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A Study of Parent Perceptions of Advanced Academic Potential in the Early Grades

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Honors Thesis

University of Connecticut

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Abstract

Parents are key stakeholders in children's education; this project, which is part of a larger study about early identification of high potential, focused on parent awareness of the behaviors that indicate high potential and the kinds of resources that would support developing academic potential in the early grades (grades K-2). This project consisted of an online parent survey and a parent workshop with a card sort component in which parents indicated what kinds of resources would be priorities. The study took place in three school districts with large populations of families from low-income backgrounds. A total of 38 parents completed the survey, and 57 card sets were collected during workshops.

Findings demonstrated that parents emphasized several key behaviors indicating high potential such as being highly curious; learning quickly and easily; and finding useful, often original ways to spot and solve problems. Overall, parents thought it was important to allow for independence, creativity, and critical thinking, as well as time together for fun and academics. Parents were interested in learning more about the best parenting practices for gifted students, ways to teach their children academic skills at home, and ways to partner with their children's schools.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Economically disadvantaged gifted students are the most under-represented group in gifted education (Garn, Matthew, & Jolly, 2010), and low-income students are estimated to be about half of the public school population in the United States (Plucker, Giancola, Healey, Arndt, & Wang, 2015). Efforts to better understand and respond to this issue of underrepresentation and limited services to students of high potential include attention to the identification process, the home-school relationship, and approaches to recognizing and responding to high potential in the early grades.

Researchers have found that parental involvement in children's education benefits children's learning (Bicknell, 2014), and family and community ties with schools make a positive difference in student's academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parents, along with teachers and administrators, may nominate students for gifted services (Purcell & Eckert, 2006). For these reasons, having a strong home-school relationship is crucial. However, research has shown that the home-school relationship is not always strong and could be strengthened (Bicknell, 2014). Workshops for parents of children who are gifted have been productive in the past in supplying parents with resources and knowledge that they need to support and advocate for their children who show advanced academic potential (Weber & Stanley, 2012). In this literature review, the above relationships will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Identification of Giftedness

Gifted and talented in the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act is defined as “Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (National Association for Gifted Children website, 2017). School districts use a variety of methods to identify students for gifted services. Gifted education specialists may use observation scales and ratings that may measure motivation and learning; nominations from parents, administrators, peers, the child, or themselves; portfolios that show performance over time; or a case study approach. Districts may also use intelligence and performance tests and assessments (National Association for Gifted Children website, 2017). Although policies and procedures are determined by each individual district, the process usually begins with a nomination, then the goes to a screening phase and ends with the placement of the child in the particular program (National Association for Gifted Children website, 2017).

Common characteristics of giftedness showing cognitively include unusual alertness, even in infancy; rapid learning; putting thoughts together quickly; excellent memory; unusually large vocabulary and complex sentence structure for age; advanced comprehension of word nuances, metaphors and abstract ideas; enjoyment in solving problems, especially with numbers and puzzles; often self-taught reading and writing skills as preschooler; and highly developed curiosity (Webb, Gor, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). Clark (2008) says that traits of giftedness showing cognitively could be an early

reader who doesn't put books down, having interest in problem solving and applying concepts, having a large vocabulary, or intellectual curiosity.

Clark (2008) stated that the creative traits of giftedness could include independence in attitude and social behavior as well as self-acceptance and unconcern for social norms. Webb et. al. (2007) also describe common characteristics that have to do with creativity as having interest in experimenting and doing things differently; having keen and/or unusual sense of humor; putting ideas or things together that are not typical; and having vivid imaginations (and imaginary playmates when in preschool).

Affective traits could show as unusual emotional depth and intensity; high expectations of self and others, often leading to frustration; advanced levels of moral awareness and justice; and need for emotional support (Clark, 2008). Characteristics of these affective behaviors could be a child who has deep, intense feelings and reactions; is highly sensitive; thinks in an abstract, complex, logical, and insightful manner; has idealism and sense of justice at early age; and concern for social and political issues and injustices.

Behaviorally, giftedness may show as having boundless energy or enthusiasm; being impulsive and eager; show perseverance; high levels of frustration; non-stop talking; or a volatile temper (Clark, 2008). Characteristics may be showing a longer attention span and intense concentration; preoccupation with own thoughts—daydreamer; learning basic skills quickly and with little practice; asking probing questions; or having a wide range of interests (or extreme focus in one area) (Webb et. al., 2007).

Under-representation in Gifted Education

Economically disadvantaged gifted students are the most under-represented group in gifted education (Garn, Matthew, & Jolly, 2010), and low-income students are estimated to be about half of the public school population in the United States (Plucker, Giancola, Healey, Arndt, & Wang, 2015). Garn et al. (2010) noted that usually the students who are identified as gifted by their school systems come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds with access to extra resources for the children. Some of these advantages and resources include being a part of more extra-curricular activities, experiencing smaller class sizes, having more experienced teachers, and being exposed to more vocabulary words from their parents (Plucker et al., 2015).

Across our country, research has shown a relationship between state demographics and educational outcomes. Specifically, states with higher poverty rates tend to have lower outcomes. Additionally, there is a gap between the academic performance of low-income and other students in almost all states (Plucker et al., 2015).

Borland, Schnur, and Wright (2000) noted the potential for academic giftedness to be identified and cultivated in all students and schools regardless of economic factors. However, few states have ample policies in place to address the formal education of gifted students, never mind gifted students from low-income backgrounds and families (Plucker et al., 2015). There is a nationwide movement to collect more data on high performing, low-income students across the country over time and making these results well known as well as allowing for students to move through coursework at a pace that matches their achievement level. They also recommend teachers to have proper training in working with gifted students, requiring services for all gifted students and monitoring

these programs. Finally, they suggest that local education agencies be held accountable for the performance of high-ability students from all economic backgrounds including low-income (Plucker et al., 2015).

Characteristics of gifted, low-income students may show differently than their peers who are not low-income. It is crucial to have a wide range of identification practices for low-income, high-ability students such as multiple and varied tests, assessments and observations, several times to enter into gifted programs, use data of past performance, and provide training to all teachers to hone their skills to become better spotters of ability (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). It is also important to look out for obstacles in having children identified as gifted.

One barrier may occur when a parent is asked to nominate their child for a program or to attend meetings about a specific gifted program, but if this information is not presented in a language that they can understand, they will be less likely to have their children participate. Another barrier in the identification process may be because teachers are not relying on qualitative data to make their nomination decisions, but rather relying on their perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse, low-income students and the strengths of their families. Olszewski-Kubilius, and Clarenbach (2012) also suggest creating services and programs for students as early as preschool that have a challenging courses, with advanced training, and extra learning time that will allow the students to build relationships with peers, local institutions like universities, and families. Building these support systems can help support the child's development as well as give them exposure to possible career paths, and positive role models.

Parent Involvement and Expectations

Parental involvement in children's education benefits children's learning (Bicknell, 2014). Parents have the ability to guide children to their goals, to organize the home environment, and to use strategies to monitor and support their children (Plucker, 2013). Bicknell (2014) conducted a case study of 15 children ages 10 to 13 to study parents' recognition of and involvement in their children's gifted math education. She found that these particular parents, whose children were chosen by their school as being gifted and talented in mathematics, served as motivators, resource providers, monitors, content advisors, and learning advisors. In some families, parents may not provide those same supports, perhaps in part because of not having access to the information or experiences that would prepare them to provide that type of support (Borland et al., 2000).

Yang (2007) found support for the argument that low socioeconomic status does not necessarily mean that students will have trouble in school. One of the their suggestions that could mediate the effects of low socioeconomic status is parents communicating high expectations about schooling. Parents of Asian American students in this study had similar views of their children's education regardless of having high, low, or average income levels. Morawska and Sanders (2008) conducted a survey of 211 parents who have at least one gifted child, who were mostly Australian. They found that parental confidence in their children was the best predictor of child behavior, when compared to other factors such as the child's gender or their mother's education level.

Cross-culturally, different things are expected from children by their parents. Jolly and Matthews found while reviewing other studies that what is praised in children is

different in terms of cultures. White, Asian American, African American, and biracial families all valued different traits such as effort, intellect, and morality (Plucker & Callahan, 2013). Yang (2007) found that Asian American families placed a high value on education, effort over ability, children's obedience, and a disciplined routine schedule. These parents tended to sacrifice for their children's education and used in-home learning environments that enriched their children's interests, as well as parental supervision and support. These parents served as good role models by learning and studying at home themselves and not watching TV while their children are doing their homework. Many of these parents have children who excel at school.

In an inquiry study, five African American and Hispanic students from the inner city, who were economically disadvantaged, were identified as gifted in kindergarten and were put into a gifted program. The inquiry found a strong relationship between the success of the students and the role of their families (Borland et al., 2000). The parents in the inquiry did not believe in an immovable caste system, they believed that academic success can lead to upward mobility and they socialized their children accordingly. These parents created a home environment in which the norms resembled middle-class norms and were unwilling to assign causation to racism for all of their disappointments. They also identified and encouraged their children's giftedness, provided positive role models for their children, took risks, and had a stable family despite four of the five mothers being single mothers (Borland et al., 2000).

Student Motivation

The home environment is an essential place to build motivation for academic conquests and success. Parents can create a growth mentality in their children by giving

them praise about their work, effort and achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Garn et al. (2010) discovered that parents used strategies at home such as interactive instruction, restructuring the learning environment, relating homework to the children's interests, and developing internalization. These strategies are used to build academic motivation as well as provide support to their children. The researchers also found that parents were not consistent in providing these sorts of home environments that support academic motivation. Yang (2007) found that most of the parents had games and materials at home to supplement their children's critical thinking and problem solving skills. The parents also provided a special place for the children to do their homework without interruption and with supervision and support. Love and harmony in the family, good role models, and a disciplined schedule were also important to this group of parents. These findings show us that if parents can motivate and support their children at home by creating an environment that encourages academic rigor, parents can play a large role in their children's academic success.

Home/School Relationship

The relationship between home and school is important to research to further our understanding of important connections (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). Bicknell (2014) found in a case study involving a survey of 15 students' parents that this relationship was not strong and needed to be strengthened. The context of this case study was 15 children, aged 10-13, who were identified by their school as being gifted in mathematics. In an interview of 5 parents and 4 teachers, some interesting perspectives regarding the parent-teacher relationship were revealed. Parents wanted the school to provide more programming and supports for gifted students, and teachers wanted parents to talk with

them first instead of going directly to the administration when they were having concerns or troubles with any part of the school. Teachers in this interview say this action creates issues in communication that could be avoided (Penney, 2000). Besnoy et al. (2015) found that several parents of twice exceptional students started school with total confidence in the system, but after time they lost that relationship altogether. Parents found the only successful way to help their child get the services they needed was to advocate for them themselves. Every parent in this study had to get resources about advocating for their children from sources other than from school (Besnoy et al., 2015).

Additionally, a supportive school culture is important to allow low-income, high-ability students to grow and succeed. Some suggestions are valuing all differences as positives, intellectualism, and academic achievement, as well as viewing parents and the community as partners in the education of their town's children and encouraging their participation and input (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012).

Parent Workshops

Workshops for parents of children who are gifted have been productive in the past in supplying parents with resources and knowledge that they need to support and advocate for their children. Weber and Stanley (2012) used research-based information about gifted children in the categories of characteristics, identification, appropriate education, and parenting practices to inform parents of gifted children. The researchers received positive feedback from the parents and overall, they thought the parent workshop was successful. The parents reported they needed the information that they were given and it was also helpful to connect them to other parents who were going through similar experiences with their children. The University for Young People's

Project Promise was another successful summer enrichment program for low-income gifted students in grades 4 to 12. The program capitalized on the importance of parent and family support and provided a multi-generational perspective and framework for summer enrichment programs (Kaul, Johnsen, Witte, & Saxon, 2015). The program gave support to families of meals, transportation, financial scholarships, and provision of necessary materials. Siblings were also given top priority for the following year, if they met all of the requirements for the program. Parents were welcomed at the beginning and the end of the program and were taught about college, the importance of encouraging their students to take classes requiring more effort and work, and having high expectations for their children. The authors thought family support may have been the most significant underlying reason for the positive effect of the program. At the end of the summer, parents had higher expectations for their children academically, their interest had increased in their children's performance academically, they had greater support of the program because of their perceived familial support and greater likelihood of long-term participation in the program. There were similar results for siblings, and siblings had a positive influence on one another, which increased motivation and led to family unity. In the long run for the students, it is expected that their participation in the program will give higher academic support to their future children as well as set higher goals and expectations for themselves.

In a study in which parent workshops were held to give parents math and reading worksheets as well as training on how to use them, students were tested before and after the workshops. Students with involved parents in grades 2-4 made greater gains in both reading and math than children with less involved parents as well as greater gains than

older students in grades 5-8. This finding was true across all income and education levels. However, students from lower-income families made fewer gains than students from higher-income families, no matter how involved their families were. Nonetheless, low-income students with more involved parents made greater gains than low-income students with less involved parents (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Directions for Further Research

Authors have reviewed 53 sources published since 1983 on parents of gifted learners and have discovered gaps in the research. The relationship between home and school is important to research to further our understanding of important connections in gifted education (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). Jolly and Matthews (2012) specifically say we should research parents' understanding of giftedness, and how parents support and influence their children at home.

Chapter 3: Methods

In this study, I aimed to analyze and evaluate parental awareness of the behaviors that indicate high potential, as well as what resources parents need to support developing academic potential in the early grades (grades K-2) by looking specifically at responses from parents whose children show indicators of high academic potential from typically underserved populations. I intended to better understand ways that parents of children of high academic potential from typically underserved populations support their children at home, and to begin giving parents access to some of the information they were seeking through parent workshops.

The design of this study, participant selection and demographics, and data analysis methods used to answer the following research questions will be outlined in this section:

1. What are the perceptions of giftedness and expectations about advanced academic opportunities among parents of children who have demonstrated high academic potential in the early grades, particularly in families from typically underserved populations?
2. How do parents support their children at home, who have demonstrated high academic potential in the early grades, particularly in families from typically underserved populations?
3. What types of resources do parents from typically underserved populations seek to help them support their children of advanced academic potential?

Study Design

I investigated parents' perceptions about their children who have been observed to show signs of advanced academic potential in grades K-2, as well as the parents' expectations for their children's education and their perceptions of the types of resources that would be useful in supporting and advocating for their children. The study was an exploratory one with quantitative and qualitative components, conducted with parents of students in 18 schools in a Northeastern state. Parents were invited to the study based on the participation of their children in a larger-scale research study in the schools.

Part one of the study involved an online Qualtrics survey (see Appendix). The survey contained two Likert-scale response questions regarding parents' perceptions of (a) the importance of different behaviors as signs of high academic potential and (b) how often their child exhibits particular behaviors. It contained two open-ended response

questions about what parents can do at home to help children develop creativity, critical thinking, and academic strengths, and what types of resources and information would be helpful as they work to support their child's academic growth and development. This parent survey was opened in summer 2016 and stayed open for 4 months after the final parent workshop discussed below. Some parents completed the survey before the workshops that occurred in part two of the study, but most completed the survey after part two.

Part two of the study involved three summer workshops for parents that took place in conjunction with a summer math program attended by students in the treatment group of the larger study. During the workshop, I shared information from the background research on gifted education in the early grades regarding parents' academic nurturing of their children in general and with a focus on math, as well as local resources that could be helpful for parents to support their children academically outside the classroom. The workshop included a card sort activity as a further step in data collection. I distributed 36 cards to small groups of parents. Parents grouped themselves based on where they were sitting in the room; groups varied in size from two to about six people. Each card identified one resource that may be helpful to parents in supporting their child's academic growth and development. Each group conferred together, categorized the cards, and decided on the top 10 most important resources. Then, individual parents decided on their own top 3 most important resources. The 36 card sort resources are listed in Table 3.1.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to a list of free enriching events listed by town for my child | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Access to a list of free interactive, online, educational games for my child |
|--|---|

3. Access to free books, worksheets and curriculum to enrich my child at home
4. Resources in Spanish
5. Access to suggestions of critical thinking activities, creative games, and insight on building on school subjects that I can carry out at home
6. Resources specific to my child's grade level
7. Access to links connecting me with other parents whose children are showing high academic potential
8. Information regarding identification and understanding my child who is showing high academic potential
9. Access to information about how to advocate at school for my child who is showing high academic potential
10. Access to information on the social and emotional development of my child who is showing high academic potential
11. Access to information on the different issues my child who is showing high academic potential may face
12. Access to information on motivating my child who is showing high academic potential
13. Access to join a support group with other parents who also have children who are showing high academic potential
14. Information regarding all of the different schooling options and laws regarding my child
15. Access to receive an educational kids' magazine for my child to read at home
16. Access to educational products to enrich my child's learning experience at home
17. Information regarding best toys for my children that are educational and thought provoking
18. Access to computer software for my child that is affordable
19. Information about contests and awards my child can participate in
20. Information about scholarships my child can apply to
21. Information regarding when conferences or community networking events are happening

- in Connecticut regarding gifted and talented education
22. Information about enrichment programs with registration costs that happen on the weekends
 23. Information about enrichment programs with registration costs that occur over the summer
 24. Information regarding enrichment programs my town offers
 25. Access to information on the best way to communicate with my school / town
 26. Access to information on the best parenting practices with children who are showing high academic potential
 27. Access to educational videos that could help me help my child with his/her homework
 28. Information on my portable device, rather than on a computer
 29. Access to a website that could help my child with his/her homework
 30. Access to free virtual field trips for my child
 31. Information on educational crafts I can do at home with my child
 32. Access to a puzzle maker to quiz my child on what he/she is learning in school
 33. Information on creative ways to show my child how school subjects are used in everyday life
 34. Information regarding ways to help my child learn to work well with other students in a group
 35. Information about research on high potential learners
 36. Information about how to help my child with perfectionism issues

Table 3.1. List of 36 card sort resources.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data. The quantitative data came from the first two Likert-scale questions in the parent survey and from the ranking of resources in the card sort activity into their group's top ten most important resources and their personal top three most important resources. For the analysis of the first Likert-scale survey question regarding the importance of a particular behavior as a sign of high academic potential in an elementary school student, I found the means and standard deviations to determine the general patterns in the data. For example, I noted if any one behavior seemed to have been chosen by parents as "extremely important," or if all responses seemed to be closer to "slightly important." For the second Likert-scale survey question asking parents to indicate how often their child shows a particular behavior, I found the frequencies and percentages to determine the general patterns in the data. Again, I noted if any one response seemed most common or if all frequencies and percentages appeared to be mostly evenly distributed. Finally, for the top 10 resources card sort and the top 3 resources card sort, I found the frequencies to determine the general patterns in the data.

Qualitative data. Using the 31 responses from the first short answer question and the 26 responses from the second, I used open coding to code the answers for each question. The name of each code was a short description of what it meant. Then, I created a codebook of my codes with detailed description of the qualities or properties of each code, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, typical exemplars, atypical exemplars, and "close, but no" responses (Saldaña, 2013). After finalizing my codebooks, I organized my codes from the first open-ended question into 14 main themes, and the second open-

ended question into 10 main themes. I considered both the qualitative and quantitative data in relation to my two main research questions stated at the beginning of this chapter.

Participants

Survey participants. The quantitative and qualitative data for the survey portion of this study were collected online via Qualtrics. Survey invitations went home to parents with other paperwork regarding the larger study, either through the mail or in children's backpacks. The survey invitation letter included a QR code and the link for the survey. Where parent emails were available to the research team, the invitations were also sent via email. Parents of approximately 300 children across three districts were invited to the survey.

A total of 38 parents completed the survey, representing 12.7% of those invited. At the end of the survey, parents responded to demographic questions, including what district and school their child in the project attends, what grade the child is in, the respondent's relationship to the child, and their race/ethnicity. The survey invitation and the survey itself were available in both English and Spanish, given the large population of Spanish-speaking residents of the school districts involved in the study; however, no respondents answered the Spanish version of the survey. Summaries of the demographic data appear in Figure 3.1, Figure 3.2, and Figure 3.3.

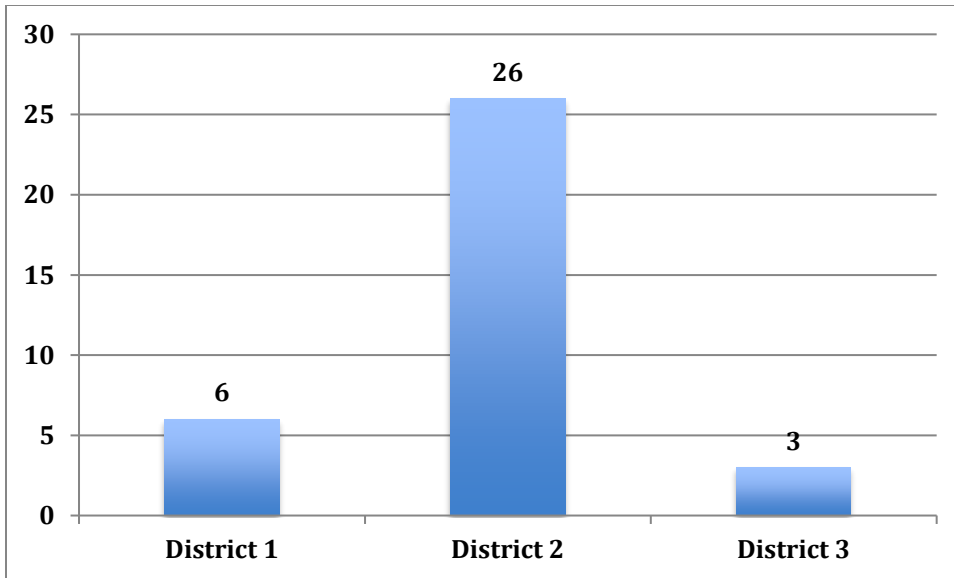


Figure 3.1. Survey participants by child's school district. Some participants did not answer this question.

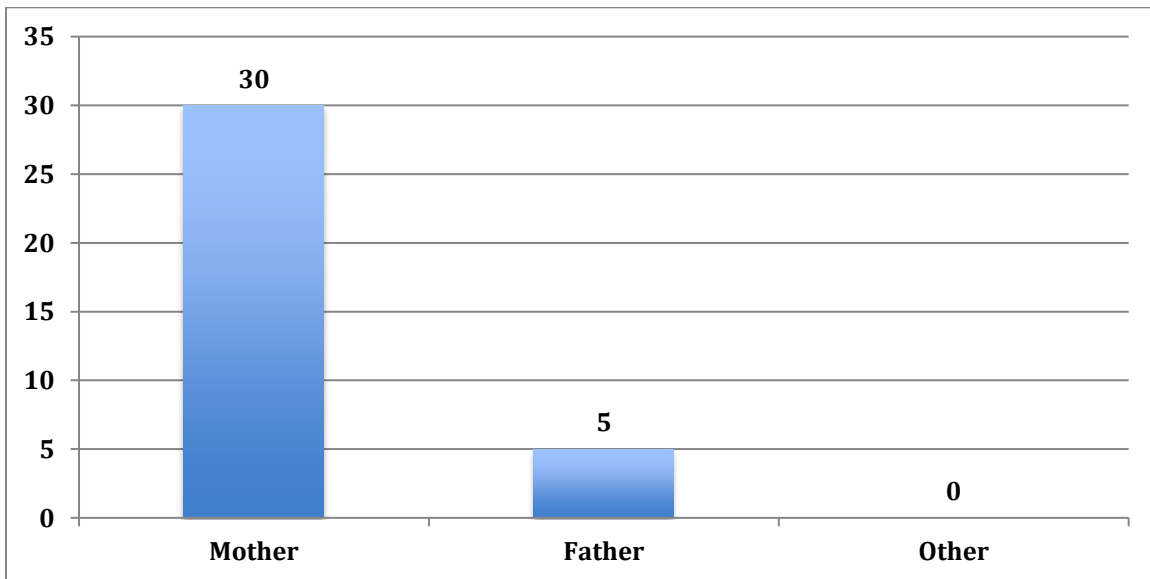


Figure 3.2. Survey participants by relationship to the child. Some participants did not answer this question.

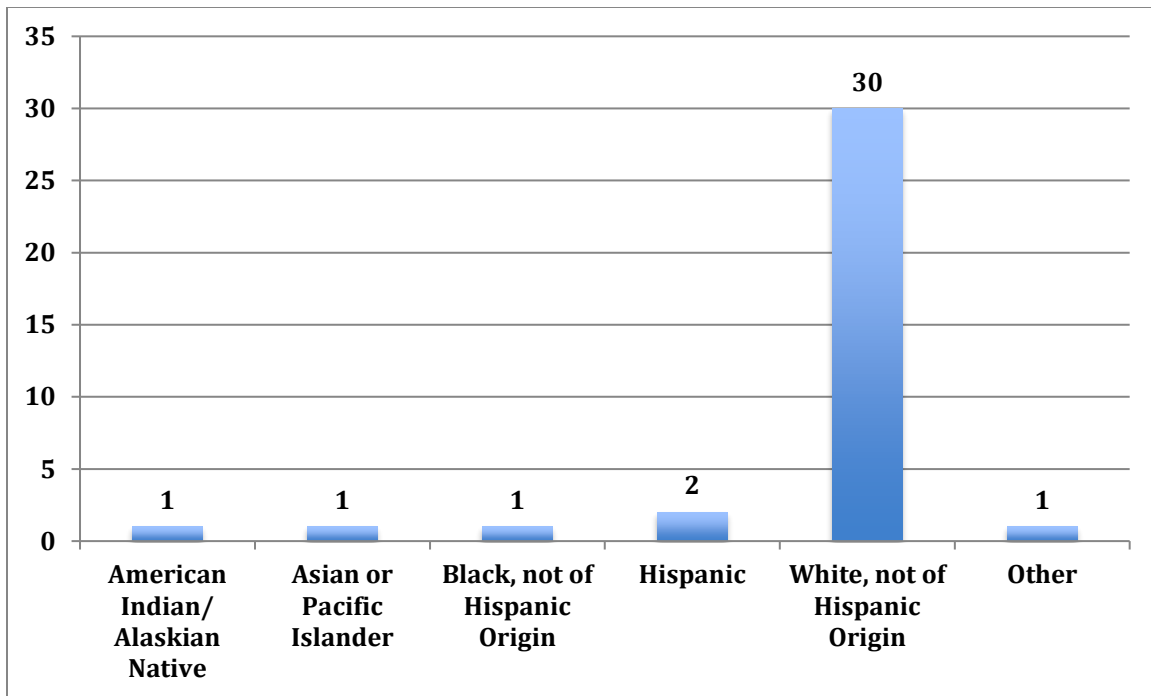


Figure 3.3. Survey participants by race/ethnicity. One participant appeared in two groups. Some participants did not answer this question.

Card sort participants. Across all three districts, 57 small groups of parents, or about 30% of all parents invited, participated in the ranking of resources in the card sort activity into their group’s top ten most important resources, and 49 participants ranked their personal top three most important resources. The parents invited to the summer workshops were parents of students in the treatment group of the larger study. See Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5 for card sort participant information. Like the survey, the card sort was available in both English and Spanish; two groups completed the activity with the Spanish-language cards. I did not collect demographic information on parents involved in the card sort portion of the study.

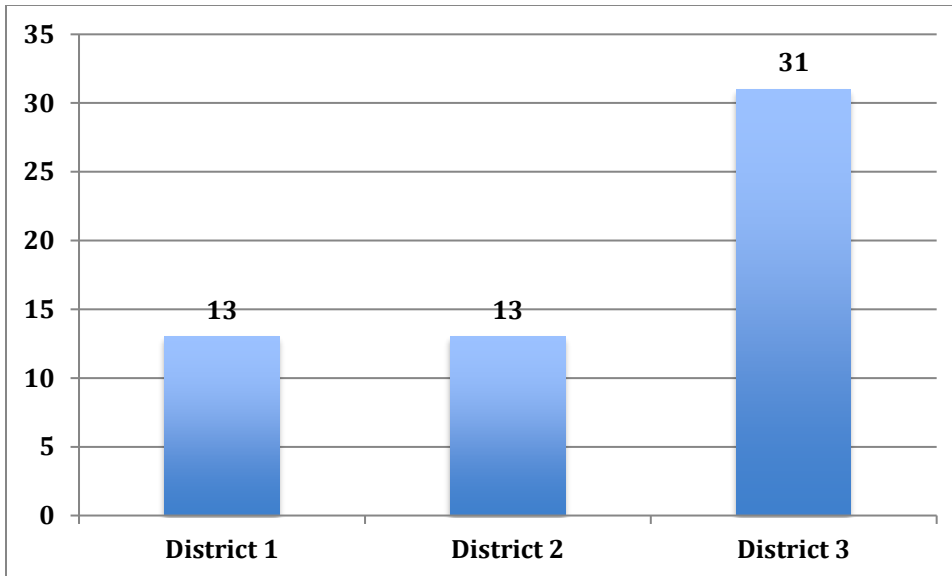


Figure 3.4. Top 10 card sort participants by school district.

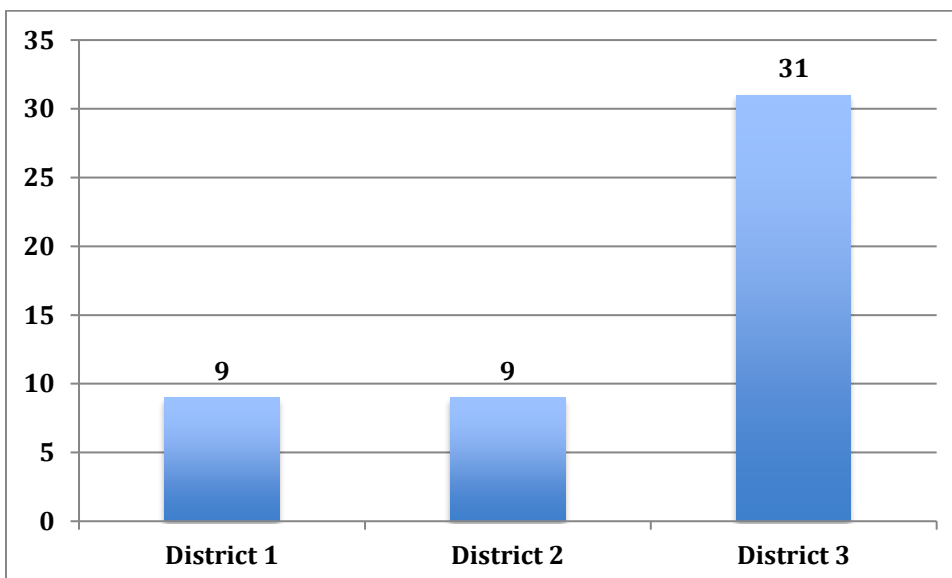


Figure 3.5. Top 3 card sort participants by school district.

Subjectivity Statement

As an undergraduate student in the University of Connecticut's Integrated Bachelor's/Master's Program for elementary education and in the Honors Program, I am especially interested in young students who may have high academic potential. I do not have any children myself, nor did I know any of the students or parents in my study.

However, as a future teacher and mother I was interested in finding out what behaviors to look for in children and how to better nurture their academic development, and as a future teacher I was interested in learning about the communication and resource exchange between school and home. Additionally, I wanted to create a workshop and an online website for parents that would act in a progressive way to give them access to some of the resources that may be useful in supporting and advocating for their children academically.

Trustworthiness

While I was coding, I reiteratively verified my codebook. Also, an independent student in the field coded a portion of my data. Finally, the primary researcher from Project SPARK verified my codes.

Chapter 4: Findings

Parent Perceptions of High-Potential Behaviors

On the online survey, parents responded to two questions about academic behaviors indicating high academic potential. These Likert-scale questions focused on parents' perceptions of the importance of a particular behavior as a sign of high academic potential in an elementary school student, and parents' perceptions of how often their child participating in the larger study shows a particular behavior.

Table 4.1 displays mean scores for parent responses to the question about how important certain behaviors were as indicators of high academic potential, reflecting a scale in which a score of 5 represents extremely important and a score of 1 represents not important. Mean scores on all the behaviors were above the middle score of 3, and the highest scored items emphasized passion, curiosity, and creative problem solving.

Participants agreed more closely on the importance of behaviors such as showing passion/curiosity about particular topics, while there was a larger standard deviation on the importance of behaviors such as having a good sense of humor or behaving very well in school.

Table 4.1

Mean Score Responses Regarding the Importance of Behaviors as Indicators of High Academic Potential (n=38)

Behavior	Mean	SD
Shows passion/curiosity about particular topics	4.89	0.31
Finds useful, often original ways to spot and solve problems	4.68	0.63
Asks many questions	4.59	0.69
Understands new concepts and connections easily	4.35	0.72
Is very expressive with words, numbers, and symbols	4.35	0.72
Creates new, original ideas	4.32	0.78
Uses a common-sense approach to solving problems	4.3	0.74
Has a strong memory	4.19	0.57
Has a large vocabulary	4.00	0.91
Knows large amounts of information on school-related or other topics	3.76	0.86
Gets lots of questions correct	3.57	0.90
Gets along well with peers	3.49	1.17
Follows directions consistently	3.35	1.25

Behaves very well in school	3.35	1.38
Has a good sense of humor	3.30	1.27

Table 4.2 displays frequency scores for parent responses to the question about how often their children elicit certain high academic potential behaviors, reflecting a percentage calculated out of the number of participants who chose always, often, sometimes, or rarely for each behavior. Participants responded that their children elicit three behaviors the most, with the highest combined always and often scores. Those three behaviors involved learning quickly and easily, high curiosity, and making advanced connections independently, while the behavior that had the lowest combined always and often scores had to do with children expressing themselves in unusual ways.

Table 4.2

Parent Responses Regarding Frequency of Display of High-Potential Behaviors

Behavior	<i>n</i>	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Learns quickly and easily	35	13 (37.1%)	22 (62.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Is highly curious	34	21 (61.8%)	10 (29.4%)	2 (5.9%)	1 (2.9%)
Makes advanced connections without being taught	34	14 (41.2%)	16 (47.1%)	3 (8.8%)	1 (2.9%)
Shows an exceptional memory	35	13 (37.1%)	16 (45.7%)	5 (14.3%)	1 (2.9%)

Is highly creative / inventive	35	15 (42.9%)	13 (37.1%)	6 (17.1%)	1 (2.9%)
Is loyal and responsible	35	14 (40%)	14 (40%)	7 (20%)	0 (0%)
Shows high level of confidence and/or self-direction	35	14 (40%)	14 (40%)	7 (20%)	0 (0%)
Learns skills independently	35	7 (20%)	21 (60%)	7 (20%)	0 (0%)
Comes up with new ideas, new uses, new solutions easily	35	7 (20%)	21 (60%)	5 (14.3%)	2 (5.7%)
Interprets/translates/facilitates to help others	35	7 (20%)	21 (60%)	4 (11.4%)	3 (8.6%)
Works to achieve and meets outstanding personal and/or academic goals	35	14 (40%)	13 (37.1%)	6 (17.1%)	2 (5.7%)
Engages in adult conversations and situations	35	12 (34.3%)	15 (42.9%)	7 (20%)	1 (2.9%)
Shows advanced reasoning	35	11 (31.4%)	16 (45.7%)	7 (20%)	1 (2.9%)
Shows the ability to lead	35	10 (28.6%)	16 (45.7%)	7 (20%)	2 (5.7%)

Shows in-depth knowledge	35	6 (17.1%)	20 (57.1%)	8 (22.9%)	1 (2.9%)
Has a sharp sense of humor	34	8 (23.5%)	17 (50%)	7 (20.6%)	2 (5.9%)
Is highly reflective / sensitive to surroundings	35	10 (28.6%)	14 (40%)	8 (22.9%)	3 (8.6%)
Uses advanced problem-solving skills	35	8 (22.9%)	16 (45.7%)	11 (31.4%)	0 (0%)
Understands and uses abstract concepts	35	7 (20%)	17 (48.6%)	10 (28.6%)	1 (2.9%)
Uses technology in advanced ways	35	7 (20%)	13 (37.1%)	12 (34.3%)	3 (8.6%)
Expresses ideas, feelings, experiences and/or beliefs in unusual ways	35	6 (17.1%)	11 (31.4%)	14 (40%)	4 (11.4%)

While there was a range of answers for both of the questions, the answers showed some relationships. Parents emphasized the importance of certain characteristics and also said that their children frequently display those same behaviors. These characteristics and behaviors were curiosity, creativity in problem solving and making connections independently, and ease of learning. Interestingly, participants rated having a good sense

of humor as the lowest behavior as an indicator for high academic potential, but 73.5% of participants said that their child always or often has a sharp sense of humor.

Parent Efforts to Support Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Academic Strengths

Following the items related to behaviors indicating high academic potential, the survey included an open-ended question regarding how parents can work with their children to develop creativity, critical thinking, and academic strengths. Thirty-one parents responded to that question. The most common response was something related to asking children open-ended questions, and allowing them to puzzle things out and come up with a solution on their own. For example, one participant (SVR93) wrote, “puzzle things through with them. Ask questions,” and another participant (MLW109) wrote, “giving children opportunity to come up with their own solutions to problems.” The second most common answer was reading with or to their children. After reading with or to their children, the next common responses on the survey revolved around encouraging children’s interests. For example, one participant (ATR77) said, “talk with them about their interests,” while another stated, “take interest in the areas the child is interested [in]” (TEM19).

There was one participant (JEG16) who gave a much longer answer than others. Nineteen codes were created solely for this person’s responses, and no other participants mentioned these specific answers; this accounts for almost 1/3 of the codes for the first question. For example, “set boundaries” and “be patient” were two responses that no one else shared. However, this respondent also expressed some points in common with others, such as “encourage them to find their own answers to questions.”

As outlined in chapter 3, I coded the responses and then grouped the coded responses into major themes. Responses to this question yielded 63 codes within five main themes: (a) spending nonacademic time together for fun, bonding, and a way to broaden their background knowledge; (b) spending academic time together to improve schoolwork; (c) giving them the tools needed to cultivate independence, creativity, critical thinking, and internal motivation to learn; (d) modeling for your child how to be a well-rounded academic and passionate person; and (e) creating the best home environment for children to thrive in. I explain these themes below with sample responses from participants.

Spending nonacademic time together for fun, bonding, and a way to broaden their background knowledge. This theme captured codes related to parents' spending time with their children in ways that are not specifically tied to academics. They discussed activities to do together that are used for bonding, fun, and broadening their background knowledge. Specific activities included talking with their children and allowing them to express their feelings, exploring parks and trails together, doing art projects together, and going to museums and libraries to experience topics that are outside of the normal school realm. One participant, AKJ105, said, "Play and explore the outdoors. Allow children to express their thoughts and feelings. Have fun!" Another participant, ATR77, said, "expose them to museums, nature, topics of interest outside of school."

Spending academic time together to improve schoolwork. Participants mentioned some academic interactions that parents can have with children that can specifically improve their schoolwork. Some of these interactions were reading with and

to them, being there for them for academic assistance, playing academic and developmental games with them, and encouraging them through their frustrations and disappointments. For example, one participant, LCE64, said, “Deal with frustration head on: ‘I can see this isn’t easy. But let’s work on it together. With hard work, you will master this.’” Another participant, XHA53, said, “reading and discussing what they read. Playing developmental games such as word games, math games.”

Giving them the tools needed to cultivate independence, creativity, critical thinking, and internal motivation to learn. Participants discussed this theme about what specific types of tools they could give their child to cultivate independence, creativity, critical thinking skills, and help foster internal motivation to learn. Specifically participants thought that parents should allow children to puzzle things through on their own, give them materials such as unstructured toys and appropriate books to explore on their own, teach them where to find answers so they can learn at their own pace, and allow them to fail. To illustrate this, one participant, RVK73, said, “Don’t interfere with the child’s creative process by showing him the right way, let [the] child fail or let [the] child express himself in a way that may not make sense to you.” Another participant, LBM89, said, “Provide materials that are open ended,” and finally, MLW109 said, “Teach how to research information so they can learn at their own pace, without restrictions.” Participants also talked about encouraging their interests and spending time exploring these interests, and making learning fun. For example, one participant, MLW107, said, “Make learning about new topics fun and encourage self-study topics. Find appropriate level of books and games for ability.” Finally, another participant, LMB89, said, “encourage children to explore their interests.”

Modeling for children how to be a well-rounded academic and passionate person. This theme revolves around how parents should act in order to be a role model for their children in terms of being a passionate, moral, and academic person. For example, MDM56 said, “Set a good example of how to persevere at interests that are appropriate for the individual’s level of interest and capacity to learn. Parents can be fantastic mentors.” Another participant, JEG16, said, “Volunteer and bring them with you, have a healthy relationship with their mother/father (model good behavior), admit mistakes (we are only human), practice the golden rule,” while another participant, ATR77, said, “Show/demonstrate/reinforce the importance of education.”

Creating the best home environment for children to thrive in. This theme has to do with the rules and climate that will allow children to thrive in. Some rules were to have less screen time with electronics, a regular bedtime, and setting up boundaries and responsibilities. The home climate that the participants described is one in which parents are challenging, stimulating, and supporting their children. For example, TFA72 said, “Engage in conversations with their children regarding topics that may seem above their developmental level. Explain the reasoning behind [parenting] decisions.” Another participant, SVR93, said, “Let them try things themselves. Be there for assistance but don’t take over.” While another participant, LBM89 said, “Encourage less screen time and provide materials that are open ended.”

Parent Perceptions of Resources to Help Foster Development of Academic Potential

Survey responses as well as the card sort activities contributed to the data that was collected on this topic. In the survey, participants were asked “What types of resources and information would be helpful to you as you work to support your child’s academic

growth and development?” In the card sort activities, parents listed their group’s top ten and their individual top three resources that they would like access to.

What types of resources do parents seek to help them support their children of advanced academic potential? The second open-ended survey question reflected 8 main themes that parents were looking for extra resources on: keeping students challenged and engaged in the classroom; partnering with teachers and schools to actively work as team to further their child’s academic growth; continuing to teach and improve overall academic skills or specific curriculum standards at home through parent teaching, activities, websites, books, and games; engaging children socially, creatively and/or academically through group programs; encouraging changes or additions to the current school curriculum or services available for their child; best parenting styles and practices for gifted students; motivational techniques to encourage gifted children to do their best; and fostering skills needed for academic success in the long run.

The most common response involved seeking information on how to keep children engaged and not bored at school as well as how to advocate for this. For example one participant answered, “How to keep my child engaged at school. He reads during math instruction!” Participants were also seeking suggestions for supplementing the curriculum at home. There were 8 main themes that parents were looking for extra resources on: keeping students challenged and engaged in the classroom; partnering with teachers and schools to actively work as team to further their child’s academic growth; encouraging changes or additions to the current school curriculum or services available for their child; continuing to teach and improve overall academic skills or specific curriculum standards at home through parent teaching, activities, websites, books, and

games; engaging children socially, creatively and/or academically through group programs; best parenting styles and practices for gifted students; motivational techniques that encourage gifted children to do their best; and fostering skills needed for academic success in the long run.

Keeping students challenged and engaged in the classroom. Participants discussed their concern for keeping students challenged and engaged at school and are seeking information regarding how to advocate for this. Parents are interested in learning how to advocate for more challenge in school to keep children engaged and information on bad behaviors at school that may be from a lack of interest. For example, one participant, RVK73 stated, “[my son] often gets in trouble at school for behaviors that we think are due to lack of interest. What’s normal [behavior in terms of being potentially gifted] and what’s not related”. Another participant, RPK73 asked, “How to help a gifted child who struggles with behavior. How is advocate at a public school that does not have a gifted program”.

Partnering with teachers and schools to actively work as team to further their child’s academic growth. Participants discussed wanting to seek ways they can participate directly in their children’s academic growth, as well as have direct interaction with teachers so they can suggest projects, strategies and supplementation materials for use at home. One participant, TKT52 said, “Having access to a timeline of academic topics covered in school could be helpful in providing prior support to help initially grasp new concepts introduced in class. Suggestions on ways to supplement the current curriculum.” Another participant, TFA72 stated, “Interaction with the enrichment teachers at school who can suggest projects or strategies at home.”

Encouraging changes or additions to the current school curriculum or services available for their child. Along similar lines, participants talked about how to advocate at schools with no gifted programs and for more challenge in school, and how to disagree with or add to the school curriculum. For example, one participant, LBM89 asked, “How to encourage a school to move away from “paper learning”.”

Continuing to teach and improve overall academic skills or specific curriculum standards at home through parent teaching, activities, websites, books, and games. Participants seemed to be looking for specific resources they could use at home to teach their children and to improve overall academic skills or specific curriculum standards at home. Some of these resources they were searching for are parent teaching materials, activities, websites, books and games. One participant, XVP79 said, “Ways to teach math, books or articles on how to improve logical thinking/reasoning in kids.” Another participant, KSC88, said they were looking for, “Ways to interact that involve learning with play.” Other participants mentioned online tools, books and activities to develop academic skills.

Engaging children socially, creatively and/or academically through group programs. Participants discussed wanting resources for opportunities for and funding for group programs outside of school, group education outings, and different events that develop academic growth. For example, TFA72 said, “Funding for or group opportunities for educational outings to museums, science centers, historic sites, cultural events, etc.” This theme revolved around learning as a group through a program.

Best parenting styles and practices for gifted students. Participants were interested in received resources regarding information on parenting a bright child, and

what benefits their learning. For example, RVK73 said, “What benefits their learning. Obstacles and how to treat them.” While MFR38 stated, “Information on how to deal with children who are academically inclined.”

Motivational techniques that encourage gifted children to do their best.

Participants discussed wanting resources regarding encouraging academic interest, motivation and growth. For example, LMB89 wrote, “How to encourage the non-traditional learner who is more hands on. How can I continue to support and develop my child’s talents?” Another participant, RVK73 said, “How to foster his academic growth without pushing him or making him lose his fire...” While another participant, BPJ86 said, “Strategies for engagement and motivation.”

Fostering skills needed for academic success in the long run. Participants’ discussions seemed to reference wanting resources that will help them foster the skills needed for academic success in the long run like organization and logical thinking. For example, SVR93 asked for, “Anything about collaboration, working well in groups.” While another participant, RAT17 stated, “Problem solving projects with open ended solutions.” Finally, XVP79 said, “How to improve logical thinking/reasoning in kids.”

Card sort top ten results. Figure 4.3 displays overall frequency scores, as well as frequency scores by school, of parent groups’ collective top ten scores of which resources would be most helpful for them in supporting and advocating for their child’s academic growth and success. Participants agreed most closely on the importance of having information about scholarships their child can apply to. Access to free books, worksheets and curriculum to enrich their child at home; and access to suggestions of critical thinking activities, creative games, and insight on building on school subjects that can be

carried out at home received an equal score, which was the second highest score. The resource that parents gave the lowest overall score to was access to computer software for my child that is affordable.

Reported Overall Scores for Group's Top Ten Most Important Resources

Resources	Overall Score	School One Score	School Two Score	School Three Score
Information about scholarships my child can apply to	32	7	8	17
Access to free books, worksheets and curriculum to enrich my child at home	28	7	7	14
Access to suggestions of critical thinking activities, creative games, and insight on building on school subjects that I can carry out at home	28	7	5	16
Information on creative ways to show my child how school subjects are used in everyday life	26	5	4	17
Access to a list of free enriching events listed by town for my child	25	4	6	15
Access to a list of free interactive, online, educational games for my child	25	5	5	15
Access to information on motivating my child who is showing high academic potential	25	4	6	15
Access to information on the best parenting practices with children who are	24	8	3	13

showing high academic potential				
Information regarding enrichment programs my town offers	23	4	2	17
Access to information about how to advocate at school for my child who is showing high academic potential	21	6	4	11
Access to information on the social and emotional development of my child who is showing high academic potential	21	3	5	13
Information regarding ways to help my child learn to work well with other students in a group	21	4	5	12
Information on educational crafts I can do at home with my child	20	5	5	10
Access to information on the different issues my child who is showing high academic potential may face	17	3	4	10
Information about how to help my child with perfectionism issues	16	4	2	10
Access to educational products to enrich my child's learning experience at home	16	5	4	7
Information about contests and awards my child can participate in	15	3	7	5

Information about enrichment programs with registration costs that occur over the summer	15	3	4	8
Access to free virtual field trips for my child	13	3	2	8
Resources specific to my child's grade level	12	3	2	7
Information regarding best toys for my children that are educational and thought provoking	12	5	3	4
Information regarding when conferences or community networking events are happening in Connecticut regarding gifted and talented education	12	4	2	6
Access to a puzzle maker to quiz my child on what he/she is learning in school	12	3	3	6
Access to a website that could help my child with his/her homework	11	2	3	6
Access to educational videos that could help me help my child with his/her homework	11	4	3	4
Information regarding identification and understanding my child who is showing high academic potential	10	2	2	6
Information regarding all of the different schooling options and laws regarding my child	10	2	2	6

Information about enrichment programs with registration costs that happen on the weekends	10	2	1	7
Access to information on the best way to communicate with my school / town	10	3	3	4
Information about research on high potential learners	10	2	4	4
Access to join a support group with other parents who also have children who are showing high academic potential	8	1	3	4
Information on my portable device, rather than on a computer	8	2	4	2
Resources in Spanish	7	3	2	2
Access to links connecting me with other parents whose children are showing high academic potential	5	0	1	4
Access to receive an educational kids' magazine for my child to read at home	5	2	1	2
Access to computer software for my child that is affordable	4	1	2	1

Figure 4.3. Reported frequency of parent groups' collective top ten scores of which resources would be most helpful for parents in supporting and advocating for their child's academic growth and success. The information is organized by the highest reported "overall score". The overall score a combination of parents' group scores from all three schools. Fifty-seven groups from three schools participated in this cart sort activity.

Card sort top three results. Figure 4.4 displays overall frequency scores, as well as frequency scores by school, of parent’s individual top three scores of which resources would be most helpful for them in supporting and advocating for their child’s academic growth and success. Participants agreed most closely on the importance of having access to information on the social and emotional development of their child who is showing high academic potential. There was one card that no parents had in their top three at all. That card was information regarding the best toys for my children that are educational and thought provoking. Finally, there were three resources that only one parent per resource put in their top three. Those were access to free virtual field trips for my child, information regarding identification and understanding my child who is showing high academic potential, and resources in Spanish.

Reported Overall Scores for Individual’s Top Three Most Important Resources

Resources	Overall Score	School One Score	School Two Score	School Three Score
Access to information on the social and emotional development of my child who is showing high academic potential	25	3	4	18
Access to information on motivating my child who is showing high academic potential	24	1	0	23
Access to free books, worksheets and curriculum to enrich my child at home	22	5	4	13
Information regarding enrichment programs my town offers	21	2	0	19

Information about scholarships my child can apply to	20	2	2	16
Access to information on the best parenting practices with children who are showing high academic potential	17	7	2	8
Information regarding ways to help my child learn to work well with other students in a group	16	3	5	8
Access to suggestions of critical thinking activities, creative games, and insight on building on school subjects that I can carry out at home	15	5	3	7
Information on creative ways to show my child how school subjects are used in everyday life	15	0	7	8
Information on educational crafts I can do at home with my child	14	3	2	9
Access to information on the different issues my child who is showing high academic potential may face	13	3	7	3
Information about how to help my child with perfectionism issues	13	2	1	10
Information on my portable device, rather than on a computer	9	4	0	5
Access to a list of free interactive, online, educational games for my child	9	8	0	1

Access to a list of free enriching events listed by town for my child	8	2	2	4
Access to information about how to advocate at school for my child who is showing high academic potential	8	0	0	8
Access to educational products to enrich my child's learning experience at home	8	3	1	4
Access to educational videos that could help me help my child with his/her homework	8	2	4	2
Resources specific to my child's grade level	6	2	2	2
Information regarding all of the different schooling options and laws regarding my child	6	0	0	6
Access to a website that could help my child with his/her homework	6	3	2	1
Access to links connecting me with other parents whose children are showing high academic potential	5	3	0	2
Information about research on high potential learners	4	3	0	1
Access to a puzzle maker to quiz my child on what he/she is learning in school	4	3	0	1
Information about enrichment programs with registration costs that occur over the summer	4	0	3	1

Access to join a support group with other parents who also have children who are showing high academic potential	3	0	3	0
Access to receive an educational kids' magazine for my child to read at home	3	0	0	3
Access to computer software for my child that is affordable	3	0	3	0
Information about enrichment programs with registration costs that happen on the weekends	3	0	3	0
Access to information on the best way to communicate with my school / town	2	2	0	0
Information regarding when conferences or community networking events are happening in Connecticut regarding gifted and talented education	2	0	0	2
Information about contests and awards my child can participate in	2	0	0	2
Access to free virtual field trips for my child	1	1	0	0
Information regarding identification and understanding my child who is showing high academic potential	1	0	0	1
Resources in Spanish	1	1	0	0

Information regarding best toys for my children that are educational and thought provoking	0	0	0	0
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Figure 4.4. Reported frequency of individual parent's top three scores of which resources would be most helpful for them in supporting and advocating for their child's academic growth and success. The information is organized by the highest reported "overall score". The overall score a combination of parents' group scores from all three schools. Forty-nine parents from three schools participated in this card sort activity.

Connections between survey responses and card sort. Overall, parents seemed the most interested in finding out more information or gaining access to resources regarding continuing to teach and improve overall academic skills or specific curriculum standards at home through parent teaching, activities, websites, books, and games; fostering skills needed for academic success in the long run; having access to information on the social and emotional development of their child; having information about scholarships their child can apply to; and partnering with teachers and schools to actively work as team to further their child's academic growth.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overall, there were three behaviors that participants cited in their responses that aligned with literature on key gifted behaviors. In general, participants were looking for more information on the best parenting practices for gifted students, ways to teach their children academic skills at home, and ways to partner with their children's schools. Both parents and educators could be trained in the future to identify high academic potential and how to support it. Additionally, ample policies could be put into place that outline the formal identification and education of gifted students from all backgrounds.

Key Gifted Behaviors Parents Cited

There were three behaviors that parents said they see either always or often in their children that are a display of high academic potential. These were *learns quickly and easily, is highly curious, and makes advanced connections without being taught*. Webb, Gor, Amend, and DeVries (2007) noted common characteristics of giftedness include rapid learning; learning basic skills quickly and with little practice; putting thoughts together quickly; advanced comprehension of word nuances, metaphors and abstract ideas; highly developed curiosity; and puts ideas or things together that are not typical, which all align with these three behaviors that parents say their children display most often.

Parent Perceptions of Needed Resources and Relationships

Parents wanted more information on the best parenting practices for gifted students, ways to teach their children academic skills at home, and ways to partner with their children's schools. The home-school relationship could be strengthened to open up more avenues for two-way communication. Districts and parents would benefit from multiple means of formal and informal parent to school communications. Perhaps parent workshops could be a positive avenue to open up this communication between the two parties and consideration could be taken about starting them in earlier grade levels. This way, both parties could discuss information on the current best practices for things like incorporating academic skills at home, the best parenting practices for children of high academic potential, and ways to get involved in their children's academics at home and at school (Weber & Stanley, 2012).

Districts could share resources with parents to support learning at home such as curriculum outlines with the overall topics and timing that the topics will be covered in class. This way, parents could partner with the school system to incorporate what their children are learning in school, into their home lives. Parents could pre-teach different topics to their children, or reteach if their child needed it. Districts may also think about supplying supportive activities for parents to do at home with their children. Since Common Core has school systems responsible for the same information as one another, it may be beneficial if there were national sites that parents could log into to get a vast amount of information from across the nation.

Identifying High Potential

Both parents and educators could be trained in the future to identify high academic potential and how to support it. Workshops could be used to teach both parties about high academic potential in the early grades, as this has been useful in the past for parents (Weber & Stanley, 2012).

Finally, states could work to create ample policies to address this problem. States could create laws that outline the formal identification and education of gifted students. Currently, there are few states that have these protective laws in place (Plucker et al., 2015). States could also work to make policies for gifted students from low-income backgrounds and families that would raise their representation in gifted education and would work towards solving this issue. Districts could also be monitored after they have been trained on how to support gifted students for the performance of high academic potential from all economic backgrounds which echoes what Plucker et al., (2015) called for in their study.

Summary and Conclusions

More research may be done on how characteristics of high potential may show differently in students who are from underserved populations, as this may be a barrier in the identification process of gifted students (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Also, further research on the best parenting practices for gifted children who are from underserved populations may be beneficial for those of us in that particular situation. Additionally, both districts and parents would benefit from multiple means of formal and informal parent to school communications. This may take the form of things like parent workshops or a website available to both parties to share information and resources. Opening more of these lines of communication between schools and families will promote more effective learning and growth experiences for each child. Finally, both parents and educators could be trained in the future to identify high academic potential and how to support it, and ample policies could be put into place that outline the formal identification and education of gifted students from all backgrounds. Limitations to this study include a small sample size from one Northeastern state. Therefore, results cannot be generalized across all parents whose children are of high academic potential.

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