TAG You're Out!

Understanding the Impact of the Termination of a Talented and Gifted Education Program on Families: A Phenomenological Case Study

by

Brian Sikora

A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Julie Alonzo, Chair

Dr. Heather McClure, Core Member

Dr. Chris Murray, Institutional Representative

University of Oregon

Winter 2024

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Brian Sikora

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Title: TAG You're Out! Understanding the Impact of the Termination of a Talented and Gifted Education Program on Families: A Phenomenological Case Study

Gifted education programs provide differentiated instruction for advanced students with the goal of challenging students to deepen their learning experience and move them toward their full potential. For many students, however, barriers exist in the system that prevent them from accessing gifted programs. The barriers exist in the referral process, assessment protocols, gifted instruction, as well as larger systemic factors such as state and district funding. The unfunded mandate in gifted education has created the greatest barrier, as many districts are not able to support TAG (talented and gifted) students. In many cases, families and the school districts rely on these programs to provide support when the districts are unable to fund them. However, when budget and funding constraints negatively impact such outside programs, there are very few, if any, options. This study used a phenomenological approach to look closely at the closing of one such outside program. Sharing the narratives of families impacted by the closure provides an important perspective regarding the need for TAG programming available outside of the school district catchment areas. Interviews with both students and families provide insights into what is most important to families regarding the education of their gifted children. Implications for policymakers and educational leaders are discussed, and design considerations for gifted education programs are shared.

Search Words: Gifted education; Gifted education need; Gifted education budget. Gifted education barriers; Gifted education program closure; Gifted education lack

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Brian Sikora

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene OR
Pacific University, Eugene OR
National University, Costa Mesa CA
California State University, San Bernardino CA

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Education 2024, University of Oregon
Special Education Teaching License 2009, Pacific University
Master of Arts, Human Behavior, 2000, National University
Bachelor of Arts, Behavioral Science, 1996, California State University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Gifted and Talented Education
Special Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Education Content Writer, Inflexion, 6 months

Practicum Supervisor, University of Oregon, 6 months

Assessment Specialist, Greater Albany Public Schools, 3 years

TAG Coordinator, Oregon State University, 2 years 7 months

Special Education Teacher/Case Manager, Greater Albany Public Schools, 12 years

Senior Account Executive, Enterprise Rent-A-Car Sales, 3 years

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to a few people who helped me to accomplish this goal. First, I would like to thank the members of my cohort who helped make this goal seem achievable. The weekly pushes were very necessary, and I can only hope that I have helped as well. Secondly, I want to thank Matt Coleman. You are an outside-of-the-box thinker, and I appreciate your encouragement. Next, I would like to thank the two members of my committee, Heather McClure and Chris Murray. Heather, I could never find a kinder, more caring person if I spent forever looking. Thank you for helping me realize that I was worth it. Chris, your analysis of my proposal opened my eyes to what more I can bring to the paper. Finally, the biggest thank you goes to my advisor Julie. You have been there all along. You have taken calls and texts when I was struggling, and you helped me focus my thoughts and continue to this day to encourage me. You must have seen something in me, and I appreciate it more than I can say.

DEDICATION

This work belongs to some people in my life. First to my parents. Mom, I know that you were not here to see me accomplish this, but I know how proud you would be, and Dad, I know just how proud you are. Amy, thank you for the sacrifices, encouragement, and love, and Aidan and Riley, this is for you, boys. You can do anything you want in life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

An Historical Look at Gifted Education

One of the earliest mentions of gifted education came in 1936 with Howard Taylor's study "The Gifted Child and His Education". This publication provided one of the earliest indicators that there may be challenges in the education of gifted students. Although Taylor's work brought the topic to the attention of some researchers and educators, very little was published on the topic in the following twenty years. Even by the 1950s, few articles addressed any issues within gifted education, and certainly, none addressed the imbalance of under-represented groups (e.g., language, culture, and gender) or the funding needed to implement gifted education. In the early years, most of the research on the topic was published in the long-running journal *Exceptional Children*, as very few other publications addressed concerns in this field.

Over the next couple of decades, articles with a focus on gifted education began showing up in the *Journal of Educational Research* and *Gifted Child Quarterly*, a newer publication. Several early education pioneers contributed articles in this era, most notably James Gallagher. The focus in the 1950s regarding gifted education was centered on programming itself. There was a concern about social adjustment and social acceptance. Researchers looked, without success, for a link between gifted students and anxiety and emotional maladjustment (Gallagher & Crowder, 1957).

Another area of study in the realm of gifted education was underachievement. The expressed concern was that gifted children were not working at the level that they should be and

were not as interested in school success as educators felt that they should be based on their gifted status. Studies were conducted to determine what factors contributed to these students' lack of achievement. Several factors were found to play a part, from the education level of parents (Gallagher et al, 1960), and teacher ability (Gallagher et al, 1960), to students simply being content to have lower grades despite their creativity and giftedness due to the authors' suggestion that a traditional academic environment may not always nurture creative thinking (Drews & Montgomery, 1964). There was even concern expressed about students and their parents being uncomfortable about being associated with a gifted program because gifted education is part of special education (Hamilton, 1960).

It was not until 1964 that a study addressing underrepresentation in gifted education was published. In this case, socio-economic status was the highlight, as researchers found that gifted students in non-wealthy school districts were less likely to receive gifted education services. About a decade later, a congressional study specifically addressing education programs for exceptional children was embarked on. The findings of this study shared that existing gifted programs did not reach significant sub-populations such as minorities and economically disadvantaged families (Marland, 1971). Soon after the publication of this report, Bernal, one of the major champions of gifted and bilingual education, started conducting trailblazing research that would pave the way for investigation into minority students and the lack of representation in gifted programs.

In 1974, Bernal published "Gifted Mexican American Children: An Ethno-Scientific Perspective" in the *California Journal of Educational Research.* His study solidly confirmed the congressional report's findings that far too few minority students were being identified as gifted

and cautioned that the instruments used for testing needed to be evaluated. Bernal continued his

research, authoring many articles on minority and gifted education until his passing in 2017.

By the end of the 1970s, it was clear from the research that several problems were

starting to come to the surface. There were systemic problems with the referral process, the

eligibility process, the delivery of services, and more glaringly, underrepresentation within

marginalized groups. The latter was such a problem that articles written in the late 1970s

proposed a quota system where schools would make sure that they were finding minority

students eligible for gifted programs, even if it meant using a flawed system, and not necessarily

finding the right students eligible (LeRose, 1978).

Transitional Years: More Emphasis on Who is Missing from Gifted Education

The 20 years between 1980 and 2000 could be considered transition years. They form a

bridge from the early concerns in gifted education of *social acceptance* and *underachievement* to

the issues that we are seeing today in *identification*, *delivery of programs*, and

underrepresentation. Studies started to focus more on referral and identification processes.

Researchers were starting to see that there were flaws in the nomination and referral process and

wanted to discover what links the referral process had to the lack of diverse representation.

During the 1980s, different types of journals started to publish articles about gifted education.

One such journal, *The Journal of Negro Education*, focused on finding out how to assist children

of color in the successful transition to gifted education programs. They reported that programs

such as the Program of Assessment, Diagnosis, and Instruction (PADI) helped children to

become more self-confident and eager to attend school (Johnson et al., 1985).

Another statistic was starting to emerge during this period. As researchers noted the

underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs, they were starting to report on their

overrepresentation in other special education programs. Twice the number of Black students were being served in special education programs as should be based on population numbers (Chinn & Hughes, 1987). The students were, by and large, being assessed with the same instruments for both gifted programs and special education, which set up the potential for future studies to examine the specific assessment instruments to understand the discrepancy.

As the 1990s passed, researchers were still asking these questions. Studies started examining other possible causes. In the 1990s, researchers turned their focus to understanding why minority students continued to be underrepresented in TAG. One of the insights of the time was that bilingual students may need more than just the standard assessment tools to get a better picture of their giftedness. Another possible contributor might be that teachers might have a bias against certain minority groups or simply fail to understand how factors such as skin color, culture, or economic status might impact classroom performance (Frasier, 1995). Regardless, it was very clear that the tools used for identification were not working when it came to non-white students. In the 2000s, the call to identify racially and culturally appropriate methods of identification became increasingly urgent. Studies examined the cultural underpinnings of assessment tools in an attempt to discern whether they were inadequate to appraise the giftedness of students of color. Ford et al. (1997) explained that the goal was to help develop instruments that are better suited to "recruit and retain minority students in gifted programs" (p. 205). At the turn of the century, despite a variety of assessment tools and procedures, minority students were still vastly overlooked.

Current Problems in the World of Gifted Education

The literature continues to point to four major factors impacting gifted and talented education in the United States. These factors include issues with referrals, assessment, identification, and programming.

Training of School Personnel

The training of school personnel has a major impact on both the referral and identification process, and – ultimately – on equity within gifted education. Recent research points toward a few key factors. One factor is the lack of proper training. As there is a mandate for gifted education, but no funding at the state level, in Oregon, there is little training available to pre-service teachers, and not much more professional development for seasoned teachers. Classroom teachers do not always understand the needs of all their students, especially if the student comes from a culturally diverse background. In a recent study, an EL teacher who was being interviewed referred to the fact that "the classroom teachers are generally responsible for the gifted referral process and ... they typically do not consult the EL teachers regarding gifted referrals" (Allen, 2017). In this case, the most qualified specialists addressing bilingual needs are not even part of the process, nor are they consulted.

In addition, the unfunded mandate has left districts to choose how to use their limited resources (Siegel et al., 2016). It is left to the TAG administrators to be student advocates and make sure that the process of referral and identification does not leave out underrepresented populations who would benefit from these services (Lakin, 2016). A study into problems with referrals revealed that teacher bias was a major factor. Following interviews with school staff, a researcher noted, "Some educators may have little patience for students who are not yet proficient in English and may be much quicker to refer [such students] for special education" (Ford, 2012, p. 397).

In addition, behavioral problems may hinder identification, and many referrals only begin because of student discipline (Ford, 2012). In an interview, a teacher reported this about a student, "I would think, if it wasn't for the language barrier, he would be gifted" (Allen, 2017, p.

82). Other teachers interviewed made similar comments. At the same time, some educators do feel that teachers are the best source of referrals for gifted programs (McBee, 2006). The classroom teachers have the best opportunity to see the strengths of the students in an academic setting. When teachers are allowed to independently refer a gifted student without equity training, there is almost always some bias, and certain students will likely come to the top…not always because of their giftedness, but due to other factors (e.g., gender, likability, work ethic, strong use of English language).

The problem does not just exist for EL students. Special education students, especially students on the Autism Spectrum, are often overlooked for gifted education referrals because the teachers fail to recognize their gifts if classroom behavior gets in the way. One study that looked at the link between special education and gifted education implied that the limitations of gifted and talented instruction are likely to be more critical for 2e (twice exceptional) students, whose patterns of strengths and needs require additional resources in terms of training and experience across special and gifted education (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2013).

Gifted education is also overlooked in pre-service programs. While working as a gifted education director, I served on a committee to look at the possibility of adding a gifted education emphasis to a local teaching licensure program, and after many conversations, it was determined not to add the emphasis because the school did not feel that enough students would be interested in that focus. According to a study by Bangel et al. (2010), "training in gifted education has been offered at the graduate level but few elementary teachers choose gifted education as their area of concentration when pursuing a master's degree. As a result, most training in gifted education is offered to elementary teachers through in-service workshops that have been found to result in minimal change in participants' classroom strategies" (p. 209).

Problematic Evaluation Tools and Processes (Major Impact on Identification and Equity)

The second factor creating a barrier to access to gifted education is the evaluation

process. The debate on screening has revolved around the traditional method of teachers and

parents making referrals vs. a screening tool for all students. Card and Giuliano (2016) reported

that the introduction of a universal screening program led to a large increase in the number of

culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students referred for gifted education. In a 2016 book,

Ronald Ferguson analyzed this research and added, "The universal screening produced a 180%

increase in the gifted assignment rate among all students who qualified for subsidized meals, a

130% increase among Latinos, and an 80% increase among blacks" (Ferguson, 2016, p. 48).

Unfortunately, cost-cutting measures ended the program that Card and Guliano had studied, and

things reverted to pre-program status.

Although universal screening is a good way to ensure that all students are considered for

gifted education, it, by itself, does not solve the problem. Other studies have investigated the role

of the assessment instruments used in the identification process and their possible relation to

disproportionate white and non-white students being found eligible for gifted programming.

Naglieri and Ford developed a non-verbal assessment instrument. The idea was to take the

element of language out of the equation when doing assessments (Naglieri & Ford, 2003).

Naglieri and Ford studied his assessment and determined that it did prove useful for CLD

students, but that there was very little difference between white and non-white children when it

came to results. Other studies eventually confirmed these findings (Giessman et al., 2013).

Although there are exceptions, the typical educational evaluation has cognitive testing performed

by either a school psychologist or someone specifically trained to do these tests. The observation,

rating scale, and academic testing are done by classroom teachers with varying levels of

experience. This, of course, creates an imbalance and potential equity issue. Consider the situation a different way, and one could say that half of the testing is done by a teacher who can get to know the student well and can observe over a long period, and the other half is a one-shot test with a psychologist who does not know the student.

An argument can be made that the testing instrument itself might create an equity issue. Educators have pointed out that most of the tests used to identify gifted students are designed by white, middle- or upper-middle-class experts whose academic backgrounds and experiences have led them to set criteria tending to favor students from the same backgrounds (Castellano, 1998). Very few standardized instruments are designed for diverse students, and a student's language and cultural experience can become a barrier to success in the testing. In the case studies where an assessment has been designed with cultural sensitivity in mind, the gap in scores between White native English speakers and CLD students shrinks. Using tests designed in this manner might help culturally diverse students gain access to gifted programs that would otherwise not be available (Naglieri & Ford, 2003). In reality, no single assessment should be considered definitive. It is considered best practice to use multiple criteria and data for identification, as would present a more holistic view of the student (Mun et al., 2020).

Despite additional research in this area, not much has changed regarding underrepresentation in gifted education. In the most recent 20 years, there has been an increase in studies to understand the underrepresentation of bilingual and culturally diverse students in gifted programs. Educators and researchers have attempted to build on the theories of Bernal, Gallagher, and Frasier, seeking ways to reduce the deficit. As Awaya (2001) wrote, "Gifted education should be a developmental opportunity for a broad spectrum of students, not simply a reward for those who have already displayed the desired characteristics" (p. 194). Sadly, the

equity issue is not just language or culture-based. There are fewer girls than boys in gifted programs, students from lower-income communities are often excluded, and even where a student lives could play a part, with students in rural areas far less likely to be in gifted programs (Puryear & Kettler, 2017).

Newer policies show that educators are working on addressing equity issues, but there is much work still to be done. Diverse students are not only missing the benefits of gifted enrichment programs, but they are also not being served alongside their gifted peers in the least restrictive environment. Teachers across the U.S. are challenged with how to help their diverse students who are struggling academically. According to Becker and Deris (2019), "The education professionals overwhelmingly noted that they did not feel competent making educational decisions regarding English language learning students and more often than not, the students were placed into special education when the root of their difficulties likely stemmed from language acquisition" (p. 4). Many gifted culturally and linguistically diverse students are being served for a disability, while their giftedness eventually regresses until it is unidentifiable (Stein et al., 2012).

Beyond The Equity Conundrum: What Happens After a Student (Finally) Qualifies

The third main barrier to accessing gifted education for students is the design of the programs themselves. Studies show that the lack of consistency in district policies allows a lot of students who should have been made eligible to fall through the cracks (List & Dykeman, 2020). Esquierdo writes, "Schools will need more than simple adjustments to current school policies and procedures. The restructuring of the gifted education program calls for a strong focus on educating and informing teachers, parents, and the community about the characteristics and identification process of gifted bilingual students" (p. 35). Studies as recent as 2022 show that

this problem is continuing to be prevalent and much more needs to be done. Some of the best thinking regarding gifted education student eligibility comes from researcher Del Siegle. He has authored many studies on this subject at the University of Connecticut. He says,

> A comprehensive, inclusive system for identifying gifted students from all populations requires a holistic approach of broadened identification. In addition to using multiple criteria, considerations should be made for students with high potential who may not have the necessary background knowledge to be immediately successful with gifted services, but who can flourish if provided sufficient scaffolding. In addition to providing support for academic success and meaningful learning experiences, effective interventions are culturally responsive and address the unique learning needs of different populations of students. Through this approach, students will be ready for gifted service interventions and benefit from the advanced content and instructional delivery of programs with these features, stay in the programs, persist, and embrace learning opportunities across time."
> (Siegle et al., 2016, p. 122)

In addition, researchers are calling for more large-scale research studies into underrepresentation in gifted programs that include much more background information about participants that goes beyond one simple demographic (Mun et al., 2020).

Once the students are in the program, the programs themselves are quite inconsistent. A 2010 study by Reis and Renzulli revealed some real disconnects between recommendations and research regarding gifted education and what was happening in practice (Reis & Renzulli, 2010). The report revealed that students in gifted programs in the United States were "offered less rigorous curriculum, read fewer demanding books, and were less prepared for work or post-secondary education than other industrialized countries" (p. 309).

Many parents who were interviewed in a more recent study were disappointed in the offerings found in the gifted classrooms and felt that the online learning that grew out of the COVID-19 pandemic better fit the needs of their students than what was happening in the gifted classroom (Wolfgang & Snyderman, 2022). Other studies reported similar results. Parents noted that much of the classroom work in a normal year is busy work that prevents gifted students from excelling, in an attempt to keep all students moving at the same pace; the gifted students were becoming bored and frustrated by the slow pace of education (Kanevsky & Keighly, 2003). In contrast, many students were thriving in the virtual model where they were able to learn at a much faster pace and could tailor their learning to their passions. This line of thinking is substantiated by Wolfgang and Synderman's 2022 study.

> As districts start providing more virtual opportunities for gifted students, they will need to consider different options regarding the delivery of instruction. If it is determined that a gifted student might benefit from instruction via a virtual model, districts should take the time to determine how instruction will be delivered so that it meets the needs of the student." (p. 68)

The inconsistency in gifted education programs in both rigor and responsiveness to students' needs, as well as the shift toward virtual education, highlights the need for thoughtful planning and adaptation to ensure that these programs are effectively meeting the needs of gifted learners.

Budgets and Funding: The Unfunded TAG Mandate

Many articles have been written about the previous factors, but few have addressed the overarching issue that undercuts everything: funding. How much impact does funding (or lack thereof) have on the first three factors? The biggest gap in literature is in this particular area, although in the past several years, articles looking at gifted mandates and funding have been published. The fact that not all school districts even have access to gifted education should be of

great concern for families and educators. There is even a discrepancy between state mandates for

gifted education and funding. According to the National Association for Gifted Children

(NAGC), the states can be divided into three groups (see Table 1). Only fifteen states both have a

gifted education mandate and funding, 29 have a mandate or definition for gifted, but no funding,

and 6 have no mandate or funding. Oregon falls into the category of having a mandate for gifted

education, but no funding.

Table 1

Gifted Funding and Mandate Chart

States with Gifted Mandate and Funding	States with Gifted Mandate and No Funding		States with Neither Mandate Nor Funding
Colorado	Washington	Illinois	California
New Mexico	North Dakota	Tennessee	Idaho
Texas	Oregon	Florida	South Dakota
Arkansas	Missouri	Ohio	Michigan
Louisiana	Minnesota	West	Massachusetts
Nebraska	New York	Virginia	New Hampshire
Iowa	Alaska	Pennsylvania	
Mississippi	New Jersey	Maryland	
Alabama	Hawaii	Delaware	
Georgia	Rhode Is.	Maine	
South Carolina	Nevada	New York	
North Carolina	Vermont	Utah	
Virginia	Arizona	Montana	
Kentucky	Wyoming	Kansas	
Indiana	Oklahoma	Wisconsin	

Information provided by the National Association for Gifted Children

General funding discrepancies are reflected in spending for gifted students, as seen when

comparing budgetary allocations in affluent suburban districts with those in financially

constrained rural districts. Findings from national studies assessing programs for gifted students

indicate that rural school districts designate proportionately less funding for gifted programs than

suburban and urban school districts (Moon et al., 2012a, 2012b). Whereas federal policies serve

to protect special education services to ensure that children who qualify for those services receive them, gifted students do not have this assurance in place. Furthermore, cuts in public school budgets such as those currently challenging school districts, which affect both staffing levels and program funding, are most likely to affect nonmandated program options. Hence, teachers of gifted students are often at risk of having their jobs cut, resulting in fewer services for gifted students (Merrow, 2004). As a result, rural gifted students are at risk of not having instruction provided by teachers with special skills or competencies in addressing their educational needs, and many of these students "may not receive the critical academic stimulation and enrichment needed to support their full cognitive, social, and academic development" (Howley et al., 2009, p. 521).

The Loss of Gifted and Talented Programs

Professor François Gagne is a leading researcher and author in the field of gifted education. He is known for his theory of talent development within gifted and talented populations. In his 2011 article "Academic Talented Development and the Equity Issue in Gifted Education," he outlined step by step what needs to be in place for the successful development of gifted students and what a program should look like. There is a particular concept that he mentioned that deeply resonates with many gifted educators, and even though it is only one of the tenets of what a gifted program should be, the comparison makes sense to describe the need for gifted students to work together. He likened TAG programs to sports programs. A sports team and all of its players need to practice daily to get better and develop their talent. In a school, we have gifted students, and if they are not grouped to practice and develop their skills, their talent will not grow as much as it could if it were better supported (Gagne, 2011).

This analogy is supported by research by Kulik (1992) who reported, "Gifted students who were grouped and received advanced enrichment or acceleration benefitted the most because they outperformed control group students who were not grouped and did not receive enrichment or acceleration by 5 months to a full year on achievement tests" (Kulik, 1992). Another author asserted that "students who participated in gifted programs in an elementary and secondary school maintained academic interests and increased career aspirations in college" (Taylor, 1992) and saw "both higher achievement and higher standardized [test scores] as well as a higher rate of earned college degrees. Students whose grade level was accelerated tended to be more ambitious, and they earned graduate degrees at higher rates than other students" (Colangelo et al., 2004). Other studies that included surveys with parents and teachers found that opportunities for gifted students to interact with one another were essential to feeling connected (Wolfgang & Snyderman, 2022).

These claims were supported by studies that interviewed gifted students several years removed from their experiences in grade school. A 2004 study revealed that students in strong gifted education programs felt "positive about their experiences, reporting that they were academically challenged, socially accepted, and did not fall prey to boredom that they experienced in general education classrooms" (Colangelo et al., 2004).

As an educator in the gifted education field, I have felt the effects of the challenges faced by gifted students first-hand. School districts provide very little time for teachers to fully consider gifted referrals and even less time to provide specialized support. I have seen the effects internally as a K-12 TAG building facilitator and as a gifted and talented coordinator doing outreach to the school districts. As a K-12 facilitator, it took months longer than necessary to bring students through the process because teachers did not have the time or training to address

my students' needs. I needed to be very persistent—to the point of being a bother—to have rating scales filled out. The specialized "education plan" that was supposed to be implemented to provide differentiated instruction was probably looked at by only 2% of the teachers, let alone implemented.

As a coordinator of a K-12 outreach gifted camp, I was inundated with families who wanted a spot in the camp because the districts were unable to provide the support due to a lack of funding. The districts were very interested in referring students to my camp for their support, but sadly, were unable to provide financial assistance for us to run the program. In situations such as this, the gifted students stand to lose the most. In a state with no mandate, there would likely be no access whatsoever to gifted programs. A 2016 study revealed that 42.4% of schools in the United States had zero students identified as gifted (Peters et al., 2019). It is nearly always left to the gifted coordinators to be the sole student advocates for this group of students to make sure that this chronically underrepresented group is not left out of benefiting from these services (Lakin, 2016).

Yet even with the evidence that shows the benefit of gifted education programs, the lack of funding is causing these programs to disappear. In the mid-Willamette Valley, Oregon, for example, the local school districts (Greater Albany Public Schools, Corvallis, Philomath, Salem, and Lebanon) used the Oregon State University (OSU) K-12 summer and winter TAG programs to support their students because there was very little funding in the district budgets to pay for staff to do an in-house program. When a program such as this one run through the university also goes unfunded and disappears, it greatly affects the school districts.

As the former director of the OSU TAG programs, I had many meetings with school district leaders who very much wanted to continue the partnership to support gifted students, but

they were unable to put forth any funding to make it happen. Research suggests that these programs work. They develop talent and skill, foster connections with similar students, and set students up for future success. With evidence of their usefulness for talented and gifted children, preserving such programs should be a priority for education leaders.

What Parents and Students 'Really' Want from a Gifted Program

Herzog and Bennet conducted a survey in 2004 that set out to find what perceptions parents had about their gifted child's learning needs, and the survey revealed consistent trends. The greatest percentage of parents felt that their child needed to be challenged and stimulated, and that was lacking in public schools. The second greatest percentage wanted a program that allowed their child to be creative. Parents also wanted to see more in-depth learning and higher-level curriculum content (Herzog & Bennet, 2004). Additionally, respondents indicated that one of the most important factors in a gifted program is the ability for parents to have input, and they wanted much greater communication between the program and home.

In their 2012 review of literature on gifted programming, Jolly and Matthews found that in every study, nearly all parent participants found value in gifted programming, but satisfaction seemed to vary, and dissatisfaction was typically due to lack of involvement or communication, lack of advanced challenge, or simply not pushing deeper thought or creativity (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). In some cases, the level of involvement bordered that which would be found in a home-school program. "Parents of gifted students determined that (a) they were the best judge of their gifted child's learning needs, (b) schools were ineffective at meeting these learning needs, and (c) change needed to occur" (Jolly et al., 2013, p. 10). Weber and Stanley (2012) further emphasized the need for parental involvement. "Gifted children reap the benefits when their parents understand and are actively involved in all aspects of their lives" (p. 134). Finally,

two other studies (Hahn et al., 2014; Matthews & Kitchen, 2007) reported the specific things that parents wanted to see from a gifted program that they would consider registering their child to attend. These specific things are:

1. *Differentiated Instruction*: Parents want to see that the instruction provided to their students is not the same as everyone in the class if their child is advanced in their knowledge of the concept.

2. *Teacher Support and Training*: Parents want to see teachers trained in Gifted and Talented teaching strategies.

3. *Accelerated Pacing and Complexity*: Parents want to see a program that will allow their children to advance at their own pace and explore more complex topics as they are ready.

4. *Parent Involvement*: Parents want to be involved in the education plan and have a say in what is happening in the classroom.

5. *Impact of Funding Cuts*: Parents are recognizing the funding issues and want to see a better funding plan for gifted programs.

6. *Advocacy for Gifted Programs*: Parents want to see more advocates for gifted education at the community, state, and federal levels.

7. *Transparency and Communication*: Parents want to see better communication between the program and the home.

8. *Equitable Access*: Parents emphasize the need for equitable access to equipment, facilities, and field trips in gifted programs.

The Context of This Study

Oregon State University's pre-college programs is a department within enrollment management designed to provide youth outreach programs. The main goal of the various programs housed in this department is to increase college awareness and access for K-12 students. The programs are presented as academic camps and are intended to foster a love of learning and promote college readiness. The programs that exist within the precollege program's banner are Stem Academy (a summer program for all students with an emphasis on science and math education); SMILE (Science and Math Investigative Learning Experience); I-Invent summer camps, where students take on the role of an inventor; Discover the Scientist Within, geared toward girls and stirring their interest in science; as well as several others.

This study is a post-mortem evaluation of one of the programs that existed under the precollege program's umbrella. The Talented and Gifted (TAG) program was a popular program that operated for roughly 20 years before ending following the summer of 2022. The program was targeted to students who were identified as gifted and talented in grades 3-10 in the local school districts. Most of the programs that exist under Oregon State University pre-college programs are funded through semi-permanent grants or from University funds. Only two programs, the TAG program and STEM Academy, were self-funded, which means that funding comes directly from tuition to the program, or from smaller grants that need to be applied for yearly.

The Stem Academy had more stability due to the program having built capital over multiple years under one director. The TAG program had been through several leadership changes and was previously directed by retired superintendents who volunteered much of their time and ran the program with only enough budget to sustain existence from year to year with no

prospect for long-term growth. I took over as the director of this program in January 2020, when the previous director retired. In taking this position, I was told by the former director of pre-college programs that the budget was tight but hoped that I would be able to grow the program to have a more statewide presence. There was only enough budget to pay me a part-time salary, but with the projected growth, the salary would grow as well. Only a month and a half later, we entered a pandemic that saw enrollment in the program plunge.

Although I was able to run modified programs in 2020-2022, the lack of income caused the budget to decline. Meetings held with school district leaders in hopes of partnerships never resulted in financial support. In early 2022, the decision was made that there was not enough money in the budget to continue past summer 2022. This decision impacted quite a few families who used the program to support their talented and gifted children. This group of students is underserved in public schools, and this was the only resource in the local area that consistently provided differentiated instruction to meet gifted students' needs.

The closure of the OSU TAG program provided the impetus for this dissertation study. Having been actively involved in the program for several years and having observed first-hand the strain the program's closure had on families, I wanted to learn more about the impact the program's closure had on the gifted students whom it had previously served and their families. More importantly, I wanted to learn more about what families want for their gifted children that is not being provided in public school, or since the closure of this one particular outlet. I hoped that these interviews would provide evidence of what parents want to see in gifted programming and allow me to produce a plan for developing a future gifted program that addresses these identified needs.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

In this qualitative study, I sought to understand the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of parents and students who were previously served by a Talented and Gifted (TAG) program, following the closing of that program. Phenomenological studies allow a researcher to explore a topic in great depth and explicitly provide opportunities for the participants to tell their stories and exhibit whatever emotions might arise from the discussion of the topic. This approach enabled me to gain a better understanding of the impact that the closing of the program had on the people who previously received the program's services, as well as what sort of program they would like to have in place to support their children in the future.

Setting

This study was set in the state of Oregon, and all the participants were residents of the state. The University that housed the program that was closed is in the town of Corvallis, and most of the participants reside in either Corvallis, the neighboring city of Albany, or the larger metropolitan city of Portland. Corvallis has a population of approximately 60,000 with nearly 80% of the residents identifying as white, non-Hispanic. In Corvallis, 96.4% of the population has a high school degree or higher, with nearly 60% of the population holding a bachelor's degree. Albany has a very similar population, but a substantial difference in education level, where, unlike Corvallis with 60% bachelor's degree or higher, only 27.3% of Albany's population has this level of education. Portland's population is much higher at 641,000 and has very similar educational data to Corvallis. As with most metropolitan cities, the racial make-up is slightly more diverse in Portland, with 73% of the residents identifying as white non-Hispanic.

Data collection took place in three locations. One interview took place in Corvallis, one in Albany, and the rest (including the focus group) took place virtually using the online Zoom platform. Data collection took place between July 1, 2023, and August 31, 2023. For the individual interviews, I recorded the data as well as asked the questions. In the virtual focus group, I had a moderator help with asking the questions, so I was able to more intently listen and observe, as well as ask clarifying questions when needed.

Study Participants

To be eligible to participate in this study, participants must have participated in the Oregon State University Precollege Programs TAG program, either in summer or winter during either school year 2020-2021 or 2021-2022 or both years. Oregon State University houses a pre-college programs department that targets K-12 education. According to the program's website, the goal is to "support and oversee a wide range of youth outreach activities designed to increase college access and academic preparation for Oregon's youth. Academic programs and youth camps provide pathways to higher education and offer opportunities to enhance college readiness and career awareness" (https://precollege.oregonstate.edu/). Several programs target local students, one of which is the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program, which sits at the center of this research study.

Participants were recruited from both eligible students and their parents. The students, at the time of program participation, were between third and tenth grade. Because some of the participants attended the program two years before data collection, some subjects were in 12th grade at the time of this study, but none were enrolled in anything lower than 4th grade. The program had a relatively even mix of male and female students, and the demographics were mixed in terms of race, with white being the dominant. In addition, most of the participants of

the program were financially well off, although the program did offer scholarships to families

needing assistance. In all, 114 unique participants attended the program during the past two years

and received an email asking if they would be interested in sharing their thoughts about the

program's closing when I learned it would not be continued. Of those, 31 families responded,

indicating that they would like to share their thoughts. At the point that IRB permission was

obtained, I reached back out to those families and at that point, 16 agreed to participate. All of

the interviews took place in July and August 2023.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected from two sources: multiple individual interviews and one focus

group. The interviews were conducted individually, and I interviewed both the adults and the

children. The focus group consisted of eight adult (parent) participants.

The Interview Sessions

The first source of data came from individual semi-structured interviews that I conducted

individually with both adults and students. The semi-structured nature of the interview protocol

provided the option to ask any follow-up questions to explore unexpected things that might come

up organically through the interview process. Using the semi-structured interview approach

allowed me to get the information needed but with enough flexibility to capture information that

might not have been expected. I used similar questions as the basis for all interviews, but the

wording was tailored for either adults or children, depending on the participant I was

interviewing. My original intent was to hold all the individual meetings in person. That proved to

be difficult with participants' schedules. Except for two participants, the rest requested to be

interviewed through Zoom, which I did include as an option for those who could not participate

in person. This option for Zoom-based interviews turned out to be beneficial, as it appeared that

the participants in Zoom were quite relaxed, as they were in their home environment, and seemed willing to open and speak freely. In both settings, it seemed as though participants were willing to provide honest and open answers. In the following sections, I provide summaries of the parents' and students' responses to the interview questions, one at a time.

The following interview questions were used specifically for the adults:

RQ 1-1 Think back about your child's experiences in the TAG program. Can you tell me about some of the most positive experiences they had?

RQ 1-2 What were some of the things you remember wishing could be different about the TAG program when it still existed?

RQ 1-3 Describe your feelings when you learned that there would be no more TAG program.

RQ 1-4 Think back to when your child was participating in the TAG program. Did you notice any differences in their academics or connections with other students (either positive or negative) that you think were related to the TAG program?

RQ 1-5 Have you done anything to continue to expose your child to additional skills normally found in a gifted education program? If so, what have you done?

RQ 1-6 Describe the support that your TAG student receives in their current school setting.

RQ 1-7 What are you looking for to support your child moving forward?

RQ 1-8 If you were on the program design team, what would you like to see in a gifted and talented program in general? Build your perfect program.

The following interview questions were used specifically for the students:

RQ 2-1 Think back about your experiences in the TAG program. Can you tell me about some of the most positive experiences you had?

RQ 2-2 What were some of the things you remember wishing could be different about the TAG program when it still existed?

RQ 2-3 Describe your feelings when you learned that there would be no more TAG program.

RQ 2-4 Describe the support that you receive in your current school setting.

RQ 2-5 If you were on the program design team, what would you like to see in a gifted and talented program in general? Build your perfect program.

The Focus Group

There was one focus group in this study. The participants of the focus group were parents of the OSU program attendees. The reason for holding focus groups was to be able to capture the stories in the participants' own words, as they told them, while also providing a source of data triangulation and member checking. Being able to hear each other reflect on their experiences in the TAG program and their feelings about its closure prompted a more colorful conversation, and participants openly shared more of their experiences than they had in their individual interviews.

Much like the individual interviews, I originally had an idea of how the focus groups would go, but due to scheduling and participant preferences, I needed to adjust. I had planned to do in-person focus groups. I was going to have one group for adults and one group for children. However, the participants nearly all preferred a Zoom meeting for the focus group, and I was not able to get enough children willing to participate in a focus group to be effective. Thus, I ended up with a single-parent focus group. After several attempts to convene an in-person focus group among the participants who had previously indicated they were interested in being part of it, I decided to invite them to participate in a Zoom focus group. This resulted in one focus group consisting of eight participants. Seven of the eight had previously participated in the individual interviews, and one participated in the focus group only. The participants in the focus group were

all female and each was a mother or otherwise guardian of a child who participated in the TAG program at Oregon State University. The purpose of the focus group was to gain a deeper understanding of the questions that were part of the individual interviews, as well as a means of member checking to gain clarification and make sure that I had correctly interpreted the themes and ideas that came out of those individual sessions. The questions were worded in a way that would allow a freer-flowing conversation among the participants in the group.

In the focus group, I had the moderator ask the questions, while I observed. This allowed me the ability not only to hear participants' answers but also to observe body language and interaction with other participants. To assist with member checking, most of the questions provided a brief summary of some of the key findings from the interviews and then asked participants to comment.

The questions used in the focus groups were:

RQ 3-1 In the focus group discussion regarding the OSU TAG program, several participants shared their thoughts on what was positive about the program. The top two comments that were received from families when asked about the program were:

- *Interaction with Peers at the Same Academic Level*
- *Challenging Students to Excel*

Would anyone like to elaborate on this?

RQ 3-2   The comments that I received about what could have been better about the program were mostly centered on the length of the program, that it could have been longer, and that during the COVID years, there wasn't much variety. Am I correct, and who would like to comment?

RQ 3-3 With the unfunded TAG mandate, I am hearing that there is little to no (in nearly all cases) support in the public schools. What do you feel needs to be done to bring support to the gifted students so that they will get the enrichment that they need?

RQ 3-4 In most of the interviews, parents such as yourselves have given me an idea of what they would like to see for their kids. Many have liked the idea of a campus-based TAG/High Achieving Magnet type school designed to let students navigate their education journey at their own pace while continuing to focus on building social skills. Can you give me some more thoughts on this idea or let me know if there is something else that you think would work well for TAG students?

RQ 3-5 With a focus on equity, can you speak about the importance of program cost to families, and talk about ways to keep the cost low so that all families have the option to enroll? What are the ways to make that happen? In the interviews, grants and scholarships were discussed. Are there any other ideas that would help make what you want to see a reality?

Recording and Data Transformation

The Interviews

The interviews were done on a one-on-one basis. I either sat with the participants in person, asking the questions and recording the answers, or we met through a secure one-on-one Zoom call. This allowed me to be flexible in the conversation and to ask clarifying questions as needed. The interviews ranged in length from 28 to 47 minutes, with the average length being 39 minutes.

The Focus Group

For the focus group, I had a moderator ask the questions, and I recorded the responses as well as observed the participants' behavior and interactions.

Analysis Strategy and Procedures

This study used a narrative analysis approach. Narrative analysis has been described as a tool that provides a "rich framework through which researchers can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through stories" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 1). In this study, the participants had stories and ideas that they wanted to share. The participants had an emotional investment in the program on which this study is focused, and this study allowed them to tell those stories and make suggestions about how to improve gifted education As the researcher, I looked for themes, trends, similarities, and differences. I allowed the participants' emotions to provide context and richness to their stories and ideas, and I organized these themes and trends into a framework that tells a story about the TAG program, the impact that it had on the participants, and what they hope for in the future.

For each question that I asked the participants, I assigned what I believe to be a spectrum of themes in a preliminary codebook (see Table 2), and with that, I have attached categories and codes that I used when I interpreted the results. I anticipated that the answers would trigger an emotional response to the first few questions. I used three codes for emotional responses with *A* being *positive* or *good*, *B* being *neutral* and *C* being *negative* or *bad*. A good or positive response could show relief, joy, happiness, or satisfaction. A neutral response would show apathy, indifference, or no feeling, and a negative response might be anger, grief, abandonment, fear, sadness, or worry. There is one question that exists to provide context, as well as two questions that are designed to gather ideas on what is needed in gifted education and to brainstorm ideas. I also made a comparison of the parents' and the children's answers to see if there were any specific trends worth noting.

Table 2
Coding Plan

Research Questions	Codes	Themes
Think back about your/your child's experiences in the TAG program. Can you tell me about some of the most positive experiences they had?	Feelings and emotions- Challenge or similar Feelings and Emotions- Inclusion or similar Feelings and Emotions- motivation or similar	Feelings and Emotions- Connectedness, challenged, included. This is designed to gather stories about what parents and students liked about the program and how it made them feel.
What were some of the things you remember wishing could be different about the TAG program when it still existed?	Feelings and Emotions- The program lacking	Feelings and emotions- Program not challenging, program not providing what student needs, program duration and timing issues. This is designed to gather information about what could have been better.
Describe your feelings when you learned that there would be no more TAG program.	Feelings and Emotions- Good; Feelings and Emotions- Neutral; Feelings and Emotions- Bad	Feelings and Emotions: Good- Relief, Joy, Happiness, Satisfaction; Anything that would indicate a positive feeling toward the end of the program.
Describe the support that your TAG student receives in their current school setting.	Program Examples- Neutral	These examples exist for context only.
Think back to when your child was participating in the TAG program. Did you notice any differences in their academics or connections with other students (either positive or negative) that you think were related to the TAG program? Have you done anything to continue to expose your child to additional skills normally found in a gifted education program? If so, what have you done? If you were on the program design team, what would you like to see in a gifted and talented program in general? Build your perfect program.	Feelings and Emotions- Good; Feelings and Emotions- Neutral; Feelings and Emotions- Bad Ideas- Neutral Ideas- Neutral	* Feelings and Emotions: Good- Student will have more success; Student will thrive; Anything that would indicate new or more success than previous * Feelings and Emotions: Neutral- Anything in the interview that would indicate that there would be no difference * Feelings and Emotions: Bad- Student will do worse, the student will lose connection to TAG friends, the student will struggle; Anything in the interview that would lead to a sense that the student would now do poorly because of lack of TAG program. This question provides examples of programs that parents have looked for to support TAG students with the lack of the OSU program. This question provides a forum for examples, and ideas from the parent and child perspective on what they would want to find in a TAG program.

Methodological Integrity

In this study, as in all research involving human participants, there are threats to the integrity of the research. When dealing with people and their stories, problems can arise with translation, interpretation, and bias. My goal was to acknowledge and address those things that could threaten the validity and integrity of this study and make sure that there were remedies built in to ensure that this research tells a legitimate and valid story, and that the data interpretation is honored in the nature that it was given.

First, I would like to address my relationship with the participants. I was the director of the program which is the focus of this study. I had prior interactions with both the students and the parents. There were some families with whom I grew to have a friendship. These families understood the nature of the study and my need for non-biased accounts of the impact of the program closure on their families. For this study, I was consciously aware of the need to set aside any bias that I might have regarding gifted education and look objectively at the data provided in their stories for themes and trends. I was committed to seeking out alternative viewpoints and found during the interviews a multitude of perspectives that gave this research diversity.

Although there is a concern that the families would all feel that there is a need for gifted education, that would likely be true in the case of any family that signed their child up for a similar program. I am aware of the potential for participants to exaggerate their reaction to the closing of the program, and I looked for evidence in the stories that might be false and thus could skew results. I did not find any. The stories and accounts seemed honest and the ideas and perspectives on how to create a strong TAG program came from the participants' experiences and their thoughts on the topic.

The second potential challenge to validity came from the questions posed during the interview and focus group sections. I purposely designed the questions to not be leading but to simply ask participants to relate, in their own words, their reactions, perceptions, and perceived impact on their family. In any case, where a group of people are together in a focus group, certain members of the group can be an influence on others. In this study, many of the families already knew each other, and I made sure to stress the importance of the need for unbiased conversation and to make sure that individual members of the groups were not trying to persuade or influence others' answers. I did not find, during the interviews or the focus group session, evidence of bias or undue influence.

Finally, the familiarity that I have with these families might lead them to want to give answers that would be "good for the study" or "what I would want to hear." Again, I was very clear as to my role as an impartial and unbiased observer and emphasized that I was asking only for them to share their stories as they were rather than to try to say things they believed I might want to hear. The participants all appeared to take this request seriously, and I do not have any reason to doubt the accuracy of the information that was given in either the individual interview sessions or the focus group.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

The Individual Interviews

RQ 1-1 Think back about your / your child's experiences in the TAG program. Can you tell me about some of the most positive experiences you/ they had?

Parent Responses to the First Interview Question

During the interviews, parents underscored their children's enthusiasm for learning, the relief from the typical classroom academic pressures, the stimulating challenge and enrichment offered by the OSU TAG program, as well as the valuable social interactions and sense of belonging among like-minded peers. One parent emphasized, "And I think it's a positive too, for kids to be able to be in class without the pressure of grades, just, just for the enjoyment of learning because they don't get that in school."

In their interviews, the parents highlighted their children's enjoyment of learning, the freedom from the academic pressure of the regular classroom, the challenge and enrichment provided by the OSU TAG program, and the social interactions, and sense of belonging among like-minded peers. Another remarked, "It was wonderful to see students come together from all over the state and come back year after year because they had such positive experiences and such a stimulating time." A different parent noted that the TAG program got their son, "interacting with other people who had his intellect level and his capabilities. He thought it was fun. It wasn't like I had to force him to go to school. He wanted to go to school."

Student Responses to the First Interview Question

Students highlighted the formation of new friendships, the enjoyable nature of the classes, exposure to unique topics and technology, and the opportunity to learn and socialize in

an environment tailored to their interests and abilities. One student explained, "I learned more at the TAG program in four days than I did in two weeks at summer camps." Another shared, "The classes were a good length, generally longer than regular school classes, which gave a chance for the lesson to get interesting." A third student reflected, "Getting to choose what I was going to do and being with kids on the same level and interested in the same stuff was nice."

RQ 1-2 What were some of the things you remember wishing could be different about the TAG program when it still existed?

Parent Responses to the Second Interview Question

Parents expressed a variety of opinions on what could have enhanced their children's TAG program experience. They consistently emphasized the importance of the program duration, course variety, accessibility, and adaptability. Many wished for the program to last longer, extending throughout the year instead of a few weeks in the summer. Some would have liked to see a more extensive variety of classes to cater to different interests, especially after the limitations that came from the COVID-19 pandemic. Accessibility, transportation options, online learning and increased student involvement were also mentioned as areas for improvement.

Students Responses to the Second Interview Question

The student interviews revealed several key insights to improve the TAG program experience. Overall, their feedback emphasized the importance of program duration, addressing social aspects, offering a broader range of classes, and resolving logistical issues. One student suggested, "I think it was great. I think maybe if it could have been like, more of the [calendar] year or a longer time in the summer." Another reflected, "I didn't have tons of friends there... So that was kind of disappointing just because it was like I was on my own."

RQ 1-3 Describe your feelings when you learned that there would be no more TAG program.

Parent Responses to the Third Interview Question

The quotes that were received from the parent interviews captured emotional responses, which ranged from disappointment and frustration to anger and a sense of loss. They also expressed concern about the lack of alternative opportunities for their gifted children. One parent said, "It's a big loss because that was like the one thing that she did that was identified as a TAG program." Another remarked, "Yeah, it was a bummer because, as you know, there's really nothing in school (for TAG students), so it was kind of our only real lifeline." A third parent stated, "I hit the roof, man. I couldn't believe it. I was just so disappointed." Another parent reflected, "It was devastating, honestly. It was really, really tough for me to hear."

Student Responses to the Third Interview Question

Students reported mixed emotions, including disappointment, sadness, and the feeling of missing out on a fun and educational experience. As one student said, "I was really sad because I was looking forward to doing it again this year." Another reported, "I was pretty bummed out because it was really fun. Plus, it's something to do over the summer." A third student shared, "I was really disappointed, to be honest. It was a really good time."

RQ 1-4 Think back to when your child was participating in the TAG program. Did you notice any differences in their academics or connections with other students (either positive or negative) that you think were related to the TAG program?

Parent Responses to the Fourth Interview Question (this question was specifically designed for parents).

While most parents didn't observe noteworthy academic differences resulting from the TAG program, they did not perceive this as a negative. Positive influences were noted in social connections, cross-pollination of knowledge, and the ability for the students to develop an interest in subjects that they wouldn't find in the everyday curriculum. One parent reflected that their son "was just having a little more fun with learning as opposed to pressure with learning." Another said, "We saw cross-pollination of knowledge between the TAG program and regular school, especially in science and engineering." A third parent said that their daughter, "incorporated drawing skills learned in the program into their creative activities."

RQ 1-5 Have you done anything to continue to expose your child to additional skills normally found in a gifted education program? If so, what have you done?

The interviews revealed that the parents have explored various ways to provide additional skills and enrichment to their gifted children, including enrolling them in online classes, music lessons, robotics, and specialized programs like Johns Hopkins. Many parents, however, highlighted the financial challenges and limited availability of such programs in their areas. One parent said, "The loss of the TAG program has made it harder to find similar quality programs, and it was one reason we moved to an area with better educational opportunities." Another noted, "The cost of such programs is a financial challenge for our family." A third parent explained, "Our family laments the lack of advanced instruction or TAG programs in the public school system. We want to see programs like we had when we were growing up." Still, another parent noted, "We haven't found any suitable programs in our local area, and we don't want to travel long distances for practical considerations."

RQ 1-6 Describe the TAG support received in the current school setting.

Parent Responses to the Sixth Interview Question

This question brought a lot of emotional commentary. The most notable quotes stand out, as they exemplify the strong emotions, sacrifices, and challenges that parents face in their pursuit of appropriate instruction for their talented and gifted children. As one parent shared, "The support for TAG students is close to zero and disheartening." Another said, "The family switched school districts to find better support for our gifted child. This change involved additional expenses and risks due to commuting." A third parent lamented, "There is nothing in Oregon similar to the specialized magnet schools for gifted students like what we experienced in California."

Student Responses to the Sixth Interview Question

This particular question got the students talking. The students were able to articulate their experience in public schools as it pertained to their education as gifted students. One student shared, "Elementary school did a better job identifying and supporting TAG students. They had exploratory projects and opportunities to grow." Another reflected, "I would like to have different classes in school, especially for subjects like math, with multiple levels to cater to different abilities." A third student said, "I would like to get involved in any type of early college program. I am interested in something like this." A fourth explained, "I hope to be able to take Algebra One next year, even though I am younger. I wish I was able to do that."

RQ 1-7 What are you looking for to support your child moving forward?

Parent Responses to the Seventh Interview Question

These quotes from the parents regarding what they are now looking for stand out, as they directly reflect the desires and concerns of parents with gifted children. Parents emphasized the need for personalized attention, tailored programs, appropriate challenges, and prevention of

boredom within the school system. One said, "If the kids could have a little bit more... even a little one-on-one time with a faculty member that would pay special attention to them, I think that would be cool." Another parent explained, "It would be amazing if they actually had some kind of program at school for TAG students, something that [their daughter] could join." A third parent reflected, "I guess just that they're being challenged to a level that's appropriate for where most of the students are at [not the TAG students]." A fourth parent shared, "I just want him to not be bored in school."

RQ 1-8 What would you like to see in a gifted and talented program in general?

Parent Responses to the Eighth Interview Question

When asked to pretend that they were on a design team to create a gifted and talented program that would bring the most important elements that they wanted to see, the feedback from parents emphasized equitable funding, tiered approaches, alternative education models, and real-world applications. The parents felt that these components were most important in putting together an impactful program for their gifted students. One parent said they believed that gifted education should receive equal attention, funding, and resources as special education programs receive. Another parent proposed different approaches for different age levels, including breakout programs at the elementary level, transitional programs at the middle school level, and access to college-level courses and internships at the high school level. Several of the parents recommended alternative schools with smaller class sizes and a wide range of classes tailored to gifted students' abilities and interests. A couple of parents suggested involving industry or companies in providing real-world problems for students to solve and gain practical experience.

Student Responses to the Eighth Interview Question

The students were asked the same question about designing a program that would have all the important elements that they would want in a gifted program. A few of the students advocated for schools to offer a wide range of classes and electives, allowing students to choose subjects that genuinely interest them. They indicated that this would prevent them from feeling pressured and encourage a love for learning. Most of the students pushed for some sort of control over the pace of their learning. The students wanted to be able to progress faster in subjects where they excelled and have the freedom to delve deeper into their interests. A few other students mentioned the concept of identifying gifted students at an early age and inviting them to participate in advanced programs, which would allow them to have more challenging coursework even at the elementary level. Much like the parents, the students felt that an alternative school setting with a wide range of subjects tailored to ability and interest level would be a benefit.

The Focus Group

Focus Group Question 1. Regarding the OSU TAG program. The top two comments that I received in the individual interviews when I asked for an indication of what was positive about the program, were that it was a place for students to work with others at their academic level and a program that challenged students to engage at a higher level. Would anyone like to elaborate on this?

In the focus group discussion regarding the OSU TAG program, several participants shared their thoughts on what was positive about the program. The top two themes that emerged from families when asked about the program were the benefits of peer interactions and challenging students to excel.

Interaction with Peers at the Same Academic Level

Many participants mentioned that the TAG program provided a valuable opportunity for students to interact with peers who were at a similar academic level. This allowed students to engage with others who shared their intellectual interests and abilities, creating a supportive and enriching environment.

Challenging Students to Excel

Another key point raised was that the TAG program challenged students to engage at a higher level compared to their experiences in public school. Participants noted that the program encouraged students to explore non-traditional topics and pushed them to excel academically. Additional comments and elaborations from the focus group members included:

- **Unique and Enriching Topics:** Some participants appreciated that the program introduced their children to non-traditional topics they might not have encountered otherwise, broadening their horizons.

- **Positive Learning Environment:** Participants felt that the program provided a relaxed and interruption-free learning environment, allowing students to focus on their studies and interests.

- **Motivated and Engaged Students:** The absence of behavior issues typically seen in public schools was noted, with students in the TAG program being highly motivated to learn and engage with the material.

- **Emotional and Social Growth:** Some parents mentioned that the program had a positive impact on their children's emotional well-being, allowing them to connect with like-minded peers and feel more comfortable discussing their interests.

- **Inspiration and Exposure to Campus Life:** One parent mentioned that their child was inspired by being taught by young high school and college-level instructors and exposed to a campus environment, which was a "new and exciting experience."

- **Filling Curriculum Gaps:** The program was seen as filling gaps in the regular school curriculum, offering students opportunities to explore different subjects and interests.

- **Finding Like-Minded Peers:** For parents in areas with limited access to gifted programs, the TAG program provided a valuable opportunity for their children to find like-minded peers and engage in intellectually stimulating activities.

Focus Group Question 2. The comments that I received about what could have been better about the program were mostly centered on the length of the program, that it could have been longer, and that during the COVID years, there wasn't much variety. Is this correct? Does anyone want to comment?

In this focus group discussion about the TAG (Talented and Gifted) program, participants were asked to provide insights into what could have made the program even better. Parents answered this question with consideration to the fact that the program had recently been canceled and the conversation was more in reflection, rather than as a way to improve it. These are the key points that were raised during the conversation:

- **Extended Duration:** Participants emphasized the need for a longer duration for the TAG program. Many felt that the program should offer more than just two weeks or one Saturday of activities, as was the case with the winter programming. They wanted a more extended and sustained program to allow for in-depth learning and exploration.

- **Variety of Classes:** Participants expressed a desire for a greater variety of classes within the TAG program. During the COVID era, some felt that the classes lacked diversity and

that there were repetitions. This limitation was partly due to challenges in securing

instructors during the pandemic.

- **Introduction of Foreign Languages:** It was suggested that the program could benefit

    from the inclusion of foreign language courses. This would provide students with

    exposure to different languages and cultures, enhancing their educational experience.

- **Narrowing Focus on Specific Topics:** Participants highlighted the effectiveness of

    narrowing the focus on specific topics or subjects. This approach allowed students to

    delve deeper into a particular area of interest, fostering a passion for learning and

    preventing boredom.

- **Cross-Disciplinary Exploration:** One parent mentioned the idea of encouraging cross-

    disciplinary exploration, which was well-received by the rest of the group. Participants

    mentioned the positive impact of combining subjects such as music and math or

    exploring topics that span multiple disciplines. Such cross-disciplinary approaches were

    seen as engaging and intellectually stimulating.

- **Sustained Interest and Engagement:** The discussion emphasized that a longer program

    duration and a diverse range of classes could help sustain students' interest and

    engagement in the TAG program.

Focus Group Question 3. With the unfunded TAG mandate, I am hearing that there is little to (in most cases) no support in the public schools. What do you feel needs to be done to bring support to the gifted students so that they will get the enrichment that they need?

The discussion highlighted the need for a more holistic and engaging approach to gifted

education, as well as the challenges related to funding and state-level disparities in support for

gifted students. The group acknowledged that addressing these issues requires ongoing efforts at

multiple levels, including policy changes and innovative teaching approaches. The participants of the focus group had an awareness of the systemic challenges faced. It was clear from the conversation that they paid attention to what was happening within district, and state education. It was also clear that they had given this thought independently and had thought about what could be done to affect change for their gifted children.

In response to this focus group question, the group provided several insights:

- **Redefining Gifted Education:** Some participants expressed the need to redefine what constitutes gifted education. They pointed out that simply giving gifted students more work or extra assignments is not an effective approach. Gifted education should focus on more meaningful and engaging enrichment activities.

- **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** The idea of promoting project-based learning in classrooms was suggested. Project-based learning allows students to approach topics at their level and can be adapted to accommodate gifted students' needs. It was seen as a flexible model that could benefit all students.

- **Specialized Classes:** Participants mentioned the possibility of creating specialized classes or programs for gifted students within the school system. These classes would bring together gifted students to explore a variety of topics and delve deeper into their interests.

- **Funding and Resources:** Some participants highlighted the importance of addressing the funding issue. They felt that additional resources were needed to provide the necessary support for gifted students. Funding could be allocated to develop and implement enrichment programs.

- **Private or External Programs:** Another approach discussed was the possibility of external programs, either private or externally funded, that could provide enrichment opportunities for gifted students. These programs could complement what is offered within the regular school system.

Focus Group Question 4. In most of the interviews, parents such as yourselves have given me an idea of what they would like to see for their kids. Many have liked the idea of a campus-based TAG/High Achieving Magnet type school designed to let students navigate their education journey at their own pace while continuing to focus on building social skills. Can you give me some more thoughts on this idea or let me know if there is something else that you think would work well for TAG students?

In response to the question about the campus-based TAG/high-achieving magnet-type school that was discussed in the individual meetings, the focus group provided various thoughts and insights:

- **Accessibility:** Some participants emphasized the importance of accessibility, as not all families can easily reach a specific campus-based location. They suggested considering remote or online options to accommodate students from different areas.

- **Advocating for Advanced Courses:** Several participants shared positive experiences with advocating for their children to take advanced courses at nearby high schools or colleges. They highlighted the benefits of allowing students to access advanced coursework, even if it means leaving their primary school.

- **Online Learning:** Online learning was mentioned as a potential option, especially for specific subjects that can be effectively taught online. However, participants also stressed the value of in-person interactions for social development.

- **Balancing Isolation:** The importance of balancing a child's potential isolation in an online learning environment with opportunities for social interaction and engagement was noted. Many participants stressed the significance of maintaining social skills development.

- **Meeting Diverse Needs:** The discussion underscored the diversity of needs among TAG students. Some thrive in a traditional classroom setting with advanced coursework, while others may benefit from a more flexible, independent learning approach.

- **Consideration for the Whole Child:** The importance of addressing both academic and social-emotional needs was highlighted. Participants stressed the value of programs that foster peer interaction and support.

- **Advocacy and Differentiation:** Participants shared experiences of advocating for differentiated instruction and the need for programs that recognize and address individual student abilities and interests.

Focus Group Question 5. In keeping with equity, can you speak about the importance of program cost to families, and talk about ways to keep the cost low so that all families have the option to enroll? What are the ways to make that happen? There could be grants, or scholarships available…Are there any other ideas that would help make what you want to see a reality?

The focus group generated a range of innovative ideas and perspectives on how to keep program costs low and secure funding for TAG students, demonstrating a strong commitment to promoting equity and accessibility in TAG education. Most of the ideas centered around funding from outside sources that might have a vested interest in gifted programs. All of the ideas were valid and would be an excellent starting point for a gifted education program looking to launch.

For this question, every participant got the chance to share their ideas. Each of the participants provided several valuable insights:

- Participant 1 highlighted the significance of keeping program costs minimal to ensure accessibility for all families, as high costs can exclude some students from benefiting. They emphasized the need to explore funding sources such as grants and corporate sponsorships, specifically mentioning companies like Intel (which is prominent in Oregon).

- Participant 2 shared an example of someone who received a full ride through the Ford Family Foundation, suggesting it as a potential funding source to investigate.

- Participant 3 expanded on the idea of corporate sponsorships, proposing partnerships with high-tech companies like Intel or HP, which could support the program financially and provide career development opportunities for TAG students.

- Participant 4 recommended exploring the musical world as a source of funding, mentioning organizations like the Oregon Symphony that might have donors interested in supporting TAG programs. Additionally, they suggested looking into resources available to Native American students.

- Participant 5 brought up the idea of "niche funding," where different students could be sponsored by various niche funding sources, tailoring support to individual students' needs and interests.

- Participant 6 emphasized the importance of mentorship opportunities for TAG students, suggesting that a mentoring component be integrated into the program.

- Participant 7 reflected on the need for innovative solutions and encouraged the creation of an innovation lab within the program, where students could generate ideas that could potentially generate funding for the program.

- Participant 8 expressed strong support for the initiative, highlighting the importance of creating new models for TAG education and emphasizing the urgency of the need for change.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The interviews and focus group provided me with a wealth of information. Some of the questions were asked to both the parents and the students, while others were asked exclusively of the adults. In the cases where both parents and students answered, I used a compare and contrast approach to highlight important findings in each case.

The Individual Interviews

Question 1: Think back about your/your child's experiences in the TAG program. Can you tell me about some of the most positive experiences you/ they had?

From the interviews, it was clear that both parents and children valued the TAG program for its positive impact on education and social connections. The differences in perspective appeared to be due to parents viewing the program's impact on their children's growth and development, while children provided more specific insights into their daily experiences and interactions within the program. The children were able to bring a bit more insight due to them experiencing the program without their parents being present.

Similarities between Parents' and Children's Responses

Both parents and children highlighted the *positive educational experiences* provided by the TAG program. Parents mentioned that their children were intellectually challenged and engaged, while the children themselves enjoyed learning new topics and appreciated passionate instructors. Both parents and children also emphasized the *social interaction* aspect of the TAG program. Parents mentioned their children making friends and connecting with like-minded peers, and the children agreed, expressing their enjoyment of meeting new friends. In addition, both groups acknowledged the *unique learning opportunities* offered by the program, such as

exposure to different subjects, technology, and classes that were not typically available in regular school.

Differences in Parents' and Children's Responses

Parents provided an ***external perspective*** on their children's experiences, whereas the children described their personal experiences. Parents mentioned the program's impact on their children's growth and development, while the children focused more on their day-to-day experiences. Parents often praised the ***instructors*** and educators in the program for their positive influence, while children rarely mentioned the instructors, focusing instead on the ***subjects*** and ***overall experience***. The children highlighted the longer class ***durations*** in the TAG program, which allowed for more engaging learning. The parents did not specifically mention class duration.

Question 2: What were some of the things you remember wishing could be different about the TAG program when it still existed?

Parents and children shared common answers regarding program duration, variety in classes, and recognizing the importance of social interaction. The parents, however, had a more practical focus on logistical challenges, while the children discussed the impact on their friendships and the alignment of program content and curriculum with regular school.

Similarities between Parents' and Children's Responses

Both parents and children expressed a desire for the TAG program to ***last longer***. Parents and kids suggested year-round or longer summer sessions, indicating a shared interest in extended learning opportunities. Likewise, both parents and children mentioned the importance of having a wider ***variety of classes***. They believed that more diverse topics and courses would improve the program experience. Parents and children also acknowledged the value of ***social***

interaction with *like-minded peers*. Both groups mentioned the benefits of working with other kids who think similarly or at a similar pace. Some parents and children identified *logistical challenges*, such as transportation issues, parking, and campus-related inconveniences. This shows that the practical aspect of the program was considered by both, although I suspect that the children's concern about the traffic and parking reflected their parents' frustration with interactions associated with arrival and departure times.

Differences in Parents' and Children's Responses

Children, especially siblings in the same program, discussed the importance of *forming friendships with peers* in the program. They mentioned feelings of isolation when not having friends from their school at TAG. Parents did not specifically comment on this topic. Children occasionally mentioned that what they learned in the TAG program *did not always align* with what they were learning at their regular school. This was another concern that was not brought up specifically by parents. Although both parents and children mentioned *logistical challenges*, parents were more specific about issues such as parking and transportation. Children focused on practical matters such as long walks between classes and poor air conditioning.

Question 3: Describe your feelings when you learned that there would be no more TAG program.

Both parents and children shared feelings of disappointment and concern about the discontinuation of the TAG program. The parents, however, often had a broader range of emotional responses and focused more on financial aspects and the educational impact, while children shared about missed opportunities and social connections within the program.

Similarities between Parents' and Children's Responses

Both parents and children expressed feelings of ***disappointment*** when they learned about the discontinuation of the TAG program. Parents often used words like "bummed," "disappointed," and "sad." Children also used phrases such as "pretty bummed out" and "really sad." This shared sense of disappointment suggests that both groups valued the program. Likewise**,** both parents and children mentioned ***missing out on opportunities***. Parents mentioned the loss of a valuable program for their children, while children expressed missing the chance to participate in a fun and educational experience. Parents and children expressed concerns about the limited availability of similar programs. Parents were worried about their children not having access to other enrichment programs, and children indicated that there ***weren't many alternatives*** for kids like them.

Differences in Parents' and Children's Responses

Parents often used deeper **emotional** descriptions, such as feeling "numb" or "angry," while children's responses tended to be more straightforward, using words like "sad" or "disappointed." This variation likely stems from the deeper vocabulary and richer experiences of the adults as compared to the children. Some children highlighted the importance of ***social connections*** and friendships they made in the program. Parents, more concerned about their children's overall education, did not place as much emphasis on the social aspect. A few children mentioned how the TAG program had ***impacted their learning*** and understanding of specific subjects, such as criminology. Parents tended not to mention specific content learning, referring to concerns about lost opportunities for deeper learning more generally.

Question 4: Think back to when your child was participating in the TAG program. Did you notice any differences in their academics or connections with other students (either positive or negative) that you think were related to the TAG program?

The overall takeaway regarding this interview question was that most parents did not perceive significant academic differences in their children as a direct result of the TAG program. Parents felt the program had a positive impact on non-academic aspects and personal development, with academic benefits being less clear and measurable for most parents.

Question 5: Have you done anything to continue to expose your child to additional skills normally found in a gifted education program? If so, what have you done?

The biggest takeaway from this question is that parents of gifted children were actively seeking ways to provide additional skills and enrichment opportunities for their kids. They pursued various avenues, including online classes, music lessons, robotics, and specialized programs such as the Johns Hopkins program. Even with these opportunities, many parents faced challenges, such as the financial cost of these programs and limited availability in their local areas. This finding underscores the importance of accessible and affordable gifted education opportunities for these children. There is only so much that can be done at home and within the school system as it is currently structured to accommodate these gifted learners.

Question 6: Describe the support that your TAG student receives in their current school setting.

The common theme across both parents' and children's responses was the lack of sufficient support for TAG students in schools. The parents tended to express frustration and a desire for systemic change, while children often described their experiences and desires more personally. This difference could have something to do with the children not understanding the

bigger picture beyond what they had seen from their own experience. There was, however, some variability in children's experiences, suggesting that support may differ between schools or districts. Overall, both groups highlighted the need for more effective support and differentiation.

Similarities between Parents' and Children's Responses

Both parents and children expressed a common theme of ***limited or no support*** for TAG students in their schools. They noted that the support, when available, was often insufficient or inconsistent. Some parents and children expressed a ***desire for differentiated instruction***, especially in subjects like math where there are more complexities. They emphasized the need for tailored educational experiences to challenge TAG students appropriately. Both parents and children mentioned seeking support and enrichment ***opportunities outside of school***, indicating that they are actively looking for ways to address the lack of school-based support. In addition, both parents and children expressed ***frustration with the educational system***'s inability to meet the needs of TAG students adequately. This frustration seemed to stem from unmet expectations and the feeling that TAG students are often overlooked.

Differences in Parents' and Children's Responses

Parents tended to be more vocal about their ***concerns*** regarding the lack of TAG support, emphasizing issues such as the absence of dedicated TAG programs, challenges in advocating for their children, and the need for greater attention to TAG students' unique needs. Children, on the other hand, often described their experiences and observations more ***matter-of-factly***. They mentioned specific instances of support, such as participating in competitions or being moved ahead academically, but generally had fewer expectations, as they are likely not to have been as aware of the bigger educational policy issues. The children's responses revealed some ***variability in their school experiences.*** While some mentioned limited support, others noted participation in

competitions, acceleration in math, or exposure to different curricula, suggesting that support for TAG students may vary within and between school districts throughout Oregon, where all of the students go to school.

Question 7: What are you looking for to support your child moving forward?

The parents of gifted children shared that they were looking for more personalized and challenging educational experiences within the school system. They emphasized the need for flexibility, special attention, tailored programs, and opportunities to prevent boredom and ensure their children reach their full potential. They indicated that they would consider outside programs when schools are unable to meet these expectations. Compounding the problem is the lack of outside programs to fill the gaps.

Question 8: If you were on a design team to put together a gifted and talented program that would bring the elements that you would most want to see, what would the program look like? What are your ideas for better TAG support?

Several common desires of both parents and children regarding gifted and talented programs emerged, such as the need for personalization, advanced opportunities, and enjoyable learning experiences. The differences between parents' and children's responses might be due to the differing perspectives of adults and children, with parents often considering long-term goals and administrative aspects, while children focused on immediate educational experiences.

Similarities between Parents' and Children's Responses

Both parents and children wanted ***flexibility and personalization*** in the gifted and talented program. They feel that students should have the freedom to explore their interests and choose their classes or projects. Both groups also saw the need for ***advanced classes*** or opportunities for gifted students to learn at an ***accelerated pace***. They wanted programs that

challenge students and allow them to reach their full potential. Parents and children would like to see learning *enjoyable*. They saw value in incorporating *creative projects* and activities to keep students engaged and motivated. Both parents and children mentioned the importance of having *supportive instructors* who can provide assistance, mentorship, and guidance as students pursue their interests. Parents and some children mentioned the benefit of exposing students to a *college-like educational environment*, where they can choose their courses and have more control over their learning. Both groups appeared desperate for change and shared a strong desire for educational experiences that catered to their unique needs and interests.

Differences in Parents' and Children's Responses

The primary difference is that parents often spoke from an adult perspective with the benefit of hindsight, while children expressed their current experiences and desires. Children's responses were more focused on their immediate educational needs and desires. While parents shared thoughts on the qualification process, the children were not involved in this aspect and had no comment or concern on the matter. The parents were more open to the idea of a separate program for TAG students apart from the mainstream classroom, whereas the children wanted to remain with their non-TAG peers and hoped that a program could happen within their school. The children were very open about wanting to be exposed to new concepts and were readily willing to embrace change.

What Can be Learned from Individual Interviews?

The interview sessions suggest that TAG students need specialized attention that is not being fulfilled in the schools. Parents and students are seeking a place where they can realize their potential without the pressures of a traditional classroom. The sentiments expressed by parents and students reflect a longing for several things within their educational journey: a desire

for extended programs, a broader range of subjects, increased accessibility, and online options. When the TAG program at Oregon State University ceased to exist, it left behind a void filled with disappointment, frustration, and a yearning for a replacement. The conversations had during the individual interview sessions show that TAG programs are more than just academic enrichment; they foster cross-pollination of knowledge, social connections, and the development of interests beyond the standard curriculum.

With the closure of this program, parents have continued to seek ways to expose their children to additional skills, navigating financial constraints and limited availability. Their neighborhood school environment often fell short, necessitating changing school districts, with one family having to pay additional expenses to find a nurturing educational setting. Both parents and students hope for change. The families in this study have a vision that includes equitable funding, tiered approaches, alternative models, and real-world applications. They would like to see more educational control and programs that begin in the earlier elementary years that are tailored to student interests and skills.

What Can be Learned from the Focus Group?

The focus group provided an opportunity for the participants of the individual interviews to go into more depth on the topics, have a discussion with other participants, and have an exchange of ideas. Participants praised the Oregon State University TAG program for its potential to foster peer interactions among students with similar academic skill levels. This connection, they explained, created a foundation for intellectual exploration and mutual support. Equally significant was the program's ability to challenge students academically, pushing them beyond conventional boundaries to higher academic success.

Several suggestions for improvement were made. An extended/longer duration program, allowing for sustained learning, was a prevalent desire. Greater class variety, while limited during the COVID years, was also sought. Participants suggested incorporating foreign language courses to enrich cultural understanding. A focus on specific subjects to combat boredom and cross-disciplinary exploration to stimulate curiosity was well received among the group.

The lack of support in public schools due to unfunded TAG mandates was discussed. A call for redefining gifted education emerged, emphasizing enrichment activities and project-based learning. Specialized classes or programs within the school system were seen as a possible means of providing support for TAG students. The group was aware of the funding issue, and figuring out a solution to this conundrum was discussed across the group. Participants liked the idea of a campus-based specialized school but had a concern about accessibility in such schools, emphasizing the importance of remote or online options for those not able to attend in person.

Focus group participants stressed the need to keep program costs low for equitable access. Funding sources, including grants, corporate sponsorships, scholarships, and niche funding, were discussed as potential solutions. Innovative ideas, such as partnerships with high-tech companies, mentorship programs, and innovation labs, were proposed as possible ways to secure financial resources for TAG programs.

How the Focus Group Expounded on the Individual Interviews

The focus group information complements and enriches the individual interviews by offering a broader perspective, in-depth exploration of issues, validation of key themes, and the emergence of a collective vision for the future of TAG education. The focus group discussions validate and enrich the key themes identified in the individual interviews. The focus group brought a greater diversity and ability to hear other ideas and interact in a meaningful way.

Each participant was able to offer a unique viewpoint and perspective. This diversity provided a broader understanding of the issues and solutions in TAG education. The focus group delved deeper into challenges and potential solutions. For instance, the issue of funding and resources in gifted education was explored more comprehensively, with participants suggesting various funding sources, including grants and corporate sponsorships. The focus group discussions were able to clarify and provide additional detail on certain topics. When discussing the campus-based TAG school concept, for example, the focus group highlighted the importance of balancing online and in-person learning, addressing the concerns of accessibility, and considering diverse student needs. This allowed a more comprehensive view of the potential challenges and benefits of such programs.

Perhaps the most important aspect of holding the focus group was that it allowed for the emergence of a collective vision for TAG education. It brought together participants who could brainstorm and build on each other's ideas. This discussion led to innovative solutions and a more comprehensive understanding of what is needed to improve TAG programs.

A Recap of the Literature

Professor François Gagne's work emphasized the critical need for tailored programs to develop the talents of gifted students effectively. He drew a parallel between TAG programs and sports teams, highlighting the necessity for daily practice and collaboration to nurture talent (Gagne, 2011). Research studies support the effectiveness of such programs. Gifted students grouped for advanced enrichment and acceleration consistently outperformed their peers in achievement tests. Additionally, participation in gifted programs positively impacted academic interests, career aspirations, and overall achievement, providing substantial long-term benefits, including a higher rate of earned college degrees and graduate degrees. Lack of funding,

however, threatens the existence of these programs. Gifted education's underfunding forces gifted coordinators to be the primary advocates for TAG students. The absence of a state mandate for gifted programs makes the situation worse, as evidenced by schools with zero identified gifted students in the United States (Peters et al., 2019).

As for parents and students, surveys indicate their strong desire for programs that challenge and stimulate gifted students, foster creativity, and offer in-depth learning. They emphasize the need for higher-level curriculum content, increased communication between programs and homes, differentiation in instruction, teacher training, accelerated pacing, and parent involvement. Advocacy, transparency, equitable access, and community involvement emerged from the literature as essential components for an ideal gifted program (Herzog & Bennet, 2004; Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Matthews & Kitchen, 2007; Weber & Stanley, 2012; Young & Bali, 2014).

Connecting These Findings to Previous Studies

Both previous studies and this study highlight the positive impact of TAG programs. The participants in this study who participated in the TAG program emphasized the positive educational experiences and social interactions they gained. These findings are similar to those reported by Herzog and Bennet (2004) and Jolly and Matthews (2012), who indicate that TAG programs are associated with academic growth, increased social connections, and higher achievement.

In addition, both prior research and this study suggest the importance of providing academic challenges to gifted students. The literature (e.g., Kulik, 1992) focuses on the benefits of acceleration and enrichment, which was confirmed by the participants in this study who also valued being intellectually challenged within the TAG program.

Both prior literature and this study point out the challenges faced by gifted students in public schools. The literature (Howley et al., 2009; Merrow, 2004; Moon et al., 2012a, 2012b; Peters et al., 2019) suggests that many public schools lack the resources and support for gifted education. This notion was confirmed by the participants in my study, who shared their experiences of limited support and the need for systemic change.

Both prior literature and this study also highlight the need for personalized and flexible educational experiences for gifted students. Both adult and child participants in this study shared in-depth their desire for tailored programs, advanced opportunities, and individualized learning paths. These findings are similar to those reported by Gagne (2011) and Jolly and Matthews (2012).

Both prior research and the current study point to the importance of equity in gifted education and the challenges related to funding. Siegel et al. (2016) discuss the impact of unfunded TAG mandates. The participants in the current study confirmed their frustration with a lack of financial support for TAG programming and went on to discuss ways to keep program costs low and secure funding for TAG programs. The suggestions they provided extend prior research by offering guidance for those interested in securing additional funding to support TAG programs, not dependent on a state budget.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The history of gifted education underscores the need for improvements. Over the years, the focus has shifted from early concerns to contemporary issues, such as identification, program delivery, underrepresentation, and funding. As stated in the literature synthesis, the current landscape faces four major barriers to gifted education: inadequate teacher training, a debate between traditional referral methods and universal screening, design inconsistencies within programs, and funding disparities that are causing programs to disappear. Studies have shown the importance of talent development through regular practice, much as with sports teams (Gagne, 2011). Prior research supports the benefits of grouping and advanced enrichment for gifted students, highlighting the value of interactions with peers.

The findings from this study align with the existing literature, emphasizing the positive impact of TAG programs, the need for academic challenges, and the lack of support in public schools. Going one step further, this study adds a personal and detailed perspective, with participants offering innovative solutions to the problems in gifted education. The participants in the current study shared what they would like to see in a program that supports gifted students.

Study Limitations

In any study, there are bound to be limitations, and efforts must be taken to be certain that the limitations don't impede the integrity of the study. In this case, I took care to make sure that the research and findings were factual and bias free. No study can be completely free from factors that could influence findings. The limitations of this study include the following:

- Generalizability: The study's findings may not be broadly applicable beyond this specific TAG program and its participants. The demographic factors of this group might not be generalizable to other gifted programs throughout the United States and beyond.

- Sampling bias: The participants were recruited from a small pool of participants of the Oregon State University TAG program. These are families that have strong emotions about the closure of the program and despite my effort to keep the interviews bias free, their answers may have bias toward support of the program.

- Researcher bias: As the former director of the program featured in this study, I have a pre-existing relationship with the parents and students. There is a possibility that my prior knowledge, experience, and personal feelings could influence my interpretation of the interview answers.,

- Timeframe constraints: The study was conducted during the summer of 2023, and the Oregon State University TAG program closure took place a full year prior to that. This could be a factor in two ways. To look at it one way, parents and children had been away from the program for a full year, and details might not be as clear as if it was a more recent closure, but conversely, there also might not be enough time to fully develop a deeper feeling of nostalgia or longing for the program.

- Methodological limitations: The use of qualitative research tells a detailed story and captures feelings and perceptions but might not show statistical data that a quantitative study would.

- Parent only focus group: Not being able to have the children represented in the focus group might present only one side of the story when it comes to member checking and clarification of my analysis of the children's answers in the individual interviews.

Implications for Practice

Based on the results of the literature and the study, there is a strong need for a specialized and comprehensive school program for gifted and talented (TAG) students. My goal is to take what I have learned, honor the ideas and perspectives of the participants, and work to bring their collective vision to reality. I hope to be able to incorporate my findings into the development of a TAG program. I intend to propose a program that TAG students could attend in person, with additional online access options, optimized for personalized learning and incorporating a variety of features identified in the current study.

The history of gifted education has evolved over the years, but there are still many barriers to supporting our gifted and talented students. Based on the literature and the findings from my study, I feel that I have identified important features that will enable me to formulate a program to address the collective vision of what families want to see for their children. Although this will not solve the issues within public schools (teacher training, non-equitable assessment, and instruction, state funding), it could provide an alternative for students that promotes a flexible curriculum, project-based learning, and extended programs. advocacy, community involvement, diverse funding sources to ensure equitable access and partnerships with technology companies and mentorship programs to secure real-world experiences and financial resources.

Comprehensive TAG School

My goal is to establish a specialized TAG school that operates as a separate brick-and-mortar facility. This school would provide a full-day program dedicated to TAG and high-achieving students, allowing them to immerse themselves in a program that is designed to support them and their unique needs. This program would also be set up to accommodate gifted students with other special needs (Autism Spectrum, Communication needs, etc.). Following the

suggestions of my study participants, the ideal program would run similarly to a college where classes and workshops would be available to students in many subjects, and students would be able to "navigate their journey at their pace" through high school, with the understanding that they would be taking all state-level graduation required courses along the way.

Online Learning Options

Recognizing the importance of accessibility for TAG students, especially those facing geographical or logistical constraints, I hope to offer online learning options as part of the program to ensure that students can participate, regardless of their geographic location. The experience providing comprehensive distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that it is possible to provide instruction to students using tools such as Zoom, and the widespread success of online learning technologies, such as Canvas and Blackboard to support post-secondary educational initiatives suggests this approach might be viable for use with TAG students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools as well.

Early Intervention and Extended Support

The Oregon State University TAG program served students from third through tenth grade, and we found that to be a good age range. My proposed program, however, would run through senior year. Starting early would allow us to identify and nurture students' talents and skills from an early age. Including students, all the way through their senior year in high school will help ensure that the TAG students enrolled in our program will continue to benefit from high expectations, personalized learning, and peer support throughout their secondary education and thus better prepare them for a successful transition to college.

Collaborative Learning Environments

The program will foster a collaborative environment that promotes peer interactions among students with similar academic skill levels, developing mutual support and intellectual exploration.

Project-Based Learning and Enrichment Activities

Project-based learning will be at the core of our program. This will be challenging and stimulating, thereby fostering creativity and in-depth learning. To cater to diverse student needs, we hope to maintain a balanced approach between online and in-person learning. In addition, we plan to provide a curriculum that allows for subject specialization and cross-disciplinary exploration to stimulate curiosity and prevent boredom. In some cases, we hope to offer extended programs that go beyond standard school hours, allowing for sustained learning and the exploration of a broader range of subjects.

Advocacy and Community Involvement

The literature points to the need for parents to feel involved and part of the process (Herzog & Bennet, 2004). In my proposed program, parental involvement, as well as the inclusion of members of the community who are supporters and advocates for gifted education, will be encouraged. There will be transparency in program development and operations. Parent-teacher associations and community partnerships will be welcome.

Innovative Funding Sources

One of the first steps that I will take is to present this study and the findings to interested groups. I hope that over the next year to two years, I will be presenting at conferences around the country and beyond, as well as sharing the insights gained with influential parties at the community and state levels. There are many families in search of the type of program I am

proposing, and they are the strongest advocates. During this period of presenting and networking, I will be exploring various funding sources, such as grants, corporate sponsorships, scholarships, and niche funding, to address the funding need. I will also be having conversations with the local community and businesses that might be stakeholders in gifted education. One of my main goals is for equitable funding to ensure that all TAG students have access to this program, regardless of their family's financial resources, if possible. Tuition costs should be low and supplemented by outside funding to meet the needs of lower-income families.

Mentorship and Industry Partnerships

In addition, I will also seek to develop partnerships with high-tech companies, mentorship programs, and innovation labs to provide real-world applications for TAG students to engage in applied learning opportunities. These partnerships might also serve as a means to secure financial resources for the program.

Implications for Future Research

Although the current study provides useful insights with practical applications for the development of a future program, there are still many areas to be researched. A future longitudinal study might track the academic and life outcomes of TAG program graduates to evaluate the outcomes of TAG program participation. A future quasi-experimental study might compare the effectiveness of different models of TAG programs, such as campus-based TAG schools, online TAG programs, and in-school TAG programs. In addition, there is a need to investigate the impact of specific teacher training and professional development programs on the quality of instruction and support for gifted students.

A study to explore the impact of partnerships with high-tech companies, mentorship programs, and innovation labs on the development and success of TAG students could also be of

benefit. Another area for future research is a study on best practices for including gifted students with special needs in TAG programs. Although more exploratory or descriptive, it would also be interesting to research the impact of parental involvement and community engagement in gifted education programs and to investigate innovative funding sources and models for supporting TAG programs. For example, it would be useful to research the feasibility and effectiveness of various funding approaches, such as grants, corporate sponsorships, scholarships, and niche funding.

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