A Qualitative Investigation of Principals' Experiences with and Interventions
Provided to Gifted Students who have Dropped out or are at Risk of Dropping Out

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated principals' experiences with gifted students who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school. The research was guided by the following research questions, 1.) What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts? 2.) What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts? and 3.) What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

The researcher sought to answer these questions by administering a qualitative survey to high schools' principals in southeastern Virginia. The survey was administered via Qualtrics utilizing the Qualitative Survey Questionnaire designed by the researcher. Responses were coded by the researcher and organized by themes. The information derived from this study may assist administrators in identifying the efforts of building leaders to support gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out and how to support gifted students before they reach the point of dropping out.

The findings of the study indicate that principals have varying experiences with gifted students who have dropped out and gifted students at risk of dropping out. Principals identified academic and non-academic interventions. Principals identified building-level, school division-level, and community-based staff as providing interventions to those students.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine principals' experiences with, and the interventions and supports they provided to gifted students who have either dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out by answering the following research questions: 1.) What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts? 2.) What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts? and 3.) What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

To answer these questions, 43 high school principals in southeastern Virginia school divisions were invited to respond to an online survey. The survey was designed by the researcher and consisted of 4 open-ended questions. A total of 17 principals responded to the survey.

The findings of the study indicate that principals have varying experiences with gifted students who have dropped out and gifted students at risk of dropping out. Principals identified academic and non-academic interventions. Principals identified building-level, school division-level, and community-based staff as providing interventions to those students.

DEDICATIONS

To my ancestors, who gave life and limb so that someday I would have the opportunity to read and write.

To my mother, who put her education on hold to bring me into this world and instilled in me the importance of both education and family.

To my father, who taught me that love means having to make hard decisions and nothing in life is worth losing your soul.

To my children, who are the source of my motivation to make this world a better place.

To my husband, who obeyed the call to help mend my broken pieces and encouraged me to become my whole self.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

According to Matthews (2009) and Renzulli and Park (2002), the exact number of gifted dropouts is unknown. Due to the varying definitions of gifted and dropout, it is estimated that as few as 2% of gifted students and as many as 20% of gifted students dropout annually depending on how "gifted dropout" is defined (Matthews, 2009; Renzulli & Park, 2002). Data regarding dropout rates are often collected and reported by subgroups. Subgroups can be based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and academic abilities. Students who are culturally and linguistically diverse as well those from lower socioeconomic homes are at a greater risk of dropping out. Students who are homeless and or in foster care are also regarded as a subgroup. With the available research on student dropouts, one subgroup that is often overlooked and understudied in the graduation and dropout conversation are gifted students (Camper et al., 2019; Matthews, 2009).

Overview of the Study

This study sought to examine principals' experiences with, and the interventions provided to, gifted students who have either dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out. This was done by surveying high school principals to determine their experiences with gifted students who have either dropped out or are at risk of dropping out and providing supports to those students.

Historical Perspective

According to Irvine (1987), studies on high school dropouts go back at least as far as 1958, citing a study conducted in Iowa. In 1962, data from that initial study were utilized "to describe differences between talented dropouts and similar students remaining in school" (Irvine 1987, p. 79). The earliest projections were that 18% of dropouts were gifted students, but that figure was later argued to be a misinterpretation of the figure reported in the 1972 Marland Report compiled by educational commissioner S. P. Marland. The Marland (1972) report was the first national report on gifted education (Irvine, 1987; Matthews, 2009; Renzulli & Park, 2000). As stated by Matthews (2009),

> The oft-misquoted 17.6% figure actually refers to the percentage of gifted students who dropped out in one statewide study, not to the percentage of all dropouts who are gifted. (p. 531)

Statement of the Problem

Gifted students are leaving school early without earning a high school diploma. As with any student dropout, there are economic ramifications. Webber (2018) cited that dropouts are at an increased risk for unemployment, substance abuse, and dependence on government assistance that costs society in terms of services provided and lost tax revenue. Latif et al. (2015) added that 'the progress of a nation is highly dependent on the education of their citizens' (p. 1512). When students drop out of school, future economic growth is threatened.

The problem is that while Ritchotte et al. (2014) regarded gifted underachievement as a 'frustrating loss of potential for society' (p. 183), they also noted that this group is not typically perceived as being "at-risk" by educators. Rather they are perceived as being 'lazy, unmotivated or having behavior problems' (Seeley, 2004, p. 1). By nature of their cognitive ability, gifted students are not expected to underachieve (Alexopoulou et al., 2019). According to Landis and Reschly (2013), "[d]ropout among those identified as gifted is a puzzling irony for educators" (p. 221); other researchers describe the phenomenon as paradoxical (Bennett-Rappell & Northcote, 2016). It is presumed that 'gifted kids will make it on their own' (Ritchotte et al., 2014). Despite the differing thoughts on the matter, gifted students are indeed dropping out. There is a sufficient availability of literature documenting the reasons why gifted students are dropping out; however, there is a gap in the literature regarding dropout prevention and intervention with gifted students. To guide school leaders in addressing this issue, research is needed.

Significance of the Study

Across the nation and around the globe, students are dropping out of school. "High school dropout is one of the most pressing educational and economic issues in the United States" (Landis & Reschly, 2013, p. 220). High school graduation rates have been long held as an indicator of a school or school division's quality. In Virginia, dropout rates have been included in the criteria for annual accreditation—challenging principals to decrease their dropout rates (VDOE, 2018). The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) collects and reports annually dropout rates by school and school division. When dropout statistics are reported, the statistics include gifted dropouts; however, the gifted student data are not disaggregated as a subgroup. According to Matthews (2009), the research in this area is in the beginning stages. Zabloski and Milacci (2012) noted that since the early inquiries into gifted education of the 1970s this field of research has been slow-growing and averaged intervals of approximately seven to 10 years.

Studies on gifted dropouts have become more frequent in the last decade but have remained primarily quantitative in nature with very few empirical studies (Matthews, 2009; Zabloski, 2010). This current study is significant in adding to the body of literature on gifted dropouts, by providing additional qualitative research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

Within the context of mounting demands for accountability, educators and other school professionals are challenged with meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student body to stem the loss of students to dropout (Webber, 2018).

Included in the diverse student body are gifted students who are also at risk of dropping out.

Justification of the Study

This study examined a topic in student achievement that is often overlooked and rarely talked about – gifted dropouts (Landis & Reschly, 2013). The information derived from this study may assist administrators in identifying the efforts of building leaders to support gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out and how to support gifted students before they reach the point of dropping out. Ritchotte and Graefe (2017) sought to understand the experience of gifted individuals who drop out of school to uncover *if* and how their needs can be addressed before the cumulative process begins (p. 275). Landis and Reschly (2013) suggest that the gifted students' academic aptitude support a higher potential of success when intervening with this group.

Conceptual Framework

Although gifted students have the cognitive ability to be successful in school, all gifted students are not graduating. Many are choosing to leave school early (Ritchotte & Graefe, 2017). According to Hansen and Toso (2007) reasons for dropping out range from personal and family problems to social and school-related problems.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, human needs are classified into a hierarchical system with the most essential or basic needs as the base for all other needs (Burleson & Thoron, 2017). This hierarchy is depicted in Figure 1. Humans must successfully achieve one level before they can move on to the next. The lowest level in the hierarchy is

physiological needs and the highest level in the hierarchy is self-actualization. When this hierarchy of needs is applied to the school setting, all students must have their needs met at the lower levels before they can demonstrate achievement at the highest level (i.e., graduation). When those needs are not met students will not be successful and may drop out of school (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
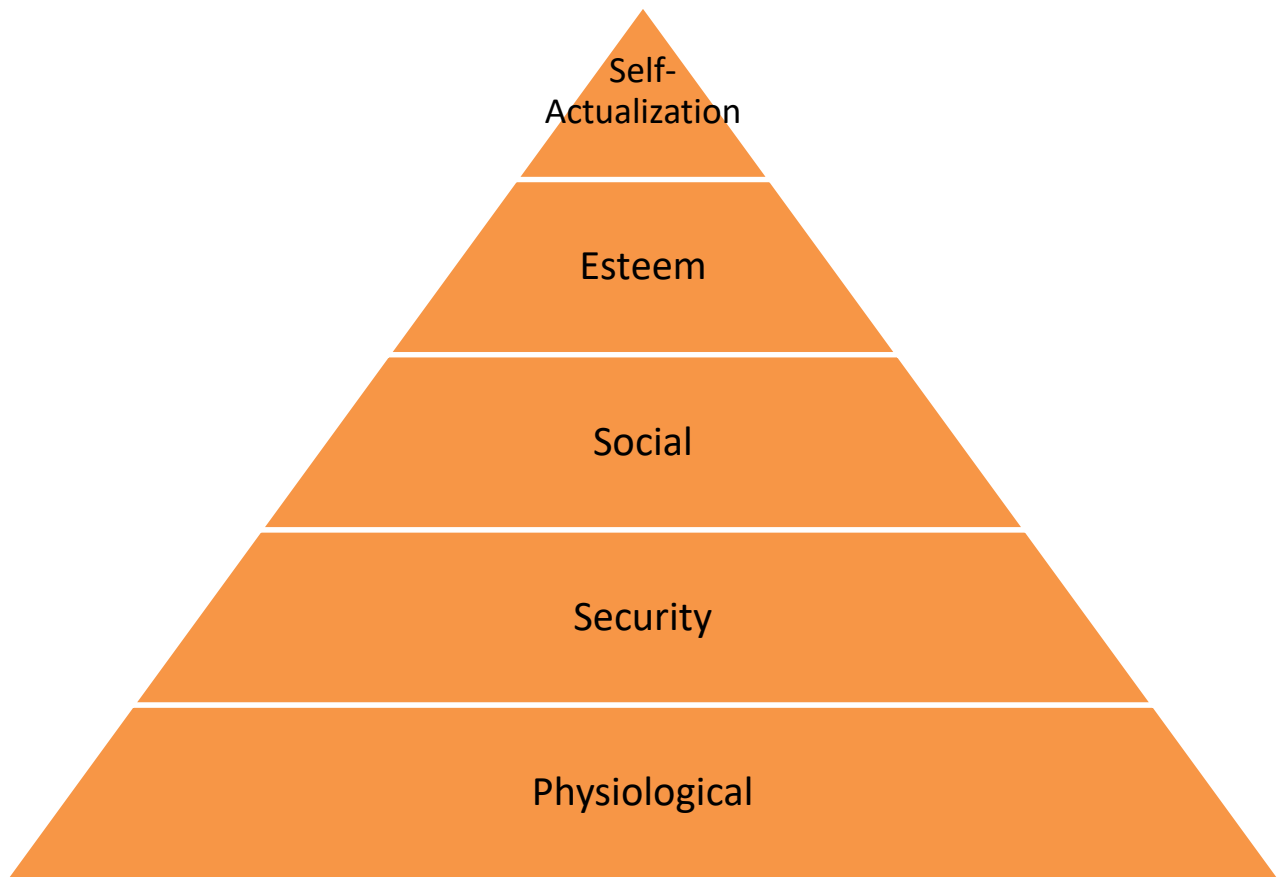
Figure 2

Conceptual Framework
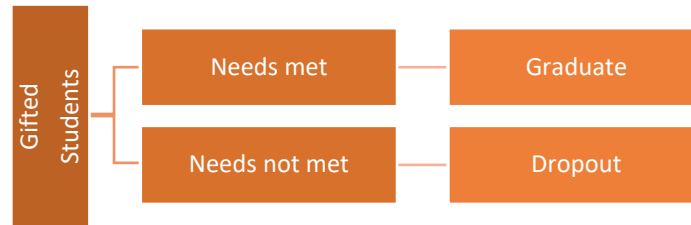
Research Questions/Guiding Questions

In order to ensure that the focus of this study adequately addresses the identified research problem, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?
2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?
3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

Key Terms

Throughout the literature, the terms *gifted* and *dropout* have varying meanings. These variations have made it challenging to not only draw a conclusive definition, but to accurately generalize research findings across the population at large.

For clarity and continuity, key terms associated with and guiding this study have been defined. According to the VDOE (2012),

> *Gifted students* mean those students in public elementary, middle, and secondary schools beginning with kindergarten through twelfth grade who demonstrate high levels of accomplishment or who show the potential for higher levels of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment. (p. 4)

For the purposes of this study, gifted students will be those students identified by their respective school divisions with the assumption that they meet the definition provided by the VDOE.

Virginia has adopted the definition established by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); a dropout is an individual who:

- Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year and was not enrolled on October 1 of the current school year, or

- Was not enrolled on October 1 of the previous school year although expected to be in membership; and

- Has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or school division-approved educational program; and

- Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:

    o Transfer to another public school division, private school, or state- or school division-approved education program;

    o Temporary school-recognized absence due to suspension or illness;

    o Death. (VDOE, 2008; p.2)

For the purpose of this study, dropout will be defined as those students who left school without earning a high school diploma even if they went on to complete a General Education Development (GED) certificate or high school diploma through another means of education.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are those factors in which the researcher has no control. According to Roberts (2010) these factors can include, but are not limited to sample size, methodology constraints, length of the study, and response rate. The following limitations applied to this study. The researcher had no control over the

1. Approval to implement the study in the 15 Region 2 school divisions in Virginia.
2. Participant response rate.
3. Principals' definition of gifted; some were not sure if they had experiences with gifted dropouts or felt they did not have any gifted dropouts.
4. Gifted dropout data being readily available at the state or school division level.

Delimitations are those factors that are controlled by the researcher. Roberts (2010) identified some of these factors as the time, location, sample, and selection criteria of the study. The following delimitations applied to this study:

1. This study focused on the experience of high school principals.
2. This study was focused on the southeastern region of Virginia.

Organization of the Study

   Chapter 1 introduces the problem, provided an overview of the study, including the significance and purpose of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, and definitions. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the history of gifted education, identification of gifted students, characteristics of gifted students, the prevalence of gifted underachievement and dropouts, and the roles of school staff in dropout prevention. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 presents the data obtained from the study as well as detail the analysis of the data. Lastly, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and presents implications for educational leadership as well as recommendations for further study and exploration.

<center>**CHAPTER TWO**</center>
<center>**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**</center>

Background

According to Jolly (2005), the concept of giftedness has been around since the 19th century. Pioneers in the field of gifted education, namely Stedman, Hollingworth, Terman, and Whipple, date back to the early 1900s. Stedman created the first classroom for gifted students; an *opportunity room* where their individual potential could be developed to its fullest capacity (Jolly, 2005; p. 38). Admission to or inclusion in the opportunity room was based on IQ (p. 39). Hollingworth authored the first textbook on gifted education and further developed the definition of gifted. Unlike Stedman, Hollingworth often included definitions of gifted in her published works. Hollingworth went on to offer characteristics and behavior traits of gifted children. Children with an IQ of 130 or above were deemed gifted by her standards. One of the students in the opportunity room with an IQ of 187 was regarded as prodigious. Jolly (2005) also noted that when Hollingworth authored her 1942 book entitled *Children Above 180 IQ*, no definition of genius existed at that time (p. 39).

Terman, regarded as the 'father of gifted education' revised the Binet-Simon test and published it as the Stanford-Binet IQ test (Jolly, 2005; p. 40). He is also known for his longitudinal study, the Genetic Studies of Genius. This study along with much of his work has drawn criticism for having an overemphasis on IQ scores, placing one's intellect only second to one's morals (Jolly, 2005; Warne, 2018). Whipple was a proponent for special classrooms for gifted students and the development of specialized instruction. He was a firm believer in the use of IQ to determine giftedness and worked to identify additional tests for 'selecting gifted children for special classes' (Jolly, 2005; p. 41). Whipple further believed that gifted children could benefit from instruction designed to match their abilities (Jolly, 2006).

Attention to gifted education increased in the United States around the mid-to-late 1950s including the founding of the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) in 1954 by Issacs (NAGC, n.d.). After the Russian launch of Sputnik, the National Defense Education Act was passed in 1958. The focus was on mathematics and science education in order to bring the United States to the competitive level of its foreign counterparts (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). In 1963 and 1965, California and Illinois, respectively, developed state programs for gifted education. Teacher training and professional development throughout the state was the focus as

they sought to create services and programs for gifted students in individual school divisions with the state's backing and support (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). The 1970s brought the first definition of gifted in the Marland Report (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012) and the Office of Gifted and Talented in the U.S. Department of Education. According to McClain and Pfeiffer (2012),

> The definition established by the advisory panel reads: Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society (p. 2).

The Marland Report was compiled by educational commissioner S. P. Marland and was the first national report on gifted education (Marland, 1972). It spurred further work and development in the area of gifted education, including state plans that later became policy (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). In 1975, Public Law 94-142 was passed to provide an education to all students with special needs but did not include gifted students. Between the mid-1970s and early 1980s, more states developed their plans for gifted education. Whereas the California and Illinois plans were more discretionary, the later states emphasized mandated programs and services that went beyond identification (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). The 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report once again brought light to gifted education and the United States failure to serve gifted students adequately. This report was compiled by the National Committee on Excellence in Education.

> Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education on August 26, 1981, directing it to examine the quality of education in the United States and to make a report to the Nation and to him within 18 months of its first meeting. He had a concern about the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system. (A Nation at Risk, 1983)

The Commission found that:

> [o]ver half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school. Despite widespread publicity about an overpopulation of teachers, severe shortages of certain kinds of teachers exist: in the fields of mathematics, science, and foreign languages; and among specialists in education for gifted and talented, language minority, and handicapped students. (A Nation at Risk, 1983)

The Jacob K. Javits Gifted Student Education Act was passed in 1988 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The passage of this act provided funding for the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and several smaller centers (VanTassell-Baska, 2018). Through a competitive grant process, the Javits Act provides funding for research and demonstration projects but does not provide for funding for local gifted education programs (Brown & Wishney, 2017). "One of the key priorities of Javits funding is to reduce the achievement gap for students at the highest academic levels" (Brown & Wishney, 2017, p. 23). The Javits Act was reauthorized in 2001 as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and most recently in 2015 under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (NAGC, n.d.). The Every Student Succeeds Act calls for the accountability for advanced learner outcomes and acknowledges the need to provide for the gifted in its language; however, implementation remains undefined and open for interpretation (VanTassel-Baska, 2018).

Search Process

The literature under review was obtained through searching Education Research Information Center (ERIC), Mendeley, Academia.com, and the Virginia Tech University Library. The initial ERIC search parameters were set for "gifted dropouts" with no additional filters. This was done to gain a full scope of the research available. This search yielded 243 results. Of the 243 articles available, 84 were published since 2000; 45 since, 2012; 22 since 2017; and 1 in 2020. When the parameters for "full-text Available" through ERIC and "peer reviewed" were added as filters, the number of articles was reduced to 49. Additional searches were conducted for "dropout prevention" and "gifted underachievement". Articles obtained through Mendeley and Academia.com were suggested by the site based on articles uploaded to the user's library and previous articles reviewed. Articles not available in full-text copies, for download, or at no-cost were requested through the University Library System. Items selected for review were chosen by most recent publication date and those commonly cited in related studies. In total, 96 articles, briefs, and other documents were downloaded for review. This literature review explored the available literature on the topic of giftedness. Specific areas of giftedness will include definition, identification of gifted learners, and unique characteristics of gifted learners. Additionally, the literature will explore underachievement and dropout of gifted students.

Definition of Gifted

At its origins, the terms "gifted" and "talented" were very narrowly defined and only considered achievement or intelligence. Early definitions did not give considerations to creative or vocational gifts (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Throughout the evolution of gifted education through legislation, the definition of gifted has broadened. One of the first federal definitions was published in the Education Amendments of 1969 with updates in 1972 and 1978 as a result of the Marland Report (1972). A more contemporary definition of gifted was published in 1993 by the U.S. Department of Education and has been revised to its most recent version appearing in the ESSA of 2015. The act states:

> Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015)

While many states have developed their own definitions of gifted, they vary in the terminology used to classify gifted students to include "gifted and talented," "high-ability," and "exceptional". Only two states, Massachusetts and South Dakota, do not have definitions for "gifted" (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012).

The early scholars in gifted education formed their definitions around academic prowess and cognitive proficiency (Jolly, 2005). They described gifted as being genius and really bright. This later evolved to include terms such as creative and inquisitive. Delisle (1986) noted that there is "wide variance in definitions of the intellectually gifted populations" (p. 558). Current definitions include not just academic areas, but areas of the arts as well as leadership. According to Scott (2012), the current definition of gifted does not include "the social-emotional and psychological needs of gifted students" and is missing the consideration of "culturally influenced areas of giftedness" (p. 24).

Identification of Gifted Learners

The earliest identification of gifted students was based almost entirely on IQ testing as a measure of cognitive ability (Card & Giuliani, 2014). Pioneers in the field of giftedness, Terman, Stedman, Hollingworth, and Whipple, all held that IQ scores were the primary indicator of giftedness with their minimum qualifying scores for exceptionality varying in range from 115 to 140 (Jolly, 2005). Each research has a slightly different minimum IQ score to identify giftedness.

These IQ scores based on the researcher include: Stedman – IQ of 140; Hollingworth – IQ of 130; Terman – IQ of 140; and Whipple – IQ of 115 (Jolly, 2005). All four agreed on the use of the Stanford-Binet assessment as the standard for measuring intelligence. Hollingworth later acknowledged intelligence manifesting in other ways (Jolly, 2005). As early as the 1970s, the use of IQ tests was challenged by critics citing that IQ tests were biased against non-whites and should be considered as part of broader criteria (Card & Giuliano, 2014). While most states have mandates for identifying gifted students, not all states have mandates to serve those students (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). Absent national criteria for identifying gifted learners, states are responsible for developing identification criteria (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). This also contributes to the variations in state policy on gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2014). Some states establish criteria for local school divisions, while other states have passed on the responsibility of developing identification criteria to local school divisions, including those states that do not have state-mandated criteria (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). These identification criteria and processes can vary almost as much as gifted students themselves (Kennedy & Farley, 2018). In addition to IQ scores, traditional criteria can also include achievement test scores in the top 3-5% and nomination by classroom teacher (Scott, 2012). Approximately one-third of states still mandate IQ scores to identify gifted students (Card & Giuliani, 2014).

The NAGC recommends the use of multiple assessment tools to include standardized tests, parent, teacher, and student nominations, portfolio or performance assessments, and review of educational records. According to the *Understanding the Virginia Regulations Governing Educational Services for Gifted Students* (2012), Virginia defines four areas of giftedness: "general intellectual aptitude; specific academic aptitude; career and technical aptitude; and visual or performing arts aptitude" (VDOE, 2012, p. 4). Each local school division is required to develop and submit annually a local plan for serving gifted students including the process for identifying gifted students. In Virginia,

> The Regulations require school divisions to use multiple criteria to seek out students with superior aptitudes, with special attention paid to the identification of students who "are economically disadvantaged, have limited English proficiency, or have a disability." (VDOE, 2012, p. 6)

Further, the VDOE requires a minimum of three assessments and specifies additional assessment requirements based on the area of identified giftedness. Eligibility or ineligibility for local gifted programs may not be determined based on one single criterion (VDOE, 2012).

The literature reviewed on the referral and identification of students for gifted programs supports universal screening for all students (Card & Giuliano, 2015; McClain &Pfeiffer, 2012; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; VDOE, 2012, 2017). Universal screening enables all students to have a fair opportunity at being identified, by not relying on a single referral source to be screened. This is especially crucial for minority and low-income students, who are typically underrepresented in gifted programs. This continues to occur despite the fact that according to the VDOE (2017) they are:

> Actively promoting an open-access referral process, whereby classroom teachers, parents, students, or community members recommend students for gifted identification, contributes to more diverse referrals. Effective communication and publicizing information is key to including multiple stakeholders in the referral process (p. 3).

Referrals from teachers, administrators, parents, - and at older grades - self-referrals, often lessen the number of children referred. Parents may not always know the procedures for referring their children for screening including when the screening occurs or how to sufficiently complete the paperwork (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Teachers tend to overlook students who have behavior problems or who do not fit their mold of what a gifted kid is supposed to be. This is due in part to the fact that most teachers are not trained to work with gifted students and do not always recognize the characteristics, "in particular, the characteristics of culturally and economically diverse gifted students" (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018, p. 43). Chu and Myers (2015) noted that:

> [u]nfortunately, according to the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted and the National Association [of] Gifted Children's 2012-13 *State of the States in Gifted Education* (2013), only three states require general education teachers to have training in gifted education at any point in their careers (only seventeen states require such training for teachers in gifted education programs). The lack of training affects the ability of teachers to work with this population. Most teachers do not know that gifted students learn differently from their age peers in terms of habituation, retention, and abstraction of knowledge. (p. 46)

The VDOE Virginia Advisory Committee for the Education of the Gifted reported that:

> The NAGC recommends that divisions and school provide teachers with professional development training that stresses the learning characteristics of underrepresented gifted populations, awareness of cultural differences, understanding of students with multiple exceptionalities, and the use of equitable and non-biased assessments. Another essential component of identifying underrepresented students is training teachers to recognize their own biases, enlightening them about local communities and recognizing how talents appear in various cultures. (VDOE, 2017, p. 6)

Jolly (2005) and Grissom and Redding (2016) found disparities in the referral and identification of certain ethnic, racial, and other minorities. African American and Hispanic students are less likely to be referred for screening than their White counterparts (Card & Giuliano, 2015). Standard referral and screening processes often do not account for cultural variations (Scott, 2012). Students who are English language learners (ELLs) and those students from low-income backgrounds are also less likely to be referred (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Cross, 2009). Grissom and Redding (2016) found that African American students performing the same as White students on national tests in reading and mathematics were more likely to be referred for gifted placement when taught by a Black teacher than a White teacher. Utilizing data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten (ECLS-K), Grissom and Redding (2016) found that African American students were less likely to attend a school with a gifted program when compared to their White, Asian, and Hispanic peers. Of those attending schools with gifted programs, the data show that African American students were less likely to be referred for gifted services (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Neihart and Yeo (2018) further suggest that differences between Eastern and Western philosophical viewpoints on ability also play a role in the identification process. Parents in America and Europe tend to focus more on developing their children's predetermined innate potential. These parents believe that children are born with an IQ that is fixed and achievement is measured by working up to that ability. In contrast, parents from Asian cultures focus on the environment in which the child lives and develops and encourage hard work in order to maximize their potential (Neihart & Yeo, 2018). These parents believe that all children have unlimited potential and their achievement is only limited by the expectations of their surroundings.

Characteristics of Gifted Students

While all gifted students are not the same, there are common characteristics amongst this population. These characteristics include but are not limited to students being highly sensitive; having deep intense feelings and reactions; having a large vocabulary for age; exhibiting a wide range of interests; capable of abstract thinking; having idealism and sense of justice at an early age (Webb et al., 2007); being extremely sensitive to their environment; and being highly empathetic and vulnerable (Shechtman, & Silektor, 2012). Stambaugh and Ford (2015) noted that gifted students "feel at a deeper level than do others of their same age and are more concerned with social injustices …" (p.193). Peterson et al. (2009) conducted an 11-year mixed methods study that included checklists completed by parents and open-ended questionnaires completed by gifted students. A sample of 121 parents of gifted second through fifth graders at the beginning of the study received a "life-event checklist" annually, at the end of the school year to document events that occurred in their students' lives during the year (p. 38). Upon graduation, ranging from 8 to 11 years from the beginning of the study, students were asked to complete an open-ended survey to "explore positive and challenging experiences, and both support and hinderances, with a primary emphasis on negative experiences" (p. 37). The qualitative responses gathered by gifted students endorsed themes of "sensitivity, perfectionism, intensity, self-criticism, and loneliness" (p. 45).

Despite their high cognitive abilities, some gifted children lack the ability to adequately express themselves when it comes to social-emotional situations (Shechtman & Silektor, 2012). Gifted children who may not yet be identified as gifted may be mistakenly diagnosed as having a mental health disorder or behavior problem. This is exacerbated by the perceptions of many - administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents—that gifted students do not have the same social and emotional needs as non-gifted peers. Early critics suggested that their superior cognitive abilities made them superior in the area of social and emotional adjustment. This was based heavily on the findings of Terman's work in the mid-1920s (Neihart &Yeo, 2018). Lovecky (1993) stated that gifted students "are as different from average as are the developmentally disabled" (p. 29). Delisle (1995) cited that the primary change in working with gifted students after having worked with developmentally disabled children was the level and pacing of his instruction. Both groups required individualized curricula; capitalization on

strengths to overcome weaknesses; and grouping with peers of similar interests and functioning level (Delisle, 1995). According to The Aspen Institute (2018),

> [t]eacher preparation and ongoing professional development must address the science behind how students learn and develop and provide opportunities for educators to practice this work and observe and coach their peers. And teachers and school leaders must be given opportunities to build their own social and emotional skills so that they can, in turn, model and support these skills in their students. (p. 12)

Neihart and Yeo (2018) stated that "gifted students do have unique psychological issues, but these do not arise from giftedness itself. Rather, giftedness seems to add complexity to an individual that can either enhance or interfere with healthy adjustment, depending on several factors" (p. 497). The heterogeneity of gifted students coupled with the broad varying definitions of giftedness, make it difficult to fully identify the needs of gifted students (Kennedy & Farley, 2018). Additional considerations must be given to students from low-income backgrounds and students who are linguistically and culturally diverse.

> Abraham Maslow taught us that, in order to reach our full potential, we must have our basic needs met. This includes the need for safety, belonging, identity, and esteem. For diverse gifted children, to develop optimally, they must be challenged *and* appreciated (Ford, 2004, p. 27).

Students from low income or socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to downplay, minimize or deny their giftedness for fear of not fitting in outside of their normal class group (Neihart & Yeo, 2018). Scott (2012) purports that African American gifted children have additional social-emotional and psychological needs.

> In essence, too many very capable and motivated Black students are living a life of deception. Although brilliant, they choose to perform average or below-average levels in an effort to be accepted among their peers. This double life is rather self-destructive and conflicting. These students know that they are just as smart as their White counterparts. However, they are not willing (or, in some cases, are not able) to show it because they do not want to feel different from or unaccepted by peers and others. Sadly, these students may be dying emotionally, psychologically, and socially. (Scott, 2012, p. 28)

Stambaugh and Ford (2015) suggest that culturally different students are likely to feel overlooked or out of place or experience microaggressions.

A microaggression is any comment, attitude, action, or gesture individuals experience as inappropriate or hurtful based on their personal history or characteristics (Franklin 1999; Sue, 2010). These microaggressions are brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative ethnic/racial slights and insults towards others – most often Blacks, Hispanics, and women. (p. 192)

Microaggressions can vary in subtlety and intentionality and are often rooted in stereotypes or assumptions about the marginalized group and are viewed as degrading by members of the group. Over time, microaggressions can lead to poorer social-emotional and mental well-being and an increased risk for post-secondary dropout (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015).

Gifted children are often diagnosed with co-occurring conditions such as attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and autism spectrum disorders. Students in this category are sometimes identified as twice exceptional or 2e students (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). According to Cross (2009), "… recent research has shown that suicide ideation among the gifted is at the same level or less than that of the general population" (p. 40). Likewise, cutting behavior among all adolescents, including the gifted has increased over the past two decades and can be an indicator of possible thoughts of suicide (Cross, 2009; Delisle, 1986;). It was the 1980 suicide of child prodigy Dallas Egbert that created a national awareness to suicide among gifted students (Delisle, 1986; Neihart & Yeo, 2018). Egbert successfully completed suicide in 1980 after two failed attempts the year prior. Parents and school staff should understand hypersensitivity and vulnerability among gifted adolescences and be knowledgeable in the warning signs of mood disorders that make them more susceptible to suicide (Mahoney, 1995). The misdiagnosis of social emotional problems in gifted children, such as anxiety and depression, AD/HD or oppositional defiant disorder further puts them at risk for serious mental health problems or anti-social behaviors. According to Stambaugh and Ford (2015) many times gifted students are acting out due to lack of stimulation in the academic setting to meet their needs. Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) was founded in 1981 by Dr. James T. Webb to "offer the gifted community support and guidance through education, research, and connection" (www.sengifted.org). This national organization offers an annual conference, online resources, and self-study programs and certifications. Its membership consists of parents, educators, and practitioners. One of SENG's campaigns is to promote awareness of misdiagnosis and under diagnosis of mental health disorders in gifted children. As

a support offered to parents, SENG has developed a model for parent support groups. These groups are facilitated by SENG certified facilitators across the United States (www.sengifted.org). Peterson et al. (2009) found that parents' perceptions of stressors in the child's lives did not mirror the student's perception of the same event. In one case, the parent regarded her father's illness and subsequent passing as having a significant impact on her son's academic performance. The son identified the family's move and change of schools to care for his grandfather, which resulted in him losing his spot on the varsity soccer team as the "event" impacting his academic performance. Gifted students, even though they may be under substantial stress, are unlikely to share with adults, including their parents. Gifted students are also likely to be concerned about the social-emotional needs of their peers. Their sense of social justice often compels them to try and solve another's problems (Peterson et al., 2009).

Underachievement in Gifted Students

Underachievement is defined as not achieving at the level of one's academic potential (Landis & Reschly, 2013). In the context of gifted education, underachievement is seemingly an oxymoron, almost paradoxical (Bennett-Rappell & Northcote, 2016). It challenges the long-held beliefs that gifted students will perform and achieve because of their high-ability (Johnsen, 2013; Lewis et al., 2007). Underachievement in gifted students can take several forms. While some students exhibit course failure, others opt out of more rigorous courses (e.g., honors, Advanced Placement [AP], International Baccalaureate [IB], and dual enrollment courses) for general education classes and put forth the minimum effort to meet grade level standards. Students in the latter group often grow bored due to the lack of challenge and eventually dropout. Gifted underachievement has been regarded as an indicator of and a precursor to gifted dropouts (Landis & Reschly, 2013).

Gifted Dropouts

The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) was started in 1986 in response to the school dropout epidemic in America. The NDPC continues to serve as a clearinghouse for education and research on dropout prevention. According to the NCES, the event dropout rate between October 2016 and October 2017 was 4.7%. This represents the number of students between the ages of 15 and 24 who left school without a diploma within the span of one school year; this is a 1.2% increase from 2007 (McFarland et al., 2019). The NCES also reports dropout statistics by race, ethnicity, and gender, but does not include gifted students. The dropout rate for

gifted students varies greatly based upon the definition used for dropout. Just as the definition of gifted varies, so does the definition of dropout. When combined, broader definitions of gifted yield larger numbers of gifted dropouts and are felt to provide a more representative picture (Renzulli & Park, 2000; Ritchotte & Graefe, 2017). The earliest projections were that 18% of dropouts were gifted students, but that figure was later argued to be a misinterpretation of the figure reported in the 1972 Marland Report (Irvine, 1987; Renzulli & Park, 2000). Renzulli and Park (2000) estimate that as many as 20% of gifted students drop out of school each year. In Virginia, dropout data are reported based on the number of students that do not earn a qualifying diploma or transfer to another school division (VDOE, 2012). This dropout rate is reported separately from the on-time graduation rate. As with the NCES, Virginia's data also do not currently disaggregate dropout rates for gifted students.

As with the general student population, dropping out does not occur all at once. It is the end-result of a process that has taken place over time (Ritchotte & Graefe, 2017). Many gifted dropouts report having thoughts of dropping out as early as late elementary or early middle school (Landis & Reschly, 2013). According to Irvine (1987), studies of high school dropouts go back to at least 1958 and were initially conducted in Iowa. In 1962, data from the initial study were utilized "to describe differences between talented dropouts and similar students remaining in school" (Irvine, 1987, p. 79). Likewise, the risk factors vary, but do not differ significantly than the general population (Landis & Reschly, 2013).

Lockett and Cornelious (2015) conducted a study in an urban school division in Mississippi, where the state dropout rate averaged 38%. The purpose of the study was to determine the factors that influenced students to dropout by obtaining the information from the dropouts themselves. Using the 1990 NCES definition for dropout,

> a student, who was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year, was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year and has not graduated from high school or completed a state-or district-approved educational program. (p. 5)

Lockett and Cornelious (2015) surveyed dropouts using a questionnaire of 38 questions modified from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. According to their survey data, 7.5% of respondents cited the following as having influenced their decision to leave school: being bullied, addiction or use of drugs, addiction or use of alcohol; or influence of a boyfriend or girlfriend. The research also indicated that 15% of respondents reported being influenced by

having a baby; staying home to care for a baby or other family member; divorce of parents; or working long hours. Additionally, 17.5% indicated incarceration, 20% noted unfair discipline practices, and 27.5 % cited family problems. (Lockett & Cornelious, 2015). Items endorsed at 37.5% to 55% include lack of teacher assistance, failing subject area tests, retention, and getting behind. There are many reasons cited for why gifted students drop out of school. According to VanTassel-Baska (2018) gifted students are at a greater risk of becoming a high school dropout due to unmet academic needs. Additionally, "gifted students' success is less optimal when their economic, cultural, socioemotional, affective, and developmental needs are ignored trivialized, or poorly addressed" (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015, p. 192). Gifted students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those of cultural and ethnic diversity were felt to be at increased risk. "A policy document, issued by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation in 2012, found that gifted poor students were not achieving at equal levels with their more advantaged peers either in school or continued education beyond high school" (VanTassel-Baska, 2018).

Renzulli and Park (2000) conducted a two-prong study, Study 1 and Study 2, in order to "gain comprehensive information about gifted high school dropouts and to examine factors that are related to the gifted students' dropout behavior using nationally representative longitudinal data," the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (p. 264). This study consisted of a sample size estimated to be 25,000. Study participants in the sample were in the 8th grade during 1988 and participated in three follow-up data collections with the last collection completed in 1994. The sample for Study 1 was comprised of approximately 1,300 students who had dropped out by the second data collection. Of the almost 1,300 students in the sample, just over 25% were gifted. For Study 2, the sample was composed of gifted and nongifted dropouts who were 8th graders in 1988 and completed all data collections (for a total of four data collections). This sample consisted of almost 13,000 students with just over 3,500 identified as gifted. Results from Study 1 revealed that 49% of gifted male dropouts left school without receiving their diploma due to school failure. Other reasons provided by the gifted male dropouts included having to get a job (40.7%), an inability to keep up with schoolwork (38.1%), a dislike of school (37.4%), and an inability to balance work and school (32.7%). For gifted female students who dropped out, 35.5% did not like school, 33.8% were pregnant, 29.1% became a parent and were failing school, 26.8% had another problem, and 23.2% could not keep up with schoolwork (Renzulli & Park, 2000). Results of Study 2 revealed that students with the following characteristics were less

likely to dropout: gifted students who wanted to finish college, gifted students who did not have a child, gifted female students, White gifted students, gifted students with fathers who did not finish high school, and gifted students in the upper socioeconomic status quartiles (Renzulli & Park, 2000)

Zabloski and Milacci (2012) conducted a phenomenological case study of gifted dropouts in a rural setting. The seven subjects interviewed for the research had all dropped out during high school. Six of them had earned their GED certification, and the seventh was enrolled in a GED program at the time of the interview. One study participant had gone on to earn a Bachelor's degree; three other participants were working on college degrees. The results of this qualitative study revealed that all study participants had experienced traumatic life events during middle school that contributed to their decision to drop out. The study participants also noted a lack of supportive relationships in the school environment as contributing factors to their decision to drop out of school (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). According to The Aspen Institute (2018), a student's social-emotional connection with teachers is fundamental to learning.

Although no research was found relating to dropout prevention and intervention strategies specifically with gifted students, Landis and Reschly (2013) and Ramser (2011) recommended strategies from general education felt to be applicable to gifted students. These recommended prevention strategies include ensuring appropriate academic challenge, multifaceted student engagement, extracurricular involvement, supports for academic transitions, and supports for interpersonal and home needs. Intervention strategies include counseling, tutoring, mentoring and engagement through self-directed study or projects. Reenrollment, vocational training, and community involvement were also recommended for addressing high school dropouts (Ramser, 2011).

Role of School Staff

The challenge of combatting school dropout involves multiple school staff. Annually, school principals are charged with meeting school accreditation standards. In Virginia, accreditation is determined by a school's performance on School Quality Indicators which include reducing the dropout rate (VDOE, 2017). As principals are responsible for all academic programming in their building, gifted student services are often not the primary focus and lack administrative support (Johnsen, 2013). In a study by Alvarez McHatton et al. (2010), in-service principals reported that they received minimal preparation (i.e., compliance and funding) in the

area of specialized populations, which including gifted and special education. Lewis et al. (2007) found that principals are often lacking school division-level support to adequately implement gifted programming.

Teachers are regarded as having the most direct influence on student achievement for both general education and gifted students and are included in a number of prevention and intervention strategies. In reference to gifted students, teachers lacking an endorsement in gifted education may not understand the unique needs of gifted students and therefore may need additional training in differentiation in order to have the greatest impact (Bennett-Rappell & Northcote, 2016; Landis & Reschly, 2013).

School counselors are members of the school's staff whose primary focus is the academic, career, and social emotional development of students (https://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/school_counseling/index.shtml). Most school counselors are based in schools and serve in multiple roles within the school building. School counselors are staffed at lower staffing ratios than their specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) counterparts and may have multiple staff assigned to a single building, particularly at the high school level. While school counselors are called upon to assist all students, Minor (2015) found that many school counselors do not receive training in their counselor preparation programs to effectively meet the counseling needs of gifted students and gain most of their knowledge from their job experiences.

Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2008) explored the role of school social workers in dropout prevention efforts. School social workers are specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) typically employed at the school division level and assigned to multiple schools. School social workers are trained mental health professionals who provide direct, as well as indirect, services to students, families, and school personnel (https://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/social-work/index.shtml). Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2008) suggested that school social workers could play an integral part in addressing school dropout due to their ecological approach and multisystemic training.

Summary

The literature reviewed ranged from graduate level papers and research studies to periodicals and newsletter publications. The majority of literature available was qualitative in design and relied heavily on the perspectives of the subject or those related to the subject (i.e.,

parents, teachers, counselors). Reviewed literature provided data obtained through surveys, interviews, and record reviews. Information on this subject was readily available and in great supply.

The literature reviewed presents a chronological account of gifted education, as well as the evolution of the definition of giftedness. From the 19th century to present day, services for the gifted population have expanded and the definition has broadened. The identification of gifted students has also expanded but continues to be disproportionate among racial, ethnic, culturally and linguistically diverse, and lower income populations (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Lacking from the definition and identification criteria reviewed in the reviewed literature is consistency from state to state and considerations for cultural influence on giftedness (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Scott, 2012). Despite best practice recommendations for universal screenings for gifted identification, students of color, particularly African American and Hispanic students, remain underrepresented in gifted programs. Those identified for and participating in gifted programs often experience additional social-emotional challenges related to conflicts between academic pursuits and cultural norms and expectations (Card & Giuliani, 2015; Scott, 2012; Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). These sociocultural conflicts can lead to underachievement in gifted students and places them at risk for academic failure and disciplinary sanctions. Over time, underachieving students have an increased risk for becoming dropouts.

Gifted students have historically been recognized as having special academic needs; however, the thought of possessing special social and emotional needs have emerged in recent decades. It was nearly 30 years after the founding of the NAGC in 1954 that attention was brought to the social and emotional needs of the gifted in 1981 with the suicide of a gifted college student and the subsequent founding of SENG (Neihart & Yeo, 2018). While there are proponents and critics of this theory, the research available supports that gifted students at least have the same social-emotional needs as non-gifted students and require—at minimum—the same supports. Further research supports that gifted students have unique social-emotional and psychological needs (Neihart & Yeo, 2018) and often feel misunderstood, isolated, and neglected by peers, family, and school staff (Chu & Meyers, 2015). Gifted students with learning disabilities or emotional difficulties are sometimes identified as twice exceptional or 2e. Students in this category are also at an increased risk of underachievement due to unmet

academic and social-emotional needs. Students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often struggle without curriculum and instruction that is both rigorous and culturally relevant (Scott, 2012).

The ESSA legislation (2015) has recognized the need to include outcomes for gifted students in school accountability standards as gifted students were not making consistent gains in comparison to lower performing peers and gap groups. The ESSA does not provide guidelines for implementation (VanTassel-Baska, 2018). Like the general population, gifted students are subject to the realities of life and sometimes make the decision to leave school early. The number of gifted students who drop out of school every year is reported to vary between 5% and 20% depending on the definition for dropout and the definition for gifted being utilized. VanTassel-Baska (2018) suggested that gifted students were at a higher risk for dropping out due to lack of rigor in the curriculum and having a higher level of prior knowledge. Studies on gifted underachievement also indicate that these students are at risk of dropping out. Multiple researchers have examined gifted dropouts and found themes such as of lack of positive adult relationships, school climate, unchallenging curriculum, and family obligations or lack of family support as contributing factors to their decision to dropout (Bennett-Rappell & Northcote, 2016; Lockett & Cornelious, 2015; Renzulli & Park, 2000; Ritchotte and Graefe, 2017; Zabloski and Milacci, 2012). Some secondary themes related to social emotional needs were also revealed: poor relationships with peers and lack of support from school staff.

Dropout prevention and intervention strategies are primarily undifferentiated for gifted students. Landis and Reschly (2013) referred to strategies for general education due to a lack of strategies identified for gifted students. General education dropout prevention and intervention strategies include academic and affective supports and employs school and school division staff.

While multiple studies on school dropouts have looked at the reasons for why gifted students decide to leave school early, no research was found in order to examine dropout prevention and intervention programs in addition to supports provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school. These topics will be crucial for school administrators to properly provide the necessary supports gifted students need in order to keep them, and potentially other students, in school to achieve graduation.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

School dropouts are both an educational and a social problem (Webber, 2018). Despite the numerous studies on dropouts, there are relatively few on gifted dropouts (Camper et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

Research Design/Methodology

This study was a qualitative study. Qualitative studies are aimed at learning about an experience from those who have lived the experience. Unlike quantitative research that focuses on the amount of data gathered, qualitative research focuses on the quality of the data gathered. Qualitative research seeks to create a picture of the total experience by identifying themes across subjects or participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Design Justification

According to McMillan and Wergin (2009), qualitative studies are most effective for understanding the perspective of the subject experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. Of the available research on gifted student dropouts, qualitative research comprises a relatively small portion of the data. Zabloski and Milacci (2012) conducted a qualitative study of rural gifted dropouts. In their study, researchers utilized a case study design.

The research being conducted for this study consisted of a qualitative survey aimed at gaining the perspective of school administrators addressing dropout among gifted students. According to Rubin and Babbie (2017) survey research is regarded as an ancient research technique dating back to the Old Testament. Surveys are effective in reaching large populations and are among the most frequently utilized research techniques. Surveys can be administered in many formats to include mail-in, interview, telephone, online, and mixed-modes. Online surveys are relatively new in the field of survey research but offer many advantages over other formats such as reducing costs in printing and mailing, less time to distribute, and automatic collection of survey responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Research Questions

In order to ensure that the focus of this study adequately addresses the identified research problem, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?
2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?
3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

Site/Sample Selection

Data were gathered from high school principals in the VDOE Superintendent's Region 2. This region includes the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg. Also included in this region are the Counties of Accomack, Isle of Wight, James City, Northampton, Southampton, and York. Region 2 was selected as the study site based on data related to graduation rates in the region. Gannavarapu (2019), of the Virginia Commonwealth University Capital News Service, compiled a list of the 15 school divisions in Virginia with the highest number of seniors for the 2018-2019 school year. Five of the 15 (or one-third) of the school divisions with the highest number of seniors in Virginia are in Region 2 – Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, and Virginia Beach. Of these five school divisions, all but one met or passed the state average for on-time graduation rates. Accomack County and the city of Newport News both have one school within their school division that boasts a 100% graduation rate for the 2018-19 and 2017-18 school years.

The sample for this study was determined by first obtaining permission from the member school divisions to distribute the qualitative survey to the high school principals in the school division. An email was sent to each superintendent requesting permission (see Appendix D). Three school divisions granted permission to conduct the study, and one school division declined via the initial contact form. One school division replied advising they were not accepting applications for administrator-involved surveys due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and one school division did not respond. The remaining nine school divisions required the submission of a formal application or letter of application. Of the nine applications submitted, seven were approved and two were denied. In total, approval to conduct research was received from 10 school divisions yielding a sample of 43 out of a possible 55 high school principals.

Data Collection Procedures

As permission was granted by each school division, an email was sent to the principals within the approving school division inviting them to participate in the study; a link to the survey was provided. Email addresses for the principals were obtained from the VDOE website and cross-referenced with the school division website. Any discrepancies were clarified by emailing the school division contact for research studies. After the initial email, two subsequent follow-up and reminder emails were sent 2-4 weeks apart for a total of three email contacts to each principal. In total, 17 responses from principals were recorded.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were gathered using a qualitative survey designed by the researcher consisting of open-ended questions. The survey questions were based on the research questions and were vetted by current school administrators that were similar to the study participants but not part of the survey sample. Surveys associated with this study were distributed via an email communication containing a link to access the survey. The survey was created and administered using Qualtrics software. Responses were collected anonymously and stored using Qualtrics until downloaded for analysis.

Instrument Design

The qualitative survey protocol was designed by the researcher (see Appendix A). Based on the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018), the protocol included basic information regarding the study and instructions to the potential participant. The qualitative survey protocol consisted of four open-ended survey questions aligned to the identified research questions. The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide their own responses rather than select from pre-determined responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Table 1 shows the study research questions and aligned survey questions.

Table 1

Research Questions and Aligned Survey Questions

Research Questions	Survey Questions
1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?	1. Describe your experience with gifted students who have dropped out of school.
2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?	2. What interventions or supports were provided to those students?
3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?	3. Describe your experience with gifted students who are at-risk of dropping out. 4. What interventions or supports are being provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out?

Instrument Validation

Instrument validation is the process of assuring that the interview questions align with the research questions. The qualitative survey protocol was vetted by current school administrators similar to the study participants but not included in the study sample (Roberts, 2010). The questionnaire was distributed to the group of administrators to evaluate and provide feedback to the following questions:

1. Are the interview questions clear and easy to understand?
2. Do the interview questions align with the corresponding research question?
3. Do the interview questions elicit the response necessary to answer the research questions?
4. General comments, suggestions, etc.

According to Roberts (2010), the data collection instrument may require revisions to reflect relevant recommendations from the validation process. The validation of the survey instrument did not yield any necessary revisions. The qualitative survey protocol was then tested on subjects, not included in the study, to simulate the survey process (Roberts, 2010; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Five secondary administrators not included in the study population were invited to participate in a trial survey. With a 60% participation rate, responses gathered from the test

sample were consistent across participants. Additionally, all participants were able to access the survey with ease and complete the survey within the anticipated time of completion. With successful completion of the trial, the qualitative survey protocol was attached as an appendix to the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) application.

Data Treatment

All data obtained through this study were kept confidential. Participant responses were anonymous; it was not possible to identify a participant's response or their school division. No demographic or identifying information was collected or reported (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, and gender).

Electronic data were stored within a password protected share drive that only the research team had access to. All information will be stored for three years after the conclusion of the study. No personal identifiers were collected. All electronic responses will be deleted. Emails were kept separately from survey responses and deleted once no longer needed. The reflexive journal and respective notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and shredded one year after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis describes a multistep process rather than a single event (Roberts, 2010). Analysis of qualitative data begins with reviewing data as it is collected to make relevant notes and necessary adjustments to the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). At the end of the data collection, the researcher will review all the data collectively to gain familiarity with the data collected. Next, data are sorted and organized based on initial themes. These themes are then coded and grouped by similarity to create categories. Creswell and Creswell (2018) identified three categories of codes. The first category consists of those codes that can be expected due to common sense or based on research. The second category consists of codes that in contrast to expected codes, were not predicted, or suggested by the literature prior to the study. The third category consists of those codes that were neither expected nor able to be predicted but are of significant interest based on their unforeseen connection to the phenomenon under investigation. Once the emergent themes are identified, a narrative is prepared to describe each theme, citing examples (responses) from the interviews.

Data Analysis Techniques

Survey responses were collected and stored in Qualtrics until downloaded for coding and analysis. The data were coded using an open coding system. Open coding involves using keywords, also known as codes, and categorizing them into themes as they emerge rather than assigning them to predetermined categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Babbie, 2017)

Timeline

From the initial approval from the Virginia Tech IRB on September 10, 2020, contact information for all 15 Region 2 superintendents was obtained from the VDOE website and initial contact was made within two days. The first approval response was received approximately three days after IRB approval. The first email contact with school principals was made seven days after IRB approval and included two school divisions, totaling nine principals. Initially five weeks was allocated for data collection. This included a follow-up reminder email approximately two weeks after the initial email; and a final reminder email approximately 4 weeks after the initial email. This timeframe was extended due to the amount of time required to secure school division approvals. School division approval timeframes ranged from three days to three months. At least two school divisions postponed the review of research requests due to adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data analysis began as responses were received and ran concurrently with the data collection process until the acceptable number of responses were received (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey remained open to all participants regardless of when the initial email was received to ensure that everyone had an ample opportunity to participate. The survey was closed approximately five months after the first email invitation was sent. Once the survey was closed for responses, data analysis was finalized.

Methodology Summary

High school principals in Virginia's Region 2 were invited to complete a qualitative survey to determine their experiences with and interventions and supports provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. After receiving permission from the school divisions, high school principals were emailed the link to the survey along with information about the study utilizing contact information obtained from the VDOE. Ten out of 15 Region 2 school divisions granted permission for the study yielding a sample of 43 out of a possible 55 principals as possible participants.

The qualitative survey consisted of open-ended questions designed by the researcher. The survey questions assessed the principals' experience with gifted students who have dropped out or were at risk of dropping out as well as support that was provided or are being provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out. In total, 17 out of a possible 43 responses were received.

Qualitative data from the survey were coded by the researcher using open coding and analyzed for common themes. Those themes were presented in terms of relevance and significance in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS

Review Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?
2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?
3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

In total, 43 high school principals across 10 out of 15 school divisions in Virginia's Region 2 were invited to participate in the study by completing a qualitative online survey. The survey consisted of four open-ended questions that sought to answer the above-mentioned research questions:

1. Describe your experience with gifted students who have dropped out of school.
2. What interventions or supports were provided to those students?
3. Describe your experience with gifted students who are at-risk of dropping out.
4. What interventions or supports are being provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out?

The survey was developed by the researcher and administered through Qualtrics. All data were stored in Qualtrics until downloaded for analysis. Blank or incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis, resulting in 12 viable responses.

Data Findings

This section presents the data collected through the recorded responses to each survey question. The responses to the survey questions are aligned to the corresponding research questions.

Research Question One

What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?

Corresponding survey question:

1. Describe your experience with gifted students who have dropped out of school.

Recorded principals' responses to survey question one:

P1. *I have not experienced any gifted students who have dropped out of school in the past five years.*

P2. *no experience*

P3. *In my experience gifted students who have dropped out fall in to one of a few categories: Family issues (pregnancy, caring for a loved one, etc.), Students who have fallen behind because of absences (usually due to a family issue or mental health issue) and feel unable to catch up.*

P4. *In 3 + years I have not had any gifted dropouts. Under the current circumstances, I have had requests to drop classes, but no potential or suspected dropouts.*

P5. *Once a student(s) are one to two years behind in order to earn a high school diploma and the students informs me that they are interested in moving on; then I recommend the GED program. I also look at the age of the student (Usually 17 years old) I do this knowing that there are many other options of gaining post-high school training and career preparation once the student receives a GED.*

P6. *My experience is very limited in this area, as few students identified as gifted, continue to receive specialized services in a traditional high school setting.*

P7. *As an administrator, I have worked with students who are gifted but dropout of school due to low motivation, lack of family support, and/or circumstances where the student has prioritized entering the workforce. The majority of dropouts I have worked with are not gifted students, but I would estimate between two and five percent fall into this category.*

P8. *Few students are seeking fulfilment in untraditional methods and will often take jobs that don't require the use of their academic abilities.*

P9. *"Throughout my career, I have been involved with providing an educational environment that would support the learning styles of all students. Unfortunately, I have witnessed moments in which traditional schools and traditional methodologies did not meet the need of the learner. Unfortunately, when the system doesn't fit, students often find alternatives to addressing their educational needs. When gifted students drop out of school, we must as an organization continue to be committed to meeting their needs from a non-traditional aspect. As educators, we must be*

intentional in connecting to their passion to succeed in this world. This investment
comes in many forms, some may opt for a GED, others may opt for other
alternatives. However, it is important to note the progression of the educational
journey for our gifted population that has become bored or frustrated with our
preconceived notion of success. "

P10. *To my knowledge, I have not encountered gifted students dropping out. However, I*
know that we have had a few honors students that have dropped out. This does not
occur often.

P11. *I have only had 1 gifted dropout during my high school tenure. She was exceptional*
academically but had severe social and emotional issues. She was socially awkward
and found it difficult to fit in socially. She dropped out and although we attempted
several interventions, we could not get her to come back.

P12. *I've had a about two students that have dropped out or left traditional school to*
pursue GED programs.

Explanation of Research Question One Data

The recorded responses in Table 2 represent principals' experiences with gifted students who have dropped out. The responses include length of service as an administrator for some as well as their knowledge of why some students dropped out. Four out of 12 principals reported no experience or no knowledge of gifted dropouts. One principal reported limited experience with gifted dropouts. Seven out of 12 principals reported some experience with gifted dropouts, to include current and historical accounts and factors contributing to the decision to drop out.

Table 2

Principals' Coded Responses to Research Question One, Survey Question One

Principal Responses	No Knowledge or Experience	Limited Experience	More Experience
P1	X		
P2	X		
P3			X
P4	X		
P5			X
P6		X	
P7			X
P8			X
P9			X
P10	X		
P11			X
P12			X

Research Question Two

What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?

Corresponding survey question:

2. What interventions or supports were provided to those students?

Recorded principals' responses to survey question two:

P1. *None needed.*

P2. *N/A*

P3. *We utilize our school-based services such as school counselors and administration. We also utilize district-based resources such as attendance liaisons, school social workers, and school psychologists.*

P4. *Constant communication from teachers, communications to parents, and schedule changes are what we have done to accommodate gifted students who have needed additional support.*

P5. *Support of the school counselor, graduation coach, an ISAEP [Individualized Student Alternative Education Plan] teacher as well as career and technology*

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course options. Day treatment counselors as well as the parent liaison assist them if needed.

P6. *Supports will include the same options available for non-gifted students. Presentation of alternative options to complete high school. Accelerated course work where available. Development of a plan of action that includes the student's career plans, counselors, graduation coaches, and outside agencies when available.*

P7. *Supports include student conferences, parent conferences, providing a mentor, exploring career goals, college/career visits (to help students see the future past high school). Academic remediation if needed (with gifted students we often see them shut down if it is the first time they have struggled) or academic acceleration if the desire to dropout is due to boredom. If these do not work, and a student still desires to dropout, we work to facilitate entry into the ISAEP/GED program.*

P8. *Map out the years in regard to course selections and schedule follow up meetings monthly; Student/Admin conferences as needed; parents don't attend but are informed; Provide opportunities for the student to visit places they are interested in seeking employment after graduation; Discuss alternative ways to graduation.*

P9. *Graduation coaches, career counselors, tutoring, and access to resources and supports are designed to address the whole student.*

P10. *We have a graduation coach that works with potential dropouts by tracking students with academics and attendance each semester. The graduation coach as well as guidance counselors meet with students to develop individual plans. These teachers check in with each student often. Some of these plans have been remediation and credit recovery courses online to accelerate their time in complete courses they have failed. Also, the principal as well as other administrators that may have relationships with the student may meet with students as well. The grad coach assists potential dropouts with the process for the GED program and meets with parents too. She does a great job following up with students until they have qualified and passed the screening process to participate in the program. Even with all of these efforts, we have still lost students each year.*

P11. *Online opportunities; GED; Open Campus; Penn Foster*

> *P12.* *Students were identified and provided a system of support with teachers, school*
> *social worker, graduation specialists, mentors to work with the students and re-*
> *engage them in school. Check and connects, home visits, flexible schedules etc.*
> *were offered to the students.*

Description of Research Question Two Data

The responses in Table 3 reflect principals' knowledge of interventions and supports provided to gifted students who have dropped out. These interventions and supports include an array of strategies employed and identified the staff involved in providing them. Two out of 12 principals reported no interventions or responded not applicable. Ten out of 12 principals identified interventions (see Table 4). Of those 10 principal responses, eight principals identified staff involved in providing those interventions (see Table 5).

Table 3

Principals' Coded Responses to Research Question Two, Survey Question Two

Principal Responses	No Interventions Identified or Not Applicable	Identified Interventions
P1	X	
P2	X	
P3		X
P4		X
P5		X
P6		X
P7		X
P8		X
P9		X
P10		X
P11		X
P12		X

Table 4

Interventions Provided to Gifted Students who have Dropped Out in Research Question Two,

Survey Question Two

Principal Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Conference with Administrator							X	X				
Conference with Counselor			X		X		X	X		X		
Conference with Parent				X			X			X		
Schedule Changes/Flexible Scheduling				X								X
Career and Technical Education					X							
Teacher Communication				X								
GED/ISAEP Consultation/Enrollment					X		X			X	X	
Alternative Routes to Graduation						X		X		X		
Intervention by School Social Worker			X									X
Intervention by School Psychologist			X									
Intervention by Parent Liaison					X							
Intervention by Attendance Technician			X									
Intervention by Graduation Coach/Specialist								X	X	X		X
Intervention by Career Counselor									X			
Day Treatment Counseling					X							

(continued)

Table 4 *(cont.)*

Principal Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Course Acceleration/Online Learning/Credit Recovery					X	X				X	X	
Community-Based Outside Agency Services					X							
Mentoring							X					
College/Career Visits							X	X				
Academic Remediation								X		X		
Tutoring									X			
Home Visits												X
"Check & Connect"												X

Table 5

Staff Identified as Providing Interventions to Gifted Students who have Dropped Out

Principal Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Administrator			X					X		X		
Attendance Liaison/Technician			X									
Career Counselors						X			X			
GED Coordinator/ISAEP Teacher					X							
Graduation Coach/ Specialist					X	X			X	X		X
Guidance/School Counselor			X		X					X		
Mentors							X					
Outside Agency						X						
Parent Liaison					X							
School Psychologist			X									
School Social Worker			X									X
Teacher				X								X
Tutor									X			
Day Treatment Counselor					X							

Research Question Three

What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

Corresponding survey questions:

   3. Describe your experience with gifted students who are at-risk of dropping out.

   4. What interventions or supports are being provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out?

Recorded principals' responses to survey question three:

   P1. *We have been able to help them overcome their obstacles with night school and APEX.*

   P2. *N/A*

P3. Many are experiencing hardships at home due to finances, their own health, the health of a loved one. Some are experiencing mental health issues. We work to keep them engaged as much as possible and utilize our GED program as a last resort depending on their standing.

P4. During this pandemic, what the gifted students have requested is to lighten their course load. When needed, we have allowed these students to drop classes. These students have shared that they are or were overwhelmed, stressed, or depressed. Since reducing their class loads, they are doing fine.

P5. First, we offer the support of the teacher. Department tutoring is also offered. Usually students that are at risk of dropping out have other matters going on in the home and family. Sometimes the student must support the family instead of attending school. Childcare sometimes occurs for the student. Regardless of the reason, my goal is also to assist the student in reaching career goals and academic success.

P6. Limited experience

P7. There are often students who are bored in classes and/or are struggling for the first time. It is crucial to spend time determining what is causing the student to shut down academically. Just as we do with students and behavioral issues, we essentially conduct a functional behavioral analysis. Overwhelmingly, these steps have worked for the gifted students I have worked with and the actual dropout rate is minimal across the schools where I have served as an administrator.

P8. Desire to achieve without putting in the work; Feels they are not capable of remaining in classes with others that are younger.

P9. My experiences with gifted students who are at-risk of dropping out of school are the same for any student that may be experiencing the frustrations that school can present. I work hard to establish a relationship that would lead to hope and promise. This relationship would lead to trust. It has been my experience that this trust will often lead to success in the student's ability to overcome all obstacles be it academic or personal.

P10. In revisiting the first question, I'm certain some of our students have been extremely bright in honors classes As well as AP courses have dropped out. I would venture to

say that outside factors such as family issues, unhealthy relationships, and mental and substance abuse are some of the main causes for dropouts. Some of the family concerns especially now has been students working to support their families and to support younger siblings because parents are working. In some cases, it's no longer about school but survival.

P11. *Most of the gifted students are highflyers. Those who have struggled are those with outlying factors that would affect any student.*

P12. *We provide the students with the same supports and tiered intervention responses for all students and convene student intervention teams to monitor supports provided. Constant family communication is key in working with those students as well.*

Recorded principals' responses to survey question four:

P1. *APEX* [On-line learning platform]

P2. *Currently, we have no gifted students at risk of dropping out.*

P3. *School counselors, administrators, mentors. School social workers, attendance liaisons, school psychologists, GED coordinator.*

P4. *Support from counselors, parent communications, and schedule changes.*

P5. *tutoring; counseling support; career and technological planning; options for online learning; maintaining placement in the high school.*

P6. *Same as supports for any student that is at risk for dropping out.*

P7. *Interventions include student conferences, parent conferences, providing a mentor, college/career goals exploration, college/career visits, academic remediation/acceleration (depending on which is needed, or both), meeting of our ACCESS team to determine if outside interventions/counseling are needed (or other family supports), counsel to the ISAEP/GED program.*

P8. *Parent/student/counselor conference; Check In and Check Out (PBIS); Monthly student/admin update meeting; Map out the journey to graduation with counselor.*

P9. *We currently use all of our resources to work with gifted that are at-risk of dropping out of school. Alternative scheduling, counseling, mentoring, and tutoring are used to assist my students.*

P10. *The supports are similar for most students from the previous question. However, I need to add the school psychologist and social worker support our students especially with family dynamics. In addition, we have mentors who just try to build relationships with students to support students in danger of dropping out.*

P11. *Therapeutic Day Treatment; In-home counseling; Online / credit recovery opportunities; Open Campus; GED*

P12. *1.) Mentors; 2.) Flexible schedules; 3.) Check and Connect; 4.) Progress monitoring by student success teams*

Explanation of Research Question Three Data

        The responses of survey question three and survey question four represent high school principals' experiences with gifted students who are at-risk of dropping out and the interventions and support provided to those students. These responses include factors contributing to the students' at-risk status. Also included are the strategies employed to prevent these students from dropping out and the persons involved in implementing these strategies. For survey question three, depicted in Table 6, one out of twelve principals responded not applicable (N/A). One out of twelve principals reported limited experience. Ten out of 12 principals reported some experience with gifted students who are at risk of dropping out. For survey question four, illustrated in Table 7, one out of 12 principals reported no interventions. Eleven out of 12 principals reported interventions for gifted students at risk of dropping out (see Table 8). Of those 11 principal respondents, six principals identified staff involved in providing those interventions (see Table 9).

Table 6

Principals' Coded Responses to Research Question Three, Survey Question Three

Principal Responses	Not Applicable	Limited Experience	More Experience
P1			X
P2	X		
P3			X
P4			X
P5			X
P6		X	
P7			X
P8			X
P9			X
P10			X
P11			X
P12			X

Table 7

Principals' Coded Responses to Research Question Three, Survey Question Four

Principal Responses	No Interventions Identified or Not Applicable	Identified interventions
P1		X
P2	X	
P3		X
P4		X
P5		X
P6		X
P7		X
P8		X
P9		X
P10		X
P11		X
P12		X

Table 8

Interventions Provided to Gifted Students who are At Risk of Dropping Out in Research Question Three, Survey Question Four

Principal Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Conference with Administrator			X					X	X			
Conference with Counselor			X	X	X		X	X				
Conference/Communication with Parent				X			X	X				
Schedule changes/Flexible Scheduling				X					X			X
Career and Technical Education					X							
Teacher Communication				X								
GED/ISAEP			X				X				X	
Alternative Routes to Graduation						X						
Intervention by School Social Worker										X		
Intervention by School Psychologist			X							X		
Intervention by Attendance Liaison/Technician			X									
Day treatment counseling											X	
Course Acceleration/Online Learning/Credit Recovery	X				X		X				X	
Community-Based/Outside Agency Services											X	
Mentoring			X				X		X	X		X
College/Career Visits/Exploration							X					
Academic remediation							X					

(continued)

Table 8 *(cont.)*

Principal Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Tutoring					X				X			
"Check & Connect"												X
"Check In- Check Out"/PBIS								X				
Referral to Multi-disciplinary/ Intervention Team												X
Therapeutic Day Treatment											X	

Table 9

Staff Identified as Providing Interventions in Research Question Three, Survey Question Four

Principal Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Administrator			X					X				
Attendance Liaison/Technician			X									
GED / ISAEP Coordinator			X				X					
Graduation Coach/Specialist										X		
Guidance/School Counselor			X	X			X	X				
Mentors			X									X
Outside Agency							X					
School Psychologist			X							X		
School Social Worker			X							X		
Teacher				X								

Emergent Themes

The recorded responses to the survey questions were coded and analyzed. The data analysis led to the identification of three emergent themes in relation to the research questions.

Theme One

Principals' experiences with gifted student dropouts and students at-risk of dropping out (research questions one and three; survey questions one and three). While some principals reported little to no experiences with gifted dropouts, others reported detailed experiences with gifted students who had dropped out or identified circumstances that led to gifted students dropping out. Experiences with gifted dropouts were both current and historical. Some principals identified challenges that placed students at risk of dropping out. The following codes were attributed to this theme: no experience/knowledge/issues; limited experience; number of students encountered; external factors; social and emotional factors.

Theme Two

Interventions and supports provided (Research questions two and three; survey questions two and four). Interventions and supports provided to gifted student who have dropped out and gifted students at risk of dropping out were coded as follows: alternative routes to graduation; college and career visits; career and technical education exploration; action planning; conferencing; tiered interventions; multidisciplinary teams.

Theme Three

Staff involved in providing intervention (Research questions two and three; survey questions two and four). Staff involved in providing interventions as identified by principals were categorized by the following codes: building-level staff; school district or division-level staff; and community-based, non-employee staff.

Data Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?
2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?
3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

The researcher attempted to answer the research questions through aligned survey questions. Analysis of the data collected revealed emergent themes. These themes were derived by coding the data and organizing those codes into categories.

1. Principals' knowledge of gifted dropouts and students at-risk of dropping out (Research questions one and three; survey questions one and three)
2. Interventions and supports provided (Research questions two and three; questions two and four)
3. Staff providing intervention and supports (Research questions two and three; survey questions two and four)

In Chapter 5, findings and implications will be explained and supported by the data collected and reported in this chapter.

<p style="text-align:center">**CHAPTER FIVE**</p>

<p style="text-align:center">**FINDINGS, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS**</p>

Review and Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?

2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?

3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

This chapter discusses the findings based on the analysis of the data collected. Implications for practice based on the study's findings and recommendations for further research will also be discussed.

Summary of Findings

The following findings were made as a result of the data analysis process. Supporting data and research are also cited.

Finding One

Surveyed principals report varying experiences with and knowledge of gifted dropouts or gifted students at risk of dropping out. In response to survey question one, several principals reported *no knowledge of, limited experience* or *no issues with gifted dropouts* (see Table 2). Others reported detailed experiences with gifted students who had dropped out, some indicating the number of students they had knowledge of. Some principals were able to identify the circumstances that led to gifted students dropping out such as *lack of family support; entering the workforce; school related issues; or social-emotional issues, i.e. boredom, frustration, low motivation*. Experiences with gifted dropouts were both current and historical in nature. In response to survey question three, at least one principal indicated not applicable or limited experience while others reported more experience. Some principals identified challenges that placed students at risk of dropping out that include *boredom, home and family matters (i.e., pregnancy, childcare, financial issues), health, and mental health issues (i.e., stressed, depressed, and feelings of being overwhelmed)*.

As principals are responsible for all academic programming in their building, gifted student services are often not the primary focus and lack administrative support (Johnsen, 2013). In study by Alvarez McHatton et al. (2010), in-service principals reported that they received minimal preparation (i.e. compliance and funding) in the area of specialized populations including gifted and special education. Lewis et al. (2007) found that principals are often lacking school division-level support to adequately implement gifted programming.

Finding Two

Surveyed principals report academic interventions and support for gifted dropouts and gifted students at-risk of dropping out that included counselor conferencing, GED/ISAEP consultation/enrollment, and alternative course delivery options. In response to survey questions two and four, five principals identified conferencing with the counselor as an intervention. Four principals identified intervention by the graduation coach/specialist; course acceleration, online learning, and credit recovery; and GED/ISAEP consultation or enrollment as interventions (see Table 4 and Table 8).

Finding Three

Surveyed principals report non-academic interventions and support for gifted dropouts and gifted students at-risk of dropping out that included mentoring. In response to survey questions two and four, five principals identified students were supported through mentors (see Table 4 and Table 8).

Although no research was found to examine dropout prevention and intervention strategies specifically with gifted students, Landis and Reschly (2013) and Ramser (2011) recommended strategies from general education felt to be applicable to gifted students. Prevention strategies include ensuring appropriate academic challenge, multifaceted student engagement, extracurricular involvement, supports for academic transitions, and supports for interpersonal and home needs. Intervention strategies include counseling, tutoring, mentoring, namely "Check & Connect," and engagement through self-directed study or projects. Reenrollment, vocational training, and community involvement were also recommended for addressing high school dropouts (Ramser, 2011).

Finding Four

Surveyed principals identified building-level staff involved in supporting students that included school counselors and graduation coaches. Across responses to survey

questions, five principals identified graduation coaches and four principals identified school counselors as the building level staff involved in providing assistance to students (see Table 5 and Table 9).

School counselors are members of the school's staff whose primary focus is the academic, career, and social emotional development of students. Most school counselors are based in schools and serve in multiple roles within the school building. School counselors are staffed at lower staffing ratios than their specialized instructional support personnel counterparts and may have multiple staff assigned to a single building, particularly at the high school level. While school counselors are called upon to assist all students, Minor (2015) found that many school counselors do not receive training in their counselor preparation programs to effectively meet the counseling needs of gifted students and gain most of their knowledge from their job experiences.

Finding Five

Surveyed principals did not identify the school division's gifted coordinator or the school's gifted resource teacher as providing interventions or support to gifted dropouts or gifted students at risk of dropping out. There were no responses to any of the survey questions identifying supports or interventions provided by the gifted staff at the building or school division level. Lewis et al. (2007) cited a lack of communication from school division gifted staff as having an impact on principals' implementation of gifted programming at the building level.

Conclusions

The findings of this study provide the following insights to the previously established research questions.

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts? The findings of this study indicate that high principals' experiences with gifted dropouts and gifted students at risk of dropping out varied in their knowledge and familiarity of gifted students. While some principals reported no or little experience with gifted dropouts, others reported more detailed experiences. These responses are detailed in Table 2.

2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts? The interventions and supports provided to gifted students who have

dropped out were both academic and non-academic in nature. The interventions provided are identified in Table 3 and Table 4.

3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out? Principals reported varying experiences with gifted students at risk of dropping out (see Table 6). The interventions or supports provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out were also academic and non-academic in nature and some mirrored the supports provided to gifted dropouts to a large degree. Tables 7 and 8 illustrate the principals experiences with gifted students at risk of dropping out and interventions provided to them, respectively.

While it was not a survey question posed, principals identified building level, school division-level, and community-based staff that are involved in supporting students. Staff positions reported across survey responses received were similar in title and responsibility. The identified staff positions can be found in Table 5 and Table 9.

Implications for Practice

Implication One

School divisions should disaggregate their dropout data for students identified as gifted to determine the prevalence of gifted dropouts. This will enable school divisions to plan interventions and supports for gifted students who are underachieving and at risk of dropping out. This implication is associated with Findings One and Five.

Implication Two

School division-level staff could include principals in professional development opportunities, i.e. State and National conferences on gifted education and services. This will allow principals to increase their knowledge and awareness of gifted students' unique learning and social emotional needs. This implication is associated with Findings One and Five.

Implication Three

Principals with the support of school division staff could establish practices to identify gifted students who are underachieving or at risk of dropping out in order to provide intervention and support. Principals may not be aware of students' gifted identification. Likewise, gifted students may not be enrolled in gifted or honors classes and programs and may go unnoticed by building staff. This implication is associated with Finding One.

Implication Four

Principals and school staff could utilize existing intervention and referral mechanisms aligned to a tiered framework to provide intervention and support for gifted students who are at risk of dropping out. Existing student assistance or student intervention teams are already established for the purpose of identifying strategies to support students' academic, behavioral, and or social-emotional needs. This implication is associated with Findings Two and Three.

Implication Five

School divisions should provide professional development to all staff working with gifted students. This will enable teachers, school counselors, administrators, and other school staff to gain knowledge and understanding of the special academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students. This implication is associated with Findings Four.

Suggestions for Future Study

The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. To further address the issue of dropout prevention and intervention with gifted students, the following recommendations for future study are offered:

1. Conduct a study to compare the perspectives of multiple positions within a single school division (i.e., gifted coordinator, school counselors, specialized instructional support personnel) in addition to principals. Multiple staff positions outside of the role of principal were identified in the responses as being involved with providing interventions or supports.

2. Increase the sample size to include assistant principals. As administrative duties are often delegated to staff in these positions, they are often the ones designated to lead student intervention teams and committees (i.e., child study, student assistance/support team).

3. Consider a study that includes middle school principals as the dropping out process begins before students reach high school.

Reflections

To whom much is given, much is required. This process has been a labor of love. When I set out on this journey, I did so knowing that it would not be easy, but necessary. The more

challenges I encountered, the more I knew I had to press forward. I have dedicated my life to helping students overcome obstacles and barriers to academic success. As a social worker, I am a change agent and trained to advocate for the underserved and marginalized. s an educational leader I have an obligation to ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to learn.

Throughout this study process I encountered administrators on all levels that did not think my topic was 'a thing'. Part of the challenge in addressing gifted dropouts is that the data on gifted dropouts is not readily available at the school division, state, or national level. While disheartened at the reactions I got, I took each opportunity to share what I knew from personal experience and what I have learned from research to plant a seed that hopefully took root.

Overall, I am encouraged by the responses collected; even though some were blank, and one was filled with random letters. More principals than not were able to describe their experiences and identify interventions and supports. It is my heart's desire that this study will help to shine light on the plight of many gifted students and spark a change in at least one division's thought and approach to serving all students, including the gifted.

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Qualitative Survey Questionnaire

A Qualitative Investigation of Principals' Experiences with and Interventions Provided to Gifted Students Who Have Dropped Out or are At-Risk of Dropping Out of School

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine high school principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

Research Questions

In order to ensure that the focus of this study adequately addresses the identified research problem, this study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What do high school principals indicate are their experiences with gifted dropouts?
2. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate were offered to gifted dropouts?
3. What interventions or supports do high school principals indicate are being provided to gifted students at-risk of dropping out?

Survey Questions

1. Describe your experience with gifted students who have dropped out of school.
2. What interventions or supports were provided to those students?
3. Describe your experience with gifted students who are at-risk of dropping out.
4. What interventions or supports are being provided to gifted students at risk of dropping out?

Research Question-Survey Question Alignment

Research Question	Survey Question
1	1
2	2
3	3, 4

Certificate of Completion

This certifies that

Monica Lynn Williams

Has completed

Training in Human Subjects Protection

On the following topics:
Historical Basis for Regulating Human Subjects Research
The Belmont Report
Federal and Virginia Tech Regulatory Entities, Policies and Procedures

on

June 25, 2018

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval

VIRGINIA TECH.

Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 10, 2020

TO: Ted S Price, Monica Lynn Williams, Carol S Cash

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

PROTOCOL TITLE: A Qualitative Investigation of Principals Experiences with and Interventions Provided to Gifted Students who have Dropped Out or are At-Risk of Dropping Out

IRB NUMBER: 20-284

Effective September 10, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **September 10, 2020**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

——— *Invent the Future* ———

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

APPENDIX D

Email to Division Superintendents

Subject Line: Request for Permission to Conduct Gifted Dropout Dissertation Research

Dear Division Superintendent,

My name is Monica Williams, and I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am conducting research to investigate high school principals' experiences with, and the supports and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out (IRB #20-284).

I am seeking high school principals in Region II as participants for my research. This research involves a survey consisting of 4 open-ended questions. The survey instrument can be completed on-line through Qualtrics and should take less than 20 minutes to complete. (A copy has been enclosed for your review.) There is minimal risk involved in participating in this research and it will not be possible to identify the person who provided any specific information for the research. All of the school divisions in Region II will be listed in the final report, however the names of the participating school divisions will not be identified in this study.

Please use the link below to either grant permission for this study to be conducted in your school division; deny permission for this study to be conducted in your school division; or provide the contact information for your designee in order to obtain permission.
> https://forms.gle/7KvBNN5QsZ4GkKmd9

This survey has been reviewed by the Human Research Protection Program of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. If you have any questions concerning the survey, you can contact me at (757) 756-6824. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Virginia Tech HRPP at irb@vt.edu or (540)-231-3732. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Monica L. Williams, MSW, Ed.S, LCSW
Doctoral Student
Virginia Tech

APPENDIX E

Email to Participants

Subject Line: Gifted Dropout Doctoral Research Study

Dear Prospective Survey Participant,

My name is Monica Williams, and I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am conducting research to investigate high school principals' experiences with, and the supports and interventions provided to gifted students who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out (IRB #20-284). For the purpose of this study, "dropout" includes gifted students who have left traditional school to enter GED programs; and "at-risk" includes gifted students who are underachieving or failing one or more classes.

I am seeking high school principals in Region II as participants for my research. This research involves a survey consisting of 4 open-ended questions. The survey instrument will be administered on-line through Qualtrics and should take less than 20 minutes to complete. There is minimal risk involved in participating in this research and it will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the research.

This survey has been reviewed by the Human Research Protection Program of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. If you have any questions concerning the survey, you can contact me at (757) 756-6824. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Virginia Tech HRPP at irb@vt.edu or (540)-231-3732. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Monica L. Williams, MSW, Ed.S, LCSW
Doctoral Student
Virginia Tech

 Click on the link below to access the Survey:
        https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dp73FmaxzCKdoUd

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Ted Price, Ph.D
IRB# and Title of Study: 20-284 A Qualitative Investigation of Principals'
Experiences with and Interventions and Supports Provided to Gifted
Students who have Dropped Out or are At Risk of Dropping Out of School

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about
the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of
my doctoral course work. I am seeking high school principals in Region II as
participants for my research. The purpose of this study is to examine high school
principals' experiences with, and interventions provided to gifted students who have
dropped out or are in danger of dropping out.

➤ **WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an online survey administered
through Qualtrics. As part of the study, you will be asked to answer four open-ended
questions.

The study should take approximately 20 minutes of your time.

We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study,
you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse
to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The
investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant
doing so.

➢ CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Your responses are anonymous, so no one can associate your answers back to you. Please do not include your name or other identifying information in your responses that can identify you.

➢ WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Ted Price, pted7@vt.edu

Carol Cash, ccash48@vt.edu

Monica Williams, moniw15@vt.edu

You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech IRB Office at 540-231-3732 (irb@vt.edu).

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.

If you would like to participate in this survey, click on the link below to begin:

https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dp73FmaxzCKdoUd

APPENDIX G

Region 2 School Divisions

School Division	Number of Schools Included*
Accomack County	4
Chesapeake City	7
Franklin City	1
Hampton City	4
Isle of Wight County	2
Newport News City	5
Norfolk City	5
Northampton County	1
Poquoson City	1
Portsmouth City	3
Southampton County	1
Suffolk City	3
Virginia Beach	11
Williamsburg-James City County	3
York County	4
Total	55

*Alternative schools, charter schools, and division-wide specialty schools were not included.