Disadvantaged gifted and talented students who make it to college and those who don't: Implications for school leaders

Patricia Ann Green
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds

Repository Citation
Green, Patricia Ann, "Disadvantaged gifted and talented students who make it to college and those who don't: Implications for school leaders" (2003). UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations. 2566.
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/2566

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
DISADVANTAGED GIFTED AND TALENTED
STUDENTS WHO MAKE IT TO COLLEGE
AND THOSE WHO DON'T:
IMPLIEDATIONS FOR
SCHOOL LEADERS

by
Patricia Ann Green

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Master of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Education Degree in Executive Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2004

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The Dissertation prepared by

Patricia Ann Green

Entitled

Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented Students Who Make It To College

and Those Who Don't: Implications for School Leaders

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education In Educational Leadership

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented Students Who Make it to College and Those Who Don't: Implications for School Leaders

by

Patricia A. Green

Dr. Patti Chance, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Educational Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Gifted and Talented Education students demonstrate outstanding ability in the areas of general intelligence, creative thinking, productive thinking, leadership, the visual arts, the performing arts, or an academic aptitude in a specified area. This study is a comparative, qualitative analysis of two groups of disadvantaged students who were categorized as gifted and talented in elementary school, and their post-secondary goals. Twelve students of cross-cultural backgrounds are included in the study. The academic journey of the students from elementary through secondary school, and the factors that determined whether they made it to college or not are the focus of the study. The researcher draws comparisons between the students' personal experiences including community and institutional influences. A goal of the research was to gain insight regarding disadvantaged, gifted students. The results are intended to assist educators with ideas for pro-active planning in meeting the needs of disadvantaged, gifted students, relative to college aspirations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giftedness</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted, Talented, and Disadvantaged</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged Students</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Review of Study</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Qualitative Study</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Approach</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Data</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 PORTRAITURE: TWELVE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS, THEIR STORIES AND ASPIRATIONS</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Portraits</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5</td>
<td>FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Critical Role of Family</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Pressures</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Influences</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Resilience</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factors</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications and Recommendations</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Study</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Study</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDICES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GATE Information Sheet</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol Guidelines and Format</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Format</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded Data Analysis</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIBLIOGRAPHY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I truly appreciate the individuals who had a role in the process of my earning a doctorate degree. I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Patti Chance, for her patience and guidance throughout this venture. I further thank the members of my committee, Dr. Teresa Jordan, Dr. James Crawford, and Dr. LeAnn Putney. I also extend my gratitude to Dr. Forbis Jordan for his support. All were encouraging with an expectation of excellence and an emphasis on the completion of scholarly work. Thanks also to Mauricia Broadnax, who advised me on the technical aspects of my dissertation. Dr. Joni Flowers and Dr. Tracy B. Cotton both encouraged me to work toward my doctorate degree. Both demonstrated that it could be done through their actions.

Several high school principals were contacted regarding this research project and graciously gave permission for use of their school site for research participation. Three individuals, however, stand out for their enduring support of me and the project. Principals Dr. Andre B. Denson and Mr. Ronnie Smith, as well as counselor Clifford Steele were incredible in their support, which is roundly appreciated. Most importantly, thanks to the students who so willingly and thoroughly shared their experiences as GATE students, without which there would have been no study. Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude to my daughter Briyonna for her quiet enthusiasm and understanding, even though it was not always easy. And of course, to Leon, my husband, for his wisdom, support, fit words, encouragement and enduring belief in me.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Hattie Ruth Robinson Bailey, who instilled in me a great love for learning. Her foresight in placing my sister, brothers, and me into an integrated school setting at a tender age made all the difference in our education. Because of her, I was able to receive a well-grounded grammar school education, enabling me to succeed in secondary education and higher education; a rare opportunity that far too few of my peers ever had.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a sprawling desert community in the Southwest lays a fast-growing metropolis. It is June, and in most of the high schools, the air is abuzz with anticipation. Members of the class of 2003 are frantically finishing course work and planning for graduation. As some mull over job offers, military report dates, and post-secondary education or vocational training opportunities, others just dream of life after high school. Among those looking forward to the rites of graduation are five disadvantaged, academically talented and gifted students who are quietly proud and excited about their futures. Their hard work will have resulted in graduation from high school and an acceptance to the four-year college of their choice. Thus they join their classmates in a collective sigh of relief because they have virtually completed twelve years of schooling and because school will be out at last. For this tiny group, however, school is not out for long. After working at various summer jobs, they will either attend a local four-year college or leave the city to attend an out of state college. The August destinations of those who will be leaving will take them far away from the tourism community where they attended high school. Academic superstars, this group was identified in the early elementary grades and placed in the Gifted and Talented Education Program. Focused, determined, and ever curious, they did well academically throughout their middle school years and were placed on the college preparation track. Advanced placement, honors course work, school and community
involvement and test preparation are the norm for this gifted group.

Another small group of students are also looking forward to graduation. The individuals in this group were also designated early in their grammar school years as gifted and talented. They shared in the same joys of curiosity and early promise as their high achieving cohorts. A few of the students in this group fell short of their post-secondary aspirations and will attend a community college instead of a four-year college. The remaining students will either barely graduate or drop out of school. Their middle school years were not marked with accelerated courses and preparation for the PSAT. The high school counselors who enrolled them during the May pre-registration period of their eighth grade year did not necessarily place them on the “honors track.” Their potentials are hidden beneath nondescript courses, mediocre grades, inconsistent attendance, and lack of focus or academic ambition. They decided that they would work toward landing a decent paying job after high school, and perhaps enroll in a few classes at the community college or join the military. Although their start in school was every bit as promising as the former group, their goals, at the cusp of graduation, are narrower and their career choices limited. Somehow this group melded into the high school crowd and became “invisible.” For the most part, they are just glad to be graduating from high school.

Although the community of study has a dismal post-secondary matriculation history, an increasing percentage of its high school graduates are opting to enroll full time at a state college or university after high school graduation.
Less than fifty percent of the high school graduates from this community aspire to attain baccalaureate degrees. Of this percentage relatively few are from minority and/or disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of the high school graduates are former Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) students who decided against higher education for various reasons. However, much of their disinterest in higher education may be caused by their lack of preparation.

The dichotomous journey of the college bound and non-college bound disadvantaged, gifted and academically talented student is the subject of this dissertation. This study chronicles two groups of students' early academic drive as elementary and middle school students. A critical piece discusses their middle school years and their subsequent interest or disinterest in higher learning once they reached high school. This study explores why the high-achieving GATE students made early decisions regarding higher education, put in the requisite toil, and expended the long hours necessary to qualify for a
competitive college, while the lower-achieving former GATE students lost their academic focus, sought an average curriculum, and chose, in some instances, programs in alternative education.

The study reviews both groups' perceptions of institutional influences on their decision to go to college or not to go to college, and examined historical, personal, social, and institutional factors that had an impact on their aspirations. These students' tales are woven against the backdrop of an urban, tourism setting, and diverse family situations and circumstances. A close examination of the students and their stories has a dual purpose. The study reveals how the five four-year college-bound students were able to remain focused and determined while coping with family and academic challenges. Moreover, their stories, strategies, and lessons learned can be used for inspiration and guidance for other students who are bereft of direction, fortitude, and the various skills needed to achieve baccalaureate status. How they overcame their pitfalls and reached their academic pinnacles can give insight to school leaders who sincerely strive to set an agenda for motivating urban youth of unmined potential toward higher education. This dissertation may also reveal problems of practice associated with institutional influences on disadvantaged students. Finally, strategies for working with disadvantaged, academically talented students and recommendations for systemic change bring closure to the document.

The twelve students in this study includes males and females from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with some having forebears who faced historic civil rights hurdles regarding educational access. A complete examination of the academic lives of these students includes a historical account of their inclusion into the public school setting.
Background

The term *giftedness* has evolved over the years. Originally giftedness was linked to the concept of genius. This early designation was made at the dawn of the last century when psychological tests designed to measure intelligence were developed (Terman, 1925). Used as the sole determinate of giftedness, individuals who scored on the high end of intelligence tests were considered geniuses while those who scored in the lower quartile were labeled retarded (McClellan, 1985). Throughout the years, many educators and researchers increasingly criticized these narrow definitions. One of the criticisms was that the tests appeared to be biased toward white, middle class students. By 1969, Titles III and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) outlined amendments for the provision of the development of model gifted and talented programs. The same year Congress commissioned a study by the U.S. Commission on Excellence in Education regarding the needs of the gifted and talented students in the nation. The Marland Report (1971) was the product of this commissioned study. A definition of giftedness was an integral part of the report. The definition states: “Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society” (pp. I – 3). “Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude
3. Creative or productive thinking

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability” (p. I – 4)

This definition is widely used and has been adopted by many federal and state agencies.

Before many twentieth-century, disenfranchised groups could contemplate gifted and talented education, they first had to gain access to quality schools. The journey from emancipation to full enfranchisement was long for one underrepresented group: African-Americans. Although the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation granted freedom to African-American slaves, the bonds of subsequent Jim Crow laws and racial segregation prevented freed persons from acquiring and exercising full citizenship. As chronicled by Franklin (1994), in 1875 Tennessee adopted the first Jim Crow laws separating blacks and whites on trains, depots, and at wharves. Most southern states followed suit. These actions led to the repeal of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Thereafter, a distinct separation of the races extended to restaurants, theaters, and other public places. Since segregation became the dominant rule and practice of most public institutions and facilities, it was only a matter of time before similar rules and practices would govern the public schools, but with more ruinous and long lasting effects.

In both the North and the South, African-Americans attended racially segregated schools that were almost always inferior to those that white children attended. Moreover, in some parts of the country, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American children were required to go to separate, unequal schools (Fowler, 2000, p.33).

The quest for equal access to educational opportunity became the goal and quiet determination of economically disadvantaged parents who desired better opportunities for
their offspring. In a U.S. Supreme Court case, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the high court ruled that separate but equal facilities were lawfully permissible. This ruling was unacceptable to many disadvantaged citizens who viewed equal education as the only way to uplift their circumstances. They desperately sought an opportunity to learn in the same classroom as those who had the advantage of current equipment, textbooks, modern and clean facilities, qualified teachers, and a strong academic program (Fowler, 2000). According to Fowler (2000), the Common School Era of the 1950s was characterized by educational systems that varied greatly in educational standards, with low-income and rural students receiving a fair education at best. Devoid of trained, qualified teachers, marginally educated schoolmistresses often conducted classes.

By 1950 a conspicuous disparity had grown between the middle and lower-class student populations. Gender and race bias accounted for sub-standard education for girls, the economically disadvantaged, rural residents, and children of color (Fowler, 2000). Fifty-eight years after the Plessy decision the U. S. Supreme Court revisited the issue. With the legal assistance of counsel Thurgood Marshall, the father of Linda Brown won the reversal of the 1896 “separate but equal” doctrine on the behalf of his daughter in Brown v. the Board of Education, Topeka Kansas (Franklin, 1994). This landmark decision effectively repealed the “separate but equal” doctrine. In a unanimous decision in 1954 Chief Justice Warren wrote:

Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (Franklin, 1994).
A series of other political and judicial developments such as Brown II, which charged the courts to move forward with the oversight of school desegregation “with all deliberate speed,” and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, all helped to move equal educational access closer to reality (Franklin, 1994). For low-income students, a seat in a diverse, properly equipped classroom with competent teachers was won as a result of social change advanced by the turbulent sixties and seventies decades (Franklin, 1994).

According to Kops (1998), the community in which this study was conducted also experienced conflict regarding equal educational access. A 1969 lawsuit alleged that elementary schools across the county were segregated in violation of the fourteenth amendment equal protection clause. The result was a plan that required students in a predominately African-American community to be bussed to integrated schools for the first through the fifth grades. During the sixth grade the students attended school in their neighborhood, while sixth graders from throughout the county were bussed into the predominately African-American community to finish their elementary school years.

After adoption and subsequent study it was found that this plan placed the burden of school integration on young school children who were required to ride the bus for miles to access integrated classrooms for grades one through five. A series of political and judicial actions would eventually lead to neighborhood schools for African-American students with educational enhancements for elementary school children in impoverished neighborhoods (Kops, 1998). Equal access arguments eventually expanded to concerns about the issues of quality education and standards for all, resulting in policies that opened up all educational programs to academically able students in the county.

Given the history of the equity and access struggles of lower socio-economic students, many of these students had not met the requisite requirements to enroll in
programs for accelerated students. One such program, the Gifted and Talented Education program, is a focus of this dissertation. Although such programs have existed since the 1960s, questions persist regarding whether disadvantaged students are always readily identified to participate in the program. Vanderslice (1998) questioned and challenged the under-identification of Hispanic students for gifted and talented programs. She discussed obstacles to identification including language barriers, cultural tradition, and prejudice.

A pertinent State Administrative Code 388.043 defines “gifted and talented” to mean a person who possesses or demonstrates outstanding ability in one or more of the following:

1. General intelligence
2. Academic aptitude in specific area
3. Creative thinking and productive thinking
4. Leadership
5. The visual arts; or
6. The performing arts.

(NAC, 388.043)

Although significant changes and inclusive academic programming are increasingly available, less than half of the high school graduates pursue higher education directly within a twelve-month period of graduation (Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Perennially low proficiency and college admission test scores, intolerant and often inadequate personnel, lack of rigor and true educator concern for each child are factors in the dismal post-secondary profile of many low socio-economic students regardless of their raw ability (Center for Education Reform, 1998). Consequently, many would-be
GATE students are never identified or are overlooked for accelerated enrichment programs. According to Abell and Lennex (1999), economically disadvantaged students are often under identified for gifted and talented programs, but their study suggests that this can be improved through identification training for teachers.

Enrichment programs in the subject community of this study may not be fully appreciated. First, tourism is the primary industry, and the lure of well-paying jobs is an obvious deterrent to student aspirations for higher education. In said community, there is a thirst for an unskilled workforce and a lack of intense business and community partnerships toward increasing the graduation rate and steering students toward higher education. Consequently, students, particularly lower socio-economic students, may limit their prospects to the dominant industry or choose to work in one of the local utility, retail, or service industries. Second, diverse family situations may also have a bearing on students' choice to go from school to work. Some economically disadvantaged students have little family support. They may be the first in their family to graduate from high school or attend college and may lack critical family support and mentoring (Clarke, 2000; Levine & Nidifer, 1996; Corwin, 2000). These students may come from less than ideal home situations, may be members of a dysfunctional or single-family household, or may come from homes where English is spoken as a second language. Their families may not promote reading or intellectual pursuits. After-school jobs, babysitting of siblings, or assisting in the household frequently limits the leisure, study time, extracurricular, and community service activities so prevalent among their more affluent peers. Third, disadvantaged students may be derided by their peers for excelling in academics and for exhibiting intellectual proclivities (Suskind, 1998). According to Ogbu (1991), students of Mexican descent who conform to school expectations are
labeled as “wannabees” or students who want to be white. Corwin (2000), who studied academically talented students at an inner-city high school, noted that minority students who excel were sometimes accused by their classmates of “acting white” or “selling out”. The disadvantaged academically talented are often misunderstood, underestimated, and are sometimes resented by their peers. In the Youth Education Program (YEP) designed for preparing disadvantaged youth for college, students shared with the program counselors that they were sometimes laughed at by their peers for being smart, and that they lost friends due to their involvement in YEP (Kaplan, 1999).

The trilogy of institutional, community, and family influences are worthy of focus because they play a pivotal role in disadvantaged students’ post-secondary plans and decisions. Regardless of the numerous obstacles that may befall disadvantaged academically talented students, some overcome immeasurable historical, personal, social, and economic odds to graduate at the top of their classes while attaining laudable test scores and maintaining indomitable determination to overcome the limitations and skepticism of others. They graduate from high school, attend college, and often thrive (Levine & Nidifer, 1996). Included in this dissertation is a brief profile of five such remarkable individuals.

Statement of the Problem

The problem being addressed is “Why is it that some disadvantaged gifted and talented students lose interest, become educationally disaffected, and graduate far below their academic potential?” Conversely, “Why do other disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students succeed in high school and handily gain acceptance into a college or university?”
Research Questions

1. What institutional/community factors encourage or discourage academically talented, disadvantaged youth from pursuing higher education?

2. What factors contribute to GATE students' continued academic achievement and aspirations for a college education through middle and senior high school? What factors contribute to some students' subsequent gradual disinterest in academics?

3. What are the characteristics of disadvantaged former GATE students who graduate from high school and enroll into college? What are the characteristics of their counterparts who elect not to attend college?

4. How do successful, disadvantaged GATE students cope during difficult times in secondary academic life? What strategies kept the underachievers from reaching their potential?

Conceptual Framework

Early century designation of who was considered to be gifted and talented intellectually was limited to those individuals who scored high on achievement tests (Terman, 1925). This early determination was criticized and has since been broadened to include individuals of various types of intelligence and skills. In some instances, however, biases persist regarding innate intelligence. Others sometimes preconceive members of some cultures as not having a predisposition for intelligence. A mobilization of bias (Fowler, 2000) is often overlooked in the culture and society as it relates to the disadvantaged. In the U.S. economically disadvantaged students face special challenges that can have a bearing on their achievement outlook, prospects, and status. A duality of issues arises for disadvantaged students when they are faced with
assimilating into the dominant culture and excelling academically or "fitting in" within their familiar culture and community. Coming to terms with their choices and decisions regarding this poses special challenges for disadvantaged gifted and talented students.

In the realm of college preparation there is often an uneven "playing field" with regard to academic readiness. The disparity begins with pre-school and continues as students enter kindergarten. Students with the advantage of quality schooling and home resources fare better on standardized tests, the gatekeeper to advanced courses, and eventual college matriculation. Many times this leaves disadvantaged students trailing their more fortunate counterparts in academic achievement and in opportunities for economic advancement in life.

The disadvantaged, gifted student must contend with a plethora of home, community, and institutional challenges. In the home, academic performance may not be a high priority as parents are preoccupied with earning a living. This creates a critical void, as studies indicate that students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to attend college (Horn, 1997). Parents also may depend on their older children to assist in the home with household responsibilities and the care of their younger siblings during and after school hours, limiting their time for homework concentration. Peer pressures often multiply the difficulties they experience from a lack of sufficient home support and focus constraints, particularly since, within the students' social community, they may be vilified by their peers for choosing to achieve in academics (Ogbu, 1991; Suskind, 1998; Kaplan, 1999; Corwin 2000).

Within school institutions the disadvantaged, gifted student may face problems assimilating into the dominant culture, which, in this case, may be advanced placement or honors classes wherein there are few other disadvantaged students. They must
conform to the customs of a new culture in order to “fit in” in the classroom. Even at their best they often find it difficult to overcome the skepticism of others. Disadvantaged, gifted students are often acutely aware of others’ perception of them as well as their limited resources when compared with those of their more affluent classmates. Other surprising factors have a bearing on disadvantaged students’ post-secondary decisions and plans. Freeman (1999), in a study questioning why some African-American students choose not to venture into higher education, found one simple but rather unexpected rationale for these students’ disinclination to seek higher education: college was simply never presented to them as an option.

This study was done within the framework of sociological, cultural, and institutional influences and theories on disadvantaged students’ decision to excel or not to excel in academics. Their issues make this study important, particularly since there is a distinct need for school leaders to address the needs of disadvantaged GATE students with creative, sensitive, and strategic planning. Moreover, the social, political, and economic pressures of this era truly require that “no child be left behind.”

Methodology

Male and female profiles of disadvantaged, academically talented students are presented. Students were chosen for the study based on the following criteria:

1. Each graduating student is a member of the high school graduating class of 2003.
2. Each of the college bound participants are accepted by a four or two-year college.
3. Each student has parents or guardians who did not complete college.
4. Each student is from a disadvantaged background with regard to economics, social, or language barriers.
5. Each student is a former GATE student. Background information about the lives of the twelve students is balanced with their struggles, trials, and triumphs within the context of academic mobility. A brief composite sketch of each student reveals the personal, sociological, familial, institutional, and communal influences that impacted their academic success. Personal characteristics and institutional factors that caused the students to prevail and excel against the odds are central to the focus of this study.

The data were collected through student interviews and questionnaires. The study is unique in that five of the respondents are atypical of the overall student population in this district, most of whom do not attend college after high school graduation.

The researcher accomplished the required preliminary tasks associated with gaining access to formerly identified Gifted and Talented Education students. This included human subjects protocol and clearance at the University and subject school district. The researcher met with selected secondary school principals, apprised them of the research, and received approval and an introduction to the counseling department(s). With counselor recommendations, the researcher sought entry into the lives of the participants through an initial introduction. Questionnaires, interviews, transcript and test score reviews followed. Parental permission was obtained for student participation.

An effort was made to gain contextual understanding of the students’ experiences, their choices, decisions, and post-secondary plans. In accordance with Glaser’s (1978) constant comparative model, the researcher began by collecting data shortly after students were notified. In transcribing notes, the researcher looked for recurring themes and categorized them. Through data collection and categorization the researcher sought to outline the various dimensions that were manifested. As the researcher sought to be
thorough, narratives were composed, including pertinent details through linkage. According to Glaser (1978) as the researcher continues to work with the data, a model to discover basic processes and relationships emerge. This phase included sampling, coding, writing, and analyzing data on the information obtained. Questions regarding validity and reliability may emerge in a constant-comparative case study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), data are often collected and analyzed by academics from various fields, i.e. social work, anthropology, sociology, or psychology. As such, researchers view data within the prism of their backgrounds and therefore they may produce different data and findings, although both studies could be reliable. “One would only question the reliability of the studies if they yielded contradictory or incompatible results” (p. 36).

Definition of Terms

Participant
A participant in this study is a student who agrees to participate in an ethnography or study (Spradley, 1980).

Giftedness
“Children who are identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society” (McClellan, 1985, p. 2).

Language-minority students
Students who come from homes in which the family speaks a language other than English (Lindholm-Leary, 2001).
Participant perspective

The “consideration of how different people make sense of their lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 7).

Risk Factors

“Factors or life circumstances that could have a negative bearing on students’ opportunities to focus on their post-secondary goals, i.e., dysfunctional family, poverty, language” (Horn, 1997, p. 3).

Minority

“A group occupying a subordinate position in a multi-ethnic society, suffering from the disabilities of prejudice and discrimination and maintaining a separate group identity” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 358).

Student engagement

“Level of high school attendance and the number of extra-curricular activities students reported participating in [used] as indicators of student engagement.” (Horn, 1997, p. 10)

Peer engagement

“A measure of importance that students believed their friends attributed to learning activities and…. how many students’ friends had plans to attend a four-year college” (Horn, 1997, p. 11).

Parent engagement

Parents’ “educational expectations for their child… and their involvement and discussion with their child regarding their high school curriculum, school activities, in-class work, college entrance exams and the application process” (Horn, 1997, p. 11).
Limitation

Brief profiles of college bound disadvantaged students from a Southwestern tourist community were done. The study examined the impact of school attendance and post-secondary aspirations on students who live in a community where the lure of well-paying service industry jobs is prevalent. Students from diverse cultural groups including a) Anglo-American b) African American c) Asian-Pacific Islander d) Native American, and e) Hispanic Americans were included in this study.

Delimitation

While the participants' high school experiences may be difficult to generalize, given the uniqueness of the Southwest tourism community, their reflections and pre-college related experiences may be similar to other students from disadvantaged backgrounds throughout the U. S.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the limited problems it addresses may contribute to the quintessential understanding of the importance of education as it relates to maintaining the U.S.'s dominance as a world power; that is, it illustrates why the education of every student, particularly the disadvantaged gifted, counts in such a quest. In order to have the best-trained workforce, each student must perform at his or her maximum potential (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Furthermore, dialogue regarding perennial low test scores, complaints about the skill levels of college freshmen, and the quest to improve educational outcomes for all students
has led to an increased focus on student achievement. Moreover, the study is of personal significance to gifted and talented individuals whose choices can make the difference between a life of fulfillment and financial stability and a life of static and limited personal and economic growth potential.

The lives and academic histories of these students may shed some light on what can be done to motivate more disadvantaged, academically talented students to seek enrollment in a college or university. This study may also inform and remind educators of their critical influence on impressionable lives and of their responsibilities as role models. In addition, secondary administrators can benefit from the stories of the achievers as well as the non-achievers. Their stories should graphically demonstrate institutional, home, and community points of concern. It is hoped that this study clearly suggests pro-activity on the part of school leaders toward implementing early academic programming and exposure to preparation and educational opportunities for all students, particularly for the often “left behind” disadvantaged student.

The educational gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students are huge, handicapping poor children in their pursuit of higher education, good jobs and a better life (Center for Education Reform, 1998).

Summary

The first chapter of this dissertation introduced the study: its purpose and significance. The specific statement of the problem was presented along with the selection process for the participants. Research questions were delineated and, for clarity, a definition of terms used in this dissertation was given. The limitations of the study were expressed since this is a comparative study about two groups of former GATE
students with divergent post-secondary outcomes. An introduction of the topic, background, and purpose were presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature explores the meaning and recounts the historical perspectives of giftedness and the disadvantaged and examines the compound issues faced by gifted, disadvantaged students through reviewing related writings. An understanding of the correlation of the three provides a foundation for this study. Gifted and talented students make up five percent of the school children in U.S. schools (S. Reis, Testimony to Senate Sub-Committee, 1999) and an estimated five to eight percent of third through sixth-grade students in the school district of discussion (Sloan, personal communication, October 24, 2002). Much of the existing literature focuses on gifted and talented students in general: teaching, learning strategies, identification, special programs, and finally the home, school, and community impact upon gifted students. The disadvantaged gifted has increasingly been a research focus. Themes pertaining to achievement, hope, loss of hope, and resilience continue to emerge as more academically talented students from diverse and especially disadvantaged backgrounds elect to attend college (Suskind, 1998; Anson, 1987; Horn, 1997).

Through thematic contexts and using a qualitative model, this study examines commonalities of disadvantaged, gifted youth and the determining themes that separate those who choose to pursue baccalaureate degrees after high school and those who do not; in addition, it will suggest what educators can do to encourage and motivate those who do not pursue higher education. The realm of what is known in the literature is
balanced with former GATE students’ life stories, creating a tapestry of gifted, disadvantaged youth experiences based upon their varied situations.

Giftedness

As a concept, the term *giftedness* has a dynamic history. During the early centuries, before the concept of giftedness took form, those of obvious superior intellect were referred to as “geniuses”. Individuals in this category were looked upon with both favor and admiration as well as with derision (Tannenbaum, 1983). During that time such persons were thought to “balance mental superiority with emotional or physical weaknesses in the form of disease or handicap” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 2). According to Tannenbaum (1983), contrasting notions regarding the gifted span back to the “ancient Greeks and medieval Europeans” (p. 2). Superior intellect was even seen as a “divine gift or a manifestation of emotional disturbance that can be carried into flights of creativity only on the wings of madness” (p. 4). Thus, Tannenbaum demonstrated how the term *genius* and by extension, the term *giftedness*, remained a dualistic concept for years.

Theories about the abnormal tendencies of the highly intelligent were derived in the late-nineteenth century. Researchers substantiated their claims through studies of select famous men who were thought to be afflicted with “behavioral instability” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 4). In 1891, Lombroso and Nisbet, in particular, conducted such studies. In their studies, those who were geniuses were thought to be neurotic, unstable, or strange. Although this thinking was prevalent, it lacked merit and the “mad genius” theory was subsequently rejected in the twentieth-century by contemporary gifted pioneers Terman, Cox, and Hollingsworth (Tannenbaum, 1983; Grinder, 1967).
Heredity played a prominent role in the early studies of giftedness. Francis Galton (1896) was an early investigator of the role of heredity in human intelligence. A psychology pioneer, his inquiries and early tests initiated enough interest to increase thinking about the intellectual differences in individuals, leading to the theory of “fixed intelligence” (Clark, 1992; Grinder, 1967). The “heritability” concept espoused the belief that “the amount of intelligence at birth would remain until a person died. Nothing could add or subtract from or in any way change this amount” (Clark, 1992, p. 13). According to Grinder (1967), French testing research pioneer Alfred Binet rejected the theory of fixed intelligence since he did not share this viewpoint. Grinder further espouses that this was the dawn of the nature vs. nurture debate, with the nurture theory dictating that one’s environment plays a significant role in intelligence as opposed to pure heredity or nature.

In the U.S., during the 1600s, the colonies provided scholarly education and preparation to persons thought to possess intelligence of a high degree, but confined such quality education to males as a whole (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 1994). Moreover, according to Sadovnik, Cookson, and Semel, since formal schools were rare, most affluent families within the colonies provided either tutors or shipped their children to Europe for a quality education. At the time, public schools had not been established, and interest in educating the children of the affluent prevailed over educating other intelligent children, very few of children of the less affluent, particularly children of African descent, were given a quality education (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 1994). Some were given opportunities to train as “carpenters, coachmen, or skilled domestics” (p. 72). However, opportunities for learning how to read and write became increasingly difficult as time passed, particularly for slaves in the 1800s (Sadovnik, Cookson, and Semel 1994). Given the deficient and negligible educational opportunities provided to this
inferior quality (p. 74). Therefore, it is not possible to determine the intellectual potential of the dominant minority in the U.S. at that time: African-Americans.

In his book, Terman shared a 1905 experimental study, which he conducted with seven bright boys and seven boys who were thought to be not as bright. Although his contributions were obscure, his early work eventually became recognized as the beginning of the twentieth century intrigue and study of the psychology of genius (Terman, 1925). In 1921 Lewis Terman studied the mental and physical traits of fifteen hundred gifted students. The average age of the participants was 11 years old. He developed a set of intelligence tests to gauge the intellectual strength of selected students. From this study a unitary definition of giftedness based on intelligence, as measured by a test of general ability, was developed by Terman. “Super intellectuality” was defined as the ability to make high scores on such intelligence tests as the Stanford-Binet (Terman, 1925, p. 631). The tested students in Terman’s study had IQ’s of at least 140, with an average of 150. Giftedness was further defined as “the top one percent of the population of general intellectual ability as measured by scores on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or a comparable instrument” (Senate Select Committee, p. 1, 1988). Although Terman’s study was exhaustive, it was somewhat biased in regard to gender and included very few students of color. Less than two percent of the fifteen hundred students tested were children of Hispanic, African-American, or Asian descent (Terman, 1925). A hint of bias regarding the ability of the female gender is illuminated in this excerpt:

The fact that the excess of boys over girls is far greater in the high school group raises the question whether the mental growth of boys tends to continue somewhat beyond the level which marks the mental maturity of girls (p. 634).
Besides Terman, several early research pioneers conducted extensive studies on children who were thought to be intellectually gifted. Some of their findings concluded that gifted students were "eccentric" and socially maladjusted (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 5). However, Terman refuted these claims.

Popular concern about the characteristics of geniuses intensified at the turn of the twentieth century (Tannenbaum, 1983). In her study about the early mental traits of geniuses, Cox (1926) found there to be range in ability and variety of interests among the gifted. The 1930s and 1940s proved to be a time when varied educational strategies were used to educate gifted and talented students. To Tannenbaum (1983), while it was clear that some type of "enrichment" or acceleration was needed for the intellectually gifted, there was disagreement among educators concerning the concept of "fixed intelligence" and about the best learning environment for gifted students. Tannenbaum (1983) further expounds that while some schools provided special "opportunity classes," most gifted students were educated in regular classrooms upon the recommendation and support of contemporary specialists in child study. During this time period psychologists and educators more readily questioned the concept of "fixed intelligence" and the validity of tests of general intellectual ability (Senate Select Committee, 1988). Professor J. P. Guilford, a psychologist, proposed a model of intelligence, which comprised 150 cognitive abilities in her work, *Structure of the Intellect*. Her work suggested that traditional intelligence tests did not measure creative talent or the ability to think divergently (Tannenbaum, 1983).

The advent of World War II stymied the amount of research on the gifted and talented so prevalent during the beginning decades of the twentieth century (Grinder, 1967; Tannenbaum, 1983). An interest in this research grew again, however, in the early 1950s.
when the American Association of Gifted Children published *The Gifted Child*. By 1954, the educational needs of the gifted and talented resurfaced, and there was an urgent quest for effective related programs in public schools (Tannenbaum, 1983).

The early work of researchers and test pioneers such as Terman (1925) laid the groundwork for a more enlightened, encompassing definition of giftedness. The 1957 launch of Sputnik created a renewed interest in the areas of math, science, and education in U.S. schools. As this renewed focus on education and the U.S. position as a world power emerged and coalesced, gifted education rose acutely to the forefront by the 1960's (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In 1969 the U.S. Congress added language to the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments (Public Law 91-30) relative to gifted students. Specifically, Section 806 directed the Committee of Education to launch a study to do the following:

1. Determine the extent to which special education assistance programs are necessary or used to meet the needs of gifted students.

2. Show which federal education assistance programs are being used to meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

3. Evaluate how existing federal educational assistance programs are being used to meet the needs of gifted and talented children.

4. Recommend new programs, if any are needed to meet these needs.

(Marland, p.viii, 1971)

Secretary of Education S. P. Marland convened a group of gifted educators and conducted a study regarding the gifted concept and the academic programming for gifted and talented students. From this study a federal definition of gifted and talented was
derived as a part of the Marland Report. As previously delineated, this report defines giftedness as:

Those identified by professionally qualified persons, who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and the society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability
2. Specific academic aptitude
3. Creative or productive thinking
4. Leadership ability
5. Visual and performing arts
6. Psychomotor ability

(Marland Report, 1971, p. ix)

Within the state and school district of study, the definition of giftedness coincides with the federal definition:

‘Gifted and talented’ means a person who possesses or demonstrates outstanding ability in one or more of the following:

1. General intelligence
2. Academic aptitude in a specific area
3. Creative thinking
4. Productive thinking
5. Leadership
6. The visual arts

7. The performing arts

(NAC 388.043, 1991)

Gifted and talented students distinguish themselves through ability and achievement. The motivated, gifted outpace their "age-mates," and "depart increasingly from the average students as they progress through the grades if their education program permits" (Marland 1971, A2). Gifted students often read by preschool age, are identified through faculty or parent recommendation, and are tested sometimes as early as kindergarten. Early characteristics of gifted students were thought to include early, extensive reading, a broad interest range due to reading, multi-talent, "performing at an advanced academic level beyond their grade level, i.e. a first-grade student performing at an eighth-grade level" (Marland Report, 1971, Vol. 2 A3).

As reported in the Marland Report, Miles (1954), listed the following persistent traits of gifted and talented students: "independence of thought, perceptiveness, understanding, strength of memory, originality, creativeness, depth of understanding, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, strength of influence on others, persistence, devotion to distinct goals, and desire to excel (Marland, 1971 p. A5).

Although intellectually capable and sometimes favored by teachers, some gifted students are prone to underachievement. Rimm (1986) reports that there are a number of children who begin their education vibrantly and develop an "underachievement syndrome." According to Rimm (1986), some of the classic signs of underachievement are due to student inattention.
She states, “They tend to be disorganized. They forget homework, lose assignments and misplace books; they daydream, don’t listen, look out the window or talk too much to other children. They have poor or no study skills” (p. 2). Underlying their poor skills or negative behavior may be feelings of “absence of personal control over their educational success” (p. 3). Various gifted students may display contrasting behaviors depending upon their temperament. In her book, *The Underachievement Syndrome*, Sylvia Rimm offers parents and teachers suggestions on how they can help students overcome their feelings of inadequacy and patterns of underachievement. According to Rimm (1986), support through mentor relationships is a key to turning “underachievers” into “super achievers” (p. 5). The prognosis for late bloomers, however, is not good in most cases, as stated by Rimm:

Unfortunately, only a small percentage of “late bloomers” emerge from their latent states to develop their talents. Our society includes many who continue their downward cycle to become high school dropouts. If they manage to remain in school until graduation they show only marginal achievement and have little interest in learning. They join the work force of underachievers and lead lives in which they drastically underuse their abilities to their own frustration and to society’s loss (p. 6).

One method of channeling gifted students toward academia involves early identification. Early identification of gifted students is widely thought to be advantageous to their development (Hollingsworth, 1942; Baldwin, 1987; Clark, 1992). The dilemma of how educators perceive students is one area of concern. This is especially critical because often it is the classroom teacher or other educators who may first notice giftedness in children. Clark (1992) proposes that negative educator attitudes
regarding the possibility of giftedness in impoverished milieus accounts for the low representation of minority students in gifted programs. Clark (1992) further suggests that because some members of minority groups have different life experiences than the majority group, it is necessary that educators value the uniqueness of minority students. Some researchers suggest additional variables emerge in identifying disadvantaged, minority students as gifted and talented. The National Center of the Gifted and Talented suggests ten core attributes for identifying giftedness in African-American students: "motivation, communication skills, interests, problem solving ability, memory, imagination/creativity, inquiry, insight, reasoning, and humor" (Frasier et al, 1995, p. xvi). Bernal (1974) devised a list of attributes of gifted Hispanic youth who may not be easily identified using traditional criteria. These nontraditional attributes of interest included a rapid rate of learning the English language, the ability to work independently, and good memorization skills. Bernal (1974) also adds that gifted Hispanics demonstrated leadership, interpersonal, and dominant cultural blending skills.

Tonemah and Brittan (1985) assert that gifted Native American students are knowledgeable about tribal customs, ceremonies, and traditions along with language and computer technology skills. Recognizing test bias and stereotypical behavior towards Native Americans, Tonemah (1991) recommends the following regarding American Indian and Alaska Native students:

1. A massive education and public relations effort needs to be launched to dispel stereotypic images of American Indian and Alaska Native students, particularly, Gifted and Talented American Indian and Alaska Native students. The image that all Native American Indian and Alaska Native students need remediation education needs to be dispelled.
2. More research needs to be conducted to add specifically to the literature of gifted and talented American Indian and Alaska Native education. The uniqueness of the cultures of American Indians and Alaska Natives needs to be described.

3. Multi-criteria approaches need to be developed and utilized to assess American Indian and Alaska Native students. These multi-criteria appropriate measures should be sensitive to and/or inclusive of tribal and cultural perspectives of giftedness.

4. More programs need to be developed to prepare American Indian and Alaska Native teachers. They serve as role models and can bring sensitivity of cultures and tribes to the provision of gifted education services.

5. An American Indian and Alaska Native Gifted Academy(s) or Magnet schools should be developed to serve American Indian and students which would include all traditional secondary academic areas of instruction with a tribal cultural orientation.

6. An intensive in-service training program needs to be developed to assist parents, teachers, and tribal educators to understand the needs of gifted and talented American Indian and Alaska Native students.

7. Funds should be provided to tribes to sponsor high ability and performing tribal youth to complete their education. These funds may be incentive to these youth to return to work with their tribes.

(Tonemah, 1991, p. 14)

In the school district of study, staff members or parents can recommend a student for GATE testing. However, gaining acceptance into the Gifted and Talented Education Program is partially dependent upon test scores. Students must score in the upper
percentiles on a standardized test known as the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT).

As stated previously, there are some who perceive such tests to be biased toward Anglo-American students. Historically, low identification of Latinos, Native Americans, and African-Americans has created a "dialogue of concern" with many educators and researchers (Vanderslice, 1998; Van Tassal-Baska, Patton, & Prelman, 1991). While under-represented groups, in most cases, have endured the distinct historical disadvantage of a history of marginal education, recent school reforms and accountability movements, have sparked a national agenda for improved schooling for all (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, U.S. Congress). Since the reform movement began, some educators, researchers, and parents have requested better identification and support for gifted students in general, and disadvantaged GATE students in particular.

Although it is a common belief that gifted children hail from all economic and ethnic backgrounds, it is consistently found that balance is needed regarding representative groups of children. According to Abell and Lennex (1999), "It is well documented that affluent whites are more likely to be enrolled in a gifted and talented program than minority or disadvantaged children" (p.7). This leads to further discussion regarding disadvantaged, gifted and talented students.

**Gifted, Talented, and Disadvantaged**

Gifted and talented disadvantaged students face compound home, school, social, and community challenges. Beginning in the home, achievement may not be valued. Kubilius-Olszewski and Scott (1992) contend that middle class students receive subliminal messages regarding higher education as young as elementary school. They may hear their parents or older siblings engage in talk about college, which becomes a
part of their psyche (Kubilius-Olszewski & Scott, 1992). At some point they may visit a
college campus and live in neighborhoods where their peers consider college aspiration as
a given. Many of these students realize long-term college plans initiated by family
members. In high school they may have special college counselors as well (Lindstrom &
Van Sant, 1976).

Conversely, disadvantaged gifted students may be the first college aspirants in their
family (Clarke, 2000; Levine & Nidifer, 1996). They often lack the association
throughout their childhood with family members and neighbors who have attended
college. They may turn in assignments late, procrastinate, or purposely not do
assignments in order to fit in with their peers socially (Ogbu, 2003; Ford, 1992).
Excelling in school may also be classified as "selling out or acting white" (Ford &
Harris, 1997; Ogbu, 2003). Some gifted and talented students may be successful
academically, but feel as if they lose socially, creating a hollow victory. (Fordham,
1988). Consequently, some gifted students underachieve in order to be accepted by their
peers. If they choose academia, they must then cope with feelings of loneliness and
isolation. In order to be accepted by their peers, some disadvantaged youth purposely
underachieve.

Gifted student Ron Suskind (1978) recalled how he intentionally skipped a
student assembly because he was to be presented with a scholastic award. Rather than
face certain peer ridicule, he purposely went to his favorite teacher's classroom during the
ceremony. Potential peer alienation for being academically inclined or different is one of
the distinguishing facets found in the works of Begoray and Slovinsky (1997).

In the home parents of gifted disadvantaged students may be too preoccupied with
earning a living and making ends meet to provide requisite support and nurture for their
children. Hardworking parents or guardians, who may work long hours to support gifted students and their siblings, are sometimes misconstrued as lacking interest in the educational pursuits of their disadvantaged children. Since family earnings are used primarily for living necessities, there may be little or no money left over for books, magazines, or software (Begoray & Slovinsky, 1997; Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1976). Thus, sufficient time and resources that such parents could otherwise devote towards inspiring and encouraging high academic potential in their gifted children is limited, through no fault of the parent or disadvantaged student. Nevertheless, Clark (1983) finds that family support, particularly from the mother, is critical to the success of the gifted, low-income student. In fact, Shumow (1997) concludes that resilient gifted students who live in poverty had mothers who “checked on homework, talked about school, and took their children to the public library” (p. 37). Furthermore, according to Shumow (1997), such students believe their mothers tried to listen, talk, and care for them. Support of this type is clearly beneficial to gifted and talented disadvantaged minority students.

Finally, inherent in the lives of the gifted, low-income students is the absence of transcendent individuals within their communities who emphasize education. Unlike middle class students who have college educated neighbors and community role models, many successful, college educated role models move out of impoverished areas (Begoray & Slovinsky, 1997). This limits student exposure to college-educated individuals within the community who can model transcendent aspirations for college.

Under identification for GATE programs (Exum, 1979), inappropriate notions about college, misconceptions regarding post-secondary options (Kubilius-Olszewski & Scott, 1992), and failure of schools to do enough to maximize the potential of gifted
students (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) are all challenges faced by disadvantaged students.

History of African-American Legal Struggle for Educational Access and Equity

While granting the basic freedom from servitude, the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation was not far reaching in granting other basic rights to freed persons. Because there were no laws in place to entitle the newly freed to an education, they were placed at great disadvantage. As a whole, there was no serious thrust by others to offer African-Americans an education and a better lot in life through adequate schooling, even though a few religious orders began schools for impoverished African-Americans (Sadvonik, Cookson, & Semel, 1994). Instead, a modified version of servitude began wherein many African-Americans were tied to the soil as sharecroppers (Bennett, 1969, p. 238). Unable to break even, or get ahead, the sharecropping trap was the plight of many since there were no educational or training opportunities. Notwithstanding this widespread predicament, a few disadvantaged individuals managed to get access to adequate schools. Sporadic, happenstance opportunities led to educational access for a few disadvantaged, gifted individuals of color. In their book Having Our Say, the Delany sisters (Delany, Delany, & Hearth, 1993) relate how their father, a former slave and college graduate, was encouraged to attend college by a white Episcopal priest who recognized his academic talent and sent him to St. Augustine College in Raleigh, North Carolina: “Well, Pappa did not disappoint anyone. In college he was a shining star of shining stars” (p. 27). Nevertheless, despite occasional sponsorships, most academically able, gifted, and disadvantaged children were never afforded the opportunity to get a
formal education. In understanding the plight of the gifted disadvantaged, one need only review the history of schooling or lack thereof for disadvantaged people in America.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, New England school reformer Horace Mann introduced the idea of the Common School as a means of fostering social unification and of reducing the crime rate. The goal was to provide an education for both sexes, regardless of ethnic, socio-economic, and religious disposition. Such schools would be supported through public taxes (Fowler, 2000). Furthermore, these schools would also offer an elementary education constituted within a coordinated, sequential system of education. Mann’s vision of the Common School, however, faced a number of political and social challenges, with segregation looming as one of the most cumbersome.

Due to rural living circumstances and deeply entrenched segregation patterns, many African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students were relegated to segregated, inferior schools (Fowler, 2000). Not only were the segregated schools inferior, but also most of the students they served—the disadvantaged—lived in poverty. Not until World War II brought a demand for factory workers could many minorities contemplate a better way of life through education. During the war years, minorities fled the “rural tenant” way of life to take their chances in cities in the North (Bennett, 1969). Once there, although their standard of living was somewhat improved, their educational lot and opportunity for better schooling remained stymied due to segregation strongholds. Separate, inferior schools were the order of the day (Spring, 1997), leaving the idea that disadvantaged children could be gifted or academically talented as a foreign notion and as a non-issue for many years.

A series of historical events including Brown v. the Board of Education (1954), the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Great Society legislative acts, led to court-
ordered school integration and initiatives that had a profound effect on educational opportunities for disadvantaged minorities (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 1994). Not until school integration was won, which came after the social unrest and legislative acts of the 1960s, was the identification of gifted and talented, disadvantaged students contemplated.

By this time, the economic plight and social status of the disadvantaged had only minutely improved. In 1960 only 2.8% of the physicians and 1.2% of the attorneys and engineers in the U.S. were African-Americans. Nationally, there were only four African-Americans in Congress and four federal judges on the bench (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Although these figures are representative of only a segment of the minority population, African-Americans, they give some indication of the dearth of educational opportunities for all minority people during this period. The country's failure to use the untapped intellectual potential of minority people and failure to include them into the mainstream of the society remained a problem for years to follow.

History of Gifted and Talented Education and its Impact on the Disadvantaged

In 1969 the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments provided funding for the development of model programs for gifted and talented students under Title III and IV (Stephens, 1999). According to Stephens (1999), The Gifted and Talented Children Act was repealed when former President Reagan signed the Omnibus Reconciliation Act (1981). This act mixed funding for the gifted with twenty-nine other programs, forming a block and thereby impeding its effectiveness. Funding for the gifted and talented was re-established seven years later with the passage of the Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act. The appropriation for the Javits Act was $6.5 million. More funding for
gifted and talented was made available to states through the Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (H. R. 637). This act made more categorical funding available to states for gifted education. (Stephens, 1999)

In the past, despite the fact that federal funding was available for GATE programs, there was a lack of representation of African-Americans and Hispanics in these programs (Baldwin, 1987). Today, under representation persists. Therefore, a method of identifying academically talented disadvantaged youth without penalizing them for their low performance test scores is needed (Abell & Lennex, 1999).

The teacher plays a critical role in the recruitment, retention, and education of gifted students. Understanding minority students and incorporating their culture into the curriculum, as it relates to self-concept, is important in the education of academically talented minority students (Baldwin, 1987).

Self-concept figures prominently for gifted and talented disadvantaged students. Confronting the historically chronicled social-psychological oppression endured by minorities is an important educational strategy. In fact, many disadvantaged, gifted students are the products of homes where their parents or grandparents witnessed the vestiges of Jim Crow laws and other oppression by the majority. Furthermore, because of low expectations and a pervasive debasement of minorities in society, gifted and talented may encounter “stereotype threat” (Corsini, 1973) at some point in their academic lives. Building a positive self-concept then becomes essential for disadvantaged, gifted, and talented children. A stark example of determination and positive self-concept is demonstrated in the school experiences of Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the first African-American four-star general. He shared the following regarding his steel resolve to graduate from West Point.
Silencing had been applied in the past to certain cadets who were considered to have violated the honor code and refused to resign. In my case there was no question of such a violation, which would have been formally cited by the Honor Committee; I was to be silenced solely because cadets did not want blacks at West Point. Their only purpose was to freeze me out. What they did not realize was that I was stubborn enough to put up with their treatment to reach the goal I had come attain (Davis, 1991 p. 27).

Disadvantaged Students

Disadvantaged students may be so termed due to a variety of reasons. The term can encompass economic, language, or cultural barriers. The focus of this paper is primarily on the economically disadvantaged gifted students. However, academically disadvantaged students who experience a language barrier will also be included. In their book, Beating the Odds, Levine and Nidifer (1996) outline the odds against a poor person going to college: "...what is of great concern is that the odds are even higher that a poor person, even one who graduates from high school, will not attend college at all. And in recent years the odds against the poor have grown increasingly larger" (p. 53). Some disadvantaged, gifted students seem to fall into this category.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau 34.6 million people live below the poverty line, which is a line demarcated at $18,556 of total income for a family of four. Children under eighteen years of age compose the highest and most dismal percentage of poor people in America. This group represents 35.1 percent of all poor people, yet they comprise only 25.5 percent of the general population (U. S. Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P-60-222, “Poverty in the U. S.,” 2002). Disadvantaged students often
depend on federal subsidies such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which includes children from single-parent households because many of these households depend primarily on public assistance. Children whose parents serve in domestic, gardening, or low-paying childcare positions can also be classified as disadvantaged (Kaplan, 1999).

Prior to the formalization of the gifted and talented programs, various organizations formed avenues of mobility for gifted, low socio-economic urban youth. One such program is A Better Chance, which was created in 1963 by a group of Northeast college preparatory schools (Nidifer & Levine, 1996). Academically talented, inner-city students are identified by faculty and given the opportunity to attend northeast elite schools such as Phillips Andover and Exeter (Nidifer & Levine, 1996). These academically talented students are removed from their environment and have a high graduation success rate. Afterwards, many attend Ivy League colleges.

Non-ABC affiliated gifted students of low socio-economic status face tougher challenges. Although teachers, counselors, or administrators may identify some of these students as candidates for GATE, they may not automatically place all of these students on a college preparation track. In addition, disadvantaged, gifted, and academically talented students often struggle with feelings of isolation and alienation from their peers. Fortunately, solutions to these particular problems have been studied. Lessons on self-esteem, self-concept, and implementation of activities that require a high degree of collaboration may be a few ways to discourage gifted students from becoming alienated and “at-risk”. In her studies of inner-city, academically-talented but under-performing youth, Kaplan (1999) found that students are successful when they are given counseling and provided with tutoring as well as having school, community, and family support.
toward pursuing a college preparation track. The success of her program and others like it challenges the conventional wisdom that “at-risk” youth are not likely to excel in academics. Other researchers have done extensive work on students who succeed academically in spite of the factors that work against them (Lewis, 1988). However, the challenge of making systemic institutional changes so that more disadvantaged gifted students can be channeled toward higher education remains.

Along with marginal schools, negative peer pressure, and an inhibiting environment, race also plays a critical role in some disadvantaged youths post-secondary plans. Disadvantaged students’ perception of a “glass ceiling”, regardless of educational attainment, is a factor in their decision not to pursue higher education (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

Individuals who seek to analyze why relatively few African-Americans, Latinos, and Native-Americans attend college must do so within the context of these groups’ cultures. For instance, upwardly mobile, disadvantaged students often forsake friendships to pursue their academic dreams. In a California Youth Educational Program study, student participants divulged to adult mentors that they were derided for studying too much, were laughed at, and were sometimes resented when they focused on doing well in school (Kaplan, 1999). Gifted orator Vernon Jordan in his book, Vernon Can Read, recounted another example of peer rejection. When he decided to attend DePauw University, his former high school classmates subsequently ostracized him. Jordan recounted his attempt to salvage his friendship with two friends whom he had been close to in high school:

I did try over the course of the vacation, to make some headway with Riley and Walter. We might, I thought, build a friendship that took account of our differing circumstances. If real affection was there, that should have been possible. Nothing I
tried seemed to work. Things were just the same when I came home from Christmas break: more overtures met by sarcasm and borderline rejection (Jordan, 2001, p. 75).

While social reasons may make it uncomfortable for academically talented minority students, other factors come into play as well. In 1947 President Truman's Commission on Higher Education identified five barriers that deterred young people from attending college. The barriers listed were economics, geography, race, religion, and gender (Levine & Nidifer, 1996). While social reasons sometimes foster difficulties for disadvantaged youth, economic factors most always do. As a result of Great Society Legislation, financial aid for the disadvantaged was made available to offset the economic barriers. The 1972 Basic Opportunity Grant, later known as the Pell Grant, made college attendance possible for many students who could not otherwise have afforded a college education. The Pell Grant has provided direct grant monies combined with work-study income for many students, especially disadvantaged students, over the years (Levine & Nidifer, 1996). Today, along with federal aid, many academically talented, disadvantaged students, along with other students of exceptional ability, are offered merit scholarships or enhanced financial aid packages upon acceptance to a number of colleges and universities. These aid packages are generally comprised of scholarships, loans, and work-study employment.

This reality, unfortunately, only applies to a small percentage of disadvantaged, talented youth because some of these students lack the requisite elementary and middle school background to enroll in advanced placement or honors level high school courses, which produce high-test scores, and which, in turn, induce enhanced financial aid packages from the colleges and universities. A great chasm is therefore created between the test scores of the disadvantaged and the privileged, creating, as well, a disparity in the
scores of students from different racial backgrounds. Since the mid-seventies when SAT data by race became available, the disparity has become smaller. The vast difference in both verbal and math scores between black and whites declined by approximately twenty-five percent between 1975 and the late 1980s. Since that time, however, the divide between the test scores has been constant and in many instances has enlarged (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Test scores affect minority enrollment figures. Nevertheless, in spite of fluctuating minority enrollment figures, colleges and universities across the U.S. continue to seek diversity in college enrollment. The exacting emphasis on test scores figures prominently in such goals. "In the short run at least, colleges face a momentous choice to limit the weight of admissions test scores or lose their hard-won diversity" (Nettles, Perna, and Millett, 1998 p.97).

Economics also plays a part in sustaining the low-test scores of the disadvantaged. Because of their low socio-economic status, gifted or academically talented students may not be able to afford Kaplan, Princeton Review, or other tutorials for the ACT and SAT, and thereby are at a disadvantage compared to students who can afford such resources. The lack of computer technology in the home and the unavailability of educational enhancements are also economic factors that can make the difference in disadvantaged students' prospects for college.

Race matters. Today, urban public high schools are comprised of a diverse student population of African-American, Anglo-American, Hispanic American, Asian Pacific Islander, Native American students, and other immigrants. In the school district of discussion such diversity exists.
Between 1960 and 1995 there was a marked increase in the number of African-Americans in the U.S. who attended college. African-American college graduate numbers were up 15.4 percent in 1960. Figures for Hispanics after 1970 indicated that college attendance and graduation for this minority group doubled in this time period (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Anglo-Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders have historically had high numbers of students to continue their education. Native American college attendance rates continue to flag, however. Researchers continue to study the role of race in college enrollment of minority students. Freeman (1999) delved into the psychological/social curricular, family, and self-influences related to African-Americans attending college. He found that there is a need for educators and policymakers to accept the importance of increased cultural awareness in the curriculum and to develop research.
programs that explore the historical and structural differences of racial factors involved in minority students' decisions regarding higher education.

In her work *Pipeline to College*, Horn (1997) discussed the phases that at-risk students traverse on their journey to higher education. In her research she found a high correlation between students' aspirations to attend college and their actual enrollment. Her research entailed a review of a previous longitudinal study of low socio-economic six-graders in 1988 who graduated from high school in 1992. She found, for example, that only 42 percent of the low income students aspired to bachelor's degrees compared with 64 and 89 percent respectively for middle and high socio-economic status students (Horn, 1997). Other studies have demonstrated a gap between African-American students' aspirations for higher education and their actual participation rate (Freeman, 1999). Academic preparation as it relates to taking challenging math courses and obtaining appropriate scores on entrance exams were also discussed. The disadvantaged, gifted student must traverse difficult terrain in their quest to acquire college enrollment and completion.

*Hispanic -American Giftedness: An Intra-Ethnic Purview*

Hispanic gifted and talented youth may be studied in terms of intra-ethnic origin. Several different sub-groups comprise U.S. Hispanic Americans: Puerto-Rican, Mexican-American, Cuban, Central and South American. Mexican-Americans are the largest Hispanic group in the U.S. and represent the fastest growing minority student population. Hispanic Americans comprise 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population according to the 2000 Census.
Notwithstanding their origin, distinctive characteristics, and experiences, there is a tendency for Hispanic American students to be collectively underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Cohen, 1988; Saccuzzo, Johnson & Guertin, 1994).

In a study conducted by Reis, Hebert, Diaz, Maxfield, and Ratlley (1995) of an urban school district comprised of 60% Puerto Rican students, 20% African American students, and 20% White, Asian, and other ethnic groups, factors that influenced the achievement of high ability students were found to include a belief in self and personal characteristics, a foundation of support systems and realistic aspirations, and a participation in special programs, extracurricular activities, summer enrichment programs, and appropriately challenging classes (p. xxv).

_Peceptions of Voluntary and Involuntary Immigrants: A Theory_

Disadvantaged gifted and talented students face many hurdles, some of which may be culturally, socially and psychologically based. Gibson and Ogbu (1991) express a theory regarding immigrant and involuntary minority perceptions in _Minority Status and Schooling_ (1991). Their theory separates minorities into two groups: those who came to the U.S. voluntarily in search of a better life for themselves and their offspring and minorities who were brought to the U.S. through "slavery, conquest, or colonization" (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991 p. 9). An example of the former would be Southeast Asian

---

Table 1: U.S. Hispanic population sub-groups [in thousands] (Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 2001). p. 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexican</th>
<th>Puerto Rican</th>
<th>Cuban</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>20,641</td>
<td>3,406</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>10,017</td>
<td>35,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
immigrants, Chinese or Filipinos. Examples of the latter may include African-Americans and some Mexican Americans.

According to Gibson and Ogbu (1991), the variations in voluntary or involuntary immigrant outlooks engage a number of concepts. These concepts aid in analyzing these distinct groups’ perceived chances for opportunity, collective opinions of the system, responses to perceived injustices, and personal, psycho-social viewpoints. In the case of the voluntary immigrant, a favorable comparison is made between their present and homeland lifestyles and opportunities. To Gibson and Ogbu (1991), immigrants’ frame of thinking shapes their outlook, perceptions, interpretation of and response to perceived racial slights, discrimination and effort in school. Gibson and Ogbu (1991) theorize thusly that individuals who migrate voluntarily to the U.S. are optimistic regarding their pursuit of a better life and may be more tolerant of less-than-ideal personal situations. Because they may be from economically depressed, war torn, or politically oppressed homelands, they are more tolerant of perceived societal inequities. Thus, their reflection of much worse conditions in their homelands may foster a sense of optimism and a belief that hard work will eventually help them to overcome barriers and lead to academic and career opportunities. According to this theory, parents of voluntary immigrants are more likely to emphasize to students in the home to respect school authorities, stay focused on their coursework, and avoid behavior that may detract from their academic goals or define them as troublesome in school. They view education as the opportunity to achieve a better lifestyle for their children, which is a point such parents emphasize constantly in the home. Moreover, to such families, proper behavior in school will help their children to secure opportunities to get a good education and increase their odds for a better lifestyle (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).
In contrast, Gibson and Ogbu believe that native born or involuntary immigrants have a different socio-psychological framework in that they view adverse conditions as more permanent by virtue of their being members of a long standing minority group in a perpetual majority Anglo-American society. They may view personal, adverse situations as more permanent and may take the viewpoint that their difficulties are because of persistent, institutional, and pervasive discrimination, owing to their skin color or low economic status. Subsequently, they may not excel or work as hard as a voluntary immigrant in school, believing instead that an education may not make a significant difference in their future opportunities or lot in life. Through the singular historical prism of forced and indentured servitude and the historical facts regarding systemic mistreatment of minorities and their lack of educational access, equity and opportunity, the parents of involuntary immigrants may not trust the system to educate their children to the same degree as majority children are being educated (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). Having no dual frame of reference like the voluntary immigrant, the involuntary immigrant, may experience feelings of inferiority or other self-defeating behaviors. If Gibson and Ogbu’s theory is accurate regarding the pervasive, cultural philosophy of the involuntary immigrant, it could be one source of explanation for the underachievement of disadvantaged students of color.

Summary

The gifted and talented disadvantaged student must be studied within the context of historical, psychological, sociological, ethnic and cultural lenses. They sometimes struggle to make meaning of their experiences, while they forge toward graduation and baccalaureate status. To many disadvantaged gifted students, the hope of a college
education is viewed as their only opportunity to get out of their impoverished situation and, consequently, their only chance for a more economically stable life. Beset by complex dichotomies, they must keep perspective, maintain discipline, and deal with psychological and social pressures as they move toward their educational goals, particularly because their gifted status is often viewed with ambiguity within one’s peer group. They may even be highly favored but treated as an “aberration” at the same time by admissions committees and in classroom situations. In understanding the academic choices of the gifted disadvantaged one must probe deeply into their gifted status, their psyche, their historical background, and economic situation(s). Whether they decide to take advantage of their unique abilities or allow them to remain dormant or hidden can only be understood through a complex maze of cultural priorities, familial backgrounds, educational experiences, institutional experiences, and individual characteristics of ambition, perseverance, and, most critically, resilience.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Review of Study

Despite years of scientific skepticism regarding the notion of genius, psychologists and some social scientists became enamored with the study of the intellectually superior by the dawn of the twentieth century (Tannenbaum, 1983; Terman, 1925; Grinder, 1967). Psychologists of the day began experimenting with testing as a means to differentiate between bright and below average individuals. Earlier testing work done by Galton and Cattell stimulated Frenchman Alfred Binet to advance his studies in the development of mental tests. In *Genetic Studies on Genius* (1925), Terman credited Binet with the strides that occurred in this area in the 1890s. “More than anyone else, it was Binet who taught us where to search for mental functions for significant intellectual differences” (Terman, 1925, p.2). Both Terman and Binet, however, are noted research pioneers in giftedness, due to their extensive work in the genre of testing and intelligence. Through early work done at Stanford University and in the San Francisco schools, bright and below average students were tested and the groundwork was laid regarding mental acceleration and retardation (Terman, 1925). Terman advanced the idea of intelligence quotient (IQ) by “dividing each participant’s mental age by his or her chronological age to obtain a measure that brought the two dimensions into relative perspective” (Grinder, 1967, p.22). From this designation, hence, an individual’s IQ has been a defining factor in the perception of a person’s mental ability in many academic circles.
According to Terman, one's reasoning ability is a chief indicator of intelligence and giftedness (Grinder, 1985). The term *genius*, so widely used at the turn of the century, was later replaced with *gifted* in academia. Early designations of giftedness hinged on a single IQ test. As time progressed, however, the rudimentary classification of intelligence based upon a single test became unacceptable. By 1960, the impact of international and domestic issues greatly accelerated the need for broadening the definition of intelligence and giftedness. The Sputnik (1957) surprise and the Civil Rights progress of the 1960s generated greater federal interest in improving math, science, and gifted education programs and in providing equitable educational access for students of color. Thus, federal legislation increased exponentially in an attempt to improve elementary, secondary, and special education programs, including programs for students who displayed superior academic aptitude (Fowler, 2000; Spring, 1997; and Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 1994). Moreover, during this period, further research regarding intellectually able students, in particular, amplified approaches for finding individuals with pronounced or accelerated academic skills or potential (Tannenbaum, 1983). By 1971, then Secretary of Education, S. P. Marland, convened a group of gifted educators who effectively expanded the gifted umbrella to include those with specific academic, creative, leadership, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor abilities (Marland, 1971). Although this additional emphasis and expanded classification should have led to greater inclusion, a diversity of students from low-middle-class and disadvantaged backgrounds continued to be overlooked for placement in gifted and talented programs. This identification quandary primarily affected Hispanic, Native and Alaskan American, and African-American students (Tonemah & Brittan, 1985; Baldwin, 1987; Van Tassal-Baska, 1991). Today, there remains a disproportionately small number of gifted students.
with lower socio-economic, minority group, and second language status enrolled in Gifted and Talented Programs throughout the U.S. Of this group, many lose focus and enthusiasm for their studies by their middle or high school years. In 1983 a special presidential commission led by then Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, used the dismal underperformance of gifted students, as a whole, as an indicator of national risk, stating that "over half of the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 8).

A similar follow up Commission reviewed the status of A Nation At Risk and found:

Academically, we fall off of the cliff somewhere in the middle and upper grades.

Internationally, U.S. youngsters hold their own at the elementary level but falter in the middle years and drop far behind in high school. We seem to be the only country in the world whose children fall farther behind the longer they stay in school. That is true of the advanced students and our so-called good schools as well as schools in the middle (Center for Education Reform, 1998).

Gifted and talented students often begin their school years full of wonder and curiosity. Some students maintain their high interest and performance level in school and graduate from high school with post-secondary ambitions and solid plans to further their education in college. However, other gifted and talented students may not maintain their academic vigor, may graduate with the minimum requirements, or fail to complete high school, having taken mediocre courses and earning mediocre grades far below their potential. Moreover, they may have no definite plans for post-secondary education upon graduation, limiting their career choices and opportunities and future lifestyle options.

The reasons for the difference in student achievement and post-secondary outlook are the primary thrust of this paper. Indeed, this study looks at former Gifted and Talented
Program students who appear headed for success upon graduation and those who appear to be drifting toward less promising futures relative to their potential.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

The study of giftedness engenders intrigue and sometimes wonderment about the extraordinary abilities of students who have superior intellectual or artistic skills. The intellectually gifted, described by Newland, and as reported by Tannenbaum (1983), are “Those who are able to quickly grasp concepts of greater difficulty, are able to acquire symbols and understand them, are able to deal effectively with abstractions, are quick with sound generalizations and often come up with novel but sound approaches and ideas” (p. 8). Nonetheless, the mere possession of outstanding intellectual skills or talent does not always spell academic achievement or lead to the maximization of potential described by Maslow’s (1973) self actualization concept. Issues concerning underachievement, life circumstances, environment, quality of schooling, personal perception and drive, self esteem and cultural identity, and peer relations have a bearing on the success of gifted and talented students (Rimm, 1986; Carnegie Commission, 1996; Ford, 1992; Kaplan, 1999). In Years of Promise, a Carnegie Corporation Report (1996), general student underachievement is underscored as a problem in the United States:

By the fourth grade, the performance of most children in the United States is below what it should be for the nation and is certainly below the achievement levels of children in competing countries (p. 2).

It is well documented that many U.S. children of all ability levels continue to perform below their academic ability. A distinct goal of Title I of Public Law 107-110 (H.R. 1) of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is to addresses the persistent underachievement of
disadvantaged students: specifically, “...3) closing the achievement gap between high and low performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.” Low-test scores and the myriad of excuses given as to why students are underachieving precipitated this national referendum. Nevertheless, the under-achievement of disadvantaged, gifted and academically talented students is a particularly worrisome problem that H.R. 1 only tangentially addresses.

The life stories of the twelve former GATE student participants in this study can best be studied through a qualitative case-study approach because such an approach lends itself to direct emphasis and attention to the personal stories of the participants. The basic plan or processes by which this study was undertaken is defined by Merriam (1988):

“...a case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. The bounded system or case might be selected because it is an instance of some concern, issue, or hypothesis” (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). In this instance, the processes by which former GATE students approach graduation status, whether they were determined to continue or abandon further educational options, was studied within the framework of institutional and social dynamics, using a case study design. As outlined by Merriam (1998) and Guba and Lincoln (1985), the tenets of the case study are highlighted by particularistic, thick descriptive, inductive means. Thus the particular students who were studied include former GATE students. An attempt was made to collect and analyze data by illuminating information through a thickly descriptive means, which, in turn, reveals the “discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understanding rather than verification of predetermined hypotheses...” (Merriam, 1988, p. 13).
This study utilized qualitative methods that explored the contextual meaning of the life stories of twelve former GATE students. At least five of the disadvantaged former GATE students were chosen because they graduated in the top 20 percent of their class, excelled academically, and expressed plans to attend college. These five will be compared with seven other disadvantaged former GATE students. Most of the seven graduated in the bottom 20 percent of their class from a traditional high school or alternative education program. While some plan to attend a two-year college, others have no plans to extend their education beyond high school graduation.

The framework employed to establish meaning and gain contextual understanding was in accordance with Maxwell’s (1996) qualitative, interactive approach, Glaser’s (1978) constant comparative model, and Merriam’s (1988) case study approach. How the participants perceived their familial, social, and academic lives constituted an integral part of the study. “In a qualitative study, you are interested in not only the physical events and behavior that is taking place, but also in how the participants in your study make sense of this and how their understanding influences their behavior” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17). According to Maxwell, this is known as an interpretive approach. In studying the lives of the selected students, a prism was utilized that lends itself to contextual understanding. Qualitative methods “can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn through more conventional methods” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 11).

Through the use of a comparative case study approach with a contextual emphasis, the academic lives of these students were presented and interpreted. An exploration of the inter-connected patterns that shape their lives illuminate and provide understanding of the dynamics involved with the upward mobility and downward spiral of gifted and talented
students. Findings of this qualitative study should inform practice and make viable suggestions for educators in their guidance roles, particularly as they act as policy facilitators of hope and as post-secondary dream-makers.

Researcher

As the key instrument in the research, this writer must evaluate without losing self, establish rapport with the participants, objectively record and tell a story, analyze the facts based upon grounded theory, and act ethically (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A primary intention of the researcher is to abide within the confines of ethical behavior. The Principles of Professional Responsibility, as outlined by Spradley (1980), provide a framework for ethical consideration of research participants. It involves considering informants first, safeguarding informants’ rights, interests, and sensitivities, communicating research objectives, protecting the privacy of informants, and making reports available to informants. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stress objectivity in qualitative study. Moreover, while interpreting data the researcher must contend with and overcome any tendencies to inject their prejudices and tendencies and cultural biases into the data. “Qualitative researchers guard against their own bias by recording detailed field notes that include reflections on their own subjectivity” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34).

This study examined how twelve teen-aged former Gifted and Talented students made meaning of their lives relative to their home, school, and social experiences. “Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simple outcomes or products. How do people negotiate meaning?” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 6) Indeed, qualitative researchers are interested in how participants negotiate meaning. It is further asserted that “Meaning is essential concerning the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are
interested in how different people make sense of their lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 7). It is the researcher’s intention not to have preconceived notions about the participants or their status, but rather to objectively record the data and proceed through Glaser’s six steps to derive at grounded theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), objectivity is important. “A researcher does not begin a project with a pre-conceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory). Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (p. 12). In studying students in their natural setting, which, in this case, would entail the high school setting, a pad, pencil, and minimal recording instruments were used in order for the researcher to blend in and be as unobtrusive as possible. The fieldwork of the researcher included visiting, observing, interviewing, listening, recording, and writing.

Statement of the Problem

Within the 200,000-plus-student school district of discussion there are a small percentage of academically talented, gifted students who are classified as “gifted.” According to the GATE coordinator for the school district, that figure is between five and eight percent (Sloan, personal communication, October 24, 2002). Due to various reasons and circumstances some students maintain their academic vigor while others lose interest in academics. By the time the latter students reach the seventh grade, their grades may begin to falter as their academic enthusiasm wanes. Their gradual disinterest in school may not be challenged or abated at home or in the school setting. Consequently, some former GATE students struggle to meet the minimum requirements for graduation from high school, graduate from an alternative school, or drop out of school.
The problem being addressed is “Why is it that some disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students lose interest, become educationally disaffected, and graduate far below their academic potential?” Conversely, “Why do other disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students sail through high school and handily gain acceptance into a college or university?”

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine two groups of gifted and academically talented students who take divergent roads in their academic lives. Discovering methods to support this group of students and maximizing their potential can be beneficial to both the students and the society at large. The study examines why some disadvantaged academically talented and gifted students begin their school years vibrantly, only to digress into standard classes in their middle and/or high school years and never challenge the full potential of their intellects. The study further examines why some students in similar circumstances do the opposite. They apply themselves academically, take challenging courses, and gain acceptance to four-year colleges or universities. A brief examination of the characteristics and backgrounds of former GATE students with economic and language barriers, who nonetheless graduate from high school and gain acceptance into college, are also studied. The purpose of the study was to examine how the achievers succeeded and to share the findings with the educational community, particularly school leaders. Moreover, in reviewing institutional influences, a further goal was to examine the role of school leaders in encouraging these students to reach their goals.
The findings from this study can be useful for pre-college student support systems as well as K-12 professionals who provide direction and mentoring to disadvantaged youth. Findings from this research reveal relevant information about institutional support and constraints that impact student achievement and ambition. The study’s findings have implications for channeling more disadvantaged, academically talented and gifted students toward college and explores what school leaders can do to encourage and motivate them to continue their education.

Research Questions

The following questions guide the study:

1. What institutional/community factors encourage or discourage gifted and academically talented, disadvantaged youth from pursuing higher education?

2. What factors contribute to former GATE students’ continued academic achievement and aspirations for a college education through middle and senior high school? What factors contribute to some students’ subsequent loss of interest in academics?

3. What are the characteristics of disadvantaged former GATE students who graduate from high school and enroll into college? What are the characteristics of their counterparts who elect not to attend college?

4. How do successful, disadvantaged GATE students cope during difficult times in secondary academic life? What behavior patterns kept the underachievers from achieving success in proportion to their potential?
Research Approach

In this comparative case study, two groups of students were selected. Profiles of disadvantaged, academically talented students were presented. Each group contained a cross section of students. Students were chosen for the study based on the following criteria:

1. Each graduating student was a member of the high school class of 2003.
2. Each of the college bound participants were accepted by a two- or four-year college.
3. Each student had parents or guardians who did not complete college.
4. Each student was from a disadvantaged background with regard to economics, social, or language barriers.
5. Each student was a former GATE student.

Background information about the lives of the twelve students was presented along with their struggles, trials, and triumphs within the context of their academic experiences. A brief, composite sketch of each student revealed the personal, sociological, familial, institutional, and environmental influences that impacted their academic success or derailment. Personal characteristics and institutional factors that caused the students to prevail and excel against the odds were central to the focus of this study.

Maxwell describes four components in conducting a qualitative, contextual research method. The first component of the interactive approach involves establishing a relationship with the participants. According to Maxwell, this is not a single event; instead, it is "the continual negotiation and renegotiation of your relationship with those you study" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 66). The purpose of the first meeting was to introduce this researcher and to let the participants know the purpose of the study. During the initial contact, students were presented with a letter of informed consent. In addition, a letter of...
permission to participate in the study was secured from their parents beforehand, as most of
the participants were minors and students in the school district of discussion. As a second
step, Maxwell (1996) suggests “sampling”, which he describes as “selecting those times,
settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need in order to
answer your research question [which] is the most important consideration in qualitative
sampling decisions” (p. 70). The twelve students shared general information about their
reflections as former GATE students, but some shared reflections about the early
recognition of their academic talent. Each student’s contemporaneous status in school and
post-secondary plans were examined as well. The first session ended with their completion
of a questionnaire. The researcher employed the following with the guidance of an advisor
in selecting participants for the study:

1. Selected comprehensive high schools that had former GATE students enrolled.
   Schools were selected on the basis of their urban nature, the number of
disadvantaged students they served, and the specialized programs they offered.
2. The school district alternative high schools were surveyed in order to find possible
   former GATE students in attendance who planned to graduate from an alternative
   school; in addition, students in this setting with either plans or no plans to continue
   their education at a four-year college after graduation were sought.
3. The researcher applied for and received the required permission from the school
district’s Human Research and Development department for the study.
4. The researcher met with affected school principals in order to gain access to the
counseling department, student transcripts, and other pertinent information about
potential study participants.
5. The researcher communicated with selected counselors to identify students who met the criteria.

6. The researcher and the designated counseling personnel selected the students for the study.

7. Students signed a necessary protocol form, stipulating an agreement to meet with the researcher twice and to complete a questionnaire as truthfully as possible.

8. Pertinent human subject permission information was obtained from student participants and their parents by the researcher before the inquiry began.

Data Collection

Maxwell (1996) suggested data collection as a third step in qualitative methodology. The data were collected through student interviews and questionnaires. In collecting a variety of meaningful data, this researcher collected data that provided insight and gave contextual understanding of the students. In addition to interviewing students, their parents were interviewed at least once as well, when possible. A brief outline follows which illustrates the instruments that were used to derive information on gifted and talented students and post-secondary outcomes.

1. High school test scores, grade point average, and class rank
2. School profiles
3. A questionnaire
4. Two interviews
5. A parent, teacher, or counselor interview (when possible)

Data were derived from information on Gifted and Talented students from the school district of study. The data included the history of the Gifted and Talented Program, the
number of students involved throughout the years, and current pertinent figures on GATE student involvement. School district guidance and GATE department offices were the sources of information regarding post-secondary student plans. Data were collected regarding student test scores and grades from the registrars of the participant’s school of attendance.

The capstone of the study included the fourth step of Maxwell’s (1996) components: data analysis. This step involved summarizing, synthesizing, and contextualizing the information by poring over taped interviews, questionnaires, school profiles, and student, parent and professional reflections. Recurring themes in the lives of gifted and talented students were analyzed as well.

This study recognized the challenge of educating every student to his or her potential as an unfinished task. In addition, although much has been written about the chasm between the achievers and non-achievers in school, this study sought to find answers to the problem as it pertains to the gifted and talented disadvantaged student. As long as gifted and talented students begin their academic years with promise only to limp to the graduation line or give up before they get there, this nation may never realize its fullest potential, and its gifted individuals may live beneath their potential in terms of choices and lifestyle.

Perhaps America can continue to prosper economically so long as only some of its citizens are well educated, but can we be sure of that? Should we settle for so little? What about the wasted human potential and blighted lives of those left behind? (Center for Education Reform, 1998, p.3).

The methods for studying and comparing these two groups of students were designed to question students who were affected in an attempt to find some answers to the problem. By perusing a composite of grades, test scores, parental impressions, interview questions, and
questionnaires, this researcher hoped to scrutinize areas of concern that may have been overlooked. By navigating sensitively into the lives of the students and by studying analytically their individual profiles, this researcher hoped to gain real understanding of the contextual factors that cause some gifted and talented, disadvantaged students to excel and some to languish.

Intrinsic in the qualitative research design for this study were methods that are espoused by Bodgan and Biklen (1998). The methods used in this study included in-depth interviewing, inductive analysis, and the crafting of briefly written life histories based on descriptive data that were provided by each participant. An effort was made to gain contextual understanding of the personal, social, and institutional influences on their choices, decisions, and post-secondary plans.

Prior to contacting students, counselors, or school principals, approval to study human subjects was sought from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Institutional Review Board for the research study beginning in March 2003. Additionally, approval was sought from a school district Human Subjects Research Review Committee. Once these steps were completed and the necessary approvals obtained, the qualitative study of the participants began.

The connection between researcher and participant is critical as stated by Maxwell (1996): “Your relationship with those you study is a complex and changing entity” (p. 66). He interpreted this as much deeper than negotiating entry and establishing rapport; that is, there is greater importance involved in establishing a relationship that would facilitate rather than place constraints on the research. Once the research was approved, this researcher negotiated entry by following the protocol of contacting the school principal, obtaining his/her permission, working with the guidance department, contacting students,
and letting students and parents know the role and intentions of this researcher. This provided a non-threatening framework from which to begin the research. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), "Getting permission to conduct the study involves more than getting an official blessing. It involves laying the groundwork for good rapport with those with whom you will be spending time, so they will accept you and what you are doing. Helping them feel they had a hand in allowing you in will help your research" (p. 76).

Analysis of Data

The first step in data analysis was to listen to the taped recordings of interviews prior to transcription. The next step involved transcription and reading through and organizing and reorganizing notes as mentioned by Maxwell (1996). The three analytic options mentioned by Maxwell (1996) included "writing memos, categorizing strategies (such as coding and thematic analysis), and contextualizing strategies (such as narrative analysis, individual case studies, and ethnographic microanalysis)" (p. 78). The researcher utilized the three strategies to some degree.

In interpreting and categorizing materials to better understand the data, researchers often engage in coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 1996). Coding involves searching through and reviewing accumulated data and delineating certain words, themes, patterns, events and participant interpretations (Maxwell, 1996). An example of coding in this research project included categorizing, arranging and rearranging the data at times. Using a constant comparative model, the researcher compared the underlying and recurring themes of their elementary, middle, and high school experiences. Glaser (1978) suggested that the researcher write about the categories by providing descriptive accounts of key incidents while looking for other new
incidents. He further surmised that the researcher might then review and analyze the data, working with an emerging model as the basic processes and relationships unfold. In this case study, student personal experiences, external and parental influences were explored. If the findings uncovered similarities, they were coded as recurring themes. A process-coding scheme, as discussed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), was used as well. In this instance the participants’ academic histories were written and discussed chronologically. “Typical process codes point to the time periods, stages, phases, steps, careers, and chronology” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 174). This researcher organized student experiences based upon what they remembered about early elementary school and GATE placement, their latter elementary school years, and then their middle and high school experiences.

Data collection included interviews, questionnaires, transcripts, and when applicable, parent reflections, school profiles, and researcher notes. This triangulation of data collection reduced the risk of “systemic biases or limitations of a specific method” (Maxwell, 1996). Denzin (1970) also supported triangulation since it is a collection of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings through the use of various methods.

One end result of the study was to attempt to develop theories regarding disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students’ aspirations. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a researcher must understand description, conceptual ordering, and theorizing. In describing the selected gifted and talented students’ experiences, the researcher was telling a story through a case study approach. As promoted by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), this researcher organized the data according to key issues and recurring themes. Categories of focus using conceptual ordering and event classification were subsequently completed.
The researcher worked to authenticate the research through triangulation, member checks, ethical practices, deep listening, and accurate recording. Although triangulation and member checks substantiated research findings, validity threat may persist because one needs a checking mechanism for discovering “a way you might be wrong” (p. 88). To Maxwell, ways of guarding against invalid description include the use of tape recordings and verbatim transcriptions. He further recommended detailed, concrete, chronological observation notes, which were maintained by the researcher.

The researcher also strove to avoid another validity trap discussed by Maxwell (1996): researcher agenda, which is a failure to listen closely to participants’ perceptions of the meaning of their world. As it involves imposing one’s own framework or meaning to the participant’s perceptions, it poses a main threat to valid interpretation. To guard against validity threat the researcher objectively and inductively collected, recorded and interpreted the data.

Finally, another research threat arises from formulating personal theories. Spradley (1980) discussed the dangers of “culture bound” theories. Researchers who are members of a dominant culture often have a method of viewing the world through a set prism of what is acceptable and what is not. However, Spradley suggested, “Before you impose your theories on the people you study, find out how the people define their world” (p. 14). Through ethnographic study, listening, and paying close attention to detail, the researcher can derive at grounded theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Although a formal ethnography was not done in this study, an ethnographical approach to this study proved especially insightful and beneficial in the study of disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students from varied cultural, social, and economic backgrounds.
A trait qualitative researchers are concerned with is reliability. Two individuals from various disciplines may derive different or varying results based upon observations at a given time, and they can both yield reliable results (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). An example given points out that psychologists, social workers, educators, and sociologists may interpret research differently. According to Bogdan and Biklen, "In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Our researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in a study rather than the literal consistency across difference observations" (p. 36). Reliability is an important factor and can be viewed from the source of the writer's perspective, which is influenced greatly by their training. In this case, the researcher's background as a public, secondary school educator provided knowledgeable and reliable entry into the discussion regarding disadvantaged, gifted high school students.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the fast changing multicultural, technological, and political dynamics of the world require an educated U.S populace of citizens who are able to process information in a thorough and timely manner. If the U.S. is to maintain its position as a world power and protect hard won freedoms, the education of each student must count. In order to have the best-trained workforce, each student must perform at his or her maximum potential (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The lives and academic histories of these students may shed some light on what can be done to motivate more disadvantaged, academically talented students to take the requisite
courses and strategize and seek enrollment into a college or university upon graduation from high school.

An important conclusion will inform and remind educators of their critical influence on impressionable lives and of their responsibility for informed guidance and role modelship. Moreover, secondary administrators can benefit from the stories of these achievers. It is hoped that this study will clearly promote pro-activity on the part of school leaders toward implementing academic programming and early exposure to preparation and educational opportunities for all students, particularly the often but inexcusably “left behind” disadvantaged, gifted, and talented student.
CHAPTER 4

PORTRAITURE: TWELVE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS, THEIR STORIES AND ASPIRATIONS

Introduction

A glimpse into the lives of twelve disadvantaged students who were identified and placed in courses for gifted and talented students in elementary school and their subsequent odyssey through middle and high school is presented here. Each student has unique recollections, reflections, and perceptions of his or her experiences. Their stories combine to present a rich tapestry of the cultural, social, and school experiences of former Gifted and Talented Education students. An individual and holistic analysis of their experiences provides a contextual understanding of the challenges of gifted students. It further helps the researcher to formulate recommendations for systemic change in institutional practices and helps to explore the implications for school leaders considering a proactive role in providing enhancement opportunities for academically talented, disadvantaged students.

The participants who graduated from high school were all members of the graduating high school class of 2003. Each participant was born in 1984 or 1985. There are six males and six females in the study, representing a diverse cross-section of students including three African-Americans, two Asian-Americans, three Hispanic-Americans, two Caucasian Americans, one Native American, and one person who describes himself as both Native and African-American. Half of the students in the study were born and
raised in the subject setting. Three others were born in neighboring states. Three others were born in foreign countries: one in Guatemala, one in the Netherlands, and one in the Philippines. All of the students resided and attended school in a large, 260,000+ student populated school district, located in the Southwest region of the United States.

The high schools that the students attended represented a range of school types. Two of the students attended Central High School, a comprehensive high school located in the north central part of the city. Two others attended Eastern, a comprehensive urban high school in the eastern central part of the city. These four students attended highly diverse, urban schools that are not particularly known for strong academics. Six students attended magnet schools that have, overall, moderate to high test scores. One magnet school in particular, is known for its outstanding math, science, and teaching magnet components. The other is an international baccalaureate school. The remaining two students attended school district alternative programs.

The students' curricular interests, co-curricular activities, special interests, and abilities cover a wide range. Several are multi-talented. Although, as a group, working was not a priority during the academic year, most of the students worked at least part-time in the summer of 2003. By the fall, however, at least five of them enrolled in a college or university as full-time students. Three of them planned to do so out of state. Three participants planned to attend a local community college and one had plans to enter the Job Corp in a northern city within the state.

All of the students are either from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, were raised in single-parent households, or have serious health issues within their families. Eight of the students qualify for a state scholarship worth $10,000. Six of the students accepted the scholarship, half attending the local university and half attending a local
community college. At least one of the students elected to attend a more competitive school outside of the state. Five of the college-bound participants will be the first in their families to attend college. Interestingly, most of the students cite math as their favorite subject, with all of them revealing that academics come easy for them.

It is the rich mixture of backgrounds and experiences that make their stories unique and worth telling. While all of the students think of themselves as smart, with one claiming brilliance, each displayed both humility and a thirst to be challenged. Within their storylines there are varying degrees of support and influence from family, peers, school personnel, and community organizations. In spite of their circumstantial differences, most are focused and expressed their intentions to take advantage of educational and travel opportunities. What separates them are their individual stories and perceptions.

Having faced a variety of life circumstances, each portrayed a strength and resilience unique to their individual situations. Whether they will be the first in the family to achieve a baccalaureate degree, to overcome perceived prejudicial attitudes, or to triumph over less than desirable circumstances or regrettable personal choices, most of them voiced a determination to rise above their present situations and pursue a destiny that they will craft for themselves.

Student Portraits

Adam Kennedy: The Bold and the Balanced

Adam is focused on his schoolwork and credits his good study skills to the structure that was set at home for he and his younger sister during their elementary school years. He vividly remembers his parents setting school-related parameters in his home and their
philosophy regarding grades, "Like my Mom and Dad always said, 'We are not going to
give you money for your report cards because you don't do it for us, you do it for
yourselves" (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). This early academic regimen of
going home from school and doing homework was habit forming, and today his mother
does not question him about homework concerns. He credits her as the one who "set the
foundation and gave the good habit" (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). Adam
was raised in a two-parent home until his father passed away in 2001. Adam recalls the
balance that his father provided to his life in not only helping him with homework, but
also taking him to baseball games.

The death of his father, which took place during his sophomore year in high school,
was a difficult time for Adam. He reflects that he lost his father to cancer, and that it was
a great personal loss. He is somewhat buoyed, however, by the interest that his rather
large, extended family on his mother's side has shown to him and his sister. They are
expressly proud of Adam's academic prowess and sometimes good-naturedly chide the
class salutatorian for being number two in his graduating class.

Adam is an engaging, alert, and a personable young adult who values education, but
also ranks friends and social activities as important aspects of his life. As student body
president, Adam has many associates and acquaintances, including a few close friends to
whom he speaks with on the phone regularly and whose friendship he values greatly.
He stated that most of his friends plan to go to college after graduating from high school.
Along with his many school and leadership activities, he is also a member of the Key
Club, Mu Alpha Beta Honor Society, and is a student representative on the school Budget
Committee. He was involved in the Kiwanis Club in high school, as well.
Adam was placed in the Gifted and Talented Education Program in the fourth grade. He was excited about his selection and participation in GATE. He recalls that his friends were excited and impressed with his GATE placement. He further reminisced that he attended an elementary school where the work was challenging all the way through fourth grade, but he transferred to an older, urban elementary school during the fifth grade. At this school he felt he was a year more advanced than his classmates.

When he was promoted to a nearby middle school, he found the work unchallenging and disjointed so much that he vividly recalls significant interruptions to his learning. Both his English and Spanish teachers left during the school year: one due to illness and the other due to other employment. Substitute teachers subsequently taught these classes. He remembers the period as “terrible and nothing was done the rest of the year” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). Adam laments that his English skills are not as good as they could be as a result of his never having a solid English class in middle school. On the other hand, in math, his favorite subject, he stated that his teachers were solid. In addition to instructional vacuums, Adam expresses that there were many school and class disruptions due to the number of disruptive students at his assigned middle school during grades six through eight. This was disturbing to Adam. Regarding his middle school peers, he stated, “The students don’t know the value of an education in the middle school. They are thinking ‘this is nothing,’ we can mess around. They don’t know the effect that this is going to have on them. It was kinda tough there” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). Overall, Adam did not feel that his middle school course work prepared him well for high school.

Despite his setbacks in middle school, he remained self-motivated and sustained an interest in academics. He is very confident in his speaking and leadership abilities. His
interpersonal skills are strong, and he communicated that others never intimidate him in
the classroom even when they may be more academically able than he is. In middle
school, his aspirations were to attend an elite four-year college. His college interests
centered on Stanford and Yale University. In high school he traded in those elite college
aspirations by choosing to attend a local university close to home in order to avoid
substantial post-graduate debt upon graduation from college and to receive the type of
one-on-one help he believes he can find at the local university. He plans to complete a
mission for his church at some point during his undergraduate years, then resume college
attendance, finish his baccalaureate, and maybe attend an out-of-state college for graduate
school.

Adam attends a highly diverse, inner-city high school located in the central part of the
city. Adam acknowledges that others may not consider the high school he attends as the
most challenging, but indicates that even some students taking regular courses at his
school plan to attend college. As an example, Adam mentioned how a student in a
regular English class where he worked as a student aide had plans to attend college.
Adam enrolled in mostly honors and AP courses in high school. Although academics
come easy for Adam, he encountered two courses that he found notably difficult. He
philosophically recalls that both classes were challenging and had great teachers, where
he “totally learned.” In one of those classes, AP Government, Adam was the only student
who earned an A in AP Government the third quarter. He felt great satisfaction about this
accomplishment.

A self-avowed procrastinator, Adam stated that he did not work as hard in high school
as he could have; he further relates that if he were given the opportunity to relive his
school years, he would be more studious. According to Adam, a student can learn how to
work the system in high school by finding out what they need to do to make A’s and by just doing that. He recalls only two classes in which “there was no working it (the system). You had to work hard” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). Adam prides himself on the fact that he was one of the few students in his classes who would regularly have no missing assignments.

Adam has mixed feelings regarding his classroom instructors. While he feels that only a few of his classes really challenged him in high school, he also feels that most of his teachers placed high expectations on him to do the assigned work. He stated that in the classroom he is expected to know the answers to questions. On school counselors, he opines they are “overrated.” He is especially appreciative, however, of one of his counselors, whom he feels helped him with his college paperwork and with making him aware of information. The chairperson of the counseling department indicated that the school assisted Adam with some of his college application and testing fees due to his disadvantaged circumstances.

Adam credits his success as a student to good parenting, choosing friends with similar morals and aspirations, perseverance, academic and social balance, staying busy with school and church activities, avoiding conflict with other students, avoiding negative peer pressure, and staying focused.

During Senior Awards Night, Adam Kennedy was recognized as the class salutatorian and as a High Honors graduate. He was awarded the President’s Award for Educational Excellence, the Key Club Medallion of Service, and National Honor Society recognition. He was also awarded two college scholarships. His post-secondary aspirations include pursuing a career in dentistry or in the pharmaceutical field.
Adam was first in his immediate family to attend college when he enrolled in the fall of 2003. While he did well academically in high school, he consistently ranked social activities as a priority and as one of the things he liked best about school. A recurring theme was that he did not feel that school was as challenging for him as it could have been. He also recognized that college would be different. "I know that in college it will be more time to get serious. In high school, I can just do whatever and still get A's. School is not hard. I do have one hard class--U.S. Government A.P.; it's tough" (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

When he considers his future, Adam reflects upon the lessons that were instilled in him and his sister by their parents: "Me and my sister were taught well what we need to be doing. We know that what we do, we do for ourselves, and that the choices that we make are going to break or make us. If we want to work our butts off and barely get by for the rest of our lives, that's the choice we make, but I think we are well-focused for that sort of thing" (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

Kaitlyn Smith: "Alright, Dust Yourself Off and Get Up"

Katy remembers her tumultuous home life very well and is pensive as she voluntarily discusses her disjointed childhood and coming of age. She disclosed that she is the product of a home where her father was an alcoholic and where, according to Katy, her mother was "either too stupid or too scared to do anything" (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). One of five children in a family that includes three sisters and a stepsibling, Katy has varying relationships with her siblings, parents, and step-parents. As a resident of a group home, she visits her mother and younger siblings each weekend, but sees an older sister, whom she considers to be her best friend, more frequently. She
brushes her blonde hair back on occasion during the conversation, but mostly listens intently. She directly answers questions, providing excellent eye contact, but with a twinge of uneasiness.

Katy stated that she was placed in the GATE program in the second grade. She recalls being indifferent about this placement, as were her peers. Her recollection of her early years relative to placement in GATE are:

Like, I didn’t even know what it was for. I got in it when I was in second grade. They called me in this room for a test and I was like, ‘OK.’ Somehow, I guess my Mom was excited, and I was like, what? And I went, [and] I switched schools that year. It was my third grade year, and I went to a different school and I had a GATE program there. And it was early in the morning, and I hated getting up early in the morning. We had to go to school, like, two hours earlier. We had to be at school at seven and all the other kids had to be at school at nine (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

Although Katy took her GATE placement in stride, she did recall that she enjoyed making solar cars and testing them during early morning hours. This was obviously a time of intrigue for Katy, who gave a knowing, pleasant nod when she spoke of this time during her early years. Katy shared that things were “OK” until second grade, and then things “went downhill. It went from worse to worse” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). She described an abusive, alcoholic father, “whether drunk or sober,” a docile mother, and an oldest sister who was “psycho.” She shared that this sister “beat us up all the time” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

By the time she reached middle school, Katy’s parents were divorced. She painfully recalls that her father placed her in a mental hospital in the eighth grade, causing her to
miss her entire eighth grade year in middle school. She was eventually removed from her home and placed in a local child facility. Because of this interruption to her education, Katy did not feel well prepared for high school. She cynically enjoins that her opinion is that her father had her placed in the local child facility because she “put a damper on the relationship between him and his new wife,” and they decided that she was not well (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). Of the time she did spend in middle school, she confessed that she “hated it because she was smart and not popular” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

Due to difficult and changing circumstances in her life, Katy was not focused on her future educational aspirations in middle school. Instead, she grappled with the realities of living in state and county institutions. While residing at a halfway residence for displaced teens, Katy ran away for what she steadfastly states were good reasons.

I was living in group homes, but the staff was being abusive. Like, they were slamming kids up against brick walls and stuff. So, I ran away from there, and the cops came and got me from where I was at. They, like…child protective services came and they talked to me and they said, ‘Okay, we’ll look into it and we’ll get back to you.’ They took pictures of my bruises and they never got back to me. I stayed at the county for seven months, and they never did anything (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

Despite her extreme domestic difficulties, Katy understood the value of an education. She indicated that she sustained her interest in academics and high school graduation through self-motivation. Predictably, Katy acknowledges that she had academic problems in high school. Along with domestic problems, she cites that she attended three high schools including an alternative high school: “…I lost a lot of credits and I’ve had
to work my butt off so I could graduate on time" (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). Along with working hard to retrieve her credits, Katy worked at a fabric store after school. She enjoyed working, but admits that this affected the amount of time that she had to work on her schoolwork. Katy takes pride in the fact that she was on track to graduate on time with her class in 2003.

Her post-secondary plans included moving to the northern part of the state to attend Job Corp. There she plans to major in auto mechanics. Katy’s interest in automotive gadgets spans back to her early years when she was fascinated with solar cars that were built and tested in her GATE classes. This latent interest was revived in high school when she began to learn more about automobiles. “When I was in, like, tenth grade I had a bunch—like, I don’t hang out with a lot of females, I hang out with a lot of guys. And we were all hanging out at the house and they were working on cars, and I just started learning” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). Now, her hobby is working on cars. Besides her sister, Katy stated that most of her other friends are males. Friendships are important to her, and despite a difficult time in middle school, she cultivated a friendship that endures.

My best friend has been with me through everything. [We] met in sixth grade and he changed my life completely. Before sixth grade, I had a huge fear of guys because of my father and his friends, but he taught me that guys are not all that bad and now I hang out with guys more. He’s been there for me through all the stuff I went through with my dad, my mom, and my entire family—he just stuck by me (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

As far as associations go, Katy indicated that she has friends, acquaintances, and associates. In interacting with her peers, there were times when she was asked to take
part in activities that were against her principles. Katy indicated, “I told them I wouldn’t do that. That’s what my response was” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). Katy reports having friends with various ambitions. A few plan to go to college; one is joining the Marines while another one is planning to attend a culinary arts school. Three of her friends plan to be mechanics; one will attend Arizona Institute, while another will attend Wyoming Tech, alas, another one will attend an automotive school in Reno.

Katy is looking forward to pursuing her career of choice, but foresees that her gender may be an issue at some point. “The field that I want to be in is a male-dominated field. So, there is possibly a chance for discrimination because I am a female, and that’s basically it” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). She revealed the one major reason why she desires to become a mechanic: Katy wants to be a mechanic to show her father, who is a mechanic, that she can excel in his occupation. “I want to prove that I could be a better mechanic than him and if I work on a car, it would actually run” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). The idea of pursuing higher education and attending college was introduced to Katy. College, however, never interested her.

As a student Katy has had mixed experiences with teachers and counselors. One memorable teacher was her sixth grade science teacher, Ms. Simpson. She was a mentor to Katy and other students. Katy ruefully states, “All the places I’ve been, she came and got me” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). She also reminisced about a middle school counselor she thought was “cool,” but indicated that she was a discipline problem in middle school, mostly because of her outspokenness.

In high school she stated that she has been placed on Required Parent Conference (RPC) much less than she had been in middle school, but she appears to be at odds with some of her high school teachers.
Last year, I had a, Mr. Mason. I still can’t stand him. He got me RPC’d this year, and I’m not even in his class. He said I walked by him in the hall everyday popping my gum. He said I walk up to his face and I pop it right in his ear. First of all, I have a tongue ring. I can’t pop my gum anymore because of my tongue ring. Second of all, I’m not stupid enough to walk up to him in front of the whole school in the hallway and pop my gum right in his ear (Personal communication, May 5, 2003).

On the last day of school, Katy plans to move out of the group home where she resides. She will live with her favorite older sister while she continues to make plans to move to a northern city in the state to attend Job Corp. She indicates that her sister is very supportive of her. As she looks to the future Katy acknowledges that there will be other challenges, but that she feels “fairly prepared” for her post-secondary challenges. Displaying a resilient spirit, she indicates that during difficult times her attitude is, “Alright, dust yourself off and get up” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). It is this resolve that she takes with her into the world, recognizing that she has experienced a lot in her young life but knowing she has the motivation to go forward and the confidence to fashion a career that will allow her to do what she loves: working on cars.

Joshua Kayak: Somewhere a Connection Has to Be Made

Joshua is an outgoing, spontaneous, and obviously bright student who describes himself as “Native-American, African-American, and a little white somewhere” (Personal Communication, May 28, 2003). Warm and reflective, his hair is coiffed in neatly kept dread-locks. Thus, his appearance is more Caribbean than Native or African-American. In addition, his mannerism reflects an animated individual with a contagious quick smile, which often evolves into intermittent laughter.
Joshua attends an inner-city school that has been designated as needing improvement by the state’s department of education. As a high school sophomore, he opted to attend a community college high school program but voluntarily returned to his zoned high school to be with friends and a larger and more varied student population. He also admits to not returning his waiver paperwork in time for re-enrollment, contributing to his non-return to the community college high school, a fact that disappointed his counselor and the administration at the Community College High School.

Joshua is the oldest of four siblings who are being raised in a single-parent home. His mother has a security position at a gaming establishment. Joshua is very close to his mother and indicated that she has had the greatest impact upon his education and life. He shared that she would always push him, but that he also pushes himself. During his younger years, his grandmother encouraged him to aspire for an elite college or university. Although heavily courted by Yale University recruiters in the spring of his senior year, Joshua decided instead to attend a local college, citing extreme distance, inclimate weather, and close family ties as reasons to bypass the Ivy League.

Identified as a gifted and talented student in the first grade, Joshua was excited about being placed in the GATE program. As an elementary school student, he recalls that his peers were aware of his being pulled out of the class for GATE activities, but were indifferent and preoccupied with playing and other activities. As an accelerated student in middle school, however, he recalls his peers being mean-spirited regarding his placement in higher-level courses. Joshua was called names like “nerd,” but he did not internalize the negativity. Instead his response was, “OK, whatever you say, I guess I am a nerd then... I guess” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003). He found this method of deflecting ill will about his academic advancement to be effective, and in high school he
stated that he and other honors classmates made it a game to see who could earn the best grades. Joshua places a premium on friendship and enjoys talking to his friends who are “more on the intellectual side.” He continued, “We can sit down and argue and debate about something and then the next minute, OK, we’re friends again” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

Although his circle of friends intend to attend college right after high school, he is disturbed by the number of his classmates who do not seem to value the opportunity to get a college education. “Most of the students don’t come to school that often and don’t pay attention in class, or they just don’t really care. Like, a lot of the people don’t plan on going to college. I’m like, ‘you have to go to college to get a good job,’ and they are like ‘I will find a way.’ That’s their decision, but I say (to them) I would urge you to go to college” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

Joshua set college attendance as a goal in middle school, and despite marginal and unchallenging schooling, he sustained his interest in academics and higher learning. He is very self-motivated and cites the greatest impact upon his decision to attend or not to attend college was himself. He further asserted that college enrollment is extremely important to his future and that he could not imagine not attending college after high school. His school counselor made positive remarks about his motivation, confidence, ambition and intelligence.

Although he always liked school, Joshua indicated a shift in his keen interest in school by his sophomore year in high school. He reminisced that in elementary school “like your teachers knew you and [they] knew what you could do and what you couldn’t do and how to work around that” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003). Joshua relayed that he saw a distinct change in middle school when students began to relate to different
teachers, in usually overcrowded situations, in which teachers did not have enough time for students.

I went to schools that were too overcrowded and [teachers] were too busy to be able to say ‘OK, I know you can do this’ and give you something and ‘OK, you are fine’ with the kids who needed a little more help. They just couldn’t do it. They had to hurry up and rush and so, those that couldn’t, said ‘OK’ and stopped. They just had to worry about the others and keeping going (Personal Communication May 9, 2003).

Although Joshua felt that students were being left behind, he empathized with the teachers.

It’s really hard, though. I can’t put it on the teachers. They have a lot to do. Somewhere they have to make that connection with students. I had a couple teachers where you just make that connection as soon as you walk in the door and you know this is just a great teacher. ‘Oh, my gosh, I can talk to them.’ This is like a great teacher (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

The disconnect between teachers and students began to weigh on Joshua’s coursework by the time he reached the ninth grade. He had found middle school to be quite easy and in the beginning stages of his ninth grade year, “I was always like, oh let’s hurry up and get my work done. Then I saw like, well it doesn’t seem to change, whether I do my work or not so I would do it but I would not do it as well as I normally would” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

Joshua shared that in his formative years if he finished his work he would get immediate feedback from teachers, and then they would then give him more work. However, this changed in the ninth grade. Joshua found that when he finished his work early as a freshman,
It was like OK, and I would just sit around. And then I was like it’s kind of boring so why not just wait. Do [the work] slower or maybe not as well, I don’t know. I would like get bored, then when I got bored, I don’t want to do any [work]” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

Reflectively Joshua indicated that in high school,

They don’t have time to worry about one student; they have to worry about it as a whole. It’s really about: OK, we have to get them to the next grade; not if they’re going to be behind or ahead, but we just have to get them to graduate. I think that’s the main thing. We just have to get them to graduate (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

During difficult times in high school Joshua indicated he would “bounce back and just keep going” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003). At one time he was extremely shy and self-conscious. However, he participated in a dance routine at school and was so roundly complimented that he lost most of his shyness and now considers himself a more outgoing person. He stated that he is still a procrastinator, though. Joshua senses, on occasion, that others in the school are sometimes surprised at his intelligence as a person of color. Ambivalently, he first states that he cannot stand it, and it makes him sad. But then he optimistically states that “I’m happy that I am changing their perception a little; seeing I can do it, there are others who can do it” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

In the fall of 2003, Joshua plans to attend a local university. His aspirations are to major in engineering and interior design. He hopes to earn his degree in four years and make business-related contacts along the way. He would love to attend graduate school
in Southern California, and preferably in San Diego, with the goal of eventually making his home there.

At the annual school awards ceremony Joshua garnered substantial recognition. Along with having earned an advanced diploma, he was recognized as a high honor graduate, a [school] scholar, and a state scholarship candidate. He received two scholarships to a university located in the Northern part of the state, and was awarded scholarships from the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. and a Phi Delta Kappa Scholarship from Gamma Sigma. Joshua takes this recognition in stride, placing more emphasis on enrolling in college in the fall, pursuing his goals, and getting along well with others. He dreamily speaks of making San Diego, California his home one day and has made it a part of his future goals.

*ChýAnne Weeks: Destiny's Child, "I've Got to Do This”*

Teaching low stanine math students in a high school setting is ChýAnne’s dream. She attends a local magnet school that has an emphasis on preparing future classroom teachers. ChýAnne’s coursework involves lesson planning, educational internships, and student teaching. ChýAnne thrives on this teaching-centered curriculum so much so that she baby-sits after school, tutors students, and teaches Sunday school. Her constant engagement in this area signifies her love of children. Full of life and confidence, ChýAnne has a warm smile and quick laugh that exudes alertness. She was both warm and reflective as she shared her personal odyssey as a GATE student, her middle school academic experiences, and her times at the magnet high school from which she graduated in June of 2003.
ChýAnne’s mother passed away when she was twelve years old. She has since resided with an adoptive family that was a close friend of her mother. Upon her mother’s death, ChýAnne became part of a blended family that included adoptive parents and siblings: a biological sister and two half-siblings.

ChýAnne is a determined, Native American young adult who exudes confidence and a positive attitude. She is focused and seems mature for her age. She was placed in the GATE program as a third grader. She recalls being excited to have been placed in the program and that her peers were impressed. Her classmates teased her, “Ooooh, ChýAnne is smart!” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). She recalls her elementary school years as a pleasant time in her life and expressed that participating in the GATE program had a positive influence on her later academics.

Yes, it really made me feel that I was smart. I never really felt that I wasn’t smart, and that I could do it. It was a lot of motivation. Like, I can do things and should not be afraid of what other people think…that if people think I am a dork or a nerd. In the long run, I’m going to get the education and they won’t (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

By the time she was in middle school, ChýAnne was eligible to take accelerated courses and was subsequently selected to enroll in a middle school magnet program. It was during this time that she noticed an obvious change in the attitude of some of her peers toward her. She experienced what she felt was a jealous reaction from a few of her academically able peers who were not selected to attend the math magnet middle school. “They got mad that I was in here, and they weren’t. I get that from some people. I just said, ‘I do what I have to do and that is the reason I am here’” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).
During her middle school years, ChýAnne faced several dramatic changes in her life circumstances: the death of her mother, in particular, and her subsequent placement in an adoptive family situation. Trying as this time was, she nonetheless set academic goals for herself and developed a steel determination to attend college. ChýAnne recalls this period as the time in her life when she resolved to do her best in middle school and in high school. "My mother’s death really kicked my butt... In seventh grade, [my] whole year, I was really depressed, but in eighth grade I was— ‘I’ve got to do this’ and that’s why I kicked my butt into gear" (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). While coping with the death of her mother, ChýAnne remembered an encounter with a school counselor that she found disappointing:

When I was in middle school I lived by my school, but my mother died in seventh grade year. My new adoptive parents lived all the way in [a suburban area]. I continued seventh grade and they did not change because of the law. Then eighth grade my permanent residence was [a suburban area] and I still wanted to go to [my magnet middle school]. I had been there for two years and still wanted to go there. My counselor said, ‘No,’ I need to move on. I’m like, I’m in eighth grade, my mother died a year ago, now you’re telling me I can’t even go to a school that I’ve been going to for two years? On top of my mother dying, I have to go to a new school, I’m living with a new family and you want me to do everything. That’s the problem I had with him, but then my new adoptive mom called the superintendent, and I got in there right away’’ (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

Despite this incident, ChýAnne found her overall middle school experience satisfying, and expressed that the coursework she had in middle school adequately prepared her for
the high school magnet program she would eventually enter. Therefore, when she started
high school, ChýAnne pursued the goals that she first established in middle school.

As a high school student, ChýAnne is focused and motivated. She revels in the
magnet school learning community and values the knowledge that she gained:

I relish the things that I learn. It is interesting; like I can go from not knowing
anything to knowing so much. I love that. I love the interaction with people (teachers
and fellow classmates), doing projects, and having discussions (Personal

The magnet school where ChýAnne attends specializes in math, science, and teacher
preparation. ChýAnne spoke highly of her principal, indicating that he had always been
there and supported her. She reported having a few slightly testy situations with
counselors and teachers, but philosophized that in the long run she learned from the
incidents. “If I have a bad situation with a teacher, I learn something. I learn I do not
want to be like that” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). ChýAnne described her
teachers as having high expectations for her work; she also remarked how most of the
school’s staff seemed interested in providing her with the support and encouragement she
would occasionally need. ChýAnne has consequently thrived in her school setting and is
dedicated to her studies.

The reason I do successfully in school is because my desire and my motivation [is] to
do well. I am not a genius. I’m very intelligent but it is mostly in part because of my
work ethic. I am willing to stay up until 3 o’clock in the morning doing a debate. I’m
doing a debate now for my English class. My debate is 10 pages typed. I’ve [taken]
that dedication to make sure I go to the library and get the research, and that’s what
makes me smart (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).
At the magnet high school where she attends, ChýAnne basically has acquaintances. She has a circle of friends outside of school, three young adults, one of whom is her boyfriend. ChýAnne considers the other female member of the group to be her best friend. She readily admits that her best friend does not value education as much as she does, but she still relentlessly encourages her to do well in her academic pursuits. “She’s always the one who makes sure I follow through with my projects, like ‘Did you do your projects?’ or ‘How are your grades?’ And if I get a low grade she will say, ‘Why did you do that? You should study.’ She really makes sure that I stay on track, even though she does not value education. She thinks I can be something. She wants me to be something. She states, “You can be so great; you’re so smart. Keep on track” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). ChýAnne deeply values her friendship with her close circle of three dear friends, particularly her best friend. She basks in this positive encouragement and influence from her best friend. On the other hand, she has had peers who have tried to influence her to do things that were against her principles many times. In these instances, ChýAnne stated that she stuck by her principles and said, “No, I won’t do that” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

ChýAnne is ambitious and was influenced to be an educator by her mother who was a classroom teacher. She considers herself fortunate to be in the magnet program and states,

I think it’s great. I have learned so much especially in the Teacher’s Academy. It is absolutely wonderful in the TEACH Academy. All the staff is supportive of everything we do and they are always willing to help us do more especially with teaching. The teachers are really helpful. If you ask for a lesson plan, everyone is
really helpful. Everyone is really helpful in the TEACH Academy. I love about [my magnet school], that they are helpful (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

ChyAnne indicated that she is having problems at home and wants to get a job at a bank so that she can move out as soon as she turns 18. She places a lot of confidence in her friends to be there for her. She is determined to enroll in college in the fall and has a steel mindset regarding accomplishing her goals in the future.

At her high school’s annual awards ceremony ChyAnne was honored as the most outstanding student in the TEACH Academy. In the fall of 2003, ChyAnne plans to attend a local university where she has already been accepted. She is eligible for a $10,000 scholarship award for her diligence and grade point average. ChyAnne plans to use these funds to complete her baccalaureate degree in four years; afterwards, she will obtain a math teaching position and then establish herself in a local school district.

Ever focused, ChyAnne seeks to strike a balance between academics and social activities; thus she is careful to prioritize her multi-faceted life:

It’s fun to do all the fun stuff but in the long run, is it really going to matter who I knew in high school, or if I was Prom Queen, [or] did I go to this certain football game? No. What matters is academics. I’ve come to realize that, especially this last semester of high school. All the extra stuff is fun, but in the long run what will matter is how I did in my classes. I will have my whole lifetime to make friends, but I won’t have my whole lifetime to get an education like this...I do have fun but I make sure I have all my other things done first so I don’t have to stress out (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

Although ChyAnne said she wishes she had participated in more activities while in high school, she was clearly satisfied that she did right by making academics her priority. As
she left her interview session to go to her after-school job, she seemed to walk with an aura of peace about what she had accomplished and would accomplish in the future.

*Marlin Banks: “Never Judge a Book by Its Cover”*

Tall and muscular looking, Marlin Banks’ appearance belies the fact that he is an avid reader and lover of English as well as a step dancer, basketball player, trackster, and one-time football player at his high school. Bright-eyed, alert, interested, and articulate, Marlin was thoughtful and sure of himself in conversation about his background and academic pursuits. Marlin’s two favorite subjects in school are math and English, but he also enjoys the social aspects of school. One reason for his enjoyment of school academics and activities is that his presence at school means, “being away from home” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

During Marlin’s formative years, he lived in a neighborhood that had a relatively high crime rate. Because he resided on the Westside of town, his parent, out of interest for his personal safety, forbade him to go outside to play.

When I was younger, I wasn't allowed outside for anything, so my scapegoat [sic] the only time I got to have fun and stuff like that, would be at school. So, I made that—I took that for an advantage, or whatever. I made the best of it (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

According to Marlin, since academic and social engagement is what he loves most about school, he literally hates it when his teachers refuse to call on him, which they do rather frequently, when he raises his hand. Marlin, concerned about this oft-repeated occurrence, once questioned a teacher about her habit of not calling on him in class:

I went up there and I asked her—one of my teachers—and she was like, ‘Well, I feel
you're doing too much, and you shouldn't be in this class.' And I was like, 'Well this
is an Honors class,' and stuff like that, and it's like, 'Well, you answer too many
questions; I need to call on other people' (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).
This response frustrated Marlin because, as he adamantly stated, he was not trying to
answer all of the questions; rather, he just wanted to participate. His readiness to answer
questions drew mixed responses from his teachers. The range of responses regarding his
alertness and class participation ranged from "Whatever" to "So what?" teacher attitudes.
Some teachers even took advantage of his eagerness and sharpness by having him grade
papers as an unassigned student aide since he usually completed his class work quite fast.
Marlin took this in stride, indicating,

It was alright. Cause it was like, it gave me something to do rather than sitting there.
I mean, cause, normally, I would just finish my work and be like the first person done
and get bored, and then start talking to other people and get in trouble. So, it kept me
from getting in trouble (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

During his senior year, he spends one-half of his school day at a senior high trade
school and the other half at a diverse, inner-city high school where he is zoned to attend.
It is apparent that Marlin thrives on the world of opportunities that are open to him in an
academic setting.

Marlin was placed in the GATE program in the second grade. He recalls that he was
excited about his placement in GATE. However, he remembers that his peers were
disapproving of his placement. His fellow students sometimes called him a "nerd" or a
"hip hop nerd." Marlin said he thought they were "real jealous" of him (Personal
Communication, May 7, 2003). If his peers ostracized him, he was completely supported
at home with regard to his educational pursuits. He stated that his mother has had the
greatest influence on his education. He earnestly recalled:

I remember, I was about two years old. I had already knew how to tie
my shoes and everything like that; she started teaching me everything.
So, by the time I was in Kindergarten, I was doing my older cousin’s
math homework and English homework and they were in middle school.
And then, she told me that once I was in fifth grade, ‘OK, this is the
make you or break you point—either you’re gonna let everyone around
you bring you down or you’re gonna make something out of yourself
and be prepared for high school.’ And with that in mind, I didn’t want
to let her down, so I didn’t let it break me; I made it make me (Personal

Marlin matter-of-factly spoke of a close relationship with his mother who checked his
homework each night and explained wrong answers to him. Cognizant of their
demography and geography, she took great care to monitor his associations.

When I was in school, she made sure I didn’t hang around the wrong people, so she
always asked my friends what they wanted to do in life, so that I wouldn’t be around
any negative people. And in elementary school, she just didn’t let me go outside
because it was a bad neighborhood; and she didn’t want me around that environment
and just kept me in the house (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

Marlin is the oldest of five siblings. He has two younger brothers and two younger
sisters. They reside with their mother. He has never known his father. Marlin recently
moved out on his own but is in contact with his mother.
Marlin was a GATE student through his sixth grade year and was placed in accelerated classes in the seventh and eighth grades. Marlin credits this to his mother’s proactivity in working with his school counselor, who suggested his schedule to his mother. Marlin recalls that he attended three middle schools. Teachers at these schools were “real strict” and placed high expectations on him. When he finished his work, they gave him extra work. He felt that he was pushed in middle school and was required to check over his work to ascertain whether he had the correct answers to problems.

As a natural progression, Marlin enrolled in mostly honors classes in his freshman and sophomore years. During his freshman year, Marlin made mostly good grades, but, as his high school years progressed, his grade point average began to decline. Marlin accepts responsibility for this and stated:

Um, as far as academically, I was real lazy last year in one of my classes, so it made my GPA drop. And as far as socially, I lost a lot of friends due to the fact that I didn’t want to go out and party. I wanted to stay home and do homework and make sure my grades stayed up (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

His lapse work ethic also created other disappointments. “I was ineligible for track and I had qualified to go to State. I became ineligible for State and cried...oh, I cried” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

As he progressed through his junior and senior years in high school, he took fewer honors courses and no AP courses. He indicated that some of his teachers encouraged him to take AP courses. However, the courses generally conflicted with the scheduling of the electronics classes he took, part of the day, as a junior and senior at the trade school. As far as contact with his counselors is concerned, he does not recall speaking to them until his senior year regarding graduation.
Marlin is pleased with his attendance at the trade high school because he earned credits toward a community college degree. He plans to attend a community college after high school, get an associate of arts degree, transfer to a local four-year college, and then transfer out of state and graduate from an out-of-state school.

While Marlin obviously enjoyed school and is generally positive about his experiences, there are ambiguities. On the one hand, he reported that most of the school personnel responded to him in a very positive manner, yet he shared several unpleasant incidents that irritated him:

In middle school, I had a math teacher that told me I wouldn’t be anything when I first got into the class—the first week of school. I mean, I was in the class and I didn’t speak cause I had just moved to a new school and I didn’t know anybody. I was very shy to answer questions and things like that. And then, one day, he had called on me to answer a question; and I didn’t want to answer it, and he was like, ‘well, you’re just dumb; you’re not gonna amount to anything.’ So, from there, my goal was to prove him wrong. And, I got an A in his class and made him sign me for accelerated math the next year (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

Marlin shared his other experiences that were both positive and negative responses regarding what his teachers and others thought about his intelligence. He especially remembers the reaction of his French teacher upon learning how well he grasped French. After taking French his freshman and sophomore years, Marlin claimed that the teacher wanted to skip him to French III, but he demurred because all of his friends were in French II. He said he enrolled in French II, but “got in a lot of trouble for talking” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).
Marlin expressed that some of the doubt and surprise he experienced from others had to do with stereotyping. Marlin feels that he is stereotyped frequently and related an incident that disturbed him:

One of my ex-girlfriend's mother didn't like me just by the way... she looked at me and didn't like me at first. And then once she seen that I was actually helping her daughter, cause I would tutor [her] in math and stuff like that, and once she seen that I was really smart, she came back and apologized for it. And I told her it was alright, cause most people do it (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

Marlin expressed that sometimes when people see that he is an African-American male dressed in baggy clothes, their first reaction is somewhat negative. Already steeled by the high frequencies of such incidents, Marlin foresees such attitudes as possible obstacles that he may have to overcome in the future to achieve his goals. Acquiring financial aid for college and "a lot more people trying to bring me down once I get to the college level" are two obstacles he believes he will have to hurdle (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003). He pointedly expressed his concerns regarding race and mobility in higher education:

They don't like to see people doing better than them. Especially when it's a young black male trying to come up in the world—they don't want to see that, no matter what. I believe it goes back to the stereotype thing. You see a black person they're automatically dumb, which goes all the way back to slavery and stuff like that... so a long line of history (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

In confronting his difficulties, Marlin chooses to write poetry or divert his energies to something positive. Generally, he does live to prove to people that they are wrong about him because his experience has been that most people eventually come back to apologize.
Friendships are important to Marlin. His best friend attends a local university, and he selected her as a friend because of her ability to engage with him in intellectual conversations. Furthermore, she is supportive and is always there for him. Outside of this friendship, he indicated that he basically has only associates. When peers have try to influence him to do something that is against his principles, he usually says “no”, but not every time. Because his tendencies lean toward academics, other students have said to him, “Oh, you suck,” or “You’re gay,” or have referred to him as “Pointdexter.” He usually shrugs off such statements with, “whatever.” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003) Despite this, Marlin has acquired mixed group of friends. Some will attend college; others will not.

At his high school Senior Awards Night, Marlin was recognized as an honors graduate and a candidate for the state scholarship. In the community, Marlin is involved in the Sigma Beta Club, an affiliate of the Sigma Beta fraternity, which mentors young adult males in the community by promoting positive activities and college aspirations. They were the group that introduced him to the concept of college, and have offered their support in helping him and other Sigma Beta Club members to achieve their college enrollment goals. Marlin’s immediate post-secondary plan is to attend a community college. Afterwards, he would like to attend graduate school at either Georgia Tech or UCLA.

Sherry Williams: The Young, Gifted, and Restless

Green lawns, picturesque buildings, young brothers and sisters with open books, lounging on campus greens beside staid administrative offices and not-so-new dormitories, all emanated a strong sense of culture; Sherry Williams took it all in on
her first tour of the historically black colleges. After touring colleges both her sophomore and junior years in high school, she had seen the likes of Grambling, Jackson State, Clark-Atlanta, Spellman, Morehouse, Morgan State, and Alabama State. She was struck by the uplifting cultural aspects of the campuses, the highly diverse faculty, the bookstores lined with cultural, Greek, and historically black college gear, and the warm Southern hospitality and verdant scenery of the South. For Sherry Williams, who was born and reared in a southwestern, arid desert, and mostly Mormon community, this was all new and excitingly different. It was during this time that Sherry decided to attend a historically black college after high school graduation.

Sherry considered herself fortunate to have the connection to and the acquaintance of Reverend Patrick Kelly, a youth pastor at the Desert Bloom Baptist Church where she attends. Reverend Kelly plans and organizes for and accompanies students on the Annual Historically Black College Tour. He also personally sponsors many activities for teens throughout the community, hoping to enlighten them about college admissions, financial aid attainment, and college matriculation. According to Sherry, this is a good thing because she received no such motivation or guidance from anyone at her local middle or high school. She reported that of the seven seniors at her church, she was the only one who passed the math section of the state high school exit exam. The fact that Reverend Kelly and others provide tutoring and information regarding college for the youth at her church and in the community made her proud.

Sherry’s mother, a custodian, perceived that she may have given birth to a gifted child after she noticed how Sherry was “always interested in picking up a pencil,” after “she wrote her name at two years old,” and after Sherry began to “read by the time she enrolled in kindergarten” (Personal Communication, June 15, 2003). Mom understood
that this was no small feat, since Sherry hailed from a family with a lower socio-economic status and, thus, limited resources. Mrs. Williams had Sherry tested in the first grade and indicated that the teachers and the school staff were “very good to work with” concerning identification and initial GATE placement. She laments, however, that by the time Sherry reached middle school she “was a forgotten child” (Personal Communication, June 15, 2003). “They were not interested in my child, and seemed to feel that she was not capable. They thought she might fail” (Personal Communication, June 15, 2003).

Both Sherry and her mother wistfully spoke of a counselor she had in middle school who did care and who placed Sherry in accelerated courses. Unfortunately, Sherry changed schools at the end of that year. Mrs. Williams indicated that by the time her daughter had reached the tenth grade she knew her daughter was not being challenged. She added that she tried to rectify the problem, but the school counselor would never return her telephone calls. When queried as to whether she took her concerns to the administrative level, she stated that she decided to just “leave it alone. This made her skate, though” (Personal Communication, June 15, 2003).

If academic skating is defined as a forced journey of unfulfilled academic potential, Sherry, regretfully, excelled at it. She reported feeling unchallenged during her entire high school years. “I can finish my work in the first five or ten minutes of class and sit there the rest of the period” (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003). Sherry reported not being challenged by teachers nor given more work to do. Rather, “they sat at their desks.” Sherry took only two honors classes in high school, although the curriculum at Central High has several honors courses. As a freshman and as a first semester sophomore in high school, Sherry consistently maintained a 3.5 grade point average in
her coursework. By the time she was a second semester sophomore, however, her grade point average hovered consistently around a 3.0 each quarter thereafter.

Sherry is the middle child in a family of three children being raised by a single parent. She is a quiet, reflective African-American young adult who possesses a sense of exasperation with her school experiences, but an equally quiet determination. While she has not had the ideal academic experience, she has set her goals high. She senses that her mother wants the best for her and her two brothers and was impressed when her mother removed her younger brother from the public school system and placed him in a college preparatory charter school. She has a large extended family and idolizes her maternal grandfather, a human resources analyst, whom she says always encourages her to continue her education and shows confidence in her ability. She speaks fondly of family and church connections, both appearing to be her anchor. Sherry spends time with youth activities at her church including singing in the choir. She has also worked at a local department store in the mall for the past two years. Consequently, she is not involved in any after school activities.

Sherry’s favorite subject in school is math. She states that it always has been. She recalled, however, a particularly painful incident in high school involving a math course:

My teacher was prejudiced because she did not like me and was trying to give me a low grade by cheating me out of points on my papers. My mom came up here, and they had it out and that was it. She finally gave me my rightful grade. That hurt me because she tried to put me down and hurt me and there is no reason for it (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003).

Sherry explained that there were three other African-American students in her math class who were failing and though the teacher was surprised about her own strength in math,
she was nonetheless inclined to fail her, also. Sherry’s mother recalled the incident and opined, “They do not want to see them excel. They are more interested in seeing students of color fail” (Personal Communication, June 15, 2003).

Despite all of her difficulties in high school, Sherry expresses how she always tries to bounce back and just keep going. She acknowledges that if she could relive her high school years, she would take more challenging courses. She ranked academics as her highest priority in high school and indicated how often she had asked her counselor throughout the years to place her in honors courses. The counselor, however, continued to place her in regular courses each quarter. She further indicated that she was unable to get teacher recommendations for Advanced Placement courses, even though she felt that she had demonstrated skills through her grades and her readiness for such courses. Mrs. Williams, her mother, stated that she did not take her concerns to the administration out of frustration. This frustration was exemplified in the schooling of Sherry’s younger brother, who may also be academically talented, when Mrs. Williams removed him from the public school system and placed him in a private charter school.

The school that Sherry attended, Central High, is highly diverse and is located in an urban area. It is not particularly known for its academics, but Sherry reflects, “I like Central. A lot of people say it is ghetto, but I like it” (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003). Sherry has one best friend and three other girls that she associates with at school. She shares that she is basically quiet and does not converse with very many of her classmates. In order to fit in, she indicated that she “hangs out with her cousin and his friends” at school. “They stand against the wall making a whole bunch of noise, and I just stand there and watch them,” she laughed. She indicated that she is sometimes amused by their antics (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003). On occasions when
peers have tried to influence her to try different things, her response has been, "If it's not me then I'm not doing it, I am not trying it no matter what you say" (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003). Sherry has a diverse group of friends. Her best friend is a teen mom who attends a vocational school; Sherry is her child's godmother. One of her friends attends a local college; another plans to attend college in Arizona.

Sherry is disturbed by the lack of concern and interaction she has experienced as a minority student with adults at Central. "Teachers and counselors don't try to be bothered with us, neither do the administrators. They act like they don't have time for us, but they have time for everything else. They don't expect us to do well" (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003). She said she knew of only two African-American students in the entire senior class who were taking AP classes at Central. When asked about a reason for this she recoiled,

Because they think we are inferior. That is what they expect of us because of past years, and what has gone on since slavery. Just observing, you can tell what they think we are. It doesn't make me any difference because once they see how smart I am, they can't say anything. They can't tell how you are or who you are by just looking at you. They have to get to know you (Personal Communication, May 15, 2003).

In spite of her difficulties and perceptions of poor curricular and co-curricular student to adult interactions, she earned an advanced diploma and a state scholarship to a state college or university. Sherry plans to bypass this award and enroll at Alabama State in the fall of 2003. She plans to major in pre-law. She enjoys her Street Law course that she was enrolled in. She is impressed with her instructor who discusses cases with the students and gives them opportunities to role-play case scenarios and work on special
law-related cases. She confidently states, "I like to argue. I know I’m powerful; when I get into it, I am there. I will argue you down ‘til you quit."

Kenneth Johnson: "Stay Focused. Know What You Want to Do, Do It, and Be Serious"

Kenneth Johnson is an alert, thinly built African-American male with distinct features. After dropping out of school in April 2003, he reflectively shared his odyssey as a seven-year-old Gifted and Talented Education student who reveled in elementary school, but languished in his journey throughout middle and high school. He attended both an inner city and an affluent suburban high school. Kenneth’s entry into and exit from an alternative high school symbolizes the story of his academic life. His story is earnestly shared with range of feelings from frustration, wistful reminiscence, to stifled hope.

As the middle child of five siblings, Kenneth was raised in a single-parent home. His mother works as a childcare assistant. His father is not a part of his life. He was recommended for the GATE program by his elementary school principal. This happenstance referral was made after he was sent to the principal’s office for disciplinary action. During his office visit the principal reviewed his records. As Kenneth remembers it, the principal remarked, "You are exceptionally smart. You should get into GATE.” He recalled how happy he was about this prospect. Since it was only the middle of his first grade year, he began his GATE placement in the second grade and remained in the program through the sixth grade. As a middle school student, however, Kenneth began to stray from his studious habits as shared in the following account:

Middle school was kind of like [high] school to me, but I didn’t know that till I got to high school. Middle school was like a gang and getting in trouble and all that, and the
whole school was like that. And I was into my work and started getting around the
wrong people and started falling off (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).
Later Kenneth talked about the one middle school teacher who stood out in his mind.
The teacher called Kenneth on the weekends to see how he was doing. According to
Kenneth, his mother gave his teacher permission to discipline Kenneth for unruly
behavior. This was one of the means his mother used to keep Kenneth motivated. He
recalls that his mother was very interested in his attending school regularly:
But in middle school and elementary, my mom was, like, strict. I had to go to school.
If I was sick, I had to go to school. I never missed a day in elementary. But in middle
school, I started growing up, and I wanted to be like the rest of the kids (Personal
communication, August 26, 2003).
Kenneth attended an urban middle school in the center of the city where he resides.
While his middle school learning environment was not the best, Kenneth has positive
memories regarding his early middle school years.
For me, middle school was great. I had all accelerated classes. I did all my work; I
got A’s and B’s. I didn’t get a C until 7th or 8th grade—that was the first time I got a
C—no, that was the first time I got a D. Yeah, so my middle school years were good
(Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).
It was during this time Kenneth began to dream of attending college. “I wanted to go to a
college, where if I put that on a resume, they would be like, ‘oh.’ I wanted to go to a
good college, not just any college. (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003)”
Kenneth’s interest in college and academics continued in high school. As a freshman, he
said he initially did well in his courses. He joined the Alphas young men’s fraternity
group, which was a positive experience:
When I was at Central, I was online and they always talked about college. We learned mostly about black history and if we had lower than a 2.0, we couldn't be online anymore. And we had to go to school everyday. And every Wednesday we had to wear a suit and tie. They just kept us motivated (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

During late fall of his freshman year, however, he decided to discontinue his association with the Alphas in order to play basketball. Around this time a marked change in his academic focus and choice of friends began to surface.

I went to high school and I was still doing good in classes and then I started hanging around the wrong people. And I stopped doing my work and my grades were falling, and my mom switched me schools (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

Kenneth stated that because his brother was very popular in high school, he wanted to “hang” with his brother and his friends. He retrospectively shared that if he could live his high school years again he would have made different choices.

I would have ran with a different crowd, ‘cause that was my main problem. They would always talk me into doing stuff that I wanted to do, but I knew wasn’t right. And I did it cause I was young and wanted to have fun (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

Kenneth’s mother eventually transferred him to a suburban high school in order to get him away from his friends and give him a more positive high school experience. At first Kenneth liked the new high school that he attended, which is in a growing, rather affluent suburban part of the city. He instantly recognized key differences between his new school and the inner-city school that he previously attended:
It was like it was the total opposite of Central. All the teachers were smart. At Central, there are kids that are smarter than the teachers, sometimes; man it’s crazy. [Suburban] was real clean, and all the teachers stay on you about your work. They had extra classes that we really didn’t need, just to help us stay ahead, you know (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

While his new school provided more opportunities for academic advancement, Kenneth did not do well academically or behaviorally. He failed all of his classes during his first term there. Kenneth was also referred to the school district’s behavior program for severe school rules infractions. He earned all of his credits during his one-semester term at the behavior program, making him eligible to return to a comprehensive high school setting. Upon returning to his suburban school of former enrollment, Kenneth missed school often and made all failing marks at the end of the semester. He indicated that when he attended classes, he earned good grades, but his overall grades and subsequent credits suffered because of excessive absences. Kenneth also resented the long bus ride to the suburban high school and began to miss school. Kenneth’s credit loss and sporadic school attendance was disappointing to his mother.

After I stopped going to school at Suburban…my mom…she stopped being in my business because she felt I wasn’t listening to her. So she told me I could take care of myself, but everyday, she would tell me I should go to school (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

Along with failing grades and a deteriorating relationship with his mother, Kenneth became conflicted about his home life and indicated that things became “harder and harder.”
I would have a lot to do when I get home and I would have to get that done. And I would want to go to sleep and I was trying to decide which one to do. Should I do this or go to sleep or do chores? Stuff would always get in the way. Friends and family, but mostly family. Like my mom and them. It’s only her and four of us and my little brother and sister. They’re not old enough to take care of themselves, and I got to help out and worry about them (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

In his fourth year of high school, Kenneth transferred to a school located in the northern part of the city that was closer to his home. At this school he began dating Ellen. By the summer he had moved out of his home with his mother and moved in with Ellen and her family. With both of them behind in their credits, Kenneth and Ellen enrolled in an alternative high school in the fall of 2002. As in the past, Kenneth was referred to the office for disciplinary reasons on several occasions. Nevertheless, during his first semester there, he passed most of his classes.

Kenneth’s geometry teacher described him as a very able student. She remarked that he had strong skills in math and had the ability to conceptualize and articulate geometrical patterns and theories better than anyone else in the class, except Alvin, who was also classified as gifted and talented. She marveled at the ability of the two students, and how they complemented each other in class discussions. While Kenneth was referred to the office periodically for being disrespectful to authority figures, his geometry teacher stated that he was not that way with her. She stated that while he had great intellectual potential, he seemed to be conflicted about authority figures and issues regarding race. The following incident report written by Kenneth after one particular referral is indicative of this point.
In English III third period Stacie, Elijah, Deangelo, and myself were sitting in class talking when we were rudely interrupted by an offending comment. The substitute, Mr. Sapp, said in exact words ‘You people need to quit with your language.’ Only one person was talking. Being of black race with a comment like that from a white teacher, I felt offended. He also told me ‘use it on the streets where it belongs.’ That’s what made me switch to a defensive mode. So we exchanged words back and forth. After raising his voice, I raised mine and that[s] when he began writing a referral. I’m not writing to get anyone in trouble, I just want you to know the facts, because I can’t be or I shouldn’t be RPC’d [suspended] for protecting the right to speak. No curse word was said at the time. The word that was said was ‘nigga.’ I asked him [if] he could fault us for saying something we grew up around. I know it’s more proper ways to talk, but sometimes words slip. If attending your school puts me in a bad position to stay focused, I think the problem should be taken care of.

No offense to you. Thank you for your time.

11/26/02

Incident: 11:19 a.m.
Written at 11:37 a.m.

Witnesses available to testify

[Signed] Kenneth Johnson

Kenneth continued his erratic academics at the alternative school, passing courses on alternate semesters. In April 2003 he dropped out of school. He went to work for a construction company, but according to his girlfriend, he was fired from that job due to a disagreement with his boss and a temper flare-up. His plans were to enroll in an online virtual high school in order to earn his diploma.
Although Kenneth experienced duress in his home and school life, he offered the following words when he was asked what advice he would give to seven-year-old disadvantaged GATE students who may find themselves in a situation similar to his, “Just stay focused and don’t let other students or other kids, or even your family distract you. Stay focused and know what you want to do, do it, and be serious.”

Lore Acosta: Rocky Road, Charting a Survival Course Against the Odds

It was mid-January and Lore had already finished high school. In fact, she graduated a semester earlier than her class—the class of 2003. Her sojourn to an early graduation resembled a winding road, since she attended several elementary, secondary, and alternative schools along the way.

As a second-grade student, Lore was placed in the Gifted and Talented program. She moved once during her elementary school years, causing her to change schools. Nevertheless, she was excited about her placement in the GATE program, and her friends were impressed. After elementary school, Lore attended two different middle schools and a behavior school for fighting at one of the middle schools. As a high school student, she attended a traditional high school, an evening high school, and an alternative day high school from which she graduated.

Although Lore followed a checkered academic road, she emphasized that she was determined to graduate from high school. Partly buoyed by her family and, in an inverse way, her friends, Lore reflected upon the family factors that inspired her to graduate from high school, even though several of her friends did not:

I think it had a lot to do with my sister. My sister, she had a baby when she was 19 and graduated from Mountain View, too. And she had so many problems with not
going to college and having children, and I just wanted so much more. I wanted so much more for myself. I didn't want to go through the same thing... and I didn't want to be.... Both of my bothers graduated, my sister's graduated, my dad graduated... it would have been a big disappointment if I wouldn't have done something quick (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Other than the fact that she changed schools once because her family moved, Lore recalled her elementary school years as uneventful. Middle and high school were just the opposite. It was then that Mrs. Acosta noticed a change in Lore's schoolwork ethic and attitude. She remembered Lore as not wanting to apply herself and not wanting people to know she was smart. She also stated that Lore wanted to act hard around her friends, but this was not her true character. Lore began ditching school. Lore was involved in a fight and was subsequently placed in a behavior school program. During the seven-week interlude, she did earn the opportunity to return to a traditional school setting by earning passing grades and demonstrating good conduct. But once she entered high school, Lore became a habitual truant. Mrs. Acosta was aware of Lore's absences. She brought this to the attention of school officials on more than one occasion. She also took away her daughter's privileges on several occasions due to absenteeism. Lore subsequently ran away.

This led her to withdraw from a traditional high school and enroll in a non-traditional evening program as a freshman in high school. Lore longed to be with her friends in a day school program, so she returned to the traditional high school setting. At Mountain View High School, she met Mrs. Krauss, who was memorable to Lore because she took an interested in her as an individual.
She helped me with all my work, even the work that wasn’t hers. She just encouraged me why I should be going to school. Her class is the only class out of six classes that I passed…. But it was like more one-on-one with her. It wasn’t just always about school—it was about family, you know, how family, this, that. Matter of fact, it was freshman year—I had her both my freshman and sophomore year—she called home…I was talking a lot (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Lore indicated that she had other teachers who cared about her as well, but Mrs. Krauss stood out partly because she would call home to check on her. Lore rationalized that other teachers may not have called home because, “I would get suspended and truancy tickets, and they just figured my parents already knew.”

Outside of the classroom, Lore was very involved with her friends, especially Jenny, whom she met on their first day of middle school. As a newcomer from California, Jenny began to talk with Lore, and they became best friends. She described the depth of their friendship:

I’ve known her for a long time. I been knowing her for ten years—we grew up together at Adams. She’s been with me through it all—through me running away, drugs, you know, everything—she’s just been there. Never did me dirty or never broke my trust. We’ve had our fights. We’ve had our fights where we don’t talk for like a month, but she’s always there” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Although Jenny eventually dropped out of high school, Lore values her friendship with Jenny and is hopeful that she will finish high school. According to Lore, Jenny is enrolled in GED courses, and she has volunteered to help her. In describing the two of them, Lore saw herself as the leader and the one who often suggested to Jenny that they
leave school for lunch or skip school and go to the park. She describes the contrast in their personalities and goals:

She’s more of a ‘let’s go to the movies’ type person, and I’m more of a ‘let’s go party.’ I’m wilder. She doesn’t really have the motivation to kind of press on in life. She’s starting to get it. Whereas me, I’m like, ‘you have to go back to school. You can’t do this to yourself (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Most of Lore’s friends do not plan to attend college. This is a cause of disconsternation to Lore who wistfully commented on what she perceives as their lack of desire and attitude toward school. However, this does not deter Lore from her aspirations for higher education. She expressed her disappointment in her friend’s devaluation of education.

Disappointed, upset because I see myself going somewhere in the future and when I think about—and when I wanna, when I decide to come home, I don’t want to come home and see everybody on drugs with a whole bunch of kids, you know, no husband, no wife, whatever the situation, I don’t want to come home to that. I want them to be happy and successful and be able to say, ‘Yeah, I did it’ (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

As an early graduate, Lore has secured a job as a nurse’s assistant trainee at a local convalescent center. It is to Lore, just a job, as her interests do not lie in nursing. She views her nursing trainee position as temporary, since earning an associate’s degree, and, eventually, a bachelor’s degree is her ultimate goal. After her formal high school graduation, she plans to move to Florida to work and go to school. Her career goal is to become a corrections officer.

Lore’s motivation to continue her schooling is born of her desire to not imitate complacent friends. Her family instilled these values in her. She cites her mother as
having had the greatest influence on her life. To Lore, her mother is a model of perseverance and right values, given all the struggles her mother has had to endure in life:

My mom had a hard life... a hard life. She's been living on her own since she was twelve. Her parents... her father died when she was twelve, and she didn't get the chance to graduate. She had to start working and she presses on; she doesn't stop. There's no limit for her; there's no limit for her and she gave me those values (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Another positive influence in her life was her father. Mr. Acosta traveled frequently in his position, but Lore saw him every weekend. Lore and Mrs. Acosta affirmed his support of Lore, especially regarding her schooling. Another positive item to note has been her involvement in church activities, especially youth camp. She was particularly grateful for the church pastor whom she stated has been there for her.

Although she has post-secondary plans, she soberly lamented that her choices have caused her to foresee setbacks regarding her educational opportunities.

It's gonna be rocky—I know it's going to be rocky for the next few years, because I'm gonna be living almost 2,000 miles away from home and I don't have any friends out there. It's gonna be rocky. I think after awhile, I'm gonna come home. I'm not gonna be gone that long. And, after I get myself settled and once I get to a university then it will be easier, and I'll be balanced by then and able to stick to a healthy lifestyle (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Part of Lore's angst about the future has to do with the choices she made in school. She admits to not working hard in school and only performing at minimum ability on tests. She now understands the connection between high school effort and post-secondary opportunities. She laments the fact that her prior school-related decisions have relegated
her to begin her college years at a community college rather than a university. Due to these choices and her sporadic attendance in school, Lore feels unprepared to reach her post-secondary goals. Nevertheless, somehow, she has a spirit of resilience about facing an uncertain future.

*Carlos Meza: “I’m Not Bookish, I’m Cool Smart”*

A year before he was identified and placed in the Gifted and Talented Education Program, Carlos was noticed by his second grade teacher as having exceptional academic potential. His teacher began by giving him additional math work to complete. He then introduced him to computers. According to Carlos, his teacher along with teaching the other students, worked with him individually to the extent that he no longer engaged in his second grade coursework; rather, he completed different lessons than the other students. Carlos remembers his succeeding third and fourth grade teachers supplying him with algebra and other textbooks. He continued to thrive in math and attended a math and science magnet middle school for grades six through eight.

Carlos continued to do well in his academic courses in middle school and complemented his educational experiences by electing to participate in band, thereby learning to play an instrument. Being a member of the band is an obvious source of pride and interest to Carlos, who portrays a quiet twinkle when he speaks about his involvement in the musical arts. By the time he became a student in his district’s magnet high school for math and science, he had developed a fledging interest in music. A trumpet player, Carlos was involved in marching band, varsity band, jazz band, wind ensemble, and on occasion, orchestra. As a senior, he was active in the Swing Dance
Club as well. He was enthused when the school’s jazz band did a recording, in May 2003.

Carlos Meza is a quietly personable, reflective, confident, and mild-mannered student at a math and science magnet high school. He resides with his parents and a younger sister in the seventh grade. His mother is a homemaker and his father works as a minimum-wage earner. He indicated that his parents are ecstatic with his school success and post-secondary prospects. The Mezas live in a modest neighborhood not far from the high school where Carlos attends. As a child, Carlos was ever curious. He recalled times during his childhood when he would watch the discovery channel all day long. The additional enrichment opportunities he received in elementary school buoyed his interest in academics. He felt academically prepared when he went to middle school, yet he related that by the time he transitioned from middle school to high school his interest had become latent and he found himself often bored in school. When asked what brought about the precipitous drop, he stated matter-of-factly that in elementary school the teachers provided him with hard coursework, but he did not find this to be so in middle school. Carlos’s contention was that middle school teachers:

...taught from the syllabus and killed it. It was boring. Sometimes I was not doing the work. It was too much restraint and there was only one level of classes. And then like, doing homework when I understood the material, it seemed so pointless back then. And I couldn’t understand what getting a grade was for (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

To Carlos, the ideal middle school would offer more options and give students more of an opportunity for input regarding course selections. During his middle school years, Carlos disclosed he did not think much about his post-secondary aspirations.
He began to formulate questions regarding college on his own during his sophomore year and conducted research in the library and online. A motivation of his personal college research was finding a challenging school to attend. "I never thought about college until my sophomore year, and it's like I went to a magnet middle school and it really wasn't too much of a challenge. Then I went here" (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

His counselors in middle school and high school had very little impact on Carlos's direction or success as a student. He bluntly stated, "I just get my schedule and go to the classes. I never really see them for anything. Like, sometimes, I wouldn't even know their names" (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Although he felt relatively unchallenged in middle school, Carlos was pleased to have the opportunity to attend a math and science magnet high school. This was an opportunity that some of his former GATE peers did not have. He reflected on the impact that this had on Gabe, a friend of his:

Well, we were like best friends in middle school. And I went to the magnet middle school and he went to just a regular middle school and that probably hurt him cause he was pretty smart but he—I don’t know—his grades went down when he didn’t get in, and then...and then he, you know...he took honors courses and...and stuff, like...and then he went to a regular high school instead of a magnet high school. And he took like honors and stuff, but I guess he didn’t think it was worth too much. Then I went here and...and then I realized that this wasn’t much of a challenge, so then I started researching colleges and I just couldn’t see myself going to a place that wasn’t hard (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).
No one in Carlos’s home, school, or community introduced him to the concept or possibility of college attendance. He indicated that sequentially he knew that there was high school, then college, and that it was expensive, but he had no in-depth understanding of what college was really about. He does not recall actually how he found out about college, but that he “probably went online and talked to people—talked to friends about it” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

Carlos’s happenstance method of learning about higher education belied his intellectual ambition to attend a “good” college upon high school graduation. His personal search for a challenging school of higher learning led to his acceptance at a Claremont College. He will attend Harvey Mudd in Claremont, California, the fall of 2003. Because he is academically able and financially disadvantaged, he was granted a lucrative financial assistance package that will require his parents to pay a mere $1,000 per year for his college education. Carlos’s post-secondary goal is to pursue a career in his favorite field—computer science. He would like to someday own his own computer business and cites networking, connecting with talented people during college, and earning an advanced degree at Cal Tech, Stanford, or Carnegie Mellon as part of the road to achieve his post-secondary goals. Although Carlos excelled academically in high school, in retrospect, he was not pleased with his work ethic. He indicated that he was lazy and did not exert himself at times. He surmised that in high school his philosophy was to not pay attention to grades, but rather just do the work. He readily asserted, “I do not make academics the center of my life. I’m not bookish smart, I am ‘cool smart’” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003).

If academics are not the center of his life, spending time with friends and on his hobbies are. Carlos ranked these two above academics. His hobbies include playing the
trumpet, computer programming, and spending time on websites. He describes his hobbies as “more academic than the academics.” He spends time communicating with some of his friends online. Friends are very important to Carlos, and he indicates that he has a group of best friends, most of whom will attend college in the northern part of the state in the fall. Most of his friendships began in middle school, and he developed a few more in high school. Carlos places a premium on friendships, but stated that he would probably disassociate himself from a friend if they started getting into trouble.

During the Senior Awards Night in May, Carlos was recognized as a Magnet Scholar and an honors graduate. He was one of the few graduates who received the President’s Award for Outstanding Academic Excellence. In addition, he was awarded a Barringere Music Scholarship, a state college scholarship, a May Foundation Scholarship, and a state college band grant. His grade point average automatically qualified him for a $10,000 scholarship to an in state college or university, which he summarily declined in order to attend an out of state college.

Being in a challenging learning environment is particularly important to Carlos. Although most of his friends will attend a state university in the fall, he is adamant about attending school out of state because he does not feel that he would be sufficiently challenged at any of the state universities. “I like getting challenged” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003). He indicated that if he had the opportunity to give advice to a 2003 second grade GATE student, his words would be [to], “Always try your best, challenge yourself, and be the best you can be.” For teachers his words are, “Challenge the students. Keep it light. Don’t [drone] droll on. Don’t teach like you are on TV” (Personal Communication, May 27, 2003).
Marina Garcia: "I Don't Want to Just Stop, I Want to Have More Options"

As a third grader, Marina was placed in the Gifted and Talented Program. Her memory of her time in GATE is a relatively happy one. Of her peers, she stated that they either did not know or responded indifferently about her placement in GATE. She stated, "If they did know, they would just think I was smart or something. I didn’t know what the big deal about GATE was" (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003). She acknowledged that her previous participation in the GATE program had very little impact on her later academic decisions.

Marina has attended an International Baccalaureate high school since her freshman year in high school. In high school she was an active member of the German club, Art club, and soccer team. While she would not call it a hobby, she says she enjoys art the most because it provides a satisfying outlet for self-expression. She also finds reading highly stimulating, but math, by far, has been her favorite subject in school. Math, along with other challenging academic pursuits, never intimidated her. Although she enjoyed participating in various activities in school, she was more focused on making up credits during her senior year.

Marina is a quiet, retiring, yet earnest young adult. Although she appears lethargic at times, she demonstrates good listening skills. She lives with her mother, three siblings, and her daughter. She is the oldest of four children living in a single-parent home. With one younger sister and two younger brothers, Marina lives in a modest, low middle-income neighborhood near the magnet school where she attends school as a senior. Marina indicates that her mother, a housekeeper at a sporting goods store, has had the greatest influence upon her education. "My mother has [had the biggest influence on my
Marina’s father, a gardener, lived with the family while she was in elementary school. However, he has not been with the family since Marina completed fifth grade. Marina wistfully acknowledges that his absence has affected her schooling:

I think it did because not having a dad around, my mom was more lenient with me. I hung out with friends more, but I’m not blaming it on my mom.... Also, my dad not being around made me realize, just recently last year, that I didn’t want to get stuck in the same situation that my mom was (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

Marina’s daughter, Leticia, is three and a half weeks old. Marina loves her daughter and thus realizes that pursuing higher education will take longer as she plans to pay for her education herself and provide for her daughter. “...Taking care of my baby, that’s going to be very hard--going to school and working with the baby” (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003). Right now her only college option is a local community college. She heard about the community college from her teachers and from a family friend. Her friend encouraged her to start at the community college because it is easier. Marina confessed that she felt unprepared to reach her post-secondary goals. However, she stated that college attendance is important to her and that she had “looked into” the community college and the courses they have.

Well, I do want to continue studying because I don’t want to just stop. I want to have more options, and I want to go to community college. You know, start there, and then I want to go to a university (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).
According to Marina, attending college will be a divergent path from the one most of her friends will be taking, considering that most of them will be getting a job after high school. She shared that her friends do not value education and added:

They just don’t see that we get free education and they don’t take advantage of earning their diploma. Some say they’re going to college, but most of them are getting a job after school. Yeah, I don’t believe they are because of what they are doing now. You know, they don’t come to school now, and college is just months away and they’re not prepared for it so, I don’t think they are going (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

Marina feels badly that her friends value education so little.

I feel bad—I feel kind of sad because I try to tell them that they’re so close to graduating, and they’ve worked for thirteen years to get their diploma. And they are just like ‘whatever, I’m gonna get it no matter what,’ and I feel real bad because a lot of my friends now, they have babies and I want them to do that—you know, it’s not just them. I want their babies to be proud of something, you know (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

While academics are important to Marina, so are her friends. She cited social contact as one of the things that she liked best about school. “I don’t really get to spend time with [my friends] out of school, so when I see them in school that’s when I get to talk to them” (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003). Her best friend is a person whom she describes as outgoing, humorous, forgiving, easy going, and a good listener.

He doesn’t have a bad temper... He’s really funny. In class, he’s the class clown, and I make comments, you know. I like to make funny comments, and me and him would
do it together, so that's how we started being friends” (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

As a middle school student, Marina set her sights on attending a community college after high school graduation. Nevertheless, sometime between the eighth grade and the tenth grade, Marina’s interest in academics changed. She expressed that she owed this disinterest to peer pressure. She became less focused on her studies and more involved with her friends.

I guess from middle school and then starting high school, my cousin was here. She was a senior, and I started hanging out with her. And I wanted to have fun and I was thinking like my friends were thinking: ‘Well, I’m gonna graduate…whatever’ (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

In retrospect, Marina indicates that if she could relive her school years again, she would make different life choices.

As an example of negative peer pressure, Marina talked about a time when someone asked her to do something that was against her principles and the outcome. “Yes a friend [tried to influence me to do something against my principles], and I did just give in and then afterwards I regretted it. And then I was kind of upset with my friend for pressuring me to do that” (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

Regarding her middle and high school education, Marina has ambiguous recollections. She asserts that middle school prepared her well for high school, and that her teachers had high expectation for her. Yet she states that she made the decision to set a goal to attend a community college after high school on her own and has kept this goal throughout her high school years. She gave no indication that counselors or teachers spoke with her extensively and purposely about post-secondary aspirations and planning. Marina admits
that she experienced academic difficulties during high school, mostly in the area of credit deficiency. The fact that she worked hard and retrieved those credits, enabling her to graduate with her class, is a source of pride for her. Despite this accomplishment, she feels unprepared for university coursework and plans to attend a community college first. Marina found her middle and high school teachers most encouraging when she earned good grades. She feels that her teachers had the greatest impact on her course selections.

While Marina regards her teachers in a generally positive light, she regards her high school counselor in a largely negative light:

I guess counselors could [reach out more in the school community] 'cause the only time I see my counselor is when there’s a group thing unless I come to her, you know. The only time I see her is when we’re doing senior checks, and that’s the only time I see her (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

Marina wishes counselors would reach out more to students during every phase and in every facet of a high school student’s life. She wishes there was more contact and caring between the counselors and students.

They could focus more on the individual, and I know that’s hard because there are so many students. I think trying to focus on individuals is a lot easier than focusing on the whole, the whole body because everybody thinks different and everybody wants to do different things. So if they told, like, one whole body, ‘Oh, you need to work hard for your own good,’ but you don’t have nobody to talk—I mean you do, but they [students] have to go and talk to them [counselors], themselves. You know, kids, they don’t really like going and asking things, unless they’re asked. And then they’ll answer but going and getting help on their own, they won’t (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).
Along with more outreach and frequent, positive contact with students, Marina pines for a more individual and personable approach from counselors and administrators. She openly wished the administrators at the school would take more time to get to know the students instead of just "showing up to be there," and responding to students in an aloof manner. (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

Right now, all of Marina's focus is on graduating from high school, caring for her daughter, and making plans to further her schooling beyond high school. While friends and friendships continue to be of paramount importance to her, she values education and hopes to attend a university sometime in the future.

**Benjie Seung: Love of Life. "Friends Are What Keep You Going."**

When he arrived in the U.S. at the age of five years, he spoke only Tagalog. Young Benjhe (Ben) Seung attended pre-school in his native Cebu, Philippines. When he was enrolled in kindergarten shortly after arrival in this southwestern U.S. city, Ben indicated that he learned his new language—English—with ease. Although once fluent in his native language, Ben indicated he sparing uses Tagalog today, although he understands the language and considers himself bilingual.

Ben Seung is a slightly built young adult of Asian features with short, jet black hair. He speaks with ease and laughs often. His demeanor is that of a free-spirit, who seems comfortable with himself. Ben's ethnicity, as explained by him, is mostly Chinese and Filipino with some Spaniard extraction. By the time he reached third grade, Ben was placed in the Gifted and Talented Education program. He recalls that he was happy about his GATE placement and his friends were impressed. Ben excelled in his coursework in elementary school, but recalls middle school as not particularly memorable, although
he does feel that it prepared him for high school coursework. Middle school was memorable to Ben in that he met his best friend there. He recalled not meeting much with his middle school counselors; there were just the occasional course scheduling days.

Ben attended a magnet high school that he feels is “one of the greatest schools there is” (Personal Communication, August 22, 2003). While he was fond of his high school, he limited involvement there with the Key Club and a few other activities. He chose math as his favorite subject because he likes “playing around with numbers” (Personal Communication, August 22, 2003). Ben’s hobby is building computers, but he is unsure whether he will major in computers when he attends the local community college in the fall.

As a student at Magnet, Ben indicated that he turned in most of his assignments, but became lazy and uninterested in school in the tenth grade. He indicated, however, that if he could relive his high school years, he would have made different life choices; working harder in his classes would be change number one. While Ben was not motivated in his coursework, he was clearly interested in the social aspects of school. He stated that he met most of his friends at school or at social gatherings, and that friendship is very important to him. “Friends are what keeps you going. They are there the whole time—long time friends” (Personal Communication, August 22, 2003).

Most of his friends attend Magnet. Ben recalled that friends sometimes tried to persuade him to participate in activities that were against his principles, but that his steady response so far has been, “No, that’s OK.” Ben said that he managed to stay close friends with these students even though he did not succumb to peer pressure. He did not recall ever distancing himself or “disowning a friend at any time.” According to Ben, he is academically motivated at times by his friends who encourage him to study. “They’ll
tell me to study. Sometimes I do; sometimes I don’t” (Personal Communication, August 22, 2003). Ben has a wide mixture of friends, some who plan to go out of state to college, but most will attend the local university. Ben set a goal to attend a four-year college when he was in middle school and kept this goal throughout his time there. Ben indicated that he will attend a local two-year community college instead of the local four year university because he procrastinated and missed the university’s admissions application deadline. Since he has no transportation, his plan is to use the public transit system to get to school.

Although teachers placed high expectations on him throughout middle school and high school, Ben felt especially good about his high school counselor. The individuals who had the greatest impact on his decision to attend college after high school were his peers. Some of his friends and peers plan to go to college and some do not. Ben’s best friend does not plan to attend college and wants to be a professional fighter or join the military.

Although Ben ranks friends and social activities high on his priority list, the two are held in check by academics. School and academics are very important to his family. He was first introduced to the concept of college attendance by his parents who were both degreed professionals in the Philippines. He is oldest of four siblings; they all live home with their technically, single parent mother. Ben’s father moved with the family to the U.S. in 1991, but was unable to practice law as he did in the Philippines because legal licensing differences between the two countries. He visits the family every 6 months and helps to support the family. Ben’s mother, who possesses a degree in engineering, chose to remain in the U.S. with her children in order for them to have greater educational and cultural opportunities. She works at a local establishment in a job that requires little education. Although there is considerable transcontinental distance between the father
and the family, the Seung's are one family and education is highly valued. They encourage their son with the joint message “...do good in school and succeed” (Personal Communication, August 22, 2003).

Ben graduated from high school as an honors graduate with a 3.8 grade point average. Notwithstanding the fact that he was distracted at times in high school for social reasons, he states, “I wanted to get the honors diploma and to do whatever possible” (Personal Communication, August 22, 2003). Ben enrolled in English, math, psychology, and information technology in August 2003. His plans to finish two years at the local community college and then transfer to the local university in the future. Most of his expenses will be paid. His high, weighted grade point average qualified him for a state scholarship.

**Zoë Young: Cultivating Ambition, Finding Fertile Ground**

“I love to travel. I traveled as a student ambassador to Europe after my freshman year. Since then I have been obsessed with making plans to study abroad” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003). Zoë Young is as outgoing and vibrant as she is outspoken, adventurous, and ambitious. In our initial visit she expounded on her middle school, high school, travel, and volunteer ventures in addition to her aspirations to attend college and later plans to enter politics. Fresh from a visit to Washington D.C., where she was honored as an outstanding youth volunteer of America, Zoë spoke in an animated, yet earnest repose concerning her general school impressions and GATE experiences. Zoë was identified for the Gifted and Talented Education Program in the second grade. She recalled how excited she was in elementary school about her placement in GATE and how impressed her elementary school peers were with her GATE placement.
Her recollection of this time was that both “elementary and middle school were completely easy” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003). As a sixth grader she enrolled in a magnet middle school mainly for social reasons, but after finding the people “rude” she decided to transfer to her zoned middle school. She immediately recognized the academic differences between the two middle schools:

The people there were not nearly as smart as the people in the magnet school. I think it was a big confidence booster to be around people that weren’t smarter than me, all the time. The teachers there were way more lax with grading and all that because they knew that they couldn’t fail, like half their class and so they were so just, you know…they would make an assignment, make it due on a certain day, and I would be the only one to turn it in. So they’d have to extend the due date and these kids wouldn’t do anything (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Zoë found her zoned middle school to be extremely unchallenging considering the extreme academic apathy of her peers and classmates.

Zoë is the only child of a retired military officer and a waitress. She has several older siblings, now in their 50s, who reside in a neighboring state. Both of her parents actively support her, but she sometimes worries about their health. She describes her 82-year-old father as a brilliant man, although he has no formal education. Her 46-year-old mother attended high school in the Philippines, but after the death of her parents she had the sole responsibility for raising her brothers and sisters when she was thirteen. Nevertheless, Zoë proclaims proudly that her parents had the greatest influence on her education and desire to pursue higher learning.

At the end of her middle school years, Zoë was derided by her peers for choosing to attend a magnet, senior high school located way across the city from her home. She was
told by one of her classmates, “You are so dumb. Why do you want to do that? You are going to have to take hard classes” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003). Zoë, however, shuddered when she thought about the possibility of trying to learn in an apathetic educational environment in high school similar to the one she had been attending in middle school.

They were just skating by with no hopes to do anything with their lives and it got to the point that in 8th grade my goal was instead of getting straight A’s to get more than 100% in every single class. And I did it both semesters, and that’s pretty sad I can get over 100% in every single one of my classes (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Zoë, with stoic resolution, did not listen to her classmates and enrolled in a magnet high school anyway.

Overall, Zoë is pleased with the atmosphere and the education that she received at the magnet school. She stated that it has been worth the drive across town. She speaks warmly about the teachers in high school that have supported her, but disappointingly about the people who shouldn’t be teaching. She cordially mentioned that throughout her schooling she had one memorable counselor, Ms. Kim, who was very “supportive and awesome.” She laments that she left half way through her sophomore year. This was “upsetting” to Zoë because she opined that she does not know that many good counselors. Zoë stated this while reminiscing about Ms. Kim and a disappointing experience with another counselor:

After she left, I was stuck with two different people—one guy that I was supposed to have this year. He left like a week into the school year. And then I was stuck with Mrs. Cassidy again and I almost cried when I found out that I had her cause they’re
just incompetent. I got a letter two weeks ago saying that I didn’t pass my proficiency. It was a registered letter that my mother had to pick up from the post office with another girl’s name on the inside. Another name, another student number, they just sent it to the wrong address. How could they say that I didn’t pass my proficiencies when I passed them with flying colors, you know. We had the same first name but totally different last names. And my mom, when she opened it, she didn’t look for my name on the inside letter and she was just freaking out, almost had a heart attack, called my cell phone screaming and yelling. And I was like mom, I passed my proficiency (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Zoë experienced several other trying situations as a high school student. She recounted how the loss of her algebra teacher due to an illness caused her classmates and herself to receive a marginal algebra education. This negatively affected her own performance in geometry at the magnet high school. This low grade and confusion in algebra and geometry remain a painful memory for Zoë. “We didn’t make it through half of what we were supposed to” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003). As a result of an ungrounded algebra education, she earned a “C” in geometry. This was devastating for Zoë, and after this trauma she resigned herself to the reality that she would not make straight A’s in high school. Though disappointed, Zoë refocused and decided to “keep the faith and keep moving toward her goals.”

Another obstacle she confronts now and into the future deals with caring for her aging parents, whom she asserts have “strange health predicaments.” She worries if their health will hold up while she is away at college.

I don’t have any younger brothers or sisters that could stay. And so that would present an obstacle if [my father] were to pass before like... I finish my
undergraduate college and [my mother] would not be able to move out near me or something. Or the other way, my mom’s health is as bad as my dad’s even though he is in his 80s and she is only 46. But her health is just as bad, and so I think my dad is way more emotionally capable to handle it but not physically capable. I don’t know if he would be able to live on his own. I can’t pay for him to be in a nursing home while I’m trying to do undergraduate work in college. I don’t know how that would work out (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

While Zoë made friends at the magnet school beginning the freshmen year, she readily admits that friendships can be ephemeral.

[Friendships] were a very, very important part of my life a couple of years ago, but recently I’ve just began to see through a lot of people. I know that when I go to college I am going to be the only person who is going out of state and so right now my point of view is that it is great to have friends now but the chances of me actually keeping in touch with them is slim to none. It’s almost like, why should I waste my time (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Of acquaintances, associates, and friends, she states that she mostly has “friends on the verge of just being acquaintances, because they come and go” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Regarding peer pressure, she emphatically stated that none of her friends tried to make her do anything. She was indirectly influenced to do some things, but stated that these incidents were “not to the point where I would go and want to do anything that would make me stray from my morals” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Zoë was an active member of the speech and debate teams and the student council in high school. She resigned from the latter due to ethical reasons. In the summer of 2002,
she completed a summer session at Stanford University as a participant in the highly selective Junior Statesmen of America Program. Upon her return, she organized the first Junior Statesmen chapter for high school students in the state. Where Zoë distinguished herself and made her mark, however, was in the world of volunteerism. As a junior, she volunteered her services at a women and children’s shelter. Her efforts led to free immunizations for child shelter residents. In addition, she assisted with the collection and distribution of school supplies for homeless children. The recording of tapes and books for distribution to disadvantaged youth was accomplished through her efforts as well.

According to a local newspaper article Zoë’s zeal for volunteering was noticed by others and she was selected as the recipient of the 2003 Prudential Spirit of Community Award from a field of 24,000 national applicants. (Review-Journal, pg 2B, February 23, 2003) Zoë was awarded $1,000 and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington D.C. Thus, Zoë’s leadership skills in the area of volunteerism are recognized on the local, state, and national level.

While she attended school full time, worked part time at a local clothing store, and volunteered in the community, Zoë is also well traveled. She reports that she has been to Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and France through the People to People Student Ambassador Program.

All of Zoë’s friends plan to go straight from high school to college. Her well-crafted post-secondary plans included attending Albion College, a small liberal arts college in Albion, Michigan in the fall of 2003. She chose Albion over larger universities in order to have an environment where she can focus on her studies. She will attend Albion on a full-ride scholarship. After two years at Albion, she plans to transfer to a larger university in order to enhance her opportunities to study abroad. She hopes to attend
graduate school abroad and afterwards earn a law degree. Her long-term ambition is to be a U.S. senator or vice-president of the U.S., and ultimately a U.S. ambassador to Switzerland.

Zoë experienced highs and lows as a student at the magnet school, but she accepts the bitter with the sweet. As she looked forward to graduating from high school, she is grateful for the learning, social, and volunteer opportunities that she took advantage of as a student at the magnet school. Because her horizons have been broadened at a young age, she is disappointed that other magnet students are not being guided toward seeing the unlimited possibilities outside of the southwestern, desert community where they now reside. Zoë shared the counseling and sometimes administrative advice that she sometimes received with above average, accomplished magnet students:

Um, 'you know the [state] scholarship is a really good scholarship. Are you sure you want to go out of state?' And, just, 'Are you sure you want to take that many AP classes? You're gonna be stressed out.' And so I mean the administrators, especially at Magnet, they have no real desire to get to know the students. I mean, I'm not pointing fingers or anything, because there are a lot of administrators that support you, but a lot of them--they don't care. They're just doing their job to the least of their ability (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Zoë disagrees with the philosophy of encouraging students to limit their horizons by not inspiring them to take advantage of all that may be available to them in the nation’s and the world’s institutions of higher learning. As far as she is concerned, she wants to see more of the world and perhaps live and study abroad one day. That is her dream. It is a dream she hopes to fulfill, and a dream she hopes to share.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS,
RECOMMENDATIONS,
AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Early twentieth century definitions of gifted and talented were replaced with a more broad based definition as a result of the Marland Report (1971). With this more contemporary definition came an expectation of more gender and racial inclusion. While there was subsequent scrutiny and concern about an all-inclusive identification of GATE students, research shows that students of all races are being characterized as gifted and talented today. However, designation as a gifted and talented student does not spell success for many disadvantaged students. Problems associated with the student achievement crisis, such as flagging test scores and unchanging marginal but yearly academic progress reports, is not limited to the general student population. These issues also plague a number of gifted, disadvantaged, and talented students, given the pervasive socio-economic gap between those with abundant financial resources and those with scarce resources.

Although the students in this study began on the “level playing field” of receiving designation as gifted and talented, their academic lives and histories evolve into divergent stories. These stories are analyzed in this chapter. Furthermore, an analysis of the students’ stories is enveloped in the interpretation of the findings. A central purpose of
the study is achieved through a listing of the research questions and sequential responses to the questions. The significance of the study and limitations will be revisited in this chapter. A capstone of the report will be the recommendations and implications for school leaders followed by suggestions for further research and a concluding summary.

Table 2: Diagram of Contributing Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Decisions</th>
<th>Issues of Loss</th>
<th>Response to Loss</th>
<th>Rainbow Perceptions</th>
<th>Rainbow Realities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circle of Friends</td>
<td>Social Interest Orientation</td>
<td>Setting Social Priorities</td>
<td>Loss of Innocence</td>
<td>Bouncing Back</td>
<td>Giftedness Leads to Inevitable Success</td>
<td>Success Flows from Deliberate Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Balance of Academic and Social Interests</td>
<td>Focusing on Goals or Fixating on Detractions</td>
<td>Loss of Early Academic Advancement Opportunities</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Gifted Students Need Less Attention</td>
<td>School Leaders Must Meet the Special Needs of All Students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Critical Role of Family

The role of family, particularly of parents, had a significant influence on the participants' early academic orientation, course mapping, decision-making, and aspirations. Although mothers and fathers played a significant role in the students' lives, extended family members played meaningful roles, as well. Several students spoke of the lasting influences those family members had on their upbringing and academic focus. This early influence and the role that parents and extended family played in their lives was not forgotten by the participants. Of the students who matriculated into college after graduation, all of them had the benefit of a significant, lasting relationship with a family member; all the college bound participants acknowledged this as a fact.

Adam, whose father is now deceased, credits his parents with instilling in him a strong, academic work ethic. Through early training and parental involvement, he was trained to complete his homework daily. This training lasted well into Adam's high school years, as he recalled that he was one of just a few students in his classes who would regularly turn in all class assignments.

That is the key right there. If you have parents that are committed, that will help you with your homework and make sure you are on top of it, then that is the key right there (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

Adam credits his mother and father with developing within him a keen, early focus on academic excellence. Van-Tassel Baska (1997) cites the powerful role of parents in promoting academic excellence: “Parents clearly have a powerful role in promoting excellence. Their influence is far greater than any other resource to young learners” (p. 12).
Only three of the twelve study participants, Zoë, Carlos, and Lore reside with both of their parents. Along with the support of his parents, Carlos had the added adoration of his grandfather who took an early interest in his learning as well. According to Mrs. Meza, her father began working with Carlos at age three or four by teaching him to write his name. She stressed, however, that she and her husband were totally involved in the education of Carlos and his sister. Mr. Meza meticulously kept a calendar of his son’s academic and musical engagements. Choosing to be a homemaker, Mrs. Meza willfully sacrificed material comforts in order to raise her family. The Meza family survives on Mr. Meza’s minimum wage income and occasional tips. Mrs. Meza feels that the sacrifice has been worth it, even though they have been limited to living in a low-income neighborhood. “We want them to have a better life. A decent income is the way of the world” (Personal Communication, September 17, 2003).

While Zoë, another participant who had the benefit of growing up with both of her parents in the home, worries about her parents’ health, she credits them the most for motivating her to pursue higher education. She admires her father as possibly the smartest person she knows; nonetheless, she recognizes that his career choices were limited because he lacked a formal education. Likewise, Zoë’s mother had to discontinue her schooling. She was cast in the role of caretaker to her younger siblings as a teenager, and Zoë is keenly aware of the impact this had on her mother in terms of later employment options. Zoë is empathetic toward her parent’s lack of opportunity, yet she uses their experiences as a motivating factor. She readily cites her parents as having the greatest influence on her seeking higher education.
The benefit of residing with both parents, however, was not a luxury enjoyed by the majority of the study participants. Benjhe Seung’s father does not reside with the family, but has an obvious influence on his son. Although Mr. Seung returned to the Philippines for professional reasons, even his limited presence in his son’s life has been a motivating factor.

Ben admits to being lazy at times and over-indulged socially. Yet, he was focused enough in his course work to earn a 3.8 grade point average and an honors diploma. Because Ben admired his father’s focus in pursuing career goals, he emulated his father by focusing on his high school studies. Ben’s parents’ focus on education as it relates to improving one’s options, opportunities, and a chance for a better quality of life, is consistent with Ogbu’s assertions regarding voluntary and involuntary immigrants (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991).

The role of the mother proved to be especially significant in the lives of all of the gifted and talented students, particularly those from single-parent homes. Five of the participants said their mothers had the greatest influence on their education. Marlin, a prime example, whose father was absent during his childhood, reminisced on he and his mother’s subsequent close relationship:

The things I went through as a child. The things my mom told me, because me and her had an open relationship, and she would tell me everything. She told me all the obstacles and hardships that she went through during high school and college and told me that I was going to probably go through some of the same things. And the way things have changed from the 80s, and I was prepared for it (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).
Marlin stated that his mother had the greatest influence on his life and was very involved in his education throughout his elementary and middle school years. Nord (1988), points out that the involvement of single parents, mother or father, can be a positive force in their child’s education through significant, proactive involvement. Furthermore, gifted researcher, Shumow (1997), substantiated the work of earlier researchers with regard to the importance of maternal presence and involvement in student lives. In a study of low-income, gifted and talented students, she found the proactive participation of the mother to be a positive factor in the lives of disadvantaged GATE students who excel.

Of the twelve students in the study, four—Sherry, Adam, Joshua, and Carlos—indicated that extended family members played an important role in supporting their educational pursuits. Sherry and Carlos’s grandfathers both took time with them and are part of their inspiration for wanting to succeed in life. Joshua’s grandmother had Ivy League ambitions for her grandson. At a young age, Joshua’s grandmother attempted to inspire him to attend an elite college. However, he quickly squelched this idea by insisting that the cold eastern climate and the distance from his mother did not appeal to him (Personal Communication, October 3, 2003). Instead, Joshua chose to attend a local college where, according to his former high school counselor, he is very happy and pleased about his college choice. Although Joshua did not fulfill his grandmother’s elite college dream, he did listen to her persistent and encouraging message that he could and should go to college. Another student, who was studied but is not featured in the profiles, resides with his grandmother while his family lives in Colorado. He spoke fondly of fishing trips that he and his grandfather took when he was a boy. During their outings the senior relative
persistently encouraged his grandson to follow in the footsteps of his uncles and earn a college degree.

While their families were supportive in most instances, each student in the study voiced a strong sense of self-motivation to achieve. Marina, a teen-aged mother, stressed that she wants to continue her education in order to have more options in life. This type of resilience, even in the face of less-than-desirable home situations, is representative of disadvantaged gifted students’ drive and ambition.

Just as strong family ties play an important role in the success of college bound students in this study, dysfunctional and strained parental ties play a significant role in the lives of some and underlie one of the major reasons why some of the participants in this study did not attend college. Kenneth Turner, a former GATE student who dropped out of school, was conflicted about his role in the family. Coming from a single-parent home, he was sometimes asked to assist with the care of younger siblings:

Like my mom and them. It’s only her and four of us, and my little brother and sister, they’re not old enough to take care of themselves. And I got to help out and worry about them (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003).

Kenneth was sometimes asked to assist with the care of his younger siblings after school until his mother would arrive home from work. This arrangement did not appeal to Kenneth, and it precipitated his eventual move in with his girlfriend’s family. Kenneth wistfully reflected about how concerned his mother had been about his education from elementary to the early years of high school, while bemoaning how her concern appeared to wane after she began to believe that he was no longer listening to her.

Although Kaitlyn Smith said she never aspired to attend college, she alluded to the
dysfunction of her family unit during discussions with the researcher. According to her story, her family included an alcoholic and abusive father, a docile mother, and siblings who were unstable and prone to abusive behavior.

Kaitlyn’s subsequent residence in a child welfare facility and several group homes remain an unpleasant memory for her. Her admitted “acting out” in school might have been a byproduct of her tumultuous home life and later dissatisfactory group home experiences. While she visits her mother on some weekends, she stated that she does so mostly out of respect and does not have a close relationship with her mother. Kaitlyn feels that her mother should have taken a more active role in protecting family members from her father. It is a fact that her family life negatively impacted her education, as she missed her eighth grade year in school because her father did not send her to school. Rather, he had her placed in a mental facility.

A disconnect in the family unit was a concern that was expressed by Marina Garcia, as well. Her father lived with the family during her elementary school years, but later moved out. In retrospect, Marina expressed that she learned the value of a two-parent family as she watched her mother struggle on her own. This constant struggle and preoccupation with earning a living, according to Marina, caused her mom to be less attentive, especially to the choices, she, Marina, was making. One of the choices Marina made resulted in her becoming a teen mom. Nevertheless, Marina does not blame her mother for the choices she made. In single-parent situations in which one parent must accept the responsibility for providing for the household by working long hours at sometimes menial jobs, the parent often, understandably, possesses neither the energy nor the resources to devote and give to their children. The lack of parental supervision and
communication emerges as a key issue regarding matters related to teen pregnancy. One view expressed by Valerio (1999) suggests community resources as a way to assist parents through communication issues with their adolescent offspring. She espouses “the need for development of community programs to purposefully help parents improve communication with their children, especially during adolescence” (p. 224).

In most instances, the role of family is a distinct, determining factor in whether or not gifted and talented students will succeed. Extended family may express pride in the students’ accomplishments, thereby encouraging them to continue to excel. Parents can contribute to their son or daughter’s chances for academic success in several ways. Whether attending school functions, providing a nurturing environment at home, or taking a proactive role in monitoring course performance and homework completion, parental involvement in the education of their children is critical (Baker & Soden 1998; Nord, 1998).

Social Pressures

The importance of acceptance by one’s peers is heightened during the adolescent years. Adolescence, a most critical juncture, poses a time of life-changing choices and consequences. Personal decisions that were made by the participants during this time had a bearing on post-secondary choices and attainment.

Katy illustrated the importance of peer acceptance in her statement regarding her middle school experience. Although she missed the eighth grade, she said of the first two years, “I hated it because I was picked on because I was smart and not popular” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). According to Maslow (1973) there are at least five sets of goals, which may be termed as basic needs. These basic needs, in brief, revolve
around physiology, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Moreover, there is a desire to either achieve or maintain the conditions that encourage the receiving of those needs (Maslow, 1973). How participants dealt with peer pressure, friendship, and social situations during their secondary school years had far-reaching implications. The value they placed on friendship and the decisions they made in association with their peers affected their post-secondary options and chances for securing opportunities.

Friendship and social activities figured prominently in the lives of Adam, Marina, Ben, Carlos, and Lore. Their preoccupation with friendship and social activities had varying effects on their academic focus and post-secondary plans. As student body president of Central High School, Adam had many acquaintances and social obligations. He also participated in church activities, secured a wide array of associates, and relished in a small group he could call friends. Nonetheless, Adam effectively balanced his academic requirements and social obligations. In fact, he managed to graduate as class salutatorian even while he maintained his popularity at Central as head of the student government. Highly principled, yet outgoing, it appears that Adam was able to stay focused mainly because of his early upbringing and to his decision to live according to the values he had been taught.

While friends meant a great deal to both Ben and Carlos, each drew a line when it came to academics. Although Ben, a self-avowed reveler, expressly ranked friends as a higher priority than academics on a questionnaire, he earned a respectable 3.8 grade point average in high school. Carlos also reveled in his close circle of friends, some of whom he had known since middle school. He too ranked friendship above academics, work, social activities, or hobbies. While friends were extremely important to Carlos, he did not succumb to peer pressure when many of his friends decided to attend a state college
upon graduation. Instead, Carlos decided to attend a selective college in a neighboring state, confirming his steadfast mantra, “I like getting challenged” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2003). He also readily admitted that if a friend started getting into trouble, it would jeopardize their friendship. Both Ben and Carlos had the benefit of both parents’ constant encouragement and reinforcement about the value of an education. This perspective appears to have helped them both place friends and friendship into a less intrusive compartment of their lives.

Compared to other aspects of their adolescent lives, both Marina and Lore ranked friends as the most important priority. When Marina arrived at high school, she was attracted to an older crowd of students and placed a premium on friendships over coursework. She frequently spent time with school friends, church friends, and, particularly, her best friend, whom she met in high school. She soon became uninterested in her coursework, which showed in her average grades. Marina partially credited her lack of interest in coursework to peer pressure. Although she indicated that she worked fairly hard in school, she conceded that if she could relive her high school years, she would make different life choices. In analyzing Marina’s grade point average, class ranking, and test scores, it is apparent that a preoccupation with the social aspects of her life diverted her attention from academics. Although she was graduating with her class, she felt badly that some of her friends were not graduating; she also regretted that most of her graduating friends had no plans to attend college, because, unlike them, she desired to attend college in the future.

What excited Lore the most about school was the mere joy of being away from home and of having fun with friends. In middle school, Mrs. Acosta, Lore’s mother, noticed a change in her schoolwork and attitude, especially as Lore became more involved with her
friends. She remembered Lore as not wanting to apply herself and not wanting people to know she was smart. She also stated that Lore began to “act hard” around her friends, but this was not her daughter’s true character. Her high school counselor shared how Lore would sometimes act as a spokesperson for her friends after particular incidents on campus, and how she always articulated her position very well. Lore emphasized how much she liked attending parties, socializing with others, and simply spending time with friends.

Nonetheless, Lore had an inner drive to finish school because most of the members of her family had done so, which intensified the pressure she felt to keep the family tradition going. In fact, strong family ties and influence played a part in Lore’s earning her high school diploma early. However, her infrequent school attendance, propensity to aggrandize the social over the academic, and failure to perform her best in school impeded her preparation for college. Lore is a self-described leader, not follower, but she confessed that she sometimes led her friends to go to the park or to an eating establishment instead of school. She lamentably spoke about the choices she had made and how they had consigned her higher education possibilities to the community college. She feared that this college pathway could delay her dream of becoming a corrections officer. Lore also indicated that if she could relive high school again, she would make different choices.

Adam, Benjhe, Carlos, Marina and Lore all valued their friends. What is different about Adam, Benjhe, and Carlos is that they enjoyed their friends without losing their focus on academics. Education was obviously important to both Marina and Lore, but their unbalanced devotion to social activity, during a most critical period in their academic lives, proved detrimental. It stripped them of the option of attending a four-
year college upon graduation, a goal for which they both shared for a long time and thought they would easily accomplish.

Community Influences

The African proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child" is applicable to children from all ability levels and walks of life. Absent a stable home environment, low socio-economic disadvantaged youth often find it advantageous to become involved in community mentoring organizations. Organizations that provide mentors may include churches, community youth organizations, fraternities, sororities, and specialized after-school programs. Such mentoring arrangements have proven to be a lifeline for some disadvantaged students who may not have the requisite encouragement and validation from natural family members.

Fehr (1993) cites mentoring as "providing the protégé with information, assistance, counseling, protection, and challenges; drawing attention to the protégé's successes, and developing trust and friendship" (p. 65). Mentoring organizations for high school disadvantaged youth may originate in the form of fraternity or sorority "youth lines" wherein the parent organization seeks out high school students to join an association comprised of school-aged youth who are mentored by "Frat Brothers" or "Sorority Sisters." Generally, the criteria are that the student must show academic promise, be willing to engage in community volunteerism, participate in civic functions, be mentored, and follow certain guidelines thought to enhance their matriculation into college. Often, lasting mentoring relationships are born from such associations. Kenneth described his membership in such an association, the Alphas.
When I was at Central I was online, and they always talked about college. We learned mostly about black history and if we had lower than a 2.0, we couldn't be online any more. We had to go to school every day, and every Wednesday we had to wear a suit and tie. They just kept us motivated (Personal communication, August 26, 2003).

Several similar organizations exist within the African-American community and can be an important vehicle in keeping students focused toward college matriculation and success. Marlin also reported joining such an organization, which was called the Sigmas at Eastern High School. Within the Latino community, the Hispanic Leadership Conference exposes students to college and leadership skill enhancement. The Asian Chamber of Commerce offers annual college entry workshops for interested students as well (Suzuki, personal communication, February 23, 2004). Finally, a Native American Annual Student Conference is offered by the personnel of the Center for Academic Advancement for Native American youth.

Three of the participants mentioned their involvement in church activities. Adam related that church membership was the source of some of his friendships, as did Marina, who recalled:

Well, when I was going to church, there was a youth group and I went to the youth group every Wednesday. It was fun. It was nice being around a lot of kids that wanted to go to school. And since the church was by here, they all went to Cascade High School, and I wanted to hang out with them (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

Marina later widened her circle of friends, but she spoke with fondness of her friends that she met at church. She viewed their influence as positive.
Sherry Williams spoke enthusiastically about her involvement in church activities, such as singing in the choir and participating in after-school tutoring. She was especially grateful to have access to tutoring as well as travel opportunities sponsored by the youth leader at her church. Indeed, her youth minister and a small coterie of volunteers make it possible for several students from the community to tour a number of historically black colleges every year. Sherry spoke warmly and aspiringly about attending an out-of-state historically black college in Alabama due to this exposure. A local newspaper featured an article about the young minister who has made it possible for hundreds of African-American students to tour the nation's historically black colleges. In the article, he shared the goal of his "Unity Through Knowledge Annual Black College Tour" as a tour to expose African-American students to college life and to historical sites such as the King Center:

"The goal is to get more young black students to think about going to college. Enrollment of blacks in college has increased in the past years. My goal is to continue the trend. After the first tour, I really tapped into the need for this tour and a need for it within our community (Sun, October 18, 2003)."

Equally powerful are school-based mentoring opportunities. Some secondary schools offer programs that provide a forum for mentor connections, while others do not. Regular classroom teachers and counselors are in an optimum position to mentor students and provide information while serving as positive role models. Carlos Meza's second grade teacher, after discovering his academic talent, became a mentor to him. Carlos pointed to this individual as having had the greatest impact upon his education. Carlos recalled, "He introduced me to computers, 'cause I wasn’t in GATE in second grade, so instead of"
putting me in GATE, he just taught me about computers. And he taught me...like math stuff and he started giving me more math” (Personal communication, May 20, 2003). This was an obvious advantage to Carlos, as this early orientation evolved into an abiding interest in math and computer science. He also gained enrollment in a middle school magnet program partly due to the selfless dedication of this early mentor. Mentors can be found in school, church, civic, and community organizations. Such mentors can play a significant role toward motivating students to excel in academics, to focus on constructive pursuits, and to plan for college.

In addition, activities such as the annual African-American and Latin-American Career Day, hosted annually in the subject school district, are invaluable because they expose students to career choices, allow students to shadow professionals in their respective fields, and permit students to learn from professionals who share their ethnic heritage.

Another opportunity for student growth can be found in the area of community outreach or volunteerism. The benefits of volunteering and devoting time to others were exemplified by the efforts of Zoë Young. Zoë was very active in community volunteer ventures. She eloquently espoused some of the personal benefits of volunteerism when she stated “You can be paid hourly for what you do. You can be praised for what you do, but nothing is more rewarding than making a difference” (Review-Journal, February 23, 2003). One of the recurring themes and traits of gifted students are that they often become bored. Zoë’s commitment to volunteerism demonstrates the personal fulfillment to be had through harnessing creative talent and energy on the behalf of helping those less fortunate. Early exposure to networking opportunities, working with mentors, or volunteering in community outreach programs serve dual purposes. The experiences can
develop character, help the needy, expand student contacts, provide students with meaningful, enduring contacts, and enhance recognition and scholarship opportunities.

Personal Resilience

Whether college bound or not, each student in this study experienced some type of difficulty in his or her young life. Some of the obstacles were temporary and some were life changing, causing a few of the participants to lose their academic focus. Many of the participants, however, demonstrated remarkably resilient aspirations relative to their circumstances. In the wake of grief, disappointments, and setbacks, eleven of the twelve participants cited earning a college degree as a personal goal. Their alertness, desire, and drive, in some instances, to become better educated was evident.

As elementary school students, most of the participants were focused on their studies. Both they and their parents reported pleasing elementary school experiences in both their regular and GATE classes. According to the parents of the participants who were interviewed for this study, the school personnel, as a whole, were helpful during the elementary school years, making the participants formative years productive and meaningful.

Each participant realized at a young age that academics came easily for him or her. Whether it was Carlos, Marlin, or Sherry, who all wrote by the age of four, or Marina, whose mother glowed with ebullient joy that her daughter grasped knowledge so readily, all the participants were recognized by their parents and/or school personnel for their budding intellectual talent. By the time the participants reached sixth grade, most were placed in accelerated courses and remained focused academically. The middle school years, however, brought new challenges for the twelve participants.
Each of the students began to experience various life and academic challenges.

It was during middle school that Kaitlyn's home problems accelerated, causing her to miss her eighth grade year. Carlos's mother also mentioned that he experienced some difficulty in middle school. For a brief time he was placed in the regular program at his magnet school of attendance due to an extended illness. Nevertheless, he kept his focus.

Adam and Chy'Anne faced special challenges in middle school. Adam attended an inner-city middle school, and he recalled the level of discipline in the school as being poor. Disruptive students, lack of continuity in teaching personnel, and missed opportunities led Adam to reflect upon his middle school years with misgivings. He lamented that students in his middle school did not know the value of an education. Despite this environmental circumstance and the passing of his father, Adam still managed to maintain his focus and continued to excel when he began attending the inner-city Central High School. Both GATE and general population students are challenged to remain focused in disruptive school environments.

Another realm of difficulty for the disadvantaged gifted students falls in the area of personal loss. Chy'Anne's loss of her mother was a personally trying time for her. Throughout the various transitions in her life, she contended that she kept the faith and kept moving towards her goals. She set high academic and post-secondary goals for herself in middle school and kept them throughout high school. Other disadvantaged GATE students demonstrated similar resolve.

Each, with the exception of Chy'Anne, who resided with adoptive parents in suburbia, experienced economic and emotional difficulties in the home at one time. The catalyst for these difficulties varied. Two students lost one of their parents to cancer; one dealt with an extreme geographical separation of a parent from the family; one had a parent...
who traveled throughout the week, limiting his time and contribution to the family; another had a particularly trying home situation; alas, two felt the twinge of stereotyping and the sting of perceived racial discrimination in school. Most of the students maintained their academic concentration, however, and managed to graduate from high school. Eight matriculated into college, and others, like Lore, spoke of enrolling eventually.

Even Kenneth, who did not graduate from high school, lamented not reaching his goals. He stated, “I didn’t reach none of my goals” (Personal Communication, August 25, 2003). Although he did not make the most of his opportunities, he voiced concern regarding disadvantaged GATE students who are in school today. His message and advice to them was to keep their focus, above all.

In few areas of their lives was the mettle of each student tested more so than in the area of focus, resilience, and drive. Those who maintained their early academic training and orientation, kept friendships in proper perspective, persevered through their family disadvantages, and stuck with a challenging curriculum successfully matriculated into a four-year college. The disadvantaged GATE students in this study who began vibrantly in the program but took their eyes off of their goals, by placing too much emphasis on the social and allowing perceived racial injustices to cripple their progress, lost focus or became ensconced into undisciplined behaviors. Nonetheless, they were resilient enough to make it into a two-year college and managed to keep the dream and goal of attending a four-year college alive.

Those students in the study who faced the most severe home situations, majored in the social side of school life, or were unable to see past all the difficulties of their personal lives were stalled in their quest for academic fulfillment in high school and in short-term
future college prospects, which can be attributed to, but not limited to, the none acquisition of the prerequisite academic skills and necessary habits of mind that enable one to succeed as a academic being.

Institutional Factors

While each student had different experiences with educators, it is apparent that the collective and individual influences of schoolteachers, counselors, and administrators does impact the lives of impressionable students including those who are gifted and talented. Although their collective role is significant, it was often the case that an individual teacher or counselor made a lasting impression through their caring attitude or academic reinforcements.

Teachers

Each participant had vivid memories of at least one teacher who left an impression that impacted them positively or negatively in school. Of the college bound students, Chy'Anne was the most positive about her experiences with her teachers. Overall, she found her teachers to be supportive and encouraging. She found that her teachers placed high expectations upon her, and she reported feeling extremely well prepared academically for post-secondary education. In the few instances where she felt slighted by a teacher, she chose to take a philosophical stance: “Sometimes if I have a bad situation with a teacher, I learn something. I learn I do not want to be like that” (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003). When asked if the school personnel had an impact upon her education, Chy’Anne responded,
Mr. Gates has always been there and always supported me. My counselors at Magnet, if I need something, are always there to help me in whatever possible. And I just learned so much. Everyone is really there for me (Personal Communication, May 5, 2003).

Teacher competence is important to gifted and talented disadvantaged students, as well. Kenneth reported that at Central it appeared to him that, in some cases, the students were smarter than the teachers. He marveled when he attended a suburban high school. "All the teachers were smart" (Personal Communication, August 26, 2003). Under-qualified teachers are sometimes prevalent in schools that serve low socio-economic students. One of the goals of H.R. 1, No Child Left Behind Act, is to certify that each school has highly-qualified teachers. This emphasis should serve disadvantaged students well, as inner-city schools are the least likely to have highly-qualified teachers because of high teacher turnover.

While most of the GATE participants reported good experiences with their teachers, both Sherry and Marlin shared a combination of mixed and negative reactions regarding classroom teachers. Sherry was disgruntled about a low grade she was given by her math teacher and asserted that this was just one instance of prejudice against students of color at Central. Moreover, she stated that school personnel at Central "don't try to be bothered with us" (Personal Communication, May 12, 2003). Sherry expresses a slight disgust with schoolteachers, counselors, and administrators. Although she claimed that her mother knew the principal socially, she did not indicate that this helped ease the plight of she and her peers. Sherry insisted that she had the requisite intellect and grades for advanced placement courses, but she was not placed in such courses because her teachers refused to nominate her, nor were her counselors willing to intervene on her
behalf. While most of the disadvantaged GATE respondents reported high teacher expectations, Sherry responded that her classroom teachers only expected modest achievement from her. Moreover, her mother felt that teachers, counselors, and administrators responded indifferently to Sherry and her African-American peers. Unfortunately, Sherry's contention is not limited to inner-city schools. In a study of a suburban Shaker Heights School system, the following was found by Ogbu (2003):

A common complaint against teachers was they did not believe that Black students could perform academically like White students. A related complaint was that teachers expected Black students to behave differently; they expected black students to not pay attention in class and to not do class work or homework like White students. Parents and other adults in the community shared these perceptions of teacher beliefs and expectations (pg. 24).

This perception in the school and larger community coupled with complaints about counselor “gate keeping”, or purposely discouraging or failing to place able students of color in higher-level courses, fuels the debate about equal treatment of students within the school setting.

Marlin experienced mixed reactions from teachers regarding his intelligence. He described an elementary school academic experience that was mostly enjoyable. His mother recalled that some of Marlin’s teachers would call her from time to time and praise her son as an “exceptional child,” and make statements like, “your son is wonderful”, or remark that “he is a good child” (Personal Communication, September 17, 2003). His time in elementary school was followed by an equally satisfactory middle school experience. By the time he reached high school, however, Marlin began to face more skepticism from his teachers. His experiences ranged from being chastised for
answering too many questions in class to receiving initial teacher skepticism about his abilities. As a result, Marlin learned to cope with a range of responses, particularly the often surprised reactions to his demonstrated intelligence. While most of the other participants in the study held that they were expected to know the answers to questions in class, Marlin contended that his teachers did not always expect him to know much. When asked about his inner feelings regarding the mixed teacher signals, Marlin replied that one "should never judge a book by its cover" (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003).

Marlin resignedly described the metamorphosis his teachers had to make upon discovering the extent of his innate intelligence. He even found that sometimes, upon completion of his assignments in class, teachers would ask him to grade papers. Marlin took these requests in stride and philosophized that these tasks kept him from getting into trouble.

In spite of his difficulties with teachers, Marlin chose to focus on the positive aspects of his overall experience with teachers from K-12. He indicated on a questionnaire that his teachers, in general, placed high expectations on him and, for the most part, were positive. Marlin described his response to skeptical teachers by stating,

Yeah, that's the way I was raised. I mean, you don't sit there and...vengeance is God's...you don't sit there and try to get revenge against somebody. You let them see your positive so that they feel bad for even assuming it, and then they come back and apologize to you (Personal Communication, May 7, 2003).

Unlike Marlin, Joshua found that his teachers had a high level of confidence in his intellectual ability. However, he found that learning in an inner-city classroom could be difficult at times. He talked about overcrowded classrooms, apathetic students, and
overworked teachers. He recalled how his elementary schoolteachers, unlike his secondary schoolteachers, seemed to have more time for him and his fellow students. Joshua, nonetheless, empathized with secondary teachers, especially about their ominous workload. Despite concerns of this sort, he opined that somewhere a connection has to be made between teachers and students, and spoke about the few times when he felt that he had made such a connection with a teacher. Whenever he had the occasion of connecting with a teacher, he would remark to himself, “This is a great teacher. I can talk to them.” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003). Although he only recalls experiencing just a few unique moments like this, he wishes such occurrences could have been more commonplace.

The need for more personalized instruction is one of the issues that have prompted a national agenda for school reform. Recognizing the urgent need for change in the American institution called high school, Breaking Ranks, A Report of the National Association of Secondary School Principals on the high school of the 21st century (1996), presented six themes that address critical components for high school improvement. This report stresses that improved high school education in the 21st century “depends on personalizing the high school experience for students, lending coherency to their education, organizing time differently, using technology at every opportune point, revitalizing the ongoing professional education of teachers and administrators, and enhancing leadership at every level at which it can affect teaching and learning” (p. 5). Dynamic, dedicated, caring, and problem-solving school administrators who are adept at reconciling budgetary and reform needs must provide bold leadership in getting high schools to address student needs and make the ‘connection’ that Joshua spoke of. The
fruits of such reform will undoubtedly benefit the gifted and talented as well as the general student population.

Guidance Counselors

Only one-third of the participants reported a strong relationship with their counselor. Kaitlyn spoke positively about her school counselor. She was assigned to Mr. Sanders and enjoyed working him as his student aide in the counseling office. She seemed at ease with him as her counselor. The two appeared to share an easy, congenial relationship that included occasional light joking. Mr. Sanders shared a few general insights regarding Katy with this researcher. Without compromising the tenets of confidentiality, he stated that he and Katy had a good rapport. At times, they were even able to talk about the appropriate behavior and the proper posture a young lady should exhibit around boys. He expressed that she had gone through a lot. However, he was not above pointing out her faults, especially her wisecracking ways. It appeared from this researcher’s observations and conversations that Mr. Sanders may have filled a fatherly void that was absent in Kaitlyn’s life. Mr. Sanders quietly lamented the fact that Katy had left school before earning a final elective credit. He was hopeful that she would finish her high school education and expressed that he found her to be a bright person with great potential. Mr. Sanders seemed to have a sincere regard for Katy’s well-being.

Both Benjhe and Joshua’s counselor’s spoke highly of them also. A high school counselor, who was very familiar with Joshua, spoke with pride about his academic ability and confidence. This counselor seemed genuinely pleased as she related to this researcher in September 2003 that Joshua had enrolled in a local college, and was happy about his college choice. Benjhe’s counselor also spoke well of him, although honestly
describing him as a “smart, nice kid, but [who] likes to party” (Personal Communication, August 14, 2003).

In contrast to their high school guidance counselors, few of the participants remembered who their middle school counselors were or recalled any positive experiences with their middle school counselors. Generally, their recollection of their middle school counselor only surfaced around issues related to course scheduling or some negative issue. Therefore, many of the participants either did not remember or want to remember anything about their middle school counselor(s). Chy’Anne, however, vividly remembered a counselor who wanted to transfer her to another school against her will despite the fact that she was in the process of coping with a tragic personal loss. Her experience with this counselor demonstrated the antithesis of a “caring” counselor. In fact, two-thirds of the participants either had a bad experience with a counselor or found their relationship with their counselor to be nondescript or, in Adam’s words, “overrated.”

Although most of the research participants remembered who their high school counselors were, this researcher was occasionally given blank stares when she interviewed the participants regarding the quality of their student/counselor relationships. Consequently, some of them had no problem giving examples of the incompetent counselor who mailed the wrong test scores to a parent, the apathetic counselor who would never return phone calls, the indifferent counselor who would never initiate discussion about college or financial aid matters, the procrastinating counselor who would wait until the last moment to review high school transcripts, and the invisible counselor who would never introduce his or herself to any student.

Therefore, high school counselors, in general, made a dubious impression upon the
majority of the participants in this study. In fact, of the twelve individuals profiled in this study, only Kaitlyn, Ben, and Lore spoke positively about their high school counselor(s). Adam, Chy’Anne, and Zoë offered mixed reviews about the counselors assigned to them in high school. Three of the participants recalled having very negative experiences with their school counselors, and the final three participants were non-committal about their counselors. These numbers clearly indicate that the disadvantaged, gifted and talented students in this study were ambivalent, at best, about their experiences with school guidance counselors. The numbers also appear to indicate that counseling services to this particular student population can stand improvement.

Since disadvantaged, gifted and talented students must face many obstacles in order to succeed in school, they need strong advocates at the school level. School guidance counselors appear uniquely situated to fulfill such a role. However, the guidance counselor must be thoroughly trained for the essential services of providing early exposure to post-secondary options, appropriate course placement from beginning to end, better financial aid information, consistent communication, and empathic, hands-on guidance to a student population with so much promise but little support, especially when compared with their more affluent, gifted cohorts.

Most of the students in this study who aspire to attend a college or a university after high school graduation will be the first in their families to do so. Specifically, this is true of five of the eight study participants who enrolled in a two or four-year college after graduation. Because of their disadvantaged background, these students are often in dire need of guidance associated with completing college admissions applications, negotiating admissions complexities, and conquering the all-important financial aid hurdles. Fallon
(1997) cites some of the difficulties and hurdles of disadvantaged, academically talented youth, and their unique need for school counselor assistance:

Many first generation college students come from urban public schools with poor academic programs. Many students, although intelligent, have not been exposed to a college preparatory curriculum that will give them the academic skills for college success. Because many of these students are not viewed as college material, they have not been encouraged by school counselors, teachers, or administrators to take part in the courses and guidance activities that will help them successfully compete for college admission. Thus, students who need information the most are least likely to get it (p. 6).

While Chy'Anne had rave reviews about her high school teachers and counselors, Zoë, who attended the same school, had a more sober approach when she relayed the story of a well-liked counselor, Ms. Kim and her subsequent counselors:

I mean she (Ms. Kim) was awesome. She took a job in St. Louis and left in the middle of our sophomore year. That was really upsetting. She was the only counselor... I don’t know if you’ve noticed... that not only speaks English but actually cared. I mean there are still a few counselors who care, but I’ve never had them as my counselor. After she left I was stuck, with two different people--one guy who left like a week into the school year. And then I was stuck with Mr. Sinclair again and I almost cried when I found out ‘cause they are just incompetent” (Personal Communication, May 8, 2003).

Zoë’s words demonstrate that caring and competence are prized among students from all intellects and grade levels. Although Zoë experienced difficulties in the area of guidance, she feels extremely well prepared for post-secondary education.
Administration

School administrators are in a position to play a key facilitative role in the education of former disadvantaged, gifted students by establishing a school climate of inclusion and fulfillment for all. Four of the study participants did not comment on the administration at the elementary, middle, or high school they attended. Three students were conflicted about the role of the school administration, but three students reported positive experiences or feelings regarding school administration. Two students were outwardly critical of the school administration where they attended high school.

Ken, for instance, described one incident in elementary school when he was referred to the principal’s office for a disciplinary infraction. While in his office, the principal began to study Ken’s school record and commented positively about his academic ability and had him tested for GATE. Through testing, it was found that Ken, in fact, qualified for the GATE program. This type of probing, diagnostic, proactive involvement model exemplifies the right kind of an administrator, which is one that looks beyond stereotypes and student faults in order to meet a student’s academic needs.

Marlin recalled the special interest his high school principal took in his academics. He further described a memorable encounter with his school principal after coming to his counselor’s office on a discipline referral:

I remember there was one time when I got sent to the counselor’s office for talking too much in class, and she [the principal] walked in and asked me what I was doing, read the referral, ripped it up, and brought me in her office and just chewed me out. ‘You’re better than this. You’re one of the smartest kids at this school and you’re acting like you’re one of the dumbest. You better calm yourself down and
get in class and work hard. I plan to see you come back to this school driving a Mercedes’ (Personal Communication, May 13, 2003).

He indicated that he respected his principal for her interest in him.

Marina did not appear to have as much adoration or respect for her high school principal. According to her, he was detached and aloof. In spite of the large high school population, she said she wished the adults at her school would take a little time to focus on the students as individuals. She also expressed a desire to see more meaningful outreach from the counselors and the administrators at school. Instead, she could only recall attending group situations whereby a school counselor or administrator would only remark to the whole group, “well, all you guys should go to college…” without offering instruction on how to get there. Marina also felt that her principal walked around campus to show his presence, but felt that his minimal interest in her and other students was either forced or insincere. Marina saw no effort on the part of the administrators to make a connection with the students at the school.

Research Questions

As the previous analysis shows, several themes emerged that shed light on the original research questions that were posed for this study. The following sections examine these findings in terms of the research questions.

1. What institutional/community factors encouraged or discouraged, gifted academically talented, disadvantaged youth from pursuing higher education?

Based on this study of participant experiences, institutional factors that encouraged gifted and academically talented youth to pursue higher education included effective early identification of intellectual ability programs, proactive administrators,
one-on-one mentoring opportunities, and well-trained and proactive counselors who sought information about college admissions and financial aid and then aggressively sought to share such information with disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students. Finally, schools, because of an enlightened administration, that saw the value and made the effort to keep students with strong counselors throughout their high school years factored strongly in encouraging gifted academically talented, disadvantaged students to pursue higher education.

Community factors that encouraged students to attend college included community/university inspired organizations such as the Sigma and Alpha young men’s’ clubs. These organizations gear students toward college as early as their freshman year in high school. Community organizations, in particular, that provided travel and college exposure opportunities to students have proven to be particularly timely and effective.

Students also reported the positive influences of religious institutions toward exposure to college information. After school, church-based tutoring programs assisted students with their areas of academic deficiencies and provided a nurturing atmosphere where students were encouraged to do well academically in order to increase their chances for college attendance.

Long time university-based programs such as Talent Search and Upward Bound continue to assist academically talented, disadvantaged youth by encouraging college attendance and by offering programs of support toward college matriculation, retention, and attainment of a college degree. Joining in this mission, is the recently funded Gear-Up Program, which begins identifying and gearing up disadvantaged, academically talented youth to attend college as early as the sixth grade.
Based on this study, institutional factors that most discourage academically talented students from attending college include school counseling services that require students to take the initiative regarding post-secondary options as opposed to having proactive counselors taking the initiative of inculcating the idea of attending college to students from all walks of life. Most of the participants in this study cited parents or family members as those who introduced them to the idea of attending college. School personnel from elementary school through high school should nurture the idea of college attendance. A lack of student education regarding the life-long benefits of a college education and prospects of acquiring appropriate financial aid options for funding a college education is definitely lacking. School-based counseling that is primarily concerned with scheduling and testing services forfeit a valuable opportunity to mine and guide human potential toward higher education. Furthermore, school administrators who are detached and unapproachable inhibit productive, viable interchange of ideas regarding program improvements for academically talented students. Another hindrance is school administrators who are not innovative in seeking to find novel ways to reach different but advantaged segments of the school population: gifted and talented student population.

Community factors that may inhibit disadvantaged academically talented students from attending college include the location of some college incentive programs. Programs that are located on or near a university campus exclusively may deter students from participating for a lack of transportation. Traditionally, university student assistance programs have been located miles from the lower-socioeconomic students' place of residence. Transportation issues may pose a problem and cause academically able students to bypass valuable exposure to pre-college opportunities.
2 A. What factors contribute to disadvantaged GATE students continued academic achievement and aspirations for college through middle school and senior high school?

Factors that contribute to disadvantaged GATE students' continued academic achievement and aspirations for college through middle and high school include family encouragement and influence, a personal desire for more knowledge and academic challenge, and a desire to have more options in life.

Although all of the studied disadvantaged GATE students were either from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, suffered the loss of a parent, or were being raised in single parent households, eight of the twelve participants enrolled in a two or four-year college upon high school graduation. Demonstrating a high resilience quotient, they suffered through less than desirable personal circumstances, overcrowded classrooms, marginal instructors, perceived racial discrimination, and in some cases, dependence upon one economically challenged, but striving parent. A third of the participants used their parent hardships and lack of opportunities as motivational factors for striving to achieve a formal baccalaureate education. This strategy of inverting a negative to a positive was apparent with the GATE achievers v. the non-achievers. When asked if their middle school aspirations changed by the time they reached high school, nine of the twelve students reported sustaining their middle school goals throughout high school. Another recurring theme was that achievers generally surrounded themselves with like-minded college-bound friends. When asked what person had the greatest impact on their decision(s) to attend or not attend college, half of the respondents answered “myself.” This type of self-belief, self-motivation, and resolve is representative of gifted achievers.
2 B. What factors contributed to some students' gradual disinterest in academics?

Factors that contributed to some disadvantaged GATE students' gradual disinterest in academics include a relationship with friends and peers who have no college aspirations; home situations that diverted students' concentration to other life issues; personal choices to miss school for illegitimate reasons; peer pressure; lack of early knowledge about college; and failure to grasp the connection between daily academic application and long range opportunities. The factors that contributed to some students' gradual disinterest in academics are inherent in their stories.

For example, although Marina is clearly bright, she did not indicate that anyone in particular introduced her to the serious prospect of attending college after high school, even though a few classroom teachers casually mentioned the subject. This lack of early exposure and guidance toward higher education was one cause for her withdrawal from academic pursuits. As a single parent, her mother had to work, thereby leaving little time for supervision of Marina and her siblings. Marina frequently spent time with school friends, church friends, and her best friend. Her preoccupation with her friends also appears to have diverted her attention from academics and personal goals.

Home life issues deflected Kaitlyn and Ken's attention from academics. Katy's survival in group home situations was expressed as an area of concern. Her removal from the home of her parents to new and varied living arrangements led to her eventual estrangement from her parents and was also one of the reasons for her drop in school focus. Ken's decidedly resentful disposition about his home living situation and subsequent decision to leave home complicated his life. Instead of assessing his fatherless home situation and using his mother's predicament as a motivational point, Kenneth chose to rebel and seek his own course. His choosing not to persevere in his
home situation, nor to capitalize on his schooling as his one sure way to escape a life of financial difficulty, muddled his options. Without his family base, his life became mired in sporadic schooling and little achievement, and with intimate entanglements, added responsibilities and, consequently, more struggle. Unlike his disadvantaged, yet achieving GATE peers, who inverted their difficulties to educational advancement, Kenneth seemed restless and conflicted about his present and future. His uncertainty manifested itself through defiance to authority figures, bridled anger, and regression from academic achievement and pursuit of higher education.

3 A. What are the underlying motivating factors of disadvantaged gifted students who graduate from high school and enroll in college?

According to the study, the underlying motivating factors of disadvantaged, gifted students who graduate from high school and enroll in college include but are not limited to a solid support structure and goal orientation.

**A Solid Support Structure and Goal Orientation**

Parents who take the time to train their sons and daughters to support and value academics, structure time for homework, establish the expectation of continuing education, monitor student's course selections, take a proactive role in their son/daughter's education, monitor their relationships, and constantly instill in them the value and purpose of earning good grades and preparing themselves for college from a young age, create opportunities for their sons/daughters that are superior to any other advantages the child may encounter.

For instance, Marlin's mother was actively involved in his pre-school and early education. She even cautioned him about his approaching middle school years, a time
when some students’ attentions are diverted by a plethora of other stimuli. The watchful, guiding, proactive, nurturing role of a concerned parent is one of the distinguishing characteristics of GATE students who succeed. It is part of the gift that Adam so aptly spoke about.

Whether students attended a magnet or inner-city high school, course mapping and planning were important factors in their success. Adam, Carlos, Joshua, Zoë, and Chy’Anne took predominately honors and advanced placement courses. The rigor offered in these courses, as described by the participants, provided good preparation for college-level courses. Methodical planning and perseverance led to several of the students’ acceptance into a college honors program, a highly selective college, or a specific college of choice. The students in this category focused on the fact that they wanted to attend a four-year college and worked toward achieving this end. Although they encountered many difficulties, they demonstrated the requisite drive and resilience to make goal-driven choices to begin their journey to higher education.

*Goal v. Social Orientation*

Chy’Anne, Carlos, Adam, Joshua and Zoë placed varying emphasis of importance on interpersonal relationships while attending secondary school. They all seemed to have given a lot of thought to friends, and each, with the exception of Zoë, had a small coterie of friends who seemed to be carefully selected. Chy’Anne’s friends are young adults who had already finished high school, but welcomed her into their set and were extremely supportive and almost paternal about her schooling, even chiding her if she failed to get her work done. She seems relieved to have connected with these three friends. Although all of the participants had friends, their friends respected their personal boundaries. Adam’s friends, for instance, jokingly dared him to partake in certain activities, but from
his description, they knew that there was virtually no chance of him acquiescing to their enticements, so they lightheartedly shrugged it off. Zoë, who expressed that she had few close friends, emphatically stated that no one had ever asked her to do anything against her will. Both Joshua and Carlos had understated, yet clear boundaries on what they would and would not do. These students displayed a strong, resolute, character about themselves that would cause one to believe that they would not be easily distracted from their principles. The characteristics they demonstrated and voiced to this researcher embodied vigilance, alertness, and values resolution. Surrounding themselves with positive, like-minded individuals proved to be one of the formulas for staying focused academically. Most of the college-bound students had friends who planned to attend college as well.

3B. What were the determining factors of their counterparts who elect not to attend college?

Factors that contributed to former GATE students not attending college include personal career choices, lack of early information about college, loss of academic focus, failure to take a challenging curriculum, failure to apply one’s self, and a distracting home situation.

_Early Decisions_

Early decisions about future career choices influenced their educational choices. Some disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students, like Kaitlyn, decided at a young age that their post-secondary goals do not require higher education. Kaitlyn was one of two participants who did not feel that a college education was essential for their future success in life. Indeed, Katy’s choice to pursue a career in auto-mechanics does not necessitate
a venture into higher education. Ken opined that "thousands of dollars" were not necessary conditions for success, despite declaring before that he wanted to become an architect or an attorney. In fact, the value of an education has been found to make a stark difference in one's future earning potential. According to the Postsecondary Education Newsletter as seen in Figure 3, the value of an education can be converted to monetary value.

Figure 3: Median earnings of degree holders in 2001 (Postsecondary Education Newsletter, 2001).

Marina, Marlin, Sherry, Ken, Lori, and Ben indicated during their interviews that they would like to attend a four-year college at some time in their futures, but were not able to proceed there directly after high school graduation for various reasons. Some of the reasons had to with the lack of requisite courses, grade point averages, economic
resources, and, in one instance, a failure to submit pertinent college application materials due to procrastination.

4 A. How do successful disadvantaged GATE students cope during difficult times in secondary academic life?

All of the participants in this study faced some type of difficulty in their personal and/or academic lives. Each of the students who made it to college indicated that during difficult times they both “keep the faith and keep moving toward their goals” or they “bounce back and try to keep going.” This survivor spirit was pervasive even though students faced trying times. For the students who persevered through the very personal loss of a parent, part of their resolve to succeed had to do with the memory of that parent. According to McMillan and Reed (1994), resilient students traverse their difficulties by constructing hope filled realities they can attain. An example of resilience in this group is Carlos’s persistence to get a magnet, middle school education. His mother recalled a time during his middle years, when, due to illness, he missed school frequently and was placed in the “regular” program at his magnet school. Although this greatly disappointed Carlos, he remained in the middle school’s general program and was later accepted by the high school magnet math/science program in his freshmen year of high school. One characteristic of resilient students is their ability to recognize their circumstances as temporary.

When friends tried to ridicule him for his academic prowess and resorted to name calling, Joshua’s response was to shrug and agree with them, “OK, whatever you say, I’m a nerd then, I guess” (Personal Communication, May 9, 2003). His clever approach worked, and he experienced less ridicule as the school years progressed. Zoë was also vilified by some of her inner-city middle school classmates for opting to attend a magnet
high school. Zoë's “just have to take hard classes” reputation did not deter her because she actually had a burning desire to learn. The coping mechanisms of disadvantaged GATE students has a bearing on their success.

4 B. What strategies kept the underachievers from performing to their academic potential?

*Critical Decisions and Choices*

The inability to make strategic personal choices of long-term benefit mainly kept this group from reaching their academic potential and immediate post-secondary goals; instead, this group specialized in personal choices of short-term benefit. Such choices entailed giving peer pressure undue weight in their decision making, failing to take honors and advanced placement courses in school, coping unsuccessfully with distractions and diversions at home and school, declining involvement in positive community groups, and adopting poor work habits.

Marina, for example, regretted the decisions she made because of peer pressure, and indicated if she had the chance to relive her high school years again, she would definitely make different life choices, as did Marlin. Both Ken and Marlin had exposure to community organizations that encouraged discipline and college attendance, but they both decided to discontinue their involvement with these organizations. Lore chose not to go to school on a regular basis, which led to her enrollment in an evening alternative high school. She stated that she was not able to regain the necessary pre-requisite coursework or grade point average to gain admissions into a four-year college directly after high school. She also stated that she experimented with drugs, further diverting her attention from academic pursuits.
Sherry indicated that she worked hard only in the classes that interested her. Her inability to matriculate into advanced placement and more honors courses left her feeling “fairly prepared” for baccalaureate-level college work. But she adopted a “them against us” attitude, which appeared to limit her purview of the people willing to help her to realize her academic hopes and dreams.

Economic Factors

Most of the study participants who elected not to go to college were raised in single-parent households. Working parents struggling to provide a living for themselves and their offspring often cannot devote the necessary attention to student social and academic development. It is also unlikely that they would have the money to finance their children’s education. Marlin, Sherry, and Benjhe earned a state-college scholarship and could have attended an in-state four-year college on scholarship, but chose to attend the community college instead, citing the fact that it costs less to attend a two-year college, which allowed them to save part of their scholarship money for later enrollment in a four-year college. Economic factors had a definite effect on the decision of some former GATE students not to enroll in a four-year college, a decision that often affects college completion rates.

Choice of college is, of course, a very important factor, particularly when a student finds he must choose a community college rather than a four-year school. Students beginning at four-year campuses are much more likely to complete college and take less time doing it (Orfield, 1992, p. 340).
Conclusion

Academic focus, achievement, and post-secondary goal attainment can be difficult for students of all intellects and ability levels. This study revealed a cross section of gifted students who achieved early identification and unobstructed participation in the GATE program of their respective elementary schools. Most of them recall being excited about their GATE placement and sometimes received the enthusiastic approval of friends. Of the participants, only two males of color, expressed resentment from peers regarding their interests in academics, which is congruent with the findings of Gibson and Ogbu (1991) and other sociologists. In spite of their individual trials the GATE students in the study, for the most part, showed great resilience despite their personal circumstances. Student attitudes about their predicaments played a large role in their academic success, post-secondary dispositions, opportunities, and circumstances. Eleven of the twelve participants set goals to attend college as middle or high school students. A post-secondary status review revealed that only five actually completed matriculation and enrolled into a four-year college upon graduation from high school. Three of them enrolled in the community college, and the remaining four are believed to have not enrolled in college. Their varied outcomes were associated with student, parent, and peer engagement. Generally, if students had strong parental involvement and interest in their education, were involved in positive school or civic/community activities, made wise choices regarding friends, and stayed positive regardless of their personal circumstances, they reached their immediate post-secondary goals. The role of concerned extended family and the empathetic motivational dynamic, as described by Zoë, both figure favorably in disadvantaged GATE students’ resolves to excel. Enrollment in a magnet program and/or advanced placement courses enhanced opportunities for college
enrollment after high school for GATE students. The attention and diligence of teachers, counselors, school administrators, mentors, and community organizations enriched student’s lives and, in many instances, made the critical differences between disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students who made it to college and those who did not.

Implications and Recommendations

The GATE students in this study who reached their post-secondary goals of matriculation into a four-year college revealed that they did so with the help of family and community members, as well as school personnel. The following discussion contains recommendations for the aforementioned groups on how to successfully channel disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students toward matriculation into a four-year college upon high school graduation.

Classroom Teachers

Teachers should be on guard for disadvantaged students of high ability and personally speak to counselors and administrators about the intellectual talent encountered in their classrooms. With mounting classroom responsibility, teachers may not have additional time to devote to the personal tutelage or mentorship of a disadvantaged, gifted, and talented youth. They can, however, advance student opportunities for exposure by recommending them to school counselors and administrators for enrichment opportunities and exposure to worlds beyond their neighborhood. For example, teachers might recommend a disadvantaged student for participation in youth forums or similar events that exposes students to otherwise unknown opportunities. Also, teachers who devote time to disadvantaged students may directly and positively impact students’ future
decisions. Mentoring or tutoring a disadvantaged gifted and talented student, even for a few hours a week, could make the difference in a GATE student's decision to excel academically or languish in mediocrity.

Guidance Counselors

It is recognized that the present structure of high school counseling departments, coupled with high counselor to student ratios, (500:1) make it difficult to offer each student the full attention he or she deserves; however, a few suggestions are given on behalf of disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students.

Counselors should review the files of assigned incoming freshmen that are coded as gifted and talented and schedule them into courses according to their ability. Make high school exposure to honors classes and eventual assignment to AP classes a matter of course. If students show resistance or disinterest in high level courses, meet with parents and students to discuss the importance of taking rigorous courses in order to prepare for college, and try to help the parent and student resolve any barriers associated with accurate placement.

Counselors should also collaborate with guidance administrators and devise ways to free counselors from data entry, clerical, and record keeping duties in order to provide ongoing, purposeful personal, academic, and career counseling. One suggestion is to hire a para-professional to relieve counselors of repetitive, non-student related functions.

It is recommended that counselors personally provide students handouts and other tangible information about upcoming college tours, college fairs, or college information in the course of credit reviews. Counselors should continue to make sure disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students, along with other students, are well aware of post-secondary options. In such matters, a posture of urgency should be the general order of the day.
Further, it is also recommended that counselors continue to work with the administration in structuring counseling departments that pair students with the same counselor throughout their high school years. Second, absent yearly stability in the counseling office, it is also recommended that the gifted disadvantaged be assigned the strongest counseling possible throughout the year. Both of these strategies will permit professionals and students to establish a working relationship of familiarity and foster a free flow of information.

Counselors should continue to stage financial aid workshops for underclassmen. Encourage disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students to attend financial aid orientations yearly so they are fully aware that if they aspire to a competitive college, it is possible that their disadvantaged situation could garner them sufficient financial aid to cover college costs if they have superior test scores and grades. Early disclosure of this point may motivate students to do their best academically. Again, on such matters, a posture of urgency should be the general order of the day.

Finally, counselors should urge preparation for college entrance exams through tutoring or self-study over a span of years, beginning in the middle school years. Beginning middle school exposure and information regarding upcoming college entry exams and how to study for them throughout high school could heighten the learning curb about college in general before high school begins, which would benefit all students but particularly the gifted disadvantaged.

School Administration

Administrators should structure and implement opportunities for GATE students to continue their co-hort association throughout middle school and high school, which could be done through a club or organization.
Periodical review of programming and activities for various segments of the student population is another way to monitor inclusive school programs.

Administrators should continue to make sure that district-wide college exposure opportunities are available to diverse student populations.

Perhaps administrators should consider trading in a position or positions in order to hire para-professionals for data entry and other non-counseling related routines. This would free counselors to concentrate on purposeful academic, social, and career counseling.

Administrators should continue to devise ways to get middle school counselors involved with students in more meaningful ways that go beyond the mere scheduling of student courses.

Administrators should also make it a point to be cordial and accessible to students and provide an atmosphere wherein students feel free to discuss their ideas or concerns with the school principal.

*Parents and Family Members of Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented Students*

Parents and family members need to pay close attention to the early learning ability of family members. As soon as it is acceptable, have the minor tested for the Gifted and Talented Education Program. Early identification and GATE program placement will afford the student early opportunities to cultivate their academic talent and will provide an outlet for intellectual energy as opposed to unproductive student behavior.

It is also recommended that parents and family members become interested and involved in student coursework and homework. Training children to place daily reading and homework completion as daily priorities creates good habits.
Parents and family members also need to make it a practice to monitor student academic progress weekly. Most schools will accommodate parents who wish to receive weekly progress reports. Close academic monitoring will keep the parent informed of the student’s academic progress. The parent can then obtain tutoring or provide extra reinforcement in the home in the student’s weak academic areas. Anticipation and scrutiny of progress reports will send a subliminal message to the child regarding the importance of academic progress and excellence.

Parents should pay close attention to students’ talents, interests, and aptitudes. Involving students in extra-curricular activities or hobbies that coincide with their talents and general interests may assist students in finding and developing aptitudes that could facilitate an early start toward a career of interest. This early start could positively influence the later quality of the student’s life.

It is also recommended that parents and family members closely monitor students’ K-12 course selections. Communicate with school personnel as soon as concerns or issues arise.

Gifted and talented students should be scheduled into rigorous courses unless there is a substantial or medical reason indicating otherwise. Middle school is a critical time period and parents should vigilantly make sure their gifted son/daughter is placed in accelerated courses through middle school and that they are enrolled in honors and advanced placement classes in high school.

Extended family members can begin “college talk” to students when they are in preschool and continue throughout high school. They can also share any valuable expertise regarding college exposure, admissions, and financial aid insight with students.
Having an early understanding about what college is along with constant reminders about the subject, eventually breeds an inner disposition for and an expectation about college for disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students. Early exposure also gives them time to engage in contemplative research about particular colleges, which will help them ascertain the differences in college admissions requirements and what that infers about their own pre-college preparatory needs.

In a test-conscious society, early preparation for college entrance exams only enhances students’ chances to do better on the tests. Setting aside a few extra hours per week to devote to pre-college testing throughout middle and high school will yield substantial scores in the future when it counts.

As much as possible, provide a home study atmosphere that is conducive to studying and thinking. Since economic situations may preclude a disadvantaged student’s access to a computer at home, provide opportunities for students to visit a nearby library in which computer access is available.

Parents should create a visible calendar of students’ activities. This will reinforce to students that parents value their endeavors. This could build confidence and a motivation to excel in their areas of interest.

Higher Education

Continue partnerships with local schools in order to gear young, academically talented, disadvantaged students toward college exposure, matriculation, retention, and completion.

Programs such as Gear-Up, Talent Search, and Upward Bound are far reaching in their appeal and seek early involvement of disadvantaged, academically talented students toward college enrollment and degree completion. Also, continue to place such
programs for low socio-economic students near their home community. If community college branches are located closer to the area where students live, offer programs at these locations, as transportation can be problematic for disadvantaged students seeking services.

Continue to include disadvantaged, gifted and talented students in grant proposals that may lead to funding that gears students toward college.

Working in tandem with the school district, university student services personnel could provide tours and shadowing experiences for disadvantaged, gifted and talented students, particularly in the areas of math/science and technology related opportunities, and other high need career areas that channel students toward college and eventual employment in those areas.

*Mentoring Organizations*

Continue to include freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior status students in college exposure organizations that stresses school attendance, scholarship, and good behavior. Contact middle school students for early exposure to organization membership and for introduction to the function and purpose of such organizations. When feasible, pair members of the organization with second semester 8th grade students to encourage positive connection and orientation before they enter high school.

*Further Study*

Attainment of a college education continues to be a proven, reliable pathway out of humble and marginal circumstances in the U.S; hence, the better academically prepared disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students will inevitably receive the best chances to matriculate into and excel at a four-year university, and thereby secure a better quality of
life. The areas of early identification, parenting, community partnerships, early exposure to the idea of college attendance, rigorous course completion, and careful academic mapping and post-secondary planning have evolved as areas that will benefit disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students' options of enrolling into college upon high school graduation. On-going research is needed regarding the disadvantaged, gifted, and talented student. Some other areas of possible research and exploration are included here.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. Longitudinal studies on disadvantaged GATE students who are involved in university or school based programs that expose them to early mapping toward higher education vs. a control group that does not have the benefit of such program involvement. A study of the types of programs that work could be done and suggested for implementation in urban schools.

2. A study on middle school factors that may derail gifted and disadvantaged students from higher education aspirations.

3. A qualitative study of the impact of books and testimonials regarding students who excelled against the odds: how they did it and how to present the message and make available such readings to promising disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students. The feasibility of making such writings required reading for inner-city youth could be examined as well.

4. The effects of stereotyping on disadvantaged, gifted, and talented students.

5. A study on the college completion rates of disadvantaged, former GATE students.
6. A study that explores non-school related programs, like Talent Search and
Upward Bound, that excel in motivating gifted disadvantaged students to
attend college, and that explores the dynamic institutional differences
between them and actual schools.
APPENDIX A

GATE INFORMATION SHEET
GATE PROGRAM

Gifted and Talented Education Program

What is gifted education?
• Exploring subject matter in a global context
• Developing leadership skills
• Being producers as well as consumers of knowledge
• Inspiring inquiry and divergent thinking
• Making positive contributions to society
• Fostering creativity
• Promoting complexity and higher level thinking skills
• Enhancing problem solving strategies

How do students benefit from gifted education?
• They make more progress when the curriculum, teaching methods, and materials are adapted for their needs
• Like other students with unique needs, they will not reach their highest potential without differentiated instruction for at least part of the education

Does my child need the services provided by the GATE program?
• Gifted children are those who possess or demonstrate outstanding ability in one or more of the following areas: General intelligence, academic aptitude, creative thinking, productive thinking, leadership
• Many gifted children are highly curious, discuss subjects in detail, need only 1-2 repetitions for mastery, construct abstractions, initiate projects, thrive on complexity, and are highly self-critical

How are students selected for gifted education?
• Parents may talk to the child's teacher, counselor, or principal to begin the referral process
• Students are individually tested on cognitive ability to determine eligibility into the GATE program according to the Nevada administrative code for special education programs

(School District of Study)
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Research Involving Human Subjects
Protocol

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Name: Patricia A. Green
Department: Educational Leadership
Title of Study: Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented Students Who Make It To College and Those Who Don’t

1. Subjects: Disadvantaged seniors who were once participants in the GATE program will be studied. Students will be selected from five local high schools, and four alternative high schools including Adult Education Programs. The students will be identified and recommended by high school counselors, based on a 54 or gifted classification as evidenced by designation on the students high school transcript.

2 Purpose, Methods, and Procedures:
   a. Purpose:
      Many students who were identified as gifted and talented students in elementary school continue to do well throughout middle and high school and are accepted into four year colleges. Some disadvantaged student’s fit into this category. Conversely, there are other disadvantaged, former GATE students, who do not fare as well in their coursework, take less challenging courses, and/or may subsequently graduate from an alternative school setting, barely graduate from high school, or drop out.

      This study is designed to access the commonalities of disadvantaged former GATE students who succeed throughout their K-12 school years and those who do not. This study will analyze why the disparity between the college bound and non-college bound student exists. Using a qualitative research design, data will be collected from students who were classified as GATE students during their elementary school years. The study will add to the literature regarding the phenomenon and give an indication of how more disadvantaged, gifted students can be channeled toward maximizing their potential and attending four year colleges after high school graduation.

   b. Methodology
      A comparative case study approach will be used to analyze the data regarding the students. The methods that will be used include a questionnaire, a transcript review, an interview with the student (s), teacher or counselor reflection of the student, and a composite profile of the student. Data regarding the GATE program will be considered, researched, and included in the study as well.
c. Procedures
Qualitative methodology will be used in this study by administering questionnaires, interviews with students, and constructing student profiles through speaking with school counselors, teachers, and transcript review. (Quote Bogdan and Bicklin here).

3. Risks
The risks to the participants involved in this study are minimal. The names of the participants will be kept confidential. When students are referred to in print, fictitious names will be used in order to protect their identities. The information collected will be held in the strictest confidence and will only be shared with the researchers advisor.

4. Benefits
The academic progress of many academically talented students continues to flag as the nation advances to a standards based approach (A Nation Still at Risk). In order for America to sustain dominance in the world economy and continue to provide its citizens democratic opportunities, an educated populace that operates on the full potential of its human resources is necessary. Studies on gifted and academically talented students inform educators on what can be done to facilitate more student maximization of potential. Other gifted and talented students could possible have the benefit of more purposeful guidance and mentoring toward academic success by school personnel.

5. Risk-Benefit Ratio
Since the names of the participants and personal information will be kept confidential, the benefits far outweigh the risks. Through sharing their stories, the students will add to the body of knowledge in this area by providing valuable information about disadvantaged, gifted students. This could lead to more understanding and proactivity among administrators, school counselors, and teachers, regarding the varied needs of disadvantaged, former GATE students.

6. Costs to the subject
The participants may miss a total of approximately one half hour of class time in order to meet with the researcher for an interview. This will be done during the last thirty-five minutes of an elective course, so as not to interfere with the students’ core classes.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas 
Department of Educational Leadership 
Child Assent Form

General Information

I am Patricia A. Green, a doctoral candidate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Department of Educational Leadership. I am the researcher on this project. You are invited to participate in a research study about Gifted and Talented Students.

Procedure

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a brief interview, and fill out a questionnaire. Either one of your teachers or your counselor will be interviewed regarding your school progress and potential. Your school profile will be reviewed and your course transcript. There is very little risk with the interview process. You may feel fearful of having a stranger interview you, but it is for a good cause.

Benefits of Participation

The benefits from this research include finding out more about gifted and talented students like yourself. The findings of the research will then be shared with the education community like teachers, counselors and school principals so that they can better understand how to motivate and assist students toward better planning and preparation for their futures.

Risk of Participation

If you happen to feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked, please discuss this with me. I will explain the questions to you in more detail. You may skip a question if it makes you feel uncomfortable in any way. If you have any questions about the study or if you feel you are being harmed in any way as a result of participation in this study, you may contact me at (702) 646-8213, or (702) 799-8390. If you have questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at (702) 895-2794.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or at any time during the research study.
Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral material that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least three years after completion of the study.

Participant Consent

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study. A copy of this form has been given to me to keep.

____________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant  Date

____________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Department of Educational Leadership
Parental Informed Consent

General Information

I am Patricia A. Green, a doctoral candidate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Department of Educational Leadership. I am the researcher on this project. Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. The student population focus for this study is former Gifted and Talented Education Program (GATE) students. The purpose of the study is to discover and analyze the underlying reasons why some former GATE students do well academically through their K-12 school years and enroll in college upon graduation, while others do not. Your child is being asked to participate because he/she is a former GATE student.

Procedure

If you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to participate in two brief interviews, and fill out a questionnaire. Either one of his/her teachers or counselor will be interviewed regarding your son/daughter’s academic progress and his/her potential. You will be asked to participate in a brief interview regarding your son/daughter’s academic achievement and aspirations as well. A profile of your son/daughters school and a copy of his/her transcript will be reviewed as well. There is minimal risk associated with the interview process.

Benefits of Participation

The benefits from this research include adding to the body of knowledge regarding gifted and talented students, like your son or daughter. An attempt will be made to discover what school leaders, teachers, and counselors can do to improve former GATE students’ odds of continuing their education after high school graduation.

Risks of Participation

There are minimal risks associated with this study. During the interview your child may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. If this is the case, I will explain the questions in more detail. Your child may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You and your son/daughter are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or at any time during the research study.

Voluntary Participation
Your son/daughter's participation in this study and in any part of the interview is voluntary and he/she may state that he/she does not want to answer the questions without any penalty. If you have any questions about the study or if you feel that your son or daughter has experienced harmful effects as a result of participation in this study, you may contact me at (702) 646-8213. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at (702) 895-2794.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral material that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least three years after completion of the study.

Participant consent

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study. I understand that parental permission is needed for my child to participate. A copy of this form has been given to me to keep.

Signature of Participant                                    Date

Participant Name (Please Print)
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW FORMAT
Thank you for talking time to meet with me today. My name is Patricia Green and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I am conducting a study on gifted and academically talented students like yourself. I will conduct interviews to collect information on former GATE students who may have experienced some disadvantage while in school. I will explore whether or not they graduate from high school and their post-secondary plans. As a former gate student, I will be asking you questions about your k-12 academic life and the impact of educational, social, and psychological experiences on your present academic standing and choices, and post-secondary plans.

This interview will be recorded, so I can focus on our discussion without taking detailed notes. Please feel free to ask me to stop the tape recorder at any time if you have topics that you would like to discuss confidentially.

1. Tell me about yourself….
   a. What school activities are you involved in this year?
   b. What are your hobbies?
   c. What is your favorite subject in school?
   d. What do you like best about school? What do you like least about your school?
   e. How do you feel about the school you attend?

2. Tell me about your family….
   a. Do you have brothers and sisters/step brothers and sisters? Who lives in your home? Who are you closest to in the family? Why? What kinds of things do you like to do as a family?
   b. How involved are your parents in your education? What is their response to your present status in school. Are school matters discussed very much in your home?
   c. What does your family value most? Elaborate.
   d. How important do you think family is relative to educational success and why?

3. How important are friendships to you at this time?
   a. Do you have a best friend? Describe him/her? Why did you choose this person as a friend?
   b. Do you have basically friend, acquaintances, or associates?
   c. Has a friend ever tried to influence you to do something that was against your principles? What was your response?
   d. What would cause you to disassociate yourself from a friend?
   e. Do any of our friends plan to go to college?
4. What are your post-secondary aspirations?
   a. What steps have you taken to move toward your goal?
   b. What are some of the obstacles you have had to overcome academically in order to
      reach your goals? What you foresee as possible obstacles that you may have to
      overcome in the future in order to achieve your goals? How do you plan to handle
      your difficulties?
   c. During difficult times in your high school academic life, what did you do? Give me
      an example.
   d. Paint me a picture of what you see yourself doing five years from now? Ten years.
      Describe the road to get there?

5. Who has had the greatest influence upon your education?
   a. Of teachers, counselors, or administrators who in your school setting(s) have had
      The greatest impact upon your education? Elaborate
   b. What role did your parents play in your education?
   c. Do your peers value education? How does this make you feel?
   d. What community organizations have made an impact upon your desire to attend
      college or go from school to work?
Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. My name is Patricia Green and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I am researching and interviewing students who are former Gifted and Talented Students. The focal student population of this study will be those who may have experienced some economic or social disadvantage. I will seek to determine and analyze the underlying reasons for their post-secondary educational choices. Your son/daughter has been selected for this study because he/she is a former GATE student and meets the prerequisites for the study.

This interview will be recorded, so I can focus on our discussion without taking detailed notes. Please feel free to stop the tape recorder any time if you have topics that you would like to discuss confidentially.

1. Please tell me a little about yourself or your family.

2. Is the participant your only child, or does he/she have siblings. Tell me a little about him/her and your other children? What is the birth order of the participant?

3. When did you discover that your/son daughter was academically gifted? How did this make your feel? Are there any experiences regarding your son/daughter’s schooling or education that you would like to share?

4. How would you rate your involvement in your son/daughters education?

5. What are your aspirations for your children and the participant in particular?

6. Tell me about your experience with teacher, counselors, and administrators that your son daughter encountered in school? Were they particularly encouraging to your child regarding academics or otherwise?

7. Did you ever think about going to college yourself? Can you tell me about that?
Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. My name is Patricia Green and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I am researching and interviewing students who are former Gifted and Talented Students. The focal student population of this study will be those who may have experienced some economic or social disadvantage. I will seek to determine and analyze the underlying reasons for their post-secondary educational choices. Your son/daughter has been selected for this study because he/she is a former GATE student and meets the pre-requisites for the study.

This interview will be recorded, so I can focus on our discussion without taking detailed notes. Please feel free to stop the tape recorder any time if you have topics that you would like to discuss confidentially.

1. How long have you been acquainted with the participant?
2. What would you say are the participant’s outstanding or salient qualities?
3. What is it that distinguishes this student from his/her peers?
4. If you had to predict if this student will be successful in higher education or the world of work, what would you say and why?
5. What subjects does the participant excel at the most?
6. Can you share some insight on 1) the type of academic student the participant has been while in your acquaintance 2) their academic ability 3) their aspirations 4) any characteristics that weaken
Please complete the following questionnaire. **Circle one answer to the question that you think best describes your answer.** Indicate your response to the question(s) by circling the letter and statement indicated below the question. For question number one fill in the blank. In addition, on the last question, rank order the items in terms of importance to you.

1. At what age were you identified as gifted and talented?

2. If you recall, describe how you felt about your placement in the GATE Program.
   - A. unhappy
   - B. apprehensive
   - C. indifferent
   - D. happy
   - E. excited

3. If you recall, describe how your peers felt regarding your placement in GATE.
   - A. they did not know
   - B. they did not know, I concealed it
   - C. indifferent
   - D. disapproving
   - E. impressed
   - F. happy

4. If possible, describe how you felt about your peers' reaction to your GATE placement.
   - A. indifferent
   - B. disappointed
   - C. hurt
   - D. regretful
   - E. pleased

5. Did your middle school course work prepare you well for your high school courses?
   - A. yes
   - B. no

6. Have you ever experienced academic difficulties in high school?
   - A. yes
   - B. no

7. Was there a time frame in your school life when there was a marked change in your interest in academics? If so, indicate when.
   - A. grades 4-6
   - B. grades 7-9

203

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
8. To what do you owe your disinterest or sustained interest in your academics?
   A. peer pressure
   B. family influences
   C. mentors (teachers, coaches, advisors, etc.)
   D. school environment
   E. life circumstances
   F. self-motivation

9. As a middle school student what did you think you might want to do after high school graduation?
   A. I did not think about such things in middle school
   B. get a job after graduation
   C. attend a community college
   D. attend a trade school or join the military
   E. attend a four-year college
   F. attend an elite four-year college

10. If your goals changed by the time you reached high school, from your previous middle school goals, to what do you owe the change in your aspirations?
    A. different friends
    B. a mentor took an interest in me and my school work
    C. a member of my family took an interest in me and my school work
    D. I kept most of the same goals I set for myself in middle school throughout high school
    E. a life changing circumstance. Explain ____________________________

11. What person had the greatest impact on your selection of honors or regular courses in high school?
    A. counselor
    B. teacher(s)
    C. peers
    D. parents
    E. myself
    F. others __________________

12. What person had the greatest impact on your decision to attend or not attend college after high school?
    A. counselor
    B. teacher(s)
    C. peers
    D. parents
    E. myself
    F. others __________________

13. Which factor had the greatest impact on your course selections in high school?
    A. parental guidance
    B. guidance from my school counselors
    C. previous course difficulty
    D. previous course success
    E. life circumstances. Explain ________________________________
14. Did you ever feel intimidated by classmates whom you felt were more academically able than you?
   A. frequently
   B. sometimes
   C. hardly ever
   D. never

15. If given the opportunity to relive your school years what would you do differently?
   A. I would have been more studious
   B. I would have associated with different peers
   C. I would have made different life choices
   D. I would have listened/not listened to the advice of others
   E. nothing, I like the choices I made
   F. other _________________________________________________________

16. What impact did your previous participation in the GATE Program have on your later academic decisions?
   A. no impact
   B. very little impact
   C. a marginal impact
   D. some impact
   E. a great impact Explain ____________________________________________

17. Overall, how did school personnel such as teachers, counselors, and administrators respond to you as a student?
   A. indifferent
   B. sometimes skeptical of my ability
   C. mostly discouraging
   D. encouraging
   E. very positive

18. How would you describe your classroom teachers' expectations of you and your classwork?
   A. indifferent
   B. low expectations
   C. average expectations
   D. high expectations

19. Did anyone introduce you to the idea of higher education or going to college while you were a student?
   A. Yes. My parents or someone in my family
   B. Yes. A neighbor or someone in my community
   C. Yes. One of my school teachers
   D. Yes. One of my school counselors
   E. Yes. Other _______________________________________________________
   F. No.

20. How would you describe your academic preparation to reach your post high school goals?
   A. unprepared
B. fairly prepared  
C. prepared  
D. extremely well prepared  

21. During difficult times in your school life which of the following best describes your actions or reactions?  
   A. I give up easily and stop trying  
   B. depressed, but I easily snap out of it  
   C. I have a tendency to brood or dwell on things or events  
   D. I talk things over with a friend or a family member  
   E. I try to bounce back and just keep going  
   F. I keep the faith and keep moving toward my goals  

22. When you earn good grades in school what is usually the response of your classmates?  
   A. indifference  
   B. supportive  
   C. encouraging  
   D. surprise  
   E. resentment  

23. When you earn good grades in school what is usually the response of your classroom teachers?  
   A. indifference  
   B. supportive  
   C. encouraging  
   D. surprise  
   E. disbelief  
   F. resentment  

24. Choose the statement that describes your work ethic in high school?  
   A. I did not work very hard in my studies in high school  
   B. I worked fairly hard in my studies in high school  
   C. I worked hard in the classes that interested me only  
   D. I worked very hard in all my classes in high school  

25. Choose one of the following words or phrases that best describe your intellectual ability:  
   A. average  
   B. above average  
   C. smart  
   D. brilliant  

26. To you, how important or what is the value of a college education?  
   A. it makes no difference whether a person attends college or not, a person can be a success in life without a college education  
   B. a college education is not important for my future career goal  
   C. college attendance is important to me  
   D. college attendance is extremely important in my future. I can not imagine not attending college after high school
27. Rank the following according to their importance in your life as a high school student. (1 = very important, or 5 = least important).

__________ Friends

__________ Social Activities

__________ Academics

__________ Work (a job)

__________ Spending time on a hobby

__________________________________________  ________________________
Participant Signature  Date
APPENDIX F

CODING DATA ANALYSIS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class Rank</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Weighted GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>2 of 332</td>
<td>3.698</td>
<td>4.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>369 of 446</td>
<td>2.172</td>
<td>2.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>70 of 462</td>
<td>2.731</td>
<td>3.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>74 of 332</td>
<td>3.098</td>
<td>3.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>38 of 40</td>
<td>0.833</td>
<td>0.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Ann</td>
<td>55 of 446</td>
<td>3.794</td>
<td>4.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>7 of 462</td>
<td>3.884</td>
<td>4.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>74 of 95</td>
<td>1.645</td>
<td>1.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>42 of 452</td>
<td>3.544</td>
<td>4.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>287 of 389</td>
<td>2.111</td>
<td>2.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>98 of 452</td>
<td>3.167</td>
<td>3.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>37 of 446</td>
<td>3.574</td>
<td>4.274</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class Rank, GPA, and Weighted GPA Table
Grade Point Average Graph
Participant SAT scores

* Other participants did not take SAT

Participant ACT Scores

* Other participants did not take the ACT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>At what age were you identified as gifted and talented?</th>
<th>If you recall, describe how you felt about your placement in the gate program.</th>
<th>If you recall, describe how your peers felt regarding your placement in GATE.</th>
<th>If possible, describe how felt about your peers’ reaction to your GATE placement.</th>
<th>Did you middle school course work prepare you well for you high school courses?</th>
<th>Have you ever experienced academic difficulties in high school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>7 or 8</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>They did not know</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Ann</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Disapproving</td>
<td>Disappointed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>They did not know</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Impressed</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Grade Range</td>
<td>Personal Motivation</td>
<td>College Goal</td>
<td>Change of Academic Interests</td>
<td>Change of Aspirations</td>
<td>Influence on Selection of Courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Grades 4-6</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Grades 10-12</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>I did not think about it in middle school</td>
<td>I did not think about those things</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Grades 10-12</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Ann</td>
<td>Grades 7-9</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>Grades 7-9</td>
<td>School environment</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Others: Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Grades 10-12</td>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Grades 10-12</td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>Elite 4 year college</td>
<td>Financial expectations</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>Grades 7-9</td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>I do not recall a marked change in my interest in academics</td>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>I did not think about it in middle school</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Grades 7-9</td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>Grades 10-12</td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>4 year college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>I do not recall a marked change in my interest in academics</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Elite 4 year college</td>
<td>Kept most goals</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8: "kept most goals" is a shortened answer. Full answer was: "I kept most of the same goals I set for myself in middle school throughout high school."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>12 What person had the greatest impact on your decision to attend or not attend college after high school?</th>
<th>13 Which factor had the greatest impact on your course selection in high school?</th>
<th>14 Did you ever feel intimidated by classmates whom you felt were more academically able than you?</th>
<th>15 If given the opportunity to relive your school years what would you do differently?</th>
<th>16 What impact did you previous participation in the GATE program have on you later academic decisions?</th>
<th>17 Overall, how did school personnel such as teachers, counselors, and administrators respond to you as a student?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Previous course success</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>I would have been more studious</td>
<td>Very little impact</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Guidance from my school counselor</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Not sure but do sth. To change it</td>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>Mostly discouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Previous course success</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch'yAnn</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Parental guidance</td>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>Joined more activities</td>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>Others: Mother</td>
<td>Previous course success</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Made different life choices</td>
<td>Great impact</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Previous course success</td>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>Taken more challenging classes</td>
<td>Very little impact</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
<td>Previous course difficulty</td>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>Different life choices</td>
<td>Very little impact</td>
<td>Positive and encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Life circumstances</td>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>Different life choices</td>
<td>Great impact</td>
<td>Positive and encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Previous course difficulty</td>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>Marginal impact</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Previous course success</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Different life choices</td>
<td>Very little impact</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Previous course success</td>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>Different life choices</td>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Previous course difficulty</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>I would have been more studious</td>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>18 How would you describe your classroom teachers’ expectations of you and your class work?</td>
<td>19 Did anyone introduce you to the idea of higher education or going to college while you were a student?</td>
<td>20 How would you describe your academic preparation to reach your post high school goals?</td>
<td>21 During difficult times in your school life which of the following best describes your actions or reactions?</td>
<td>22 When you earn good grades in school what is usually the response of you classmates?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>Keep Faith</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>School counselor</td>
<td>Fairly prepared</td>
<td>I give up easily and stop trying</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Fairly prepared</td>
<td>Bounce Back</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Ann</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Extremely well prepared</td>
<td>Keep Faith</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>Extremely well prepared</td>
<td>Keep Faith</td>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Average expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Fairly prepared</td>
<td>Bounce Back</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Average expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>I dwell on events</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>School teacher</td>
<td>Unprepared</td>
<td>Bounce Back</td>
<td>Supportive and encouraging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>Keep Faith</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Unprepared</td>
<td>Bounce Back</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Fairly prepared</td>
<td>Bounce Back</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Average expectations</td>
<td>My parents/family</td>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>Keep Faith</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q 21 answered were shortened: I keep the faith and keep moving toward my goals (Keep Faith), I try to bounce back and just keep going (Bounce Back)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>23 When you earn good grades in school, what is usually the response of your classroom teachers?</th>
<th>24 Choose the statement that describes your work ethic in high school.</th>
<th>25 Choose one of the following words or phrases that best describes your intellectual ability.</th>
<th>26 To you, how important or what is the value of a college education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Did not work very hard</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Worked fairly hard</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Not important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Worked very hard in all classes</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Extremely Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Ann</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Worked very hard in all classes</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Did not work very hard</td>
<td>Brilliant</td>
<td>Extremely Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Worked hard in the classes that interested me only</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Worked hard in the classes that interested me only</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>It makes no difference if a person attends college or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Did not work very hard</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Did not work very hard</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Extremely Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Worked fairly hard</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Worked fairly hard</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>It makes no difference if a person attends college or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Worked fairly hard</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q 24 answers were shortened: I did not work very hard in my studies in high school (did not work very hard)
I worked fairly hard in my studies in high school (worked fairly hard)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank the following according to their importance in your life as a high school student (1=very important, 5=least important)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>(1) Social activities (2) Hobby (3) Friends (4) Academics (5) Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>(1) Work (2) Friends (3) Social activities (4) Academics (5) Hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>(1) Academics (2) Friends (3) Social activities (4) Hobby (5) Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Ann</td>
<td>(1) Academics (2) Work (3) Friends (4) Hobby (5) Social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>(1) Academics (2) Social activities (3) Friends (4) Work (5) Hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>(1) Academics (2) Work (3) Hobby (4) Social activities (5) Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>(1) Academics (2) Social activities (3) Work (4) Hobby (5) Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>(1) Friends (2) Social activities (3) Work (4) Academics (5) Hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>(1) Friends (2) Hobby (3) Academics (4) Social activities (5) Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>(1) Friends (2) Academics (3) Social activities (4) Work (5) Hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>(1) Friends (2) Academics (3) Social activities (4) Hobby (5) Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>(1) Academics (2) Friends (3) Social activities (4) Work (5) Hobby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionnaire Response Grid
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Anne</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community/Mentoring</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Anne</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Code Graph
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
<th>Parent Engagement</th>
<th>Peer Engagement</th>
<th>School Influences</th>
<th>Community Mentoring</th>
<th>* - High School</th>
<th>Goal Status</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Goal Attainment</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Attend Local 4 Yr. College</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled in 4 Yr. College</td>
<td>AP/Honors Courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Automotive School</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>High School Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Attend 4 yr. College</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>AP/Honors Courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High School Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chy'Anne</td>
<td>Local 4 Yr. College</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled Local 4 yr. College</td>
<td>Honors Courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>Attend 4 year type college</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>Honors Courses Trade School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Student Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Out of State 4 Yr. College</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled Community College</td>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Student Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth</td>
<td>Attend 4 Yr. elite College</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>General/Alternative Education</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Stud.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Engagement and Status Grid**

* Indicates whether student graduated from high school or not
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Goal Engagement</th>
<th>Parent Engagement</th>
<th>Peer Engagement</th>
<th>School Influence</th>
<th>Community Mentoring</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Goal Status</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Goal Attainment</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lore</td>
<td>Attend Out of State College</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>General/Alternative Education</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Selective College</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled in Highly Competitive College</td>
<td>AP/Honors Courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Local Community College</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not Enrolled Working</td>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjhe</td>
<td>Attend Local 4 Yr. College</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled in Community College</td>
<td>Honors Courses</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Attend Out of State 4 Yr. College</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Enrolled in Michigan College</td>
<td>AP/Honors Courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY


225

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


NAC: System of Public Instruction, NAC 388.043, pg. 2.

http://www.leg.state.nv.us/NAC/NAC-388.html.


Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Patricia A. Green

Local Address:
848 Trotter Circle
Las Vegas, Nevada 89107

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, Social Science, 1977
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Master of Arts, Counseling, 1979
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Dissertation Title: Gifted and Talented Students Who Make it To College and Those Who Don’t: Implications for School Leaders

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Patti Chance, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Teresa Jordan, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. James Crawford, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Lee Ann Putney, Ph.D.