do as well in academic areas. They wouldn't necessarily be identified as gifted because it is not on the IQ level whenever you're looking at someone that is gifted in electronics (HSAP3).

Policy reform suggestions made the screening process a focal point. Several educators and leaders expressed that the screening process should be modified to include students from all backgrounds. A gifted screener explained the following:

We have a large population of students that are in a lower socioeconomic status that, for reasons outside of their control, they miss a lot of school, and they take care of siblings, or they take care of parents. They have excessive absences. They have horrible grades, but then you look at their standardized test scores, and they knock it out of the park; to me that should be looked at in terms of, well, if this kid is never, ever, ever at school for some reason—we can't control that, but this

kid can score an advanced in some sort of test, maybe there's something there that we can screen and see if it is a possibility (GS).

Others expressed that the screening environment needs to change because the intimidation of the setting can hinder identification. A high school assistant principal noted:

It tends to be like when kids go to recess, you know, bring them in for a screening or their PE, they'll bring them in for a screening. It needs to be a time when they are not distracted by what they are missing. I think the screening needs to be done consistently in a more reliable manner because I do think that we're missing kids from that initial screener (HSAP3).

Not only does the environment itself impact testing, but also the testing coordinator can impact testing results, according to one gifted screener who stated:

I think maybe the people screening the second round could be a little friendlier, maybe a little more aware of the students they are servicing because I feel like if the environment in which someone is being tested is not conducive to the learning aspect, it is going to affect the way the child performs, not necessarily smiles and giggles but just, is the room well lit... but somewhere where it is conducive for the learning environment, or the child feels secure with the testing, maybe an introduction to the person who's testing prior to testing so that the child can ask some questions, get to know who that person is before they are screened for a service that they may miss out on because of nervousness (GS).

Some of the educators believe that if universal screening is employed, that could make a monumental impact on representation in gifted education. Educators from a

separate district explained how universal screening has impacted their gifted education program. One elementary educator stated:

A few years ago, we switched to a non-verbal IQ test to help with identifying students that are lower socioeconomic with, you know, vocab and stuff, and also ESL children, you know, children that have English as a second language. I do feel like that has bumped our numbers up; however, I do feel like it is hurting our verbal children (ELE3).

Educators and leaders in this district consider unconventional characteristics, such as acting out in class, as a sign of giftedness. An educator of gifted students claimed:

We look at data, so, we have universal screenings three times a year for beginning, middle and end. And we look at those reports, to see who is in the top of their class, meaning about 85% or higher 84 to 85% or higher, on universal screenings. We look for a steep. We also look at teacher recommendations, and a lot of times I do look at behavior because a lot of times the gifted students are the ones that act out in the classroom (ELE2).

One diagnostician believes the methods for identification should be streamlined to avoid confusing parents and students and asserted:

I think that would be less confusing for parents and schools if there were just a standard, if the matrix that they use to get in was all streamlined. I think they need to streamline the identification process. Like in my opinion, I know kids that qualify in pre-K. That may be a good thing or letting us use a little bit of professional judgment as far as testing goes (GD).

Educators shared their perceptions of the gifted education program currently in place and, conceptually, believe that although some aspects of the gifted program are effective, there could be significant improvements to identify and better serve the needs of gifted students. Educators generally believe that the district does well with providing college courses, opportunities for leadership and growth, small class sizes; however, many educators expressed that the district could improve on identifying more students, and—as one survey respondent educator expressed—the “truly gifted students and not just the ‘smart kids’ and foster that uniqueness where they can feel celebrated and accepted” (SE2). Another survey respondent educator highlighted the importance of identifying more students for gifted education and attested:

I think that the district needs to work harder at identifying giftedness. It is important to universally screen students but also allow the students to understand what they are being screened for and communicate with the parent ahead of time so that the child can mentally prepare for an encounter with a new staff member, likely in a new location, and with a different type of testing instrument. In addition, it is important to use a variety of testing instruments to allow for the elimination of poverty of experience or other aspects of the child’s life as limiting factors in their successful identification (SE3).

Another area of improvement to the gifted education policy that educators discussed was the curriculum. Educators and leaders discussed the importance of gifted students’ desire to be challenged and acknowledged the difficulty in meeting the various needs of gifted students. A high school assistant principal explained:



I think another challenge is trying to expand their knowledge without it being work, letting it be more cerebral and not necessarily having to sit down and write papers or complete assignments. I think making it interesting to discover without the drudgery of assignments. The student needs things that will challenge their minds in more ways than ELA, and they need to make it more individually tailored to those students that are gifted in other manners than reading (HSAP3).

An elementary educator of regular education students detailed an experience with one gifted student and explained how it can be difficult to meet the needs of gifted students while still being required to have them complete the work of the regular education curriculum. The educator stated:

It is being that above level, that reading above level, their knowledge base, and then having to learn the information that everybody else is in class. I had a student one semester I taught ELA second grade, and I had a student that was reading on a sixth grade reading level. Well, we still had to give the spelling test every week. So on Friday she would be reading her chapter book, and I would say a word and she'd just write it down and then go right back to her chapter book, you know, so I know that she was bored with what we were doing, but I was able to be like, you're good, go ahead and read your book. Just make sure you write down the words when we call them out. So I do think they get bored easily if they are not pushed. We have so many kids who are struggling or who are not getting it that we focus on, but they get left out, getting that push. It takes a really special teacher to be able to say, okay, here is your specific assignment for your level and we need more of that (ELE).

A high school educator conveyed the same sentiment describing challenges faced with teaching gifted students, especially those in regular education classes. The educator expressed:

It is having that natural curiosity that they tend to have, having it stifled because of a classroom full of other kids that aren't ready for that next level, to move on at a faster pace like the gifted students typically are. I think that is a challenge that students face, but as a teacher, I also face that challenge to keep those kids engaged at a higher level and to keep them progressing further along in their educational journey. It is just a hard balance when you have a classroom full of kids that are gifted and not gifted (HSE3).

A middle school educator contended that, when addressing the needs of gifted students, "there can't be a one size fits all for gifted. and that is the problem...we're trying to make it a one size fits all instead of servicing each student the way they need to be served (MSE3). One high school principal echoed the belief and noted:

There's a big generic blanket, and some kids are really successful in math, and some kids may struggle in English, but the one that loves social studies and history, may have no interest at all in an elective over here. When you're talking about gifted...they just want to be challenged (HSP).

## **Summary**

Union District educators and educational leaders generally believe that parents are resources for exposure, and that early exposure to concepts such as reading, vocabulary, art, music, colors, numbers, and shapes can increase students' chances of being identified as gifted. Educators and leaders, in addition, acknowledge that low socioeconomic

backgrounds can limit students' exposure to significant concepts, which may, in turn, hinder gifted identification. Educators and leaders note that a support system is a vital component of students' academic success. If gifted students have parents and teachers who are unfamiliar with characteristics of giftedness or the gifted education program, they are less likely to be identified for gifted education. Parents and teachers who are knowledgeable about gifted education have a tendency to advocate for their children and/or students for gifted services. Educators indicated connections of siblings' and/or peers' giftedness but do not believe there is a correlation between a sibling's or peer's giftedness and a student's giftedness.

Culturally relevant leadership, based on educational leaders' practices, is present to a degree; however, a better understanding of the gifted education program is necessary for educational leaders to challenge underrepresentation and induce change in the gifted education program. Educational leaders show support for the diverse needs of all students and understand that educators and leaders need to be trained to effectively address the needs of all gifted students. Educational leaders acknowledge that some gifted students are overlooked for the gifted education program. Some of the reasons listed for overlooking some gifted students include students not testing well, parents or teachers lacking knowledge of gifted characteristics, and low socioeconomic status. Educational leaders, overall, did express that the gifted education program is valuable though some were not particularly well-informed of the gifted education program. Educators communicated that it is the responsibility of leaders to inform parents, teachers, and students of the gifted education program.

Teacher recommendations are perceived as an essential aspect of identification, which makes educators' perceptions a factor when determining how policy impacts representation. Several educators stated that they are uncertain of what qualities to consider when referring students for gifted education. Some educators noted that they either do not refer students for gifted education at all, or assume that students are already identified as gifted by the time they reach high school. When referring students for gifted education, educators who do, say they consider social and academic qualities of students and how they interact with their peers and teachers. Educators expressed that they do feel prepared to serve gifted students despite their limited familiarity with the gifted education program.

Perceptions of giftedness varied amongst educators and leaders, and all educators and leaders perceive giftedness as a unique quality. Many educators and leaders reflected on their personal experiences with gifted students and some educators said giftedness is the ability to think outside the box, while others said giftedness consists of advanced intelligence and aptitude. Educational leaders expressed that some of their experiences with gifted students involved students being all in and very academically involved, or they were completely disengaged. Educators did acknowledge that there are misconceptions surrounding giftedness, which can lead to underrepresentation of certain groups. Some educators and leaders explained how factors of socioeconomic status can hinder identification simply because parents and schools of low socioeconomic standing have so many other pressing matters that gifted education is not a priority. Furthermore, educational leaders perceive the difficult testing process as being another factor for underrepresentation. Educators and leaders noted that students may not want the label of

gifted because of the pressures and social inclusion that comes along with that. Educators and leaders acknowledged language gaps for ELL students as a potential barrier to gifted identification. Educators and leaders, alike, stress that discrepancies in gifted identification are not intentional but, instead, are factors of parents and teachers being uninformed about gifted education.

The gifted education policy details the identification and evaluation practices and emphasizes the importance of practices being nondiscriminatory. Perceptions of educators' role in gifted education varied in responses. Some educators felt that teachers are gifted students' most important advocates, while other educators deemed parents to be gifted students' most important advocates. Educators and leaders implied that giftedness extends beyond what the district offers. Educational leaders stated that gifted education should incorporate factors other than those that are academically based. Some explained that the screening process should be modified to include students from a larger variety of backgrounds. Others shared concerns about the screening environment. Moreover, educators and leaders intimated that the curriculum should be more challenging and more effectively address the individual needs of gifted students.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the current study was to understand, through a social capital and culturally relevant leadership lens, how gifted policy impacts representation of students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How does students' social capital impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?
2. What characteristics of culturally relevant leadership—if any—are present in the gifted identification process, and how do they impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?
3. How does policy regarding gifted screening and identification impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?

As discussed in Chapter 4, some educators and leaders perceive parents and teachers as essential components for gifted identification, as parents and teachers are students' core networks to academic resources. Educators and leaders noted that one's

socioeconomic status may contribute to or limit students' exposure to pertinent concepts, which may, as a result, lead to or hinder gifted identification. Because students rely chiefly on parents and teachers for cognitive resources—educators and leaders discussed— if parents and/or teachers are unfamiliar with gifted characteristics and/or the gifted education program, students are less likely to be identified. When parents and teachers are knowledgeable about the gifted education program and gifted characteristics, they are more likely to advocate for students' identification.

Educational leaders' practices, according to their responses, do indicate that aspects of culturally relevant leadership are present in the district. Educational leaders show support for the various needs of students and understand that training needs to be implemented to more effectively meet those needs. Despite school-level educational leaders' limited knowledge of the gifted education program, they did consider gifted education to be a valuable program and communicated the obligation of leaders to inform parents, teachers, and students of gifted education.

Recommendations from educators are deemed as a pertinent aspect of gifted identification, which aligns with the gifted education policy; therefore, the current study includes educators' and leaders' perceptions of giftedness. Some educators mentioned that they were unsure of what qualities to consider when referring students, and others stated they do not refer students at all for gifted education. Perceptions of giftedness varied greatly in educators' and leaders' responses; however, all educators and leaders perceive giftedness as a unique quality. Educators and leaders, additionally, acknowledged that giftedness is exhibited differently in different socioeconomic groups. I analyzed the gifted education policy to compare and contrast practices and procedures

related to the gifted identification process. Several educators and leaders indicated that educators are the most important advocates for gifted students and their needs. Educators and leaders did note, nonetheless, that changes to the policy should be made to identify more gifted students, better address gifted students' needs, and incorporate other aspects of giftedness.

### **Impact of Social Capital**

The current study sought to answer the research question *How does students' social capital impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?* Social capital is defined as the network of relationships in society, and Social Capital Theory explains how those networks can lead to beneficial educational and economical resources (Acar, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Dufur et al., 2013; Hanifan, 1916). Connections to educators and parents manifest as social capital for students, which can lead to access to advantageous educational resources (Ford, 2006, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Galindo et al., 2017). Findings of the current study reveal that parents and teachers who are informed of the gifted education program and are familiar with gifted characteristics are more likely to advocate for gifted identification, which, in turn, impacts representation of gifted students. This finding aligns with research that demonstrates that schools serve as social capital for students because of the resources shared between stakeholders, and students who are able to utilize educators as social capital are more likely to obtain educational resources (Bartee, 2019; Dufur et al., 2013; Ford, 2014b; Galindo et al., 2017).

Educators and leaders share the perspective that parents are resources for exposure, and students' home environment has an impact on exposure to vocabulary,



reading skills, art, etc.—all resources that can be instrumental in developing advanced abilities. This finding aligns with research that explains how parents in high-income households are more likely to fund and partake in a variety of educational activities that enhance academic development (Caucutt et al., 2017; Dufur et al., 2013; Ford, 2014a; Galindo et al., 2017; Phoenix, 2002; Sapon-Shevin, 1996). One finding is that educators believe that students need a support system to be academically successful, and teachers can serve as a pivotal component of access to the gifted education program. This aligns with one of the three types of social capital Woolcock (1998) discussed, bridging, which involves connections between unlike groups that can lead to access to resources. Some Educators and leaders acknowledge that although parents may be uninformed with giftedness and the gifted education program, teachers can bridge the gap between the exposure that students may lack at home and what students can gain from school. Findings from the current study include word of mouth can lead to gifted identification, and students who are in environments in which teachers are not trained are less likely to be identified. These findings align with one of the forms of social capital that Coleman (1988) explains—information channels, which, as previously explained, entails that information from a trusted resource can lead to results. Teachers are considered trusted resources in educational institutions; therefore, if a student is recommended for gifted education, the student will more likely be tested, which can potentially lead to gifted identification.

Some educators believe that there is a connection between an individual's giftedness and their peers' and/or siblings' giftedness though findings related to peers' and siblings' giftedness impacting one's giftedness are inconsistent. Educators and

leaders noted, however, that there are a variety of different scenarios, and whether or not a student has a gifted peer or sibling does not necessarily impact his or her giftedness. Educators expressed that gifted students tend to interact regularly with other gifted students and acknowledged that there are a number of cases in which several siblings are in gifted education. Nonetheless, aside from the notion that connections to peers and family are considered advantageous assets (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Galindo et al., 2017; Horvat et al., 2003), findings for that aspect of social capital are not significant enough to be supported by research.

Another finding in the current study is that parents and teachers who are informed about gifted education are more likely to push for services for their children or students. One educator in the findings described how one of the child's teachers advocated for gifted services, and although he did not qualify during the first round of tests, the teacher continued to request services, and the student passed the gifted identification screening. This aligns with the results of Horvat et al. (2003) that described the results of a student having an educator as a resource, which led to the student's identification after the educator requested the student be tested. Findings show that parents who are informed about gifted education may have their students tested outside of school, which aligns with research that states that families from high-income households are more likely to have their students tested outside of school since they can more easily afford those tests (Morgan, 2020).

### **Culturally Relevant Leadership**

The current study addresses Research Question 2. *What characteristics of culturally relevant leadership—if any—are present in the gifted identification process,*

*and how do they impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?* The current study includes interviews of educational leaders to examine culturally relevant practices and whether or not those practices impact representation of gifted students. Educational leaders' responses indicate that, though certain aspects of culturally relevant leadership are present—high expectations for students, an inclusive climate, emphasis on student achievement, and self-reflective practices (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021), other culturally relevant practices—empowering students to challenge inequities, incorporating students' knowledge and values in the curriculum, and leading professional developments to guide staff in embracing cultures (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021)—could be implemented to enhance culturally relevant leadership. All educational leaders did acknowledge that some students may be overlooked for giftedness—some from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which impedes an individual's level of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Galindo et al., 2017; Häuberer, 2011; Orr, 1999); however, educational leaders did not suggest that underrepresentation may be due to racial or ethnic backgrounds. Educators' and leaders' responses indicate that there is very little direct involvement in gifted education, which would suggest that even if all areas of culturally relevant practices were present, their focus is not on gifted education but on the school as a whole, leaving the gifted department to take on the duties of identifying and serving gifted students.

One finding is that educational leaders believe that educators would benefit from training in gifted education, and training could potentially lead to an increase in gifted

identification. This finding aligns with research that suggests that culturally relevant leaders induce change in an organization to more effectively address the diverse needs of students in the organization ((Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020; Owen et al., 2017; Washington, 2021). Educational leaders do acknowledge a need for training and a need for change. Educational leaders, moreover, expressed a need to identify more gifted students, especially students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who may not possess evident characteristics of giftedness. The finding that culturally relevant leaders take on the responsibility to inform parents, teachers, and students of the gifted education program aligns with the research that states that culturally relevant teachers develop connections with the community and provide professional developments to ensure that educators meet the needs of a diversified group (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020).

Findings show that educational leaders have high expectations for their students, understand that gifted students desire to be challenged by their curriculum, and recognize that gifted students have unique abilities and needs, which is supported by the research that states that culturally relevant leaders place high expectations on students and implement students' values in the curriculum (Horsford et al., 2011; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020). The aspects of culturally relevant leadership that findings do not support, however, are the effort of culturally relevant leaders to empower students to challenge inequities and embrace students' needs through cultural inclusion (Horsford et al., 2011; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Mun et al., 2020).

Culturally relevant leadership relies on self-reflective practices of educational leaders (Washington, 2021), and educational leaders did reflect on their current practices

and experiences with gifted students to address challenges of gifted education within the district. Findings show that educators and leaders acknowledged that there are common misconceptions about giftedness, and that many gifted students are not high achievers, which can impede identification of low achieving gifted students. Ezzani et al. (2021) analyzed the cultural reform initiative implemented in a district and explained how conceptions of giftedness can lead to underrepresentation of certain groups.

Another finding is that universal screening can enhance identification of underrepresented groups. Educators and leaders in one district detailed how the implementation of universal screening and nonverbal tests increased the number of ELL, low socioeconomic, and Black and Hispanic groups. Educators and leaders explain that district members put in an effort to identify underrepresented groups. A heavy reliance on cognitive standardized assessments leads to underrepresentation (Ezzani et al., 2021; Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2015), and findings for the current student show that educators and leaders in one district strive to consider more nontraditional gifted characteristics, such as acting out, which has led to an increase in identification of gifted students.

### **Gifted Education Policy**

The current study aimed to answer Research Question 3. *How does policy regarding gifted screening and identification impact the representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district?* The policy consists, in part, of parent or teacher recommendations prior to the screening process; therefore, investigating perceptions is a critical element in scrutinizing practices and implementing change as needed (Ford, 2015; Frasier et al., 1995; Mun et al., 2016, 2020). Overall, educational leaders and educators perceived giftedness as the ability to advance academically or to

exhibit distinctive qualities that make them stand out amongst their regular education peers. However, because some gifted students' abilities are not displayed in ways that are traditionally or stereotypically perceived as giftedness, they may not be identified (Mun et al., 2021). The findings of the current study support research that shows English language learners may be overlooked for gifted education because of language barriers (Mun et al., 2016). Some educators and leaders believe that giftedness is demonstrated differently in different socioeconomic groups and believe that when there are more imperative matters at hand in relation to low socioeconomic status (lack of resources, dangerous environment, low academic school performance), parents and educational leaders may not make gifted education a priority.

Several educators primarily believed that they were prepared to serve the needs of gifted students though they indicated that they are unsure of what qualities to consider when referring students for gifted education. This aligns with research that shows that teachers rely on their own ideals when they have not received training for gifted education (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). One finding from the current study is that educators consider academic qualities when referring students for gifted education such as good grades and high test scores, and another finding indicated that gifted education is perceived as an elitist program, which aligns with the notion that there are preconceived notions about giftedness (Ford, 2014a; Lawrence & Glenn, 1994; Shippen et al., 2009; Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). These preconceived notions are what lead to some students either being overlooked for gifted identification or parents and students not wanting to pursue services.

Findings for the current study reveal that educators and leaders acknowledge the struggle of gifted students with blending in socially because of the aversion to the idea of being different for some gifted students. These findings align with the findings that Ford et al. (2008) noted: 66% of participants stated they know someone who was teased for doing well in school, and 42% of participants were teased themselves for doing well in school. Additionally, Ford et al. (2008) noted that participants disclosed that they do not do well in school because of fear of being teased. This perception of giftedness that gifted students themselves may possess could lead to an avoidance of being a part of the gifted education program.

Policy for the gifted education program in the district for the current study does include a section that explains that gifted screening practices should be nondiscriminatory, and cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration when completing gifted evaluations (Louisiana Department of Education, 2021). However, the policy does not account for specific equitable practices that should be implemented to prevent deficiencies in gifted identification. Utilizing the equity index (EI) method (Ford, 2014b) to ascertain whether or not underrepresentation is beyond statistical chance, because the percentage of the gifted population in Union District is beyond the 20% threshold in comparison to the overall population in the district, it is considered beyond statistical chance that underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic groups and overrepresentation of White and Asian groups are a result of human error and could be deemed, instead, a result of discriminatory practices, according to the EI method.

Policy states that parents or teachers may refer students for gifted education. Educators are perceived as crucial components for gifted identification, though some

educators do not believe that educators are the most important advocates for gifted students' needs because of preconceived notions of giftedness or lack of training. Findings for the current study show that educators and leaders deem certain aspects of the gifted education program effective; however, educators and leaders believe that the current policy should be modified to identify students from a variety of backgrounds, to incorporate additional aspects of giftedness, and to ensure that testing environments are conducive to a more comfortable testing process. Research shows that feelings of discomfort during testing situations can lead to low performance, especially for negatively stereotyped groups (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Ford et al., 2008; Ford & Trotman, 2001).

### **Implications for Practice**

Research for the current study yields several implications. Findings support the importance of professional development to prepare teachers and educational leaders to effectively serve and support gifted students, working towards minimizing the gifted gap. Secondary educators expressed that they feel prepared to serve gifted students but not prepared to nominate students for gifted education, proving that gifted policy, which states that the screening process begins with teacher nominations, does impact representation of gifted students. Educators need to be properly trained to identify gifted students, especially since identification relies so heavily on teacher recommendations. Since screening all students at a certain age has been reported to increase the percentage of identification in underrepresented groups in gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2016; Ford & Trotman, 2001; Lakin, 2016; Morgan, 2020), another recommendation is to implement universal screening to greatly enhance equitable practices. Other



recommendations include incorporating nonverbal tests to aid in the identification of English language learners, providing professional developments for educational leaders and educators that instruct faculty on how to identify and effectively serve gifted students, and considering gifted characteristics outside of academic achievement and standardized tests scores to identify gifted students. Policy should be modified to incorporate specificity in equitable practices to effectively adhere to the clause that the evaluation process should be nondiscriminatory and conducive to students' cultural backgrounds.

The finding that social capital of students does impact representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district could be beneficial to policy makers and educational leaders at the school and district level. Since parents and educators evince social capital for students, it is essential that educational leaders provide every student with access to informed educators; therefore, every educator should be trained to identify gifted characteristics and to have a comprehensive understanding of the gifted education program to prevent students who do not exhibit traditional or stereotypical gifted characteristics from being overlooked for gifted identification. Educators must bridge the gap between students' potentially limited access to resources at home and access to school resources. Regardless of students' low socioeconomic status, every student should be provided with access to advantageous educational resources and exposure.

The finding that some aspects of culturally relevant leadership are evident; however, a better understanding of the gifted education program is necessary to enhance representation of underrepresented students in gifted education is beneficial to

researchers and educational leaders. Having a better understanding of culturally relevant practices can impede deficit thinking and inequitable practices surrounding gifted identification and ensure that every students' needs are met. Though it is evident that educators and leaders in Union District consider the needs of each and every student, there are other aspects of culturally relevant leadership that can be implemented to enhance practices.

Lastly, the finding that policy regarding gifted identification does impact representation is particularly useful. The understanding that teachers' perceptions are an essential component for identification emphasizes the importance of providing professional development opportunities for educators to minimize misconceptions of giftedness which can lead to some students being overlooked for gifted identification. It is also important to note that findings show that there are no ulterior motives for underrepresentation, and it, instead, is a result of the district as a whole—parents, educators, educational leaders, and students—lacking information on gifted education. Understanding how policy impacts representation can lead to the district equipping stakeholders with the necessary information to better understand gifted education practices.

Incorporating an equity policy with specific instructions, rather than a general statement, delineating methods for addressing the need for equitable identification in the gifted education policy handbook may prove to be beneficial in striving for the minimization of the gifted gap. Educational leaders in gifted education should analyze the numbers in gifted education to ensure cognizance of underrepresentation of certain groups and to take steps to promote equity.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The focus of the current study was to understand, through the lens of Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership, how gifted policy impacts representation of gifted students in a gifted education program in an urban school district. There is some evidence to show that students' social capital, culturally relevant leadership practices, and gifted policy practices do impact representation of gifted students; however, the methodology for the current study limits generalizability. More research is needed to determine the extent to which students' social capital impacts gifted identification and whether or not there are other methods from which students can gain social capital. Additionally, more research should be implemented to determine whether or not social capital regarding peers and siblings has an impact on gifted identification. Including gifted students' perspectives on gifted identification, underrepresentation of certain groups, and the gifted program, in general, could potentially enhance the overall results.

The current study does incorporate aspects of quantitative data from the survey. However, I used the survey for the purpose of a pilot study of twenty participants; therefore, the current study mainly utilizes qualitative data to scrutinize gifted identification practices and representation. It may be beneficial to incorporate quantitative data using a more generalizable sample to gain a comprehensive understanding of perceptions and practices.

I analyzed culturally relevant practices based on educational leaders' responses; however, the current study may have yielded more advantageous results had it been implemented in a district in which there were initiatives surrounding culturally relevant

leadership. Culturally relevant practices in an urban school district should be investigated to more effectively determine whether culturally relevant leadership impacts representation of gifted students.

The current study primarily focused on teacher recommendations of the gifted policy. It may be beneficial to focus more attention on how matrix points, screening data, and standardized gifted exams impact identification.

Future research should be implemented to determine factors that prove to influence equitable representation in gifted education. A similar investigation should be executed using a larger sample. Continued research can greatly impact the gifted education program in this district and the educational community as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Findings for the current study explain how social capital, culturally relevant leadership, and gifted policy practices impact representation of gifted students in an urban school district. Four essential findings encompass the study. (1) Parents and educators evince social capital for students and are essential components for gifted identification. (2) Educational leaders do exhibit qualities of culturally relevant leadership; however, educational leaders must gain a better understanding of the gifted educational program to enhance equitable gifted identification practices. (3) Because much of the identification process depends on parent and teacher recommendations, if parents and educators are uninformed of the gifted education program, it will impact identification. (4) Educators and educational leaders believe that the gifted policy should be reformed to identify more gifted students.

While these findings do relinquish practical implications, more research should be implemented to enhance generalizability and gain a better understanding of how social capital impacts gifted identification and to what extent, how culturally relevant leadership initiatives can impact gifted identification, and how other aspects of gifted policy impact gifted identification.

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**APPENDIX A**

**HUMAN USE EXEMPTION LETTER**



Office of Research and Partnerships

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Dr. Bryan McCoy and Zakisha Brown (Student Researcher)

**FROM:**  Dr. Walter Buboltz, Professor/Elva L. Smith Endowed Professor  
[buboltz@latech.edu](mailto:buboltz@latech.edu)

**SUBJECT:** Human Use Committee - Review DECISION

**DATE:** May 10, 2022

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been completed for your proposed study:

**HUC No.:** 1416, 22-089

**TITLE:** Examining Representation of Gifted Students in an Urban Gifted Education Program Through the Lens of Social Capital Theory and Culturally Relevant Leadership

**HUC DECISION:** Exempt from full review

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

It has been determined that your study meets the requirements for exemption **45 CFR §46.104(d) (2) (i)**:

**(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:**

**(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;**

**Additional comments from Reviewer:** The study stores survey responses and participant information on a password-protected device and in a locked file cabinet viewed only by the researcher. There is no physical contact with participants and no treatment involved.

*Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.*