

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTED MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Middle school students who fall under the gifted and talented category are often perceived as being “self-sustaining, easy to handle” students. Research into the nature of gifted and talented students over the last 40+ years has proven otherwise, demonstrating a wide range of social and emotional issues as well as the need for advanced academic challenges. However, middle school teachers have shown mixed opinions about the specific needs of gifted and talented students, oftentimes seeing GT students at the middle school level to be less student and more “student helper”. This study was conducted to determine the current trends and perceptions in teachers’ thinking on the matter of GT students. The DATA Questionnaire was distributed to hundreds of middle school teachers and GT Coordinators in the region to determine the current perception of gifted students with multiple respondents ($N = 62$). Questions range from teachers’ views on the academic rigor and flexibility of GT students, social relationships of middle school GT students, and even the development of students’ sense of self. The results demonstrated a gap in agreement between those with less teaching experience than those with more teaching experience. Further research into this topic could include replication studies separated by teaching experience level and separate studies for those who regularly work with the gifted and those who do not.

Keywords: Gifted, Talented, Talent Development, Enrichment, Acceleration, Middle School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iii

List of Tables.....vi

List of Figures.....vii

Introduction.....1

Statement of the Problem.....1

Theoretical Framework.....2

 Purpose.....3

 Research Question.....3

Literature Review4

 Issues Facing Advanced Students Academically.....4

 Unique Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Students.....8

 Teacher Preparation for Gifted Students.....11

 Summary.....15

Methodology.....16

 Research Design.....16

 Participants.....16

 Instrument.....17

 Procedures.....18

 Data Analysis.....18

 Summary.....19

Results.....20

 Descriptive Statistics.....20

 Inferential Statistics.....21

 Sub Question One: What issues do advanced middle school students face academically?.....23

 Sub Question Two: What are the unique social and emotional needs of advanced middle school students?.....23

 Sub Question Three: How do teachers influence advanced students’ development?.....26

 Summary.....29

Discussion.....30

Limitations.....38

Implications for Future Research.....	38
Conclusion.....	42
References.....	44
APPENDIX A.....	52
APPENDIX B.....	56
APPENDIX C.....	59
APPENDIX D.....	58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant demographics.....	21
Table 2. Group descriptives on subscales.....	22
Table 3. Item reliability scores for “Identification” questions.....	22
Table 4. Group descriptives involving acceleration between those who do and do not regularly work with the gifted.....	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. “Focus on Others” questions separated by those who do and do not regularly work with gifted learners.....	24
Figure 2. “Grade Skipping” questions separated by those who do and do not regularly work with gifted learners.....	25
Figure 3. “Grade Skipping” questions separated into those who were or know of an identified GT student or not.....	25
Figure 4. “Focus on Others” questions separated into those who were or know of an identified GT student or not.....	26
Figure 5. Scatterplot with Double-Line Graph indicating Identification scores.....	28
Figure 6. Scatterplot with Double-Line Graph indicating Acceleration scores.....	29
Figure 7. Grade Skipping preferability between those who have experience with Gifted And Talented family members and those who do not have experience.....	31
Figure 8. Question 5 from the DATA questionnaire.....	41

Introduction

Middle school students are often viewed as “transitioning to high school” students. For gifted and talented (GT) students this may prove to be detrimental to their continued development. Battles (2007) notes that a lack of understanding of the implementation of a gifted program across elementary, middle, and high school affects not only the number of students able to be served, but the effectiveness of the instruction given. The primary talent pool is the focus of the elementary grades and the performance of students in Advanced Placement classes, internships, and cooperative trade courses are featured at the high school level. The middle grades are often left being an afterthought in the gifted and talented realm unless they show a sudden decline or spike in performance. Kunkel and Pittman (1991) noted that the dropout of students from gifted programs occurs most often during a student’s 7th grade year, accounting for over 44% of dropouts from the gifted program. Renzulli and Park (2000) look ahead at attrition rates, noting that 18-25% of gifted students do not complete their programs. These figures are coupled with a landscape that sees gifted teachers that do not fit in with peer groups, often viewed as outsiders in the school (Henley et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Attitudes toward gifted and talented students being viewed as outsiders is problematic. Since GT students can be identified using specialized techniques in elementary school, being viewed as an outsider may start early. Not only is being viewed as an outsider a problem from the perspective of their peers, but it is also problematic for teachers to hold these attitudes. Middle school teachers are of particular concern as they assist students in beginning to choose their career paths. Settlemyre (2018) points out that teachers’ attitudes are influenced by beliefs

that include gifted students being able to rely on themselves and that gifted students are difficult to create curriculum for.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study comes from various sources. Working with gifted students often illustrates a need for higher levels of emphasis in gifted education at the elementary level. The students in question are often bored and do not rely on a teacher for a source of inspiration or challenge, instead choosing to rely on their ingenuity. The self-regulation model, as noted by Steenbergen-Hu et al. (2020), has been shown to be an effective model of working with higher level students with little direct interaction with a teacher. Further still is the idea that gifted programs are viewed with a sense of cynicism, often being cast as programs that only serve elite students rather than those who show the greatest potential (Yaluma & Tynner, 2020). The feeling among middle school teachers is one of expectation, both from gifted students and their families. This study is meant to examine the current beliefs and trends of middle school teachers who work with the gifted to identify any trends that need to be addressed in the education community.

One of the main sources of contention with gifted students is how they are seen by their teachers. Often confusing the needs of gifted students for normal developmental issues, the specific issues facing gifted students are given the same treatment as those of other students. With the specialized needs and cognitive processes of advanced learners, these methods prove ineffective. Papadopolous (2021) notes that this attitude is far-reaching, being noted on a global stage to contribute to a loss of potential growth in gifted learners.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe how middle school teachers in a southeastern state and across all content areas view gifted learners in their classes. This study was conducted over three weeks and surveyed middle school teachers from over 50 counties in the state. This study is limited by time and is purposefully limited in the scope of only surveying teachers in one southeastern state in the United States. This study is reproducible for other states but may require modifications for interstate use if researchers are comparing multiple states' educational policies.

This study will be conducted by surveying middle school teachers in the state of Kentucky. These teachers span a wide variety of educational settings, including those working in K-8th grade schools, 6th-8th grade middle schools, and 7th-8th grade middle schools. Respondents will have different levels of education, years of teaching experience, and experience working with gifted students.

This study will benefit teachers of gifted students in the region, specifically middle school teachers. This will also benefit the gifted community as advocates for gifted education can make assertions to administrators and school boards with research to back them up. This kind of research adds to a knowledge base that demonstrates the current attitudes of middle school teachers and the future needs for teacher candidates.

Research Question

The main question being addressed is: "What are teachers' attitudes toward gifted middle school students?"

Literature Review

This review of the current literature had a few tenets governing it. The three research questions were broken down into three sub-questions, each of which was broken down into two or three topics to support each of those sub-questions. This organization offered coverage of the topic from as many different aspects as possible. The use of JSTOR, ERIC Databases, WKU Libraries, and current texts on hand were used when looking for material. The most used search terms included: Gifted and talented, acceleration, social/emotional needs, teacher preparation, and middle school. The three main sub-questions act as the headings in this section and begin with students' academic needs before shifting to their emotional needs. The last sub-question focused on teacher training and preparation to work with gifted learners.

Issues Facing Advanced Students Academically

One of the key components of talent development at the middle school level is the inclusion of enrichment programs. These programs can exist inside and outside of school hours and allow students to delve further into a topic of their choice. Programming outside of school ranges from Super Saturdays to summer camps for academically-advanced middle school students (WKU Gifted and Talented Programming, 2023). Enrichment programs can also be found in the classroom in the form of related arts classes or specialized semester-long courses that give advanced students opportunities not commonly offered in the curriculum. Exploratory programs such as MathCounts or local Science Fairs give outlets for students who are ready for real-world experiences with higher-order thinking at their core (George & Grebing, 1995). These programs can reach even further into the student's content of choice and affect not only the students in the program but also those around them positively (Plucker & Callahan, 2020).

Accelerated classes are another option for high-level learners. These classes are often available in middle school and allow students to learn at a pace that will ensure their continual growth. Placement in these courses is traditionally determined by several factors, including previous performance in 5th and 6th grade, teacher recommendation, and performance on standardized tests (Plucker & Callahan, 2022). In the middle school setting, these classes give students an idea of performance at a higher level than their peers, giving them personal distinction amongst their peer group (Greene, 2006). Some accelerated classes offer high school credit for completing the course with a high enough average, allowing gifted students the opportunity to take higher-level classes throughout their high school career in comparison with their age-level peers.

Pull-out programs are typically offered at the elementary level but can be seen as a “class choice” when entering middle school. These programs can range from a separate class covering various topics in a subject to group talk sessions to allow gifted students to engage like-minded peers and improve their social skills. While these programs do not have to be explicitly academic, they must serve a stated purpose in the gifted curriculum.

One of the main problems facing gifted education in America is a lack of opportunity in many underrepresented communities. These opportunities can present themselves in some ways. One current trend in lack of opportunity is the lack of advanced learning opportunities for gifted learners. While there are examples of many private/magnet schools receiving funding from outside sources (Wagner, 2008), many public schools are seeing the opposite side in terms of funding. With school boards dealing with a similar or even decreased budget in the future, administrators will favor staffing core classes with trained teachers and cutting advanced classes and programs to serve the general school population. Along with a lack of funding for classes,

the spending for gifted education per student has dropped since the Marland Report in 1972 (Wai & Worrell, 2020). As funding increases for intervention/Response to Intervention classes, the amount of attention and resources earmarked for gifted education has decreased, partly because of public response (Peters & Oveross, 2022). The current view of gifted education has somehow been disconnected from special education, a mistake that has cost some students an opportunity to learn at their recommended pace.

Looking further into this idea of inappropriate pace, this could constitute a violation of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ensuring the fair and appropriate education of students regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity under the 14th Amendment. This denial may also fall under Public Law 94-142 signed into act under President Ford in 1975 (IDEA Website, 2024). This law established that children with disabilities from the ages of 3-21 were entitled to the same opportunity for free education as other students, including any support that needed to be put in place to help the student succeed (Shields, 2023). This claim can be viewed as a denial of services for gifted students who have behavioral problems in class or who are twice exceptional (Ford, 1995). An example of these cases includes *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982) which instituted the idea of Individual Education Plans for special education students. This law was an amendment Public Law 94-142 that stated the the goals of educating special education students would be not to be at the same level as their peers, but to receive measurable benefit from their education (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). A further revision of individual education needs came from the ruling in the case *Andrew F. v Douglas County School District* (2017) which raised the rigor of a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) to as close as possible to a general education student's curriculum. This case determined that a student's IEP must align as closely as possible to regular education standards to ensure the quality of education for students with an

IEP (Andrew, 2024). Both demonstrate potential violations of students' rights to gifted services based on their disability if they are ignored.

The issue of lack of achievement within the gifted populations of students makes itself known in the classroom. The lack of engagement from a previously identified gifted student can stem from several sources. This can include conditions at home, emphasis placed on education, or a lack of determination in the face of initial failure (Joseph, 2020). These barriers are often what stop those in underrepresented populations of any school, ranging from ethnic minorities of a region to those in a lower socio-economic background (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). It is often these external factors that hinder the continued development of gifted students and may even cause them to stop participating in their school's gifted program.

The change from elementary to middle grades also offers changes in the available programming for gifted students. In elementary grades, grade acceleration has been shown to give high-ability learners the environment they need at a relatively low cost to the school itself (Lloyd, 1999). Looking further into the meta-analysis of Hattie (2009), we see that grade acceleration offers a 0.68 effect score, well above the 0.40 average set for one year's growth. Looking at the changing economic needs of school districts, this may be the first concern on the minds of the administration. For the parents and families of students who can be accelerated into a higher grade than their chronological age, proper placement in a challenging learning environment gives the best possible chance for high growth over a similar period spent in the classroom (Miss Prism, 2008). Among all types of gifted programming, grade skipping has been shown to provide the most drastic improvement in student performance over a long period (Kanevsky & Clelland, 2013; Steenbergen-Hu & Olzeweski-Kubuius, 2016). The idea that students may have problems adapting socially has been discussed but is often dismissed as

students who achieve academically at a high level are often cognitively capable enough to understand the feelings of their “new peers”.

In the middle grades, the available acceleration options for students increase. Students can take more advanced courses in the subject of choice, demonstrating their preference and a higher ability in a specific area. These courses must not only contend with covering increased amounts of material, but they must also be taught with the social and emotional needs of the middle school student in mind (Rosselli & Irvin, 2001). Pullout programs take the form of daily instruction on topics that allow flexible and in-depth thinking beyond the curriculum. The middle school also has more offerings for the creatively gifted and those exhibiting leadership qualities, including participation, and leading roles in afterschool clubs and athletic programs, including Academic Team, Student Technology Leadership Program, and Junior Beta Club.

Unique Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted Students

Students identified as gifted and talented often face many social challenges. One of those, possibly the most daunting to deal with, is time management. This issue is seen more at home than in the classroom but can often influence a student’s performance in the classroom. Cross (1997) discusses the idea of students using so much energy in their schoolwork or academic pursuits that they simply don’t have the time to invest in a social relationship the way their same-age peers do. These students may simply not have the available time their peers do to form meaningful relationships, going so far as to leave them with the feeling of having “no rest time” for something as simple as interacting with people in a non-academic environment (Brown, 1993).

Other students are affected by the idea of *asynchronous development*, the idea that a student will show cognitive development in some areas very quickly while having little or no

growth in others in that same period. Peterson (2006) mentions that while these students represent some of the highest achieving population in their school, that does not mean they have peers that are like their emotional and social developmental level. As these students reach the very end of the bell curve in terms of performance, they will struggle to find even one person in their grade level whom they can consider a peer. This type of development can manifest as social isolation, exclusion from school activities, and a degradation of the student's overall self-concept.

While this situation may seem daunting, gifted students often find like-minded peers within school-provided opportunities. From accelerated classes to in-school enrichment programs, students are often offered a wide range of development opportunities. An accelerated class, VanTassel-Baska (2005) adds, may be one of the first places that gifted students find like-minded peers. This environment may even be the place where the student goes beyond academic achievement and begins to develop their social and emotional skills. The strength of a school's talent development program should not be solely judged based on the academic achievement of its students but on the overall development of the student.

The high to extreme focus of a student on a particular subject or topic can be seen as an "intensity" by same-age peers who may not have the same level of commitment. These can range from devotion to a particular subject area to behavioral patterns that do not fit the current societal norm. This idea can be summed up by the disharmony hypothesis (Preckel et al. 2015) stating that a gifted student is capable of high levels of intelligence at the cost of poor social and emotional skills. Students falling under this hypothesis can appear boorish, abrasive, and unaware of how their behavior affects others around them. Without guidance and the intervention

of like-minded peers, students can exhibit antisocial behavior that will further distance them from their same-age peers.

Something that could be considered an “extension” of these intensities is the idea of perfectionism. This could be defined as an ethical or practical consideration that affects students in their overall performance in tasks (Kottman & Ashby, 2000). Students with a perfectionist view will have two schools of thought. The first is to not start any task as they will not be able to complete it to their level of expectation, while the other viewpoint sees students being hypercritical of their work at every step to the point where they cannot advance without a sense of doubt or failure. These students create extremely high standards for themselves and experience personal frustration when they cannot meet those lofty goals (Kottman & Ashby, 2000). Without the right outlet to allow them to fail and grow as students, those affected by perfectionism will not reach their potential, evolving into an underachieving group of students.

The gifted student, for all their benefits and talents, will experience a sense of separation from the rest of their peers. The idea of feeling “un-apart” goes hand in hand with the continual changes experienced by gifted students in their personal and familial relationships (Peterson, 2006). Students who are already struggling with making connections to same-age peers are shown to struggle with creating a self-identity that is not tied to their academic strength. From being available to help other students (Cross, 1997) to relating to close family members, the expectation for giftedness to be a universal constant is a distinct stressor on gifted students.

This feeling of inadequacy for gifted students can often be compounded by their self-awareness of their social standing. Meyer (1989) reviewed several viewpoints on the emotional well-being of gifted students, including being more introspective than most students, having a heightened emotional sensitivity to events and interactions, and the tendency to act in a

non-conformist manner that lets them interact with older members of their community. The cognitive processes of these students also branch out into their emotional intelligence for a varying set of results. Students who exhibit these non-conformist behaviors and relate to older members of their community are seeking a faster path toward self-actualization (Subotnick et al. 2011). The advanced intellectual abilities of these students translate to all parts of their lives, but students do at times experience asynchronous development.

Talent development programs in schools are not strictly reserved for the development of academic skills. Cummings and Tabel (1978) note that schools are often places where students come to learn social skills and teamwork, despite neither one of these being directly listed on a curriculum. This can be especially true with gifted students who often find more comfort in the classroom than anywhere else. With advances in curriculum since the 1960s benefiting the core fields of Math, Science, and Social Studies (Howley, 1986), the idea of developing social skills must also be an integral part of the education of gifted students. Without further development of students in all aspects of their lives, some students may not reach their full potential and could even withdraw from everyday activities that give them the best opportunities for success.

Teacher Preparation for Gifted Students

Teacher preparation has made significant changes over the last 20 years. These programs were initially created to prepare teachers to work in one classroom with one set of students. Teacher preparation programs have expanded to include offerings in classroom management, curriculum, observation, and dealing with some special education populations (Feiman-Nesmer, 1989). However, the training in gifted education has been limited for teachers in general and varies from district to district. Some districts require as little as 6 hours of GT training per year (Houston ISD, 2017) while other districts only require that a teacher hold a master's degree in

that subject with no other specialized training. This amount of variance between teacher preparation programs demonstrates a lack of commitment to gifted education despite being a designation that falls under special education.

Even with teachers who are properly trained, the level of content and teaching strategies need to be advanced for students to achieve at their highest level. Coleman and Gallagher's work (1995) listed several points of consideration for those who teach advanced students. These points included the regular curriculum not challenging gifted students, the lack of collaboration between regular and gifted education teachers, and the uneven dispersal of experienced teachers working with gifted students. The use of advanced teaching techniques, specifically those that engage the students in real-world experiences, is essential to maximizing their potential learning. These issues can be remedied by using pull-out programs once or twice a week. Chval and Davis (2008) counter this idea, stating that while this is beneficial in the short term for the gifted student, the teaching style and quality of experience may not transfer over to the regular classroom, leaving the gifted student without a learning experience that is properly suited for their ability level.

The goal of any teacher working with gifted students should run parallel to the goals of all their students: To allow for continual growth on each student's level. To this end, Tirri (2008) notes that the most effective teachers are those who are student-oriented, focusing their efforts on planning for the individual needs of the students in their classroom. These teachers must have the goal of continual growth for each student based on their level of ability, not just a predetermined level of proficiency. The stereotype of "Intelligence is inherited and so it does not change, gifted children are just born that way" is something that Clark (1997) uses as an argument for both the current tenor of gifted education and the main idea to be discredited if gifted students are to

receive the proper education. When teachers are not trained to properly work with gifted students, it is the students who lose out on their maximum potential for growth.

The activities for gifted students are indeed more complex, but they should avoid just being “more” work. Kershen (2015) notes that students who are gifted need to be engaged in different approaches according to their strengths. Using the average level of achievement and average engagement strategies in a class for a gifted student will leave them feeling underwhelmed and looking for more of a challenge. This can apply to gifted students in both pull-out settings as well as in a regular classroom. Gallagher (1998) uses the example of examining the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Many students will work on understanding the fundamental concepts of the event. Gifted students, having already learned about the basics, should be engaged in higher-order thinking questions such as “What would happen if Lincoln survived the attempt?” or “Were there signs/signals of the assassination that Lincoln’s entourage could have picked up on to stop it?”. These open-ended questions are invaluable to engage gifted students in thinking beyond the basics of a topic.

Going further into open-ended questions, students with a higher level of cognition will not have their needs met with questions that require lower-level thinking. Armstrong (2010) notes that while the same topic can be covered, it can be presented in various forms of complexity to facilitate learning at different levels of ability. Engaging students in thought-provoking discussions will not only cultivate new ideas for them to learn from but will also help them generate a higher-order thinking process. When students are given a space to perform at their highest levels, they often find they outperform their expectations (VanTassel-Baska, 2003). The most effective experiences must have a sense of real student engagement.

The gifted teacher must not only create a curriculum that looks different from the regular curriculum but also create goals and products that reflect an advanced level of learning. Manning et al. (2010) relate advanced curriculum to the need for advanced materials and products that reflect their level of learning and production. Asking a gifted student to prove their full ability using the same assessment or product that general education students would use does not allow them to fully express their depth of understanding on a topic. VanTassel-Baska and Little (2003) reinforce this idea, commenting that teachers of gifted students must know standards both above and below the current level of their general education students to serve the needs of their gifted students. These considerations are possible for general education teachers if they are consistently trained and developed in gifted education methods.

Gifted students have trouble finding similar-aged peers, often looking to their teachers for guidance and a role model. These teachers must have characteristics that benefit the needs of gifted students including nurturing creativity, creating a safe yet challenging environment, and encouraging a sense of awareness and responsibility (Ramsey, 1990). These teachers must establish their credibility through consistent classroom performance, attention to detail, and the use of advanced teaching techniques that allow gifted students to express themselves. If teachers working with gifted students cannot establish a level of credibility and consistency of method with their students, they may end up becoming lethargic and tend toward underachievement (Caraisco, 2007).

While attention to academic achievement is essential to the gifted student's success, teachers who work with gifted students must also remind themselves of the fact that they are still young adults who are developing their self-concept. These students face distinct emotional and psychological challenges that other general education students may not face (Margolin, 1993).

Though gifted students are often noted for their high academic performance, many gifted students exhibit high levels of consideration, empathy, and leadership abilities (Hankey & Hulse, 2015). These attributes must be nurtured by teachers of the gifted to see them reach their full potential. Thus, gifted teachers must be trained and able to consider gifted students in their entirety and focus on the overall development of the child, not just the student.

Summary

Throughout the literature, several ideas emerged that fit the theoretical framework of this study. The need for increased teacher preparation, the differing social and academic needs of gifted students, and the current levels of attention these facets are receiving are critical needs for attention. This study is intended to examine those needs.

Methodology

This study centers on examining teacher attitudes toward gifted middle school students. Ideas addressed include teacher preparation for gifted students, beliefs about gifted versus general ability level students, and the social-emotional needs of students. The main question being addressed is: What are teachers' attitudes toward gifted middle school students?

This information gathered is based on a quantitative data tool known as the DATA Questionnaire (Szymanski et al., 2018) in Appendix A. It contains ten demographic questions, ranging from gender to years of experience and questions concerning previous involvement in a gifted program, and twenty-seven Likert-Scale questions. This form was sent out to middle school teachers whom I have received previous approval from their principals to conduct this research.

Research Design

The methodology used was quantitative with a survey design. This was a cross-sectional design involving the examination of three sub-questions relating to the research question. This was a useful tool in terms of its speed of distribution and easily accessible data that can be understood at both basic and advanced levels. The drawback of this survey was the exclusion of the three qualitative questions at the end of the original document.

Participants

The participants ($N = 62$; *female = 52, male = 10*) in this study are current middle school teachers in a southeastern state holding certification in their content. Their range of teaching experience varies (*min = 1 year, max = 36 years*) and increases the validity of the research looking for opinions to come from across the gamut of teaching careers thus far. All

efforts were made to ensure their responses remained anonymous. The schools chosen were all public schools serving students in the middle school years (6th - 8th Grade). This decision was made to determine the attitudes of only public schools. The attitudes of teachers in private schools may have altered the validity of the study. In schools that served students in K-8th Grade, principals were asked to only distribute the survey to those teachers who primarily worked with middle school students.

Instrument

The survey used was selected due to its coverage of topics that related to my research question involving teacher attitudes toward gifted students. The main research question was: “What are teachers’ attitudes toward gifted middle school students?” The sub-questions included:

- *What issues do advanced middle school students face academically?*
- *What are the unique social and emotional needs of advanced middle school students?*
- *How do teachers influence advanced students’ development?*

While it is not an even balance of nine survey questions per sub-question, there is a recognized fair amount of coverage in the survey questions for each sub-question. The survey is uses a Likert-based scoring system on a 1-4 scale, with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 4 being “Strongly Agree”.

The survey used for this study is an existing survey that was created to measure teacher attitudes toward GT. There is discussion that it provides psychometric evidence of reliability and validity for the instrument (Szymanski et al. 2018). There were five subscales used, each using a Likert Scale system of 1-4 with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 4 = Strongly Agree. Questions 4, 12, and 17 are reverse-keyed questions, all found in the Identification subscale.

The results from this study will add to the effectiveness of the DATA survey, making it able to be distributed as a survey tool for gifted and talented student research. This study uses the tool in question to examine the attitudes of teachers, meaning that while the original study using this tool was to ascertain its validity, the present study is meant to use the tool as an already proven valid tool and recognize its findings. While other studies may have been focused on gifted students in general, my study was meant for middle school students.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought and approval for the study granted (see Appendix C). The survey was distributed on February 15th and was closed on March 6th. The survey was distributed to 30 counties in central region of the state, including 56 middle schools. Out of the 56 schools, 11 replied to the survey with responses from 62 teachers. The survey was accompanied by the IRB approval form including a section confirming the informed consent of all participants. All results were collected anonymously electronically using a Google Forms version of the DATA Questionnaire (Szymanski et al. 2018; see Appendix A). At the close of data collection, the data analysis was conducted.

Data Analysis

The initial step was to import the data to an Excel worksheet with cleaning of the data to follow. Any missing data was imputed to the mean, a method of adjusting for missing values resulting from errors by the respondents (Jamshidian & Mata, 2007). Though the number of missing data points was minimal, retention of the data was possible. The reason for this missing data was determined to be skipping questions and forgetting to go back and complete the survey. None of the respondents surveyed had more than one missed question. The data analysis was performed by Jamovi version 2.4.14 (jamovi.org), an analytical software. Data analysis began

with cleaning the data. Data cleaning was conducted to examine missing data and invalid responses. After data cleaning, Likert scales were converted from text to numerical format for analysis. Questions for each subscale were identified and coded accordingly for grouping. For each participant, after reverse item coding on the three items on the Identification scale, each subscale score was calculated by summing the items responses in the subscale. Analysis of data began with examining demographic data. Descriptive statistics were then examined. After, for each subscale, Cronbach alpha was conducted to ascertain the scale's reliability score. Mann Whitney *U* test was run to ascertain group difference between those participants who responded that they regularly worked with GT students and those who responded that they do not. These results are presented in Appendix D.

Summary

The data collection method was designed to be efficient for those surveyed (27 questions) and informative enough to be a useful tool. All three sub-questions were able to receive coverage in the survey. The survey was easily converted to a Google Forms survey and distributed to over 50 counties. The results were derived 48 hours after the conclusion of the survey.

Results

The goal of this study is to determine the current trends and beliefs of middle school teachers when dealing with gifted students. This will be done through the context of three areas of focus: Academic Issues, Emotional Issues, and Teacher Preparation Systems that are different for gifted students.

The main question being addressed is: What are teachers' attitudes toward gifted middle school students? This will be achieved through analysis of the results of the survey from different viewpoints, including Descriptive and Inferential Statistics as well as an overview of the sub-categories that were used in determining teacher attitudes toward the three research sub-questions.

Descriptive Statistics

The responses of those surveyed appeared in Appendix D. This appendix includes statistics ranging from mean and standard deviation to effect size in the entire field of those who responded. Most of respondents taught middle school students exclusively (88.5%), with teachers from one county working with multiple grade levels due to the setup of their schools (K-8). The majority (77%) of those surveyed held a master's degree or higher. All teachers surveyed were part of the public school system. These results and more are in Table 1.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics (N = 62)

Demographic Data	<i>n</i>	Percentage of Sample
Female	52	83.9%
Male	10	16.1%
Bachelors Degree	14	22.6%
Masters Degree	40	64.5%
Specialist Degree	7	11.3%
Ph.D	1	1.6%
0 - 9 years teaching experience	25	40%
10 - 19 years teaching experience	17	27.4%
20+ years teaching experience	19	30.6%
Regularly work with gifted students	43	69.4%
Personal experience with a person identified as gifted	49	79%
School allows accelerating gifted students	49	79%

Inferential Statistics

The group descriptives of the five subscales are found in Table 2. These descriptives include those who regularly work with gifted learners (Group) as well as the average score, median, standard deviation, and standard error. The five subscales and reliability scores (expressed as a measure of the Cronbach alpha) are listed below in Table 2. The results shown in Table 2 indicate the highest level of reliability on Acceleration Concerns with the lowest reliability found in Curriculum and Policy Development. The Curriculum and Policy Development statistics show only one question with a standard deviation above 0.9, so the low score on the Cronbach alpha is unusual. Typically a Cronbach alpha score of 0.7 or above indicates a high level of reliability (OARC Stats, 2024). The phrasing of the questions in the

Identification subscale may have lowered the score and could be viewed as a possible reason for a lack of reliability as shown in Table 3.

Table 2.

Group Descriptives on subscales (N = 62)

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE	Cronbach α	Mann U (<i>p</i> -value)
Acceleration Concerns	No	19	2.34	2.25	0.487	0.112		312
	Yes	43	2.13	2.00	0.590	0.0900	.747	(.138)
Focus on Others	No	19	2.32	2.33	0.451	0.103		285
	Yes	41	2.07	2.00	0.590	0.0922	.706	(.097)
Grade Skipping	No	19	2.09	2.25	0.554	0.127		308
	Yes	43	2.43	2.25	0.580	0.0885	.612	(.121)
Identification	No	19	2.52	2.60	0.447	0.103		356
	Yes	43	2.82	3.00	0.573	0.0874	.570	(.423)
Curriculum and Policy	No	19	2.67	2.60	0.468	0.107		284
	Yes	43	2.92	3.00	0.476	0.0726	.550	(.055)

Table 3.

Item Reliability Scores for “Identification” questions.

Item Reliability Statistics

	Mean	SD	If item dropped Cronbach's α
(I-Rev) Children high poverty typically not gifted ^a	2.79	1.088	0.373
(I-Rev) Nontradition id gt cultural linguist diverse lwrs stnd ^a	2.21	0.704	0.587
(I-Rev) Eng second lang first prof in Eng before gifted classes ^a	2.81	0.972	0.408
(I) Stndts id as gifted may be underachievers everyday work	3.24	0.783	0.597
(I) Regardless race ethnicity gender or SES have equal % gif	2.60	0.931	0.562

^a reverse scaled item

This can be reinforced with two of the questions in that section having the highest standard deviation seen (1.088 and 0.972). However, the ways that questions are phrased does come into question when looking at the Grade Skipping section, posting a mid-level Cronbach alpha score with only four questions to derive data from, including a reverse-keyed question.

Table 2 provides the results from the Mann Whitney *U* test conducted on each subscale. Results indicate that although there exist mean differences on subscales between the group there is no statistical difference. Larger samples may provide detection of differences.

Sub Question One: What issues do advanced middle school students face academically?

This question was examined from multiple angles, ranging from curriculum for the gifted to overarching policy for gifted students within the school. This sub-question showed the second most solidarity in terms of overall mode of responses and overall lowest average standard deviation. The average standard deviation for questions involving Curriculum and Policy was 0.8048 with its mode at 3.0 and the lowest mean at 2.65. These are indicators that in general, teachers agreed with the statements relating to the need for gifted curriculum with no items reverse keyed. The highest of these five questions in terms of means was “Teachers should provide specific instruction for gifted students”, scoring a 3.18 mean and a mean of 3.0. The standard deviation on this question was 0.666, also indicative of the lowest score among the questions covering this sub-question.

The correlation matrix shows that a focus on curriculum and policy creation shows a positive correlation, while a negative correlation appears when compared to a focus on other students and acceleration concerns (Appendix B). This idea showed the least amount of variance with the number of years of experience in comparison to the rating given by teachers, as presented in Appendix D.

Sub Question Two: What are the unique social and emotional needs of advanced middle school students?

This question had two sub-categories listed in the DATA Questionnaire: Focus on Others and Grade Skipping as it pertains to the emotional well-being of the student. This section showed the widest margin of separation between those who do and do not work with gifted learners regularly in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The Focus on Others subscale probes the level of priority participants place on “promoting the good of the majority or providing resources to students who are below average. High scores on this subscale reflect negative attitudes toward special programming for gifted learners”. This subscale determines perspectives that all students need educational opportunities. Grade Skipping asks questions to determine understanding of and attitudes toward whole-grade acceleration such as “Can more students benefit from full grade level skipping” and “Most gifted students fare better with interventions than grade skipping”. The results for these questions can be found in Appendix D. High scores reflect positive attitudes toward grade skipping.

Figure 1.

“Focus on Others” questions separated by those who do and do not regularly work with gifted learners.

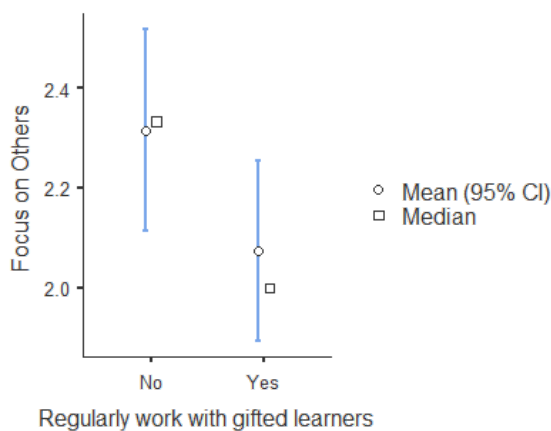
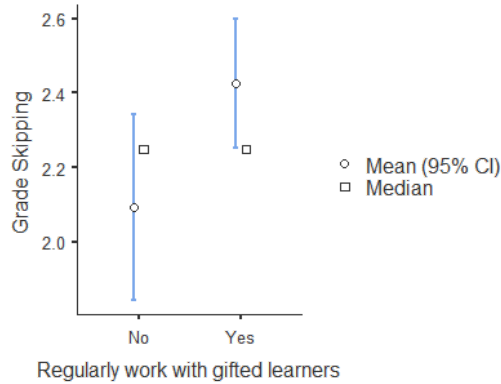


Figure 2.

“Grade Skipping” questions separated by those who do and do not regularly work with gifted learners.

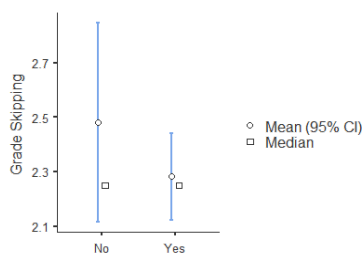


Both charts indicated a noted difference in the treatment of gifted students in terms of their social and emotional needs in a higher-level classroom as well as the need for special attention to their emotional needs. The difference in their mean in comparison to their difference in median has an inverse relationship, showing that those who regularly work with the gifted have a higher mean than the median while those who do not regularly work with the gifted have a lower mean than the median.

Another idea to consider is the variance in these two sections with those who were either identified as gifted and talented themselves or know an acquaintance who was identified. These results can be found in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

Figure 3.

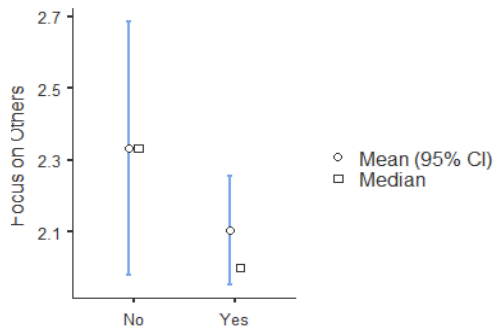
“Grade Skipping” questions separated into those who were or know of an identified GT student or not.



Close friends or family identified for the Gifted and Talented program.

Figure 4.

“Focus on Others” questions separated into those who were or know of an identified GT student or not.



Close friends or family identified for the Gifted and Talented program.

All five questions show the “no” answers having more variance, showing less consensus among those without experience of a Gifted and Talented student. This is demonstrated by the confidence scores in Figure 4, noted with the blue bar running along the y-axis. It is also noteworthy that all the data collected saw the mean be on level or higher than the median, indicating a right skew.

Sub Question Three: How do teachers influence advanced students’ development?

This question revealed the most volatility in terms of correlation with years of teaching experience, illustrated by the standard deviation scores in Table 1. The two question categories from the DATA Questionnaire involved Acceleration and Identification, both of which are primary duties of the classroom teacher and gifted faculty. One drawback in this section was the three “reverse-coded” questions in the Identification section. These questions are worded so that answers will typically be lower (Strongly Disagree) instead of higher (Strongly Agree). This can affect the results as they will be dependent on the response of other questions to create a combined score relating two subscales with a similar topic.

Despite the three reversed questions, there was still a moderately high level of variance on the question of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status when considering even levels of the gifted population. Acceleration Concerns asked teachers if they observed common problems such as missing grade-level material and interactions with above-grade level students. This was seen as a less volatile issue with most responses falling around a combined mean of 2.195. According to Szymanski et al. (2018), Acceleration Concerns subscale “specifically identify typical misconceptions regarding acceleration. High scores on this subscale reflect negative attitudes toward accelerating students through curriculum by any means” (p.42). Where this statistic really stood out was in the measurement of just those who regularly work with gifted students, shown in Table 4. The lower mean score shown by those who regularly work with gifted students indicates less reaction to typical concerns expressed by school officials, indicating a level of experience in accelerating gifted students.

Table 4.

Group Descriptives involving Acceleration between those who do and do not regularly work with the gifted.

Group Descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Acceleration Concerns	No	19	2.34	2.25	0.487	0.112
	Yes	43	2.13	2.00	0.590	0.0900

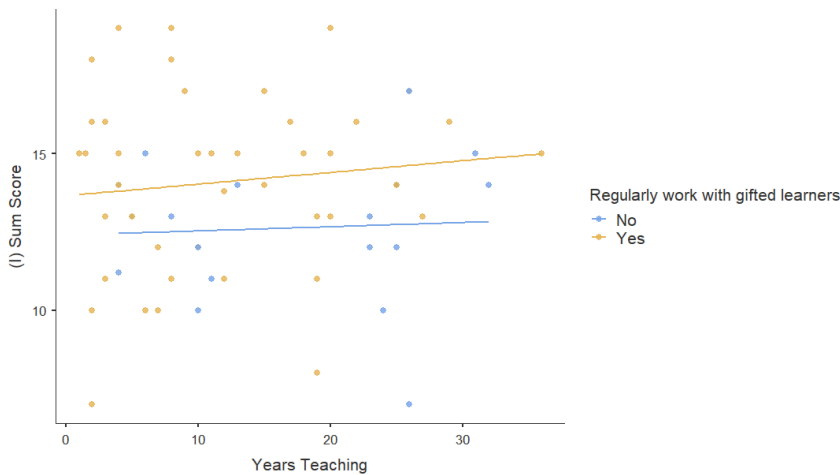
While the differences in experience with the gifted have been noted throughout the collected data, it is in these two where the data becomes less varied. Two charts stand out as noteworthy among the data. These can be found in Figure 5 and 6, respectively. They show a scatter plot with a double-line graph, comparing the sum of the scores between those who do and do not regularly work with the gifted. According to Szymanski et al. (2018), “The Identification

subscale reflects the extent to which teachers have positive attitudes regarding identifying diverse learners for gifted programming. This subscale is especially beneficial in light of recent developments in the field regarding twice-exceptional and gifted English language learners” (p. 42).

Figure 5 indicates not only the difference in the two values, but the different slopes of the two groups of teachers over time. This figure notes years of teaching experience combined with the sum score on Identification questions. Those who regularly work with gifted students start out with a higher level of understanding about the Identification process and continue to increase their understanding and agreement with others over the years. Those without experience working with gifted learners stay stagnant over time with only a few outliers above the trend line.

Figure 5.

Scatterplot with Double-Line Graph indicating Identification scores.

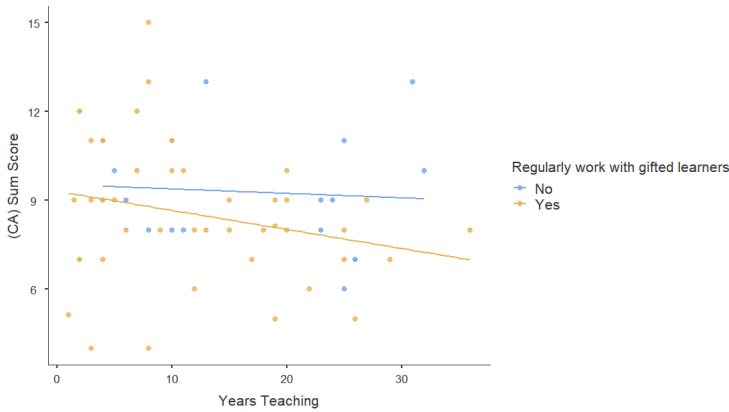


Following along with Figure 6, we see that a lower score is indicative of less concern about students’ acceleration issues. From the collected data, there are multiple outliers in those who do not work regularly with the gifted, but a majority of those falling under the trend line of

“regularly works with the gifted” even indicate lower or higher scores early on in their teaching careers.

Figure 6.

Scatterplot with Double-Line Graph indicating Acceleration scores.



Summary

These figures followed the prevailing trends and thoughts of educational professionals. The largest difference in the results resulted from the years of experience of those surveyed. In general, the results showed that a higher number of years in teaching resulted in higher scores for awareness of gifted student needs and curriculum development. These statistics will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Discussion

This study was designed to survey middle school teachers in a southeastern state of the United States to understand their perceptions and beliefs about gifted middle school students. The results indicate there are several points of interest regarding the level of understanding that teachers have for gifted middle school students, while some points remain unclear. This project may be used as an instrument to demonstrate current teacher attitudes toward gifted students in professional development for middle school teachers. This project centered on three questions to help understand teacher perceptions and the data collected gave insight and ideas on all three.

Question 1: What issues do advanced middle school students face academically?

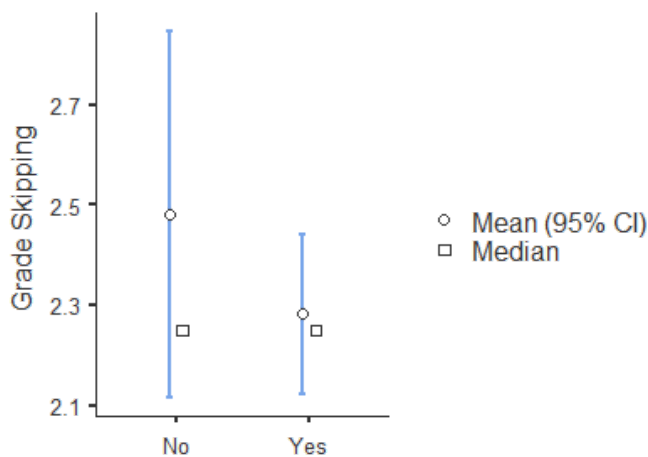
This first section discusses the academic needs and expectations that gifted middle school students face. This question addresses several issues, the primary issue being that of differentiation of instruction. Several questions from the beginning of the Questionnaire reference the need for appropriate levels of instruction for gifted students, including an overwhelming 85% of respondents agreeing with the idea that students need instruction appropriate for their level of intelligence, not just their age. This response mirrors the thoughts of George and Grebing (1995), focusing more on providing opportunities for students who are ready to perform at a higher level. This idea has parallels with another question from the data concerning whether mastery of basic skills was more important than getting ahead of other students academically. This question was more level in its response, with only 47% of teachers reporting that the basic needs of students were more important than students being able to advance at their appropriate pace. This convergence of ideas shows that while teachers feel gifted students should be challenged, around half of those teachers still consider the basic skills the foremost set of ideas that guide curriculum development. This may come from pressure from

individual schools or districts to drive up their test scores or “raise the floor” of achievement scores, but this dissonance in thinking is not allowing more gifted students to learn at an appropriate level.

There was a level of separation among respondents between grade skipping and acceleration in the elementary and middle school ranks. Approximately 68% of teachers surveyed stated that grade skipping was not an effective method of challenging students. This stands in contrast to Miravete’s work (2023) in which he determined that data shows that students who take part in grade skipping in the Elementary levels show positive results. This difference of opinion may come from those who do not have experience with gifted and talented family members, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7.

Grade Skipping Preferability between those who have experience with Gifted and Talented family members and those who do not have experience.



Close friends or family identified for the G/T program.

While the median values of Figure 7 are nearly identical, the mean values for those who do not have personal experience with gifted and talented education show a 0.2 score difference. Those without experience agree with the concerns expressed in the DATA questionnaire than those who have experience with gifted and talented education. This disparity may come from a lack of experience and success from grade skipping, instead of considering the number of students who did not benefit from grade skipping. Few students become maladapted both socially and intellectually for middle school, while those who thrive are considered the norm for grade skipping at the elementary level. This result confirms the idea proposed by Lloyd (1999) in which students in the elementary level can benefit from grade-level acceleration.

Acceleration for middle school students was seen more positively, showing a 56% majority of responses in favor of the practice. While this may be seen as a natural response to an increased availability of acceleration options at the middle school level, this may also reflect an idea that becomes more obvious as students mature. The idea of teaching students at their intellectual age versus their chronological age is one of the driving themes behind gifted and talented education. This idea becomes more prevalent in middle school as classes begin showing obvious separations between those who belong in more accelerated paces and those who do not. Those in classes meant to be at an accelerated pace should receive an adjusted curriculum that teaches not only the established standards of the curriculum for their age group but also exposes them to material that allows for their continual academic growth in specific content areas. Robins and Sanguras (2023) suggest curriculum compacting or telescoping as two of the best options to keep gifted students engaged. These are both feasible ideas that not only cover the necessary curriculum but to engage students in diverse methods and mediums of instruction and study. In the next section, the question of social and emotional needs will be discussed.

Question 2: What are the unique social and emotional needs of advanced middle school students?

This question looked into teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward the unique social and emotional needs of gifted middle school students. This research question produced the most consensus among respondents to the survey. More than 89% of respondents agreed that gifted and talented students had different social and emotional needs than regular students. One of those needs can be accentuated through another result of the Questionnaire in which 85% of respondents agreed that this same population of students needs interaction with similarly minded peers. Grouping students by ability is nothing new, but special attention must be paid to consider the needs of gifted students. The results indicate a positive correlation can be formed between consideration of gifted students' needs and their placement around other gifted students, making it imperative for all teachers to find ways of ensuring proper amounts of interactions between like-minded peers. The results of this section agree with VanTassel-Baska (2005) who believes that proper placement of gifted students in an accelerated setting is better for their continual growth.

Opponents to this idea may cite the troubles students have when accelerating students beyond their own chronologically aged peers. Casino-Garcia, Perez, and Insa (2019) looked at high-performing students and noted that while there is a moderate correlation between cognitive ability and emotional intelligence, these students have higher levels of adaptability and lower levels of stress and impulse control management. While their intelligence allows them to make connections and perceive social situations at a higher speed, it also allows them to think of potentially multiple negative ramifications of social situations going along with the disharmony hypothesis proposed by Preckel et al. (2015).

The results, however, show that teachers in the region see a different pattern emerging from their students. Approximately 65% of teachers surveyed stated that students did not face worries of isolation due to their gifted placement, while 72% of those surveyed stated that these students would not have problems with their classmates in an accelerated environment. The trends shown here would lean toward the acceptance of younger students who can communicate on the same intellectual level having a positive experience in their new settings. This result is backed up by Cummings and Taebel (1978) mentioning that students come to advanced classes to learn social and emotional skills as much as they do academic skills. The one drawback to this idea is that only 54% of respondents felt that students would not have a problem with their new gifted placement. This may be due to the question itself as problems can arise in many different forms, not necessarily a social or emotional issue.

Among the problems facing gifted students, one of the most prevalent in the classroom is underachieving. Approximately 84% of surveyed teachers stated that they noticed underachievement in the work of their gifted students. This may tie into a lack of planning on the part of teachers, a point that will be covered later. The more likely culprit is a lack of focus on the material being presented. Gifted students, for all their cognitive abilities, have the tendency to turn their focus on and off depending on the subject matter. Wolfgang and Snyderman (2021) note that some of the causes of gifted students' underachievement include a lack of interaction with like-minded peers, intellectual conversation, and the lack of rigor and challenge in the work presented to the students. As much as teachers expect from students in terms of their cognitive abilities, planning and preparation for peer-to-peer interaction of like-minded students has shown to be one of the best ways to increase student engagement and decrease underachievement. The next section will discuss teacher preparation for working with gifted students.

Question 3: How do teachers influence advanced students' development?

This section references teacher training and preparation before and during their career. The section that produced the most compelling results would be in teacher professional development and education on topics related to serving gifted and talented students. There was a negligible impact by those who did not have a family member identified as gifted and talented (13 respondents). Conversely, those who did not work with gifted students (19 respondents) made significant contributions to the data. The following beliefs are held by at least 50% of the teachers who did not regularly work with the gifted:

- They strongly agree that the public has a greater responsibility to help those who are below average and not focus on those who are above average.
- They disagree that programs for the gifted should be mandated.
- ESL students must be proficient in English before a gifted classroom can benefit them.
- They strongly disagree that teachers should receive professional development in working with gifted students.
- They strongly disagree that every state should have a policy to mandate acceleration.
- They strongly disagree that there is an equal distribution of gifted students despite race, gender, and socio-economic status.

These are some of the attitudes held by teachers in the region and are reflective of what has been observed throughout the study: There is a gap in understanding between teachers who do and do not work with gifted students.

This difference in attitude may be bridged with more focus on gifted and talented learners in the teacher preparation programs of universities. Many universities in the state have a requirement in their teacher education coursework for special or exceptional education. These

classes range from Diversity and Differentiation (Western Kentucky University, 2024) to Teaching Exceptional Learners in Regular Classrooms (University of Kentucky, 2024) and both offer education in working with gifted students. These courses focus primarily on working with students who have learning disabilities that lower their overall cognitive processes. Pendharkar (2023) noted that the population of special education students has doubled since the late 1970s. This change may be a result of testing methods and commonly recognized symptoms and criteria, allowing for increases of gifted students in the population as well. With the growing number of students in need of specialized attention to reach their maximum potential, an increase in focus on working with gifted and talented students should be implemented into teacher preparation programs across the state.

Conversely, 43 of the respondents were those who regularly work with gifted learners. Looking through their data revealed the following beliefs to be held by at least 50% of the respondents who regularly work with the gifted:

- They disagree that students are unable to compensate for material lost by grade skipping.
- They strongly agree that intellectual age is more important than chronological age when determining placement of a student in an educational setting.
- They disagree that using non-traditional methods to determine the giftedness of those who are culturally and linguistically diverse lowers the standard of the gifted program.
- They disagree that funding for the gifted takes away from other special education Programs.

These findings are reflective of experience with gifted learners, with the highest level of agreement coming on the topic of basing placement of a student on intellectual age over chronological age (93% of respondents with experience). This finding aligns with Manning et al.

(2010) when discussing the need for properly created materials for students at their intellectual age instead of just their current grade level.

A notable point made from those who work with gifted students regularly was the reaction to those from underrepresented populations. The respondents who regularly work with gifted learners disagreed with the notion that those who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be denied an opportunity to determine their level of intelligence in a manner that allows for their maximum expression. Dunne and Gazeley (2008) noted that students from underrepresented populations do not receive opportunities to receive gifted education services. However, our results show that the teachers in this area are working to reverse that trend.

Overall, the idea of increasing teacher training to increase teacher awareness is a viable option. Whether school districts would be willing or able to move in this direction is another matter, depending on each school's needs and long-term vision. This same type of research is important to be replicated as it will add to the body of available research literature for gifted education, proving a need for attention and funding. While these results showed multiple facets of thought from teachers in the region, there are still more ideas and potential routes of research that can be pursued.

This study was able to reach many teachers ($N = 62$) at the time it was conducted. However, there are factors such as time, the reach of study, and working only with middle school teachers that would have made this work a deeper examination of teacher perception at the middle school level. These and the possibilities for further research are discussed in the next section.

Limitations

This study was conducted over a three-week period via electronic survey administered to middle school teachers in central and southern Kentucky. The study was a quantitative study using Likert scale data to rate teachers' opinions.

If this study were to be replicated, a survey in more counties would be preferable. While the study reached out to 56 middle schools, surveying every middle school in the state would give a more accurate picture of the attitudes of middle school teachers in Kentucky. An increased chance for more coverage of the state would be preferable. This would allow a wider range of opinions and include the eastern part of the state to have their voice heard as part of the collected data. The original Questionnaire contained three qualitative questions that were deleted due to the relevancy and time scope of the project.

If this study were to be repeated, at least 1-3 questions asking for other opinions not mentioned should be included as well as an option for teachers to leave their email address as an option to be interviewed later with a set of pre-prepared questions that can further delve into topics that were mentioned by teachers in the qualitative section.

If the study were to be repeated, surveys should be distributed to private and charter schools. The difference in attitudes as well as difference in populations may produce results that are indicative of a difference of attention paid to gifted students in the private sector.

Implications for Future Research

This project investigated the attitudes and beliefs of middle school teachers towards gifted and talented educational practices. Avenues of exploration within this realm remain as viable areas to further the body of knowledge in this area of education.

After review and analysis of the research data, one of the possible modifications of this

study would be to disaggregate the research areas by teacher years of experience in the classroom. One of the possible modifications is to break this research up into several age groups. A study similar to this could be conducted in three phases: 0-9 years of teaching experience, 10-19 years of teaching experience, and 20+ years of teaching experience. This idea came from the repeated gaps in responses between those who regularly work with gifted students and those who do not, visually represented in Figures 5 and 6. Disaggregating the questionnaire into these three groups would provide a clearer vantage point for examining how experience plays a part in changing viewpoints and attitudes toward working with gifted students. Researchers could also search for clear delineations in the data in an attempt to uncover if there are noticeable shifts in teacher attitudes and perceptions across years of teaching experience and include interviews with qualitative data collection.

The sub-question with the most chance to be its own study would be the third research question asking about teacher preparation to work with gifted learners. This amount of focus on the DATA questionnaire shows this section could be a featured research project on its own. It can be made into a correlation study between the training and continuing education of teachers and their attitudes toward gifted students. This research could be used when school districts are looking at their professional development schedule and considering sending teachers for professional development in gifted education. It could also serve as a call to action for teacher preparation programs that need to increase their level of gifted education prep for their teacher candidates.

Examination of research literature and collected data in this study uncovered some points of interest in several areas of gifted education. The project itself was meant not only to contribute to the research base in support of gifted education but also as an examination of the current

attitudes and beliefs of those working with gifted students.

The collected works and data have shown that while the public may view grade skipping as a controversial issue, its benefits outweigh its drawbacks. The data in Appendix D shows that Grade Skipping is seen in a generally positive light with a mean of 2.73 out of 4. In the elementary levels, this has been shown to be one of the most effective forms of acceleration for those excelling in general intelligence to ensure their continual growth as students. Park et al. (2013) interviewed students who had experienced grade skipping during elementary school. Their overall experiences were positive, with more than 50% of those studied pursuing advanced degrees and high-salary positions.

While the possibility of maladjustment does exist for gifted and talented students entering a new grade as well as social hierarchy, the benefits of having students in a proper academic placement often outweigh the risks associated. Moreover, the cognitive abilities of students to process information at a high level are often applied to their emotional intelligence, allowing them to understand the social norms of a situation and adjust accordingly. Looking back at our theoretical framework, the proper placement of students can ensure that students are in the right academic and social setting for the highest potential of growth.

Gifted and talented students do exhibit differing social and emotional needs but they are also capable of overcoming these problems with the right scaffolds are set in place. At the middle school level, students in accelerated classes often exhibit one or more intensities toward the content itself or a particular behavior pattern. These can be seen as a negative by those who are unfamiliar with the behavior of gifted learners and may even lead to underachievement of those who struggle to adapt to the framework of the advanced classroom.

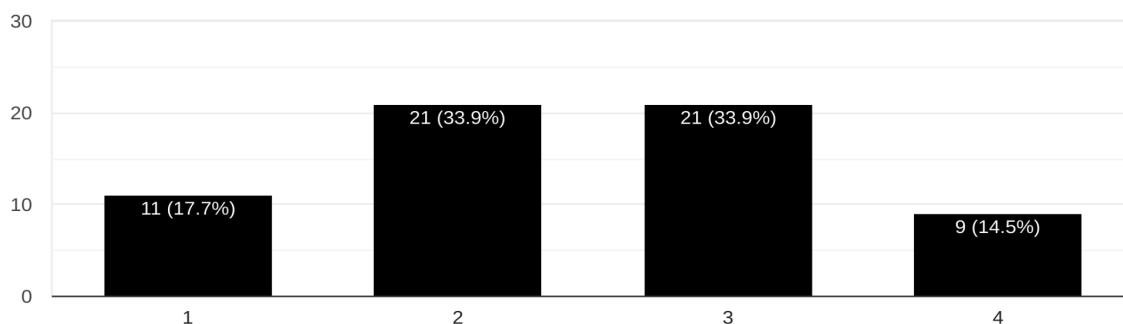
There is also the concern of those from underrepresented populations not having access

to gifted education resources. For some students, their need for interventions in one subject may not allow them the time to explore more deeply into topics in which they are strong. Figure 8 is reflective of teachers' current attitudes toward ensuring all students can achieve basic skills. This was part of the study in the DATA questionnaire and fell under the subcategory of Focus on Others.

Figure 8.

The mastery of basic skills is more critical than letting a few students get further and further ahead. (X - Axis = Likert Scale Scores, 1 - Strongly Disagree, 4 - Strongly Agree;

Y - Axis = # of respondents)



While this has been an issue for all students, Cross (2013) points out that many of the brightest students available are being shut out of gifted programs due to availability. This availability can come in the form of individual needs or a community in need of resources that is unwilling to support the endeavors of “a privileged few” students.

Many of the above-mentioned issues can be alleviated with the proper training of planning of teachers who work with gifted students. Preparation must include content creation that will challenge students of the highest caliber in each content area. The idea of adding more work instead of creating more advanced content does not serve the needs of gifted students on its

own. It is imperative that teachers with limited experience working with gifted students engage in high quality professional development to help them gain the requisite skills to serve this population. For teacher candidates, the growing need for gifted educators should compel university teacher preparation programs to include more coursework and learning opportunities that will give them a higher level of preparation when first entering public education.

Conclusion

This work is vital in considering the changing needs of students. In a post-COVID-19 world, educators have seen students regress in their social-emotional skills as well as what is expected of them. The loss of learning opportunities during the pandemic and even now with the continued rise of electronic mediums of content delivery have taken away opportunities for our highest-level learners to take part in authentic learning experiences that are meant for their ability level. The need for gifted learners coming into the real world to shape the future will not stop, so the pursuit of better methods of educating them should not stop either.

The current literature was reflective of the trends seen in the classroom today. Our results often ran concurrent to the current literature, but had some variance due to the trends of teachers in the region.

The methods chosen for this study favored expediency, operating with a quantitative method base of questioning. This study was conducted by sending out the survey via email to middle schools in the central and south central region of Kentucky.

The results of this study can be implemented in several ways. An increased focus on gifted education in teacher preparation programs has the chance to bridge the gap between the views of new and experienced teachers. While teachers do not have to think alike, it is vital for the teachers in a building to hold similar beliefs and attitudes toward the gifted students in their

room. This shared belief will act not only as a “gifted mission statement” but can guide planning and preparation of lessons and curriculum for gifted students.

The discussion of the results can be viewed as the state of Kentucky working to be ahead of current trends in gifted education. The attention paid to those who come from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds showed a higher emphasis than the original study conducted by Szymanski et al. (2018). There is still work to be done in illustrating the need for planning and preparation of teachers to work with gifted students as reported by the results.

Open discussions during faculty meetings about what is expected for GT students can also bring about change at a school or district level for the better. Having a clear definition of what is expected in terms of expected of teachers in each subject and grade level can not only ensure gifted students receive the proper curriculum to meet their needs but will also allow for a continual string of thought and curriculum building that can span the middle grades and prepare these students for the rigors of high school and beyond.

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APPENDIX A

DATA Questionnaire

Determining Attitudes Towards Ability

Teachers will complete items A – J by circling the appropriate response. They will enter in a numeric value for item B. For items 1 – 27, teachers will respond with a Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree. Items 28 – 30 asks teachers to rank order the goals of the program and allows them to chose from 1 -7 for each choice.

A. Gender		MALE	FEMALE	ND
B. Number of Years Teaching				
C. Highest degree completed		BA	MA	PhD
D. Does your school have a gifted or talent development program		YES	NO	
E. Does your school have a gifted and talented coordinator		YES	NO	
F. Type of school	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PAROCHIAL	CHARTER
G. Grades you teach		ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE	HIGH
H. Do you regularly work with gifted learners		YES	NO	
I. Does your school allow accelerating gifted students		YES	NO	
J. Have you or any close friends or family ever been identified for participating in gifted programming?		YES	NO	

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Gifted children have unique social-emotional needs that require attention.	1	2	3	4
2. Most gifted students will fare better with interventions other than academic acceleration.	1	2	3	4
3. Gifted education separates students into superior and "less-than" groups.	1	2	3	4
4. Children who come from high-poverty backgrounds are typically not as gifted as those from more affluent homes.	1	2	3	4
5. The mastery of basic skills is more critical than letting a few students get further and further ahead.	1	2	3	4
6. Teachers should provide specific instruction at the level necessary for their gifted students to develop their talent.	1	2	3	4
7. The public has a greater responsibility to help children who are below average in intelligence than to help children who are above average in intelligence.	1	2	3	4
8. Many more students could benefit from whole-grade acceleration (grade skipping).	1	2	3	4
9. A child who skips a grade cannot compensate for material that is missed by skipping.	1	2	3	4
10. Grade-skipping in elementary school is	1	2	3	4

an effective way to appropriately challenge gifted students.

11. When planning interventions for gifted students, it is more important to consider the appropriate level of academic challenge rather than chronological age.

1	2	3	4
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12. Using non-traditional means to identify gifted students who are culturally and linguistically diverse lowers the standards of the gifted program.

1	2	3	4
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13. Gifted children are as likely to drop out of school as other children.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

14. Gifted students who skip a grade often have problems because of their new school placement.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

15. Programs for gifted learners should be mandated.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

16. Acceleration in middle school is an effective way to appropriately challenge gifted students.

1	2	3	4
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17. A student for whom English is a second language must first be proficient in English before he/she could benefit from academic classes for gifted students.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

18. Gifted children need intellectual interaction with individuals who demonstrate similar intellectual ability and interest.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

19. Students who are accelerated have

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

problems with their new classmates.

20. Funding for gifted education reduces the amount of resources available for students who need accommodations for other special needs.	1	2	3	4
21. Students identified as gifted may also be underachievers in their everyday work.	1	2	3	4
22. All teachers should receive professional development annually in gifted education.	1	2	3	4
23. Most students are not gifted, so gifted students should not be the focus of the teacher's attention.	1	2	3	4
24. Every state should have a policy that permits acceleration.	1	2	3	4
25. Acceleration results in gifted children's isolation from other children.	1	2	3	4
26. All people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status, have equal percentages of gifted learners.	1	2	3	4
27. Grouping gifted children together is unfair even if shown to be effective.	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX B

Correlation Matrix

	Focus on Others	Grade Skipping	Acceleration Concerns	Identificatio n	Curriculum and Policy
Focus on Others	—				
Grade Skipping	-0.01 4	—			
Acceleratio n Concerns	0.339 **	-0.46 9 ***	—		
Identificatio n	-0.29 4 *	-0.12 6	-0.113	—	
Curriculum and Policy	-0.31 4 *	0.362 **	-0.268 *	0.119	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

APPENDIX C

Implied Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT



Project Title: Teacher Perceptions of Gifted Middle School Students

Investigator: Tom Wimsatt, WKU Gifted and Talented Education, wimsatm@topper.wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you consent to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

In this document, I will explain in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may email any questions you have to help you understand the project.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please click the button below to give your consent and continue to the survey. Please print this page if you would like to keep a copy of this form.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** This study will focus on teacher perceptions of gifted middle school students. The purpose of the study is to examine current trends and beliefs in middle school teachers who work with gifted students in the region. The main focus will be guided by three research questions:

- What issues do advanced middle school students face academically?
- What are the unique social and emotional needs of advanced middle school students?
- How do teachers influence advanced students' development?

2. **Explanation of Procedures:** The DATA Questionnaire will be administered to middle school teachers to better understand their thoughts and attitudes on gifted students. Participants (middle school teachers) will take a survey of 27 questions that are answered on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort associated with this protocol.

4. **Benefits:** The anticipated benefits to educational stakeholders are the increased attention to gifted education and the contribution to the body of knowledge regarding current trends and beliefs of educators of the gifted.

5. **Confidentiality:** All data will be collected and analyzed in the classroom on the computer of the researcher along at the end of each school day. Any paper copies of data will then be stored in a locked file cabinet in the faculty sponsor's office on WKU's main campus for three calendar years. Publications related to this study will not include identifiable references to subjects' identities.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Your continued cooperation with the following research implies your consent.

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360

APPENDIX D

Descriptive Statistics for Questions by Scale (N = 62)

	Work with gifted learners	<i>N</i>	<i>SD (%)</i>	<i>D (%)</i>	<i>A (%)</i>	<i>SA (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	Mann-W hitney <i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect Size
(CA) Skipping grade cannot compensate for missed materials	No	19	3.2	17.7	38.7	1.6	2.26	2	0.733	1	4			
	Yes	43	14.5	38.7	8.1	1.6	2.05	2	0.722	1	4	347	0.299	0.1506
(CA) Gifted who skip grade have problems new school	No	19	0.0	14.5	12.9	3.2	2.63	3	0.684	2	4			
	Yes	43	9.7	32.3	21.0	6.5	2.35	2	0.842	1	4	331	0.204	0.1897
(CA) Students accelerated have problems	No	19	3.2	21.0	6.5	0.0	2.11	2	0.567	1	3			
												386	0.708	0.0551

new classmate s.	Yes	43	16.1	35.5	16.1	1.6	2.05	2	0.754	1	4			
(CA) Accelerat ion results	No	19	3.2	12.9	14.5	0.0	2.37	2	0.684	1	3			
gifted isolation from other children.	Yes	43	17.7	30.6	19.4	1.6	2.07	2	0.799	1	4	318	0.141	0.2215
(FO) Gifted ed separates students into superior groups	No	19	4.8	14.5	8.1	3.2	2.32	2	0.885	1	4			
	Yes	43	22.6	24.2	17.7	4.8	2.07	2	0.936	1	4	347	0.327	0.1506
(FO) Mastery basic skills	No	19	3.2	6.5	16.1	4.8	2.74	3	0.872	1	4			
more crit than few getting ahead.	Yes	43	14.5	27.4	17.7	9.7	2.33	2	0.969	1	4	303	0.094	0.2583

(FO) Public has responsibility to help children below avg	No	19	6.6	13.1	4.9	6.6	2.37	2	1.065	1	4	339	0.334	0.1504
	Yes	43	24.6	19.7	19.7	4.9	2.07	2	0.973	1	4			
(FO) Funding gifted reduces sources for accomd spec needs	No	19	4.9	19.7	4.9	1.6	2.11	2	0.737	1	4	392	0.906	0.0188
	Yes	43	18.0	31.1	14.8	4.9	2.10	2	0.878	1	4			
(FO) Most stdnts not gifted so should not be focus tchrs atten	No	19	3.2	21.0	4.8	1.6	2.16	2	0.688	1	4	356	0.374	0.1297
	Yes	43	19.4	33.9	16.1	0.0	1.95	2	0.722	1	3			

(FO) Grouping gifted children is unfair even if effective.	No	19	4.8	16.1	8.1	1.6	2.21	2	0.787	1	4			
												299	0.07	0.2693
	Yes	43	25.8	32.3	8.1	3.2	1.84	2	0.814	1	4			
(GS-Rev) Most gifted students fare better with interventions	No	19	1.6	4.8	21.0	3.2	2.84	3	0.688	1	4			
	Yes	43	9.7	17.7	29.0	12.9	2.65	3	0.948	1	4	364	0.463	0.1102
(GS) More students could benefit from whole-grade acceleration	No	19	12.9	12.9	4.8	0.0	1.74	2	0.733	1	3			
	Yes	43	17.7	27.4	14.5	9.7	2.23	2	0.996	1	4	298	0.075	0.2717
(GS) Grade skip elements	No	19	9.7	14.5	4.8	1.6	1.95	2	0.848	1	4			
												285	0.035	0.3035

effective way to challenge gifted	Yes	43	3.2	41.9	19.4	4.8	2.37	2	0.691	1	4			
(GS) Accel middle school	No	19	4.8	9.7	11.3	4.8	2.53	3	0.964	1	4			
effective way to challenge gifted	Yes	43	3.2	24.2	29.0	12.9	2.74	3	0.819	1	4	359	0.428	0.1212
(I-Rev) Children high poverty typically not gifted	No	19	6.5	8.1	9.7	6.5	2.53	3	1.073	1	4			
(I-Rev) Nontraditional id gt cultural linguist diverse lwr's stnd	Yes	43	29.0	14.5	17.7	8.1	2.07	2	1.078	1	4	312	0.125	0.2375
(I-Rev) Eng second lang first	No	19	12.9	14.5	3.2	0.0	1.68	2	0.671	1	3			
	Yes	43	25.8	30.6	12.9	0.0	1.81	2	0.732	1	3	372	0.545	0.0906
	No	19	8.1	11.3	4.8	6.5	2.32	2	1.108	1	4			
												379	0.635	0.0734

prof in Eng before gifted classes	Yes	43	17.7	30.6	14.5	6.5	2.14	2	0.915	1	4			
(I) Stndts id as gifted	No	19	1.6	4.8	14.5	9.7	3.05	3	0.848	1	4			
may be underachivers everyday work	Yes	43	1.6	6.5	29.0	32.3	3.33	3	0.747	1	4	334	0.215	0.1836
(I) Regardless race ethnicity gender or SES have equal % gif	No	19	8.1	12.9	8.1	1.6	2.11	2	0.875	1	4			
												241	0.007	0.41
	Yes	43	3.2	24.2	24.2	17.7	2.81	3	0.88	1	4			
(CP) Teachers should provide specific instructio		19												
	No		0.0	6.5	11.3	12.9	3.21	3	0.787	2	4	385	0.697	0.0575

have policy that permits acceleration	Yes	43							2.7	3	0.708	1	4			
			3.2	21.0	38.7	6.5										
Gifted children have unique social emotional needs	No	19	0.0	6.5	16.1	8.1	3.05	3	0.705	2	4					
	Yes	43	1.6	3.2	29.0	35.5	3.42	4	0.698	1	4	288	0.044	0.295		
Gifted are as likely to dropout as other children	No	19	8.1	11.3	3.2	8.1	2.37	2	1.165	1	4					
	Yes	43	11.3	19.4	27.4	11.3	2.56	3	0.959	1	4	361	0.456	0.1163		
Gifted need intellect interact w/individuals similar	No	19	1.6	6.5	17.7	4.8	2.84	3	0.765	1	4					
	Yes	43	0.0	6.5	40.3	22.6	3.23	3	0.611	2	4	298	0.056	0.2717		

Note: SD = Strongly, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

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Additional Committee Members: Dr. Lester Archer Dr. Martha Day

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