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Evaluation of the EXCEL and IMPACT! Programs for Gifted Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MST, Rowan University 2000

BA, Rowan University, 1998

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

This study addressed a gap in local practice where the IMPACT! and EXCEL programs for gifted students only received anecdotal evaluation. Despite the existence of established standards, programming for gifted students rarely undergoes rigorous evaluation at the local, state, or national levels. The research project consisted of a summative goal-based evaluation that reported the degree to which the school district's programming met national standards and to identify strengths and weaknesses. The researcher conducted qualitative inquiry of an intrinsic case study to evaluate the programming at a single school district under the theoretical frameworks of pragmatism, differentiated instruction, and self-efficacy. Educators answered a census style survey reporting categorical ratings on each element of the gifted standards with additional explanatory comments on open ended questions. The mode response of the categorical ratings was reported and open ended answers were analyzed using a hybrid coding method. Results showed strength in curriculum and instruction, program design, and identification items with most of these in place in the district. The affective needs and professional development categories had lower scores, with educators citing a lack of social emotional and pedagogical training specific to gifted students. The project was an evaluation report with an action plan devised to improve professional development offerings, increase educator's abilities to address social emotional learning. Historically, programming for gifted students has been considered uninspiring and ineffective and is rarely systematically evaluated and improved. Thus, the project promotes social change by reversing this gap in practice and has potential to benefit the upcoming generation of gifted learners and the local community.

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Dedication

The study is dedicated to the three generations that inspired me to advance through all the levels of education – my grandparents, mom and dad, Lyla and Everly.

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I thank all those who helped make this research project possible. Committee Chair Dr. Jose Otaola provided invaluable mentorship through the writing and researching phases of the project. Additionally, Dr. Otaola gave exceptional support and encouragement through the difficult parts of the process. Second Member Dr. Esther Javetz helped improve the methodology of the study with her expertise on qualitative research. Dr. Otaola and Dr. Javetz helped me become a better researcher, scholar, and writer. They both truly cared about the findings of the study and my personal progress, and I will always be grateful for such support. I also thank the other members of the Walden team who mad completion of the study possible including URR Committee Member Dr. Elsa Gonzalez, Dissertation Editor Steve Lehman, and countless staff in the library, financial aid, and advising departments.

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And I give great appreciation to the teachers and students in the gifted and talented programs who work hard to make the units if study on paper come to life as vibrant learning experiences in the classroom.

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Section 1: The Problem

Across the nation, programming for gifted and talented students is underfunded, poorly defined, and poorly evaluated. To meet the needs of the gifted learners, a school district in the northeastern United States has developed and implemented the EXCEL Program and IMPACT! Program for Gifted Students. The local problem is that this programming for gifted students has not been thoroughly evaluated. The project will use program evaluation methodology to systematically evaluate the program based on the established programming standards. Qualitative inquiry utilizing survey data and document reviews will be employed to conduct an evaluation of the programming. The resulting analysis will be used to create an evaluation report with a needs assessment and action plan to better meet the needs of gifted students.

In Section One: The Problem, I describe how this problem unfolds and provide a research-based context for the program evaluation. Evidence of the problem is reported at the local and national level, providing a rationale for evaluation of gifted programming as a problem worthy of study. A review of the literature provides definitions of practices specific to gifted education programming and current evidence of effective programming practices in the categories of programming, evaluation, specialized pull-out programs, identification, and professional development. The thorough description of current literature will offer a context for understanding this local problem and frame the need for the ensuing research project to improve services for gifted students.

Definition of the Problem

Differentiated educational programs for gifted and talented students have long been an area of debate and concern in educational policy. Despite this discussion, many schools, districts, and states do not recognize a need for specialized programs for gifted education, nor do they conduct thorough evaluations of programs for gifted students (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2013). Even though programming standards and effective practices exist, local district policy and practice often fail to meet the standards or evaluate the program against these criteria (NAGC, 2015a). Evaluation of gifted programming is a gap in practice at many local and national levels.

The local problem that prompted the study is that the local school district has implemented a gifted and talented program that has not been systematically evaluated against national standards. District administration would like a thorough evaluation of the programming to determine if the standards are being met (Director of Curriculum, personal communication, August 1, 2016). The program handbook, curriculum, and materials need to be reviewed and evaluated. Additionally, the barriers to effective practice from the teacher's perspective have not been systematically recorded. The collection and analysis of this data will provide thorough evaluation of the program, an area that is a gap in local and national practice.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

For many years, the local school district has dedicated two programs, EXCEL (grades 6-8) and PAGES (grades K-5), to the education of gifted students. This

programming lacked oversight and had not been evaluated based on any established standards (Director of Curriculum, personal communicaiton, October 20, 2013). In the 2013-14 school year, the district used the NAGC's Master Checklist (Neumeister and Burney, 2012) as a guide to self-evaluate the state of the district's elementary gifted program. This informal evaluation showed a gap between district practice in the PAGES program and the established criteria in many programming and instructional practices. This analysis prompted an initiative to improve the gifted programming that failed to meet established standards.

Thus, collaborative teacher groups met throughout the 2014-15 school year to enhance current programming and design and pilot new programming that would better meet the needs of gifted students. The committees developed program visions, handbooks, new curricular units, and established consistent professional learning community meetings. An enhanced EXCEL program and a new IMPACT! Program for Gifted Students were designed with a vision based on accelerated content and constructivist and problem-based learning experiences and skills. Curricular units involved investigation and group problem solving activities designed to build relevenat skills in an exciting 21st century environment. The new program built by teachers was implemented, and the district began a process of change in the gifted programming.

Anecdotal feedback of the piloting was positive, so the programs were adopted as the official gifted and talented curriculum and were to be implemented consistently across the school district in 2015-16. As the programming has been enacted, only anecdotal evidence of effectiveness has been observed. Feedback on the stregnths and

weaknesses of the program have not been thoroughly analyzed or reported. The district administration wishes this program to be evaluated and validated using a systematic standards based evaluation (Personal Communication, Director of Curriculum, August 2015). A need to describe the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges and systematically evaluate the EXCEL Program and the IMPACT! Program based on established standards existed.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Stakeholders consistently report low levels of satisfaction with the overall state of gifted programming. Parents and students perceive gifted programming as variable, unstable, band inadequately funded (Young & Bali, 2014). Educators also feel that gifted students are not challenged or enriched adequately (Loveless, Farkas, & Duffett, 2008). These findings suggest programming should be evaluated and improved.

Systematic collection of data from the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted correlates with these perceptions. Only 30 states require services of any kind for gifted students, and only four states provide funding deemed adequate for gifted services (NAGC, 2015b). This data indicates that gifted programming is likely to be inadequate for the students and would benefit from evaluation and improvement.

Despite the clear need for better oversight, the majority of states across the nation do not fully evaluate nor report on programming for gifted students. Twenty-eight states do not require information about gifted programming to be reported to the public on the district report card, and only 11 states report on programming available in their statewide reporting (NAGC, 2015a). Only seven of these states ask local school districts to record

achievement of gifted students (NAGC, 2015b). A lack of proper evaluation is evident, and represents a clear problem in gifted education.

Though equitable identification of gifted students is specifically targeted in the NAGC Standards, analysis of trends is difficult due to lack of reporting. Only twenty states record any demographic data for gifted populations at all (NAGC, 2015b). Only 12 collect information about low socioeconomic students, and only seven track English-language learner (ELL) student participation rates (NAGC, 2015b). The overall lack of data collection shows the potential to continue historic patterns of underrepresntation and an inability to track which practices may improve equitable identification rates.

Definition of Terms

Acceleration: Students move at a faster pace through curriculum to reach learning at their advanced level. This can be achieved through early entrance, grade skipping, advanced classes, accelerated classes, or curriculum compacting (NAGC, n.d.).

Curriculum compacting: Teachers eliminate portions of the curriculum deemed too basic for the gifted learning. More time can be spent on deeper or more advanced learning opportunities (NAGC, n.d.).

Giftedness: Demonstrated abilities or achievements in the top 10% of students (NAGC, n.d.).

Identification: Policy and procedures that analyze a variety of data sources to determine high ability and high potential learners (NAGC, 2010)

Specialized programs/pull-out program: Specialized classes for groups of gifted children. Pull-out programs refer to those specialized programs that occur during the

school day in a separate location from the student's primary general education classes (NAGC, n.d.).

Programming: The entire range of services available for gifted students at a school district. This term should be used in contrast to "program," which denotes only services provided in a gifted, specialized, or advanced class (NAGC, 2010).

Significance of the Study

The research addressed a local problem by gaining insight into a change process for a program that serves gifted students with the need for a modified educational program. The changes to the EXCEL Program and the new IMPACT! Program lacked critical and systematic analysis. This study gave valuable information about the quality of the program and the strengths and weakness of the local program. This is a critical need in both the local and larger educational landscape, as both the district and nation have exhibited a lack of evaluation and oversight of education for gifted students.

The mission of this programming is to create social change both immediately and in the future. The program focuses on developing students with high abilities into productive community leaders who can address social and environmental problems. The curriculum of the program develops the 21st century skills of problem solving, collaboration, and ethics. Projects in the program include community minded service projects such as preservation of local watersheds. This capstone project will enhance the program, which develops these civic minded future leaders.

Research Questions

The focus of the evaluation was a systematic review of the programming to validate that the practices met the established standards for gifted and talented programming. Additionally, explanatory descriptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the programming were obtained which were utilized to develop a needs analysis and action plan.

RQ1: To what extent does the district's gifted and talented programming meet the NAGC's recommended programming criteria?

RQ2: What are the educator's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the district's programming for gifted students?

Theoretical-Conceptual Framework

Several theoretical and conceptual understandings interlock to frame this inquiry into gifted programming. The exercise of program evaluation derives from pragmatic philosophical theory. The concept of differentiated instruction provides a rationale for applying evaluation procedures to gifted programming, which provides a modified learning experience for some students. More specifically, the school enrichment model (SEM) of gifted education and the social-cognitive theory of self-efficacy guide the research and design of this particular study. These frameworks create a conceptual blueprint to rate a gifted program, to inquire into the development of the teachers in the program, and to create an action plan for real world implementation.

Pragmatism focuses on scientific inquiry into problems of human experience where researchers can affect a practical impact. Classic pragmatic theory is based on the

assumption that practical applications and real-world results are preferred to insular knowledge (Peirce, 1903). This theory is still adhered to today as the core of pragmatism (Haack, 2003). Epistemological and theoretical truths are not as important as measured outcomes or actionable ideas. Therefore, pragmatism is being increasingly used in problem-solving approaches such as evaluations, action research, and mixed-methods inquiry (Evans, Coon, & Ume, 2011). The pragmatic world view promotes actionable inquiry with real consequences as conceived in the design of this study.

The theories of the classical pragmatists were also applied directly to the educational context. Under this theory, study of educational programs should focus on documenting real experiences and problems of students and educators while looking for action that can improve the outcomes (Dewey, 1938; Shields, 2003). In the current time, pragmatism-inspired evaluations are being used with increasing frequency and success in public administration, including healthcare and education (Shields, 2003). The tenets of pragmatism, when applied to gifted and talented education, necessitate research that discovers gaps in practice and develops into plans to address these gaps in a real world and tangible way. In this spirit, this study conducted an in-depth inquiry into programming and developed an actionable plan for implementation.

Gifted and talented education falls into a wider conceptual framework of differentiated instruction. This concept contains the assertion that diverse students benefit from an array of different content, processes, and learning environments (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2003). Educators must modify existing or standard practices to meet the needs of gifted students. A gifted programming evaluation delves into all ways

that gifted students are served in a manner consistent with this concept. This concept suggests that programming for students with high ability should exist and should be evaluated.

Over the last 30 years, systematic frameworks for gifted instruction have been theorized and implemented. SEM envisions gifted education that offers differentiated programming for gifted and accelerated learners throughout the curriculum. Giftedness is conceptualized as a three-ringed connection of ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 1985). Programming in this model includes many levels and types of enrichment for a wider variety of students than was previously considered. This model has been continuously implemented since inception and has been verified through targeted contemporary empirical study (Field, 2009; Reis, et al., 2010). SEM concepts that informed the specific programming in question strongly supported creation of the program under study in this inquiry and informed the ensuing literature review that includes identification, enrichment programs, pull-out and specialized programs, and acceleration.

Further refinement of SEM has described this concept as talent development by differentiating gifted abilities with talent. Modern interpretations explain talent as creative and productive outcomes that are realized after the development of the innate gift of intellectual–creative ability (Gagné, 1995). This concept contains the assumption that the program a district provides helps determine if the innate gifts are developed into the desired results, thus further linking pragmatism's focus on outcomes with gifted

evaluation. A gifted program evaluation research project is strongly supported by these connected concepts.

Additionally, the evaluation of the IMPACT! and EXCEL programs was dependent on the teachers' implementation of programming. The framework of self-efficacy, a person's belief in their own abilities to achieve the desired results, provides assumptions for inquiry into this aspect of the programs (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982). This explained the rationale for the NAGC self- study instrument and the detailed inquiry into the teachers' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the services for gifted students. Documentation of the successes, strengths, concerns, and barriers faced by the teachers informs the district's action plan based upon this concept.

Review of the Literature

The study was grounded in an objectives-based evaluation conceptual framework. This framework provides an effective and logical structure when validating a program in relation to established standards (Spaulding, 2014). The problem and research questions are derived logically from the schema of program evaluation. The ensuing literature review includes established standards and programming evaluation research, as well as studies that validate effective programming options, all of which serve to validate the program evaluation framework. Data collection and analysis used the Master Checklist of Gifted Programming Elements for Self-Assessment (Neumeister and Burney, 2012), an instrument designed for and aligned to an evaluation. The objectives-based evaluation theory provided a pragmatic framework to ground the review of applicable literature.

Search Procedures

Review of literature in the field of gifted programming revealed that there are established standards and known approaches for successful practice, but large gaps exist in implementation and evaluation of these standards and practices. Established standards for gifted programming include the domains of program design, program evaluation, curriculum and instruction, identification, and professional development (NAGC, 2010). Due to a nationwide lack of evaluation and data reporting, the quality of gifted programming and fidelity to these standards are difficult to measure (NAGC, 2015b). The review of literature highlighted important research on effective practices that could be utilized to frame the evaluation in this project.

To frame the study within current research, I conducted a search for all elementary gifted research in the last 5 years in tandem with a review of slightly older literature that was used to inform the 2010 NAGC standards and cited by the NAGC. I performed searches in the Walden's EBSCO database and on REL's multiple database search. Boolean terms utilized included *gifted and elementary, gifted and evaluation, gifted and program, gifted and programming, gifted and evaluation, gifted and professional development,* and *gifted and identification.* Additionally, I reviewed literature from 2000–2016 that is cited in the NAGC standards or on the NAGC website, as these studies were necessary to the formation and evaluation of gifted programming.

In the search I found clusters of research in several disparate areas of gifted education that are all vital to evaluation of programming. Laws, policies, and criteria that serve as established standards were found and analyzed at the local, state, and national

level. I discovered large scale international, national, and statewide evaluations in the form of program evaluations and meta-analysis. On a smaller, more focused scale, evaluation of specific accelerated, pull-out, and specialized curricular programs exist that are comparable to the IMPACT! Program. Another current area of research includes a cluster of studies related to identification practices. The literature review reflects these categories of established standards, evaluation of programming, accelerated/pull-out/specialized programs, identification, and professional development. This provided a framework and context to evaluate the programming under inquiry in current research and practice.

Established Standards

Standards, policy, criteria-based parameters, and legal documents provided a context for evaluation of gifted programming. The state of New Jersey provides a basic guideline for gifted programming but lacks details necessary for evaluation. The New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C 6A:8-3.1, 2005) requires districts to consult the NAGC standards for gifted programming when designing services for gifted students. The code and local policy require districts to use multiple measures for identification starting in kindergarten and to provide services for the K-12 grade level such as modifications to the content, process, products, or learning environment for gifted students. The code does little to specify services beyond this guideline as no model of programming, evaluation, or funding is mandated, endorsed, or suggested.

New Jersey districts must consult the NAGC to find more detailed standards for program design and evaluation. In 2010, the NAGC published standards for gifted

programming that evaluate different components such as program and evaluation, cognitive and affective areas of curriculum, identification, and professional development (NAGC, 2010). The programming standards are accompanied by tools such as a self-study questions and a master checklist. This provides guidance and practical instruments for districts to evaluate the programming for gifted students, which are vital to a researcher conducting an evaluation.

Evaluation of Gifted Programming

When thoroughly studied, national and international gifted programming often do not meet the established standards, nor reflect research-based practices. Teachers, students, and parents perceive gifted programming as variable, unstable, and unable to meet the students' needs (Loveless et al., 2008; Young & Bali, 2014). A meta-analysis of 20 program evaluations in the United States systematically categorized significant problems such as absent or fragmented curricula and improper identification policy (VanTassel-Baska, 2006). Systematic evaluation of gifted programming in England, Wales, and Hong Kong can showed similar disconnect between that policy and practice did not match known effective practices (Koshy, Pinheiro-Torres, & Portman-Smith, 2012; Phillipson, Phillipson, & Eyre, 2011). Due to these systematic problems with gifted programming, evaluations should be completed with an increased sense of urgency.

Despite evidence that gifted programming is not adequate, thorough evaluation of this programming is scant. The majority of states across the nation do not fully evaluate or report on programming for gifted students. Twenty-eight states do not require

information about gifted programming to be reported to the public on the district report card, and only 11 states report on programming available in their statewide (NAGC, 2015a; NAGC 2015b). Only seven of these states ask local school districts to record achievement of gifted students (NAGC, 2015b). A nationwide gap in practice is shown where gifted programming is known to be inadequate but evaluation is sporadic.

Though equitable identification of gifted students is specifically targeted in the NAGC Standards, identification procedures and reporting werenot systematically analyzed. Most identification policies were either unknown or unclear, and lacked focus on underrepresented groups (VanTassel-Baska, 2006). Only 20 states record any demographic data for gifted population at all, while only 12 collect information about low socioeconomic status, and only seven track ELL figures (NAGC, 2015b). This suggests that lack of evaluation may lead to continued patterns of underrepresentation and possible discriminatory practices.

When adequate systematic evaluation does takes place, targeted improvements to programming can result. The state of Arkansas recognized a need for improved practices and evaluation. The resulting initiative and research showed improvements in documentation of programming and service levels for historically underrepresented groups (Robinson, Cotabish, Wood, & O'Tuel, 2014). Tagreted training for administrators based on gaps in evlautaion increased knowledge of standards, efforts to meet the standards, and nominations of minority students (Cotabish & Robinson, 2012). These studies show a path for improvement through proper evaluation procedures.

Accelerated/ Specialized Programs/Pull-Out Programs

Current evaluations of accelerated, specialized, and pull-out programs in elementary grade level, similar to the structure of EXCEL and IMPACT!, have consistently shown better experiences and outcomes for gifted students. The students feel better about pull-out programs (Yang, Gentry, & Choi, 2012; Dimitriadis, 2012) and rate accelerated experiences highly (Colangelo & Assouline, 2004). Student academic outcomes improve in these types of programs (Aljughaiman & Ayoub, 2012) (Dimitriadis, 2012; Robinson, Dailey, Hughes, & Cotabish, 2014). Additionally, specialized programs outside the school day have similar positive effects on student satisfaction and achievement (Pereira, Peters, & Gentry, 2010; Wallace, 2009). Study of these practices provided the most analogous comparisons when evaluating the curricular domain of the IMPACT! Program.

Gifted students in Grades 3–8 favored pull-out programs compared to regular classes. These students reported higher levels of interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment in the pull-out classes (Yang, et al., 2012; Dimitriadis, 2012). Additionally, the teacher and students reported higher engagement and motivation, and more positive teacher–student interactions in the pull-out program (Dimitriadis, 2012). Students who experienced accelerated pacing and advanced curriculum reported better experiences. This finding counters the common myth that students in accelerated or special programs may face negative social experiences. In fact, students in accelerated classes showed improved and positive social development (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Thomson, 2012; National Work Group on Acceleration, 2010). These clear results indicate that students

will perceive a better experience and retain a high level of satisfaction with accelerated, pull-out, and specialized classes.

Elementary gifted students who received sessions of pull-out instruction focused on problem-based learning made significant gains in analytical and creative abilities compared to a control group (Aljughaiman & Ayoub, 2012). Gifted students showed significant improvement in science skills and knowledge compared to a control group exposed to similar concepts with traditional pedagogical methods (Robinson, Dailey et al., 2014). Students in the pull-out program showed higher achievement in advanced mathematics (Dimitriadis, 2012). Based on this success, pull-out programs with a focus on higher order thinking skills and creative problem solving should be considered for elementary gifted programs.

Identification

Identification of gifted students can be a vexing issue, in part because the constructs of giftedness, intelligence, IQ, and aptitude can all be considered controversial. Additionally, gaps noted in American educational achievement can cause concerns that many diverse groups may not be identified at correct rates. Historically students from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups have been underrepresented compared to the majority European American population. Teachers identify different barriers to identification of minority and ELL students, including test bias, language experiences, and lack of ability of teachers to notice gifted behaviors (Ryan, 2012). Striking a balance between identifying strictly the highest achieving students regardless of demographics or trying to find high potential in underserved groups and achieve equitable representation

are often seen as two competing interests (Dai, 2013). Though a lack of overall consistency in this area leaves many questions, some effective practices are documented, providing a guide to districts committed to equitable identification.

African American students may not be proportionally identified for gifted programming due to wide variety of historical and social factors. African American males and females each face unique barriers leading to underrepresentation (Bonner, Lewis, Brown-Perrot, Hill-Jackson, & James, 2009; Mayes & Hines, 2014). Research suggests that assessment through a variety of sources identify more African American students in early grades (Zhabanova, Rule, & Stichter, 2015). Due to the barriers for these students, gifted programming should include research-based practices that show promising results for African American students and equitable identification rates.

Alternate forms of measurement have increased minority identification in different settings. A project on prarie restoration helped identify and enrich minority students in an urban setting (Salisbury, Rule, & Vander Zanden, 2016). Hispanic and Native American students in a rural setting were identified at a higher rate utlizing a visual arts project method of identification (De Leon, Argus-Calvo, & Medina, 2010). Districts with significant issues in disproportional representation may benefit from alternative forms of assessment for gifted programming.

Students with learning disabilities may have gifted abilities that are not measured on traditional testing formats. However, the prevalence of twice exceptional students and the optimal approach to identify such students show mixed research. The criteria of both giftedness and learning disabled vary so greatly that no object definition or standard for

these students could be determined (Lovett & Sparks, 2013). Other findings suggest a tiered model of identification, similar to Response To Intervention, where a student's success on increasingly advanced material would override any scoring on aptitude tests, would in fact identify twice exceptional students in a proportional ratio (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2011). With unclear findings, districts should make sure to raise awareness among staff of the needs of some special needs students for additoinal gifted services but should stop short of advocating any approach or any target rate of identification, as measurements of these constructs are still unclear.

Intelligence quotient (IQ) is not the best measure of gifted abilities, but it has been used historically as a single indicator of giftedness (Pfeiffer, 2012). This overreliance on a single score from an IQ test may have led to historic disparity in identification (Pfeiffer, 2012). Even nonverbal tests, once thought to be more culturally fair, surprisingly were found to be no more accurate in predicting aptitude of ELLs than any other intelligence testing format (Matthews & Kirsch, 2011). Similarly, nonverbal tests did not identify more minority students than a verbal test of cognative abilities (Giessman, Gambrell, & Stebbins, 2016). Single IQ scores from any testing type should not be considered determinative of gifted ability and should be avoided as a sole determination of gifted identification.

A variety of measures should be utilized to identify students who show gifted traits differently. Use of both performance measures such as grades or tests scores and nonperformance measures including qualitative data from observation can be used in tandem to identify a diverse variety of students (Acar, Sen, & Cayirdag, 2016). Cognitive

checklists based on teacher observation of gifted traits can better identify underperformers than any aptitude or curricular based measure (Dalia & Agné, 2013). A comprehensive system of identifcation based on multiple measures should be present in order to match current research and the NAGC standards for indentification.

Professional Development

The established standards require educators at all levels of the educational organization to implement and monitor professional learning about best practices in gifted education. Despite documentation from Coleman, Gallagher, and Job (2012) showing that frameworks for professional development and gifted programming exist that should improve practice, most widespread initaitives in this area have not produced exepcted outcomes, and they have little effect on teachers' knowledge of gifted education and little improvement in teachers' practices (Vidergor & Eliam, 2011). It appears that gifted education requires a different approach than general training on gifted practices.

Conversely, smaller and more targeted training on specific pedagogical methods that meet the needs of gifted learners improves teacher ability to differentiate. Instruction on inquiry-based labs improved teacher self-efficacy in differentiating gifted students in a general education setting (Benny & Blonder, 2016). Additionally, teachers who are trained in engagement strategies and problem-based learning strategies are better equipped to serve gifted students (Trnova, Trna, & Skrabankova, 2013). These trainings that offer specific strategies for gifted students show positive results, unlike the larger and more theoretical initiatives.

Systems that create individualized coaching and articulation can improve educator professional learning. Technology allows gifted specialists at different school districts to collaborate and discuss strategies that will enhance teacher practice (Little & Housand, 2011). Individual coaching for gifted administrators produced increased confidence and knowledge of gifted programming and increased efforts to meet the standards (Cotabish & Robinson, 2012). Capacity building in individuals through small group or individual coaching is recommended for gifted programming.

Implications

The study identified strengths and weaknesses in the local school district's gifted programming based on survey data and document review. The data could be used to conduct a needs assessment and derive a resulting action plan. The action plan could be used to inform district decision making and improve the EXCEL and IMPACT! Programs.

Summary

Gifted students represent an underserved group in need of modified educational environments and learning opportunities. Despite the existence of established standards, known effective practices, and program evaluation frameworks, most gifted programming lacks crucial analysis and oversight. The local school district redesigned the IMPACT! Program for Gifted Students in grades K-5 and enhancing practices in the existing EXCEL Program for grades 6-8. The district administration wished to evaluate the programming utilizing the NAGC standards to assure adherence to best practices and to establish a continuous cycle of program improvement for gifted students.

Research relevant to the EXCEL and IMPACT! Programs showed a relatively small number of studies, but with clear areas for focus when evaluating a program. Specialized pull-out programming showed promising results in quantitative and qualitative studies that report improved instructional methodology. I utilized the established standards and the research base to frame a qualitative study of the programming for gifted students. I used categorical survey data to investigate RQ1, "To what extent does the district's gifted and talented programming meet the NAGC's recommended programming criteria?" Open-ended survey comments and a review of publicly available documents informed RQ2, "What are the educator's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the district's gifted programming?" The resulting analyses will inform the district through a needs assessment and action plan.

Section 2: The Methodology

In this study I utilized the program evaluation framework with qualitative inquiry based on the case study tradition to systematically compare the practices in the local school district's kindergarten to eighth grade gifted programming to the NAGC established standards. The current programs, branded as IMPACT! in grades K-5 and EXCEL in grades 6-8, have been revised and needed systematic study. In this study, the school district desired both a categorical rating of the programming to serve as a snapshot of the validity of current practice and rich descriptions from the educators familiar with the programming to help explain the strengths and weaknesses in the program. This was a pragmatic approach that focused on using the data to inform a needs assessment and action plan to better understand the complex system in need of evaluation and make continued improvement.

Research Questions

The focus of the evaluation was a systematic review of categorical and open-ended data to validate that the school district's programming met the established standards for gifted and talented programming. Additionally, the open-ended descriptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the program were obtained to develop a needs analysis and action plan. Through the research questions I sought both categorical data and open-ended descriptions. Qualitative inquiry was used to answer the research questions.

RQ1: To what extent does the district's gifted and talented programming meet the NAGC's recommended programming criteria?

RQ2: What are the educator's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the district's programming for gifted students?

Qualitative Methodology

The case study was the appropriate qualitative tradition for this evaluation of the gifted programming at a single school district. Case studies are used when in-depth description or inquiry into a single bounded case or a small number of cases is desired (Creswell, 2012; Stake , 1995, 2005). The research questions in this study were suggestive of the use of the intrinsic style case study. The intrinsic case study concerns in-depth inquiry into a single case because that is the only case of interest to the researcher (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995, 2005). In this research, I only examined one district's program because the school district and I were interested only in validating this program in the context of the state mandate to provide services to gifted students and the local problem that the programming has not been evaluated formally. If the district's programming is characteristic of gifted programs in other districts is not relevant to the scope of the research questions and the NAGC's self-study recommendation. The intrinsic case study style resulted in data most relevant to a program evaluation.

The primary research procedure used cross sectional survey research. Surveys are often the most efficient means to measure current beliefs and practices or conduct an evaluation of a program (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, surveys provide useful information for formally reporting needs from the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012). Cross sectional surveys measure data at a single point in time (Creswell, 2012). The study is a summative evaluation, seeking a categorical rating of a program at this

particular point which should be collected in a cross-sectional manner. This design matched the constructs of this study because in the research questions I sought to evaluate a program and provide a description of strengths and weakness in order to form a needs assessment. Categorical survey and open-ended survey data provided a snapshot of the current programming in this inquiry.

Program Evaluation Design

The study methodology was a program evaluation. Program evaluation is a systematic and pragmatic approach to collect and use data to make decisions and inform practices for a set of related activities with one intended purpose (Spaulding, 2014; Yarbrough, 2011). Specifically, this study utilized the policy-scientific framework for program evaluation. The policy-scientific approach is an empirical approach where the researcher conducts surveys, interviews, or document analyses to test the current program against established standards or beliefs of how the program should function (Leeuw, 2003). The results of the evaluation yielded a thorough description of current practice that could be used to validate if the programming met the established NAGC standards.

Program evaluation differs from some other types of research as the information gained from research can be immediately acted upon for school improvement during the study (Spaulding, 2014). I specifically focused this research project on a summative, goal-oriented evaluation process. A summative process is utilized at the end of a program cycle to evaluate the state of the program, as opposed to formative data about the process of implementation (Spaulding, 2014). The research was goal-oriented because the project

was designed to validate the program compared to specific criteria and to obtain specific information about strengths and weaknesses that can be acted on. The summative, goal-oriented approach most effectively described the extent to which the current programming met the established standards and effectively documented strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.

Evaluation Goals

- To validate whether the gifted and talented programming meets the NAGC's recommended criteria.
- To document the current practices in the local school district's gifted programming.
- To describe strengths and weaknesses of the gifted and talented programming.
- To make an overall assessment and recommendations for improvement for the district's services for gifted students.

Participants

The participants in the study were educators in the school district who were familiar with the gifted and talented programming. This included approximately 50 participants with various perspectives of administration and teaching. Educators familiar with the gifted programming included approximately 17 building administrators who oversaw the day to day operations of the programs and teachers, five curriculum staff members who oversaw the learning activities of the gifted programs, nine accelerated mathematics teachers, three enriched social studies teachers, five enriched science

teachers, and four elementary gifted and talented program teachers. The recruitment and study of these individuals followed the plan laid out in the application to the Institutional Review Board (09-12-17-0232631). These participants were able to provide a comprehensive perspective of the entirety of the gifted and talented services.

The participant selection was a census method where the researcher recruits all members of a population instead of a sample. In this case, all educators familiar with the gifted programming were recruited through an optional and anonymous survey link sent to their e-mail. A census is possible in this case because the relatively small population ($N < 50$) of educators who work with the gifted programs in question. This made textual analysis of all open-ended comments feasible. A census of participants has the strong benefit of removing any chance for sampling biases or errant conclusions based on the random nature of sampled results.

As a formal research study, measures were taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to obtain informed consent. All the participants were given a detailed description of the study and the procedures of the data collection and analysis and signed informed consent agreements as the first page of the survey. The survey did not record any names, ip addresses, or other personally identifiable information. The data collection and analysis were confidential and not even I as the researcher could match the identity of the respondent to any information in the survey results.

Measures to protect vulnerable populations were built into the methodology of data collection. In this study, such ethical considerations are necessary because the research was being conducted at my own workplace. This creates a protected class of

employees who are supervised by the researcher. Employees in a research study may feel uncomfortable because they may feel compelled to please supervisors by participating even if they did not wish to participate. Additionally, employees may feel their participation or the answers given could reflect on their job rating. Employees who may feel a compulsion to participate in the study or whom may feel discomfort from the questions were protected through recruitment protocol.

The recruitment method and collection method of an anonymous e-mail survey minimized any potential harm to employees. E-mail solicitation of participants is considered low pressure due to the fact that the recipient has the ability to choose to participate in a setting that is private and provides time to consider participation with no coercive influences such as the presence of the researcher, colleagues, or supervisors. The anonymous nature of the survey means that no one will know who chose to participate or who gave which answers. The survey instrument utilized asked only questions regarding the programming of the district, and did not ask questions of a personal nature nor questions designed to elicit information about any employee's performance. As additional protection, the survey was sent to any staff member who was on medical leave due to pregnancy or disability. Teacher input into district programs is a common educational practice. Thus, with measures to ensure anonymity and low-pressure recruitment, the psychological risk to employees was similar to routine daily tasks.

Data Collection

The primary data in this study was collected from a cross-sectional survey utilizing two instruments. Cross sectional surveys record information, perceptions,

attitudes at a single point in time (Creswell, 2012). This is a common and efficient means to collect information to evaluate a program and to analyze the needs of a population or community (Creswell, 2012). The research questions in this study were best suited to a cross sectional survey design because the purpose of the study was to collect a snapshot of categorical ratings of a program and to create a needs assessment based on strengths and weaknesses.

The first The Master Checklist of Gifted Programming Elements for Self-Assessment (appendix B) instrument designed by the NAGC was administered to educators familiar with the programming to gain insight into RQ1, which investigated the degree to which the national standards are met. The instrument gave a forced choice from three categories for each programming standard. Participants ranked “No evidence”, “Some evidence”, and “In Place” categories. This produced ordinal categorical data for analysis. This data showed gaps in attainment of the NAGC standards.

An additional instrument, entitled the Gifted and Talented Questionnaire (Appendix C), sought information as open ended comments which will also be collected concurrently from the survey instrument. The answers to such questions were intended to provide explanatory data that shed light on the reasons behind the categorical data results (Creswell, 2012). The instrument was developed by brainstorming questions related to each of the six categories of The Master Checklist of Gifted Programming Elements for Self-Assessment. The original questions were evaluated for clarity and content validity and then culled through feedback from a peer group of administrators familiar with gifted programming and research methods. A final list of questions was then phrased in an

open-ended format to elicit explanatory data about each of those categories. In addition to the pre-coded questions, two open ended non coded questions gave the educators an opportunity to share feedback about the programming that does not fit any a priori codes.

Additional data was collected from a review of the publicly available district handbooks for the EXCEL and IMPACT! Programs. This data source provided different data that can help both explain categorical ratings and give more contexts to the strengths and weaknesses of the programming. This data is likely to be helpful in determining if perceived weaknesses were based on a lack of procedures or a lack of implementation which is of importance to note in the evaluation report. The textual analysis of the district handbooks enhanced the description of the programs and deepened the explanation of the strengths and weaknesses.

Data Analysis

The initial data analysis was a measure of central tendency applied to the categorical survey data. The primary data will be the mode. The mode was the appropriate measure of central tendency to apply to categorical data that is ordinal in nature. The three rating categories of “No Evidence”, “Some Evidence”, and “In Place” implicitly represent an ordinal ranking; however, it was not a scale and does not necessarily represent an even ratio between each measure. This simple analysis will be of high utility because it created an easy to display snapshot of current practice for the intended audience of the evaluation report. An alternate method that could be utilized is to combine the latter two categories and record a percentage of “Some Evidence + “In

Place" as one score compared to "No Evidence". This would give a clearer picture of compliance to the standards, but less of a determination of the quality of the elements.

At this time, the descriptive categorical analysis will satisfy the evaluation goal that seeks the current summative rating of the programming utilizing the NAGC standards. This data can be of future benefit to ongoing study of the programming. The ratings on the checklist can be re-measured at different points in the future. Inferential statistics could then be used to measure changes in the program over time, correlations to future changes in the programming, or quasi- experimental designs. The Master Checklist ratings from this study will both give the desired data from this inquiry and create a baseline for future improvements to be evaluated.

After the raw data from the questionnaire was collected, I coded and themed the text. The analysis used a hybrid of a priori and open coding to analyze data from RQ2. Most themes were most appropriately determined a priori because the instrument collected comments in the various themes of the standards such as program design, identification, and professional development. Additional themes that presented themselves in answers disparate from the expected response categories were also determined where necessary. The subthemes and codes that informed the strengths and weaknesses of the program emerged during the analysis and thus were determined using inductive reasoning analysis of responses. I concurrently analyzed the text of the district handbooks using the same procedure. Representative quotes that describe each theme will be selected for any data presentation to stakeholders to provide a rich description.

I assured validity and reliability through multiple procedures. I triangulated the data by combining both categorical and open-ended responses on the survey with open textual analysis from district handbooks. Additionally, the data was collected from a wide range of educators. Members checked different notes and coding to assure that I accurately interpreting their intended meaning. In the latter stages, I debriefed with a peer experienced in gifted and talented education and qualitative research methodology. Triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing are commonly accepted methods utilized to validate qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). A second evaluator reviewed the open-ended responses and determined codes and themes independently. A measure of interrater reliability was calculated. Discrepant or unclear data was addressed implicitly by the comment sections of the survey. The open-ended nature of the comments collected explanations of any discrepant results. These measures triangulated and checked data sufficiently to provide credibility to the data analysis.

Limitations

This study was limited by the nature of intrinsic case study research. Qualitative researches in general, and case studies in specific, rely on an inductive approach that may not be generalizable to a larger population and are bounded to specific population, time, or context. This intrinsic case study investigates only the single case of interest and does not create any generalizable conclusions projectable to other gifted programs. This limits the utility of the results to the context of this single school district.

The study was also limited by the survey data collection method and the type of qualitative data collected. The survey data in this study gathered categorical data in the

form of participants' ratings based on their own perception of the program and corresponding open-ended comments. The scope of this study did not include quantitative measures of long-term outcomes such as student achievement, limiting the validity. The categorical data collected in this evaluation is ordinal, but without proportional ratios. Therefore, and efforts to quantify the categories would not be valid. Future study of the program should look to develop more data sources for stronger triangulation and potential hypothesis testing.

The methodology in this study relies upon data generated and rated by internal participants in the spirit of the NAGC Self-Study, which limits the potential objectivity and validity of the results. The participants may be biased to answer positive information about the program as stakeholders in the development and implementation of the very program they are rating. Internal evaluation lacks an outside judgement on the program. Additionally, since the participants worked in these gifted programs, the effect of policies and practices upon students not identified for these programs may not be represented. An external evaluation including observation is recommended at a future stage to create a presumably unbiased source of data for stronger triangulation protocol.

Conclusion

This program evaluation answered two guiding questions regarding the district's gifted and talented programming. The first research question looked for a categorical rating of the districts programming which will be answered through categorical ratings from the educators familiar with the programming. The second research question was more explanatory and in-depth in nature, and lead to information about the strengths and

weaknesses of the program. The results of both questions converge to give a snap shot of current gifted and talented programming.

The data in this study came from a cross sectional survey and a document review. The survey of educators in diverse positions in the gifted program gave both categorical data and open-ended comments about the programming under study. The document review provided a separate data source for textual analysis. Descriptive statistics give a rating to each element of the gifted standards. Open coding with a priori categories provided a framework to analyze the open-ended data which explained the categorical ratings. The data sources provided answers to the current categorical rating as needed to answer RQ1, and comments about the strengths and weaknesses as needed to answer RQ2.

The analysis of data was used to create a program evaluation report in the project phase of this study. The evaluation described current programming to document the practices in the district. A gap analysis was conducted based on the reported strengths and weaknesses. This analysis informed an action plan. This report based on the study is a framework for district decision makers to improve the programming.

Findings

The collected data from the first instrument, The Master Checklist of Gifted Program Elements for Self-Assessment, was analyzed to describe categorical ratings for each element of the district's gifted programming. The data consisted of participant answers of "No Evidence", "Some Evidence" or "In Place" for each programming item. Overall patterns showed that Program Design, Identification, and Curriculum and

Instruction were strongly evidenced, with more no evidence results indicating areas in need of improvement in Affective Needs and Professional Development. Discrepant data was recorded in Program Evaluation items. From these answers, descriptions of scoring were detailed in summary and tables which follow and are utilized to form portions of the evaluation report.

Program Design Results

Program design items were strongly evidenced in the results of the survey. Seven out of eight standards scored as 92% or above answering Some Evidence or In Place. Convincingly, six of eight scored a mode of In Place. These items are among the most consistently rated as In Place for any category of the inquiry. Thus, this area was strength of the programming. The results indicate that definitions of programs, classes, and students under the gifted programming umbrella exist and form a coherent mission and vision. Likewise, a detailed description of programming design is included in the evaluation report.

A single program design item was reported as a weakness. Fifty-four percent of respondents did not see evidence of standard eight, which pertains to early entrance, grade skipping, and other acceleration above grade level enrollment opportunities. Since this indicator is a weakness, it was therefore addressed in the program evaluation action plan.

Table 1

Program Design Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
1	0%	23%	77%*
2	8%	23%	69%*
3	8%	15%	77%*
4	0%	15%	85%*
5	8%	38%	54%*
6	8%	38%	54%*
7	8%	46%*	46%*
8	54%*	23%	23%

Identification Results

Identification items were also reported as a strong area where the district showed some or complete evidence in eight out of nine standards. This indicates that screening, and identification procedures are clear and judged effective for the diverse students of the school district. However, contrary to program design where the majority of items were fully in place, only two identification standards showed a mode of In Place, so further refinement may still be a valuable goal to achieve full implementation of standards. Additionally, a weak area is noted in standard 17, where 46% of respondents answered No Evidence. This indicates that the appeals process for students who fail to meet entrance criteria is not sufficiently publicized. Therefore, a method of communication for this item will be addressed in the evaluation action plan.

Table 2

Identification Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
11	0%	54%*	46%
12	0%	62%*	38%
13	23%	31%	46%*
14	8%	62%*	38%
15	8%	15%	77%*
16	15%	38%	46%*
17	46%*	15%	38%
18	23%	38%*	38%*
19	8%	23%	69%*

Curriculum and Instruction Results

All 12 standards in curriculum and instruction items saw a majority of respondents answer “Some Evidence or “In Place”. Nine of the 12 items scored with a mode of In Place, with two more standards split evenly between Some Evidence and In Place. These results indicate that a written curriculum for various programming exists that includes acceleration, enrichment, and advanced services appropriate for gifted students. These are among the strongest results for any area of the programming. Curriculum and instruction is strength of the school district’s gifted programming.

Table 3

Curriculum and Instruction Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
20	15%	23%	62%*
21	8%	46%*	46%*
22	8%	46%*	46%*
23	8%	62%*	31%
24	15%	31%	54%*
25	15%	31%	54%*
26	0%	38%	62%*
27	8%	38%	54%*
28	0%	31%	69%*
29	0%	15%	85%*
30	0%	46%	54%*
31	0%	31%	69%*

Affective Needs Results

Affective needs items standards were an area of weaker evidence. Two standards scored a mode of No Evidence with 62% of respondents seeing a need in items 32 and 33. This indicates that there is either no or insufficient affective curriculum and that student social and emotional needs may not be addressed fully. Standard 35 showed discrepant data, where the mode was In Place with 46%, but a significant amount, 23%, answered No Evidence. Further explanatory data or future data collection should help shed light on this standard, which states that gifted students should be provided with

career guidance. Unlike the weak areas, standard 34 saw strong results with 92% of respondents noting evidence of college guidance for gifted students. Overall results suggest that lack of practices in affective needs should be remediated in the resulting action plan.

Table 4

Affective Needs Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
32	62%	0%	38%
33	62%	8%	31%
34	8%	54%*	38%
35	23%	31%	46%*

Professional Development Results

The two professional development items standards both scored somewhat mixed results, with 31% and 54% respectively at No Evidence. This suggests that the majority of educators and parents are not given opportunities to learn about gifted specific education practices. Professional development practices are in need of improvement and should be included as part of the evaluation action plan.

Table 5

Professional Development Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
36	31%	31%	38%*
37	54%*	8%	38%

Program Evaluation Results

Program evaluation items scored mixed results, which indicated this as an overall category situated in the middle of the strong and the weak. Standards 38 and 39 scored strong results as the vast majority saw Some Evidence or In Place. Conversely, standards 40 and 41 recorded mixed results, including a concerning 38% of respondents reporting No Evidence for standard 41. These results indicate that participants felt that the students and program is evaluated internally, but that a formal evaluation and action plan reported to all stakeholders is not completely evidenced. The evaluation report project in conjunction with this research will directly align to this need.

Table 6

Program Evaluation Items

Standard Number	*No Evidence*	*Some Evidence*	*In Place*
38	15%	23%	62%*
39	8%	46%*	46%*
40	15%	54%*	31%
41	38%*	23%	38%*

Open-Ended Textual Analysis

In addition to the categorical rating, explanatory data was utilized to gain a rich description of current programming and provide more explanation of the above evaluation. Textual data was collected from survey respondent's answers on the Gifted and Talented Questionnaire in addition to document review of public district documents. The a priori themes are presented in the table below with corresponding sub-themes which emerged from this data analysis. This textual analysis informed the program evaluation report.

Because the research project evaluated established standards, a priori categories which matched the categories of the NAGC standards were utilized to structure the textual analysis. The categories of Program Development, Identification, Curriculum and Instruction, Affective Needs, Professional Development, and Evaluation were chosen to align with the NAGC standards, the research instruments, and the local problem. This

format provided a needed link between the categorical data analyzed above and the textual data which helps explain the areas of strength and weakness.

The open-ended response data was analyzed through a multi-step process to develop codes and themes which explain the data set. Initially, the entire body of text was read holistically before drawing any conclusions. Then, I assigned codes to each frequently mentioned idea in the data. The codes were divided by category to gain a first sort of the data. The codes in each category were divided again by similarity and then developed into one or more themes for each category. This provided thematic textual results for each category of the NAGC standards which connect to the categorical ratings with more rich description. These themes also formed the basis of the descriptions in the evaluation report.

Program Development Themes and Codes

Program Development was mentioned by survey respondents and existing district documents in eight different codes as indicated in Table 7. These ideas presented with two different similarities which were developed into themes which best express the open-ended results in this category. The local school district's overall mission and vision for gifted students is to develop 21st century skills. These were named variously as collaboration, problem solving, or group/collaborative problem solving, or with the encompassing 21st century label. Respondents summarized the mission as "The goal is to make sure that students are exploring and begin challenged in all areas of life that center around 21st century skills" and as "The goal is to make sure that students are exploring and begin challenged in all areas of life that center around 21st century skills."

Additionally, to accomplish that mission, the district defines roles, responsibilities, and services. These explanatory results show the basis of the strong ratings in this category from the categorical results.

Table 7

Program Design Textual Analysis

A priori category	Emergent themes	Codes
Program Development	The mission/vision of the gifted programming is 21st century skills	Mission and Vision 21st century Collaboration Problem Solving
	Roles, responsibilities, and services are clear	Group/Cooperative Leaders Levels of Service Roles and Responsibilities

Identification Themes and Codes

Identification of gifted students was described in six ideas indicated as codes in table 8. One evident theme was that students are screened and identified through multiple standardized test measures such as the OLSAT, PARCC, STAR or other instruments. Additionally, the procedures are designed to include diverse students and students with advanced potential. The teachers felt the program successfully identified diverse students, as clearly expressed “We have a high percentage of minority students and also a few special needs students”. Overall, these explanations combined with the categorical ratings reflect many of the desired practices of the standards and of empirical research as discovered in this project’s literature review.

Table 8

Identification textual Analysis

A priori category	Emergent themes	Codes
Identification	Students are screened and identified through multiple standardized test measures.	Screening Detailed Identification Standardized Test Grades
	Identification procedures include diverse students and with advanced potential.	Multiple Measures Exit Procedure Diverse Students Advanced Potential

Curriculum and Instruction Themes and Codes

Curriculum and Instruction scored the highest of any category in the categorical ratings, so explanatory data would likely show detailed practices in this area. Data showed eight ideas indicated in Table 9 which developed into four themes. Programming provides enrichment activities through the pull-out IMPACT! classes for elementary students. Similarly, middle schoolers receive enrichment through extra activities inserted after curriculum compacting in the EXCEL classes. A different practice, acceleration, is provided through accelerated mathematics classes where students learn an advanced grade level's content. A final curriculum service for gifted students are accommodations and modifications which al l teachers are to make for gifted students within parameters of every class. This explanatory data shows the reasoning educators used when scoring this as a high category and aligns to the research-based practices in the literature review.

Survey respondents identified one curricular area in need of improvement. The teachers saw a need for an advanced English Language Arts class. One teacher answered "There should be a gifted or advanced ELA class, it the only core subject without it", while another added "They need to have an advanced ELA for students who are good at that subject". Since this was expressed multiple times, it was a consideration in the formation of the action plan.

Table 9

Curriculum and Instruction Textual Analysis

A priori category	Emergent themes	Codes
Curriculum and Instruction	Enrichment through a pull-out program in IMPACT! Enrichment through curriculum-compacting in EXCEL Acceleration in Accelerated Mathematics Need for ELA services	Enrichment Field Trips Acceleration Pull-out Curriculum Compacting Accommodations Modifications

Affective Needs Themes and Codes

Educators reported three different ideas about affective needs of students as described in the codes of Table 10. Gifted students are seen to exhibit wide ranges of individualized behavior, including non-compliant behavior, which lay persons may not associated with advanced classes. Gifted students also were seen to be bored with school or the general curriculum. These explanatory ideas show an educator understanding and need for more resources to help gifted students social and emotional concerns, but district

practices were rated as lagging in the previous categorical analysis. Therefore, a combination of this data and the low rating will greatly inform the resulting action plan.

The educators indicated that gifted students have varied and unique social emotional needs. One answer stated “While many seem to 'need' the approval from their teachers, yet just as many could truly care less! I've found the genuinely gifted child beats to their own drum and does not conform to traditional expectations. They may appear lazy when in fact they are bored. And the toughest part to combat as a teacher is pulling out their best work when the topic does not interest them”. The district educators viewed the area of affective needs as important and also underdeveloped. These responses lead to the incorporation of training and resources in the action plan.

Table 10

Affective Needs Textual Analysis

A priori category	Emergent themes	Codes
Affective Needs	Gifted students exhibited a variety of behaviors	Non-compliant behavior Individuals
	Gifted students experience boredom with the general curriculum	Boredom

Professional Development Themes and Codes

Data regarding the Professional Development category showed two ideas which were codes that developed into themes as detailed in Table 11. Professional development in the district’s gifted programs consisted of many articulations between gifted educators at different sites. Educators reported this as helpful. Conversely, the educators also noted

that the professional development training sessions they have participated in are such articulations or subject area training but lacking professional development for gifted practices. This explanation showed the reasoning behind the mixed results for Professional Development Items in the categorical analysis.

Table 11

Professional Development Textual Analysis

A priori category	Emergent themes	Codes
Professional Development	Articulation with colleagues is helpful	Articulations
	Lack of gifted specific PD	No Gifted PD

Program Evaluation Themes and Codes

The present state of the Program Evaluation category of standards was evident in the data in three ideas which combined to form one theme as seen in Table 12. Educators see feedback about the program as a loop between parent, student, and educator feedback. This may be through anecdotal contacts or a more formal IMPACT! report card. Information about formal evaluations such as this study was absent in the data set. This explains the findings in the categorical analysis where formal evaluation reported to stakeholders was identified as a weakness, where evaluation overall was not.

Table 12

Program Evaluation Textual Analysis

A priori category	Emergent themes	Codes
Evaluation	Current evaluation is anecdotal parent and student feedback.	Parent Feedback Student feedback Report Card

Document Analysis

I performed an additional analysis of the district's publicly available documents for gifted and talented programming. The documents included the IMPACT! Program Handbook, The EXCEL Program Handbook, and the curricula for al l gifted and accelerated course. The analysis examined the documentation of each of the five categories of the NAGC standards. Results are reported as the percentage of standards met for each of the categories. This triangulates with the other data collected to help identify the target areas that need improvement. The results were consistent with the categorical ratings given by the study participants

The results were listed in a summarized table. In the table, each section of the NAGC standards are indicated on a separate row. Columns indicating the number of standards in each category, the number of standards with evidence in the documents, and the percentage of standards met show the results of the analysis. This helped achieve both goals of the analysis, which was to use the documents to help identify missing standards to be addressed, and to use as a comparison to the categorical data given by the survey participants.

Table 13

EXCEL and IMPACT! Program Textual Analysis Summary

Category	Number of standards	Number of standards met	Percentage of standards met
Program design	10	9	90%
Identification	9	6	67%
Curriculum and instruction	12	9	75%
Affective needs	5	0	0%
Professional development	2	0	0%
Program evaluation	4	2	50%

The text of the documents was coded and themed using the same schema as the open-ended data. The codes and themes were then compared to the standards to determine which standards were addressed in the written documents. The summary table indicates that the majority of standards in the areas of Program Design. Identification, and Curriculum and Instruction are represented in the district documents. Half of the standards in the area of Program Evaluation are represented in the documents, and none of the Affective Needs or Professional Development were met in the written program. This is consistent with the results from the categorical ratings given by participants in the survey. The results of the documentary analysis support the other research and add another numerical result which again identifies the same areas of need.

Several areas in need of improvement were identified in the document analysis. Pattern emerged in clusters of standards that were not met. In the Identification category,

the standards regarding appeals processes were absent. Any written documentation on Affective Needs curriculum was absent from the documents. Additionally, there was no written plan for Professional Development. The document analysis indicates that the district would likely benefit by adding appeals processes to the district handbooks,

Reliability and Validity

Measures were taken to check reliability and validity to the research results from the open-ended responses. In order to assess reliability of results, inter-rater reliability was tested to make sure the coding assessments would be reproduced by an alternate observer. A second researcher was utilized to review the data and assign codes to the chunks of text. The coding was compared to my coding, and a measure of inter rater reliability was scored.

Though results in any qualitative research are generally not transferrable outside the study, an internal check of validity is still recommended. Two members of the study participants volunteered to perform member checking interviews of the data set. The member check helps refine themes and make sense of discrepant data. The credibility of results is increased by this step which improves accurate reporting of the participants' intentions.

Inter-rater Reliability

To determine the reliability of the textual analysis, I conducted an inter- rater reliability measure. Inter-rater reliability is an important measure when analyzing results from an open ended or observational instrument, where the subjective interpretations of the researcher are of paramount importance (Creswell, 2012). A researcher familiar with

gifted programming volunteered to assist as a second coder. The second coder completed a pre-coding protocol and engaged in coding of all open-ended responses. After all codes were collected, the data was compiled into s spreadsheet and measures of inter-rater reliability were calculated. The outcome showed a strong agreement.

The protocol involved a brief training period with sample coding data. The second researcher was instructed on the operational definitions of the codes and given sample data to review. After attempting the sample, all questions were answered, and procedures clarified where necessary. The second coder then reviewed the data set an assigned code to each answer.

The analysis of the inter-rater results showed a strong correlation between the two coders. The results showed inter rater agreement frequency at .827, showing that 82.7% of codes were assigned the same by myself and the second coder. Since the frequency of coding implies very different reliability depending on the number of codes and the number of responses, a further analysis was needed. A Cohen's Kappa measure was also calculated which showed a .819 agreement. The Kappa score takes into account the likelihood of matches by chance and is the best measure of the statistical likelihood or agreement on coding (Cohen, 1988). Because the varieties of responses in this research were numerous, resulting in many codes, the Kappa result was very strong. The result indicted that 81.9% matching frequency was likely due to actual agreement, with the difference, .8% being likely due to chance. The results suggest the responses were reliably coded by a reproducible reading of the respondents' answers.

Validity

To assess validity of the research results, member checking was utilized to help interpret the survey responses to open ended questions. Member checking is an important step to ensure that qualitative data credibly reports the intended message of the participants (Creswell, 2012). Two participants volunteered to a brief interview to discuss the open-ended data, specifically the way the codes were developed into themes and any discrepant data. The members were both of the same or higher position status in the organization to prevent any compulsion of a subordinate, or any conflicts of interest. This check helped determine the degree that my conclusions and characterizations of the textual data matched the intended meaning by participants.

The members were asked to review the codes and how they were built into themes. Then I asked the participants about the codes and themes interpreted. Base on the discussion, some themes were refined or clarified to reflect new perspectives given by the members. Such member checking increases the accuracy of the research results because every researcher brings their own personal experiences to the interpretive act of coding qualitative data. The check helps assure the members own intention is fairly interpreted and reported.

The data gains additional validity due to the participant sample containing a wide variety of professionals including teachers, counselors, principals, and curriculum specialists. Since the sample draws on several different perspectives, the data gained is more likely to be a fuller picture of the programming than any one group could provide. Additionally, a document analysis was performed to gain the same data from a source

outside the survey participants. The high degree of agreement between the two sources indicates a higher level of validity. This form of triangulation gives a stronger credibility to the results than a narrower data collection.

Relation of the Findings to Theoretical Frameworks

The results of the research can also be related to the theoretical frameworks that underlie the study. After all the findings were organized and analyzed, I cross walked the results back to these original philosophies. The overall framework of program evaluation itself reflects the theory of pragmatism. The theory of self-efficacy was best exemplified in findings related to professional development and affective needs of students. In the elements of the programming, the conceptual frameworks of differentiate instruction, and the SEM are used to set the framework for understanding gifted programming.

Areas of deficiency found in professional development and in affective needs are related to the framework of self-efficacy. Teacher should feel empowered to be successful in their role teaching gifted students Respondents indicated that they received little or new specific training in gifted education. Additionally, survey responses showed that teachers are not provided a curriculum or training to meet the student's affective needs. These results show the teachers feel ill equipped to perform the task to a high level. The action plan developed in the project is a chance to provide stronger support and build teacher self-efficacy.

The results of the study indicated strengths in the areas of program development and curriculum and instruction. By providing levels of services to a wide range of students in a systematic fashion, the IMPACT! and EXCEL programs met many of the

theorized elements of the SEM model of gifted instruction. In a more general sense, this also related to differentiated instruction (DI). DI is a broader theory that asks teachers to plan, instruct, and assess students differently, based on their needs. The strong results in the areas of curriculum and instruction indicated that differentiated instruction that helps gifted students is occurring in the programming studied.

Pragmatism is a theoretical framework that looks for practical and easily implemented outcomes form inquiry. The form of this research study showed the influence of the pragmatic lens. A program evaluation is a study of a particular program, with results deliverable immediately to the stakeholders. The resulting action plan will be implemented to make immediate change. Much like action research, program evaluations are based on making specific and direct change, not just adding to the body of knowledge on a topic. Overall, the way that the study followed the pragmatism framework, to the program evaluation design, and finished with an action plan shows a high degree of theoretical alignment, which is strength of the project.

Section 3: The Project

The project for this study was a summative, goal-oriented evaluation report for the EXCEL and IMPACT! Programs that encompass all practices related to gifted programming for the school district. The recognized authority, the **N**AGC**,** recommends such evaluations to fill gaps in national, state, and local practices. An evaluation report comprised of a program description, logic model, and action plan was prepared for dissemination to stakeholders. The implementation of the project consisted of preparing the report for stakeholders and working with the client district to disseminate the work via the appropriate channels for each stakeholder group. The project can potentially improve programming for gifted students directly affected by these programs and serve as a reproducible model for gifted program evaluation.

Description and Goals

The national problem identified in Section 1 was a lack of through evaluations of gifted and talented programs. This problem was evident locally in the school district, which had implemented new gifted programming designed to meet the national standards but had not yet evaluated the implementation or outcomes formally (Director of Curriculum, personal communicaiton,September 10th, 2013; Director of Curriculum, personal communicaiton, August 7th, 2016). Since gifted program evaluations are not completed frequently at any state or national level, there is a large gap in practice compared to established guidance (NAGC, 2015b). A program evaluation in the genre of an evaluation report was the project prepared to resolve the local problem.

The evaluation report contains summative and formative data to meet four goals designed to document and evaluate the district's gifted programming. This type of goal-based evaluation utilizing an established standard is an accreditation policy style summative evaluation report (Leeuw, 2003). The findings in an evaluation are both formative and summative, depending on how long a view of the evaluation one takes (Spaulding, 2014). The ratings were summative of the current cycle, but also formative as they are used to plan for improvement in the next cycle. The evaluation for this project describes the programming, reports a snapshot of summative findings, and relays formative data in the form of recommendations for continued improvement.

The goals were:

- To document the current practices in the local school district's gifted programming.
- To validate whether the gifted and talented programming met the NAGC's recommended criteria.
- To describe strengths and weakness of the gifted and talented programming.
- To make an overall assessment and recommendations for improvement for the district's services for gifted students.

For this project, I considered these goals in order to prepare a report featuring a description of the program, a logic model, and an action plan. The description of current practice memorializes activities in writing, which is an important strategy to assist stakeholders. The description includes the analyzed data with categorical ratings and

explanatory details for all the elements of the NAGC gifted standards. The logic model was a graphic organizer constructed by an evaluator that shows an ordered layout of the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of a program so that these goals can be evaluated (Pell Institute, 2017; University of Wisconsin-Extension, 2017). The final section is an action plan of recommendations concluded by my data analysis. These recommendations are keys to successful report project, as the ability to take quick action directly from the report is strength of this genre (Spaulding, 2014). Because such thorough evaluation of gifted programming is rare, the ensuing evaluation report has potential to make impactful change in response to the problem identified and to serve as a model for gifted programming evaluation reports.

Rationale

The genre of evaluation report was aligned to the local problem discovered and best exemplifies the established authority's recommended practice. The problem directly addressed evaluation practices in the gifted and talented field. The established authority by law, the NAGC, recommends self-study in the form of a program evaluation. Therefore, a program evaluation report with an action plan best aligned with this context by solving the local gap in practice. Furthermore, as the evaluation practice in question involved the comparison of local practice to established standards, the specific report genre of a summative policy-scientific report was called for (Leeuw, 2003). The research was directly aligned to the problem with the research conducted and the project.

The evaluation report genre was the best project type to service the stakeholder need that was determined in the problem phase of this research. Evaluation reports

provide stakeholders with a concise yet informative description of a program (Tuckweller & Childress, 2012). These descriptions are valuable to upstream stakeholders such as administrators and governing bodies who must rely on reports for knowledge of a program, and also to downstream stakeholders such as students, parents, and teachers who are directly affected by the program (Chyung, 2015). Additionally, the stakeholders who are involved in the decision-making process find program evaluation reports to be far more pragmatic and directly related to problem identification, shortcoming analysis, and solution process than many types of research (Spaulding, 2014; Zohrabi, 2012;). A direct and timely report to stakeholders of a solution to the specific local need makes the program evaluation report genre the most appropriate project output.

Review of the Literature

Program evaluation is an evolving genre of investigation that is broadly defined and has a unique nature in research. An evaluation is a systematic attempt to decide upon the worth, success, and refinement of a program (Spaulding, 2014). The program under study can be any set of activities employed for a unified purpose (Spaulding, 2014). The ensuing literature review discusses the problem–solution nature of pragmatic program evaluation, types of data utilized in evaluation, the evaluator role, evaluation reports, and logic models. Understanding of these components of program evaluations allow researchers to create projects and reports within a framework specific enough to follow an expected format, but flexible enough to encompass the varied ways to evaluate programs.

I performed a search for program evaluation literature by reviewing results from the Thoreau multidata base search to uncover recent articles and research from the last 5 to 7 years with additional inquiry into important theory, research, or guidebooks from any year. The keywords utilized included *program evaluation, evaluation reports, logic model,* and *gifted evaluation.* I made significant efforts to sort through the results and identify writings about the genre of program evaluation, program evaluation in the context of gifted and talented education, and ways to report and conceptualize evaluation in a report. I used the findings from this review of literature to create the project for this study in the proper framework for the genre of program evaluation report.

Clusters of information were grouped and were themed in this literature review. The unique nature of the program evaluation research genre, including pragmatic benefits, is discussed. I evaluate specific important decisions in design such as formative or summative evaluation, internal or external evaluator, and type of approach. I discuss the preferred methods for creating a logic model and reporting data from the evaluation. This comprehensive review of the project genre supports the rationale for the evaluation report design that was utilized as the project genre of this study.

Program evaluation shares and overlaps with many features of research, but it differs in the specificity of its purpose and audience. Both pure research and evaluation are investigations into phenomenon that rely on systematic data collection and analysis (Chyung, 2015). However, only evaluations aim to arrive at decisions on a particular set of activities in a particular context (Spaulding, 2014). The audience for the evaluation results is a specific client, often a governing body or administrative leader of an

organization interested only in the specific program. This is quite different than other forms of research, which are seen as contributions to a common body of research. In fact, many evaluations are never published for review, but are delivered only to the client for their organizational purposes (Spaulding, 2014). This nebulous relationship to peer-reviewed research creates some barriers to effective evaluation. Many researchers may lack direct access to a program, while inversely; many organizations lack a trained researcher and evaluator (Chyung, 2015). Therefore, the program evaluation process is often never started or is abandoned because of feasibility issues. When the difficulties are overcome, and the opportunity aligns, program evaluations allow research to be utilized in a more direct context than other methods.

Programs are usually implemented and improved over time utilizing both formative and summative data. Formative evaluations collect and report data from the implementation of a program, which can be acted upon as the program is built, while summative data is analyzed at the end of a review cycle to judge the current level of effectiveness of the program (Spaulding, 2014). Though evaluations may be labelled as mainly formative or summative, the lines between the two forms are fluid. In many situations, the summative data serves as a new baseline for the next cycle of improvement, thereby transforming its use into a formative evaluation (Chyung, 2015). In this study, the overall evaluation is summative because it evaluates the programming against established standards, but it was also be utilized in a formative nature to create an action plan.

The role of evaluator may be filled by three separate strategies, each with strengths and weaknesses. Two approaches rely on an expert evaluator who studies the program to determine conclusions. The evaluator is deemed an internal evaluator if they are an employee of the organization, or an external expert evaluator if they are a hired researcher (HARC, 2016; Spaulding, 2014). Yet another strategy is to conduct participatory evaluations where a group of stakeholders from the organization act as an evaluation team (Tuckweller & Childress, 2012). Internal evaluators often have the benefit of pre-existing relationships with stakeholders and participants and have firsthand knowledge of the organization and program under evaluation. However, external evaluators are most likely to be considered unbiased because they do not have pre-existing assumptions or conflicts of interest regarding the program. Participatory evaluations often have great buy in from the stakeholders involved which may lead to greater adoption of the recommendations on the findings. However, participatory evaluations can stray from the established standards or goals and lean on participant's preferences rather than expertise brought by a professional evaluator. Thus, the choice of evaluator is not discussed in absolute, but is best considered in the context of a particular set of facts of each individual evaluation. In this study, I serve as an inside evaluator due to the dual role of supervisor of the program and researcher, and asks all educators working in the program to contribute data to the evaluation in the spirit of the participatory approach. This eclectic approach best aligns with the NAGC recommendations for self-study with the resources available to the organization.

The results of program evaluation should be recorded in an evaluation report which follows both the desires of the organization and standard report format. The evaluation report is a transaction delivered to the client (Spaulding, 2014). The client is the individual or organization who owns the program in question and is the audience for the evaluation. Components included are the cover page, executive summary, introduction, methods, and body of report. The body of the report includes the data analysis, findings, and recommendations. A good report should aim for timeliness, clarity, and transparency to inform the stakeholder groups and client. Completion of a report that is both clear and scholarly for the client to utilize for decision making is the desired deliverable in program evaluation.

The framework most often utilized for evaluation reports includes formulation of a logic model and an evaluation in that context. Logic models graphically represent the inputs, outputs, and outcomes desired so that evaluation can be made (Chyung, 2015; Pell Institute, 2017). Typically, logic models include resources and inputs, as well as desired outputs, outcomes, and impact of the program (Center for Disease Control, 1999; University of Wisconsin-Extension, 2017). Creating a logic model for the program is an important part of anlayzing current practice, and an important resource for future cycles of program improvement.

Implementation

After completing the written evaluation, implementation will be comprised of disseminating the findings to stakeholders and setting the stage for an ongoing evaluation process. Because of the nature of evaluation, the organization, in this case a school

district, will serve as a support network for information distribution channels and access to key stakeholder groups. However, some barriers will need to be overcome, as this single evaluation may not take precedence over the vast needs of a school district. An implementation plan and timeline will is discussed that will result in stakeholder understanding of practical improvement suggestions in a timely manner.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The project is supported by the cooperation of a large organization which facilitates a comprehensive internal evaluation. The school district provided support during the study and is expected to provide further resources in implementation. Because I will serve in a dual role as evaluator and employee of the district, the assistance of the district administration, the school sites, and staff are likely to continue is a cooperative relationship with the project. Numerous channels, discussed below in the implementation plan, exist to distribute the report findings. The district administration is a strong resource to rely on for assistance in disseminating the project results and for creating a pathway for continued cycles of evaluation. The support of the school district to undertake and systematize evaluations is a key to successful implementation of report findings.

Potential Barriers

Barriers to disseminating the study to stakeholders may be the relatively small role of gifted education plays in the entire context of school district operations, the large number of stakeholders who need different information about the programming, and continuity of employees in the same roles. The school district's leadership includes the Board of Education and Superintendent who are responsible for the general and special

education programs, buildings and grounds, human resources, and policy making in addition to gifted and talented programming. Therefore, the time necessary to present, study, and make decisions based on a thorough evaluation may not be feasible. Additionally, many other stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, building administrators and others may benefit from the understandings that can come from the evaluation, but will likely come from very different perspectives and backgrounds in the topics discussed. The evaluation report will need to be carefully tailored to be accessible to these diverse groups. A final potential problem may occur if the staff in key positions in the district changes. The participation by dozens of educators and support from district administrators makes the implementation of suggestions in the report may falter if those same professionals continuing in such roles. The study methodology, including participation by the educators directly involved in the program, combined with a thoughtful approach to the evaluation report and dissemination will be needed to overcome these potential barriers.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The evaluation timetable began with data collection and analysis for the final evaluation report. Survey data was collected electronically during the fall and winter of 2017. Upon completion of the survey, the data was collected and analyzed to create both categorical ratings and open-ended responses which explain those same areas. The resulting data was interpreted in an evaluation report prepared in 2018. This concluded the research and evaluation of programming and left only implementation of the project as a remaining goal.

Implementation of the project, an evaluation report, then will ensue after approval of the project from Walden University, which is expected in the fall of 2018-19 school year. The evaluation report will be first delivered to the direct client, comprised of the central administrative leadership of the school district who helped identify this gap in practice and who approved the site cooperation. I will meet with these leaders in the fall of 2018 to review the results and determine which portions and which formats to disseminate the evaluation to upstream stakeholders such as the Board of Education, and downstream stakeholders such as the educators working in the program and the public. These decisions will be made by the Superintendent or his designee, as the educational leadership decisions and the related political context of the results for the school district shall be determined by the client.

The school district holds numerous channels for distribution of the results of the study. I can meet and present findings directly to upstream stakeholders such as the Board of Education and district central administration through monthly Board of Education curriculum committee meetings where such evaluations and curricular recommendations are made. The district also holds monthly principal's meetings for curriculum updates, where reports results can be shared with each building in the district through notes and processed through discussion. The teachers directly working in the program will review the report findings and discuss results at district in-service meetings in 2018-19. The report can be posted on the district's webpage under the gifted and talented tab for parent and community information. This plan will result in proper distribution of the evaluation report to the relevant stakeholders in only a few months

after study completion, aligned to the best practices in evaluation which call for swift distribution of recommendations to decision makers and other stakeholders.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

All stakeholders hold shared interlocking of responsibilities for gifted services and evaluation. The student is responsible for completing all research and preparing a clear evaluation report. The district's central administration, considered the client, is responsible for deciding the policy implications of the findings, and will approve a distribution plan to relevant stakeholders. The district's Board of Education is responsible to implement any of the recommendations in the form of approval of new policies or funding for new resources. Downstream stakeholders such as teachers and students will also have an ongoing role to provide input from their perspective as future cycles of evaluation occur. The student who has undertaken this evaluation should facilitate this vision of shared responsibility and continual program renew with the cooperation of the diverse stakeholder groups.

Project Evaluation

As this project is an evaluation, communicating the current data and creating a system for continuous review are key next steps to ensuring future rounds of ongoing evaluation. One goal of an evaluation report is to present findings clearly for all relevant stakeholders, so they can be informed and assist in moving the program forward. Evidence of communication to stakeholders will serve as one way to evaluate the project as a whole. Additionally, the program evaluation report must not be a static end to the project. An effective program evaluation cycle serves as a baseline and a new beginning

to continuous change. Evidence of the beginning of improvement in the program and continued evaluation will be needed to evaluate the project effectiveness.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Gifted students are an underserved special population, who often feel that their educational programming is neglected. This project describes in rich detail the current programming so that stakeholders can be informed about the programming as a whole, rather than just a limited view they may have through their individual role in the district. The teachers directly working in the program will have a chance for continued input and a mechanism to collate their individual opinions. Stakeholders such as district administration and the Board of Education will be informed of both the positives of the program and areas where resources may be diverted to for improvement. The key policy makers can make better decisions for the programming with this information.

This project was designed to bolster programming designed for social change and development of civic minded leaders. The mission and vision of the programs cite collaboration, leadership, problem solving, and ethics among the goals. Creating an ongoing system of improvement for these efforts is important to development of 21st century leaders for the local community. The resulting intermediate and longer term impact will be stronger community leaders who can drive positive change.

Far-Reaching

Because qualitative research, intrinsic case studies, and program evaluation are usually not designed for generalizability, the impact of the project outside the local

community lies in the methodology as a blueprint for similar evaluations in other school districts. This is a needed but lacking area of oversight as described in a local, state, national, and international context. Since evaluations are either not conducted at all, or are delivered to clients instead of published in journals, very few such reports on gifted programming are available to school districts as a model. This study has the potential to bring attention to the national standards for gifted education and highlight the need for evaluation based on the standards. The publication of this study may provide a needed model for others to replicate gifted programming evaluation.

Conclusion

I have detailed in Section 3 the alignment between the local problem and the evaluation report genre. The evaluation report will directly address the gap in practice of gifted evaluation by reporting findings to the district decision makers in a clear report with specific recommendations. The project will be implemented once complete through various avenues to key decision makers and to other interested parties such as the teachers affected by program changes. The project will have the potential for short term and long-term impact by addressing needs of gifted students in the local context and providing a needed model for standards based gifted programming evaluation.

Strengths, limitations, and other considerations about this project will be discussed in the following section of this study. Completing a research study and program evaluation has led to my growth as a scholar and practitioner and project manager. Section 4 contains my reflections in each of these areas and documents the improvements I see in myself due to the research process.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

This section provides reflections on the strengths and limitations of the research methods and project. I consider recommendations for further research and alternate methods of gifted programming evaluations. Additionally, I document reflections about my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project manager. Finally, I discuss the implications for social change. These components of Section 4 will combine to synthesize the meta-cognitive growth I have made as a result of this project study and doctoral study in general.

Project Strengths

This project directly addresses the problem and research questions through strong alignment between gap in practice and the project. The local and national problem identified was lack of gifted programming evaluation, which is being addressed by completing an evaluation, and reporting evaluation findings. As with most program evaluations, the data can be directly acted upon by decision makers and will likely have effects on students in a relatively short term.

Additionally, the methodology made use of the wide amount of human and written resources available in the district. The census method of participant recruitment opened the input to all educators who could potentially answer the survey rather than a small sample. Combined with district handbooks, a complete picture of gifted services was presented in the evaluation.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The project comes with many methodological limitations due to the nature of intrinsic case study and program evaluation, as well as restriction based on research at a researcher's own site. The research methods of qualitative research, case study, intrinsic study, and program evaluation all produce results that are not generalizable by design. In this study, as with most in this genre, the particular case in issue is the only one of interest to the researcher and client. Additionally, only limited data could be collected because of safeguards necessary for respect of persons for the employees of the site at which I am employed. Data could not be collected from interviews, observations, or any method where the educators were identified. Therefore, the information gathered is only from teacher perception, and not expert observation or in-depth interview.

It is not necessary to remediate the generalization limitations of this study; it is simply a limitation of which others must be aware so as not to misuse the data. Qualitative intrinsic case studies by definition involve only a single case that is of interest and does not lead to generalized results. Similarly, program evaluations are deliverable to a client interested in a particular program. To overcome the potential for misunderstanding, any publication of this study should include notes about these limitations so that the results are not mistakenly used by others to infer information about other gifted programming.

To remediate the limitations of research in my own employment site, I used several methodology strategies. I employed an anonymous survey to help make sure to reach participants in way that was low pressure and free of fear of reprisal. The survey

contained a large number of questions both categorical and open-ended to obtain some explanatory information despite the inability to probe with interviews. Furthermore, I conducted document analysis of public documents to add to the textual data as a balance to the teachers' perceptions. These measures remediated the limitations to the degree that is ethical in the study.

Alternative Approaches

Alternate approaches could be utilized to yield different data, which would shed light on the problem from a different avenue of inquiry. One consideration would be to investigate quantitative data streams that align to desired outcomes. These could be any variety of student achievement or growth data that could be analyzed and tested as a hypothesis. Additionally, a strategy of outside observation could be implemented as part of evaluation. Observing teacher or student behaviors with an observation instrument could provide data about actual practice that is not self-reported. Some combination of these strategies could provide data for a mixed methods evaluation that would inform decisions with a somewhat different approach to the same problem.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Analysis of Self as Scholar

I discovered that I was not a strong writer and needed to improve my skills in academic paragraphs to be a successful doctoral scholar. I learned the proper construction of academic paragraphs utilizing the M.E.A.L. method of construction. I have also transferred this to my practice by working with educators on the desired academic paragraphs at the collegiate level and how this intersects with our role to teach argument

in writing in middle school. Such transfer of learning from Dr. Otaola to me, then from me to educators, and finally to students is a way to exponentially grow scholarship. The occasion to grow my skills and pass them on was a great opportunity provided by the reflection on scholarship that this project encouraged.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

The process of doctoral research and study completion allowed me to grow as an educational leadership practitioner. Through the process I learned the importance of empirical research and data analysis to decision making. Prior to this study, I sometimes relied on theoretical works and anecdotal or limited evidence to inform decisions. I now apply stronger research processes as norms in the school district when considering any issue of interest to employees. Instead of theoretical best practices or employee satisfaction, I now use peer-reviewed evidence and student data to guide my leadership.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

The program evaluation I undertook helped me develop further some of my preexisting strengths as a project manager. The need for well thought out missions, visions, and goals that a logic model requires are key to guiding decision making about resources in an organization. Additionally, I grew in my knowledge of accreditation procedures and goals through this study. I have applied these by assisting with projects such as creation of a curriculum review cycle and state monitoring compliance. The ability to set goals, measure progress, and continually improve a project toward the goals are key project leadership skills that doctoral study in an Ed. D. program builds. The

ability to apply this learning in my job setting is a benefit from the undertaking of a doctoral study.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

This project has potential benefit for short- and long-term impacts. One aspect is simply the nature of a standards-based gifted programming evaluation to fill a large gap in practice locally and nationally. The special population in need of specialized programming has seen only scant oversight, and even less oversight based on the established standards. To meet the needs of all students, similar evaluations should continually take place, and this study may serve a purpose for either awareness of the standards or a blueprint for a methodology for evaluation.

A separate and important potential for social change lies in the content of the programming evaluated. The local school district's mission and vision for these programs is summarized as enrichment programming that aims to develop socially responsible leaders who possess great interpersonal skills, problem solving ability, and ethics need for the 21st century. The program's symbol of the ripple effect shows this concept, as students are aware that their actions as leaders can have far reaching positive effects on people and the environment. Supporting such activity with a continuous cycle of improvement will be an outcome of this study.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Many areas of future research are suggested by this project. This includes quantitative study of student outcomes, interviewing of stakeholders, and quasi-experimental study of different materials, strategies, or classes. Due to limitations, the

evaluation in this project was not able to validate any practices with quantitative results, nor was I able to delve in-depth with particular teachers, students, or parents. These gaps in evaluation still exist and can be addressed with future initiatives during the next evaluation cycle.

Conclusion

The final report that follows this study completes a cycle of program improvement for the local school district's gifted programming. The program evaluation solves a gap in practice that was present locally and nationally. The analysis showed that many elements of recommended practice are in place and should be continued or enhanced. Additionally, specific areas of weakness are now memorialized in writing and can be addressed through the action plan. This systematic recording of programming standards ratings will help program improvement center on empirical research and self-study instead of opinion or theory only. Such a detailed and systematic look into a gifted programming is rare, and therefore it will likely enhance learning for this special population and serve as a model for future evaluation. Through similar processes, gifted programming can be studied and improved in this school district and others.

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Appendix A: An Evaluation of the IMPACT! and EXCEL Programs

Executive Summary

This report reports on the findings of a thorough evaluation of the local school district's programming for gifted students. Students in the top 10% of national norms participate in a variety of programming that features ability grouping, enrichment and acceleration. Students attend IMPACT! pull-out classes in grades K-5 which feature group problem solving, STEM, and 21st century skills. Middle school students are enrolled in EXCEL social studies and science class, as well as an accelerated mathematics program. This programming was evaluated to determine if practice meets the NAGC's programming standards and to determine relative strengths and weaknesses.

The programming showed the strongest evidence of service in the areas of program design, identification, and curriculum and instruction items. The domains of affective needs and professional development scored lower levels of evidence. Specific scoring for each programming standard is presented in charts shown at the findings portion of this evaluation.

Goals:

This evaluation is a summative, goal-oriented evaluation of the most recent cycle of programming improvement from 2013-2017. This report is prepared to communicate a description of current programming, evaluate the programming in relation to the NAGC's programming standards, and make recommendations for future goals and ongoing improvement. The data analysis and recommendations are here reported for the district's administration.

The goals of this evaluation were:

- To document the current practices in the local school district's gifted programming.
- To validate the gifted and talented programming meets the NAGC's recommended criteria.
- To describe strengths and weakness of the gifted and talented programming.
- To make an overall assessment and recommendations for improvement for the district's services for gifted students.

Evaluation Methodology

The research methodology utilized in this evaluation was a qualitative case study. Qualitative data discovered in this research includes categorical ratings, textual analysis of open-ended short answer questions, and textual analysis of publically available district documents. This data has been interpreted through an intrinsic case study, where a single case is studied in depth and that case is the only one of interest for the project. This method of inquiry is helpful to program evaluation as it acquires and analyzes data directly for decision making about this single district's programming for gifted students.

An electronic survey was distributed via email to 35 educators who would have knowledge to rate the different elements of the gifted and talented programming. 22 respondents filled out the NAGC Master Checklist of Gifted Program Elements for Self-Evaluation to give categorical ratings for each element of gifted programming. Respondents also answered the Gifted Programming Questionnaire, composed of open ended questions, to provide explanatory answers which shed more light on the ratings.

There were 35 potential participants in the study, including IMPACT! teachers, EXCEL teachers, Accelerated Math teachers and administrators who observe these programs. District handbooks for the programming were also analyzed to provide textual information to describe the current programming. The survey data has been analyzed and the results provide in-depth data with which to evaluate the program using the teacher's perceptions of evidence, which aligns to the recommended practice of the established authority, the NAGC.

Logic Model

A logic model graphically represents the inputs, outputs, and outcomes desired so that evaluation can be made. Typically, logic models include resources and inputs, as well as desired outputs, outcomes, and impact of the program. The school district's gifted logic model was developed through this evaluation by textual analysis of the district's publically available documents and the responses to the survey. Creating a logic model for the program is an important part of anlayzing current practice, and an important resource for future cycles of program improvement.

Elementary Logic Model

The logic model for elementary schools shows the logical progression of inputs, outputs, and outcomes from the IMPACT! Program. In general, the outputs are classes, policies, and written documents that can be achieved as the direct result of work put into the program. The outcomes range from changes in student abilities to long term impacts on the community. The logic model is a framework to evaluate the program and a tool to inform decisions about the program.

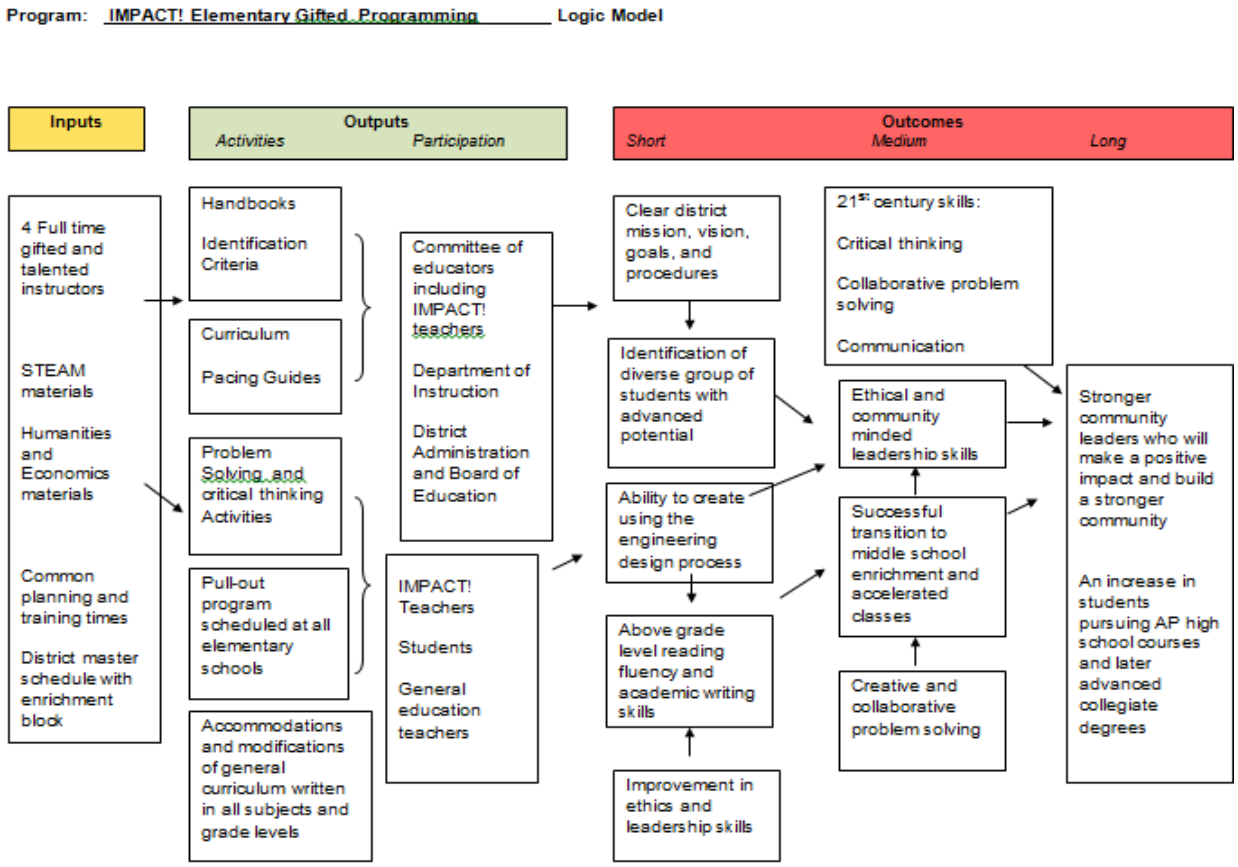
Inputs consist of staff, materials, and time devoted to the program. The IMPACT! Program for Gifted students employs four full time gifted specialists. The time needed to instruct was achieved through a consistent master schedule with enrichment periods for instruction, and frequent district articulations for program development. The district also invested in various STEAM and humanities materials, kits, and special purchases such as STEM challenge kits Lego robots, and critical thinking booklets. This yearly investment in the program allows outputs to flow forward.

Outputs of the IMPACT! Program includes handbooks, criteria, and a program scheduled during the enrichment block. The district produces updated handbooks with policies, goals, and procedures for the program as well as consistent entrance criteria to identify students with advanced potential. Every school enacted a schedule with an intervention and enrichment period where IMPACT classes occur outside the core academic program. The handbook includes a curriculum map designed during articulations that includes STEAM, humanities, critical thinking, and problem solving activities. The outputs can be used to evaluate the extent a consistent program exists on paper before moving to see if student outcomes are as desired.

Outcomes are a continuum of immediate to long term goals for the students. They include program goals such as a diverse student body and clearly aligned materials and paperwork. More importantly, there are also student outcomes such as increased problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills. Longer term goals flow from the model into successful middle and high school advanced and AP class success. Additionally, the final outcomes are future citizens with advanced degrees and

community minded leadership abilities. The outcomes should be measured over many years to see if these moderate and long term goals are truly achieved, and are a good starting point for future iterations of the ongoing evaluation process.

Logic Model of Gifted and Talented Programming - Elementary



Middle School Logic Model

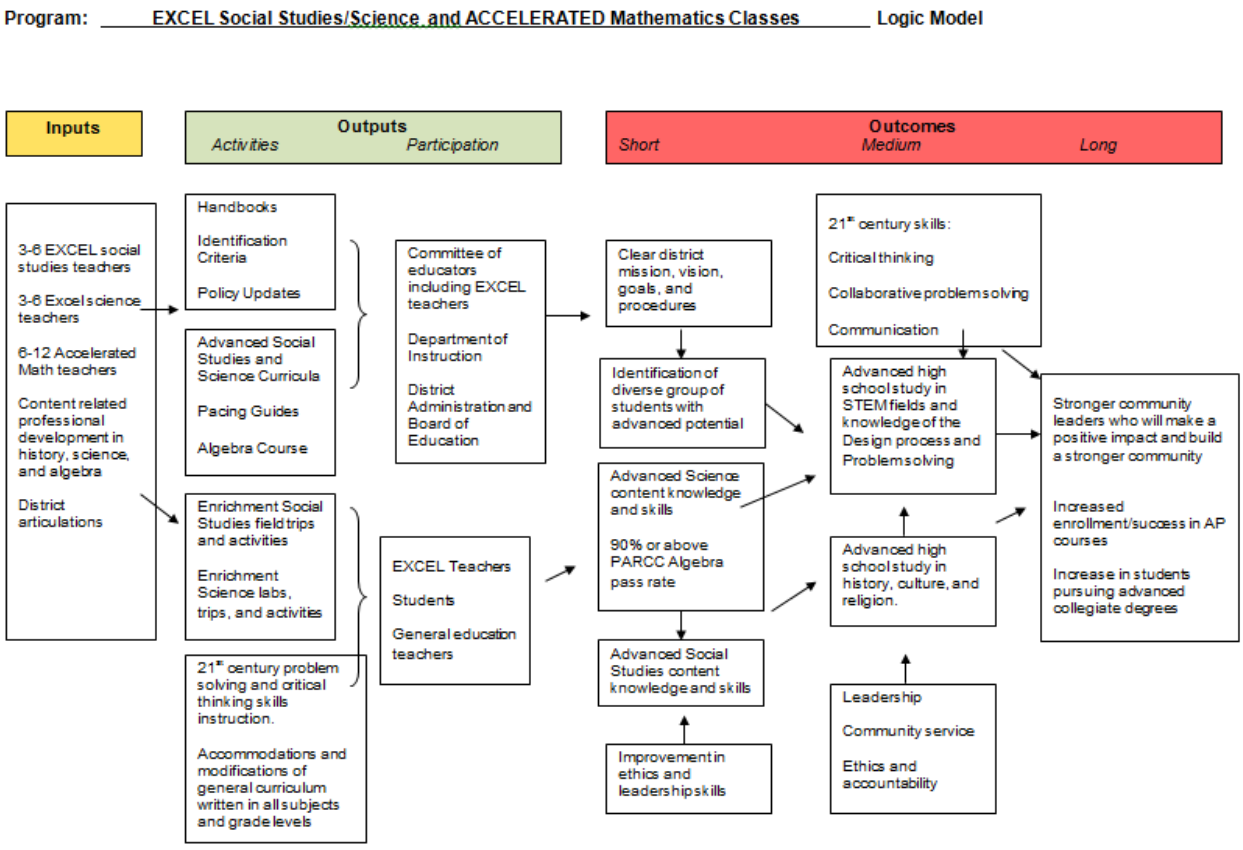
The middle school logic model is both an extension of the elementary model and a more specific listing of content attainment in social studies, science, and mathematics. The middle school EXCEL and Accelerated Mathematics programs are composed on a slightly different gifted construct than the elementary program as they are advanced subject area courses and not a specialized pull-out program. Therefore, the same 21st century skills will be evident, but achievement in specific subject matters are also direct goals.

More curriculum and instructional outputs for content are evident. Science and social studies classes are designed to have advanced content, labs, trips, and materials. The mathematics outputs include accelerated math and algebra classes for advanced students. In addition to a handbook, these are extensive written curricula with specific standards based content and pacing. This is logical due to the transition to high school advanced classes occurring after the middle school experience.

Similarly, the student outcomes again contain all the goals from the elementary programming with additional subject area detail. The subject attainment desired shows algebra scoring including PARCC passing scores and science and history AP course enrollment and success. These are additional support to the long term outcomes of advanced degrees and community minded leaders. The two logic models combined show a combination of goals in academic achievement and 21st century problem solving and leadership. As the evaluation process continues, each cycle can refer to the logic model to

determine how to define success in the program and to see what can be measured. The logic model process will help inform decision making and frame evaluation.

Logic Model of Gifted and Talented Programming – Middle School



Programming Description

The district's programming for gifted students encompasses the IMPACT! classes for grades K-5, the EXCEL social studies and science classes, and the accelerated mathematics in grades 6-8, with in class accommodations and modifications throughout the curriculum at all grades. These strategies include the research based practices of identification, enrichment programming, curriculum compacting, and acceleration. The

following subsections describe current programming, which will be evaluated in the findings section to follow.

Identification. Students are identified based on a screening followed by an in-depth scoring analysis. The identification procedures are designed to identify various types of gifted students including students with high achievement and production, students with high cognitive abilities, and students with high levels of specific measurable reading and math skills. The district utilizes multiple quantitative measures to determine the gifted students. Standardized and diagnostic tests such as the OLSAT, STAR, and PARCC scores, combined with classroom grades are evaluated on a matrix to determine qualifying students. Since each measure tests something different, multiple different measures of interrelated skills are used to find students averaging in the top 10% of ability level.

As defined by the district's framework for identification, giftedness is present in children from all cultural and economic groups. The district has identified a diverse group of students representing all ethnic groups present in the district. Over 30% of students are from minority groups and over 25% of students are from the poverty economic strata. The children identified to enter the program represent a diverse group of learners with advanced potential. The identification procedures and demographic outcomes are continually monitored to make sure advanced students from all demographic groups are continually represented fairly in this subset of students.

IMPACT! elementary pull-out program. Gifted students in grades K-5 enroll in the IMPACT!, a specialized enrichment program. Small groups of students work on

group problem solving to develop the 21st century skills needed to become future leaders, such as problem solving, collaboration, and ethical leadership. The program is symbolized by the ripple effect emanating from a falling droplet of water, describing the endless impact the students will have through leadership and community contribution.

The standards cited in the curriculum are the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) for 21st Century Life Skills. Students learn important cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and innovation. The standards also stress working with others. Important strands include collaboration, teamwork, communication and leadership. Additionally, the curriculum includes standards of accountability, productivity, and ethics. These standards align to the program vision of 21st century community minded leaders.

The district offers multi-tiered levels of service for gifted students. The first tier is enacted by the elementary classroom teachers, who provide differentiated instruction. They make adaptations throughout the day for the gifted students such as leveled readers, challenge problems, and independent work. The students also have the second tier of instruction, the pull-out IMPACT! classes. The IMPACT! curricular units are organized into humanities, STEM, and logic/critical thinking activities. Together, these practices create a modified educational experience for gifted and talented students.

The STEM units of study are mathematical puzzles, scientific investigations, and robotics. Additional research is completed in areas of interest such as aerodynamics or astronomy. The units of study include content on physical science, earth science, biology, and technology, and feature the engineering design process as a framework for

collaborative problem solving; helping students learn that applying learning to practical outcomes is a key in STEM fields. These units build on student's abilities and prepare them for middle school EXCEL science and AP high school courses.

Humanities units cover economics and trade, colony simulation, road trip USA, and mock trial. A trade fair is help as the culminating activity for the economics strand of learning and the mock trial is held as an event which gives students a look at the practical application of the legal system.

EXCEL middle school social studies and science classes. Identified gifted students in grades 6-8 are placed in EXCEL social studies and science classes. These classes apply the research based strategies of ability grouping and curriculum compacting. The courses cover the required grade level content in a reduced time period, and then provide extra rigorous and creative activities in the additional time. For enrichment, the students research, write, apply mathematical calculations, and incorporate art and music in addition to the discrete science and social studies content. The classes are a highbred of advanced content and enrichment activity.

The social studies instruction includes required content with enrichment activity. The required courses include ancient civilizations, colonial history, and the American 19th century. The enrichment activities are novel study, primary sources based essays, and on-site field experiences. Locations for the field experiences are made up of museum special collection studies and historical site analysis. Sample trips include the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the 9/11 Memorial, and

Philadelphia area places of historical significance. The enrichment offers opportunities to see historians in the field rather than just concept attainment in the classroom.

The EXCEL science classes similarly offer required science content with enrichment activity. All middle school grade levels instruct fast paced units on earth and space, chemistry, biology and physical science. In the available time freed up by curriculum compacting, students create science projects and engage in field experiences. Scientific field trip locations are the Inversand Fossil Exposure and the Edelman Planetarium. Individualized projects are assigned where students can pursue scientific areas of interest. The design of the course provides students with the appropriate middle school science knowledge along with extension activities which facilitate transition to advanced high school courses.

Accelerated mathematics and algebra classes. Students meeting specific mathematics scoring criteria take an accelerated class in grades 6-8. The criteria are published on the district's website and include a matrix of different scores. These criteria include mathematics grades and standardized test scores from the STAR Math diagnostic test. The class is a different construct than gifted and enrichment programming. The construct is acceleration which is a more content centered definition. The course structure applies both researched based gifted practices of acceleration and ability grouping. These specific classes constitute the most directly aligned component of programming, where the identification and course offered are based on the exact same construct.

These courses accelerates the curriculum by covering four years of mathematics content, including the 9th grade algebra standards, in three years of middle school. Eight

graders take the high school algebra course. The desired outcome is to produce algebra proficient students by the end of grade 8, and to prepare students for advanced study tracks in high school. Success in the class is linked both to class grade and to the PARCC standardized test scoring. Students scoring in the 4 or 5 level (on a 1-5 scale) of PARCC at the end of the course have met the high school algebra requirement and continue with more advanced classes in 9th grade. This meets the NAGC definition of a true acceleration, as students learn a different grade level content.

Accommodations and modifications. The district also utilizes an accommodation and modification framework to help gifted students in all general education settings. Each core curriculum has accommodations and modifications listed for gifted students. These include specific ideas for challenging gifted students such as higher order work, above level reading books, or independent assignments. Additional strategies under the titles of learning styles can also be applied to the variety of gifted students. Since most students spend only a part of their day in a gifted class, these accommodations and modifications constitute an important part of the overall programming for students.

Findings

The collected data from the fist instrument, The Master Checklist of Gifted Program Elements for Self-Assessment, was analyzed to describe categorical ratings for each element of the district's gifted programming. The data consisted of participant answers of "No Evidence", "Some Evidence" or "In Place" for each programming item. Overall patterns showed that Program Design, Identification, and Curriculum and

Instruction were strongly evidenced, with more no evidence results indicating areas in need of improvement in Affective Needs and Professional Development. Discrepant data was recorded in Program Evaluation items. From these answers, descriptions of scoring are detailed in summary and tables which follow, and are utilized to form portions of the evaluation report. Each category of standards are presented on the following pages.

Program design results. Program design items were strongly evidenced in the results of the survey. Seven out of eight standards scored as 92% or above answering Some Evidence or In Place. Convincingly, six of eight scored a mode of In Place. These items are among the most consistently rated as In Place for any category of the inquiry. Thus, this area was strength of the programming. The results as a whole indicate that definitions of programs, classes, and students under the gifted programming umbrella exist and form a coherent mission and vision. Likewise, a detailed description of programming design is included in the evaluation report.

A single program design item was reported as a weakness. Fifty-four percent of respondents did not see evidence of standard eight, which pertains to early entrance, grade skipping, and other acceleration above grade level enrollment opportunities. Since this indicator is a weakness, it was therefore addressed in the program evaluation action plan.

Table A1

Program Design Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
1	0%	23%	77%*
2	8%	23%	69%*
3	8%	15%	77%*
4	0%	15%	85%*
5	8%	38%	54%*
6	8%	38%	54%*
7	8%	46%*	46%*
8	54%*	23%	23%

Identification Results. Identification items were also reported as a strong area where the district showed some or complete evidence in eight out of nine standards. This indicates that screening, and identification procedures are clear and judged effective for the diverse students of the school district. However, contrary to program design where the majority of items were fully in place, only two identification standards showed a mode of In Place, so further refinement may still be a valuable goal to achieve full implementation of standards. Additionally, a weak area is noted in standard 17, where 46% of respondents answered No Evidence. This indicates that the appeals process for students who fail to meet entrance criteria is not sufficiently publicized. Therefore, a method of communication for this item will be addressed in the evaluation action plan.

Table A2

Identification Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
11	0%	54%*	46%
12	0%	62%*	38%
13	23%	31%	46%*
14	8%	62%*	38%
15	8%	15%	77%*
16	15%	38%	46%*
17	46%*	15%	38%
18	23%	38%*	38%*
19	8%	23%	69%*

Curriculum and instruction results. All 12 standards in curriculum and instruction items saw a majority of respondents answer “Some Evidence or “In Place”. Nine of the 12 items scored with a mode of In Place, with two more standards split evenly between Some Evidence and In Place. These results indicate that a written curriculum for various programming exists that includes acceleration, enrichment, and advanced services appropriate for gifted students. These are among the strongest results for any area of the programming. Curriculum and instruction is strength of the school district’s gifted programming.

Table A3

Curriculum and Instruction Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
20	15%	23%	62%*
21	8%	46%*	46%*
22	8%	46%*	46%*
23	8%	62%*	31%
24	15%	31%	54%*
25	15%	31%	54%*
26	0%	38%	62%*
27	8%	38%	54%*
28	0%	31%	69%*
29	0%	15%	85%*
30	0%	46%	54%*
31	0%	31%	69%*

Affective needs results. Affective needs items standards were an area of weaker evidence. Two standards scored a mode of No Evidence with 62% of respondents seeing a need in items 32 and 33. This indicates that there is either no or insufficient affective curriculum and that student social and emotional needs may not be addressed fully. Standard 35 showed discrepant data, where the mode was In Place with 46%, but a significant amount, 23%, answered No Evidence. Further explanatory data or future data

collection should help shed light on this standard, which states that gifted students should be provided with career guidance. Unlike the weak areas, standard 34 saw strong results with 92% of respondents noting evidence of college guidance for gifted students. Overall results suggest that lack of practices in affective needs should be remediated in the resulting action plan.

Table A4

Affective Needs Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
32	62%	0%	38%
33	62%	8%	31%
34	8%	54%*	38%
35	23%	31%	46%*

Professional Development Results

The two professional development items standards both scored somewhat mixed results, with 31% and 54% respectively at No Evidence. This suggests that the majority of educators and parents are not given opportunities to learn about gifted specific education practices. Professional development practices are in need of improvement and should be included as part of the evaluation action plan.

Table A5

Professional Development Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
36	31%	31%	38%*
37	54%*	8%	38%

Program evaluation results. Program evaluation items scored mixed results, which indicated this as an overall category situated in the middle of the strong and the weak. Standards 38 and 39 scored strong results as the vast majority saw Some Evidence or In Place. Conversely, standards 40 and 41 recorded mixed results, including a concerning 38% of respondents reporting No Evidence for standard 41. These results indicate that participants felt that the students and program is evaluated internally, but that a formal evaluation and action plan reported to all stakeholders is not completely evidenced. The evaluation report project in conjunction with this research will directly align to this need.

Table A6

Program Evaluation Items

Standard number	No evidence	Some evidence	In place
38	15%	23%	62%*
39	8%	46%*	46%*
40	15%	54%*	31%
41	38%*	23%	38%*

Action Plan Development

The action plan was develop through analysis of the research data and application of program evaluation principles. The results were analyzed for both specific, targeted areas in need of improvement and general cross cutting needs that may apply more broadly. These recommendations were written into an action plan form that is easy to read and digestible for the various stakeholder groups. The action plan should be viewed as a list of recommendations for district decision makers to use when choosing new programming, policy, or directing funds.

In the areas of curriculum and program development, only one specific improvement is included, because the results of the study showed this area was largely in place. The specific change recommended is the addition of advanced programming for

English Language Arts. Educators noted that all other core subject areas provided an enriched or accelerated course in middle school. Additionally, educators noted that reading levels vary widely at the middle school level, creating a need for a differentiated class for above grade level students. This change will add the last remaining course to the core gifted programming.

An additional program development area of exploration is included as a long term recommendation which is based on the limitations of the study. The study was limited to the evaluation of existing programming and educators familiar with the current programs. Subject areas such as visual and performing arts were not accounted for. Students who have aspirations for high level careers in art, music, design, or dance may not have an appropriate structure in place. Therefore, it is recommended to explore the current levels of service for students with gifts and talents in these areas and include them in future evaluation cycles. This is a potential area to identify and serve a wider variety of students in their area of interest and ability.

Professional development related to gifted students should be provided. The study results showed that the teachers had little training directly related to the specific students they teach, nor instruction about any unique instructional practices in gifted education. A training program exists at nearby Rutgers University that can provide gifted studies professional development. In fact, two of the instructors, Joyce Van Tassell-Baska and Alicia Cotabish, are expert researchers who are cited in the literature review for this study (Rutgers, n.d). Services include online certificate course, on-site professional training,

and conferences (Rutgers, n.d). A partnership with this organization should be a link to gifted education training of the highest level available.

A specific need in training for social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of gifted students was recorded in the affective needs domain of the study results. The evaluation results revealed that teachers felt a low level of self-efficacy in the affective needed domain. There have not been district approved resources in this area, nor any specific training directed at social emotional topics or the social emotional needs of gifted students. There are sources and organizations extant that can be used to make strides of improvement.

Training in this area can be achieved via a partnership with Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) organization and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Resources and training provided by these organizations are recommended to remediate this identified problem. SENG provides webinars, online and in person training certifications, and newsletters featuring research and practical tips for educators. CASEL provides research information and a framework for various elements of Social Resources include the framework, implementation guidance, parent resources. The CASEL framework also provides a common vocabulary for district work on SEL. These two resources will provide numerous options for teacher training and references.

Cutting across all elements was a need for increased communication. Educators varied widely in their opinion of how well distributed the information about the programming such as policies, procedures, and evaluations were. It appeared that a

systematic approach to this is needed. An increase in communications to stakeholders including students, educators, administration, and the public will be increased and made in easy to access means.

Therefore, several related communication strategies shall be implemented. The policy, handbooks for the programs, and the results of evaluations can be posted on the district website for easy access when needed. The teachers can share links to the handbooks with students and parents. In order to create two-way feedback, the sporadic parent group can be updated with increased meeting frequency. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction can provide updates on the programming to the teachers, principals and to the Board of Education throughout the year by utilizing notes and newsletters. These communication efforts can be combined into an effective communications strategy that is both a more transparent and accessible.

Overall, the action plan is an important resource that can be used when district decision makers make changes to staffing, funding, or policy. The recommendations flow from the needs identified through the program evaluation and the logic models developed from the study results. Improvements in program offerings, communication, professional development, and social emotional learning are all included to remediate gaps found in the program based on the NAGC standards. The action plan defines practical steps to take as a result of evaluation.

Action Plan

Recommended Action	Category	Comment
Develop programming for advanced ELA students.	Program Development Curriculum and Instruction	Educators expressed a need for this course and cited the existence of advanced classes for all other core subjects.
Continue to monitor identification rates for historically underserved populations.	Identification	Percentages for male, female, diverse racial and ethnic group, ELL, and special needs learners should be monitored.
Publicize evaluation results.	Program Evaluation	The results of formal program evaluations should be publicized. The district website can be utilized for this purpose.
Provide professional development for educators directly relevant to gifted student needs. Investigate the offerings from the NAGC and Rutgers University Center for the Gifted.	Professional Development	The educators reported satisfaction for articulations during professional development, but desired to complement these with instruction of gifted student's specific needs.
Enhance stakeholder/parent group	Professional Development	A district wide group was formed and met infrequently. Establishing multiple types of communication, such as a newsletter, may enhance this aspect.
Provide professional learning on social emotional needs. Utilize training materials, modules, and/or presenters from SENG.	Affective Needs	Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) is a leading organization in this field, which provides speakers, webinars, and resources.
Provide Professional learning on social emotional learning. Utilize resources and presenters from CASEL.	Affective Needs	The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the leading resource on social and emotional learning. CASEL resources include

		frameworks, guides, and presenters.
Develop a bank of resources for educators regarding social-emotional needs of gifted students. Utilize materials from SENG and CASEL.	Affective Needs	A social-emotional curriculum guide, list of resources, and a survey of student needs are ideas for future implementation in this area. Articulation with guidance counselors may also be effective.
Develop enhanced communication of policies and procedures.	All Categories	A common need in multiple categories was to communicate to all stakeholders.
Audit programming for special areas such as art, music, dance, theatre, and languages.	Program Development	There is no data on this area so it is recommended for exploration for future evaluation cycles.

Appendix B: Master Checklist of Gifted Program Elements for Self-Assessment

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR Gifted Children

Master Checklist of Gifted Program Elements for Self-Assessment

Program Design Items	No Evidence	Some Evidence	In Place	Comments
1. There is a written philosophy and/or mission statement related to gifted students.				
2. There is a written definition of which students the district considers to have what particular needs that require specialized services.				
3. There are written goals and objectives for these services.				
4. There is a written description of the services to be provided for the described students at each grade level and in each area served.				
5. Services provided align with how giftedness is defined.				
6. Gifted students are grouped together for instruction in their area(s) of talent.				
7. Services are constructed so that there is a continuum of services to meet the broad range of needs of individual gifted students.				
8. Policies are in place to allow early entrance, grade skipping, subject skipping, early credit, and early graduation according to individual student need.				
9. The roles of personnel at the district, the building and the classroom are clearly defined.				
10. A district-wide stakeholder group exists and meets on a regular basis to review the district services for gifted students.				

Identification Items	No Evidence	Some Evidence	In Place	Comments
11. The district uses a norm-referenced measure of ability in each of the areas for which program services are offered (i.e. math, language arts).				
12. The district uses a norm-referenced measure of achievement with adequate ceilings to assess achievement above grade level in each of the areas for which program services are offered.				
13. The district uses qualitative indicators of ability to perform in each of the areas for which program services are offered.				
14. The procedures ensure that all students have an opportunity to be nominated for screening by publicizing the process and receiving nominations from all stakeholder groups.				
15. Students are identified in all grade levels for which services are provided.				
16. The formal identification process is repeated at targeted grade levels including (but not limited to) kindergarten, 2nd grade, prior to placement for middle school, and prior to placement in high school.				
17. The appeals process is publicized.				
18. The appeals process allows for students to take alternative ability, achievement, and/or qualitative measures at no cost to the family.				
19. The exit procedure includes period of intervention no less than one grading period to determine of student can be successful in the program with supports.				
Curriculum and Instruction Items	**No Evidence**	**Some Evidence**	**In Place**	**Comments**
20. There is a written curriculum in core subject areas and other areas served by the district that is specific to students identified as gifted K-12.				
21. Student learning goals are clear, and evidence of how the learning will be demonstrated is clearly stated.				

22. The written curriculum has clear evidence of vertical articulation from grade to grade and K-12.				
23. There is clear evidence of acceleration of curriculum in areas served.				
24. There is clear evidence of enrichment of curriculum in areas served.				
25. Instruction and learning experiences are clearly differentiated to focus on higher order thinking.				
26. There is evidence of teaching of communication, collaboration, research, critical thinking, problem solving.				
27. The pace of instruction is appropriate for gifted students.				
28. There is evidence of student use of technology for creating content, learning content, and communicating content.				
29. Assessments are aligned to curriculum goals.				
30. Pre-assessment is used to determine individual instructional plans.				
31. Post-assessment is used to demonstrate student growth and attainment of stated learning goals.				
Affective Needs Items	**No Evidence**	**Some Evidence**	**In Place**	**Comments**
32. A written, differentiated, affective curriculum is available and used by teachers that addresses social and emotional needs of gifted students.				
33. Affective curriculum teaches students about social and emotional characteristics as well as potential issues they may face.				
34. Documentation of differentiated college guidance for gifted students is available (e.g. fieldtrips, independent study projects, speakers, or shadowing experiences pertaining to college exploration).				
35. Documentation of differentiated career guidance for gifted students is available (e.g. fieldtrips, independent study projects, mentors, speakers,				

or shadowing experiences pertaining to college exploration).				
Professional Development Items	**No Evidence**	**Some Evidence**	**In Place**	**Comments**
36. Personnel working with gifted students are provided with opportunities for continuing professional development in the area of gifted education.				
37. Parents of gifted students are provided with opportunities for professional development about the characteristics and needs of this population.				
Program Evaluation Items	**No Evidence**	**Some Evidence**	**In Place**	**Comments**
38. The district uses multiple strategies to assess gifted student performance and growth.				
39. All components of the high ability program are periodically reviewed by individuals knowledgeable about gifted learners and who have competence in the evaluation process. The results are used for continuing program improvement.				
40. The evaluation report for all educational services involving gifted students includes both strengths and areas of challenge of the program and is accompanied by a plan with implications for improvement and renewal over time.				
41. The results of the program evaluation are presented to the local school board, the stakeholder group, and accessible to all constituencies of the program.				

Checklist is taken from Neumeister, K. S., & Burney, V. (2012). *Gifted program evaluation: A handbook for administrators & coordinators.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press. Used with permission of Prufrock Press.

Appendix C: Gifted and Talented Programming Questionnaire

Gifted and Talented Programming Questionnaire

1. What are two key points about the gifted program you would share with all staff?
2. How would you summarize the district's vision of gifted programming?
3. What data do you use to identify gifted students?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current gifted curriculum?
5. What affective, social, or emotional needs do you see most often in gifted students?
6. What professional development has most helped you serve gifted students?
7. What is the biggest challenge you face in your gifted/accelerated program?
8. How do you know that this programming is effective for gifted children?
9. Do you see this programming as successful for diverse students?
10. What one weakness in the program would you most like to correct?
11. Do you see this program as successful for a diverse range of students?
12. What are any other strengths or weaknesses in the current gifted programming?