

## **ABSTRACT**

Nikia Davis, UNDERSTANDING TEACHER'S PERCEPTION OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAM: THE IMPACT OF TARGETED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING (Under the direction of Dr. Karen Jones). Department of Educational Leadership, December 2021.

Identification methods used for African American students in gifted education programs and services continue to yield disproportionate results that show the underrepresentation of students of color. When the gifted identification survey data for a metropolitan district was analyzed and disaggregated to examine the issues of underrepresentation of African American students, for the period of 2019-2021, each racial ethnic group showed varied levels of representation. By focusing on African American students, the study examines the current protocols used to identify students for the gifted education program. These methods may include referrals from parents, teachers, or students, review of current grades, End of Grade test scores, and aptitude scores received from various IQ or Cognitive Abilities Test. This qualitative study sought to understand how educators at a metropolitan middle school perceived their knowledge, ability, and training regarding referral and identification protocol for gifted services, with specific attention on African American students. Further, the study took place while teachers attended a school-wide professional learning series using culturally responsive teaching. The study collected data to investigate the impact of this training on the same perceptions. Critical Race Theory was used as the theoretical framework for this research. The research in this study also addresses the systematic institutional policies, procedures and practices that create barriers in the identification of African American students in gifted education programs at a middle school. Emerging themes from the research highlight some reasons for underrepresentation. The

results of this study provide insight into various approaches used to identify African American students for gifted education programs, to help decrease underrepresentation.



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AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAM:  
THE IMPACT OF TARGETED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PROFESSIONAL  
LEARNING

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, I would like to thank Jesus Christ for blessing me to reach yet another milestone in my life. God has always been my source, but his grace and mercy bestowed upon me during this journey reaffirms that all things are possible with God.

Thanks to my family, who have been there every step of the way. Mommy and Daddy, your love, support, encouraging words, and prayer helped me get to the end. My success is a direct reflection of your parenting. Daddy, the willpower that you have shown while I was on this journey, while dealing with your own challenges recently in life, gave me the motivation to keep climbing. It was your ongoing sacrifices and determination to be of service to others despite what others may have felt or displayed. Mommy-it was your self-advocacy and willpower that kept me pushing forward. You have shown me when our service must be taken to higher heights. Thank you to my only brother Darryl, who's proud of everything that I do. You're my true champion and I know that you will cheer me on in spite of everything with encouragement. Your support means the world to me.

To my extended family, close friends, and colleagues, you have helped me work at a steady pace and not lose sight of the light at the end of this journey. Thank you for your love, understanding, and unwavering support. I have and will continue to do my best in life in hopes that I will teach, inspire, and encourage others to follow their dreams and never give up.

With my love.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Historically, African American students have faced discrimination within the United States' educational system. Within gifted education programs specifically, identification practices serve as barriers for African American students. This study seeks to understand how educators at a metropolitan middle school perceived their knowledge, ability, and training regarding referral and identification protocol for gifted services, with specific attention on African American students. The review of literature demonstrated how African American students faced systemic bias within the educational system (Silvernail, 2010; Worrell, 2007) while highlighting the identification practices that continue to serve as barriers for African American students to the gifted education programs (Erwin & Worrell, 2012; Swanson, 2006). The first chapter lays the foundation of the topic and gives a brief synopsis and history of the problem of under-representation with African American students in the gifted education programs.

### **Background of the Problem**

This qualitative study took place in a school district that is in a metropolitan community within the southeastern geographic region of the United States. Each year in the district, the gifted education programs receive referrals from teachers, parents, and students as part of the process for identifying students for the gifted education program. After a series of testing sessions and observations, students are then identified for gifted services in the areas of Math and/or Language Arts.

The current method utilized to recruit and admit students into the gifted education programs include nominations from a parent, teacher, or a student, along with the Cognitive Abilities Tests and a series of other tests if needed, review of portfolios, classroom observation

(if needed) and reviewing previous End of Grade test scores. These practices may contribute to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs in the metropolitan community within the southeastern geographic region of the United States.

To improve learning and teaching for all students, and ensure students have access to advanced programs, it is important to review the literature and examine the historical barriers that have existed for African American student enrollment in gifted education programs. This study also aims to understand the perceptions currently embedded in the practices that have served as barriers when identifying African American students. It was essential to examine the ongoing beliefs that teachers hold about student learning (Delpit, 2012; Jackson, 2019). If teachers can show difficulty identifying gifted students of color from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, then the cycle of underrepresentation for students of color in gifted programs will continue to exist (Siegal et al., 2016; Swanson, 2006; Van Hook, 2002).

### **Segregation and Desegregation in Schools**

In 2014, research was carried out by Ford et al. that indicated that the Supreme Court ended segregated classrooms, and programs based on race were declared unconstitutional. Ford's research around the decision for the Brown vs. Board of Education case in 1954 was passed down over six decades; the law and associated legal mandates have yet to be fulfilled, particularly in gifted education. Brown vs. Board of Education consisted of four civil lawsuits filed because African American students were denied enrollment into an all-White public school. During the case, the Supreme Court found that segregated facilities deprived African American students the right to an equal education. The Court deemed segregation to have a negative psychological influence on African American students due to an inferiority complex. The case



ruled that segregation was no longer a legalized practice, and the order to desegregate public schools was made.

However, in *Brown v. Board of Education II* of 1955 (n.d.), school districts pleaded with the Supreme Court to revise the desegregation order, providing them with relief from the prior mandate. The Court responded with an order for public schools to desegregate with “all deliberate speed”. This action still required the desegregation of public schools, yet without a definitive deadline date as to when desegregation must take place. Due to an unidentified timeframe to desegregate, public schools across the nation continued to operate under separation practices for more than ten years after the initial ruling. This law was unfulfilled when examining the Advanced Placement classes, advanced students, and gifted education classes to which African Americans or Hispanics receive access (Ford et al., 2014).

Consequently, in 1956 Americans witnessed a glimpse of what desegregation would look like in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1956, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas was scheduled to desegregate and allow African American students their right to enroll in an all-White school. Instead, the school board approved a desegregation plan to finalize the process of desegregation by the year 1963. The ruling caused uproar in the African American and White communities. Still, African American students reported to Central High School demanding enrollment. Gooden (2004) described the feelings of the African American community as “rightfully outraged” as they were taunted and attacked each day, they attempted to attend classes at Central High School. The chaos resulted in the lawsuit of *Cooper v. Aaron* of 1956 in which African American (Farber, 1982) parents demanded an overturn of the decision to the school board’s desegregation plan, requesting immediate enrollment rights for African American students.

In the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1957, the school board's desegregation plan was upheld. As a result, the school board decided to withdraw all African American students who were admitted to Central High School and postpone the desegregation plan for another two and half years. Due to "all deliberate speed" identified in *Brown v. Board II*, the decision to delay equal rights for the students of color was supported by the court as well. The impact of this decision by the courts continued to limit the educational opportunities and resources for students of color, isolate groups of students and limit the interaction of students across diverse platforms. Schools with a higher population of students of color tend to have fewer resources and inexperienced teachers. Further, even where significant desegregation of schools is achieved, this does not prevent racial segregation at the classroom level, which has negative effects. Researchers report that African American students still face limited educational opportunities with programs and services offered in schools, specifically for this study around the discussion of gifted education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the years, numerous efforts have been made to equalize rights and privileges of all-American citizens. The statistics offered by the Office for Civil Rights reports that the gifted education disparities are present when examining African American students in schools (Goings & Ford, 2018). Many educators believe that underrepresentation could be resolved by identifying African American students for the gifted education programs after identifying those who show high academic success, while some scholars believe gifted education should be exposed to African American students who show academic success (Ford, 2010b).

## **Purpose of Study**

For over half a century concerns have existed about the ongoing persistence of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. The U.S. Department of Education reported in 2011- 2012 the significant differences that existed in student representation for gifted education. Approximately 61% of the total gifted population were White students and approximately 9% were African American students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011-2012).

This qualitative study sought to understand the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs, examining the knowledge of teachers and their perceptions as a barrier for African American students in their access to gifted education programs. The overall intent of the study was to understand the impact of the culturally responsive professional learning on teacher perceptions in identifying and referring African American students for gifted education programs. Culturally responsive teaching attempts to bridge the gap between teacher and student by helping the teacher understand the cultural nuances that may cause a relationship to break down, which ultimately causes student achievement to break down as well (Hammond, 2014). It assumes when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billing, 1995).

Five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching are examined through: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the

delivery of instruction (Hammond, 2014; Ware, 2006). The scholarly practitioner collected qualitative data from confidential open-ended questionnaires and one semi-structured interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009) with a district GIFTED coordinator. The impact of the training on teacher perceptions was examined with online pre-, mid-, post-professional learning confidential questionnaires; the face-to-face interview was conducted once.

### **Research Questions**

The scholarly practitioner attempted to answer two research questions:

1. In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?
2. In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perception of teachers' knowledge/ability to refer or identify gifted African American students for services, and how, potentially, these perceptions changed during and after on-going school-wide culturally responsive training using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.

### **Significance of the Study**

Inadequate resources and opportunities for students create the disparities that exist socially and economically in education (Borland et al., 2000; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Peters et al., 2019). Many African American students are denied access to school programs that are essential for them to reach their academic intellectual and economic potential and hold that promise for closing the achievement gap (Ford, 2012). The hope of this research is to contribute

to the literature, examine knowledge and perceptions, collect and analyze the results that can help to eliminate the barriers that limit the access for African American students to gifted education programming in the school.

### **Key Terms**

*Culturally Responsive* - A method of communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. Cultural responsiveness uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles in making learning relevant for students. The importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ford, 2010a; Hammond, 2015; Solomon, 2013).

*Gifted Education* - The term gifted has varying definitions. In the United States, the federal definition of giftedness states, the term gifted and talented, when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school to fully develop those capabilities. Talented individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, and sports) (Retrieved from <http://nagc.org/resources-publications/resources>).

*Underrepresentation* - Racial and ethnic populations that are disproportionately represented. A group whose percentage of the population in each group is lower than their percentage of the population in the country (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017).

*State Level Definitions for Gifted* - students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experiences or environment. Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both the intellectual areas and specific academic fields. Academically or intellectually gifted students require differentiated educational services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program. Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012).

*Cognitive Abilities Test* - is a group-administered K–12 assessment intended to estimate students' learned reasoning and problem-solving abilities through a battery of verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal test items (Coronado & Lewis, 2017).

*African American* - refers to individuals who appear or describe themselves as African American, Afro American, African or Caribbean, interchangeable with the term Black.

*White* - refers to a person who culturally and ethnically derives from European ancestry.

*Black students* - Used interchangeably. In the context of the present study, both terms are used to refer to African American (Ecker-Lyster & Nileksela, 2017).

*Critical Race Theory* - Critical Race Theory is a comprehensive framework that investigates race, history, and social influence on the treatment of African Americans. The theory focuses on the societal differences between groups of people based on the role of race and culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000).

*Disproportionality*-The over-representation of specific groups in special education programs in relation to their representation in the overall enrollment, and/or the under-

representation of specific groups in accessing intervention services, resources, programs, rigorous curriculum and instruction.

### **Assumptions**

One assumption of the study is that evidence-based professional learning on cultural responsiveness impacts teacher perceptions of the identification process for African American students for gifted education. The second assumption of the study is that all participants will recognize their own level of knowledge based on the teachers' experiences with cultural responsiveness framework and align their understanding of the identification barriers for African American students in gifted education programs.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was conducted in a middle school in the southeastern region of the United States. The school has over 800 students in the 18-19 year and close to 600 students in the 19-20 year. The scope of the study is limited to 9 certified educators in subjects of Math, Language Arts, Science, Special Education, Counseling, and administration.

The scholarly practitioner conducted confidential pre, mid, and post surveys for certified educators. Confidential preliminary surveys were sent out to certified staff. By using convenience sampling for the study, the participants were selected; teachers and the student support specialist represented each grade level. The scholarly practitioner is employed at the site of the study. The data collection and analysis were conducted over several months.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations were experienced, with the first being the sample size of teachers. The sampling included 9 certified staff members in the school district. Due to this small sample, the scholarly practitioner did not generalize the findings for teachers, unless another sample is taken

with several teacher groups with the same characteristics as well. Limitations with the collection of data could impact the validity of the result presented as well. The research is also limited to the integrity of the respondent in truthfulness in the responses and completion of the survey.

The study aligned with the school's sponsored sessions on culturally responsive teaching. Professional learning for teachers during COVID-19 was held virtually due to the health and safety CDC guidelines. Online professional learning may not appeal to all staff members and have the same degree of effectiveness; thus, the learning modality may have been a limitation.

### **Chapter Summary**

For over half a century concerns have existed about the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. Recommendations have been made at the federal, state and local level to reverse the underrepresentation (Ford, 2013). Regardless of the discussions and the various recommendations, academically and gifted programs continue to be underrepresented at high levels nationally. Research indicated that minority students are less likely to be identified as gifted when compared to their White peers (Grissom & Redding, 2016). The demographics of gifted education has continued to be resistant to change despite the program and policy changes (Ford, 2011).

The objective of this qualitative study was to contribute to the literature in understanding the underrepresentation of African American students' access to the gifted education programs, examining the knowledge of teachers and their perceptions as a barrier for African American students in their access to gifted education programs. The overall intent of the study was to understand the impact of the culturally responsive professional learning on teacher perceptions in identifying and referring African American students for gifted education programs.



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Teaching has evolved over the years, yet some educators have continued to teach and test their students. Many teachers believe that all students respond to instructional, curricular and materials, instructional practices, testing instruments, and identification checklists or forms the same way (Yull & Wilson, 2018). Recognizing the need to integrate the culture of students within the classroom and adapt culturally responsive teaching strategies or culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015; Solomon, 2013), can yield high results for African American and Hispanic students. Students who learn how to access the general curriculum at various levels of learning, with support and encouragement, show higher levels of academic achievement (Goings & Ford, 2018). Van Tassel-Baska (2018) found that low-income and diverse students identified as gifted and talented adjusted to the gifted program with an enhanced sense of confidence and demonstrated increased oral communication skills, yet they lacked a sense of belonging within the context of the program. Gifted education often operates without taking into consideration the culture and cultural differences that exist within the recruitment and retention process- screening, testing and assessment, curriculum and instruction, and placement and policies and services.

In this chapter, the historical and legal context that surrounded public education for African American learners is examined. The Critical Race theoretical framework and the relationship that exists in education is used to evaluate and analyze the data.

### **Historical Systemic Barriers in Education**

In the United States, the system of public education reproduces socioeconomic and racial disparities in the broader society by affording fewer educational opportunities. Discrimination is illegal in the workplace, federally funded programs, and privately-owned facilities open to the public under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI prohibits discrimination based on

one's race, color, or religion. Title VI also includes group or individual practices that have the effect of discriminating against specific individuals and groups because of their race, color, religion, or sex. When the rights of an individual or group are denied, discrimination exists.

Structural racism impacts the educational environment at multiple levels. For instance, marginalized children are placed in schools with less money because of district boundaries, housing policies, and neighborhood socioeconomic status (Orfield, 2009). The racial injustice that exists within the different access levels for educational opportunities has implications not only for the lives and livelihoods of students but also their communities at large. It is difficult to separate the social inequities and segregation that exists with gifted education.

Academic tracking is another process of curriculum segregation and inequality that occurs within schools and residential segregation that results in disparaging opportunity gaps between schools and different neighborhoods. Educational segregation is an extreme form of tracking that takes place between schools within the same area. Residential segregation creates a separate and unequal living environment and access to community resources; in the same manner, academic segregation creates separate and unequal teaching and learning environments for students (Drake, 2017).

Academic segregation is a way of creating separate classrooms that provide unequal teaching and learning environments and access to educational resources and opportunities. These inequalities are evident and become culturally embedded within the context of academically underperforming students, with limited resources, and course offerings that disqualify all graduates from direct enrollment in a four-year university (Drake, 2017). Some researchers have proposed that gifted programs are the new segregation within our educational system (Ford,

2010b). With 82% of teachers who are White, operating as practitioners of students of color-blindness, everyone is equal and should be treated equally regardless of inequities.

Limited educational opportunities for students create the disparities that exist socially and economically in education. Many African American students are denied access to school programs that are essential for them to reach their academic intellectual and economic potential and hold that promise for closing the achievement gap (Ford, 2012). The quality of education and access to an equitable education, including gifted education programs, are directly related to a racial stratification and segregation. Regardless of the reason for underrepresentation, unequal access to education hinders the learning ability, achievement level, the social, and economic progress of African American males and females.

Some school sites serve as places where African American males are marginalized and stigmatized. African American males are more likely to be punished, and more severely, even for minor violations of school rules (Sandler et al., 1985). Throughout the country African American children are overrepresented in special education (Harry et al., 2002) while at the same time are more likely to be excluded from rigorous classes and prevented from accessing educational opportunities that will support and encourage them (Oakes, 1992). The most recent data by the Office for Civil Rights examined the overall representation of students within the gifted programs in the U.S. public school system. African American students, specifically African American, Hispanic, and Indian/Alaska Native students comprise a lower percentage of students in gifted programs as compared to the overrepresented White students (Goings & Ford, 2018; Hodges et al., 2018).

When hundreds of thousands of African American not participating or being recommended for gifted education, the trajectory of their life opportunities is compromised.

Students not challenged will likely underachieve, resulting in lowered motivation and academic achievement. Each year, over 500,000 children of color students lack access to gifted education services and programs (Ford, 2010b). Studies have shown that talented students can experience success from caring families, and teachers who have a strong influence. In the lives of low-income students, individuals who care with sincerity about their interest and personal well-being, provide students with a beacon of hope and encouragement to succeed (Ford, 2010a).

The students enrolled in gifted education classes that are visible in many schools are predominately White with higher incomes. Gifted education facilitates upward social mobility and fiscal hierarchy, a function of White privilege and class privilege and social capital. The underrepresentation for African Americans and females persists because teachers, decision-makers, and policymakers are unable to withstand the pressure to support the status quo. Catering to a White audience in some school districts leads to racially gifted programs (Sapon-Shevin, 1996).

The underrepresentation of students of color, with a focus on African American children in gifted education programs exceeds the statistical data nationally when examining all school districts. These unidentified gifted African American students are not being served in gifted education and denied the knowledge to which they are educationally, legally, and morally entitled. When there is a pattern of teachers not referring African American students for gifted services, discrimination lies at the door of these actions. Other recruitment policies, procedures, and practices used to identify gifted and talented students are also biased and discriminatory.

Designated cutoff scores, teacher nominations, parent nominations, student nominations, the time of year testing, the age, and grade level when students evaluated are other examples that

are biased and discriminatory toward African Americans. These tests given in order to identify gifted students have a disparate impact across racial/ethnic subgroups.

Tests often exclude underserved gifted students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), disabled, or from minority or low-income backgrounds. Research shows that IQ Tests consistently produce lower average scores for minority students, in comparison with the scores of White students. However, these tests are frequently used for gifted identification (Ford, 2004; Naglieri & Ford, 2003). Gifted identification procedures that utilize cutoff scores based on these tests can result in disproportionate rates of identification.

An identification strategy that includes multiple assessments—both objective and subjective—is the best way to ensure no gifted learner is overlooked. People of color have historically been excluded from opportunities based on standardized test scores (Au, 2016). African American students who demonstrate a loss of interest in classroom activities because of feeling unchallenged, and who do not test well can be easily overlooked for the very programs that could help them succeed. Therefore, recommendations for placement into gifted programs should be based on a broad assessment of teacher recommendations, testing, and parental input (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

To acknowledge the cultural and linguistic bias of the gifted assessments with verbal and quantitative components, many researchers recommend the use of nonverbal assessments such as the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT), Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT), or Raven's Progressive Matrices (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Regardless of the level of validity attached to nonverbal assessments, researchers in the field recommend using multiple assessments of ability when assessing potentially gifted students. Although nonverbal assessments have been discussed as a fair and equitable way to assess a student's general

reasoning ability, there is still debate among researchers as to whether all racial/ethnic groups score similarly on these tests and how well the tests can predict a student's potential for success in a gifted program.

### **Universal Screening and Local Norms**

Another method used for identification is universal screening. This system assessment allows for students in a grade level, school level or district to be assessed, and given the opportunity to show their strengths. Objective data is collected through the administration of norm-referenced cognitive instruments (Peters et al., 2021). This cognitive data may lead to the identification of gifted students, especially students from traditionally underrepresented populations. With local norms, scores are calculated among students of similar backgrounds and compared with other students at the school or district. This approach can increase the equity of gifted programs and services, while highlighting those students within the school who need more of an academic challenge (Card & Giuliani, 2016).

Any time a national or group-specific norm is used, students are typically compared to other children the same age or in same grade level. The rationale for this is that "grade level" stands in place for opportunities provided to students. However, students in the same grade level, even within the same school district (Peters et al., 2019), could have had different educational experiences, both before and since they started school. Some may have had excellent pre-school experiences, whereas others had none. Instead of comparing students based on age or grade, another option to mitigate underrepresentation is to compare students according to educational experience

### **Gifted Education and Underrepresentation**

Giftedness is defined by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) (n.d.) as

Talented individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, and sports). Although Federal law acknowledges that children with all backgrounds can demonstrate gifts and talents and it offers no specific provisions, mandates, or requirements for serving gifted children to the states (Ford & King, 2014). According to the Office of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education, in 2011-12 there were approximately 3.2 million students in public schools in gifted and talented programs. Participation varies widely by state and by demographic subgroup (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011).

Gifted education programs and services have promoted racial inequities. For years, educators, policymakers, and legal personnel have failed to recruit and retain an inequitable percentage of African American males and females in gifted education and courses for advanced learners. Annually, almost a quarter million African American are not identified as talented. African American, mostly males, are always the most underrepresented students in challenging courses (Henfield et al., 2010).

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights established the 20% equity allowance to educate and support decision-makers and determining a targeted goal for the minimally accepted level of underrepresentation for each racial group and acknowledging that proportional percentages are ideal and equitable but challenging to achieve due to how chance and real variables affect individuals and groups. When the proportion of underrepresentation exceeds the designated threshold and the equity index, it is beyond statistical chance; therefore,

human error is in operation. Educators and professionals must proactively and aggressively evaluate and disaggregate student demographics while holding those who make such decisions accountable.

The inequitable representation of African American students in gifted education programs is a long-standing concern that often references the ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Drake, 2017; Siegal et al., 2016; Swanson, 2006). The statistics offered by the Office for Civil Rights reports that the gifted education disparities are present when examining students of color (Goings & Ford, 2018). Many educators believe that underrepresented students are identified once you determine those who have potential. Black students are underrepresented by 48%; more specifically, 253,000 more Black students should be identified as gifted in the United States (Ford et al., 2008). Likewise, Hispanic students are underrepresented by 38%, resulting in another large number of students who are not accessing gifted education curriculum, programs, and services. At least 500,000 Hispanic and Black students are not being challenged to reach their potential in schools nationally (Ford, 2010b).

The underrepresentation in gifted education for African American and students of color contributes to inequalities not only within society in our schools but also in the form of opportunity gaps (Siegal et al., 2016; Swanson, 2006). Since the gifted identification process that includes an IQ or non-verbal test, a checklist, and referral forms are not governed by policies and practices at the state level, the steps towards identification can be created around the cultural intelligence and academic potential of our students. Ford references this very act as human-made gatekeeping (Delpit, 2012; Erwin & Worrell, 2012; Ford, 2010b). The barriers used against underrepresented populations are evident within the policies and procedures that each school highlights to segregate within gifted education programs.



## **Factors that Lead to the Underrepresentation of Students in Gifted Education Programs**

Teacher referral practices have been referenced as a contributing factor to the underrepresentation for African American students in the gifted education programs. Frasier et al. (1995) cite several reasons that could continue to lead to low representation for African American students. These included: bias against certain minority groups, lower achievement expectations for African American students, not being familiar with the unique characteristics of giftedness that may be apparent in different minority groups, and the failure to consider the effect disadvantaged life circumstances may have on a student's behavior and attitude towards school. The attitude that may be displayed by African American students could be understood by teachers as lacking effort or motivation.

With a high concern for the disproportionality that existed the federal Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988, gave the highest priority to the identification of gifted and talented students who may not be identified through traditional assessment methods including economically disadvantaged individuals, individuals of limited English proficiency, and individuals with handicap. Teachers may also rely on the characteristics of gifted students that align with the checklist without acknowledging that all gifted kids may not demonstrate all the characteristics (Milner & Ford, 2007). Frasier et al. (1995) noted that teachers could be operating under a “deficit model” where they focus on remediation for identified weaknesses, instead of teaching to their strengths.

In 2006, McBee found that Asian and White students were referred for evaluation in gifted programs at a higher rate in comparison to African American and Hispanic students. The research completed by McBee found significant differences in teacher referral rates across students' race and class background. It was also discovered that reported that students receiving

free or reduced lunch were less likely to receive a teacher referral compared with their wealthier peers (McBee, 2006). In 2007, Speirs Neumeister surveyed 27 fourth-grade gifted teachers from an urban school district and found the most common characteristic that teachers identified as an indicator of giftedness was high abilities in reading/vocabulary/and writing. Using this indicator as a marker of giftedness may be inappropriate for African American students because it does not take cultural and background experiences of the students into account when interpreting their abilities.

### **Assessment Process**

Districts are seeking out more robust identification procedures when they acknowledge there is a concern and criticism (Brown & Garland, 2015) on the over reliance of traditional IQ measures and teacher referrals (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). Researchers found that traditional intelligence tests have yielded lower scores for African American students. To address this concern several states have developed guidelines specifying identification procedures that encourage schools to identify a greater number of African American students (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Selecting an alternative intelligent measure and or index is not necessarily addressing the problem of underrepresentation. Rather, this alternative method often creates more problems and controversy. Non-verbal assessments have been found to lead to more classification errors and frequently fail to identify a higher percentage of minority students than traditional IQ measures (Erwin & Worrell, 2012).

### **Opportunity to Learn**

(OTL) was a concept created in the late 1970s and early 1980s to ensure validity when comparing the achievement among nations on the International achievement tests (McDonnell, 1995). A metric was needed to determine if students performed poorly because they were

actually behind or because they had not yet been exposed to that content, based on the various topics taught at different times in the tested nations (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). As a result, OTL was developed as a composite variable that measured the teacher self-report data regarding the curriculum taught, measure of teacher quality, and end school facility data. A student's experiences contribute to different opportunities to learn.

The composite factors and OTL are important when examining the ability or intelligence while also assuming some level of similarity in the background experiences for a given normative group. Intelligence tests have narrow age level norms when making inferences regarding a person's ability. However, when comparing individuals to others who have similar (OTL) experiences can produce more valid measures of ability or aptitude. Students learn in different ways and their teaching may not always be the same as other students in the same grade when compared to their academic progress (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Continuing to utilize the method of measuring the aptitude and ability of students with standardized assessments may add to the underrepresentation in gifted programs for African American students, due to most children experiencing substantial opportunities to learn prior to attending school (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

According to research by Peters and Engerrand (2016) a major barrier in the identification of students is that on average students from Native American, African American, Hispanic, and low-income families receive lower observed (Plucker et al., 2013) scores on tests of academic achievement and ability than do their White, Asian, and higher-income peers. Every assessment presented, students of color and ELL families received lowered observed scores than their peers. This is true for the nonverbal measure of ability (Cognitive Abilities Test-Nonverbal subscale [CogAT-NV] and the Naglieri Nonverbal Abilities Test [NNAT]) (Peters & Engerrand,

2016). The assumption behind the effort to identify talented African American students through alternative tests has been that the intellectual abilities of diverse groups, particularly disadvantaged groups, have been obscured by cultural barriers and test biases.

While some districts may use testing alone to identify students for gifted programs, others use multiple criteria. Standardized rubrics offer educators a supplemental screening method to help and identify underrepresented students to mirror a comprehensive gifted evaluation. When a designee is held responsible for using a standardized rating to identify gifted students, the natural unreliability is evident with humans. Regardless of the amount of training individuals receive, they are still humans, and their perceptions are still influenced by their unique prior life experiences. Therefore, using individual teachers' ratings as a required component in gifted student identification is not recommended.

Students of color who are not referred by a teacher are unlikely to be evaluated for gifted services. Teachers failing to recognize (or expect) giftedness in some students can be an important barrier to equal access (Bellezza, 2012; Silvernail, 2010). These methods have focused on three main non-traditional methods of identification programming that emphasize the strengths of African American students such as creativity and leadership. In addition, they offer specialized guidance to help students overcome barriers they may experience or cope with conflicts related to identity.

### **Failure to Recognize Characteristics of Gifted African American Students**

The underrepresentation for African American students in gifted education programs can be examined through the lens of the discrimination theory, where students are not identified due to inappropriate identification procedures, limited definitions of giftedness, and the prejudice of others (Lewis et al., 2015). It has been expressed in research that African American students'

beliefs about themselves and understanding of race can be related to their overall educational and social development (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). African American students who have an unhealthy racial identity are likely to succumb to the negative peer pressure, which is evident in the underachievement and underrepresentation in gifted services. Research has suggested that adapting to mainstream societal norms to be accepted is detrimental to the academic and intellectual development of gifted African American students as they struggle with challenges related to perfectionism, achievement and career decisiveness (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010; Mayes & Hines, 2014). To ensure their success and desire for academic achievement, many African American children adopt the attitudes, behaviors, and values most associated with mainstream European American culture. When there are specific identification parameters that rely on one measure of evaluation of students' cognitive abilities, then those students who are not academically gifted according to the visual term, may not be identified, or recommended by teachers (Spencer & Dowden, 2014).

By identifying gifted African American students and addressing their racial identity, educators are challenged to provide additional support for gifted African American students and their families with understanding the underrepresentation in gifted education (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Especially students who are from different cultures, low socioeconomic status, or English Language Learners. Standardized achievement tests and nonverbal assessments have frequently been evaluated to see if they are fair assessments to determine all students' cognitive ability (Lewis et al., 2015; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014).

When the identification procedures weigh heavily on one measure of evaluation of a student's cognitive ability, those students who are not academically gifted in the traditional sense (Lewis et al., 2015) may not be identified, especially those who are from different cultures, low

socioeconomic status, or ELLs. When the cognitive measurement of one's abilities is the sole factor in the identification procedures for gifted education programs, then children who are from different cultures, backgrounds, and educational experiences may still not be identified (Lewis et al., 2015).

### **Professional Learning on Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Professional learning is about teachers learning; from learning how to transform their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth. Teacher professional learning is a complex process, requiring cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively, the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs, and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change. Teachers are an essential source of information for students (Gershenson, 2016). When teachers have ingrained social beliefs, it can cause an aversion towards marginalized groups of students in both implicit and explicit ways (Namrata, 2011) which impact learning outcomes in a negative way.

Some research shows that many teachers do not share the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of the students they teach, which hinders the ability of teachers to recognize the academic abilities of underrepresented students (Avalos, 2011). Avalos indicated that African American students are less likely to be identified as gifted when compared to their White peers. If teachers have a negative perception around the giftedness of diverse students, this may influence how teachers identify and refer students for gifted educational services (Avalos, 2011).

To better meet the needs of the diverse student population, culturally responsive teaching should be in place in schools. Implementing a curriculum that capitalizes on diversity can be difficult for some teachers because of the fear, lack of knowledge and understanding, or

discomfort of many teachers. Teachers' beliefs influence and affect their teaching practices and become barriers that prevent the integration of diversity curriculum, which can have an impact on students of color (Van Hook, 2002). Van Hook states that some teachers have difficulties discussing sensitive topics in the classroom and are not able to recognize and accept diversity.

Many teachers find it difficult to recognize that their personal perspectives consciously and unconsciously shape and shade their relationships with children and their families. Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008) insist that educators must better understand the connection that exists between a student's culture, the curriculum, and their behavior. Teachers that incorporate a student's culture or background during their instructional delivery can improve the educational outcomes of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. The understanding and incorporation of a student's culture into the classroom is referred to as culturally responsive. Integrating culturally responsive teaching into classrooms and schools empowers students to embrace their cultural heritage, develop critical consciousness, and strive for equity in educational practices (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Most scholars agree that the basic principle of culturally responsive teaching includes having the knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary to teach in a diverse society (Dickson et al., 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Teachers who are proactive and planning for students who may grapple with content, and teach their expectations (Gershensen & Papageorge, 2018) desired within the class setting have a higher success rate with students (Dunlap et al., 2010). Researched-based teaching practices and effective classroom management are associated with students making academic gains and being engaged with classroom instruction (Dunlap et al., 2010). Students of color who can identify with real-world events during instructional activities experience academic success at higher rates than classrooms that are routine and aligned with the learning for White middle-class students.

Students of color and parents experiencing a disconnect between home and school culture account for a higher percentage of the disproportionality that exists in academic programs at schools (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) agreed that teachers who seek to engage in culturally responsive teaching must first articulate a vision of teaching and learning within a diverse society. Teachers must have a clear understanding of their own culture, before understanding the culture of others. Teachers must demonstrate the ability to connect to the lives of their students with relevant and meaningful instruction to increase their understanding. Strategies used to make this connection could include a teacher's ability to integrate artifacts that reflect a student's interests, using relevant examples, and real-life problems to solve during instruction.

Culturally responsive instructional strategies seek to connect students to their community, national, and global identities (Radinsky et al., 2001). Teachers are encouraged to acknowledge and respond to the various ways that students demonstrate knowledge. Teachers can use humor to engage students, diffuse problems, or set expectations. Gay and Kirkland (2003) emphasized the critical consciousness aspect of culturally responsive teaching, arguing that teachers must know who they are as people, understand the contexts in which they teach, and intently question their knowledge base and assumptions. Overall, researchers suggested teachers can accommodate the different learning styles exhibited by their students by varying their teaching style (Kieran & Anderson, 2019).

Changing policies, creating new programs, and opening new opportunities will not accomplish the task of eliminating achievement gaps if such efforts are not accompanied by strategies to actively engage African American males and their families in taking responsibility to improve their circumstances. Programmatic interventions aimed at buffering and offsetting the



various risks to which males are particularly vulnerable. As our nation becomes increasingly diverse, the educational system is tasked with the responsibility of developing high levels of talent among all groups of children by providing equitable education (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014).

### **Teacher Perceptions**

The perceptions of teachers may impact whether African American students are identified and referred for gifted education services (Adams, 2008; Bellezza, 2012). Since high achievement is usually “defined and measured by the majority culture” (Fletcher-Jantzen & Ortiz, 2006, p. 140), studies have shown teachers often fail to identify gifted students who are not of their own culture, and their “beliefs about giftedness” are “colored by cultural perceptions” (Miller, 2009, p. 67). This lack of understanding about different cultures is further extended into the school building where the make-up of the staff does not mirror the student body.

During the 17-18 school year, 79% of public-school teachers were White and non-Hispanic. About 9% of teachers were Hispanic (of any race), and 7% were African American and non-Hispanic. Two percent of teachers identified as Asian and non-Hispanic, 2% as two or more races and non-Hispanic, and less than 1% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic and American Indian/ Alaska Native, non-Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020).

Weinstein et al. (1995) reported that a significant correlation also exists between teachers' views of racially diverse children and how children feel about themselves. This finding is critical for both in-service and preservice teachers. Educators must know that regardless of whether their views are positive or negative, they are influencing students' learning outcomes and self-perceptions. Teachers with low expectations and perceptions can impact the underrepresentation

of students of color in the gifted education program. If teachers have low expectations because they do not feel students are smart enough based on their behaviors or appearances, then the marginalization of students' social and cultural capital occurs and perpetuates a cycle. This could indicate that educators either do not value or recognize the worth of students of color (Ginwright, 2007; Khalifa, 2011).

Studies have shown that many preservice teachers enter the field of teaching without understanding minoritized children's background experiences and needs (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). Cho and DeCastro-Ambrosetti (2005) conducted a study to explore the effects of a multicultural education course on preservice teachers' attitudes about the experiences, needs, and resources of diverse student populations. Preservice teachers' attitudes improved as they developed an increased awareness of and appreciation for other cultures. However, even with this increased awareness and appreciation of students' diverse cultures, preservice teachers expressed a sense of being ill-equipped to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study examines the disenfranchisement of African American students from being recommended for the gifted programs in schools using Critical Race Theory as a conceptual framework to investigate their disenfranchisement. The beginnings of the Critical Race Theory can be traced back to critical legal studies, radical feminism, and the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 70s (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billing, 2000). Critical Race Theory within education is an evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct which allows the research to be viewed from a racially fused perspective. While Critical Race Theory asks observers to consider the roles that race, and racism play in society. In addition, the foundation of Critical Race Theory is that it is both a way

of understanding and an active movement towards social justice. In this research study, Critical Race Theory served as a framework within this study to help make sense of how corresponding educational inequities and perceptions impact the identification for African American students in the gifted program.

When considering the perennial underachievement for non-White students in schools in the United States, the inclusion of a Critical Race Theory framework is warranted in education (Howard, 2008). It has been noted that the Critical Race Theory notes a major problem in that it reinforces a racialized politics of identity and representation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Howard, 2008; Stovall, 2006). African Americans, Latinos-Latinas, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, and various Tribal Nation groups made significant strides to dismantle the law in federal courts when challenging symbolic racism during the civil rights era of the 1960s and early 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Howard, 2008; Stovall, 2006).

In *Critical Race Theory in Educational Literature*, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) went on to recognize the term “double consciousness” when describing the expectation of African American knowledge and dual participation in White and African American cultures simultaneously. These authors quoted Woodson’s *Miseducation of the Negro* to clarify the term. The term was defined as: The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people (Woodson, 1933, p. 13). Therefore, African Americans must learn, relate, communicate, and apply knowledge to two cultural worlds as a dual member of two different societies: thus, creating a “double consciousness”.

Although Critical Race Theory began as a movement among legal scholars and activist lawyers, it has extended into many disciplines, including education, because of its interdisciplinary approach to studying structures of race and racism. This is just one of the five tenets of Critical Race Theory: the transdisciplinary perspective. Critical Race Theory emerged from the legal arena as a challenge to the ideology of color-blindness, and the accompanying political discourse, viewing both it as a pre-text for racial discrimination (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stovall, 2006). Critical Race Theory stipulates that claims of objectivity and color blindness can be ways in which dominant groups camouflage their interests in order to get what's best for them. This tenet is known as the challenge to dominant ideology.

Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) drew close attention to Critical Race Theory in education as a property right as an additional tenet. This perspective incorporated "Whiteness" as property and aimed to alter education practices for students of color from a policy standpoint (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000). In a research study, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) examined the differences in course offerings between poor inner-city districts of color and upper White suburban institutions. Results indicated that disadvantaged schools offered fewer gifted, Honors, Advanced Placement, foreign language, and elective courses than advantaged schools. Additionally, upper White suburban institutions offered a rigorous curriculum with greater quality and marketability than poor inner-city districts of color.

With the experiential knowledge tenet, Critical Race Theory can generate informed perspectives designed to describe, analyze, and challenge racist policy and practice in educational institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stovall, 2006). The tenet of experiential knowledge centers around the lived experiences of

People of Color, that could be expressed through storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, and narratives. This tenet is seen as important when trying to understand racism and oppression.

The commitment to social justice tenet for Critical Race Theory acknowledges how all oppression interrelates and focuses on eradicating racism and other forms of oppression by centering People of Color and taking a stance on issues of social justice. Critical Race Theory has been used to provide a lens for seeing and acting upon racial change in order to deal with inequality related to the hidden curriculum and overt schooling practice (Ladson-Billing, 1998).

Critical Race Theory work seeks to challenge and disrupt the dominant ideology tenant (deficit thinking) by disrupting the portrayal of the problems with education as residing with African American and parents. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2000) pushed for using Critical Race Theory in education to deconstruct fundamental assumptions behind race-neutral policies and ideology about the education of African American students. Critical Race Theory in education connects with the experiences, ways of thinking, believing, and knowing the racial communities in their struggle for self-determination and equity in schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Parker & Stovall, 2004).

The centrality of race tenet for Critical Race Theory, examines the racial inequalities within the context of educational achievement by centering the dialogue around inequalities within the context of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stovall, 2006). This tenet explores how racism comes from our own thoughts, to our personal relationships, to our places of work, to our educational and judicial systems. Critical Race Theory says that racism isn't just the actions of individuals but that it's embedded in our institutions, systems, and culture. There are five tenets critical race theorists use to examine within society.

The scholarly practitioner used two tenets, the commitment to social justice, and the permanence of race and racism (Bell, 1992), as the lens for this study.

Research discussed in the literature review has identified three factors that impact the lack of proportionality of African American students in gifted education (1) teacher perceptions, (2) the underrepresentation of African American students, and (3) professional learning. These factors used elements of Critical Race Theory to investigate the issues of African American students in gifted education at large.

### **Chapter Summary**

Teachers must begin the process of change by openly and honestly addressing their perceptions and ideas about intelligence and race. When African Americans are limited in receiving equitable access to gifted education, it compromises or suppresses the learning of their innate ability, achievement, and social and economic progress. Denied educational opportunities regardless of intent fuels wider achievement gaps among students in gifted identification.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The disproportionality and inequitable enrollment of African American students plague the field of gifted education (Lamb et al., 2019). In 2018, Yaluma and Tyner investigated access and participation in gifted programs by various student groups, particularly high poverty areas across the nation using data from the Office of Civil Rights, the National Center of Education Statistics, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This study found that participation of African American was consistently lower than Asian and White students across the nation.

The research questions guided this study examined the participants' perception in a metropolitan middle school within the southeastern geographic region of the United States, around referral and identification of African American students for gifted services, and the impact of professional learning on cultural responsiveness. The scholarly practitioner attempted to answer two research questions:

1. In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?
2. In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

The scholarly practitioner collected qualitative data from confidential open-ended surveys at three points in time around professional learning experiences: at the beginning of PL, during PL, and after PL an academic year and conducted an online interview with the district gifted coordinator to examine this construct.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

This study examined the impact of professional learning on their perception of effectiveness in referring and identifying African American students for gifted education programs. The research methods used addressed: an initiative's effectiveness in producing a particular outcome (experiments and quasi-experiments address this question) and how often something has happened and aligns with the purpose of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study utilized qualitative data analysis. The history of qualitative research originated from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation. Researchers indicate that qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups association to a social or human problem. This study sought to answer questions that examine what, why, and how; as the scholarly practitioner sought to gain a complex and detailed understanding of an issue, qualitative research is appropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative designs involve a more holistic approach to collecting and analyzing data.

The research questions were answered through the collection of data and data analysis. The data and analysis provided a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of their awareness of their knowledge and abilities in referring and identifying African American gifted students, and finally the impact on culturally responsive professional learning on both of these constructs. This study measured the perception of certified educators. The teachers participated in professional learning on culturally responsive teaching.

Qualitative data in the form of a semi-structured interview for one participant and repeated the open-ended survey for research question one and two that were collected to determine the participants' knowledge of and ability for referral and identification of African American middle school students for gifted services. The instrument was administered three



times, (pre-, mid-, and post). In the study the scholarly practitioner analyzed the data to understand the teacher's perception of effectiveness and identifying and serving African American students in the gifted education programs, and how this understanding shifted throughout the professional learning experience. The final written report has a flexible structure.

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

This qualitative study took place in a school district that is in a metropolitan community within the southeastern geographic region of the United States. Each year in the district, the gifted education programs receive recommendations from teachers, parents, and students as part of the process for identifying students for the gifted education program. After a series of testing sessions and observations, students are then recommended for gifted services for the areas of Math and/or Language Arts. Data was reviewed for the Spring gifted headcount data for Middle Schools by grade level and demographics for 2018-19 and 2019-2020 year. The data showed that in the 18–19 school year, 7,960 middle school students were identified in the gifted education program. This represented 20.98% of the total enrollment of 37,934 students at the middle school level within the district (see Table 1).

Further analysis of the district student demographics for middle schools showed that African Americans represented 5.76% of the total number of middle school students identified for gifted service, while White students represented 66.6%, Asian students represented 17.9%, and Hispanic students represented 5.3% of the total for middle schools in 18-19 (see Table 2).

The data showed that in the 19–20 school year, 7,871 middle school students were identified in the gifted education program. This represented 20.41% of the total enrollment of 38,564 students at the middle school level within the district (see Table 3).

Table 1

*Total School Enrollment and Gifted Headcount by Middle Schools 18-19*

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Grade Level	Gifted Students	Total Students	Percentage
Grade 6	2,579	12,783	20.18%
Grade 7	2,497	12,739	19.6%
Grade 8	2,884	12,412	23.24%
Totals	7,960	37,934	20.98%

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Table 2

*Spring Gifted Demographics Headcount by Middle Schools 18-19*

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Grade Level	Asian	American Indian	Black	Hispanic	White	Two or More	Pacific Islander
Grade 6	483	1	153	131	1,708	102	1
Grade 7	478	5	136	120	1,653	100	5
Grade 8	464	5	170	168	1,939	133	5
Totals	1,425	11	459	419	5,300	335	11

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Table 3

*Total School Enrollment and Gifted Headcount by Middle School 19-20*

Grade Level	Gifted Students	Total Students	Percentage
Grade 6	2,579	12,675	20.35%
Grade 7	2,701	12,968	20.83%
Grade 8	2,884	12,921	20.05%
Totals	7,871	38,564	20.41%

Further analysis of the district student demographics for middle schools showed that African Americans represented 5.14% of the total number of middle school students identified for gifted service, while White students represented 66.5%, Asian students represented 19.7%, and Hispanic students represented 0.16% of the total for middle schools in 19-20 (see Table 4).

The underrepresentation for students of color at the district level, prompted further analysis of gifted student demographic identification for the 18-19 and 19-20 year at a middle school site. The overall demographics of students at the school in 18-19, with over 800 students, was Whites - 42.4%, African Americans - 14.8%, Hispanic - 22%, Asians - 14.6%, American Indian - .02%, and Multiracial - 5.8% (see Table 5).

The overall demographics of students at the school in 19-20, with close to 600 students, was Whites - 42.81%, African Americans - 18.32%, Hispanic - 31%, Asians - 4.5%, American Indian - .0%, and Multiracial - 8.05% (see Table 6).

At the proposed site location of the study, 23 students were identified for gifted education services during the 2018-19 year. The student demographics were White - 30.43%, Asian - 13.04%, Multi-Racial - 0%, African American - 8.69%, and Hispanic - 8.69%. In the 2019-20 school year, 6 students were identified for gifted education services. The student demographics were White - 83.3%, Asian - 0%, Multi-Racial - 0%, African American - 0%, and Hispanic - 16.67%. White and Asian students were overrepresented in gifted education identification while Hispanic and Black students were underrepresented in the identification for gifted education services. This data led the scholarly practitioner to understand further implications of the data and seek permission to conduct a study at the middle school site.

Table 4

*Spring Gifted Demographics Headcount by Middle School 19-20*

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Grade Level	Asian	American Indian	Black	Hispanic	White	Two or More	Pacific Islander
Grade 6	525	136	136	6	1,688	87	1
Grade 7	515	164	143	2	1,771	104	2
Grade 8	509	146	126	5	1,700	100	5
Totals	1,549	446	405	13	5,159	291	8

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Table 5

*Total Enrollment of Students by Demographics at a Middle School 18-19*

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Grade Level	Asian	American Indian	Black	Hispanic	White	Two or More	Pacific Islander
Grade 6	47	1	32	60	108	17	0
Grade 7	36	1	39	63	104	11	0
Grade 8	35	0	47	54	129	19	0
Totals	118	2	119	177	341	47	0

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Table 6

*Total Enrollment of Students by Demographics at a Middle School 19-20*

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Grade Level	Asian	American Indian	Black	Hispanic	White	Two or More	Pacific Islander
Grade 6	11	0	40	64	105	9	0
Grade 7	8	0	30	55	75	7	1
Grade 8	7	0	37	61	70	4	0
Totals	26	0	107	180	250	20	0

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The study included a total of eight middle school employees, and one district gifted coordinator. To recruit participants, an email with a description of the study was shared with all certified staff members. A total of eight participants from the study site agreed to participate after the three-week recruitment period ended. The staff members who volunteered to participate were contacted directly. The teachers, including a student support specialist were selected based on convenience sampling, as they worked at the middle school where the scholarly practitioner was the Principal.

### **Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent**

The scholarly practitioner obtained approval with the Institutional Review Board at East Carolina University after completing the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program training on the ethical principles of conducting research with children, as well as federal regulations, assessing risk, informed consent, and privacy and confidentiality. An application and a copy of the IRB approval was submitted by the scholarly practitioner to the school district, after permission was granted by the IRB at East Carolina (see Appendix A).

To apply for permissions to conduct research within the district, the scholarly practitioner reviewed the School Board Policies and the rules and procedures that are required for participation in research projects and evaluations. The scholarly practitioner identified the research pathway and the purpose of the research. The Data and Accountability Department's Research Review Committee (RRC) reviewed the application to conduct research in the district. The scholarly practitioners' focus was consistent with the implementation of existing district or school-based initiatives and programs.

The qualitative study design benefits the educational outcomes for students, however the district IRB believed given the role at the school and being the researcher, if the study was

conducted at the original site, this would create a conflict of interest and could influence staff members' qualitative responses, which was believed to impact the validity of the data. The study was revised, still at the initial site but with participants in the study confidential via open-ended questionnaire in place of the originally planned interviews and focus groups. The scholarly practitioner's focus was consistent with the implementation of existing district initiatives and programs.

The scholarly practitioner considered the ethical conduct of research and examined them as they applied to different phases of the research process. The scholarly practitioner disclosed the purpose, and nature of the study to the participants. This consent form indicated that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that it would not place a participant at undue risk. Potential participants received accurate disclosures. This allowed the scholarly practitioner to accurately inform participants about the general topic of the research, the nature of their participation, and any unusual tasks in which they might have engaged (Mertler & Charles, 2011).

The scholarly practitioner provided participants with assurances of confidentiality. Due to the scholarly practitioner knowing the identity of the participants, the scholarly practitioner assured participants that the information received during the study would not be disclosed to people outside of the research study. Information that could be used to identify participants was removed for participants' confidentiality.

Data provided by participants were kept strictly confidential and not shared with anyone outside of the study. The data collected, including survey data and transcription of the interview, were kept in Google Drive, which is an external device storage area which would allow for the information of the participants to remain confidential. In conducting the study, the scholarly

practitioner committed to report the findings without misleading others, whether the research results were positive, negative, or somewhere in between (Leedy & Ormond, 2005). The data was not fabricated to support a conclusion. The conclusions were manipulated in any manner to sway the research audience.

### **Instrumentation**

The qualitative approach was chosen to understand the effectiveness of culturally responsive professional learning on teacher perceptions on their knowledge of identifying and referring African American students for gifted education programs. The information gathered during this study was collected and analyzed to examine the perception of teachers' knowledge/ability to refer or identify gifted African American students for services, and how, potentially, these perceptions changed during and after on-going school-wide culturally responsive training using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015).

The scholarly practitioner examined several instances of data collection during this study, beginning with Examining Inequities Part I, a demographic and background information survey (see Appendix D). Examining Inequities Part II (see Appendix E), an open-ended qualitative survey, and the interview data for one district Gifted Coordinator (see Appendix F). When constructing the survey, the scholarly practitioner had to make decisions about the structure and format of the instrument (Mertler, 2019). The survey questions to include, the specific format of the questions, as well as the civics consideration about the design and administration of the survey instrument (Mertler, 2019) were considered prior to sharing the survey with participants. The four categories of survey questions are demographics, knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral.

For this study demographics questions and open-ended questions were used for the survey. Demographic questions allowed participants to indicate personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, and level of education) (Mertler, 2019). The open-ended questions allow for more individual responses, which can vary in length and content across respondents. The survey questions were based on survey questions given on the perception of teachers towards students and a focus was placed on the information on the knowledge of teachers on the gifted identification of African American students. The validity of the instrument used were checked by a non-participant and Dissertation Chair.

Each survey question was created with the other questions, allowing the findings to be examined. The first questions examined the perception of teachers on their knowledge and abilities of the referral and identification process for African American students in gifted programs. The second question asked if professional learning with a focus on cultural responsiveness practices impacted these perceptions. This data was collected at three points during the training, beginning, middle and end. The online interview with the district gifted coordinator took place once and included the semi-structured questions that focused specifically on current district research and initiatives around gifted underrepresentation for African American.

### **Procedure**

The scholarly practitioner informed the school-based participants that data collected during the study would remain confidential and used only for the purpose of the study. First the scholarly practitioner conducted one round of confidential pre-open-ended surveys-Examining Inequities Part I that included demographics and background information (see Appendix D), after the participant completed the Consent Form (see Appendix C). The confidential open-ended

survey on Examining Inequities Part I., focused on the perception of the teachers' knowledge of the gifted education programs identification process, their experience working with students of color and gifted African American students. The confidential open-ended survey on Examining Inequities Part II., focus on research question two

The first round of confidential pre-open-ended surveys were emailed to participants in October (see Appendix C). The second round of confidential open-ended surveys (see Appendix D) were emailed December after the second session for professional learning (see Appendix D). The third-round confidential open-ended survey questions were repeated from the second round and emailed at the conclusion of the professional learning training. The district interview was held on Google meet after the seventh session for professional learning out of the nine sessions.

The professional learning framework was structured around *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* by Zaretta Hammond (2015). All participants received a personal copy of the book to participate in the synchronous and asynchronous assignments that were completed outside of the designated meeting time. The professional learning was held over seven months during the 2020-2021 school year. The Google meeting sessions for professional learning were held one-two times per month depending on the number of teacher workdays that were created for the purpose of professional learning. All sessions were scheduled to last 180 minutes, with additional time of 60 minutes to be utilized to complete the asynchronous assignment prior to the next professional learning session. At the beginning of each professional learning session, participants joined the inclusion activities to create interpersonal understanding *and* increased social awareness through Social and Emotional Learning with community circles. The inclusion activities were modeled to support and encourage participants to use the same

activity with their classroom community and report their progress during the follow-up meeting sessions.

Nine professional learning sessions were held online over several months (see Table 7). The asynchronous reading assignments were shared and completed with participants before each session. The training was divided into three phases for learning: Part I - Building Awareness and Knowledge, Part II Building Learning Partnerships, and Part III - Building Intellectual Capacity. During each session, the desired outcomes and learning targets for each session were shared to provide a focus for the learning. Differentiation was modeled during the session by providing participants with a variety of discussion structures and choice to share their group and personal reflections, and discussion at the end of each session. The facilitation model created time for personal reflection, small group activity, and whole group discussion.

For the successful interracial dialogue about race and crucial issues with students to take place, the Four Agreements for Courageous Conversation guidelines were introduced. The "Four Agreements of Courageous Conversation (Singleton & Linton, 2006)," which help create the conditions for safe exploration and profound learning for all. Courageous conversation is a strategy for breaking down racial tensions and raising racism as a topic of discussion that allows those who possess knowledge on topics to have the opportunity to share it, and those who do not have the knowledge to learn and grow from the experience. With the online learning environment, participants were placed in random small groups and assigned to breakout rooms to complete the module activities as assigned. The small groups were randomly modified each month to encourage participants to learn and understand the perspective of another person.

Table 7

*Study and Professional Learning Implementation Timeline*

Month	Chapters	Reading	Focus	Study Component
	Part I - Building Awareness and Knowledge			
August				
September				
October	Chapter 1: Climbing Out of the Gap	Recognizing the Nature of the Achievement Gap, and The Marriage of Neuroplasticity and Culturally Responsive Teaching.	Understanding how to create dependent learners and the role Culturally Responsive Teaching plays in building independent learners. Participants also discussed their beliefs, assumptions, and experiences that shape their identity.	
October	Chapter 2: What's Culture Got to Do with It?	Understanding the Roots of Culture, Understanding Cultural Archetypes, and Naming the Social Political Content.	Defining Culture and understanding its connection to affective and cognitive neuroscience.	Consent Forms
November	Chapter 3: This is Your Brain on Culture	The physical structures of the brain and its connection to social-emotional readiness and active learning.	Understanding the connection between culture and neuroscience to better understand how cultural responsive teaching works.	Examining Inequities Part I

Table 7 (continued)

Month	Chapters	Reading	Focus	Study Component
December	Chapter 4: Preparing to Be a Culturally Responsive Practitioner	Making the Familiar Strange: Identifying Your Own Cultural Reference Points, Widening Your Aperture to Be Expand Interpretations.	Identify the larger socio-political context and how recognizing how you are positioned based on your own culture.	Fall Gifted Identification
	Part II - Building Learning Partnerships			
January	Chapter 5: Building the Foundation of Learning Partnerships	The Need for a Different Kind of Relationship, and Assessing the State of Rapport	In order for students to be ready for learning they need to be in a positive, trusting relationship with the teacher.	
January	Chapter 6: Establishing Alliance in the Learning Partnership	Why Marginalized Dependent Learners Need an Ally, Creating a Healthy Feedback Loop in the Learning Partnership	Become an Ally to Help Build Students' Independence	Examining Inequities II



Table 7 (continued)

Month	Chapters	Reading	Focus	Study Component
February	Chapter 7: Shifting Academic Mindset in the Learning Partnership	Socio-political Impact on Academic Mindset, Setting the Stage of a Mindset Shift	Use the alliance phase of the learning partnership to help dependent students regain confidence as learners and reconstruct a positive learner identity.	District Gifted Coordinator Interview
	Part III - Building Intellective Capacity			
March	Chapter 8: Information Processing to Build Intellective Capacity	The Power of Active Processing, Building Intellective Capacity	Key aspect of the achievement gap is the under-development of diverse students' ability to process information for deeper understanding. Yet, we don't usually talk about this as part of our equity agenda. Improving information processing skills is a key reason and component of culturally responsive education that closes achievement gaps.	Examining Inequities II

Table 7 (continued)

Month	Chapters	Reading	Focus	Study Component
April	Chapter 9: Creating a Culturally Responsive Community for Learning	Ethos Versus Artifacts	Creating a culturally responsive classroom community isn't about decorating bulletin boards, but it is about creating processes and structures that allow students to create a sense of community as well as intellectual and social safety for learning.	Spring Gifted Identification

The scholarly practitioner compiled the survey interview results and stored the responses in a safe place (see Appendix E). The scholarly practitioner observed the professional learning provided to the school site, which included the participants in the study. The professional learning aligns with the proven research-strategies for culturally responsive teaching.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perception of teachers' knowledge/ability to refer or identify gifted African American students for services, and how, potentially, these perceptions changed during and after on-going school-wide culturally responsive training at one middle school using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015). All participants are educators in a district in the southeastern geographic region of the United States. Seven participants are educators at a middle school and one participant is the district AIG Coordinator.

The collection of data was guided by two principles: the use of more than one source of evidence that converges on the same set of facts or findings, and the maintenance of a chain of evidence that links the research questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn. The technique, where participants took part in professional learning and completed confidential surveys (pre-, mid-, and post-training) was used in the data collection process to understand the potential of teacher perception as an underlying cause of the disproportionality of African American students in the gifted program. Over a four-month period, three surveys (pre-, mid-, and post-training) were given to participants. The average length of the response time for each question from the participants was 3 minutes. The method of data collection used in this study was online through Survey Monkey. The interview format with the district gifted coordinator was semi-structured (Mertler, 2019). The district gifted coordinator questions were aligning with

the open-ended survey questions for Examining Inequities Part I and II. The scholarly practitioner asked more open-ended questions that allowed for a discussion rather than a straightforward question and answer format. The interview was held online with Google Meet and took 60 minutes. The interview was recorded with Google record and transcribed with NVivo.

The analysis of data is a process that occurs when the researcher interacts with data collection (Erlandson et al., 1993). Qualitative data was analyzed through coding. This coding process is defined by Corbin and Strauss (1990) as “operations by which data is broken down, conceptualized, and coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding” (p. 58). Coding categories are developed through multiple readings of the data that include searching for words, phrases, or patterns of behaviors that are indicative of themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

At the end of the professional learning, the scholarly practitioner analyzed the interview data provided by the one interview participant and the Examining Inequities survey questions for Part I and II provided by the teachers and student support specialist. The survey responses were coded using inductive analysis (Mertler, 2019). The three-step process used to code the data analysis was organization, description, and interpretation. The organizational step of inductive analysis was accomplished through categorization or coding scheme. The scholarly practitioner identified and organized the data into important patterns and themes to construct a framework for presenting the key findings of this qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertler, 2019). After developing the categories, the scholarly practitioner reread the data. The scholarly practitioner then described the main features of the characteristics that resulted from coding the data (Mertler, 2019). Connections were made between the data, themes, and research questions.

Once the categories were determined, the scholarly practitioner described the data to answer the research questions. Data interpretation was the final step. Aspects of the data were analyzed to focus on the research questions, challenge current or future practices, and potentially guide future practice.

The online interview audio files with the district gifted coordinator were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo for transcription and coding. The NVivo software was used to help organize and draw links between ideas and concepts, which allowed the scholarly practitioner to develop themes. NVivo is a technical tool designed for qualitative analysis and mixed methods research offering tools to help the researcher deeply analyze unstructured data. NVivo helps to analyze, manage, shape and analyze the database and files together, while enabling the scholarly practitioner to easily manipulate the data and conduct searches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The scholarly practitioner looked for common patterns, themes, trends or similarities from the information to emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertler, 2019). This data was confidential and was not shared with anyone outside of the study.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption of the study is that professional learning uses evidenced-based teaching strategies that incorporate cultural responsiveness and its impact on the referral for African American students in the gifted program. The next assumption of this study is that all participants will recognize their own level of knowledge based on the teachers' experiences with the professional learning training- *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain*, while aligning their understanding of the identification barriers that African American students face in gifted education programs.

## **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was conducted in a middle school. The school has close to 600 students and is in the Southeastern geographic region of the United States. The scope of the study is limited to seven teachers in grades 6-8, one student support specialist, and one district administrator with a focus in the core areas of Language Arts, Math, Special Education, and Science.

The scholarly practitioner conducted confidential open-ended surveys with the participants. Preliminary surveys were sent out to all certified teachers at the school, and the responses returned determined who would participate in this study. The participants were representative of each grade level during the study. The collection of data, interviews, survey analysis, and research was conducted over the school year.

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this study, with the first area being the sample size for participants. The convenience sampling included seven teachers, one school counselor, and one district gifted coordinator. Due to this small sample, the scholarly practitioner was unable to generalize the findings for all subgroups, unless another sample is taken with several teacher groups with the same characteristics as well. The scholarly practitioner is the principal of the site where the study was conducted. The scholarly practitioner held multiple roles in the study which included: providing information around the purpose of the study and sharing the steps that would be taken to maintain confidentiality of the participants and results. As a result, the study was adjusted to due response bias that could have been by participants based on the scholarly practitioner's role as the principal. Response bias is a general term that refers to conditions or factors that take place during the process of responding to surveys, affecting the way responses are provided. The changes include confidential open-ended survey questions, with no interviews

conducted at the site. One online interview was held off-site with the district gifted coordinator. Due to the adjustment that was made to the study, the scholarly practitioner was unable to get the data as intended with one-on-one interviews and focus groups with participants.

The total impact of this study is another limitation. Although the scholarly practitioner believes the study will provide additional evidence to support the claim, there is no guarantee that the results could produce a huge shift in the current practices with referrals and perceptions for African American students in gifted programs.

Professional learning around cultural responsiveness for teachers will be limited due to COVID-19. The study aligns with facilitating training sessions around culturally responsive teaching. However, to change the instructional practices in the classroom, teachers need follow-up and content specific feedback. Due to limited interaction with participants within their classroom at the time of the study, the full scope of feedback to teachers will be limited. Although these limitations were presented, when implemented with fidelity, this study could impact the underrepresentation of African American students identified for gifted education programs.

### **Role of the Scholarly Practitioner**

The scholarly practitioner in this study has been a Middle School Principal in the southeastern geographic region of the United States six years. Due to the scholarly practitioner conducting the study at the site, where they were the principal, the Research and Review Committee would only approve the study if the survey questions were completed confidentially on an online platform. As the scholarly practitioner knew the identity of the participants, the participants were assured the information received during the study would not be disclosed to people outside of the research study. Information that could be used to identify participants was

removed, for participants to remain confidential. Confidential surveys were facilitated and monitored for submission. Data analysis was coded based on the data collected during the study. The scholarly practitioner had connections that were important and relevant to this study. The scholarly practitioner was an administrator at the secondary level for fourteen years and identifies as an African American woman.

### **Chapter Summary**

The explanation of the African American experience is integral to moving forward in the United States as it relates to social justice and equality. It is imperative in understanding today's African American student learners and the policies that govern their education. Underrepresentation in gifted education for ethnically diverse student groups have been widely recognized (Lamb et al., 2019).

In summary, Chapter 3 begins with the introduction and restatement of the purpose of the research and revisited the questions for the central and research sub questions. In Chapter 3, the target population and sample size were identified, along with the sampling methods and procedures. The data collection process, instrumentation and data analysis procedures were discussed for this study. The limitations of the research design, ethics, and the role of the researcher was also considered.

According to the literature, the scholarly practitioner anticipated the findings would examine the perception of teachers' knowledge/ability to refer or identify gifted African American students for services, and how, potentially, these perceptions changed during and after on-going school-wide culturally responsive training using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015). Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the



data analysis, description of the research methodology, the analysis of this study, a report of the data, and results.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perception of teachers' knowledge/ability to refer or identify gifted African American students for services, and how, potentially, these perceptions changed during and after on-going school-wide culturally responsive training using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015).

Research was needed to address the problem of African American students being underrepresented in gifted education programs (Ford, 2014; Ford & Whiting, 2007; Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). The study aimed to understand if teachers recognized their perceptions of their effectiveness in identifying and referring African American for gifted education programs. Additionally, the study took place while the school had access to a year-long professional learning series using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015). Through confidential open-ended responses on a survey completed by participants at the site, the study further investigated how these same perceptions shifted over the course of the year, given this targeted professional learning experience. One online interview was conducted with a district gifted coordinator to provide context on the gifted program. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?
2. In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

Chapter 4 begins with an overview of the study in the introduction. The chapter outlines the participant recruitment methods, response rates, timeframe and methods for data collection, and data analysis collected in the study.

### **Approval of Study**

After receiving approval for the study by East Carolina University and Medical Center Internal Review Board, district Internal Review Board approval was delayed in the Fall of 2020. Approval was given for the data collection as outlined in the proposal; however, data collection could not be conducted at the school site of the researcher. The district Internal Review Board believed as the principal of the school site, the data collection would lead to response bias and create a conflict of interest with the study. With response bias, the participants could be influenced when giving qualitative responses, and potentially impact the validity of the data. The study was revised, still at the initial site but with participants in the study via open-ended confidential questionnaire in place of the originally planned interviews and focus groups. After this revision, the study was approved by the district Internal Review Board at the original site.

### **Participant Recruitment**

To recruit participants for this study, an email was shared with all certified staff members at the middle school in this study, providing them a brief overview of the study. A follow-up email was sent to English and Math teachers, since these courses make recommendations for students to be considered for the gifted education programs. While receiving the response from interested participants, the scholarly practitioner noticed that other student services support staff were interested in participating as well. After the 3-week recruitment period ended, the staff members who volunteered to participate were contacted directly.

An overview of the study and the timeline were shared with the volunteers. Following the request to participate in the study, a follow-up email was sent with an invitation for participants. The consent forms to participate for the Internal Review Board were delivered and signed. Prior to beginning the study, the participants were told that they would have a pivotal role in the study, but the scholarly practitioner made it clear that the consent forms needed to be signed and if anything occurred during the study to impact their participation, they were able to remove themselves at any time.

### **Participants Response Rate**

All certified staff were invited to participate, to allow every grade to be represented. A total of nine teachers participated in this study. Seven middle teachers, one student support specialist, and one district gifted coordinator, agreed to participate in the study with the confidential survey method, additionally one district gifted coordinator agreed to participate as an online semi-structured interview subject. Teacher participants were of mixed genders and from different content and grade areas and levels of experience. The student support specialist had experience with the nomination process of students for the gifted education programs. For this specific study, convenience sampling was used. Participants were chosen based on their convenience and availability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Samples for qualitative inquiry are generally assumed to be selected purposely to yield cases that are “information rich” (Patton, 2001). The eight school personnel were all employees at the scholarly practitioner’s school site, and the district gifted coordinator was asked to participate due to their role in central office and knowledge of the gifted program; thus, the sample was a convenience sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## **Data Analysis**

### **Data Results**

The results are based on survey data collected from eight participants and one online semi-structured interview collected from one district gifted coordinator. The background characteristics of participants relevant to this study were (a) years of experience, (b) Grade level experience (c) Ethnicity, three ethnic groups were represented: African American, Multi-Racial, and White, and (d) Gender, both male and female genders was identified by participants.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

The convenience sample included nine participants. Most of the participants reported an educational level as a bachelor's degree (six) followed by a master's degree (three). All participants for the study had at least five years of teaching experience, and most of the participants had at least 11 years of teaching experience (ranging from 11- 18 years) and held teaching certifications in middle grades with respect to the specific content related areas. A frequency table for the demographic characteristics are further outlined in (see Table 8).

Interview participants include science teachers, English teachers, special education (SPED) teachers, a math teacher, a student support specialist, and a district gifted Coordinator. Several participants are team leaders or department chairs, have master's degrees in or outside of their fields, and have experience in Title I schools or with teaching African American students.

### **Background Information**

The study consisted of middle grade educators who were asked to examine their knowledge/ability to refer or identify gifted African American students for services, and how, potentially, these perceptions changed during and after on-going school-wide culturally responsive training using the text *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta

Table 8

*Participant Demographics*

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Numerical Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Teaching Experience (Years)
Participant 1	Male	African American	16
Participant 2	Female	White	5
Participant 3	Female	White	5
Participant 4	Female	African American	15
Participant 5	Male	White	12
Participant 6	Female	African American	15
Participant 7	Female	White	11
Participant 8	Female	African American	17
Participant 9	Female	African American	18

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Hammond (2015), when identifying African American students in a metropolitan middle school within the southeastern geographic region of the United States. Data was analyzed using NVivo software program to conduct thematic content analysis, while seeking to gain a deeper understanding of patterns and emergent themes. To address the research questions:

1. In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?
2. In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

An open-ended confidential survey was completed by the eight middle school faculty participants, and one interview was conducted with a district gifted coordinator.

The data was organized and presented according to the confidential Examining Inequities Part I and II surveys, and one online interview with the district gifted coordinator. Two research questions guided this study, and five themes were constructed according to the analysis of data. An explanation of the data analysis is organized by the research questions, themes, and additional information generated from the analysis of data.

### **Gifted Associated with Intellectual Ability**

The information obtained from the participants described varying levels of definitions when defining the term gifted. The data revealed that all the participants identified giftedness as intellectual ability and high academic achievement. In addition, the data showed that some teachers who nominated African American or other underrepresented students, still did not qualify for the gifted program. Overall, all participants shared different perspectives when defining gifted students but there were some commonalities among the definition.

### **Knowledge Gaps, System Barriers, and Lack of Experience in the Identification Process**

Participants were asked to describe the process used to identify gifted African American students. Majority of the participants were not familiar with the recommendation process for gifted education. In contrast, two participants referred students and although the students may not qualify, they continue to challenge them in class and beyond their academic abilities. Four of the six participants believed more African American students would receive nominations if the process was more transparent. They also believed the criteria and characteristics when identifying African American students needed to be reviewed and made available to teachers.

*Research Question Two: In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?*

### **Underrepresentation of African Americans in the Gifted Program**

Participants were asked to share their experiences with working with gifted African American students. Half of the participants had no experience working with gifted African American students. One participant shared that students who were gifted were observed being treated differently because of their low socioeconomic status. Some shared their observation with the lack of representation of gifted African Americans in academic classes. Typically, African American and low-income students are twice as more likely to be in remedial math courses than white or upper income children, according to a study done by Jomills Braddock in 1988 (Wheelock, 1994). Some African American students recommended for the program were instead rated as high achievers and not gifted. While another participant shared that gifted African American students did not work to their potential out of fear of not fitting in and being teased from their peers about being in the gifted class.



### **A Need for Professional Learning**

Participants were asked to give their level of experience with professional learning for gifted identification. The survey showed that culturally responsive professional learning impacted teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students by increasing the participant's awareness on the identification of African American students and building self-efficacy. Six of the eight participants never referred students for gifted services due to their inexperience and not feeling qualified or properly trained to make recommendations. All participants stated that more professional learning was needed to identify more African American students for gifted education programs.

### **Systemic Bias Impacts Underrepresentation**

The participants were asked to give their thoughts on reasons that may impact the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs across the United States. One participant stated that students are not working to their potential to keep from being in gifted classes or being teased by their peers. Three participants stated that students who are not working to their potential or fit the description of gifted are least likely to be recommended or retained in the gifted education program. Overall, participants stated that additional training with a focus on culture awareness could help with the identification disparities.

### **Research Question One**

*In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs? Major themes found in the data are shown (see Table 9).*

Table 9

*Themes Generated from Background Data Survey for Examining Inequities Part I Survey*

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Major Themes	Survey Questions
1.1 Gifted Associated Innate Ability	How would you describe the term gifted?
1.2 Knowledge Gaps and System Barriers, and Lack of Experience Identifying AAS	What is your perception and experiences regarding your effectiveness in the identification of gifted African American middle school students?

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### ***Major Theme 1.1 Varying Definitions of Giftedness: Innate Ability and Academic Skills***

The information obtained from the participants described varying levels of definitions when defining the term gifted. The data revealed that all the participants identified giftedness as intellectual ability and high academic achievement. In addition, the data showed that some teachers who nominated African American or other underrepresented students, still did not qualify for the gifted program due to language, portfolio requirements. Some participants believed that African Americans had to jump through too many hurdles to be identified for gifted programs.

Participants view the term 'gifted' from a very academic lens as they describe it with phrases such as, 'high achievement in a certain area or areas', 'demonstrates leadership skills in a specific subject area', 'strong academic skills', and 'exceed grade-level expectations in a certain area'. Only a few participants described it as 'having natural ability/aptitude', all participants shared different perspectives when defining gifted students but there were some commonalities among the definitions.

Participants' response yielded the concept of giftedness is largely based on innate academic talent as evidenced by phrases such as 'academic excellence', 'strong academic skills', and 'perform above a certain standard score'. This skewed perception and characteristics of 'giftedness' affected the participants' identification and recommendation of African American students for the gifted education programs.

Characteristics of gifted learners may not align with the traditional standardized rubrics used to identify gifted students. Gifted students from low-socio backgrounds may lack opportunities and access to school-readiness materials may delay acquisition of basic skills and

delay the development of verbal skills. However, they can show persistence in areas of interest usually unrelated to school or often take risks without thinking of consequences.

One participant believed African American students had a higher representation in regular classes than in honor classes and so ordinarily, they'd be expected to have lower academic achievement and thus not be considered for the gifted education programs. The higher concentration in regular education classes in comparison to gifted education classes may partly explain the participant's struggle to identify gifted African American students. Two participants shared that finding gifted African American students was a challenge and rare. Whereas participant 4 expressed more experience advocating for the students going to honors classes versus the standard level classes.

To what extent would these perceptions hold and be considered valid? There was the idea that African American students may self-sabotage, "African American boys didn't always work up to their ability because they felt they didn't fit in with the other students..." –Participant 4. Some participants perceived African American students as sabotaging academic achievement to avoid dealing with negative peer pressure. The practice of placing students seemed to influence student's perception of their academic capabilities. AAS perceived whites as having a higher intellectual capability and it's no wonder they teased their peers about being smart. This negative pressure limited the resources that AAS were willing to put into academic work. They would rather trade academics for social acceptance. Besides, the gifted program was perceived as a high-pressure environment where students were expected to maintain high grades. However, AAS lacked the tools to handle and manage the academic pressure.

"African American boys didn't always work up to their ability because they felt they didn't fit in with the other students, were teased about being in the "smart class". Both boys and

girls have expressed pressure to do well and at times didn't know how to handle failure, so they wanted to be in a regular class because it was less work.” –Respondent 4. This implies that African American students were just as capable of high academic performance if not for the personal and institutional barriers.

### ***Major Theme 1.2 Knowledge Gaps, Systemic Barriers, and a Lack of Experience in the Identification Process***

Participants were asked to describe the process used to identify gifted African American students. Six of the eight participants were not familiar with the recommendation process for gifted education. In contrast, two participants referred students and although the students may not qualify, they continue to challenge them in class and beyond their academic abilities. Four of the eight participants stated that additional African American students would receive nominations if the process was transparent, and they received criteria to look for when making nominations. This emerged as a theme when measuring the teacher’s perception of effectiveness and identifying and serving African American students in the gifted education programs. These sentiments, of not being effective, cut across most responses indicating that participants were not familiar with the characteristics of giftedness in African American students as well as the entire identification process. For example, “I don’t think that I am effective because I lack the full knowledge of the identification of Gifted students.” -Participant 7

The main barriers to an effective identification process, as perceived by participants, were lack of knowledge/awareness, inexperience, and lack of preparedness. Participants responded that 75% (six) were not familiar with the recommendation process for identifying students for gifted services. Understanding the process for identifying African American students can serve as a roadmap to advocating for other barriers impact equitable access. A matrix coding query

was run to see if the respondent's perception of the barriers varied with years of experience. Participants with longer work experience were more likely to report being inexperienced as per these references. "I have had minimal experience with this...I have not had a lot of experience in identification of gifted African American students." – Participant 8 (18 years of experience) "I have not mastered identifying gifted students in general." –Participant 1 (16 years of experience). The lack of knowledge in the characteristics of giftedness associated with African American or the process of identifying gifted African American students creates and maintains inequities and leads to inequities becoming systemic.

Participants discussed their limited access to culturally responsive professional learning programs. Most references were coded at the node 'non-existent' meaning the participants reported that they had never received diversity training and that such training was 'non-existent'. Some had received diversity/cultural/equity training, but it was not specific to African American students that are the focus of this study. "Most of my training has been centered around working with the culture of poverty, not a specific ethnic group of students. So, no formal training with working with African American students." –Participant 4

According to the survey data (see Appendix E), 25% (two) of the participants described the training specific to the identification of gifted African American students. Whereas 75% (six) described the training as 'minimal', 'very little', and 'not enough'. There was a general feeling that improved access to culturally responsive training specific to African American students would enhance the effectiveness of the identification process. "I think Culturally Responsive Teaching can help with this, but additional is needed" –Participant 5. "There is very little specific training in this area and there should be more PD surrounding the issue." –Participant 8

Besides the culturally responsive training, participants learned how to identify gifted African American students by reading literature on equitable practices and receiving “guidance from leadership on situations where [they] needed to be conscious of racial inequities.” – Participant 2. However, the most profound approach was teaching experience. Through experience, participants realized that some African American students lacked the conviction in their academic abilities. Some perceived the gifted program as a high-pressure program and preferred regular classes. The statement “African American boys didn't always work up to their ability because they felt didn't fit in with the other students, were teased about being in the ‘smart class’ by Participant 4, may imply that African American students deliberately performed below their potential to avoid being seen as an outsider by their peers.

Poor performance undermined the chances of gifted African American students being identified and recommended for the gifted education programs. So, to build their confidence and improve academic performance, participants established positive student-teacher relationships that allowed them to rebuild their self-confidence by “push[ing] them outside the boundaries of their learning”, “remind[ing] them of what I see in them in order for them to see it in themselves”, “encourag[ing] them to believe in themselves” and “allow[ing] them to demonstrate their gift and grow it.” –Participant 1.

Other practices that led to the effective identification of gifted African American students were collaborating with other teachers and monitoring student’s academic performance to back up their recommendations. System factors also affect the participants’ effectiveness in identifying gifted African American students. Students in honors classes were given priority when identifying students for the gifted education programs. However, most African Americans

would be enrolled in regular classes and thus not always in the best learning environment to be identified.

When examining the participants experience when working with African American students, there is such a stark contrast in the respondent's experiences working with African American students and working with gifted African American students. While all of them reported having extensive experience working with African American students, some hadn't had the opportunity to work with gifted African American students. This may point to the underrepresentation of African Americans in the gifted education programs. The analysis revealed barriers (see Table 10) to equal access to the gifted program: teacher under-referral for African American students, a need for professional development, and systemic biases. From the survey data, participants showed varying levels of experience working with gifted African American students. Some participants were able to identify working with gifted students in their classrooms who were not African American. Teachers with little to no experience in working with gifted students contributes to the low representation of African American students in gifted education

Teachers play a pivotal role in the gifted education programs. Together with parents, they identify, nominate, refer, or recommend gifted students to the gifted education programs. Despite having worked for more than five years, some participants reported that they had not referred an African American student to the gifted education programs. From the data, all ethnicities represented in this study reported 37.5% referred African Americans to the gifted program, while 50% reported having not referred African American students to the gifted program. A matrix coding query was run to determine the relationship between years of experience and referrals and



Table 10

*Themes Generated from Examining Inequities Survey Part II*

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Major Themes	Survey Questions (Appendices E)
2.1 Under Referral of African American Gifted Students	What are your perceptions and experiences regarding supplemental professional learning that you received in the identification of gifted African American middle school students?
2.1.1 A Need for Professional Learning	What is your experience working with African American students? What training have you had in this area? Describe your experience as a teacher working with gifted African American students?
2.1.2 Systemic Biases	What challenges have you as a teacher or educator encountered in recruiting or recommending African American middle school students that may qualify for gifted education?

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there was no significant difference in the referrals made by participants with say 5 years of experience and 18 years of experience.

The main factors undermining the effectiveness of the identification system, as reported by the participants, were lack of knowledge, perception of giftedness, and systemic bias. Phrases such as ‘I understood the process late in the game’, and ‘I think it really is not discussed at my school’ are an indication that teachers are not fully aware of the gifted education programs.

Participants reported the communication on the gifted identification process at the site was brief and they did not receive adequate guidance on the gifted characteristics to look out for. “The challenge comes from a short email to recommend and does not help us examine who we are recommending” –Participant 5. The participants also showed a lack of confidence in recruiting African Americans due to lack of experience. Commenting on the challenges she faced, Participant 8 said that she “had minimal experience.” Some participants felt that lack of knowledge in what constitutes as ‘gifted’ is what often led to the underrepresentation of African American students in the gifted education programs. For example, Participant 2 had experienced “pushback from teachers that take behavior and work ethic into consideration vs. potential or aptitude.”

## **Research Question Two**

*In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?*

The survey data was collected and analyzed from the open-ended Examining Inequities Survey Part II by the teachers, one district administrator, and one student support specialist. The scholarly practitioner continued to look for common patterns, themes, trends, or similarities from the information to emerge with Examining Inequities Part II survey collected. The survey for

Examining Inequities Part II was repeated again at the conclusion of the professional learning. The interview audio files were uploaded to NVivo for transcription and coding.

***Major Theme 2.1 The Underrepresentation of African Americans in the Gifted Education Programs***

Participants were asked to share their experiences with working with gifted African American students (see Table 11). Four participants had no experience working with gifted African American students. One participant observed that African American students who were gifted were treated differently because of their low socioeconomic status. Two participants shared they noticed a lack of representation of gifted African Americans in classes. Two participants shared that African American students recommended for the program were rated as high achievers and not gifted. While another participant shared their perceptions that gifted African American students did not work to their potential out of fear of not fitting in and being teased about being in the gifted class.

Teachers' expectations can impact student achievement. Differences in student ability can possibly be related to other biasing factors, however teacher expectation bias seems to match teachers' level of implicit bias and explain a significant amount of the differences in academic achievement by race and ethnicity. Implicit bias applies to this study when examining the unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes, and categories that affect behavior and understanding. In higher education, implicit bias often refers to unconscious racial or socioeconomic bias towards students.

Table 11

*Teacher's Experience Working with African American Students*


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Participant	Experience Working with African American Students	Experience Working with Gifted African American Students
Participant 1	A substantial amount of experience	Sadly, they are few and far between
Participant 2	I have had the opportunity to work with African American students heavily	I have seldom experience
Participant 3	I have taught many African American students	Often they are not in the gifted program
Participant 4	I've worked mostly in schools with 30-40% African American students	I haven't had the opportunity to teach many gifted African American children
Participant 5	I have taught many African American students in my classes	Not aware if the students are gifted.
Participant 6	I have worked with African American students	None
Participant 7	Taught many African American students	They are not gifted, but I challenge them in the classroom
Participant 8	I have worked with African American students	Not aware if they are gifted

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Participants were asked to give their account of recommending African American students or others who they believed were gifted. Two of the eight participants referred students for gifted services. One participant shared that a Hispanic student was unable to qualify, possibly due to language barriers. Six of the eight participants never referred students for gifted services due to their inexperience and not feeling qualified or properly trained to make recommendations. All participants stated that more professional learning was needed to identify more African American and other underrepresented students.

***Major Theme 2.1.1 Professional Learning is Needed in Order to Affect Change***

From the confidential open-ended survey questions for Examining Inequities Part II, participants expressed the impact the *culturally responsive* professional learning had on their knowledge and perception of recommending African American for the gifted program (see Table 12). The survey showed that culturally responsive professional learning impacted teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students by increasing participant's awareness on the identification of African American students and building participant's self-efficacy.

Most survey participants perceived the identification of African American students for the Gifted educational program as disproportionate. The culturally responsive training improved their awareness that gifted or deserving African American students were not identified. "It brought more conscious awareness that African American students are not proportionately represented or identified as gifted." –Participant 5

The survey participants perceived the identification criteria as ineffective. Following the culturally responsive training, they became more aware of the gaps that existed in the criteria.

Table 12

*Examining Inequities Part II (Appendix E) - Varying Participants Responses on Perception on*

*Professional Learning received on AA Identification Pre- and Post-Surveys*

Participant	Pre-Examining Inequities II	Post-Examining Inequities II
Question	Survey Question 6: What are your perceptions and experiences regarding supplemental professional learning that you received in the identification of gifted African American middle school students?	Survey Question 6: What are your perceptions and experiences regarding supplemental professional learning that you received in the identification of gifted African American middle school students?
P1	“Most of my training has been centered around working with the culture of poverty, not a specific ethnic group of students.”	Participating teachers in the study acknowledge the barriers do exist and affect how teachers perceive African American students
P2	“Minimal”, “Very little”, and “not enough.”	“I think culturally responsive teaching can help with this (AA gifted identification), but additional is needed.” “We need to evaluate the test (gifted) for bias and the selection process.”
P3	“There is very little specific training in this area.”	“There should be more PD surrounding this issue.”
P4	“I have not received any formal preparation or training programs to identify gifted black students.”	“I will continue to advocate for all of my students.”
P5	“Non-existent”	“There definitely needs to be education preparation and training programs in the identification of gifted African American and middle school students just as much as identifying struggling learners.

For instance, educators and programs did not “take into consideration how one’s culture plays a major part of their learning...” –Participant 1

Because teachers play a major role in the identification of African American students for the gifted program, which further supports the reasons why they should be knowledgeable and skilled in identifying gifted students. The survey revealed that the culturally responsive training improved the participant’s self-efficacy by encouraging them to diversify the identification criteria and make it inclusive. “Cultural Responsive Teaching and the Brain sparked very meaningful and honest conversations with my colleagues. This, in turn, allowed me to look at different perspectives and consider things that I haven't before.” –Participant 2.

Some participants started to reflect on their teaching practices and their role in providing African American students with equal opportunities to be identified. “cultural responsive teaching allowed me to reflect on my practices of teaching to ask...am I providing enough opportunities for African American students to examine their own learning through information processing that builds intellectual capacity which will strongly impact their chances of being identified in gifted education.” –Participant 6.

### ***Major Theme 2.1.2 Systemic Bias in the Student Identification Process***

The participants were asked to give their thoughts on reasons that may impact the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs across the United States. One participant stated that students are not working to their potential to keep from being in gifted classes or being teased by their peers. Three participants stated that students who are not working to their potential or fit the description of gifted are least likely to be recommended or retained in the gifted education program. Overall, participants stated that additional training with a focus on culture awareness could help with the identification disparities.

It appears the system had been designed to disenfranchise African Americans from participating in the gifted education programs. In the selection process, nominated students were subjected to a formal evaluation in which test scores were used to determine if they qualified or not. Based on the responses from the participants, very few African Americans qualified. Participant 3 observed that gifted African American students were denied the chance to be in the program even though they “have a different perspective to bring and are eager to participate.” This may imply non-inclusivity in the characteristics considered as ‘gifted’. A sentiment reiterated by Participant 3, “...a few others that I have recommended cannot meet the portfolio requirements due to lack of language/writing, but I would consider them gifted.” The general perception was that it was “more difficult for African American children to qualify for the gifted education programs” because they had “more hurdles to leap” –Participant 8.

The participants were aware of the bias inherent in the selection process and were making individual contributions to correcting it through advocating for diversity in school activities, collaborating, and holding transparent discussions with other teachers. Also, there was a growing interest in restructuring the system “I think it is an area we all need to discuss and change. We need to have a more effective way of recommending and following through. We need to evaluate the test for bias and the selection process.” –Participant 5. It is important to highlight the seeming reluctance by some participants to take any action to address unequal access to the gifted education programs. “I have never implemented strategies that specifically promote African American students solely...” –Participant 1. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that they needed to “be a part of advocating for the advancement of these students” –Participant 2.



## Evaluation of Findings

Five themes were identified during the data analysis. Two themes were identified for research question one and three themes were identified for Research Question two.

1. In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?
2. In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

The five themes were (1) giftedness is an intellectual ability, (2) knowledge gaps, barriers for teachers from lack of educator preparation programs (3) underrepresentation of African American middle school students in the gifted education programs, (4) need for professional learning (5) and systemic bias. Each theme is a representation of all the participants' views and perceptions regarding their responses to the confidential survey questions and one online interview with a district gifted coordinator. The themes also represent the findings for the research study.

In gifted education, the demographic classroom make-up can show the impact of Critical Race Theory as social systems and establish a clear distinction between groups of students based on their ethnicity (Howard, 2008). Critical Race Theorists find that if racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures then it doesn't end, and the routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to do the world's work will continue to limit the African American students' access to gifted education programs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The tenet of the Commitment to Social Justice examines the evident challenges for increasing access for gifted services to all students, specifically African American students isn't an easy undertaking nor is overcoming the inevitable resistance. But it is an essential move when leading from a social justice perspective. Leading from a social justice lens requires that leaders understand the rules were created to keep some in and others out. Leaders must intentionally change those conditions by reviewing and challenging the rules, examining the data, supporting students, teachers, and leaders, and establishing accountability based on the idea that all students must have access to the highest academic levels a school offers. The abilities to be successful in higher level classes, can exceed expectations when supported by their teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The tenet for the Permanence of Race recognizes that it is the systemic nature of racism that bears primary responsibility for reproducing racial inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000). This was evident when analyzing the number of African American students identified for gifted programs in comparison to Whites and Asians. Color-blind, or "formal," conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus reflect discrimination of students.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 began with an introduction on the purpose of the study. The sample descriptions show there were a total of nine participants, seven females and two males. The methodology and data analysis used for coding was discussed. The overall summary of the patterns, trends that would make up the theme were presented. The data was provided and organized according to the research questions and the theme generated based on the data (Mertler, 2019).

The qualitative study adds to the literature while examining teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of the referral and identification processes of African American students for gifted education programs. Data analysis highlighted two major themes identified for research question one and three major themes were identified for research question two. The major themes were (1) giftedness is an intellectual ability, (2) gifted identification knowledge gaps for teachers from lack of educator preparation programs to identify, (3) systemic bias, (4) under-referral of African American middle school students in the gifted education programs,

Confidential open-ended survey questions with teachers, and an interview with a district gifted Coordinator were conducted to answer the research questions. The open-ended surveys and the interview were carried out in a middle school setting and central office in a school district in a metropolitan community within the southeastern geographic region of the United States, where African American students are underrepresented in the gifted education program. The findings uncovered some methods, processes, and practices that could yield some success in referring and recruiting African American students for the gifted education programs. This data collected could possibly transfer to similar settings and serve as a resource for addressing the trend of underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. The data analysis process for this research study was the focus for Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 will have a summary and discussion around the results that are presented. The study's result and its implications on the literature is examined. Recommendations for further research and summary of the dissertation topic is given in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the conclusions of the study that were constructed on the review of the literature, data collection, and data analysis of the research study concerning the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. An interview with a district gifted coordinator, confidential open-ended survey that related the teacher's knowledge and perception of the gifted identification process, and the perception of professional learning on *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* by Zaretta Hammond (2015) when identifying African American students for gifted programs.

The selection process for determining the participants was convenience sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), as these methods aligned to the study's aims and objectives. The scholarly practitioner obtained data by creating and distributing eight confidential open-ended surveys to school personnel and conducting a semi-structured interview to collect information from a district gifted coordinator. The surveys were designed to elicit in depth responses from participants. The questions seek to find out what has changed, what has been learned, or done differently because of the open-ended survey questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The participants had varying years of educational experience and contributed meaningful information to the scope of the study. The site of the study was a middle school in the southeastern geographic region of the United States. After coding data and analyzing patterns, five themes emerged from the data.

The sample size is for one middle school and therefore not generalizable. Responses were limited to the experience of one geographic region and may not have been accurate as answers

were stated personally by teachers and their responses may have inconsistency. Ethical assurances were upheld as approved by East Carolina's University Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants signed the informed consent forms and were assured that if they had any reason or felt uncomfortable, they could at any time discontinue their participation in the study, leave the study, or not participate at all. To assure confidentiality, all study data was confidential and securely stored to be appropriately destroyed immediately after the storage requirement.

The research findings presented the analysis of the confidential surveys based on the participants' experience with referring African American students for gifted education programs. The responses to the questions were generated as they participated in culturally responsive professional learning using *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2015). The major themes played a role in understanding the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs, examining the knowledge of teachers and their perceptions as a barrier for African American students in their access to gifted education programs. The research questions examined ways teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs, and the ways culturally responsive professional learning impacted teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students.

Critical Race Theory was used as the theoretical framework to inform the research because it contains an action-oriented dimension (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical Race Theory centers on understanding the underachievement of African American students around the analysis of ideological, racial, and socioeconomic inequities in society and the relationship that highlights the importance of academic excellence and social transformation. Critical Race Theory tries not only to understand our social situation that relates to this study with the

underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted programs but to transform how society has organized along hierarchies by allowing participants to attend culturally responsive training and examine their perceptions of their knowledge of systemic structures and policies to impact positive change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

The scholarly practitioner examined the central tenets of Critical Race Theory which: (a) emphasizes the role of race and racism as well as intersecting oppression based on gender and class; (b) challenges dominant ideologies (e.g. colorblindness) and theories; (c) seeks social justice, i.e. the transformation of social conditions that perpetuate oppression; (d) centers the experiences of students of color; and (e) incorporates both transdisciplinary and historical perspectives. For the purpose of this study the tenets for the commitment to social justice, and the permanence of race as a lens for this study.

The commitment to social justice tenet for Critical Race Theory acknowledges how all oppression interrelates and focuses on eradicating racism and other forms of oppression by centering People of Color and taking a stance on issues of social justice. Critical Race Theory has been used to provide a lens for seeing and acting upon racial change to deal with inequality related to the hidden curriculum and overt schooling practice (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The work of social justice requires deep critical reflection and introspection on the part of educators

The centrality (permanence) of race tenet for Critical Race Theory, examines the racial inequalities within the context of educational achievement by centering the dialogue around inequalities within the context of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stovall, 2006). This tenet explores how racism comes from our own thoughts, to our personal relationships, to our places of work, to our educational and judicial systems.

Chapter 5 includes an overall summary, and the relationship that exists between the literature and the study. This knowledge can be used by educators to inform, reflect, and guide their practices to improve the representation of African American students in gifted education programs.

### **Findings and Implications**

The five themes were identified during data analysis: two themes were associated with research question one on their perception of gifted identification and three themes were associated with Research Question two on professional learning.

1. In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?
2. In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

The results from this study can be used to provide a baseline for future research and improve the underrepresentation of African American students.

#### **Research Question One**

*In what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs?*

#### ***Major Theme 1.1: Giftedness is an Intellectual Ability***

The implication of theme 1 reflected that teachers believed gifted students were high achievers or giftedness was based solely on aptitude scores. The theme reflected the need for teachers to understand that gifted students are children and youth who possess outstanding talent, perform or show the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when

compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. Further, giftedness is multifaceted, as are the solutions to increasing access (Wright & Ford, 2017).

Schools need more professional development on identifying and teaching gifted and talented students. The overall intent of the study was to understand the impact of the culturally responsive professional learning on teacher perceptions in identifying and referring African American students for gifted education programs. Culturally responsive teaching attempts to bridge the gap between teacher and student by helping the teacher understand the cultural nuances that may cause a relationship to break down, which ultimately causes student achievement to break down as well (Hammond, 2014). It assumes when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

With the critical race tenet for counter-storytelling, African American students can share ways for their teachers to increase their classroom engagement, which may lead to an increase in academic achievement, and give insight on ways for learning to improve. Incorporating cultural engagement strategies and increasing engagement with academics, could lead to African American students feeling more connected to their school community, teachers increasing their intentionality to connect with students through pedagogy, establishing trust, and helping with gifted underrepresentation. Essential elements of culturally responsive teaching are examined through developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Hammond, 2014; Ware, 2006). According to Steinberg (2004),



intelligence cannot be meaningfully understood outside of cultural context. Therefore, teachers need to consider the cultural context of their students, and other factors when interpreting their potential to be identified as gifted.

For gifted students of other factors, their observational skills may be strong which are often used to survive on the streets (see appendix G). Characteristics of culturally/linguistically diverse gifted students may require more repetition or hands-on experiences at an introductory level and demonstrate strong storytelling ability and ability to read environmental print in home language. While often displaying richness of imagery in ideas, art, music, primary language, etc.; can improvise with commonplace objects. According to the Albuquerque Public Schools Gifted Task Force (see Appendix G), identification of gifted African American students can be observed with characteristics (Fox et al., 1983; Nielsen, 1999; Torrance et al., 1998; Van Tassel-Baska et al., 1991; Zirkel, 2005) that focus on the strength of the student, instead of being disqualified for unobservable or undeveloped areas based on the traditional standardized rubric.

Nine cultural styles of learning for African American students were listed by Harmon (2002) that are probably learned in the home but manifested in the classroom through their behaviors, learning styles, and academic achievement levels. These cultural styles include “spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, oral tradition, expressive individualism, affect, communalism, and social time perspective” (Harmon, 2002, p. 70). Harmon (2002) continued by proposing that “in predominantly White schools where African American students are from predominantly African American neighborhoods, the cultural assets of African American students coupled with the characteristics of gifted students create additional challenges for teachers to understand their needs” (p. 71).

### ***Major Theme 1.2. Knowledge Gaps, Systemic Barriers, and a Lack of Experience in the Identification Process***

The theme reflected that some of the barriers to the effective identification process, as mentioned, were lack of knowledge/awareness, inexperience, and lack of opportunity to participate in the process. The data also reflected a lack of knowledge of the entire process involved with the gifted identification process at the site of the study. Researchers have noted teacher discretion during the identification of gifted students could contribute to the inequities with teacher discretion in the gifted assignment process as a potentially important contributor to this inequity. Because the process often begins with teacher referral, classroom teachers can play a gatekeeping role in gifted assignments. Because teachers have the role as are often gatekeepers (Archambault et al., 1993; Donovan & Cross, 2002) and, thus, have the potential to become advocates for gifted students in the nomination, screening, and identification of gifted students from underserved populations, it is important for teachers receive the various traditional linguistic and analytic intelligence talents, that may show up in student work samples outside of the typical reading, writing, and math competencies.

Since identification primarily begins with the teacher, Ford (1998) describes the impact this practice has on students of color. Teachers provide feedback on students through checklists, rating scales, informal recommendations, and cognitive assessments to document a student's academic capability and potential and end with a referral for further evaluation (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Next, teachers or other school staff formally evaluate students using tools based on the district or state's definition of giftedness. Teacher nominations can provide insight into the perspective of a student's ability and potential. However, bias can inadvertently show up during the process of identification, due to teachers being human. Student nominations can be

influenced by a student's socioeconomic status, their innate strengths, and other areas of academic strength, as well as a teacher's preconceptions of what giftedness is based on their interpretation of the definition.

As the research and this study has shown, African Americans are often left out of the teacher nomination process due to their inability to behave or perform according to the standards set by many of their teachers (Neal et al., 2003). Some students who could be nominated for gifted services may have lived in homes with little access to computers and books. Whereas other students may have grown up in cultures where education is valued, but the understanding of the various services that could be provided to students is limited or shared because of a requirement, without the intention of providing support and understanding of the gifted identification process. In these situations, students are less likely to be nominated and could remain in a traditional setting because of lack of resources.

The current methods utilized to recruit and admit students into the gifted education programs include nominations from a parent, teacher, or a student, along with the Cognitive Abilities Tests and a series of other tests if needed, review of portfolios, classroom observation (if needed) and reviewing previous End of Grade Tests. Many states have embraced a multiple method criterion for identifying students, with an emphasis on the portfolio evaluation, that highlights student creativity, artistic ability, or leadership. The portfolio evaluation is described as more holistic and supported because of the detrimental impact on gifted identification of lower scores on cognitive assessments for African American and Hispanic students (Joseph & Ford, 2006). Examples of student portfolios from underrepresented populations in classroom with all aspects of talent, including nontraditional examples of verbal ability. This method still provides teachers with greater discretion and assignment.

Joseph and Ford (2006) suggest steps that can be taken to formalize the process for gifted identification known as non-discriminatory assessments. They describe a process that draws upon a variety of sources of student data and ensures that rather than a single individual making assignment decisions, that a team based the assignment on culturally sensitive assessment are engaged in evaluations. Preservice programs despite their responsibility for referrals, nominations, and teaching gifted students, educators remain under-prepared in gifted education. Gifted education preparation is essential and can take place via coursework, degree programs, and professional learning.

### **Research Question Two**

*In what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?*

### ***Major Theme 2.1 Underrepresentation of African Americans in Gifted Education Programs***

Research has shown the pipeline to AP and IB classes and elite colleges is racially segregated. This is problematic because these spaces are often filled by students with access to gifted programs. If underrepresentation in gifted programs continues at the secondary level, this ongoing problem may have lifelong impacts on college enrollment, scholarships, employability, and one's earning potential. This is an example of Critical Race Theory tenet with the permanent of race. Providing exposure to various learning opportunities can influence academic achievement, measured IQ, and the potential for higher income. With the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developed nations, Chmielewski and Reardon (2016) found that the United States had the largest poverty inequality, as well as some of the largest income related achievement gaps within society.

Educational systems have been designed to have the behaviors and progress of white students centered as the norm. The laws, policies, and procedures have systemically excluded people of color from basic human rights-a sound and equitable education. As a result of systematic racism, African Americans have not had greater access to money, property, social networks, and education than other groups. Due to being oppressed by society's deeply ingrained biases regarding notions of intelligence and giftedness, too many African American students fail to reach their potential in our schools and gain access to gifted programs (Howard, 2008). This form of oppression, with mainly class and gender, has important implications on the underrepresentation of gifted African Americans, particularly males when examining the Permanence of Racism tenet for Critical Race Theory framework (Howard, 2008). If underrepresentation in gifted programs continues at the secondary level, this ongoing problem may have lifelong impacts.

The inequality of educational access and opportunity with the United States, has also contributed to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). According to Grissom and Redding (2016), schools in the United States have shown that White students are more likely to be identified as gifted, than students of color even when they meet the requirements. The inequities with African American underrepresentation because of teacher discretion, can be seen as subjective since the teacher referral is the first step in the identification process of gifted students (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Parent referrals is another step that can be taken within the identification process of gifted students, but many parents are not informed about the process nor the benefits of gifted identification.

Families and communities must be informed and supported in order to increase the underrepresented students in the gifted education programs. Parents can advocate for their gifted

students of color. Parents and students can provide a counter-narrative of their child's school experience that relates to the academic progress of their child. The partnership between home and school is vital in support of addressing student achievement and underrepresentation. An increase in parent involvement correlates with an increase in student achievement (Epstein, 1991). Families need to know about gifted education and their right to request that their child be screened for possible gifted identification.

Families should be informed about the assessment opportunities within the respective school and district each year. They should also know the best testing and assessment practices that is available for their child. For example, testing should be provided in children's native languages, nonverbal test should be included, and that other accommodations are available if needed to aide in the identification of gifted African American students (Wright & Ford, 2017). Parents who see the identification process as yielding data may lead to careful consideration of all their child's needs (e.g., academic, social, and emotional) may be more willing to encourage a child to participate. They could also lend more support to their child who may struggles to adapt to new challenges or one who worries about being singled out from peers.

The significance that can exist with parents and school involvement was presented in a study in Greensboro, North Carolina by Woods and Achey (1990). Although the study was done between 1986 and 1989, the results can still bring significance today. Student identification for the gifted education program in grades 2-5, consisted of various components that included standardized test scores, along with parent, teacher, peer, or self-nomination. After being nominated, students were eligible for up to three rounds of aptitude and achievement testing; the first two were group evaluations, and the third was an independent evaluation.

Parents must continue to stay involved with their secondary students as they transition from elementary schools. As adolescents progress through the various stages of puberty, they begin to seek more independence as they discover and develop their identity. More time is spent with their peers and less time with their parents (Steinberg, 2004). The line of communication and information on gifted education for African American students should be evident between schools, teachers and parents should be kept open and cultivated throughout the year.

Individuals who are actively engaged in the life of a student play a crucial role in many aspects of their development and can be defined as a student's biological parents, extended family, legal guardians, or older siblings (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). Schools should provide workshops that address the roles that parents can play in the educational success of their child. This can include workshops of the various academic and gifted programs available for all students, along with transparency on the ways that gifted education can show in students of color.

### ***Theme 2.1.1 Professional Learning is Needed in Order to Affect Change***

The implication for the themes for Research Question two reflects the fact that gifted professional learning for teachers is vital to the identification of African American gifted students. The results of the findings indicate a need for more professional learning on the characteristics of giftedness, and how giftedness may manifest in students of color and lower socioeconomic populations. When asked during the follow-up professional learning survey what their thoughts were around the professional learning since the confidential survey, most teachers mentioned their increased awareness about the topic. Wright and Ford (2017) noted in previous research that professional development must be relevant and ongoing, strategic in targeting equitable identification and assessment instruments, policies, and procedures; affective

development; psychological development; social development; cultural development; curriculum and instruction; and services and programming for gifted students from all backgrounds. This is another example of the tenet where the voice of students could counter the narrative around the low academic progress or behavior that may be demonstrated by some African American students. When students fail to receive a referral from their teacher for gifted identification, due to their behavior or academic progress not aligning with what one may perceive as giftedness, this contributes to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs.

The framework for the professional learning for teachers of gifted African American students or for identification purposes, should include an aspect for teachers to reflect on and acknowledge their own belief system (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Some research shows that many teachers do not share the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of the students they teach, which hinders the ability of teachers to recognize the academic abilities of underrepresented students (Avalos, 2011). When teachers have ingrained social beliefs, it can cause an aversion towards marginalized groups of students in both implicit and explicit ways (Namrata, 2011) which may impact learning outcomes in a negative way.

Because teachers are an essential source of information for students (Gershenson, 2016), they must be prepared to recognize the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of African American students when searching for gifted students. The professional learning should also emphasize and help teachers to recognize the unique challenges and experiences that underrepresented students can have that result from economic hardship. This can include alternative ways to identify and recognize characteristics of students according to their level of need, so that teachers are aware of the phenomenon and not confuse productivity with giftedness.



Professional learning provided to teachers should be ongoing and help to build their capacity to identify gifted African American students and measure the effectiveness of any changes on student outcomes. A change in practice could help with the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. Most of the teachers suggested that some form of professional development regarding the topic of African American giftedness would be beneficial for other teachers. Therefore, if teachers participated in informal professional development opportunities where they became more aware of the need for recognizing potential giftedness in African American students from a cultural lens, they might be more able to notice their giftedness among these diverse learners, making them less likely to intentionally overlook them for gifted identification.

### **Theme 2.1.2 Systemic Bias**

The underrepresentation observed in gifted identification rates is, in part, a symptom of larger societal inequality. The United States has long struggled with the concept of equality in public education, with race having often been the determining factor in the provision of educational services and opportunities. While public education is presented as race neutral, they continue to produce raced results in participation rates and achievement outcomes. The results on almost every indicator reported can be reliably predicted by race in these presumably race neutral schools. Further, there is no acknowledgment of the ways that a traditional curriculum “limits access to knowledge and perpetuates inequality” (Yosso, 2002, p. 102). African Americans have fought hard to gain access to better schooling with *Brown vs. Board of Education 1954* (n.d.), while now they work under the notion of underperformance within the construct of the educational system and being underrepresented in gifted educational programs.

There are many discrepancies among school districts with definitions, policies, and the implementation that results in a considerable amount of variation from school to school when trying to create a pool of identified gifted and talented students. Although many states have revised their definitions and adopted policies to focus on eliminating the inequities that exist with students of color being identified for gifted services, is still subjective and rests with teacher referrals or committees (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

In the study conducted by Donovan and Cross (2002) another standard for determining giftedness was explored. The program was not altered to target underrepresented populations. Rather, when an underrepresented student was identified at or above the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile on the school-wide standardized test, the three-step evaluation started, as no nomination was required (Donovan & Cross, 2002). So, professionals were assigned to the program to administer an individual test, monitor test scores, track data, and ensure follow through for the targeted students. Parents continued to stay informed after each test unless there was a specific parent request to discontinue. Without altering standards for entry, the number of students nominated in the gifted program increased by 181%, from 99 to 278 students. Underrepresented students' fear of gifted programs increased from 13.2 to 27.5%. Only 15% of the underrepresented students ultimately were identified in the first round of testing.

For example, many definitions were adopted to include outstanding academic performance, which still amounts to subjectivity of what represents outstanding performance. The definition is influenced by the normative performance of students in each school or School District (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Data from the CogAT Research and Development guide showed the observed score differences that existed between African American students were closer to half of a standard deviation (Lohman & Gambrell, 2012). Whereas data from other

studies show a much larger standard deviation score difference than observed in normative data (Giessman et al., 2013). These types of assessment are the most used in gifted student identification so it should be no surprise that there is a substantial underrepresentation and identify gifted populations (Callahan et al., 2013). The traditional screening tools and methods used to identify gifted African American students have tended to revolve around an intelligence test, or in some states the state mandated tests. The tests have been held under scrutiny for potential bias.

“Although the performance on standardized tests during the early years is important, other disparities within the education milieu need to be addressed,” (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008, p. 167). Any attempt to gather a test score that is high enough to warrant inclusion in a gifted program diminishes the probability of finding underrepresented students or identify students who will benefit from the challenge of a gifted curriculum. In many educational systems, African American students are not given the same opportunities as their peers leading to other factors that contribute to the underrepresentation. Intelligence tests have narrow age level norms when making inferences regarding a person's ability. Under the tenet for counter narratives, it is important for African American students to share their personal experiences about school, their teachers, educational opportunities available in school, experience with peers, and academic challenges.

Continuing to utilize the method of measuring the aptitude and ability of students with standardized assessments may add to the underrepresentation in gifted programs for African American students, due to most children experiencing substantial opportunities to learn prior to attending school (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). When comparing students to others who have similar (OTL) experiences can produce more valid measures of ability or aptitude. Students learn

in different ways and their teaching may not always be the same as other students in the same grade when compared to their academic progress (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

To measure the impact of Opportunities to Learn, one can examine the access to high-quality early-childhood education and exposure to language and rich vocabulary. The seminal study by Hart and Risley (1995) showed the level of exposure for parents for children of professional parents in comparison to lower socioeconomic parents. The differences that exist in word exposure with students resulted in a cumulative vocabulary for the low-income children that was less than half the size of those from high-income families. Before children even enter school, massive differences in opportunities to learn already exist. This further supports the critical race theory tenet on the permanence of race. This can also attribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs. Due to the socioeconomic status of some African American families, the ability of students to have access and exposure to the high levels of vocabulary, reading, and math that is often used to identify gifted students, further limits their access to the educational programs that could further develop their gifts and talents.

### **Significance in Themes from Responses (District Personnel-Participant 9)**

Although the interview with the district program gifted coordinator revealed no themes, there was additional insight shared around the planning and collaboration at the district level, specifically addressing the underrepresentation of students of color in the gifted education program. The district level administrator is responsible for recruitment, and retention of gifted education and intervention services throughout the district. The following structures are currently in place to modify the Gifted Education Plan:

- Recognize the need to change based on research and current district data trends of gifted identification patterns.
- A needed change in the mindset of teachers working with the gifted population of students, before making a programmatic change.
- Reviewing the current systems of identification for students of color.
- More intentionality around recruitment for students of color in the gifted education program.
- Assuring that new gifted education plan has a level of accountability.
- Have key programs and training to support teachers and administrators in their effort to support and retain students identified for gifted services.
- Utilize the new assessment with the portfolio as another data point to see if underrepresented populations are identified for gifted services through this project or presentation of alternative assessment tools.
- Talent Development Program is being utilized for students not identified with gifted services but show talents that can be developed and nurtured over time and possibly identified for services.

### **Limitations**

Limitations were present in this study. There were four limitations encountered during the study. The first limitation was the scholarly practitioner conducting the study is a principal of the school system where the participants were selected. To ensure there was no response bias, participants were only to complete confidential open-ended surveys without a small focus group component. The scholarly practitioner did not allow everything known about the school systems and participants to impact the data with the data analysis. Future research conducted at other

secondary schools or within the same school system should be conducted to see if the same trends are found at other similar schools or within the school system.

The second limitation in research findings are relevant specifically to African American middle school students who have not been identified for the gifted education programs. The strategies discussed and identified were focusing on the underrepresented population. Other races were not included in the study. The data that was collected focused on African American students. Including more diverse populations of students underrepresented in the gifted education program may impact the findings of the study.

The third limitation was the research study only included data collection in three months. The participants-based responses on personal and educational experiences. While the surveys provided the opportunity to provide factors to consider in the underrepresentation of African Americans in the gifted education programs. Focus groups and classroom observations over a longer period of time could allow for further research to better understand the complex processes.

The fourth limitation was the research study was held in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The professional learning training was online, thus limiting the direct interaction with participants. Due to the safety guidelines and students not attending school until the end of second quarter, classroom observations by other teachers did not take place. Including classroom observations will support the teachers in their implementation to methods discussed for professional learning.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Teachers can help to increase the motivation of African American males in gifted programs, as they acknowledge and nurture their academic potential (Ford, 1996). According to

Noguera (2003), changing academic outcomes is not simply a matter of developing programs to provide support or bringing an end to unfair educational policies and practices. This will accomplish little if such efforts are not accompanied by strategies that actively engage students and families. Teachers, peers, and schools which comprise the social influences, can have a positive impact on African American students' self-image and belief around their ability to be successful in school in the gifted program, and engage in activities that violate established norms, without fear of being considered a “sell out” for the sake of individual gain (Fordham, 1996, p. 12).

Research on the teachings with non-cognitive skills may offer another method to impact underrepresentation. The personal attributes of non-cognitive factors that include grit, motivation, persistence, self-control, a mindset towards ability and effort may also help to understand how gifted students who are underrepresented can overcome institutional and the social barriers that often impact their ability to participate and gifted services and programs. Grantham suggested that the research around non cognitive skill development helps to increase self-esteem and improve the academic self-efficacy of a student (Aronson & Juarez, 2012). With the improvement of self-esteem and self-efficacy, this could help provide underrepresented students with strategies to defeat stereotypes that are negative. This could also help with the isolation that students of color may feel when identified for gifted programs.

In 2011, Walton and Cohen conducted a randomized control trial examining an intervention targeted at cultivating non-cognitive skills over a three-year period. This study addressed African American students having a sense of belonging as freshmen in college. A review of analysis shows the correlation that exists with an increase in academic achievement and non-cognitive skill development. Over the three-year period the African American students

in the control trial had a higher-grade point average in college. Fostering the development of these specific skills may provide gifted minority students with the critical skills to help them overcome the barriers that exist internally and externally which often contributed to them not being successful in the gifted education programs, honors programs, and advanced placement.

Students who experience success can often feel disconnected and unsupported by their teachers and school community. Teacher expectations suggest these feelings have a powerful effect on student performance (Weinstein et al., 1995). According to Ladson-Billings (1994), performance of African Americans, more so than other students, is influenced to a large degree by the social support and encouragement they receive from teachers. The ability for teachers to demonstrate efficacy may be the single most important element affecting student learning. Effective teachers can either widen or narrow the achievement gap on standardized assessments that divide White and students of color (Beatty, 2013). Teachers' beliefs of students are often what they believe of themselves regarding academics. Good teachers make lasting imprints on student achievement that can last for several years (White et al., 2009).

Zepke et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of the perception and beliefs of African Americans when focused on academic achievement and accomplishments. Zepke et al. (2014) study suggested African American students show significant academic improvement when they feel a sense of belonging in their school community. In comparison, the study claimed students who feel a sense of connectivity to the school are more likely to demonstrate high self-esteem and experience positive educational outcomes in classrooms.

### **Preparation Programs**

Studies have shown that many preservice teachers enter the field of teaching without understanding minoritized children's background experiences and needs (Cho & DeCastro-



Ambrosetti, 2005). Teacher education courses focused on increasing understanding of culturally responsive sensitivity and increasing awareness of issues related to diversity and its overall impact affect preservice teachers' dispositions toward students of color (Delpit, 2006). Thus, preservice, and in-service teachers who engage in such classroom experiences must be given opportunities to practice the theoretical concepts in order to increase their confidence for developing a curriculum that supports all learners. They must also receive specific feedback that would help build their knowledge capacity and classroom experiences in practice.

To bridge the culture gap, Ladson-Billings (2000) recommended the need for immersion experiences in diverse communities for preservice teachers. She contended that such experiences would allow pre-service teachers the opportunity to understand the daily lives of students of color and low-SES students. We also must support in-service teachers in their work with diverse children. They need to understand the foundation of their own perspectives and recognize how their attitudes impact a child's self-image and perspective. When students are perceived negatively by their teacher, this could lead to low academic performance, low self-esteem and self-efficacy. The negative thoughts and feelings held by students can result in negative outcomes for their learning. Multicultural education is another factor that may contribute to eliminating the barriers with gifted identification for students of color. While important, it is equally key to increase the representation of African Americans among educators. African American educators often serve as advocates, mentors, and role models for students, especially males (Whiting, 2009).

Milner (2014) shared how African American teachers know how to engage in 'purposeful and relevant teaching' to ensure the collective academic and social uplift of Black students. Purposeful and relevant teaching is rooted in the notion that most Black teachers know the

importance of building positive relationships with Black male and female students, centering race and community in teaching and learning, and helping Black students plan for the future. Some of these components are missing in most gifted classrooms but are essential to the academic success and social uplift of Black gifted children, particularly Black gifted males (Bryan et al., 2016).

### **Professional Learning**

Teachers need professional development to raise awareness about the issue of underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programming. Teachers who teach gifted education students should be required to take classes to develop their craft in the area of gifted education. In 2019, the National Association for Gifted Children (NACG) updated their standards for gifted programming in the Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards. NACG believes that the effectiveness of professional learning is assessed through cultural relevant student outcomes. The updated NACG standards are based on equity, research-based practices and student outcomes. Standard 6.3 focuses on Equity and Inclusion, and the student outcome states, “All students with gifts and talents are able to develop their abilities as a result of educators who are committed to removing barriers to access and creating inclusive gifted education communities” (NAGC, 2019, p. 21).

Ford and Grantham (2011) offer examples for culturally relevant professional development:

- It includes characteristics and needs of gifted students who are culturally different.
- It focuses consistently on recruiting and retaining culturally different students in gifted education.
- It focuses on ways to eliminate discriminatory assessments and test bias.

- It focuses on the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination on expectations for culturally different student under referrals to gifted educations, relationships, classroom management, and more.
- It focuses on understanding racial identity and strategies for promoting racial pride in students.
- It incorporates Multicultural Literature.
- It ensures that culturally different speakers serve as professional development speakers and trainers (p. 67).

For example, in recognizing the needs of teachers for targeted knowledge and skills, the district may implement the Four Zone Professional Learning Model, a practical, comprehensive approach to striving towards equity through professional learning within gifted education programs. The model is grounded in equity literacy and funds of knowledge frameworks, and in best practices in culturally responsive gifted professional learning. The zones address the knowledge and skills necessary for proficient teachers of the gifted and address the process of systemic change (Novak & Lewis, 2021). In review of literature, Hammond (2015) shared the criteria recommended for culturally responsive professional learning need to be ongoing and ultimately lead to change.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

Districts must move beyond researching, studying, evaluating, and disaggregating their student demographics, and proactively and aggressively advocating for underrepresented students from such groups. Ford (2012) explains that it is possible to select and use an instrument and have policies without knowing that they are inappropriate for culturally different students and thus contribute to inequities. However, once it is found that such students are negatively

impacted by attitudes, instruments, policies, and procedures, if changes are not made the long-term impact could be detrimental. Policies, procedures, and practices may also be biased and discriminatory (Ford, 2012). For example, designated cut-off scores, weighted matrices, the time of year when students are tested, the age and grade level when students are evaluated. Educators, decision-makers, and policymakers must analyze and eliminate intentional and unintentional discriminatory barriers to gifted education that have the same impact or outcomes underrepresentation.

Gay (2010) amplified the importance of reforming and transforming all aspects of the educational structures, such as funding, policies, and the practices supported by administration, so they too are culturally responsive. If teachers should adjust their craft in ways that respond effectively to children's cultural learning and social needs in the classroom, as Gay suggested, then school administrators must have a similar mandate regarding the entire school culture and climate according to the reasons that were shown to contribute to the long-standing problem of underrepresentation.

Our nation is changing every day and the changes are taking place quickly. The increase in diversity in schools allows for students to interact with others with varying cultural experiences. The principal is most knowledgeable about resources and is best positioned to promote and support school-level reforms (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). The principal's leadership position in a school, is most empowered by district, and even state educational policy. The principal is also held most accountable for overall school progress. Research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school; and conversely, district-level mandates are only effective to the extent they are locally enforced.

Due to little guidance available to inform the key decision makers at the state and district level in their efforts to address these long-standing trends in gifted education, underrepresentation rates for African American students continues to be an issue (McBee et al., 2012). This suggests culturally responsive leadership can influence the school culture, while addressing the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. This can be evident when the culturally responsive leader supports and builds the capacity for the school staff and promotes a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of all students.

The Critical Race theoretical perspectives of this study supported the findings by implicating there may be a need to examine and change the protocols and practices that are currently in place for the recruitment, recommendation, and retention of gifted education programs. The beliefs, societal constructs and perception of students should not impact their ability to identify students of color, specifically African Americans for gifted educational programs as supported by the Critical Race Theory. Ladson-Billings (2004) states that “from a Critical Race Theory perspective, current assessment schemes continue to instantiate inequity and validate the privilege of those who have access to cultural capital” (p. 60).

To advance the work of underrepresentation, leaders will need to demonstrate a strong need to advocate for restructuring of the gifted identification process at the schools, improve professional development, ensuring parents/guardians are well-informed and aware of the process for gifted identification with a parent self-advocacy program, and provide students with mentoring to learn to self-advocate for individual needs. In a 1983 study, Exum noted that African American parents become wary of gifted and talented programs because they perceive them as being underpinned by principles of elitism and assimilation.

To combat parent's fears, educators "should not only be concerned with challenging academically, but should also focus on improving the students' self-identity, creating a sense of belonging, and establishing a safe place of support (Moore et al., 2005 p. 168). Support can take many forms; school principals, parents, and students should embrace support programs to identify African American students who are gifted. School counselors are in the position to help make this happen and to help the students embrace the challenges as opportunities and to help parents learn the means to support for African American students with gifted education programs.

Gentry et al. (2008) found that students' own achievement ideology and perceptions of parental achievement orientation were the "strongest predictors for discriminating among gifted, potentially gifted, average achievers, and underachievers [of] students' attitudes toward reading, math, and science" (p. 203). Long-Mitchell (2011) found a positive relationship between staff and parents, in conjunction with teachers' high expectations, increased student achievement, and self-efficacy. This indicates a need to inform parents, guardians, and caretakers in ways that respect their beliefs, while fostering understanding of the nature of giftedness, what these opportunities mean, and how they might support their child.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The gifted education training can never rest solely on a teacher, nor can it provide a full scope of impacting the underrepresentation for students of color. Gifted education too often operates as if culture and cultural differences are trivial and inconsequential to the recruitment and retention process which includes screening, testing and assessments, curriculum and instruction, and placement and policy services. There is still more to be discovered on the

underrepresentation of African American students in the gifted and talented program. Listed below are the scholarly practitioner's recommendations for future research:

- A study should be conducted with a school with similar demographics to gain an understanding on the implementation of the Four Zone Professional Learning Model, which aligns with Equity Driven Professional Learning, in identifying and retaining underrepresented students in gifted education (Novak & Lewis, 2021). Findings could provide insight on the guiding principles suggested for effectively teaching gifted students, and its impact on the teacher referrals for underrepresented students for improving gifted education services for underrepresented students.
- Findings from this study suggest bias and lack of knowledge among teachers was a factor that contributed and limited African American students in the gifted program. A study should assess whether the awareness of the factors affecting gifted education underrepresentation for students of color, impact identification rates.
- Conduct a future study with secondary schools with a focus on African American gifted students' access to honors and AP courses in high school and college.
- Conduct a future study focused on examining a student and parent self-advocacy model for gifted educational services.
- Conduct future research on the effectiveness of decreasing underrepresentation of African Americans and other students of color by districts that set equity goals to desegregate gifted education using the 20% equity allowance (Ford, 2013).
- Consider inclusion of student, parent, or principal (Counter-Story Telling) voices to triangulate teacher and district leader responses as they were not present within this study.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study revealed information regarding the underrepresentation in gifted services for African Americans. The major research question asked in what ways do teachers perceive their knowledge, ability, and training when asked about recruiting or identifying African American students for gifted programs? The second research question asked in what ways does culturally responsive professional learning impact teacher perceptions of their knowledge of or ability to recruit and/or identify gifted African American students?

Based on the data analysis, it was found that participants believed teacher perceptions impacted two areas for the representation of African Americans. Most participants thought that giftedness was an intellectual ability demonstrated in high achievement students. They believed certain characteristics were demonstrated with specific students in their classes. Other participants believed the lack of knowledge around the recommendation process caused more students no consideration during the nomination process.

African Americans continue to have disproportionately high dropout rates, low representation in gifted programs, and high rates of low academic performance (Frye & Vogt, 2010). Thousands of gifted students of color remain unidentified, undereducated, and mis-educated. The underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education has been a longstanding concern that continues to be an unresolved issue in education. Revisioning and creating a gifted education space that provides support for gifted African American students will require strategic intentionality.

Educators must be consistent and deliberate in their examination of their practices, beliefs, and attitudes toward students. If students do not believe their teachers care about them and are actively concerned about their academic performance, the likelihood of them succeeding



is greatly reduced and intentional about critically examining their own attitudes, beliefs, and practices concerning underserved populations in a concerted effort to redress the absence of their untapped gifts (Wang & Holcomb, 2010). There is a need to consult with students on how the structures and cultures of their school contribute to low and high academic achievement, while enlisting their input on interventions to improve student performance (Noguera, 2003).

Programs for the gifted and talented can be academic, leadership, or arts (music included). IQ testing is relevant to the first, while identification to gifted programs can be responsive to available interventions and help to identify students in a discipline who have varying levels of need (Donovan & Cross, 2002). These needs can require and benefit from instruction that moves at a faster pace, and that explores topics in more depth and complexity.

Educators must begin with an understanding of the ways in which structural and cultural forces shape the experience of student identities. A disruption and elimination of intentional and unintentional barriers in the trend of underrepresentation will require attention and consideration to those structures that limit access, encourage inequities, and prevent equity in gifted education. All deliberate speed continues to be essential. An understanding of the inseparable connection between culture and intelligence, with the awareness that giftedness is influenced is culturally influenced.

The value of giftedness will vary across different cultures (Baldwin, 2002; Ford, 2011, 2013). The recruitment and identification of African American students in gifted education should reject any practice that mirrors exclusiveness: rather districts should embrace inclusiveness when examining gifted education (Ford, 2006). To provoke a perspective of inclusivity, professional development and identification protocols must “emphasize

reformulation of teacher thinking from nomination of gifted students to finding talents in specific areas” (Callahan, 2007, p. 55).



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## APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board**  
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·  
[rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/](http://rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/)

### Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: [Nikia Davis](#)  
CC: [Karen Jones](#)  
Date: 7/21/2020  
Re: [UMCIRB 19-001958](#)  
ADDRESSING THE DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE ACADEMICALLY AND GIFTED PROGRAM

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 7/21/2020. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Consent Form-No Minimal Risks(0.06)	Consent Forms
CRIC(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Interview Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Study Protocol:Addressing Disproportionality of African Americans Recommended for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted Program (0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Survey Questions(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

## APPENDIX B: SITE AUTHORIZATION AND PERMISSION LETTER



DATA, RESEARCH, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

110 CORNING ROAD  
CROSSROADS II  
CARY, NORTH CAROLINA 27518

October 6, 2020

Nikia Davis  
2439 Ferdinand Drive  
Knightdale, NC 27545

**RE: Application No. 1597**

Dear Ms. Davis:

Your request to conduct your research project entitled, "Addressing the Disproportionality of African American Students in the Academically and Intellectually Gifted Program" in Wake County Public Schools has been approved. You may proceed with data collection as outlined in your proposal.

This letter serves as evidence of the project's approval. You are free to share the letter with relevant staff and supervisors as needed. Approval of this research by our office does not constitute any obligation for your selected participants to participate.

Remember that in accordance with WCPSS Board Policy 5230, approved research must at all times be conducted in a manner that is consistent with your original application. You must also agree to provide us with final results of your study as they become available.

In any future correspondence with us, please refer to your application number (#1597). We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MS', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Meghan Scrimgeour, Ph.D.  
External Research Review Committee

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM



### **Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Addressing the Disproportionality of African American Students in the Academically and Intellectually Gifted Program

Principal Investigator: Nikia Davis

Institution, Department or Division: Educational Leadership

Address E. 5<sup>th</sup> Street Greenville, NC, 27858

Telephone #: 252-328-6131

Study Coordinator: Karen Jones

Telephone #: 252-328-2856

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Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

#### **Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

The purpose of this research is to eliminate the barriers to African American students being able to access the AIG Program in one middle school in North Carolina. Inadequate resources and restricted opportunities for students create the social and economic disparities that exist in education. The research and the improvement cycles of this study are designed to engage teachers in a process of examining and improving the access to the AIG Programs in the case study school, thereby positively impacting African American students. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a certified teacher for the state of North Carolina. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn:

1. Do teachers recognize their perceptions and implicit biases regarding identifying and referring African American students for the AIG Program?

Sub question. How can professional learning around cultural responsiveness affect middle school teacher's perception of effectiveness and identifying and serving African American students in the AIG Program?

2. How does professional learning around cultural responsiveness impact middle school teacher's referrals/recommendations for African American students to the AIG program?

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about six people to do so.

**Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**

I understand I should not volunteer for this study if I am under 18 years of age, or I am on medicine for depression.

**What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**

You can choose not to participate.

**Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research will be conducted at **East Cary Middle School, in Cary NC**. You will need to come to the front conference room where the research will be conducted, in room 406, four times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 5-7 days over the next 8 months.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to do the following:

- Questions that will be asked and/or interviews or surveys that may be conducted, focus groups on which you will participate in as part of the study.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed to NVivo. No person will have access to the audio recordings.
- Data will be linked to participants via encrypted codes and code does not include HIPAA identifiers (initials, date of birth, etc.)
- Attend and participate in required professional development training that aligns with the study.
- Participate with classroom observations prior, during and after the professional development training.
- The audio and transcription of the interviews and observations will be kept for one year at the conclusion of the study. Once the time comes, the audio and transcription will be destroyed.

**What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

We do not know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We do not know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study

**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.
- People designated by Vidant Health, Physicians East, etc.

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

The paper and electronic research data will be securely locked and stored in the primary investigator's office at—East Cary Middle School. Any data securely stored on a computer will be accessible only to the researchers. All data will be destroyed after the successful completion of the study.

**What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?**

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 919-466-4380 ext. 27300 (Monday-Wednesday, between 3:30-5:00 pm).

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914

**Is there anything else I should know?**

Most people outside the research team will not see your name on your research record. This includes people who try to get your information using a court order.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.

- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

---

**Participant's Name (PRINT)**

**Signature**

**Date**

**Person Obtaining Informed Consent:** I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

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**Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)**

**Signature**

**Date**

## **APPENDIX D: EXAMINING INEQUITIES PART I**

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grades have you taught or worked with?
3. What's your ethnicity?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your experience working with African American students? What training have you had in this area?
6. How would you describe the term gifted?
7. Can you describe the process for selecting students who are referred to the AIG Program? If so, please describe it.
8. Can you reflect on a time when you referred African American students to the AIG program? Do you know what happened to the recommendation?
9. Describe your experience as a teacher working with gifted African American students?

## **APPENDIX E: EXAMINING INEQUITIES PART II**

- 1.** What practices have you used to support African American students in successfully being nominated and accepted in the middle school academic advanced programming?
- 2.** What challenges have you as a teacher or educator encountered in recruiting or recommending African American middle school students that may qualify for gifted education? Please explain?
- 3.** How have you as a teacher or educator overcome challenges in recruiting or recommending African American and middle school students that may qualify for gifted education?
- 4.** What is your perception and experiences regarding your effectiveness in the identification of gifted African American middle school students?
- 5.** What are your perceptions and experiences regarding supplemental professional learning that you received in the identification of gifted African American middle school students?
- 6.** What are your perceptions and/or experiences with education preparation and training programs in the identification for gifted African American and middle school students?



## **APPENDIX F: DISTRICT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How many years have you been in education?
2. How many years have you taught in public education?
3. In what school level are you currently employed?
4. In order to support students of color being recommended to the gifted education program, what should be the priorities?
5. When seeking to increase the proportion of students of color recommended for the gifted program, how would you rank the order of importance from questions 4?
6. Were there any recent changes to the district's gifted education plan?
7. Do you believe gifted identification services should be more inclusive for African American students?
8. Describe any impact that COVID-19 could have on the gifted identification process for students this past year. Specifically, students of color.
9. What suggestions do you have for administrators in their effort to recruit Students of Color?

**APPENDIX G: CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED LEARNERS RUBRIC**

	Traditional Characteristics	Characteristics of Culturally/Linguistically Diverse Gifted Students	Characteristics of Low Socio-Economic Gifted Students	Characteristics of Gifted Students with Disabilities
Basic Skills	Ability to learn basic skills quickly and easily and retain information with less repetition	May require more repetition or hands-on experiences at an introductory level	Lack of opportunities and access to school-readiness materials may delay acquisition of basic skills	Often struggle to learn basic skills due to cognitive processing difficulties; need to learn compensatory strategies in order to acquire basic skills and information
Verbal Skills	High verbal ability	May have high verbal ability in native language; may rapidly acquire English language skills if they possess academic skills in their home language	Lack of opportunities may delay the development of verbal skills	High verbal ability but extreme difficulty in written language area; may use language in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times
Reading Ability	Early reading ability	May demonstrate strong storytelling ability and ability to read environmental print in home language	Lack of access to reading materials may delay acquisition of reading skills	Frequently have reading problems due to cognitive processing deficits

Observational Skills	Keen powers of observation	May display high levels of visual memory or auditory memory skills	Strong observational skills, which are often used to “survive on the streets”	Strong observation skills but often have deficits in memory skills
Independence	Sense of independence	May be culturally socialized to work in groups rather than independently	Circumstances often have forced the student to become extremely independent and self-sufficient	Require frequent teacher support and feedback in deficit areas; highly independent in other areas; often appear to be extremely stubborn and inflexible

*Note.* Albuquerque Public Schools Gifted Task Force; developed by E. Nielsen (1999).

