Talented High School Students' Perceptions on How Their Parents influence Their Achievement

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ABSTRACT

TALENTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON HOW THEIR PARENTS INFLUENCE THEIR ACHIEVEMENT

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Northern Illinois University, 2019
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Talented students are an underserved population in American schools today. Despite being identified as talented in a certain domain, many of these students are not developing their potential into outcomes of advanced achievement and skill. Research shows that parents play a critical role in developing their children’s talent. To change the cycle of underachievement, we need to start working with the talented students to get their perspective on what helps them. This is a qualitative case study of four talented high school students to discover their perspective on how their parents influence their achievement and motivation to learn. Multiple interviews with the talented students and their mothers were conducted. Findings indicated that the talented students realized that their parents provided opportunities to challenge them outside of school, influenced their activity choices early in their life, and provided extra resources (e.g., time, knowledge and money) to be successful in these activities/interests.

Students also felt their parents had high standards and would push and challenge them to develop their talent while being encouraging. The talented students also perceived their parents gave them a lot of control over decisions that affected their personal life. Finally, the talented students perceived their parents had the right balance between supporting and challenging them.
TALENTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON HOW THEIR PARENTS INFLUENCE THEIR ACHIEVEMENT

BY

MICHAEL FITZGERALD
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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FOR THE DEGREE
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Carolyn Pluim, Director
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Talent is made up of three components: individual traits a person is born with and then develops, cultural domains that use systems of rules to define ranges of performances as valuable, and social fields, which are people or institutions whose job is to decide whether a performance is valuable (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen, & Wong, 1993). There are many different definitions for the terms gifted and talented used by researchers and organizations throughout the world. For the purposes of this paper I will use terms interchangeably and will use the definition provided by one of the leading advocacy groups for gifted children, The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2010), which defines a gifted/talented child as follows:

Gifted (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%) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

This definition was a purposeful move by the NAGC (2010) away from the more traditional definition of gifted that focused on a student having high levels of intelligence or IQ, with no mentioned outcomes for turning that potential into achievement or higher levels of performance. By stating in the definition that gifted students need to demonstrate expertise or competence in a certain domain, the NAGC was emphasizing a focus on talent development over time.
Talent development refers to the purposeful cultivation of talent or ability within a specific area of performance or knowledge. Through the process of talent development, talented students can transform their intrinsically exceptional ability into achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015).

Within the talent development framework, the meaning of giftedness changes over time because it is viewed as developmental within domains. When children are identified at a young age, giftedness can be seen as potential for future achievement that is signaled by high ability or high academic achievement in a domain. With appropriate opportunities, teaching, studying, practice and psychosocial support, potential is turned into domain level expertise and competence (National Association for Gifted Children, 2015, p. 9).

Just because a student is identified as talented within a certain domain does not mean that the student will become a high achiever. Talented children’s potential can be changed by a variety of influences including actions by the talented child, influences at school and influences by the talented child’s family. A study following talented students from third grade through eighth grade found that most talented students are not developing their talent to the level their potential indicates is possible and anywhere from 30-50% of these talented students dropped in achievement level from above the 90% in math and reading in third grade to below the 90% in eighth grade (Xiang, Dahlin, Cronin, Theaker, & Durant, 2011, p. 8).

In a National Teacher Survey from 2008, 73% of teachers reported that their brightest students are bored and under challenged. The survey also reported that the majority of teachers had no training specific to teaching advanced students in their teacher preparatory program and 58% of teachers said they had no professional development on advanced learners in their district in the last three years.
The decisions, actions and supports that parents make when raising their talented child can be a major influence on their child’s development of talent. Bloom’s (1985) retrospective study of 120 talented young people identified parental encouragement as an important environmental factor in turning potential into high achievement. Over 15 years later Bloom’s study was revisited and reaffirmed the importance parents have as an environmental factor that can enhance or impede the development of talent (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Arnold, 2003). Research has shown that parents play a critical role both supporting their talented child’s autonomy while also providing needed challenges that will lead to higher achievement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Subotnik et al. (2003) found that at the most fundamental level parents provide two essential resources to their child’s development of talent: money and time, in that parents provide financial resources toward extracurricular activities as well as invest their time in finding, arranging, and monitoring these activities. Looking at four case studies of talented students and their families, (Subotnik et al., 2003) also found that different family dynamics, attitudes and behaviors can play a central role in how much talent develops in these children.

Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (1994) demonstrated a correlation between maternal involvement and children’s educational development and subsequent intrinsic academic motivation. Their research provided the first empirical evidence that students’ academic intrinsic motivation is reinforced in the home by their mother’s active encouragement. This was shown in the form of two motivational styles used by mothers. The first style had mothers focus on the intrinsic value of the task (task-endogeny) with their children. Encouraging their children at a young age to be curious and persistent and to master school-related activities were examples of this style. Mothers also worked with their children when they experienced difficulty and provided additional home activities in areas of struggle. These motivational practices also
showed an indirect, but significant, increase on their children’s subsequent achievement (Gottfried et al., 1994). The second style focused on using task-extrinsic consequences such as rewards and punishments with their children, which resulted in lower levels of academic intrinsic motivation.

Witte, Kiewra, Kasson, and Perry’s (2015) qualitative study reconfirmed previous research that linked talent development with early experience, coaching, practice and motivation. They also establish that parents play a central role in enacting all four of those factors. Parents in this study introduced their children to a talent domain at a young age, sometimes being born into the domain because a parent was a competitor or coach in that area (Witte et al., 2015). Parents would often then be the child’s first coach in the talent domain. When their child’s skill level improved parents would then seek out other appropriate coaches and steer the emotions of the coach-family relationship (Witte et al., 2015). The parents would manage all added practice and competition opportunities. This included monitoring their child’s progress, purchasing resources, scheduling competitions and arranging travel plans, all to help their child improve in their talent domain (Witte et al., 2015). Parents in this study modeled high achievement themselves, while balancing when to direct their child’s attention away from leisure activities and back on their talent domain. At the same time the parents also realizing that they needed to encourage their children to spend time away from their talent domain so they could re-charge their motivation (Witte et al., 2015). Finally, some parents in this study realized that the pressure that their children felt in increasing their talent and provided support in outside consultants and psychologists for their children (Witte et al., 2015).

In a qualitative case study of children aged 5 to 15, Coleman and Guo (2013) found that parents create the most conducive context for their talented children to explore their areas of
interest. As the child’s involvement in their interest increased so did the parental support, as parents in the study directed resources such as time, money and transportation toward their talented child’s activity (Coleman & Guo, 2013).

Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) examined the importance of family support and challenge for talented students in their book *Talented Teenagers, The Roots of Success and Failure*. In this study they examined a group of 200 teenagers identified by their teachers as being talented during their four years of high school to see why certain talented teenagers continue to develop their gifts and abilities, while other talented teenagers, in similar environmental conditions, give up and abandon their talents. One of the major findings of the study is that families that provide both support and challenge enhance the development of talent.

Finding the balance between challenging and supporting your talented child can be a difficult task and parents who use punishment and apply pressure tactics on their talented children rarely produce sustained motivation in them and can create undesired emotional outcomes and negative attitudes. (Whitmore, 1986).

There are very few qualitative studies looking at how talented students’ daily interactions, routines and experiences with their parents contribute to or lessen their achievement and motivation. There are even fewer qualitative studies that incorporate the perception of not only the parent, but also the perception of the talented child. It is important to understand the talented student perceptions because research needs to move away from the mentality of working on the problem of talented student underachievement and move to the mindset of working with talented students to develop an understanding and learning of their perceptions on what influences their achievement (Schultz, 2002). I interviewed four similarly identified talented students from a high school in the Midwest. I also interviewed each of the talented student’s
mothers. By comparing and contrasting the findings from these talented students and their mothers I will be able to identify student and parent perceptions on common parental behaviors and the impact they have on the talented student’s achievement and motivation to learn.

This dissertation explored talented high school students’ feelings about how their interactions and experiences with their parents have shaped their academic achievement and motivation to learn.

Problem Statement

Talented students across the United States are not reaching their academic potential and are unable to transform their potential into higher levels of achievement or performance. It is difficult to find solutions for the underachievement of talented students because underachievement is defined in various ways and these definitions lack consistency across different contexts. For the purposes of this study I used the following definition of underachievement: “a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations)” (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 157).

Researcher’s Experiential Background

I started my teaching career in 1997 at Eisenhower Junior High in Darien, Illinois. On my schedule of classes was a seventh-grade advanced social studies class comprised of talented students. I soon observed differences between this class and my five other non-advanced social studies and reading classes. These students asked questions, focused on large concepts, and told
me that they were not challenged by the regular curriculum that covered content and curriculum meant to be mastered by the end of that grade level year. Being an inexperienced first year teacher with no training in teaching talented students I was not prepared to serve these students and sought out the district’s gifted and talented coordinator.

Meeting with her weekly started my journey to try to meet the needs of these students and propelled my curiosity about this population of students. In 2002, I became an administrator at Eisenhower and was given the duty of identifying and placing talented students in the advanced academic classes. This process involved learning more about the identification process and how we placed students. It also gave me experience in communicating with parents of both identified talented students and of the students who were not placed in the advanced classes. This experience led me to look more carefully at how we serviced the needs of students outside of the advanced classes. To learn more about how to meet the needs of talented students, I enrolled in the Gifted Institute offered through the DuPage Regional Office of Education. These training sessions allowed me to learn more about different theories and curriculum models in gifted education. I became the Gifted Coordinator for the district and went through the Gifted Coordinator Institute offered by the DuPage ROE. I then passed the assessment offered through the State of Illinois to earn my gifted endorsement/certification. It was during this time that I started noticing differences in the ability testing and the actual classroom performances of some of the talented students. This experience made me wonder why similarly identified talented students performed differently in the same classes.

In addition, in the summer of 2014, I completed a pilot study with two seventh-grade identified-talented students. Although both students were almost identical on ability and achievement testing, one student was achieving at very high levels academically (Lawrence)
while the other (Kyle) was struggling academically, getting D’s and F’s in most of his classes. One overwhelming theme to emerge from my interviews was the importance of parental support in helping the respondents overcome obstacles, discovering outside challenges, and modeling and enforcing good work habits. My findings were consistent with Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993), who found that families who provide support and challenge for their talented child enhance the development of that talent. For example, Lawrence emphasized how his work ethic and motivation came from the example his parents set. He also stated that his parents provided him a structured workplace for homework. They also gave him resources like his own laptop. Kyle, on the other hand, mentioned the inconsistency of parental support that could be linked to his failure to complete schoolwork and falling behind in his classes and grades. Kyle’s time after school was unstructured, and he spent most of it in leisure activities talking with friends or watching television. Kyle’s parents also did not follow through with homework checks or consequences when he lied about completing homework or when he received bad grades. The lack of follow through by his parents was a contributing factor to his underachievement and academic gaps in his classes.

Also contributing to my knowledge about the parental influence of talented students is being a parent of a talented student. My wife and I have struggled to keep our daughter academically challenged at school while we support her academically and emotionally at home. Outside of school she has been enrolled in classes at Northwestern University’s Center for Talent Development, the Illinois Math and Science Academy, and the Davidson Institute Young Scholars program and has pursued her interests in music through piano, guitar and ukulele.
Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do talented high school students perceive the influence their parents have on their achievement and motivation to learn?

2. What are the specific differences and similarities in the findings between the talented high school students?

3. How do the talented high school students’ perceptions differ from that of their parents?

Significance of the Study

According to the Office of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education, in 2013-14 there were approximately 3.3 million students in public schools in gifted and talented programs in the United States. These students are different from typical students in a variety of areas including, but not limited to, learning styles, depth and complexity of understanding, and potential. Despite these differences, most of these students will be taught in regular education classrooms with no modifications to meet their needs and by teachers not trained to teach high ability students (Gifted Education in the U.S., n.d.).

The findings in a meta-analysis of 38 studies on the effects of acceleration on high ability learners’ academic achievement and social emotional development suggest that acceleration influences high-ability learners in positive ways, especially on academic achievement (Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2010). Talented students can benefit from acceleration both in the short-term and in the long run as accelerated students tend to outperform students who are not accelerated in their performance on standardized achievement tests, college grades, degrees
obtained, status of universities or colleges attended, and career status (Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2010). Talented students who are accelerated equal or surpass non-accelerated talented students in self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, social relationships, participation in extracurricular activities, and life satisfaction (Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2010). Missed opportunities by our most talented students are not only missed opportunities for these students but also for society as a whole and the contributions these students could have made in the fields of arts and sciences that would help people in the future (Davidson, Davidson, & VanderKam, 2004). It is up to parents of talented students to ensure that they are challenging and supporting their talented children when schools are not meeting their needs.

The purpose of this study is to understand how talented high school students view the influence their parents have on their academic achievement and motivation to learn. By conducting multiple in-depth interviews with talented high school students, I added a depth of understanding about talented students’ feelings toward the impact their parents have on their achievement and their motivation to learn. This, in turn, can help provide insights into how parents may increase motivation and achievement by their talented children.

Theoretical Construct

I have framed my study on the theory of Talent Development as defined by the research of Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee and Thomson (2014): Parents who identify their child’s interests and ability in certain talent domains and respond by giving their talented child exposure to enrichment opportunities and resources outside of school will contribute to improving their child’s motivation and achievement. Because the Talent Development Framework focuses on developing emerging talent and potential it provides more opportunity and direction to address
the needs of a wide range of talented students including low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse talented students (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thompson, 2015). My study also explored Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s (1993) research on complex families. A family is complex when it provides both integration, a stable condition in which individuals feel a sense of support and consistency, and differentiation, where members are encouraged to develop their individuality by finding new challenges and opportunities for growth. Complex families increase their talented children’s attentional energy on growth-producing activities and, by doing so, promote the quality of their personal experience both at home and school. Following this structure, a complex family provides a stable home environment with consistent communication and actions that show love and support towards their talented child. Through this process they identify with their talented child certain abilities and interests that they want to explore further. Parents then search out different opportunities and resources that would enrich their child’s ability in that interest domain. This early identification of talent, encouragement for talented students to explore their interests and providing opportunities and resources all overlap with the Talent Development framework. Complex families encourage their child to take risks by facing challenges in this interest area that leads to growth. By complex families showing this differentiation talented children increase the time they spend on these growth producing activities and increase the quality of their personal experience.

Methodology

Much of the research on the underachievement of talented students is quantitative; however, there has been a call for more qualitative research studies, specifically studies in which underachievement is examined from the perspective of identified talented students through open-
ended responses to qualitative interviews (Schultz, 2002). At this time, there have been very few qualitative studies that examine the achievement and motivation of talented high school students from their own perspective and that focus on parental influence. My study is a qualitative case study of four talented high school students from a high school in the Midwest. I used convenience sampling and interviews to solicit rich data from the talented students that were currently enrolled in their high school “honors” or “AP” classes.

Operational Definitions:

The following definitions will frame the proposed study:

**Complex Families:** When families are both integrated (supportive) and differentiated (providing challenges) in regard to their talented children, they are categorized as *complex* (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993).

**Differentiation:** When family members are encouraged to develop their individuality by finding new challenges and opportunities for growth (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993).

**Enrichment Triad Model:** A model of teaching talented students developed by Joseph Renzulli (1977). This model consists of three interrelated types of enrichment activities. Type 1 are general exploratory activities designed to expose students to a lot of different topics they might not be exposed to in a general classroom. Type 2 are group training activities that target creative and critical thinking as well as research and problem solving skills. Type 3 are individual and small group investigations in which talented student’s research and problem solve real world problems of their choosing (Renzulli, 1977)
Integration: The bonds that family members share with each other are called integration or a stable condition in which individuals feel a sense of support and consistency (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993)

Parental Influence: The capacity of parents to shape or mold the opinions, attitudes or actions of their talented children.

Talent: It is common to identify students with IQs in the top 3-5% as talented (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). For the purpose of this study I will be using the definition provided by the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC):

Gifted (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%) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

Talent Development: Talent is best seen as developmental. Talent development refers to the purposeful cultivation of talent or ability within a specific area of performance or knowledge. Through the process of talent development, talented students can transform their intrinsically exceptional ability into achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015).

Type 3 Enrichment: The third ring of Renzulli’s Enrichment Triad Model is where talented students become actual investigators of real problems. Using data collection, inquiry, research strategies and artistic procedures students create products and presentations they deliver to their classmates and their teacher (Baum, Hebert, & Renzulli, 1995).

Underachievement: For the purposes of this study I used the following definition of underachievement: “a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations)” (Reis & McCoach, 2000).
Overview

Parental influence has been shown to have both positive and negative impacts on the achievement levels of talented students. My study seeks to provide insight into this topic by exploring the point of view of the talented student. I interviewed four talented high school students from a high school in the Midwest. I had two interviews with each student over a two month period to gain rich data. I also interviewed the mother of each talented high school student to triangulate the data and strengthen my study. In the chapters that follow I will share the review of the literature on parental influence on their talented students and explain the process I will go through to select and interview the students. In Chapter 4, I will share my results of the interviews and in Chapter 5 draw conclusions from the data to determine whether the results are similar to or differed from previous research on this topic.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The education of talented students is crucial to this group of students reaching their full potential. Challenging the students at a level equal to or just above their ability is something that school districts struggle with. The need for different strategies, programming and structure has been recognized in policy design and conversations at the federal, state and local levels for a long time.

I will discuss the historical context of the education of talented students from a policy perspective at the federal level from the 1970’s to present day. Then I will review state policies and funding, concentrating on Illinois. I will then discuss the relevant literature on talented education focusing on influences that can shape their achievement and motivation.

Federal Support of Gifted and Talented Education

Marland Report

Meeting the educational needs of talented students in the United States has been a problem for a long time. In 1971 state Senator and Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland submitted the first national report on gifted and talented students to Congress (Marland, 1972). This report defined the terms “gifted and talented” for the purpose of federal programs: “Gifted and Talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require
differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society” (Marland, 1972, p. 2). This included students who demonstrated achievement or potential ability in general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts and psychomotor ability (Marland, 1972). In 1974, as a response to the Marland Report, The Office of Gifted and Talented was established in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW). They awarded 2.5 million dollars in grants to states to fund model projects and to support universities in teacher training in gifted education (Sisk, 2008). The Council for Exceptional Children conducted the national survey of gifted and talented programs that was called for in the Marland Report. It explored the costs, evaluation procedures, benefits and concerns of gifted and talented programs (Sisk, 2008). Findings indicated that:

- Gifted and talented education had a very low priority in the competition for federal, state and local dollars.
- Minority gifted and talented students were sparsely being identified or served.
- Only 10 states had full-time personnel in their state education agencies concerned with gifted and talented education.
- Talented students were struggling on their own and research had demonstrated the need for special programing for these students to reach their potential.
- Identification of gifted and talented students suffered from lack of funds and testing procedures as well as their educational needs being met with apathy and hostility by teachers and administrators.
- Specialized programs to meet the needs of the gifted and talented students showed measurable results.

In 1981 the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act was passed and funds for gifted and talented were consolidated with other programs into a block grant giving states the right to draw funds to use at their discretion. With the passing of this act The Office of Gifted and Talented closed (Sisk, 2008).
A Nation at Risk

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was published. This 36 page report by The National Commission on Excellence in Education under Secretary of Education T.H. Bell documents the findings that the American education system is failing as a whole, and because of the state of our educational system, students from other countries are surpassing American students, which puts our country’s future at risk. The report also listed recommendations to fix the American educational system, including these findings on gifted and talented students:

Over half the population of talented students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school. The most talented students, may need a curriculum enriched and accelerated beyond even the needs of other students of high ability. Funds should be made available to support curriculum development and resource materials for talented students. Instructional time should be expanded to meet the needs of talented students who need more instructional diversity than can be accommodated during a conventional school day or school year.

**Jacob J. Javits Act**

Since 1988 the Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Youth Educational Act has identified the need for special programs for gifted and talented students to advance knowledge and services through research, model programs and leadership training. However, the Act did not include a federal policy on gifted and talented education, a federal definition on gifted and talented that states must adopt, or specific service requirements. In addition, the funding of the Javits Act since inception has been miniscule compared to the overall federal education budget, with zero funding in certain years (Callahan, Moon, Oh, 2014). The Javits Act has just been reauthorized in the Every Child Succeeds Act to support talent development in schools. The 12 million dollars
the program has been allocated for 2017 does not go to local schools, but to demonstration grants and a National Research and Development Center on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children and Youth for focused research that informs educational practice (Nagc.org, 2018). Currently the focus is on students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs including minorities, economically disadvantaged students, English language learners and students with disabilities. Their aim in this area is to close the achievement gaps and to provide equal educational opportunities for all students (Nagc.org, 2018).

**National Excellence Report**


The United States is squandering one of its most precious resources—the gifts, talents, and high interests of many of its students. In a broad range of intellectual and artistic endeavors, these youngsters are not challenged to do their best work. This problem is especially severe among economically disadvantaged and minority students, who have access to fewer advanced educational opportunities and whose talents often go unnoticed. Reforming American schools depends on challenging students to work harder and master more complex material. Few would argue against this for students performing at low or average levels. But we must also challenge our top-performing students to greater heights if our nation is to achieve a world class educational system. In order to make economic strides, America must rely upon many of its top-performing students to provide leadership in mathematics, science, writing, politics, dance, art, business, history, health, and other human pursuits (p.1).

The report set forth several recommendations to help America’s top students. These included setting content and curriculum standards that challenge all students including students that are talented. Communities and schools should provide more opportunities for talented students to be challenged inside and outside of school. School districts should increase access to quality early childhood education programs for all students that emphasize the development of student strengths. Schools must increase learning
opportunities for disadvantaged and minority children with outstanding talents. States and school districts need to broaden the definition of gifted to state that intelligence is malleable, can take many forms and requires multiple criteria to assess. Teachers need to receive better training in using higher level curriculum and how to match the curriculum to the varied ability level of the students. Finally, the report recommended that the United States should observe and study what other countries are doing to help their top students in countries where those top students are excelling. (Ross & United States. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993, p. 2-3)

A Nation Deceived

In 2004, A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students was published by the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa. This nationally research based report lists 18 types of acceleration available to talented students. These strategies are either grade-based acceleration, which shortens the length of time that talented students remain in K-12 schools, or are subject-based acceleration, which allows for advanced content in certain domains earlier than customary (Sisk, 2008). The report also states that despite overwhelming research evidence that acceleration has a positive impact on talented students, many elementary and middle schools refuse to implement these measures for fear of students’ social and emotional well-being among other reasons (Sisk, 2008). A Nation Deceived does not ask whether we should accelerate talented students, but instead inquires how to do so. The report emphasizes that we would need the assistance of legislation, the courts, administrative policies and professional initiatives to make a major change in America’s perspective on academic acceleration (Sisk, 2008).

In 2006, and then revised in 2013, the National Association for Gifted Children established national gifted standards for teacher education programs along with knowledge and
skill standards in gifted education for all teachers. These standards were established to be a resource that would guide and improve teaching of talented students.

**Every Student Succeeds Act**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act in December of 2015 (Iagcgifted.org, 2017). This reauthorization can help the education of talented students in several ways. States have an opportunity to move past the focus on basic proficiency in their accountability plan by requiring an additional measure of student growth for students in kindergarten through 8th grade. The plans also need to have an indicator of school quality or student success. While these are general in nature it opens up the door for their use to assist talented students. Every Student Succeeds Act also permits the use of Title 1 funds for the identification and services of gifted and talented students. ESSA requires that teacher training to meet the needs of talented students is addressed in both the state and district plan for the use of Title II funds. Title IV funds may also be used for talented students who are underrepresented in advanced subjects. ESSA also reauthorized the Javits grant program, opening up funds for research based opportunities for talented students (Iagcgifted.org, 2013).

Despite strong action statements for the need to end the neglect of talented students and recognition that federal leadership was needed to maintain the support of talented students as a national and state priority, school-based talented education services currently receive almost no federal funding (Subotnik et al., 2012).

Support for talented students at the Federal level has been a series of actions that have resulted in mixed outcomes. There has been an awareness from the federal government that
talented students are a population that need to have differentiated educational programming and services beyond what is normally offered, they have recognized problems in areas such as curriculum and teacher training to best serve talented students and they have established committees and departments to oversee research and distribute grant funds to support talented students. However, many of the recommendations and actions for improvement of talented students were delegated away to the state and local levels of government where discretion would lead to inaction or inconsistencies based on different priority and knowledge levels that school and government officials had for talented education. In addition, allocated funds were greatly reduced, eliminated or put in a larger fund where state and school officials had discretion on where to spend the funds from a wider list of needs and priorities. This leads us to state support of talented students, with a focus on Illinois.

State Support of Talented Education

Support for gifted and talented education varies greatly from state to state and falls into several different categories. Only four states (Florida, Georgia, Iowa, and Oklahoma) currently mandate services and fully fund their talented identification and services (Subotnik et al., 2012). Twenty-four states mandate gifted and talented services and partially fund their talented identification and services (davidsongifted.org, 2017). Nine states mandate gifted and talented services, but provide no funding. Five states fall into the category of not mandating gifted and talented services, but partially funding some services that schools do choose to provide. Finally, nine states have no mandated gifted and talented services and provide no funding. Illinois falls into this category, along with Connecticut, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, South Dakota and Vermont (davidsongifted.org, 2017).
Illinois

Illinois has large opportunity gaps which also lead to gaps for talented students. Before 2003 when state funding was available 80% of elementary and middle school districts in the state of Illinois offered services for talented students. That number has fallen to 27%, with districts serving predominantly low-income students being least likely to provide services ("General Advocacy Information," n.d.). Lack of opportunity to access services for talented students during the school day is most detrimental to economically disadvantaged students since their families lack the resources to supplement their child’s education outside the school day ("General Advocacy Information," n.d.). Illinois currently has one of the largest excellence gaps in the United States. 15% of 4th grade students and 12% of 8th grade student who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch achieved at the advanced level on the 2013 National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) Math test compared to only 2% of students achieving at the advanced level on the same test that did qualify for free and reduced lunch ("General Advocacy Information," n.d.). In 2015 Illinois received a D- from the Jack Kent Cooke Report that grades states on gifted education policies (iagcgifted.org, 2017).

With the needs of gifted and talented students being acknowledged in the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Illinois Association of Gifted Children has used this spotlight to get two bills introduced and passed in the Illinois General Assembly. Senate Bill 1223 (Accelerated Placement Act) and House Bill 2461 (Report Card Act)
Accelerated Placement Act

This act requires that individual school districts adopt policies allowing for different types of accelerated placement as stated below:

Accelerated placement. For purposes of this Article, "accelerated placement" means the placement of a child in an educational setting with curriculum that is usually reserved for children who are older or in higher grades than the child. "Accelerated placement" under this Article or other school district-adopted policies shall include, but need not be limited to, the following types of acceleration: early entrance to kindergarten or first grade, accelerating a child in a single subject, and grade acceleration (Accelerated Placement Act, 2017).

The impact of this legislation can be significant for talented students in Illinois public schools. A recent study of acceleration practices completed by the Illinois Association of Gifted Children and the Untapped Potential Project found that 55% of school districts in Illinois did not have policies allowing for early entrance into kindergarten or first grade. 46% did not have policies for single subject acceleration and 90% of school districts in Illinois did not have policies allowing for whole grade acceleration (powereupp.org, 2017.)

Due to the scarcity of federal and state policy local school districts have a lot of control of what services and programming will be available to gifted and talented students. Even when there is policy, such as with the passage of the Acceleration Act in Illinois, it is still left to local school districts to create a great deal of the details in how the policy will be executed. With each school district making these decisions unilaterally a policy can be tailored to the needs of the district, however it can also create great inconsistency throughout the state.
Local District Support of Talented Education

Students in this study are attending one local public high school. The school offers a wide range of “honors” classes as well as anywhere from fourteen to twenty-one Advanced Placement classes. Honors classes are described as more in-depth than the regular curriculum, requiring more investment and independent work on the part of the student. Advanced Placement (AP) courses are college-level courses taught at the high school. They allow students an opportunity to earn college credit and/or appropriate college placement in addition to high school credit. In order to earn college credit, a student must attain a specific score on the “AP” exam (national standardized examination) for that class. The students would also have to attend one of the colleges and universities that recognize students’ participation in the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) Program. AP classes can have a workload of an introductory college course. In some cases, this will be significantly more than what is expected in an “honors” level course.

Importance of Helping Talented Students

With the above as a background, the rationale to help gifted and talented students reach their potential is that giftedness is an interactive process and in order for these students to retain their abilities and even progress they have to be challenged or they will start to regress (Clark, 1983). Gifted and talented students need a variety of learning experiences and educational opportunities appropriate to their level of development in order to meet their needs and to develop their talents to their fullest potential. In our current school system gifted and talented students are underachieving at a large rate (Clark, 1983). Society will benefit from the highest development of all its members and the variety of strengths that gifted and talented students have
need to be nurtured so that they can make contributions to our society (Davidson, Davidson & Vanderkam, 2004).

Typically talented students achieve at higher levels than their peers. However, there is variation in how students that are labeled Talented or Gifted perform in school. Often, without a visible reason, talented students who show great academic potential fail to perform in class similarly to their previously documented abilities (Whitmore, 1986). In a large scale study examining school records, Peterson and Colangelo (1996) found that the school experiences of gifted underachievers appear not as strong compared to those of gifted achievers on both academic and non-academic variables such as absences and extra-curricular activities. This suggests that achieving and non-achieving talented students are having different experiences at school, indicating a possible mismatch between the needs of the child and the environment of the school as part of the problem of talented students underachieving (Whitmore, 1989).

School, Self and Parents Turn Talent into Outcomes

Student outcomes are influenced mainly by their experiences in school, the talented student themselves, and parental supports/actions. While other influences such as poverty, race and gender can also impact talented student achievement, these are likely the largest drivers of student success generally and specifically for talented kids. Each of these may inform why some talented students underachieve and will be discussed in more detail below.

Role of School

In a qualitative study of ten talented young adults who were underachieving and then were able to reverse this pattern, school played an important role in the student’s ability to reach
their learning potential (Emerick, 1992). The participants in this study believed that a specific teacher had the biggest impact in reversing the underachieving behaviors. The participants also believed that they were more likely to develop achievement orientated behaviors when they were stimulated in class and given choices to pursue areas of interest (Emerick, 1992).

**School Practices**

In a study of almost 6,000 talent-search identified students in grades K-12 more than two-thirds reported that they were taught in the regular classroom, learning the same material, at the same pace as their peers who were not identified in the talent-search process (Assouline, Colangelo, Heo & Dockery, 2013). They found that despite more than forty years of talent search research that shows above level testing is a valid system for discovering academic talent, it is not used in schools, highlighting the disparity between research and educational practice (Assouline et al., 2013).

**Acceleration**

Acceleration happens when students move through traditional curriculum at rates faster than typical. This can take many forms like early entrance to kindergarten or college, subject area acceleration (e.g., placing a 5th grade student in a 6th grade math class), whole grade skipping or Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school. Many researchers consider acceleration “appropriate educational planning. It means matching the level of complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student” (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 53).
Researchers have shown that talented students who are accelerated outperform their non-accelerated peers in academic classroom grades, standardized test scores, grades in college, the status of the universities they attend and their later career paths (Colangelo et al., 2004). Acceleration is a cost effective measure for schools to implement for talented students. Whole grade acceleration costs are minimal and yield societal benefits by talented students, becoming productive adults earlier in their lives. Subject area acceleration costs are higher buts still more cost effective than other forms of talented programming (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska, 2015).

**Teacher Training**

In a study of 82 gifted and talented teachers, 54 trained in teaching gifted and talented students and 28 who were not, it was found that teachers that were trained in at least three gifted and talented classes, demonstrated greater teaching skill, focusing on higher level thinking skills and student discussion (Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994).

In the State of the States Gifted Education Report for 2014-2015, professionals in specialized gifted and talented programs were required to have gifted education credentials in 19 of the 29 responding states. Seventeen states provided estimates for the percentage of professionals in GT programs who received annual professional development. Responses ranged from less than 10% (3) to two states estimating 100%, and 12 states estimating between 30-85% (Nagc.org, 2018).
Perceptions of Talented Students

Just as the actions and behaviors of gifted and talented students can affect their achievement and motivation to learn, so can their perceptions of their environments (school/home) as well as their perception of themselves. Researchers have found that a student’s view of “self” determines achievement and can enhance or limit the development of his/her potential (Clark, 1983). Purkey defined “self” as an organized, complicated and changing system of beliefs that individuals hold to be true about themselves, (as sited in Clark, 1983, p. 108). It is also important to note that the perceptions we have of ourselves are in part constructed by our interactions with others and that these self-perceptions determine our actions and perceptions of the world and other people (Clark, 1983).

Perceptions of Self

Self-perceptions are usually in reference to an individual’s self-concept, which is the person’s cognitive picture of what or who he is including personality traits, abilities, and appearance, as well as an awareness of strengths and weaknesses that enables a person to predict success or failure on specific activities related to his goals. Therefore self-concept can profoundly influence behaviors as it elevates or lowers expectations of success in different aspects of life (Whitmore, 1980). All research studies comparing the characteristics of the achiever with those of the underachiever show that negative self-concepts are the central trait distinguishing underachieving talented students from those talented students who are achieving equal to their ability (Whitmore, 1980).
In a study investigating the ability perceptions of talented students and average achievers, the results indicated that the talented students held significantly higher ability perceptions in most areas assessed by the Perception of Ability Scale for Students (PASS) assessment. The PASS full scale and sub-scale scores were analyzed looking at Group (Talented-Average), by Gender and by Time. The talented students scored higher than the average students in the Full-Scale, as well as the General Ability, Arithmetic, Reading/Spelling and Confidence Sub-Scales. There was no significant difference in the School Satisfaction and Penmanship/Neatness Sub-Scales between the two groups. The only Gender difference was the girls’ higher Penmanship/Neatness perception over the boys. The perceptions of each group remained stable over a two year time period, although there was a decline in School Satisfaction Sub-Scale for both groups. (Chapman & McAlpine, 1988).

In a study of 378 fifth through seventh grade students in Western Australia, gifted and talented students and non-gifted students were given an adapted version of the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Chan, 1988). This assessment consisted of four sub-scales: cognitive competence, social competence, physical competence and general self-worth. The results indicated that the gifted and talented students in general had higher perceived competence than their non-gifted peers particularly in the cognitive and general self-worth sub-scales (Chan, 1988).

**Perceptions of School**

Gifted and talented students generally have confidence in their talents and cognitive abilities. However, to keep this confidence in their abilities and to not underachieve they need supportive environments at school and home that are cooperative, focus on their strengths,
acknowledge and work on their limitations and that accept them as a unique individual, apart from their specific achievements (Whitmore, 1980). Patterns of perceptions and experiences understood at home are likely to be carried over to new contexts, such as school. To put it another way, talented teenagers who have supportive families that encourage their child to embark on difficult challenges are likely to enjoy activities they participate in and choose to participate in activities that require effort and will promote future growth (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993).

**Perceptions on Groupings**

In a study investigating student perceptions of differences in academic and social effects that happen when talented students are grouped homogeneously as contrasted with heterogeneously, students perceived mixed ability grouping to offer the most social/emotional advantages, while high ability grouping offered the most academic advantages (Adams-Byers, Whitsell & Moon, 2004). Students consisted of 44 5th-11th grade students attending a summer residential program for talented youth. Of the 73 academic advantages listed by these students, 57 (78%) academic advantages of the 73 total listed by the students were advantages for high-ability homogeneous grouping, while 16 (22%) were advantages for mixed-ability grouping. Of the 40 total responses under the social/emotional category 25 (62.5%) responses were social/emotional advantages of heterogeneous grouping and 15 (37.5%) were social/emotional advantages of homogeneous grouping (Adams-Byers, Whitsell & Moon, 2004). This suggests that talented youth would like a mixture of academic time with their talented peers while still getting social interaction with their non-gifted peers throughout the day.
Advanced Classes

Perceptions on Classes

In a study of talented student perceptions on Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes in high school, most students found the challenge level, quality of teachers and learning environment to be far superior than any of their other high school classes and felt that these classes would be beneficial to them in the future (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Many of the comments from students indicated a large mismatch between their ability and the challenge level of most of their other high-school classes. Wanting to be challenged, being required to think critically and escaping boredom and busywork were all examples of reasons that students gave as to why they signed up for the AP classes (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Students felt that the workload was too heavy, that the curriculum was rushed and that the classes could feel overwhelming because the teachers were giving them as much content as possible in time for the exams they had to take (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Students indicated that the workload required sacrifices in their social life and amount of sleep they had. Many students conveyed being conflicted on this topic, while the workload was heavy and cut into their social life and sleep, if the workload was lightened they did not think the class would be as challenging. Students conveyed a sense of pride in getting through the AP or IB classes (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008).
Teachers

Perceptions of Teachers

Most students perceived that the teachers of the AP and IB classes were the best in their school and described them as dedicated, hardworking, skilled and knowledgeable. They also stated that some teachers that taught the AP classes were not up to par and while the class would be AP in name, the challenge was not there. Some students would take AP classes with teachers who received this reputation as a way to earn college credits and as an easy way to bring up their GPA (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Students perceived the learning environments in AP and IB classes to be much superior to their other classes. Students identified two key factors that led to the improved learning environment: (a) the opportunity to learn with students of similar ability, motivation, and academic interests and (b) the adult-like relationships they had with their AP and IB teachers (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008).

Perceptions of Home Environment

In a study investigating the perceptions of the home environment of students nominated for a leadership training program and those of their parents, significant differences were found between the two groups (Karnes & D’Illo, 1989). Using the Family Environment Scale, 76 seventh through eleventh grade students attending a week long residential Leadership Studies Program and fifty-five of their mothers and forty-six of their fathers answered 90 items covering ten sub-scales. Mothers and fathers scored significantly higher than their children in the areas of Expressiveness—"the extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and to express
their feelings directly" and Intellectual-Cultural Orientation-"the degree of interest in political, social, intellectual and cultural activities". Mothers also scored higher than their children in the sub-scale of Independence-"the extent to which family members are assertive, are self-sufficient, and make their own decisions" and Moral-Religious Emphasis-"the degree of emphasis on ethical and religious issues and values" (Karnes & D’Illo, 1989). The results of this study suggest that leadership students perceive their home environment differently than their parents in some key areas and that activities, concepts and skills could be developed in the home to lessen these discrepancies (Karnes & D’Illo, 1989).

A study of talented students participating in a summer residential gifted/talented program focused on their perceptions of parenting styles. The researchers used Baumrind’s (1973) model which focused on two dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness. The authoritarian parenting style which was high in demandingness and low in responsiveness, was marked by controlling and punitive characteristics that was restrictive to a child’s individual identity and potential in favor of their personal contribution to the family dynamic (Bun, Louiselle, Misukanis & Mueller, 1988). The authoritative parenting style was high in demandingness and responsiveness and was marked by parent behavior that was warm and responsive with open lines of communication that included the child in family discussions on planning and decisions, while still setting reasonable expectations through clear directions to their talented child (Bun et al., 1988). Talented students reported perceiving their parents employing authoritative parenting practices (Rudasill, Adelson, Callahan, Houlihan, & Keizer, 2013). These findings are consistent with research by Abelman (1991), Cornell and Grossberg (1987) and Dwairy (2004), who found that talented students are more likely than their non-identified talented peers to report their parents’ parenting practices as authoritative (Rudasill et al., 2013). These results also align with
research showing that children whose parents use an authoritative parenting style have higher achievement than their peers whose parents employ an authoritarian parenting style (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987).

Parental Actions that Hinder Achievement and Motivation

The line between parents challenging their talented children and putting pressure on them is a thin one that needs to be used with discretion. Talented students whose talents are not identified or nurtured by their family may struggle with underachievement, low self-concept, and lack of support from their peers (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015). At the same time a talented child whose family has expectations for exceptionally high levels of achievement may struggle with anxiety and perfectionism. If the child is not taught resilience and coping skills, they may choose to quit programs or courses when the difficulty level increases (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015).

Parental Expectations/Pressure

In a mixed methods, multiple case study, Baum et al. (1995) examined the phenomenon of underachievement of talented students and the effect that Type 3 Enrichment would have on reversing the pattern. In this study teachers were trained in Renzulli’s (1977) Enrichment Triad Model, including an intervention under this model called Type 3 Enrichment. The 17 students in this study were five girls and 12 boys ranging in age from eight to twelve years old (Baum et al., 1995). Under the intervention of Type 3 Enrichment, talented students become actual investigators of real problems. Using data collection, inquiry, research strategies and artistic procedures students create products and presentations they deliver to their classmates and their
teacher (Baum et al., 1995). One of the findings in Baum et al. was that emotional issues caused by dysfunctional family conditions contributed to the underachievement of students with high academic potential. These conditions included parental pressure on their talented children to always achieve at high levels. “Student A,” a fourth grader suffered from frequent migraine headaches while at school. She reported that her mother expected her to get all A’s on her tests and assignments and never lets her do her projects on her own. “Student N,” a fifth grader, reported that her father told her to never tell anyone when she made a mistake or when she did not know something. Baum et al. found that these parental expectations took the enjoyment out of learning and seriously inhibited the child’s achievement. “Student K,” a fourth grader, came from a divorced family with alcohol problems and accusations of child abuse. He would report to school regularly with his hair and teeth not brushed and would be seen in the neighborhood riding his bike at all hours unsupervised by his parents (Baum et al.). In these examples, parental expectations had a negative impact on their talented child’s achievement.

Motivation

Parental attempts to shape their talented children’s motivation can also be a frustrating process. Garn, Matthews, and Jolly (2010) used Self-Determination Theory, a comprehensive motivational theory, to explore attitudes parents have toward the academic motivation of their talented children as well as approaches parents of talented students use at home to develop academic motivation. Thirty mothers agreed to be interviewed for this research after 297 families had responded to a nationwide survey. “Parents as Experts” was a major theme of the attitudes the mothers held, as 80% felt that they had comprehensive understanding of the unique characteristics that made up their child, which translated to them being experts on their child’s
academic motivation (Garn, Matthews, & Jolly, 2010). However, a large number of mothers did not feel confident about shaping their child’s academic motivation, with over 60% reporting that it was often an intense and frustrating process. Behavior modifications were used by 30% of the mothers to attempt to improve their talented child’s academic motivation (Garn et al., 2010).

Rewards such as computer time, computer games, and money were strategies used by parents to shape their children’s motivation. Punishments consisted of taking away privileges their children enjoyed like cellphones and computers. Parents used these strategies when their talented children were disengaged, resistant or when an assignment deadline was approaching (Garn et al.). Garn et al.’s study suggests that using these extrinsic behavior modifications may actually make the problem worse and decrease a child’s academic motivation.

**Socio-Economic Level, Race and Education**

Parental socio-economic level, race and level of education were also found to be associated with the underachievement of their talented children. Renzulli and Park (2000) conducted two comprehensive studies about talented high school dropouts to obtain a comprehensive overview of these students and to examine factors related to their dropout behavior. Using the Dropout and Student questionnaires of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Renzulli and Park found that many talented dropouts were from low socioeconomic status families, had parents with low levels of education, and came from families of racial minority groups. Additionally, many of the talented dropouts had limited experience with computers and spent less time on hobbies. The parents were also not actively engaged in keeping their children from dropping out. Only a small percentage of parents in this study took steps such as calling a school counselor, offering special tutoring programs or offering another
school (Renzulli & Park, 2000). The findings suggest that SES and parents’ educational levels may be connected to the educational support at home, which parallels Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock’s (1986) study that reported dropouts received less educational aid from parents, had parents with lower educational expectations, and had parents who were less interested in and were less likely to monitor their children’s school activities.

Parental Actions that Contribute to Achievement and Motivation

In a qualitative study investigating parent’s role in talent development and the lived experience of talented individuals, findings reconfirmed existing literature on the important role parents play in their talented children’s lives, highlighting the importance of early introduction to the talent area, access to great coaches, deliberate practice and having a strong motivation to pursue talent excellence (Witte, Kiewra, Kasson & Perry, 2015). They found that parents play a central role in their child’s development of talent and will go to great lengths to put these factors in play with their children. Parents built an early environment for talent growth in a particular domain, sought out elite coaching and competition opportunities, helped to fuel motivation when needed, monitored progress, purchased equipment and materials, and even sought outside consultants and psychologists to help manage pressure and anxiety (Witte et al.).

Early Exposure

Interest and ability in certain talent domains can be detected early in a child’s life when families provide him or her with early exposure and enrichment opportunities. Olszewski-Kubilius and Thomson (2015) found that all talented students benefit from early enrichment both inside and outside of school. In case studies of 6 children Coleman and Guo (2013) found that
families created the prime context for their children’s passion for learning. First, parents noticed their child’s interest and become receptive and supportive of it. For example, they may notice that learning in children’s passion domain looks relatively effortless, and children progress quickly as their playful activity starts to incorporate more of meaningful learning activities. Such involved learning may also increase as the family directs more time and money toward their child’s interest (Coleman & Guo, 2013).

**Parental Motivation**

In Garn et al.’s (2010) interviews with mothers of talented children, over 80% felt that their consistent interaction and deep understanding of the unique personal characteristics of their children helped them become experts of their children’s academic motivation. Mothers reported using a variety scaffolding techniques such as interactive instruction, reworking the learning environment, connecting homework to interests, and developing internalization to help build academic motivation (Garn et al.). The parents also modeled high expectations for their gifted children while at the same time showing them how to set goals that were specific, proximal and attainable so their self-efficacy was raised and their motivation grew (Winner, 2000). Garn et al. found that these parental motivational practices are important because they can significantly increase or diminish children’s early academic motivation which is significantly and directly related to future motivation and achievement. Also, mothers who encouraged their children’s academic intrinsic motivation through encouragement of curiosity, persistence and mastery of school related activities were likely to work with their child when they experienced difficulty and provided home activities to strengthen their weaknesses.
Support and Challenge

Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) examined the importance of family support and challenge for talented students in their book *Talented Teenagers, The Roots of Success and Failure*. In this work they examined why certain talented teenagers continue to develop their gifts and abilities, while other talented teenagers, in similar environmental conditions, give up and abandon their talents (Csikszentmihalyi et al.). Their research consisted of studying a group of over 200 students who were identified by their teachers as having promise or talent in certain areas: science, math, art, athletics, and music. The study followed the students during their four years of high school (Csikszentmihalyi et al.). One of their findings was that families who provided both support and challenge strengthened the development of talent in their talented child. Talented teenagers who maintain a relationship of dependence with their parents can gain the benefit of extended periods of exploration. This time of exploration needs to be spent in a way that encourages further growth and development to be beneficial to the talented teenager. As an example, the child who can rely on his parents for emotional, moral and physical support can spend time perfecting their jump shot, playing the piano, developing meaningful friendships or exploring a topic of interest in-depth. However, this time could also be spent laying around the house doing leisure activities or hanging out with friends experimenting with drugs or alcohol (Csikszentmihalyi et al.).

Integration and Differentiation

The theoretical model that Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) describes in a more formal and detailed way explores the connection between complex families and talent development. The
bonds that family members share with each other is called integration or a stable condition where individuals feel a sense of support and consistency. The concept of differentiation points to the fact that family members are encouraged to develop their individuality by finding new challenges and opportunities for growth. When families are both integrated and differentiated, they are categorized as complex (Csikszentmihalyi et al.). Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s describe that complex families increase their talented children’s attentional energy on growth-producing activities and, by doing so, promotes the quality of their personal experience both at home and school.

Balance to Build Social Competence

The parent-child relationship can also have a significant impact on the social development of the gifted child (Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee & Thomson, 2014). A "cohesive" (p. 212) family system in which there is a balance among parental nurturance, parental responsiveness, and respect for the individual interests and needs of the child is also a key factor in the development of a child’s social competence (Olszewski-Kubilius et al.). Parents of talented children are usually more involved in their child’s activities, both inside and out of school, and the parents also tended to fill their children’s daily schedules with many activities. Parents and their talented children indicated that their family structure involved having set rules that were consistently followed. This could be a result of the rules and discipline it takes for the family to manage a complex schedule (Olszewski-Kubilius et al.).
**Opportunities in Interest Areas**

Parents not only need to provide their talented children with opportunities but need to do so in areas in which their children have an interest. Once talented students have developed skills in certain areas of interest, they will need to find opportunities to use their talents to fulfill their potential and perform at high levels (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). Talented students have to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. This requires certain psychological skills, like the ability to handle criticism and challenges as well as persistence, focus, drive and willingness to take strategic risks (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2012). While students have motivation, they might not have the motivation to do specific schoolwork that is assigned to them outside their area of interest, but instead could be more motivated to engage in other learning activities or more rewarding alternatives such as social interaction with peers (Whitmore, 1986). High motivation to excel in an area in which the child has gifted ability is natural. If the learning content and the process are related to the child’s interests, goals, and learning styles, there will be a high motivation to participate (Whitmore, 1986). The highest level of student achievement often results when students are engaged in self-selected studies. Allowing students to pursue topics of passionate interest often result in high levels of achievement (Baum et al., 1995).

**Parent Perceptions of Talent Development**

In a qualitative case study of three participants, Wu (2008) found that Asian American parents believe that hard work by their child and good parenting had a bigger impact on performance than the innate ability of their child. Research inside and outside of China shows
that traditional concepts such as parents being good role models for their children, parents being involved in their children’s education, high motivation and perseverance are important to learning and achievement is mostly the result of effort, not ability dominate the specific characteristics of Chinese parenting (Wu, 2008).

Wu (2008) furthered these findings in a qualitative study of parents of Chinese American families who had been in the U.S. for more than 5 years (2008). She found that parents had strong confidence in their children’s future and in talent development. These parents believed that it was their responsibility to provide proper opportunities for their children and a supportive environment in which their children could grow (Wu, 2008). The more parents were involved in their children’s learning process the higher their confidence was in their child’s future. This confidence was not based on the level of giftedness, but on their child’s level of achievement. Their belief that the process of learning, or the nurturance of talent, was more important than the ability their child was born with is something that can be explored in different parenting styles and cultures as parents realize the control or influence they can have over their children’s development of talent (Wu, 2008).

Summary

For talented students to turn their talent into achievement they must be both supported and challenged. The Federal government has identified the need for talented students to receive differentiated instruction and curriculum to meet the varied needs of these students. However, decision making power and funds for these items have been delegated to the states and local district level which has caused very inconsistent services for talented students that varies greatly from school district to school district. The recent passing of the Acceleration Act in Illinois is a
major accomplishment for talented students and their parents. This act requires each school
district to have an acceleration program where students would be evaluated to be accelerated in
anywhere from a single subject area to whole grade acceleration (grade skipping) to meet the
needs of these talented students. Implementation has yet to be evaluated.

Parents are an important conduit for talented students to turn their potential into outcomes
of advanced achievement and skill. In the theoretical model of Complex Families that
Csikszentmihalyi describes, family members feel consistent support from each other but are
encouraged to develop individually by challenging themselves. In the Talent Development
Framework parents identify talent in their child and provide early exposure and experiences in
the talent domain area. The Talent Development Framework believes that talent is malleable and
also emphasizes the cultivation of skills such as self-confidence, mindsets and resilience which
can be taught and lead to higher performance. By interviewing four talented high school
students I hope to gain their perspectives on the behaviors and interactions with their parents, see
if they overlap with the concepts in Complex Families and Talent Development and see if it has
benefitted them in their development of their own talent and achievement.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. How do talented high school students perceive the influence their parents have on their achievement and motivation to learn?

2. What are the specific differences and similarities in the findings between the talented high school students?

3. How do the talented high school students’ perceptions differ from that of their parents?

Research Design

This study is a qualitative case study of four talented high school students from a Midwest suburban high school. This study examined whether the factors identified in existing research regarding the influence parents of talented students have on the students’ achievement and motivation to learn are the same factors that talented students at this Midwest suburban high school feel influence their achievement and motivation to learn. Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2014) called for using interviews with talented students in future research as a way to reduce potential bias in current research from survey results.
Site Selection

To study talented high school students’ perceptions regarding how their parents influence their achievement, I have selected students at one Midwest suburban high school. The high school is a public high school serving 2100 students about 60% of which are Hispanic, 30% Caucasian, 5% Asian, 3% come from two or more races and 2% African American. Around 48% of these students receive free or reduced lunch due to their family’s low socioeconomic status. This high school offers 18 different AP classes and has 397 students taking at least one of the courses, with 265 students earning college credit by passing the AP exam in the 2016-2017 school year. The school uses Chromebooks as their 1-1 device for students. The school serves a mostly middle class community near a large urban center in the Midwest.

The high school has identified Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses for talented students to enroll in. The school emphasizes the increased workload and academic rigor that would be required to be successful in these classes. In the second volume of a national report on acceleration, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools hold Back America’s Brightest Students*, (Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004) outlines how Advanced Placement Classes is one of the most appropriate and beneficial ways to service the needs of gifted and talented students in the high school setting. Research showed 3 months’ additional growth in specific area in which AP or IB (International Baccalaureate) class was taken (Rogers, 1992). A student’s AP examination score was the most important predictor of college GPA, # of semesters on Dean’s List, and honors graduation (Brody & Stanley, 1991).

Due to restrictions on research in the high schools I conducted the interviews in the conference room of the school I work in. This location was the parents’ choice for convenience,
when choosing between the school and the local library. The school was centrally located and provided easy access for all participants. The conference room in the school provided a private, quiet setting appropriate for interviews.

Participant Selection

I selected research participants from one Midwest suburban high school. I used convenience sampling (Maxwell, 2013) to test the theories previously presented and to compare the talented high school student’s perceptions of their parent’s impact on their achievement. The students I selected were former gifted and talented students from my middle school that I contacted and interviewed. Because they are former students there is an element of trust built with the students and their parents that allowed me access to interview both parties, but because the students no longer attended my school, I had no power or control over the relationship which might tarnish the data I collected. Selecting these former students also allowed me to have more insight on their level of talent as they all had been students in our advanced classes in middle school. This required a ranking score on a matrix consisting of CogAT cognitive ability test scores, STAR and PARCC standardized test scores, grades, and a teacher recommendation score based upon identified talented behaviors. I selected individuals who were currently enrolled in “honors” and/or “AP” courses at their high school. Once I identified possible participants, I contacted their parents and asked for permission to conduct interviews with their child and one parent in the summer before the 2018-2019 school year. Interviews took place during mutually agreed upon times at the middle school conference room. I explained to the parents that I hoped to learn their children’s perception of how their parents influence their achievement. I also explained that I will be asking the parent for their self-perception on how their actions influence
their child’s achievement and motivation to learn. I asked the parents to talk to their children about how they would feel about being interviewed and if parents and students agree, I would send an informed consent letter for them to sign along with an assent letter to be signed by the students. This will be a convenience sample. Each talented student and mother of each talented student signed the appropriate consent and assent form.

Interviews

I conducted two interviews with four talented high school students and one interview with each of the student’s mothers. The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Their mother was selected because of ease of access based upon their preliminary work schedule. This additional availability of time also led to increased time spent with their children in comparison to the talented students’ fathers. I chose to interview students because I wanted to gather descriptive data and gain insight through the talented students’ own words on how they interpret their parents influence on their achievement. I interviewed one of each student’s mothers to triangulate and strengthen the data. I used pseudonyms for all of the participants to protect confidentiality and anonymity. The initial student interviews were held during the week of July 17th, 2018. The mothers were interviewed the week of July 24th and final student interviews were the first week of August. This enabled me to have time to transcribe initial interviews for follow up questions or emerging patterns before moving on with the second interviews. I also audio recorded the interviews on a recorder. I took limited field notes to document contextual information about the interviews, such as the subject’s body language, mannerisms, behaviors and my thoughts and observations as the interviews progressed. These field notes were not as detailed as I hoped as I focused more on listening to the participants and asking the next
question. I created a general interview guide adapted from a qualitative case study of three gifted high school students who underachieve (Moore, 1997). Due to this being a qualitative research study, interviews were semi-structured. Questions were open-ended and designed to explore participants’ beliefs and perceptions about the role their parents play in shaping their achievement and motivation to learn. Follow up questions were formed from the participants’ responses to these opening questions. Follow up probes narrowed in focus and responses from the first interview generated questions and areas focus in the second interview. The following are the questions I asked and the topics I covered during the first round of interviews.

Questions for Students:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me what you do when really want to learn something.
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- Tell me about your school. How do you feel about school?
- How is school different now than it was in middle school and elementary school?
- Tell me about your typical school day.
- How do you learn?
- What do you think about grades?
- Describe your family.
- Describe your relationship with your parents.
- Can you describe any rules/guidelines/expectations that your parents have for you?
- What kind of resources and opportunities do your parents provide?
What is the difference between encouraging someone and pressuring someone? Describe the level of pressure you may or may not feel from your parents.

Describe your life outside school.

How are decisions made in your family?

How involved are your parents in your grades, interests, and extra-curricular activities?

If you could change one thing about your relationship with your parents what would that be?

Questions for Parents:

Tell me about ____________.

Describe ________ as a student.

How would you describe your relationship with ________.

What was ________ like in middle and elementary school?

How has ________ been challenged at school?

Tell me about ________ performance at school.

Can you describe any rules/guidelines/expectations that you have in place for _____?

What kind of resources and opportunities do you provide for ______?

What is the difference between encouraging someone and pressuring someone? Describe the level of pressure you may or may not put on ____________.

How are decisions made in your family?

How involved are you in ______ grades, interests, and extra-curricular activities?

If you could change one thing about your relationship with ________ what would that be?
During the second round of student interviews I first followed up with clarifications from the first round of interviews specific to each student. In some cases I asked students to expand on a thought or a comment from the first round and in others I would follow up on a new topic or theme that was introduced in the first round. In some second interviews I followed up on something that their mom might have said to me in their interview to see how it coincided or conflicted with one of their initial comments. In each case the follow-up was very specific to the student and their responses from the first round. Then I asked all students the following questions to end the second interview:

1. How much control or independence do you feel you have at this point in your life?
2. How much emotional support do you receive from your parents?
3. I want your opinion on how you think each of these different groups impacts your achievement and motivation: Self, parents, teachers, friends.
4. What makes you stressed?
5. How do you deal with stress?
6. Give me your advice for parents of talented students.

Analysis

The data were collected through audio recording. Once the interviews were recorded, I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed the interviews. I then took the initial step in qualitative analysis according to Emmerson, Fretz and Shaw and read the interview transcripts and field notes (as cited in Maxwell, 2013). Once that process was complete, I began the coding process. I read through the documents for patterns and topics that my data contained, and then wrote down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases
became my coding categories (Bodgan & Biklen, 2015). Some examples of coding categories were “Parental Expectations”, “Resources”, and “Student Independence” etc. The major codes will be more general, incorporating a large number of activities, attitudes and behaviors, while sub-codes will break things down into smaller categories (Bodgan & Biklen). Rules, Communication, and Grades are examples of sub-codes of the Parental Expectation coding category. Once I read over the data several times and created the coding categories, I went through all the data and assigned coding categories to each unit of data. This involved me making decisions on the data and the coding categories resulted in data fitting into multiple coding categories (Bodgan & Biklen). Finally, I entered all of the coded information into a program called Evernote. This program allowed me to put multiple tags (codes) on sections of the data, which made it easier to sort and find the data. I also entered the data into a program called QDA Miner Lite, which assisted me in looking for patterns within the data. The program allows you to see the frequency of specific words/tags/codes which I could then use to search the documents and look for new patterns or themes that I might have missed when going over each transcript manually.

After the data were coded I looked for relationships and connections that existed within and between each of the coding categories to see any themes that developed from the data analysis. Once the relationships and connections were made, I identified and formulated theories about how talented middle school students felt about the influence their parents have on their academic achievement and motivation to learn, including similarities and differences between the two different groups of talented students.
Validity

As Maxwell (2012) mentions, it is important to understand how I am influencing what the subject says and how this affects the validity of the conclusions I draw from the interview. By interviewing students and their mother, I used data triangulation (Maxwell, 2012) to strengthen my data. I used respondent validation (member check), as a way to ensure accurate data (Maxwell, 2012). Getting regular feedback from the participants I was interviewing was an important way to ensure that I was not misinterpreting the meaning of the information participants were telling me in the interviews (Maxwell, 2012). When making my conclusions, I also looked for discrepant data, to see if I needed to modify my conclusions in any way. Getting feedback from others and reporting both sides of the evidence for the reader to evaluate can be the best ways to guard against bias in my conclusions (Maxwell, 2012).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how talented high school students view the influence their parents have on their academic achievement and motivation to learn. In this chapter I will present the findings from interviews I conducted with four talented high school students and their mothers. Research questions guiding these interviews include: How do talented high school students perceive the influence their parents have on their achievement and motivation to learn? What are the specific differences and similarities in the findings between the talented high school students? How do the talented high school students’ perceptions differ from that of their parents? The findings are organized in four case studies where I present the perceptions and feedback of each talented student and their mother. Each case study is then subdivided by similar themes first giving the perceptions of the student and then their mother on the same theme. By each case study having similar themes the reader will be able to see the differences and similarities between the talented student responses. By presenting the talented student perceptions immediately followed by their mother’s perceptions the reader will be able to see the differences and similarities between the student and parent responses. At the end of each section I summarize the takeaways.
Jessica Smith is 15 years old and starting her freshman year at a Midwest suburban high school. She is the only child of her parents: Mandy and Laurel. Jessica is a high achieving student earning straight A’s in her academic classes. Jessica has an earnest personality and is very expressive with her facial expressions and hand gestures. She enjoys talking and was excited to share her thoughts with me.

Jessica’ mother, Mandy, describes Jessica as a fierce, energetic, and very opinionated teenager who likes to have fun and enjoy life. She adds that Jessica is well rounded in her interests and academics but needs to be reined in every once in a while and reminded to get to work on her studies/school work. Even though she is a teenager, Mrs. Smith emphasizes that Jessica also has empathy for other people and often puts herself in their shoes to try to gain their perspective. The Smiths have chosen not to raise Jessica in any specific religion, but Mandy stresses that they try to instill being kind to all people because it is the right thing to do, not because someone is keeping track of it somewhere.

Mandy was born and raised locally in the suburban Midwest. Neither of her parents went to college, and her father, who did not like to work for other people, opened his own business. Mandy went away to a small art school on the East Coast to study theater and to “get out of Illinois.” She came back to Illinois and taught fitness classes while going to graduate school for exercise science. Mandy’s father granted her shares in his company and a job after school, which provided her health care and the stability she needed. According to Mandy, this stability has allowed her to get a paycheck and pursue other interests she loves, teaching fitness classes and performing in local theater productions on a continuous basis. Jessica’s dad, Laurel is also
employed at a white collar job and does a lot of volunteer work in his spare time. The dual income in the household provides Jessica with material resources that she needs.

**Interests and Extra-curricular Activities**

Interests and extra-curricular activities were chosen as a theme because in order for a talent domain to be explored it is important that the talented student shows an interest in that area. Extra-curricular activities represent opportunities for talented students to develop talent and skill in an area of interest.

**Jessica’s Perception of her Interests and Extra-curricular Activities**

Jessica’s parents have had a clear influence on the activities she has participated in and how she spends her free time. Jessica is active and involved in volleyball, both in school and outside of school on a club team. She is also involved in theater and choir and plays the piano, having taken private lessons since she was in kindergarten.

I play volleyball and I’m involved with theater and that is pretty much because my mom likes theater and my dad likes volleyball, so I kind of got the impact of both of them…Oh, I play the piano and again it’s because of my mom, because I grew up just listening to her…listening to her play and sing…Everything that I do extra-curricular wise was kind of impacted by my parents…that is all my dad and mom mixed together and that is kind of my outside school life.

Jessica, although influenced by her parents’ interests, has been able to pick up activities and drop others based on her enjoyment of the activity. She knows her parents will always be there to support her interests in any way they can. When discussing volleyball, Jessica talked about how her involvement grew as she stopped going to dance and her enjoyment and desire to improve in
volleyball drove her motivation. She also explained that her parents supported her decision, saying

Then I got more involved in volleyball and I discovered I liked it more than dance because I wanted to go. I wanted to put in the work. I wanted to get better. If I wanted to do something and I was serious about it they (parents) will drive me anywhere that I need to go and that is how it has always been.

The amount of money Jessica’s parents pay for travel volleyball enters her decision making process when deciding between volleyball and another activity that she loves, theater. Jessica knows that in high school she will need to spend more time on academics due to the increased level of rigor and time to complete homework. Jessica speaks to her plan for dividing her time after school between the sports she participates in and her musical extra-curricular activities, indicating that volleyball may edge out theater club.

Pretty much the three that I am sticking to right now is volleyball, piano and theater. Choir kind of goes into theater because choir is going to be my elective all year. So volleyball I am going to have school season that starts in August and choir that overlaps with that because it is during the day. Piano is going to be once or twice a week outside of school and then I have club season that starts in November right after school season ends and that goes up until June. So it is still up in the air whether or not I am going to be doing the spring musical because it overlaps with club and it depends on how they [her club volleyball team] react about it. If not I might just not be able to do theater at all which is going to be really sad if I can’t because I really care about it but volleyball comes first before theater. That really hurts to say it but club volleyball, we are paying a lot of money to do it and it’s a commitment and theater may be but it’s not as important… I am doing school [volleyball] but if I do school and not club it’s kinda like I did three months of hard work and then I stopped. …I love volleyball and I love theater but at the end of the day I will pick volleyball, which is sad.

Jessica’s parents provide her a balance between independence and support when it comes to her extra-curricular activities. She realizes her parents leave the daily decision to attend her scheduled extra-curricular activities up to her. They also require that if there is additional skill training or new opportunities she would like to participate in, that she is the one who seeks out those opportunities and brings them to their attention. This independence requires a certain level
of discipline and initiative that Jessica does not always display. Jessica admits she has quit activities and missed out on other opportunities due to her lack of discipline and initiative.

So, I sometimes have a tendency to not want to go to things, just to be lazy. Like I did dance a lot up until I was in 6th grade so that was a really big part of my life. But it came to a part where I was like “yeah…I don’t want to go today” and then my parents were like “ok she does not feel good we won’t let her go” and then it turned into every single day that it was like that. So they were like “yeah we are not going to let you do dance anymore because you clearly don’t like it that much”. … so how it was this summer was that if I wanted to do like a volleyball camp, if I wanted to do some sort of camp I had do the research myself and I had to find it and then they will take me to wherever. Even if it is a college in Indiana they will take me to go and go to the camp, I just have to find it. And actually this year I did not care about finding it. I did not take the time and they were like “ok then you are not doing any camps this year”. Like that is how it was if you are not going to take the time then we are not going to take you. I was like “oh, ok.”

Mandy Perception of Jessica’s Interests and Extra-Curricular Activities

Mandy sees volleyball as Jessica’s top priority right now but stresses that Jessica also loves music.

But I know going into high school, her schedule is going to be different and she will be in volleyball, so I don’t know if we will be able to get lessons [piano] in there. I think she just enjoys picking up music and she loves the jazz band and her all girl group. Oh those are just good things to have. She may be able to pick up the music and do that when she gets older.

Jessica’s parents support her interests no matter what they are. They support her by attending her activities such as games and concerts, although Mandy cannot be involved with Jessica’s club volleyball team as much as she wanted due to her busy schedule. They also support Jessica by driving her to activities and support her financially by paying for Jessica to join club teams or take private lessons to help her develop her talents and skills.

As far as extra-curricular I try to go to everything that possibly I can. My husband was more involved with the volleyball because I had things that I had to…I was doing things. I try to participate as much as I can. I try to show up to everything. That includes meetings, games open houses, anything when it comes to volunteering for her team or whatever. I really do, I really try to participate. …Anything special that she wants to do
I would find her teachers or coaches. When she expressed her interest in volleyball we started checking out a club team so you have more time on the court. So we helped her with that. If she wants to continue pursuing that she is going to have to want to. Anything that she really wanted to do was like ok let’s try this. The same thing when she wanted to dance. We started at the park district. The she wanted to branch out to a private studio. Ok let’s do that.

Mandy struggles with how much to push her daughter to participate in the activities she thinks will be good for her and letting her daughter choose her own activities and how much she wants to participate in those activities. When Jessica shows an interest in something, Mandy tries to provide the resources she needs to pursue the interest. But for Mandy it is hard to find the balance between pushing her daughter to take on challenges and allowing her daughter to have control based on her interests.

One of the things is that if I had to do it all over with I would let her kinda guide instead of…because there is a fine line where the parent, me, is kind of pushing her because this is what I want you to do. Because if she does not express an interest…the kid is not going to want to do that. But like her cooking. She loved to cook when she was a little kid so. The park district had little cooking lessons and I always provided her easy recipes or the Jiffy box muffin mix and let her do it. She does, she is a great cook. She will make dinner, she makes crepes for her friends, she is known as the cook. I got her utensils like spatulas for her hands when she was little so she could mix things up.

Parental Expectations

Parental expectations was a priori theme as it related to complex families having high expectations for student achievement. Also as it relates to the concept of the parents balancing support and independence of their talented child. It is important to see how the child and the parent perceive parental expectations when it comes to academics, home life and social life.
Jessica’s Perception of Parental Expectations

Jessica knows that when it comes to academic expectations, it is her dad’s, not her mom’s, expectations that she works hard to meet. Jessica’s dad is home more often to guide her in her studies, give academic assistance, and answer questions she may have about academic concepts. Jessica also knows that her dad’s coursework in college was more academically rigorous than her mom’s, who was a theater and exercise science major. In fact, she knows from previous experiences that her mom is not much help when it comes to providing academic assistance. “My dad has cared more about academics than my mom has always, my mom just kind of…no offense to her, but academic wise I think I know more than she does and she has even said that herself. But my dad has always been the one to help me with school.”

Jessica does not feel there are a lot of rules to follow at home. In fact she could only think of one rule: doing her homework before going out with friends. When further exploring the topic of independence and control, Jessica felt she is not old enough to go to places like Chicago without an adult and actually prefers when someone’s parent is with the group of friends when they go out.

Definitely not. They [her parents] will not let me go somewhere that they know is not safe. Like they know the mall is fine, movies, restaurants they know that is fine and I can take care of myself, but if it is something crazy I am not even that adventurous, but I am not weighed down(by rules), they are not extremely protective that I cannot do anything. I know some people like that but they are definitely not like that.

Jessica feels comfortable and open with her parents. She initiates conversations with both of her parents equally and knows they will listen to her. Jessica sees her mom’s communication style as more repetitive and nagging as opposed to her dad, who will mention things once and then talk about natural consequences that will occur from Jessica not taking action.
Both of them equally I can talk to them about the same things. It’s not like I can only talk to my mom about this (topic), my dad will listen. He might not care, but he knows that if it is important to me he needs to care about it or he needs to listen. …My mom definitely nags me more. That is a word that comes up a lot in my family. We have deals most of the time, she’s like “I will stop nagging you if you keep your promise that finish this by the end of the week, like I won’t talk to you about it you are just going to do it on your own”. I’m like “ok”. Sometimes I finish it and sometimes I don’t. Then if I don’t then she is like “yeah I should have kept nagging you so there is no excuse”. My dad definitely does not nag me that much. He normally says you know you have to get it done so just get it done. But my mom has to constantly remind me. (laughs)

Even though Jessica feels comfortable talking with her parents about any topic, the one thing she would change about her relationship with her parents is her desire to talk more honestly with them. Jessica’s experience is that when she talks to her parents about topics like problems with her friends (which she refers to as drama), they react to things in a more serious manner than is necessary.

They are very open to me about things but I am not very open to them. It is not a two way street. …they blow things out of proportion. They make a big deal about everything which is respectable because I am their kid. That’s just kind of how it is. But if I am going to talk to them about, again 8th grade, there is a lot of drama because we are fourteen years old that is just how life is. …if something was bothering me I had to just keep it to myself. Because if I mentioned something about drama then they would just be like, “oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh”. So that is why I said I wasn’t very open because they kind of take things the wrong way and they make them more serious than they actually are.

Mandy’s Perception of Parental Expectations

Mandy does not see a need for imposing a lot of rules on Jessica, referencing that she does not even like to call them “rules.” She spoke of common sense family expectations, such as Jessica cleaning up after herself and the initiative she takes to complete tasks on her own. This parenting style has given Jessica a lot of freedom as she grows up.

O.K. just hate to call it rules….expectations. You have to be kind (laughs). You make a mess you have to clean it up. Expectations, we have a family rule sign in our house and what are the things? Yeah be kind, clean up, and treat each other with respect. I guess
those are all unwritten rules. Yeah she knows when she has her friends over you have to make sure that they clean up as well. …I guess one of the rules, was it an unwritten rule, she got to come home and relax and then she would do her homework. But she would do it. I didn’t really have to tell her to.

Mandy realizes that a lot of her communication with Jessica is being critical to her, usually in regard to everyday tasks and chores. This is something she is trying to change by giving Jessica more long range goals and not nagging her throughout the week about the same thing. She has found this new approach is successful in that Jessica usually has the task completed by the end of the week without repeatedly being reminded about it.

As a parent, I catch myself…I guess one of the things that is the negative part of me is being too critical and that I need to know when to shut my mouth. She needs to figure stuff out on her own. I need to guide her and then be quiet….like the everyday stuff. Clean your room. Do this. Do this. And I understand as a kid that it is going to go in one ear and out the other. She is going to need to learn especially because I kind of tell her when you have a roommate in college you are not going to be able to leave your clothes on the floor. So I said by the end of the week, so now I give her goals by the end of the week and then I need to shut my mouth. And it usually happens and she has responded well to that.

Mandy feels that she has a good relationship with her daughter. She emphasizes that there is a lot of positive communication between Jessica and herself, including nonverbal signs of affection like hugs and kisses as well as often telling each other that they love each other. Mandy is also aware that teenagers’ moods can shift rapidly and does not hold that against Jessica.

I think it is a really good one [their relationship]. There are a lot of hugs. There are a lot of ‘I love you,’ a lot of kisses and then of course maybe an hour later it’s like ‘Why are you looking at me?’ But that is ok, because that is a teenager.

Grades and Learning

Grades and Learning was chosen as a priori theme due to the relation they have to the main topic of talented student’s perception of who influences their achievement and motivation
to learn. It was important to get the talented students viewpoint on this topic and then to compare it to their mothers and that of their talented peers.

**Jessica’s Perception of Grades and Learning**

Jessica knows that her dad is the primary person that she will be talking with about her grades because he is home more often and her mom does not talk to her about grades. She feels supported by her dad’s expectations. She also feels she has high expectations for her own performance.

Personally I was raised that my dad said as long as you try as long as you study, you put time in, you don’t wait until the last minute, and you just don’t blow it off completely he will never care what I get on the test. He said as long as I put in the time and I care about it that he will always be happy, whatever I get because he knows that I tried. …I don’t know, personally I feel like I just failed even if I got a B. I just have high expectations for myself and I know my parents do too.

Jessica believes there is too much emphasis put on getting good grades in school and that grades should not define who a person is. Classes being differentiated at school by ability level has prompted uncomfortable conversations between Jessica and her friends. These conversations make her feel stressed.

At the end of the day it’s just a number and a letter in the gradebook, I know that is not very respectful to say but it should not define who you are. …Yeah so being separated into classes and knowing that’s the low class, that’s the middle class and that’s the high class, not to brag but I have always been in the high class. Not looking down but I know a couple of my friends who are in the middle class and they are like “Why am I not in the high class? I’ve got perfectly fine grades and this is defining who I am, and this is how I’ve got to live for the rest of the year being in the middle and knowing I am not good enough to get in the high (class).”
Mandy’s Perception of Grades and Learning

Mandy states that her husband is the person that works with Jessica on homework and other academic endeavors. She feels that it is important that Jessica gets into college but stresses that there is more to life than good grades. Mandy feels that Jessica will do well in whatever college she gets into but she wants her to focus on the “whole” person, mind and body.

Resources, Support and Being an Only Child

Being an only child was an emergent theme that came up in my interviews of Jessica. Since she talked about it at length, I felt that it shaped part of who she was and needed to be mentioned to give an authentic representation of what she talked about and how it contributed or took away from her achievements and motivation to learn. Since she was the only subject that was an only child this theme was not explored with any other talented student.

Jessica’s Perception on Resources, Support and Being an Only Child

Jessica feels that her family has a big home for the few people that are living there. She has her own room, bathroom, tablet, cell phone and school laptop to do homework. Jessica spends more time in her dad’s office than he does, using the “shared” computer located there. One thing she thinks makes her home unique compared to her peers is that they only have one television, without traditional cable television service. “We do have a TV, but we just have one and it is in the basement so we don’t have anything in the living room which is ‘weird’ apparently? And then we also don’t have cable so we just have Netflix which is fine because we’re not really big TV watchers.”
Growing up as an only child, Jessica has not experienced having brothers or sisters and is not used to living with people her age. She knows that she will need to learn this skill in college. “Um yeah it is great being an only child, but I feel like I am not really use to living with someone else, like dealing with someone else my own age or somewhat my own age. That is going to be something I’m going to have to learn…being a roommate.”

Expanding on being alone, Jessica explains that her parents are busy people and after spending a significant amount of time alone each day after school, it is usually her dad that she ends up eating dinner with.

So, my dad gets home at 6 if it is a normal day umm and my mom is really never home (pause) in the afternoon because she has classes and those can go from 5:30-6:30 or she comes home at 9; it all depends on what day it is, but normally I am home alone because my parents both work. Like my dad… he would come and pick me up and take me to dinner, it all depends, but normally, I’m home alone the whole afternoon.

Being an only child with two busy parents has also shaped some of her routines and built Jessica’s independence. These routines involve getting her breakfast table setting out, making her lunch, getting her outfit put together, and taking a shower all in the evening so everything is “ready” for her in the morning and she does not feel rushed. She has also been getting herself to school each day by riding the school bus since she was nine years old.

I have been making everything (breakfast and lunch) myself since early elementary school. Anyways, I have taken the bus since 4th grade. …But when it comes to school I always have everything ready in the morning I mean at night so I’ll be ready in the morning. I’ll have my lunch ready I had like my cups and my bowls set out for breakfast. I have my clothes set up. I have everything so all I have to do is put the stuff in or like put my clothes on and I will be ready. And I always woke up really, really early for no reason, just so I can have an extra hour for myself.

Jessica believes that being alone has also taught her time management skills and how to be more productive. She knows that tasks still needed to be completed while she spends large
amounts of time home by herself. Without her parent’s guidance, she organized her time after
schools so she would complete both required tasks and activities of choice.

That (being alone) actually taught me how to be productive. I learned that even when my
parents weren’t home I still need to be doing something. So I either read, cleaned,
practiced piano, I did something and yeah being alone most of the time taught me how to
manage my time better. So if I wasn’t alone as much I feel like I wouldn’t have learned
that.

But spending so much time alone also caused Jessica to feel lonely as a young child. She
did not like being alone and begged her parents for a sibling. Jessica hangs out with friends
when she can and learned to occupy her time when she was alone. She knows that since her
parents both work a lot, she will continue to spend time alone.

It’s just like, yes I have been home alone since quite the majority of my life. I’ve been
home alone since second grade and I just have had to deal with that. But I hang out with
friends and I just kind of, I’ve always had to just entertain myself. It was not the best
thing as a child. I was very, very lonely. That’s just an understatement. It was honestly
a big problem and I begged for a sibling for a while. But uh, yeah, since my parents are
always working, I am alone.

Jessica talked about having babysitters when she was younger. She also talked about how
her dad made her feel safe when she was home alone by being available on the phone if she
needed him before he came home from work.

Then if I was home alone like for instance if my mom was going to a class and my dad
had to stay over at work a little longer he would be on the phone with me. I would just
leave the phone sitting so if I needed anything he would be there. That’s kind of how it
worked when I was younger and gradually I stopped doing that and I just learned that if I
needed anything I could just call them. This was before I had a phone too, so I used the
home phone instead of just being able to text them.

Most recently the productivity Jessica has felt being alone has given way to spending
more time on social media: YouTube and Netflix. She also often chooses to spend time with
friends as opposed to being home alone.
I do prefer being with friends more. I obviously don’t need a babysitter if my parents are going to be gone that night. I would rather just stay home and relax, watch a movie or I call up one of my friends and say “hey, can we hang out I am going to be bored the rest of the night” and that is normally how it goes. I do prefer to be with people because I am social.

Mandy Smith’s Perception of Resources, Support and Jessica being an Only Child

Mrs. Smith does not find the lack of a television in the house as Jessica was growing up unusual and realizes that having a television these days does not matter much to teenagers. “She hasn’t had TV since we got rid of it like what, eight years ago. So if there is something that we have to watch we have to go next door to the neighbor’s house. … I guess TV is being replaced by their [teenagers’] phone.”

Mrs. Smith explained that she started bringing Jessica to the stage when she was two years old and she would meet other actors and walk around the stage. She also added that she enjoys being a mom much more now as opposed to when Jessica was younger because Jessica is able to have conversations, give opinions, and is more mature. “My relationship with her, I love it now. I am so glad that she is not a baby anymore. I am glad she is not a toddler. I just like the moments now. I don’t sit there and wish for days gone by, no way. Just watching her grow and change is really cool.”

Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions

Encouragement, pressure and control of decisions was chosen as a theme because they were concepts of importance guided by theory.
Jessica’s Perception of Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions

There are many areas in Jessica’s life in which she feels pressure. The sources of this pressure include her parents, school, sports and from within herself. When it comes to feeling pressure from her parents Jessica admits it is mostly her parents talking to her about homework and telling her that chores around the house need to be completed. She also acknowledges that her parents probably see these demands as encouraging her to be efficient in her responsibilities.

I feel like it is a little bit of both now that I am thinking about it because they may find that encouraging that they are encouraging me but it may seem like pressuring to me because they are like “ok finish your homework, ok do the dishes, ok do the laundry. That sounds like pressuring to me but for them it is encouraging to be just like “get this done because it is what you have to do and it is your role in this” [family].

Jessica says she feels the most pressure when she is at school due to feeling the need to do well on assessments as well as the amount of homework and studying she has to complete. She has been able to motivate herself with positive internal self-talk.

School makes me probably the most stressed out of all of the things there is. School, I know if there are a lot of things to do, I kind of just sit there and think, how am I going to finish all of this? Then I just notice that I have to take matters into my own hands and have to do it. Just the load of work that I have gotten kind of blows my mind sometimes. Yeah, school itself has made myself stressed.

The pressure that Jessica feels from her involvement in sports, and particularly volleyball, comes from performance anxiety and her desire to not make mistakes. However, Jessica realizes that when she feels stress while playing volleyball it makes her perform worse. “Volleyball has made me very stressed in the past. It is getting better. Volleyball, if there is like a really big tournament coming up obviously you are going to be nervous about that, wondering if you are going to do good. Once I get stressed I don’t work well under pressure.”
Overall Jessica realizes that the pressure she feels mostly comes from within herself and not from her parents, teachers or coaches. She says she second guesses her efforts after she gets a grade below an A and also has a negative mindset going into exams. “I kind of am hard on myself a lot, which isn’t very helpful but for school and for volleyball I am hard on myself. If I get a B I am normally upset with myself knowing that I could have tried harder. Again I don’t work well under pressure so big tests aren’t my best.”

Jessica has developed coping mechanisms to deal with the pressure she feels at school and in volleyball so that if she makes a mistake it does not multiply. This involves positive self-talk about the practice she has completed to make herself ready as well as visualizing herself successfully doing the task.

Normally I recover though. …I normally just have to tell myself that I have done this before. For school I have taken tests before and I have done well. Same for volleyball. In the beginning of the season when we were learning rotations and numbers and I am a setter so where to set people and how to get it to where it is easier for them it was just a lot in my brain because it was my first year with a good club. So there’s all of that and I was constantly rehearsing it in my mind and (thinking) am I going to do this right? Then normally when I got on the court I was like “oh, this is easy”. Everywhere I was doing it perfectly. Yeah, I normally work myself up and then it is nothing.

Jessica feels supported by her parents in that they both show up for her events on a regular basis. Her mom is also able to pick up on signs when she is feeling pressure and asks her questions to provide emotional support by talking her through her worries.

My mom and my dad for sports, even if we like suck they are still going to show up. My dad last year actually for club, he showed up for every single tournament and every single game for school. He did not miss one. Which I don’t know how, but that really felt good that he was always there even if we weren’t doing well. Emotionally for me if I am not having a good day, they normally notice. The second that I say something or body language, my mom is the first one to recognize it. I don’t know, it’s probably a motherly instinct or something. She’s normally like “hey, what’s wrong? Did something happen?” Then if something did happen I’m still like “nah, I’m fine” because I said I am not very open about that. But if it’s like I didn’t do well on a test or if I got into a fight with one of my friends, she will normally talk to me about it and that’s usually the end of it. But they are always there if I need something.
Mandy’s Perception of Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions

Mrs. Smith reflects on the struggle she has in balancing encouragement and pressure and how the pressure she puts on Jessica may stem from unfulfilled goals Mandy may have had for herself. At times, Mandy feels like she leads Jessica into decisions about activities because they were interests she pursued when she was younger. She also says that children become overscheduled by their parents because they provide their children with too many opportunities.

You know you gotta let…one thing is that I have to let Jessica take the lead. Leading the witness! (laughs) Are you really leading the witness because you want your kid to fulfill something that you didn’t get to do as a kid? Obviously you want to give them all of the opportunities that you can. Sometimes they just want to be (a kid) and play. Yeah there is a very fine line so I should have taken the lead from her. I know if she really liked it and enjoyed it than can I help lead her in that direction. I think as a parent you need to sit and reflect. Are you doing this for yourself and for your own ego, because this is missing from your life? Well then why don’t you go take the dance class then and let your kid go play in the yard?

Mandy believes that decisions are made in a collaborative manner in their household. She and her husband involve Jessica in decisions about vacations, and they expose her and encourage her to try new things like food choices or helicopter rides.

(exaggerated funny voice) Usually it’s a collaboration [making decisions]. Somebody comes up with an idea. Like we have this Tokyo thing. Let’s go to Tokyo for the Olympics. My husband is doing a lot of the research. But we will collaborate. I think we collaborate. I ask for input. Like this weekend we are going to the city. And I asked Jessica if she would like to come with and she was like “yeah.” Well we are probably going to a restaurant that you are going to have to try new things, are you ok with that? She goes “yes I am.” I said “ok.” We are going to do something really exciting. We are going to take a helicopter ride pending the weather. If the weather is not good, then we won’t go on it. She also wanted to go see a play. I said, “OK let’s go to a play.”

Mandy states that they have exposed Jessica to more adult content since she was a child by attending the plays Mandy has performed in. This continues with their choice to take Jessica to see the play Avenue Q. This play explores issues like sex, drinking and surfing the web for pornography. Since there are only three people in their family unit, she feels like they have
treated Jessica and her opinion on family decisions as more of an equal. She also realizes that her time with Jessica at home will be running out soon.

We are going to see Avenue Q. That is not something you would bring a grade school student to. I think a teenager will think it is really, really cool. I know the show inside and out. The subject matter is really….nothing she hasn’t heard before so. But it will be good, so yeah we are going to see Avenue Q. So she is thrilled. When it comes to decisions, yeah I think it is a collaboration. Because there is only three of us. So you know what I mean? I want to include her in everything, I mean she is not going to be with us for very long. What we have got four years and then (snapped fingers) she is out of there. So I don’t have much time (laughs).

Influencing Achievement and Motivation to Learn

Jessica’s Perception of who Influences her Achievement and Motivation to Learn

Jessica believes that her parents have had the biggest impact on her motivation and achievement. Her dad has assisted her with academics, being able to answer her questions and provide guidance on most academic subjects. Her mom has supported her emotionally by talking with her and physically supports her with her expertise in exercise science. Jessica realizes that being supported by each parent in this way has created the well balanced person she is today.

They have helped me achieve and motivate me in positive ways, in every positive way possible. Even if that involved nagging or reminding me constantly to do something, it gets done and they motivate me.

My dad has always helped me with [school] work and my mom has always helped me with techniques and like how to maintain myself and it kind of all just came together. One parent was good at, like my dad was amazing at helping with academics. My mom was helping me with mental and physical, like how to maintain myself. So when both of those came together they really, really helped me and if I didn’t have that I wouldn’t be the person I am today.

Besides her parents, the group Jessica said most impacts her achievement and motivation is her friends. The comradery and partnership of studying together has helped motivate her in the
classroom and on the court. They often get together and work ahead to get as much homework and studying done as possible for the following week.

My one friend and I, the last week of school, we went into Barnes and Noble on Mother’s Day and we finished and studied for everything for that following week. So we always motivate each other and get each other up, academically and athletically and every way possible, umm but yeah. We always just call up and just be like “hey, do you want to work on our math study guide together and we can like finish it and get it done so we don’t have to do it this week.” And they are like “sure”. Then we bounce ideas off of each other and always motivate (each other). I am really grateful for my group of friends.

Jessica realizes that she is the person who has to do the work to achieve in school. She has learned to motivate herself to get tasks accomplished. However, there are times that she struggles to get started, so she has established a set routine and has used starting techniques such as writing out a plan and taking a “first step” to complete her tasks.

Definitely there are days when I don’t want to do anything. I think everybody has had that day. But I know what I have to get done. It’s not like, yeah I nag myself sometimes. I like need to, I know what I need to get done. Yeah, I just maintain healthy habits and starting techniques that I have learned and I just kind of buildup on that and I motivate myself.

The teachers who have helped Jessica the most are the teachers who have attempted to build positive relationships with her. They have talked to her about not only the curriculum, but have showed interest in her life outside of school. She mentions that a teacher’s ability to differentiate instruction to the different abilities of their students is an attribute that has helped her achieve. Jessica explained that she has had teachers who have at times motivated her in a negative way. These teachers have used poor teaching strategies and procedures in the classroom and have talked down to their students to create a negative learning environment.

All of the teachers that I’ve liked, their social and they talk to me about more things than just school, like family or friends. Like a few teachers have always just opened up to me which has really been helpful in the classroom and out of the classroom....They know how to adapt to every single student in the classroom. So if I am having trouble in something obviously that is what teachers are meant for, to help. But some teachers I know are not capable of adapting to different students capabilities.
Some have negatively impacted me… Yeah, ummm some I have had in the back of my mind, this is not how to teach. If I ever become a teacher this is not how I want to act to students who are fourteen and fifteen.

When asked if there were other individuals or groups who have impacted her learning and motivation, Jessica mentioned that her volleyball coaches have had an impact because of their persistence in asking her about her academics. This reminder helps her because she knows that she has to have good academics to participate in volleyball.

Mandy’s Perception of who Influences Jessica’s Achievement and Motivation to Learn

Since this question was very specific to Jessica’s perception of who influences her achievement and motivation to learn I only asked Jessica this question and not Mandy.

Jessica Smith Takeaway

Jessica and her mom Mandy are both on the same page when it comes to her extracurricular interests and activities. Jessica’s interests were heavily influenced by her parent’s interest and activities. Music, dance, theater and volleyball were all activities that Jessica’s parents were involved in. As she got older Jessica was able to choose her activities based on her interest and enjoyment level. Her parents also gave her the freedom of when to attend practice and allowed her to quit an activity or join a new one as she wanted. In the end, she enjoys playing piano, playing volleyball and being involved in theater.

From the talent development perspective, Jessica’s parents involved her in activities outside of school from a very early age, providing early exposure to areas of interest. While they may have been their interests originally they turned into interests she enjoys and continues to develop her talent and skills. They also provided Jessica financial resources to attain private
lessons and club team participation that would allow her to further develop her talents in these domains. Finally, they provided her with transportation to practices, rehearsals, games, tournaments and recitals.

Communication is an area where Jessica and Mandy’s perceptions are different. Where Mandy sees a completely trusting relationship with open communication, Jessica’s perception is slightly different. Jessica knows that her parents are very open to her and have talked to her in a very straightforward manner from an early age. Jessica feels comfortable talking to her parents on most subjects or if there is a problem, but also is not totally open with them because she feels that they have categorized conversations about her friends as being filled with “drama”. Jessica also feels that her parents blow things out of proportion. This has caused her not to talk to her parents about friend related issues, a point that Mandy is not aware of.

When it comes to making family decisions Mandy and Laurel treat Jessica very much like an adult. Both Jessica and Mandy expressed that in their small family unit of three, family decisions are discussed with her and that her opinion holds a great amount of weight in the decision making process.

Outside of final grades on report cards Mandy really had no knowledge at all of Jessica’s academic work, leaving academic help and assistance completely up to her husband. Her perspective that there was more to life than grades is shared by Jessica, despite the fact that Jessica achieves at a high level. Jessica felt the most pressure when it came to her academic workload. Jessica and Mandy both stated that Mandy did help her cope with stress by calming her down, showing Jessica breathing techniques and doing yoga together.

In terms of complex families, the Smith Family encourages and models a strong work ethic, productive use of time, setting high standards and dedication to doings one’s best. The
Smith family is very high when it comes to differentiation, allowing Jessica a lot of freedom to develop individually by seeking out new challenges and opportunities. When it comes to integration, Jessica feels a sense of support, but mostly from her father, simply from the fact that his work schedule allows him to be home more often. Mandy, who also works during the week chooses to participate in two extra-curricular activities of her own, teaching fitness classes and being involved in Community Theater productions. This greatly reduces the time she can spend at home or being physically present at Jessica’s activities. She expressed feeling guilty to me about not being around more to advise and help guide Jessica because she has been doing so many shows and had so many rehearsals that took her time away from her family.

Mandy also reflected on how hard it is as a parent to balance pushing a child towards interests and challenges while also allowing them the independence to choose their own activity or to not choose an activity at all. She questions parent’s motive in pushing kids towards activities and if they are doing it to provide their children with all the opportunities that they can or if it is because they are missing something from their own life and hoping to relive it through their children. I think it is a question that Mandy is asking herself.

Kellan and Eileen Dwyer

Kellan Dwyer is 15 years old and starting his sophomore year at a Midwest suburban high school. He is the oldest child of his parents Eileen and Patrick. Kellan has a younger brother, Finn, starting seventh grade and a younger sister, Mary, who is starting fifth grade. Kellan plays soccer and baseball in high school. In his free time Kellan practices photography and computer programming/coding.
Kellan’s mom, Eileen, describes him as a smart, loving and helpful child. She said he is a serious student who is responsible and does everything he is supposed to do but gets bored easily and has not really been challenged by the classes or the academic work he has been assigned. She notes that he is very cooperative and not very defiant for a teenager.

Eileen went to college at a state school in the Midwest and graduated with a liberal arts degree in psychology. She never pursued a career in psychology because she met her husband and started raising a family with three children. She is currently a grant writer for an elementary school district. Her husband Patrick is a college graduate, employed full time and live in an upper-middle class neighborhood.

**Kellan’s Interests and Extra-curricular Activities**

Kellan enjoys playing a wide range of sports. He has played competitive basketball, football and baseball, but currently soccer is his main sport. He expresses his enjoyment in watching, practicing and playing the game. Kellan states that his dad being a big sports fan influenced his interest in sports.

Soccer is really my main sport that I enjoy participating in, practicing, playing with my brother, watching it. I also like football, baseball, basketball. My dad is a big sports fan. Not really soccer too much, but baseball, football and basketball, which I have played for a really long time. So I think that is where a lot of my interests in sports comes from.

Kellan explains that his interest in technology and photography have unexpectedly presented him with an entrepreneurial opportunity. While on vacation in Michigan, Kellan had used his drone to take pictures of the outdoor landscape. He posted them to his Instagram page and then was contacted by the Visitor’s Bureau in Michigan about wanting to buy some of his pictures for their website.
I like photography. I like technology. Yeah, photography I have a drone so I do a lot of photography with that. I work with some businesses, specifically the visitor’s bureau in Michigan in the town that we have a house in. I have an Instagram page where I share my photos. They saw that page and contacted me and asked if I would be willing to work with them. I work with them. Just supplying them with photos for their website and stuff like that.

Kellan says this is a pursuit he enjoys and he does not want to make it a chore. He is not using this to springboard into looking for other clients or drone photo opportunities.

Kellan finds it disappointing that his high school does not offer any advanced computer science classes, since that is an interest he enjoys and knows that he wants to pursue it as a career. He pursues computer science outside of school doing coding, programming as well as building apps and websites.

I actually do it all outside of school requirements. There’s no computer science classes really in school, which is kind of disappointing in my point of view because that is something that I really like to do and want to do in my career. I do a lot of that at home, just building my own stuff. I’ve built apps before; I have built websites before. That is something I really enjoy doing.

Since Kellan does a lot of learning on his own at home. He outlines the process that he goes through when learning something he does not know. His process involves research, either reading the content or watching online tutorials. Then he will go to an online forum to ask for help and get answers to his questions from people who have the knowledge and experience in the field he is learning. Kellan understands that if he is going to progress in his areas of interests, it will be on his own, outside of school.

I usually start by trying to teach it to myself either through a book or online with a YouTube tutorial or something like that. …Well I like to code so anytime that I am learning a new programming language or anything like that I usually watch a YouTube tutorial and then go from there. Once I get out of the tutorial part where I start to write my own stuff that is where I usually encounter problems and then I will go online onto a forum or something and people will be able to answer my question.
Eileen Dwyer’s Perception of Kellan’s Interests and Extra-curricular Activities

Because Kellan is so independent, Eileen does not feel like she is very involved in his extra-curricular interests. Since he keeps to himself at home and does not ask for any assistance from her in his academics or interests, she just tries to provide advice, suggestions or send him links to articles that she thinks he might find interesting. “At this point I’m not much involved at all. I just like knowing what he is up to and trying to advise him, even though he never asks for advice I’ll like make suggestions or send him a link to something that I read. He is very independent with that.”

When talking about the business opportunity Kellan had in selling his drone photos to the Michigan Visitor’s Bureau, Eileen talked about the unusual excitement that Kellan showed when he found out about the opportunity. As parents, they showed a lot of trust by letting him handle most of the business aspects of the opportunity on his own. This includes letting him have the initial face-to-face meeting by himself. They supported him by driving him, monitored the email exchanges and gave him suggestions of items that he should include in his email to the Visitor’s Bureau. This caused a little bit of conflict between Eileen and Kellan.

He told us right away. You usually have to drag information out of him with a lot of questions. He did tell us he was very excited about it and shared it with us, and we do follow him on Instagram so we can tell who is looking at his stuff. But he has done all of the contact and like he went to a meeting with them and I just drove him there. I did not go in. I let him have the discussion and then he is responding with his pricing in an email, so my husband and I been reading that and making sure it is worded well and also that he is protected. I was worried about the legal aspects of him just giving his photographs away. So that is where I was very involved. I was like “this is the legal stuff that you have to put in your email to him”. That is where maybe he and I butt heads a little bit. But I would say semi-involved. I am not seeking it out for him, I am just hoping to guide him.
Eileen states that she has tried to push him with ideas and suggestions in the past and now realizes that Kellan is confident in his skills and works on his own time schedule.

No, he does stuff on his own time and schedule. He is not overly eager about this whole thing. He is just like this guy wants to buy some of my photos. This is how it’s going to go. He is not pushing me to go drive him here or there to take more drone photos. …he also has the mindset that this is kind of his hobby and he doesn’t want it to be a chore. He enjoys it and he kind of does it on his own. He is not actively pursuing anyone or trying to advertise his services. In the past I have been the one that have been like “you could do this or this” with all of these ideas. He is confident in his skills, which is good and I think he is, he is just very chill.

When talking about Kellan’s interest in sports she states that as parents they are there to support him, but just like academics and other interests he has, they are not going to push him to do things, but just give him suggestions and let him follow his natural curiosity and interests. If he stops liking an activity he is participating in, he is free to stop playing and pursue something else. My perception is that Kellan’s mom gives him a lot of freedom to make his own choices and independence to pursue interests as he sees fit.

We just want him to enjoy it. We again, don’t care about the outcome. Well we care, because he is happy if he wins, but I just want him to enjoy it….Take baseball for example. He played baseball at the high school level. For the first time, he didn’t love it and he doesn’t think he is going to do it again next year and we are not going to push him. He thinks he may want to try a different sport, and we’re always like “follow your curiosity” is how we like to guide him.

**Kellan’s Perception of Parental Rules and Expectations**

Kellan perceives his parents to have high expectations for him to do well at school. He always does do well in school, so on the few occasions when there is an academic problem, he problem solves with his parents, listening to their suggestions. There are not a lot of household rules for Kellan, only referencing a common sense rule of “don’t do anything stupid.” He is free to go out with his friends when he chooses and gives his parents basic information about who,
what, where and when. If he wants to stay out later, as long as he asks them, they will agree. Kellan does not find his parents to be overbearing or strict and feels that his parents trust him.

I would say that my parents have high expectations, at least for school. I usually do well in school so if they notice if something is not going well in school, then we will talk about it. We will discuss it and can talk about what is going wrong and what we can do to fix it. Ummm rules, I would say the main one is don’t do anything stupid. They are usually pretty free about me being with friends or anything like that. I would say they trust me. ... [they may ask] who is going? Where are you going? How long are you going to be there? When I ask them when I have an hour left when I told them how long we are going to be there I usually say “can we stay for another hour after that” they will say “yeah that is fine”. I wouldn’t say they are too intrusive or strict.

Eileen’s Perception of Parental Rules and Expectations

Eileen talked about the family rule that homework needs to be completed before doing any other activities. She also stated that Kellan has some household responsibilities that he completes without any issues. Finally, she voiced her concern that Kellan does not get enough sleep and spends too much time on electronic devices, like his computer and phones. Eileen also recognizes that as parents, they have given up trying to control this aspect of his life. Rules are as far as school goes it’s always homework gets done first and then you can play and if you need to you can take a break and we are not hard and fast but in my experience it is always better to get the homework out of the way and then you can relax. He has some responsibilities just doing normal housework and he has been very responsible with that. We try not to let him stay up too late. Screen time has gone out the window (laughs) as far as any rules with that because he has been spending a lot of time on screens, this summer especially.

Kellan’s Perception of Grades and Learning

Kellan states that grades are important to him because they open up opportunities for college. However, he prioritizes his personal interactions with friends and his family more than he does getting good grades. Kellan claims that you should not worry too much about not having
straight A’s because it is not important enough to make you stressed, but when asked, he has always earned straight A’s. Kellan is a student who thinks about his present in terms of how it will affect his future.

I would say they are important, just because they kind of, especially in high school they define your future opportunities in terms of college. So I would say it is really important that you make sure you get good grades. It is not the most important thing in the world obviously. Some things come before that, family you know social life to a degree. You don’t, well in my opinion, you shouldn’t sweat too much about your grades if they are pretty good. I would not worry too much about not having straight A’s and stressing over that. I think there are a lot more important things that you could be worrying about.

When it comes to homework, Kellan states that he spends a lot of time completing it because it is required. However, he has not had the need to study that much because he remembers the information naturally. In class, he is frustrated when he is assigned classwork that feels like busywork and is not adding to his knowledge in the content area. Annotating text in English class is an example of a classroom requirement he feels is a waste of time and actually makes him dislike reading. Kellan feels that the teachers make the key difference in whether the class is enjoyable and if there is in-depth learning taking place.

Yeah homework I would say that I spend a lot of time doing it because it is assigned and you have to do it if you want to pass the class. But studying I wouldn’t say I do as much. I think a lot of that information just sticks with me naturally. So I don’t really study too much.

Sometimes it can be frustrating just because some of the stuff that you do may not make sense. I try to put it in a bigger picture like, why does this stuff matter. Sometimes it does not really add up to me …for example in my English class we do a lot of annotations and every single person you will talk to will say that they hate annotations. For me, I also hate annotations. I know that a lot of people do not enjoy reading. I do, but annotations make me hate reading. So I feel like it is counterintuitive to make people that hate reading already hate it even more.

Kellan likes to be challenged as a student and chooses the highest level of classes, taking any advanced placement and honors classes available. He talks about how his biology teacher made the class fun, interesting, and still rigorous. In his geometry class he liked that the teacher
gave the students some choice in how they learned the content. In every class Kellan likes to get
the materials from the teacher and figure out the best way for him to learn the topic.

I like challenges as a student. I think I get good grades. I try to challenge myself as
much as possible. I take the highest level classes offered. I just try to do my best in those
classes. …Next year I’m taking Honors Algebra 2, Spanish 3, Honors English 2, Honors
Chemistry, AP World History I believe, Investments and a study hall. … I really liked
biology. The teacher was really nice, really fun. She made the class a lot more
interesting without losing depth in what we were learning. … (in Geometry) The teacher
allowed you some freedom in how you decided to learn. You had a textbook or you had
your Chromebook to learn it. …I guess I learn the best when I am allowed to teach
myself in a way. Whatever the thing is that I need to learn, using the materials that I am
given I like to figure out my own way through the topic using those materials.

**Eileen’s Perception of Kellan’s Grades and Learning**

Eileen described Kellan as having fun playing with other kids when he was younger, but
he was still a very serious student. He did not like it when other students would interrupt the
learning process and slow things down. Kellan is very goal oriented and wants to get through as
much material as possible in the classroom. He felt the same way when kids were not taking
organized sports seriously, feeling annoyed they were slowing down the progress of the team and
what they could be learning.

He was kind of the same, very serious but still he could play and have fun when it was
time to play and have fun. He could not tolerate other kids that were making it harder to
get through (the content) because they were slowing things down because they were
talking too much or they were causing trouble in the classroom. Even on sports teams he
got very annoyed with kids that didn’t take it seriously. … He doesn’t like when things
get diverted from the goal. On sports team he is just annoyed that kids are not taking it
seriously and not getting to the end result that they wanted.

Eileen expressed that Kellan has never been challenged at school. She said he would
receive “challenge work” sometimes from teachers, but that would be just extra work on top of
the work he had already completed. Kellan saw this as a punishment for being successful in
school. Even in his “enrichment class” where he was pulled out with other talented students, he
did not feel challenged. Eileen would talk to the teachers and they would just praise his level of achievement on the work he had completed. Eileen wished that teachers would adapt the curriculum to his ability level, which even in high school, never happened. She felt uncomfortable pushing school administration and teachers for this change, so she never went beyond initial conversations and questions about what could be done to challenge Kellan.

He has been in enrichment, but he never found it challenging. When he was in elementary school a lot of it has been giving him extra work and he did not appreciate that at all. It was always like “oh you got all of the words right on the spelling test, here is the challenge list”. Let’s make it harder for you but it was also longer and you had to write them out and do the vocab. So for him it was like a punishment for being successful. I would have loved to see the curriculum adapted to him not just more added to him. … Kinda the same (at the high school). They don’t have much there. When I asked about it at his initial meeting with his counselor I showed her his ACT scores from 6th grade and she was like “this is the honors track”…I never really said anything. I probably should have pushed more for it. My wish would have been to have like an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for him like they have for children with challenges. But I didn’t push it. I always talked to the teachers and they always said how great he was doing. It’s like “yeah, I know”.

Eileen continually has thoughts of taking Kellan out of the public school system and sending him to a “gifted” school but has not done so because she wanted him to have friendships with the other kids in the neighborhood. She knew in public schools that his academic achievement and grades would be at a high level, but that he would achieve this high level without being challenged. Eileen believes these experiences of not being challenged at school have made Kellan dislike school in general.

Yeah, I would say. He never loved school, which is too bad. I always thought that maybe we should take him out and send him to a gifted school, but then we always wanted him to be social with the kids he lived around. We wanted him to have those friendships and that outweighed it for us. It was more the social aspect. We knew he would do well but we knew he really wasn’t being challenged.

Even though Kellan was not being challenged at school, he did not complain and completed the assigned work even if he thinks it is a waste of time. Teachers have noted that
they would like to see more class discussion from Kellan, but he wants to get through as much content and homework as possible while he is at school and adding to the class discussion would just slow things down. For Kellan, the real learning begins when he arrives home from school, as he explores his interests of coding, computers, app, and web design. Eileen is grateful that Kellan is self-motivated to pursue his leaning outside of school.

   He does not [complain about being bored] …He just does it [work assigned]…. I think teachers said that he could be more involved in class discussions but that is not his personality at all, he’s like “get to the end.”…He goes off [when he gets home] and finds something to do like coding, building a computer, designing an app or a website. He follows his curiosity which is great.

   Kellan’s Perception of Material Resources/Opportunities

Kellan has a computer, tablet, cell phone, drone and other photography equipment. He also has his own bedroom. Kellan notes that his parents make him work for items that he wants. He gets paid to mow the lawn and does additional household chores to help around the house. If there is something that he really wants that will also help him improve himself, he will discuss the expense with his parents and a decision will be made about purchasing it. “They [parents] make me work for a lot of the stuff that I have. I mow our lawn and my dad pays me for that and I don’t have an allowance or anything besides that. I would say if they can tell that something I want will better myself, we would have a discussion about that and whether it can be obtained.”

Kellan’s primary source of income is mowing the lawn and when he receives money for his birthday and other holidays. He only needs money to pay for things when he goes out with his friends, which does not really amount to a lot of money. Kellan really does not mind that some of his friends receive a weekly allowance from their parents because his money accumulates over time by saving most of it. He always has money when he needs it.
I would say a lot of that money comes from either birthdays or Christmas but also mowing the lawn, which is my primary source of income. I don’t really spend that much money outside of going out with friends. That’s a lot of what I spend and I guess we don’t really go out that often. If we do it’s usually something pretty cheap. I save most of my money and the accumulation of that over time is where that comes from. I don’t mind it (friends getting a weekly allowance) that much. If I was broke that it would be a different story. But I am not broke, so I don’t really mind that much.

**Eileen’s Perception of Material Resources/Opportunities**

When it comes to material resources for Kellan, Eileen states that she and her husband try to purchase things that will help him fulfill his curiosity. As parents they want to encourage any interests or hobbies that Kellan wants to explore. She mentions that Kellan saves his money, using his drone as an example, she cannot even recall if they contributed that much to the total purchase. “If he has a curiosity we try to help him fulfill it. Like the drone, that is one thing he really wanted to get into so we just helped him save, and I don’t know if we even helped him pay for it very much. But we try to encourage that kind of interest in hobbies.”

Eileen states that she and her husband have tried very hard to provide Kellan with opportunities to further develop his talents in areas of his interest, but Kellan has refused opportunities like taking classes at Northwestern Center for Talent Development. She discusses how Kellan was tested going into kindergarten and the psychologist told them opportunities they could explore with Kellan because he was very gifted and they were going to have a hard time making sure he was being challenged. Despite this, even from a very young age, Kellan did not want to participate in these challenges and his parents chose to not push him into something he did not want to do. They still continue to present opportunities outside of school to challenge Kellan and he states that he can explore those on his own by teaching himself.
Opportunities - he has always been invited to go to the enrichment things at Northwestern and he has never wanted to go. Yeah from when, because he was tested before he went into kindergarten and they were like “you are going to have challenges on your hands because he is so gifted and here are some of the opportunities” and we discussed it from when he was teeny tiny and he just does not want to go. So we just figured that it was better to not push. I don’t know if I will regret that later on of maybe having him be aloof or anything like that but I didn’t want to make him miserable if he didn’t have to be. I didn’t know what he would get out of it because it was a classroom.

With Kellan every time we get the catalogues [classes or enrichment opportunities], we were like “here, look and see is there anything”…and he always says that he will find it out on his own that he doesn’t need anybody to teach him.

**Kellan’s Perception of Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions**

Kellan defines encouragement as getting a little push to do something when you are already thinking about doing the activity, whereas pressure is being pushed to do something that you, either do not have an interest in doing or think will be very difficult. He fully realizes that his parents do not pressure him at all and only encourage him to explore his interests.

I would say that encouragement is when someone has a half of mind to do something and they need a little push to go through with that thing. That is different from pressure in my mind because pressure is when there is something the person doesn’t want to do or is going to have difficulty doing and a person is driving a person them to do that thing even though it might not be the best for them. I would say that my parents don’t pressure me, at least in my definition of pressure. I would say they are very encouraging and I can’t think of a time that they ever pressured me to do something.

Kellan states that decisions involving other members of the family are usually made by more than one person and that his parents take his input as well as his brother’s and sister’s input seriously, valuing their opinions. He also knows that his parents have the final say on things. However, when it comes to making his own decisions, Kellan believes that his parents give him a significant amount of autonomy, letting him make most decisions independently. He states that his parents may ask him what he is doing or why he has made a certain choice, but he feels he feels they have given him a lot of independence, which he is happy with.
Decisions in my family are never really made from one person’s point of view. It has to be run by at least one other person. Mainly if it is my parents making a decision they will consult each other about it before they make a decision. But if it is more of a family decision then everybody will talk about it and we will make the decision after sufficient has been established I would say. Yes. I would say the same with my brother and sister. I think everybody’s decision is valuable. Everybody’s input is valuable when making a decision. I think the final vote goes to my parents. …my parents give me relatively a lot of independence. As long as I don’t screw up or do something bad then I am usually pretty independent. You know they still make a lot of the decisions or ask me what I am doing or why I am doing whatever I am doing. But I would say in general I have a pretty good amount of independence. I am happy with the amount of independence that I have.

**Eileen’s Perception of Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions**

Eileen once again confirmed that as parents, they do not pressure Kellan. Eileen brought up grades as an example, saying that they use grades as a measuring stick but they do not overemphasize their importance. She even admits that she does not check Kellan’s grades as often as their other children’s because she knows that he is checking them daily. She tries to encourage Kellan when she can.

I feel like pressure hasn’t been much at all. Grades to us, are a great measure, but they are not the end all be all. So we never like really pressure him and we won’t pressure him to do stuff that he does not want to do. Yeah I guess we are more encouraging than pressuring. I don’t know if that answers your question. I have the opportunity to check grades but I don’t, (laughs) because I know that he is checking it every day. I don’t check it as often as I would check my other children, but I do try to keep tabs. Then they [the school] send us quarterly progress reports.

Decisions, according to Eileen, always involve discussion. As parents they try to take everybody’s opinion into account. Eileen elaborated that for small decisions, her children may fight them on a decision and they may force them to participate anyway, but on the big decisions, like buying a new house, the family decided together.

Discussion always discussion and taking everybody’s opinion in account depending on the topic. There are silly things that they fight us on. Let’s go to Starved Rock for the day and go hike. “We don’t want to do that”. We make them do that kind of stuff. But big decisions like buying our new house that was a family decision. It’s always
discussion and there are not many things where we say “this is happening”. …I hope he (Kellan) feels his voice is heard. I think I’ll have to ask him that because I don’t know if I ever have.

Kellan’s Perception of who Influences his Achievement and Motivation to Learn

Kellan believes his parents are the biggest influence on his achievement and motivation to learn because from the time he was born, they have set up an environment in which learning was accessible to him. He also believes his parents’ encouragement and the resources they provide have enabled him to successfully improve himself and the education he received.

I would say my parents, only because they were the ones that were helping me before I even knew how to talk. From the very beginning they were already setting up that environment in which I could succeed. I think they have definitely created an environment in which I am encouraged to learn, in which learning is accessible to me. They give me the resources to be able to further develop myself and my education.

Kellan believes that he has been a big influence on his own achievement and motivation to learn. Through his focus, goal setting and planning for college, he has been able to prioritize what he needs to accomplish for his long-range success. At the same time he is looking for current opportunities to sharpen his skills in the areas he finds interesting like his drone photography.

I guess I try to keep myself focused on what I have to do for the future for the most part in terms of getting into a good college and going from there. But also in the present I want to have opportunities right now to be able to do what I like, like the photography thing. That was something I created for myself with Instagram. So I definitely have a role there on keeping myself focused on what has to happen.

Kellan does not feel like his teachers have been a big influence on his achievement and motivation to learn because he does not struggle academically so he does not feel he needs their assistance. He believes that teachers are there to assist students in reaching their highest potential and they do that by helping students motivate themselves.
To be honest, if I struggled more in school they would have more of an impact. For me personally, the teachers are there to teach me. They don’t really have an impact on driving me to do better or anything like that…It’s their job to help us achieve to our highest potential so I think in that respect that is how they help us to motivate ourselves to achieve.

Even though Kellan’s friends are smart, he does not think they have a big influence on his achievement and motivation to learn because they do not talk about academics very often. He stays away from talking about grades because he does not want his friends to think he is bragging or trying to show off.

They (his friends) are all really smart people. I guess we all just really don’t talk about grades that much. We will congratulate each other if we do well on a test that was really hard but yeah, I guess we don’t really talk about it that much….To be honest I don’t really talk with them that much about it because I don’t want it to seem like I am bragging about it or showing off like that. I like to stay away with that stuff with my friends.

Kellan feels that another group that influences him is his extended family. He has a very close relationship with them and they get together for dinner once a week. Since they are Italian immigrants he sees things from a different perspective from them. He knows his grandparents are proud of his accomplishments and the fact that he does not want to let them down motivates him to work hard to achieve academically. Kellan talks about the family dinners they have every Sunday night at their Nana’s house.

One [influence] I guess, would be my extended family. …Well my mom’s side of the family are Italian immigrants, so they are really fun to be around because they have a different perspective on America and how life is different here from what they were used to in Italy. So it’s fun to be around them and learn from them kind of how things are different. We have our own traditions that originate from Italy. You know family dinner every Sunday night. Eating dinner a lot later than most people. Different foods, different language. …so my Nana which is my grandma usually will tells us to get there around five. Everyone will get there around six-thirty because that is how Italians roll. They are usually late to everything. From that point she will still be making dinner so all the moms will go in and help her make dinner. All of the kids will be in the basement playing soccer or whatever until it’s time to eat. We usually eat around 7:30 or 8:00. It’s usually all of my mom’s siblings and grandparents. But sometimes it gets extended to my mom’s aunt’s family and her cousins. So it’s usually a big affair. It’s lots of fun
though…. My grandparents are really proud of me and really want me to do well and make the family proud. So that is one [influence].

In ranking which group has the biggest influence on his learning and motivation to achieve, Kellan lists his parents first and then himself, followed by his extended family, his friends, and then his teachers.

**Kellan Dwyer’s Takeaway**

Kellan has interests in sports, photography and all things involving computers and technology. He is very independent child and pursues most of his interests after school, as his high school does not have any computer science classes at his skill level, which he finds disappointing. He takes initiative to work on these areas of interest daily and works by himself in his room.

Eileen feels like she is isolated from Kellan’s interests because he is so private. She provides him with links to articles that she thinks he will be interested in and can read when he wishes. She does not push him to do any particular activity and leaves him to decide what he wants to pursue on his own. I perceive that she stays very hands off with Kellan because he earns outstanding grades, stays active and he uses his free time to pursue areas of interest which follows a pattern shown in complex families.

Kellan feels that his parents have high expectations for his academics, which he does not stress about because he always achieves at an extremely high level. He also feels that there are not a lot of rules to follow outside of using common sense. He does not find his parents intrusive or strict and feels that his parents trust him. Eileen stated that there is always a homework first rule that Kellan follows. Household chores that he always completes and they try to make sure he gets enough sleep. The one rule that has not been followed is limits on screen time. Eileen
admits that she has given up on that one. This follows a pattern of not pushing too hard against Kellan. I perceive this to be the case because he is doing extremely well at school and he is spending this time pursuing intellectual interests.

Kellan and his mom are both frustrated with the school system as it is. Kellan sees the importance in getting good grades as they represent future opportunities. He gets frustrated with the amount of homework that he has to complete as he does not see its value. He completes it because it is required that he does so. He challenges himself at school by always taking the most challenging classes available but still does not feel he needs to study that much to attain top grades. Eileen is frustrated at the lack of challenge that Kellan has received from his classes all the way from kindergarten to high school. Instead of differentiated curriculum the most the teachers have done is give him extra work. She wishes that there was a system similar to what students with special needs have where talented students would be evaluated and then receive an Individualized Education Plan with goals that would be specifically tied to his interests and ability levels. She has not spoken to teachers or school administrators past introductory conversations about his need to be challenged. I see this as a pattern of not wanting to push too hard for what she believes is in Kellan’s best interest. Both Kellan and his mom feel that Kellan does the most learning at home because of the lack of challenge at school.

In terms of resources Kellan has everything that he needs. He does not spend that much money and can usually pay for his own things, such as his last drone he purchased from birthday and holiday money. If he wants something educational he knows that his parents will help him attain it.

In terms of the Talent Development framework Kellan has been provided many opportunities to be challenged outside of school and with the exception of sports he has turned
them all down, believing that he can learn whatever the topic, better on his own. However, the true nature of Talent Development Framework emphasizes the developmental nature of talent and domain specific abilities. It’s goals point towards seeing what a student can do with their abilities, motivation and commitment to turn their talent into demonstrated achievement. Kellan has demonstrated this repeatedly at the highest level, he has just taken a different route, mostly self-taught but still using books, message boards and online experts to help him learn and achieve.

When it comes the question of if the Dwyer’s are a complex family, Kellan emphasized his parents being the biggest influence his achievement and motivation to learn as they set up an environment for him that encouraged learning, made learning accessible to him and provided the resources need to further develop himself. These comments, Kellan’s perception of trust he feels from his parents, Eileen’s sending him articles of interest to read, driving him to his drone photo meeting and sporting events are all examples of integration or consistent support. When it comes to differentiation Kellan was definitely encouraged to develop his individuality by seeking out new challenges and opportunities. As previously mentioned, he sought these out independently working on programming, coding, building computers, apps and websites and taking drone photographs, with the help of online forums, videos, and books he was building his skills and using his free time towards these productive activities. I would categorize the Dwyer’s as a complex family. Kellan has a nice home, a computer, phone, drones and other photography equipment. He works mowing lawns and using money from birthdays and other holidays to pay for items he wants. He knows that his parents will contribute financially to anything that will help him better himself. Eileen states the same, they will contribute to anything that will help him pursue his interests, but honestly doesn’t remember contributing much to what he purchases
because Kellan saves all of his money. Eileen knows that Kellan has not been interested in organized academic opportunities outside of school that they have presented to him, preferring to learn at home in his own way.

Kellan’s parents have encouraged him to explore his own interests and he cannot even remember a time that his parents put pressure on him. Eileen agrees that they have not pressured Kellan and academically she barely checks his grades. Decisions are made collaboratively with all family members with Kellan’s parents getting the final say.

Kellan believes his parents have had the biggest impact on his achievement and motivation to learn by setting up an environment in which learning was accessible to him and providing him with encouragement and resources. Through hard work and long range goal planning Kellan feels he has had a big influence on his achievement. Teachers and friends have not been an influence on his academic success. Kellan has a very close extended family that comes over once a week for a family dinner. They are an influence on his achievement and motivation to learn because he does not want to let them down.

Mike and Mary Nelson

Mike is 14 years old and is going into his freshman year at a suburban high school in the Midwest. He first points out his athleticism and then the fact he is taking band and all honors classes in high school. He describes himself as hardworking and interested in the content areas of science and math.

I am really athletic. … So, I’m doing track, basketball, volleyball, those are the sports I’m doing. I am doing all honors classes in high school. …one of my electives is band, and then I am also taking Spanish and honors biology, honors geometry, world history and honors English.[As a student I am] hard working, interested in the work. …Mainly just science and math.
Mike’s mom, Mary Nelson, describes him in very specific terms, saying “He is definitely an engineer.” He is the first born son in their family with two younger sisters. She discussed his behavior in the sandbox when he was younger, moving piles of sand from one place to another. In gymnastics she described him as studying the equipment instead of actually getting on the equipment to practice. Mary described Mike as analytical, structured, and a fast learner.

So he was our first of three. He is our only son. He is definitely an engineer. He was the kid who would sit in the playground and would be analyzing the sand and picking it up and moving it from place to place. When he entered gymnastics, he was more interested in checking out how the equipment was put together than actually getting on it. He’s always grasped things very quickly. He’s a fantastic kid that I am biased since I am his mom.

Mary grew up as an academically talented student just like Mike, but that her parents were from India and did not understand some of the issues that she faced growing up. She stated that her parents were very strict and she could not please her parents. She expressed that her grades were never good enough for her parents, even if she was getting an A. All she was allowed to do was study and was not allowed to be involved in extra-curricular activities outside of band. Her husband, Mike’s dad, grew up academically talented as well and was enrolled in an international baccalaureate program in high school. With his parents giving him a lot of independence and freedom, they try to find a middle ground when raising Mike and his sisters. Mary confided that she tries to parent Mike in the opposite way of her parents, wanting him and his sisters to be exposed to any and all activities that they want to participate in.

Like my kids I grew up academically talented but my parents were very different in that they came from India. They were not educated in America’s schools. So a lot of the issues that I faced they did not quite understand. They were the kind of parents where nothing was good enough. So not 91% get a 93% get a 95% you should be number one in your class. I wasn’t allowed to do extra-curricular. It was all study, study, study and that is all that I did. The only extra-curricular that I was allowed to do was band. …Being married to my husband, he was also a very highly talented student. He went to high school with the IB program, the International Baccalaureate program. His parents were
very hands off. So with my parents being very overbearing and his parents being hands off we tried to find some kind of middle ground. Because I think there was some things that work really well for them it is something still worked well for me so we try to find ways the good points were. …In terms of how I parent, I try to do almost the exact opposite of how I was raised in the sense that we want our kids open to everything.

Mary talked about her priority to build close relationships with her children and said she has put extra effort into building one with Mike because he is her only son and entering his teenage years. She feels having a close knit family will prepare Mike for trouble he may face in high school. She also worries about him because as a boy he faces different pressures than the girls do.

As a parent I really worked hard to have a close relationship with all three kids and probably more so with Mike because he is our only son. So the girls are very close so try to work very hard to be close with him and also because he is going into the teenager’s years I know that whatever troubles he will face in high school and growing up if he has a solid close family base then you should be OK. The advantages that I grew up in and it has been dropped in American schools we can understand better what situations he faces. I probably worry about him more than I do the girls because I think the pressures are very different for a boy then they are for a girl.

Mike’s Interests and Extra-curricular Activities

Mike talked about his interest in sports and music. He knows his interest in music was sparked by his mom, as she played instruments when she was growing up and introduced her children to instruments when they were younger. Mike’s interest in sports, and specifically track, came purely from his enjoyment in participating in these activities. Mike is able to choose the events he participates in, which are sprints and hurdles.

I enjoy sports…I really like track and music. I have a drum set and a xylophone that I play around with. … Music, because my mom played an instrument and she wanted us to get involved in instruments. Then in third grade she let me take private lessons in percussion because I was saying that I wanted to and ever since then I have been playing
it. [In track] I really like running. I don’t do long distances; I just do sprints and hurdles. I just really like running and jumping.

Mike talked about his new interest in golf and how it is different from gymnastics, the sport he had been in for many years. He said he had friends who were playing golf and he went with them and enjoyed the game. He liked the fact that he was a novice in the sport. He did not know what to expect and there was not any pressure to do well compared to gymnastics where he knew what to expect and would feel nervous. He said he will continue to play golf but not with the high school team, as he does not want it to interfere with his marching band schedule.

When I quit gymnastics I just wanted to try it out because my friend plays golf a lot so I just wanted to try it out. I started playing golf so I’ve been out golfing a few times…it was fun. …going to gymnastic competitions I knew what was coming so like, yeah, I have still gotten nervous about it but I knew what was going to happen. With golf it is pretty new so I don’t really know everything that is going to happen, or where the ball is going to go, but I like that it is new. I will continue to play as a hobby. Like, I am not going to be doing the golf team at high school, because I would have to like change up my schedule and it messes with marching band and everything.

Mary Nelson’s Perception of Mike’s Interests and Extra-curricular Activities

Mary and her husband are very involved in Mike’s interests and activities. Mary said she looks for opportunities like camps to improve his skills in new sports he is attempting. She tries to encourage him and asks questions about the rules of the games for the sports he is playing. They attend all of his activities when appropriate. Because Mary and her husband do not have sports in their background, they study the sports their children are involved in. They film Mike and review it with him to try to help him improve. Mary also emphasizes that they talk with him, checking on his well-being and how he is feeling. Mary talked about how as parents they have encouraged Mike to set up times with his friends to practice/play sports. These friends are
more skilled than Mike and will help him improve. Finally, Mary drives Mike to and from any opportunity/activity that will help him improve as long as Mike sets it up with her in advance.

We make it a point to…I know he told you that he stopped gymnastics and now he is looking at basketball, volleyball and back to track and field. So, I found camps for him. We are encouraging him. If this is how he thinks he wants to be involved in high school, fine. What my husband and I will do is “What are the rules of the game”? How can we help him? We will study the sport because neither one of us have athletic backgrounds so this is all new for us. But for gymnastics, one of us was at every single meet. We would never just drop him off and walk away. We would go through tape…we would film him on his routines, we would sit down and go through it with him so I can speak more of gymnastics. …It is kind of teaching him to network to. You need something, you have friends that can provide that, set it up. That is the one thing I did this summer also, whatever you want to do, set it up, I will drive you. So he took up golf this summer. Fine you set it up and I will drop you off and I will pick you up. That is what I am here for.

Mike’s Perception of Parental Rules and Expectations

Mike talked about his parents’ expectation that he gets all A’s in his academic classes. They limit the amount of television that he can watch and insist that homework be completed before he does anything else.

They expect me to get all A’s in my classes. They are strict about how much time we are allowed to watch TV…an hour to two hours every day but sometimes we don’t even get that much time because we’re outside in the summer or we have too much homework. They are also strict on like how much time we should spend on homework. It should always be done before we go outside or watch TV or do anything. …and it definitely helps doing it first.

Mike is allowed to go out with his friends as long as he gives his parents notice and lets them know who he is going to be with. He also cannot stay out too late on a school night. “They are fine with me going out with friends as long as I talk with them in advance so they can plan for that and they have to know like who’s going and if it’s like a school night I can’t be out too late.”
Mary’s Perception of Parental Rules and Expectations

Mary emphasized that they expect Mike to get all A’s not as a blind expectation but because they know Mike is capable of achieving them. She noted that they do not expect perfection from him or for him not to get anything wrong, but as parents they expect homework to be completed before anything else.

What we do tell them is aim for at least 95%. Give yourself a little bit of padding. Don’t give away the simple points because you are going to need them later on. Homework comes before anything else, so when they get off the bus they get a snack and get your homework done. Nothing takes the place of homework.

In terms of school, Mary expects that Mike will treat teachers with respect. If he is having trouble with a concept, his parents expect that he will ask his teachers or talk with his parents. As parents they try to instill that he can accomplish anything that he sets his mind to, and Mary draws comparisons between the work ethic that Mike used in gymnastics to accomplish achievements and using that same work ethic to accomplish things in school. Mary and her husband began talking to Mike and his sisters at a very early age about college and how important it is to choose the right path. They talk to their children about possible careers related to their interests and that no matter what they choose, they expect them to do it to their best abilities. Finally, Mary talked about their expectation for Mike to be a good citizen by helping people.

Respect, respect, respect. Talk to your teachers with respect. Look them in the eye. If you are having trouble and you don’t understand something either be comfortable enough to go talk to your teachers or come talk to us. We always make it a point to tell these kids that there isn’t anything that they can’t accomplish, they can do anything that they want to do. If they put their minds to it they can do it. We cite examples for each one of them. Mike has always had his gymnastic career to really highlight...we draw a lot of parallels between what he has accomplished in gymnastics to what he can accomplish in school and it is all a matter of that work ethic. We talk to them a lot about….I mean starting as early as third or fourth grade we talk to them about college, we talk to them about
careers, we talk to them about what choosing the right path means to them, what choosing the wrong path could mean to them. We instill these ideas as early as we can but we are also not sitting there saying “you must be a doctor” “you must become this” we talk about what are different careers, what are your interests. In my family again you are either a doctor or an engineer. We want them to understand that there are plenty of things that they can do. But just whatever it is that you do, do it to the best of your ability. And again, be a good citizen, help your classmates, help your teachers, but more than anything be a good citizen.

**Mike’s Perception of Grades and Learning**

Mike talked about preferring hands-on learning and used playing percussion as an example of how hands-on learning helps him. Science is the academic class that conducts more hands-on learning in Mike’s opinion, so in a class that is not hands-on like math, he reviews his notes so he can understand the concepts more deeply. Mike emphasized that his interest in the topic or content made a big difference in his willingness to go beyond the normal expectations and try to learn more by researching it online or by asking his parents.

I prefer hands-on learning. For example I play percussion and the best way that I can learn a different techniques is by trying to play with that technique and then watch videos on it just to learn it, but it’s easiest to learn it what I like try to use it and to figure it out from there. With science it’s more hands on, but with math it’s like not really hands on. … If I didn’t understand the topic very well then I would just go over the notes again and try some of the example problems out until I understood it. Or I would ask my parents, I asked my parents for the most help in Algebra. When I am interested [in the topic], I will actually try to learn more about it that just what I know I have to do. I research it and I look it up on google…Recently I have been experimenting with 3D printing drumstick holders.

Mike felt that learning is more important than grades. In terms of college, Mike believes that grades are not as important for college as they used to be because schools are also looking for a student’s involvement in activities. “I know for colleges, grades aren’t as important anymore, so you also need extra-curriculars. So I don’t think grades are the most important thing.”
Mary’s Perception of Mike’s Grades and Learning

Mary explained that she and her husband have a system they used to help their children in middle school, which they believe has been pretty successful. In fifth grade they were completely hands on with their child’s grades and learning. They double checked their assignments, were constantly checking the online grading system, and stayed completely on top of their children’s academics because of the new transition to middle school. Then in sixth and seventh grade they followed the same philosophy for the first trimester. In the second trimester they spot checked assignments and expected their children to come to them if they want help. By the time the third trimester came around, they were not checking any assignments and only helped their children when asked. In eighth grade they followed the third trimester system for the whole year and mentioned that Mike really did not want any assistance.

It is up to you to say hey I want you to quiz me in social studies. By eighth grade we were very much hands off with Mike, and I think that was actually more of his doing than ours. So every once in a while I would say, “I know you have a science test do you want help”? No mom I’ve got it covered, and if he said that I am good with that. I don’t feel like going through eighth grade again. I don’t want to go through high school again. So we wanted to make sure that he is capable of carrying his own load, understanding what his obligations are. So fifth grade we are a lot more hands on because it is a big change coming from the elementary school. Learning how to have homework in more than one subject that is going to take more than 10 seconds to do all of that stuff so we are going to be a lot more hands on in fifth grade. In the sixth/seventh first trimester we were there, second trimester we backed off a little more and third you are kind of on your own. Eighth grade you should be off and running. I feel like that philosophy has worked really well just seeing how Mike has developed over the last four years.

Mary continued to talk about how they really did not help Mike at all in eighth grade with his academics. It was important that they were completely hands off in eighth grade when his GPA would be reset and he could make mistakes when the stakes were not as high as when he
started high school. She continued to ask him how his classes were going, but that was the limit of her involvement, which she saw as a great learning experience for Mike.

All I would do is ask him every once in a while “are you doing ok”? “Do you need any help”? “I’m fine, I’ve got it” ‘are you checking power school”? We did not check his grades, we don’t. If he was going to get himself in too deep and he couldn’t pull himself out, now was the time to learn that. I want him to learn it when his GPA is resetting as opposed to…He was actually very surprised because I did explain to him day one freshmen year to the day you graduate senior year that number is going to carry with you. He was generally surprised. It does not reset. Make your mistakes here. Especially in eighth grade, we were not involved. I don’t even know one paper he wrote. I don’t know anything. That’s fine. I am perfectly comfortable with that. I would check in with him on in terms of “What are you learning in science right now”? “What are you learning in math right now”? But, very hands off.

Mary did not believe that Mike has been challenged in school. There were classes that he enjoyed more than others, opportunities that he explored in technology, and teachers that had a big influence on him, like his science and especially his band teacher. Mary mentioned algebra as a class that showed Mike that things are not always going to come easy to him and made him learn how to study better. Mary felt this was an important skill with Mike entering high school.

In the fifth grade, his enrichment class he had the opportunity to write those video games and code as his independent project back when that was offered. He loved doing that. That was one of his favorite things he did here. His seventh grade science class. He enjoyed the science, he enjoyed the labs and he enjoyed the teacher, and I think it goes without saying his band teacher. Jazz band challenged him. His band teacher found ways to get him out of his comfort zone, teaching how to trust his instincts and stuff like that. I think those were the three experiences that challenge him. I think Algebra 1 as a whole I don’t think it was hard but I think algebra 1 taught him how to study a little bit better. I think this is the year he learned that things aren’t always going to come that easy for him, because he is going to have to work for things, but he will get there. He gets it. But this is the year that he really understood that he’s really going to have to work a little bit harder than he thought he did. Which I think is really important going into high school.
Mike’s Perception of Resources and Opportunities

Mike identified that his parents are both great resources for him in terms of his academics. With his dad working in finances and his mom being formerly employed as a rocket scientist for NASA, they are particularly helpful with their math and science knowledge.

My mom was a rocket scientist but now is a stay at home mom, and my dad works with stocks. They both know a lot about the math and science and about all the subjects, so I can ask them for help with my homework, and my mom also knows people that work in Space X and NASA, so sometimes she gets posters and pins and stuff from them from the missions that they do.

When it comes to something his parents do not know a lot about, sports, Mike explained that they sign him up for lessons and ask a lot of questions so they can learn more about the sport he is participating in. “When I was in gymnastics they didn’t know anything about it, but as they asked lots of questions so they could learn. …because neither of them did sports when they were young. My mom wasn’t allowed to and my dad didn’t want to, so they are making sure that my sisters and I are in sports.”

In terms of resources, Mike has his own room, but there are several computers his family shares in the common areas of his house. Even when using his school issued computer, Mike chooses to not do homework in his room because he does not like working in silence.

I have my own room but we have like two or three computers that we share in there and in that area off of the living room, but we have like our own school computers. …I don’t like doing homework in complete quiet so I would just sit down in the dining room or out on their porch so there was some noise, so I never even did homework in my room.

When it comes to Mike’s interest in technology, his parents have been more than willing to provide him with the opportunity to access a variety of technology when they turned the family playroom into a Maker Space. Make Spaces are usually found in schools and the Nelsons
modeled their Maker Space after the one in Mike’s middle school. They had a 3-D printer, robots they could code and program, and computers that they could design and print with.

Well after “Santa” got us the 3D printer, our parents decided to expand everything and make it into a Makers Space. We were kind of done with the playroom because we are all growing up, so the Maker Space would be better suited for us. After we got the 3D printer, we just decided that we wanted to make a Maker Space like the middle school has. So now we have Ozzo bots, a Sphero and Ollie and a few computers that we can design and print stuff.

Mike talked about how his parents then came up with the idea to turn another room in their home into a music room for him and his sisters. It started when he got his own drum set and then the band teacher loaned them a second drum set for his sister to practice on. From there they added a xylophone and then added other instruments that all of the children could practice.

After I started playing percussion last year I think we got my first drum set for me and then the band director loaned us another drum set so my youngest sister and I could practice and I could show her things on one drum set while she played on another. This year we also got a xylophone. Then we turned an old changing table into a rack for all of our other instruments. We have saxophones, clarinets, piccolo, flute, drumsticks, we have a ton of drumsticks.

The Maker Space ended up providing Mike with the incentive to create his own business. He used his 3-D printer to cash in on the fad of Fidget Spinners. After going through a couple of revisions he was able to produce them with his 3-D printer and some bearings he purchased online. Mike’s sisters helped him recruit customers, and he was able to make a solid profit by selling each Fidget Spinner for $5.00. Mike then progressed into making keychains for his old gym and the coaches who worked there. He was able to figure out how to 3-D print in multiple colors and create a cool design his coaches could give to their students. Mike indicated that using technology to make and sell things was something that he was really interested in and hoped to do in the future.

Well since we had a 3D printer, in seventh grade everybody loved fidget spinners, so I decided I have a 3D printer I might as well make them and try to sell them to people. I
went through a few revisions but I designed a fidget spinner and caps and bought the bearings through Amazon and sold them at school. … It costs me like $2.50 to make so I was making a pretty decent profit. Everybody really liked them and I ended up making like $400 bucks off of them. Then my sisters also like went out and talked to people about buying them so they brought in customers too. Then I had a keychain business for a while. I sold to my old gym and some of my old coaches, just keychains with the logo on them that they could give to their kids. I figured out how to get more than one color so I was able to change the color and make it really cool.

Mary’s Perspective of Resources/Opportunities

Mary talked about constantly looking for opportunities for her children. She talked about setting up the Maker Space in their house and said that the reason they did it was due to their children’s lack of time to take advantage of the Maker Space at school and that if they had one at home, they would be able to take time to build and create. Mary talked about Mike’s Fidget Spinner business and then more recently how Mike completed an entrepreneurial class they had discovered for him at the Illinois Math and Science Academy. Mary discussed that even when they do their vacation planning, they look for vacations that will be educational as well as fun.

If you ask my husband every night after he goes to bed I am constantly looking for any opportunities that I can find. We set up a maker-space in our house. This was my husband’s doing. He saw that our kids were getting more interested in 3D printing and things like that so we have a 3D printer, we have ozobots. So we do all of these things because their time is so limited in school, at home on the weekends you have all of the time in the world. Mike turned our 3D printer into a fidget spinner business. He made about $400 from his friends here. Two weeks ago he did the IMSA entrepreneurial class. When we see what they are interested in we try to find classes that can supplement that. We are constantly looking for ways that we can see where their interests lie. Also, even in our vacation planning we look for things that are both educational and fun. This summer we took them to Costa Rica. We took them to the rain forest. They learned about how people in Costa Rica live. They learned about how they eat. They learned about their culture. Everything is designed to open up their eyes to a world way bigger than they are.

Mary talked about how Mike’s band instructor came to them and said that he had taught Mike everything he could about percussion and that he needed private lessons. She recalled that
the band teacher even suggested a certain instructor he knew who had helped teach a master class at the school before. The band director identified that Mike had talent and needed to be pushed. Mary shared that Mike was able to get confidence from his band instructor and technical skill from his private lesson teacher. After a year and a half, the private lessons have made a huge difference in Mike’s percussion skills and have carried over to his interests at home with their music room. Mary felt that once they know that one of their child’s interests is here to stay, they are happy to make an investment to improve their skill.

The band teacher came to us and said that he had taught Mike everything that he knows about percussion and he needs more…The band teacher recommended a certain teacher that had come to the school to teach a master class that year. …It has now been a year and a half I think and this teacher has made a huge difference. I asked Mike what has your private lesson teacher taught you and what has your band director taught you? Mike would tell you that his private lesson teacher brings technique and skill to me and my band teacher gave me confidence. To see Mike on the drum set in seventh grade and then see him in 8th grade, it is completely a different kid. To be able to get confidence from your teacher and skill from your private lesson, I think that is pretty successful. …Another thing is if you look at our home today, we have a drum set, we have a xylophone, we have several sticks we have all kinds of stuff. So again, this is something that I know is going to stick with him. I think because he is such a technical kid, this is his creative outlet. When we are convinced, my husband and I are convinced ok this is here to stay, we will make the investment. So we have an entire music room set up for all three kids. Mike has several types of sticks, several types of mallets anything he needs. But we always tell them, all three of them, if there is something you need educationally we are here for you. For anything else it is a want vs a need and we need to discuss that.

Mike’s Perception of Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions

Mike said that pressuring someone is forcing them and encouraging someone is giving them a choice. He said he feels pressure from his parents to get good grades but encouragement to try sports and music. Even though he quit gymnastics, he still feels pressure from his mom
about going back to that sport. Pressuring is like forcing someone to do it and encouraging someone is like giving them a choice whether or not to do it.

I feel they pressure me to get good grades and to make sure I’m doing my homework first, but then they will like encourage me to try different things out like sports and music like jazz band. I really like that. My mom wants me to keep doing gymnastics…yeah, well I decided that I want to stop it, and I said that like two or three times and every time my mom would say “are you sure you want to quit?” and I would say “yeah,” so eventually I stopped. Yeah but my mom still wants me to go back.

Mike shared that his family usually makes big decisions like where to vacation together as a family. Mike expands on their decision to go to Costa Rica this past year.

Yeah usually our parents have the ideas, but we also have ideas where we want to go and then they like research all of them a little bit and they figure out the best ones and then we decide from there. Costa Rica just had the most stuff to do because we wanted to do an active vacation this year. We went to Costa Rica. My Spanish came in handy there. We went zip lining, repelling down a waterfall, horseback riding. We did a lot of hiking also so was a really like a cool slash beach vacation; it was more like an active vacation

When it comes to control of his life and independence Mike states that his parents have given him complete academic freedom this past year; however, they are still involved in who he is hanging out with and his friend/group activities. Because of his friend’s obsession with a video game, he has started hanging out with some girls this past summer.

Well this year especially they gave me a lot more control over my homework and projects. If I wanted help or needed help, I just went over to them and asked them, but otherwise they just like backed off. But then going out and hanging out with friends I have to talk to them about all of that. I have to make sure it is ok with them first. So they have more control over that part of my life. I am fine with that. As I grow up they are getting involved less and less. Like especially with school work they don’t need to get involved. All of my friends are obsessed with Fortnight and their moms are not noticing it, so my parents are not very happy with my friend’s parents or my friends right now, and neither am I because they have wasted their entire summer. …I am actually talking more with the girls now because they are not obsessed with Fortnight, and I am getting back together with a few of my gymnastic friends.
Mary believed that they mostly encourage Mike in the activities that he participates in and in the academic tasks he needs to complete. As parents, whatever Mike participates in, they want him to do it to the best of his abilities, and that is where she states the pressure comes from. She reminded Mike that the life that they have now came from a lot of hard work and dedication. The Nelsons also push Mike to take advantage of opportunities he might not have done on his own. Opportunities like track, jazz band and an IMSA class have all turned out to be things Mike enjoyed and continues to pursue. The pressure from his parents to try these activities resulted in him pursuing interests that he might not otherwise discovered if left to his own choices.

I think we probably do a combination, there is definitely…I like to believe the majority of what we do is encourage him. We like to let him know that anything that he wants to do, we are open to it, within reason. The pressure I think is whatever you are going to do, do it well. Again, I think if you ask him, yes there was pressure to get A’s but there was never a pressure to get 100% or to be #1 in your class. But the encouragement comes from, we want a better life for you. If you like the life you are living right now it came from a lot of hard work and a lot of dedication. I don’t feel like, we don’t pressure our kids like I was pressured, but we certainly… when a teacher says I would like Mike to try something like this. We would definitely encourage him for things like that. There are a lot of things that Mike …for example, he was so much about gymnastics in 5th grade I said “why don’t you try track and field”. “I don’t want to” “why don’t you try it” “I don’t want to”. So finally I said you have two months off from gymnastics, you don’t have to think about it, just try it. What do you have to lose by trying it? He tried it. He loves it. Jazz band, same thing. His band teacher came in and said I have this jazz band and Mike was like I don’t want to get up early to come to school. I was like just try it, just try it. He tried it and look what happened. I mean he was spectacular. And today he is trying to argue with the high school band director that he belongs in the high school jazz band. The thing with him is that there is a point where you have to say “just try it”. Make the option, get the information, then you can make an informed decision. So it has been a battle to get him to keep an open mind about things like that. So that is probably a combination where the encouragement and gentle pressure is coming from. But, I think he has seen in more than one option or opportunity that my mom and dad aren’t crazy it kind of has worked out for him. He actually was not too enthusiastic about the IMSA class either, but my husband was like “no, I’m going to really dig in on this one, I want
you to take this class”. By the end of the week he was like “you know I think I want to attend IMSA”. After I did my happy dance and my I told you so’s. I’m like “look, we are trying to keep you open, not so open that you can’t pick anything but you should know what’s out there”.

Mary stated that decisions are made, especially when it comes to her children’s individual path through life, in a progression that changes as they become older and grow up. When Mike was young his parents made decisions for him that they believed were in his best interest. During Mike’s middle school years, his parents had longer conversations with him in which they tried to guide him in his choices without giving him black and white choices. Instead they gave him details of alternatives in the hope he would make smart decisions. Now that he is in high school, they allow him to make his own choices as long as it is not a life altering decision. They make sure Mike knows they will support him and know that he will learn from his decisions, both good and bad.

When they are little, it is more we tell them this is what you are going to do. This is what you want to do. This is how you should do it. What we tell them as they enter middle school especially seventh grade or so. It is less about us saying this is how you are going to do it and more about us talking to him, talking with him. There is a lot more open exchange. There have been times where Mike has said to us “I want to do it this way” and because we talk…and we tell him that, our job now is to guide him, not to tell him black and white not to touch the stove, don’t put your head in the oven. Now it’s Mike, you have a choice between this and this. Which do you think you want to take? Which do you think you should take?

I would like to believe now it is more guidance. My husband tells him that “we may not agree with every decision you make, but we are going to back you up.” Unless it is something that could absolutely alter his life, get him in some kind of trouble or something like that. At this point, there are paths he needs to take and lessons he needs to learn. So we have kind of gone away from black and white decision making to at least give you some rope and see how far you are going to go with it.

When Mike is making a decision, Mary stated that he does not frequently talk to her or her husband, instead internalizing his thoughts and holding his feelings inside until it comes out
in the form of an outburst, which makes it more difficult for them to help him. When Mike does
talk with one of them, there is a tension that releases from him. Mary knows that Mike prefers to
talk to his dad because Mary and Mike often butt heads, but as long as he can talk to one of his
parents, Mary knows that their relationship will be ok.

I think he takes on a lot of stuff on by himself. He does not talk to us as much as the girls
and he is a lot like my husband where he holds stuff in until it has to come out and
usually by that point it is a lot harder to help him solve whatever problems that he is
trying to figure out. What we have found is that when we do sit down and talk about
things whether it be Mike and my husband or Mike and myself, is that there is a tensions
that just releases in the air. Mike and I probably butt heads way more than my husband.
My husband and Mike get each other a lot better, and one that I have always said as long
as he knows that he can talk to one of us than I know we are OK. So there are situations
where he is better off talking to my husband and that is a learning process. Through these
four years at Benjamin especially. I came to a point where I understood that I don’t have
to know everything that is going on with him and there’s times when my husband comes
home and I’ll say “hey I think you can talk to Mike. I think he needs to talk to you” so I
think we’re getting better about understanding that.

Mike’s Perception of who Influences his Achievement and Motivation to Learn

Mike believes that his parents have had an impact on his achievement and motivation to
learn. He realized that his parents have pushed him to pursue things he is interested in; they
identified his talent at a very early age, enrolled him in accelerated classes outside of school, and
fought for him to be enrolled in an enrichment class in school when he was not initially placed in
that class.

They pushed me to learn more about things that I’m interested in, but it’s mainly me that
takes the initiative when I want to learn more about something….Well, they realized that
I was talented so they put me in classes. Gifted classes at Northwestern I think for all
three of us when we were younger….I actually didn’t pass that into the enrichment class
the first time, but my parents fought for me and the school psychologist tested me and he
realized I was gifted and I was put into the enrichment program.
When it comes to his own influence on his achievement and motivation to learn, Mike felt that obviously he has a huge impact since he is the one that does all of the work.

Talking about his teacher’s influence on his achievement and motivation to learn, Mike talked about a specific teacher he felt helped him a lot and gave him extra projects in her class. Overall he felt that teachers have a “good amount” of influence on his achievement. “Yeah, she helped me a lot. She would have me do extra projects, and I worked on a project, and it was like the human bones and that was an extra project that we did in her class.

When talking about his friends’ influence on his achievement and motivation to learn, Mike felt that his friends helped him understand the topic because he had to explain everything to them.

Mike also talked about the fact that his gymnastic coach helped him by giving him determination and confidence and teaching him the skills to succeed.

Mike feels that as far as ranking who has the most influence on his achievement and motivation to learn he feels that he has the most influence followed by his parents, coaches and then his friends.

**Mike Nelson’s Takeaway**

Mike Nelson is involved in sports, band and has a great interest in technology including coding and 3D-printing. Mary influenced Mike’s interest in music with band being the only extra-curricular she was allowed to participate in when she was younger. Mrs. Nelson is very involved in all of Mike’s activities. Not having a sports background she and her husband take it upon themselves to read up on the sports and video tape his gymnastic performances. Mike admits that when they start to give him input on how to improve in sports based upon their
reading and watching him perform, it can be very frustrating. He has also been consistently pushing back against things that his mom wants him to do and trying things that he wants to do. Quitting gymnastics and taking up golf is an example of this. Being persistent with his mom about quitting when she didn’t want him to, showed strength and independence. Vocalizing his enjoyment of golf and emphasizing the newness and unknown expectations seemed to be a weight lifted off his shoulder compared to the pressure he felt to perform in gymnastics.

As far as academic expectations set for Mike, it is very specifically set that he should get straight A’s. Ironically, Mary stated that no grades were ever good enough for her parents even getting A’s would result in her parents expecting higher A’s. With Mike, she tells him he should aim for at least 95% because it will allow him a cushion if he needs it. Where Mike feels pressure to achieve this goal, Mary sees it as a realistic expectation based upon Mike’s ability. Mike sees his parents as strict with their grade expectations, limiting television viewing, and instituting a homework first rule when he gets home from school. Mary expects that Mike will give his best in everything that he does and tries to instill in him that he can accomplish anything he sets his mind to. Mary talks to him about college and what the right path and the wrong path look like starting in third grade. Mary also expects that he will respect teachers and other adults and treat his peers with kindness. The expectations that his mom sends Mike consistently can both build his self-confidence and put pressure on him in his day to day life.

Mary is very systematic and straightforward in her approach to raising Mike. This approach is perfectly illustrated in the “system” that she and her husband use with Mike to help him in school. This system starts in fifth grade where they check everything that he does and ends in eighth grade only being a resource there for Mike if he needs them. Reducing the assistance they give him each year to build his self-reliance and independence seems to have
really worked in getting him ready for high school. Mike vocalized his preference for hands on learning like they do in science and band and that for classes like Algebra he needed to review his notes more in order to achieve an A. Mary shared the same viewpoint as Mike on his preferences for science and band although she attributed it to the teachers he had for those subjects and saw Algebra as a class that showed Mike that he would have to put in effort in order to achieve because she did not feel that Mike has ever been challenged at school.

When it comes to resources and opportunities Mary and her husband provide Mike and his sisters with a wealth of opportunities, showing dedication to their child’s interests that go beyond the normal parents. First, by being a former rocket scientist at Nasa Mary is able to help Mike with any math or science question that he may have. Mary also stated that she spends a part of each day looking for opportunities for her children that they might find interesting or she might think would be beneficial to them. Mike agrees that this is one type of encouragement that he enjoys from his mom and that she has made him try things that he ends up enjoying that he might not have tried without her push. Most impressively, Mary has transformed two rooms in their house towards Mike and his sister’s interests. One room being a technology Makerspace and the other being a music room. This allows the students the ability to pursue their interests and develop skills whenever they choose when they have free time at home. This pursuit to provide Mike with new opportunities and challenges and unlimited opportunities to develop his current interest put the Nelson family at the extreme high end of the Talent Development Framework. Planning family vacations specifically for the educational opportunities and paying for private lessons for band are two more examples of this.

Mary believes that she uses mostly encouragement to help guide Mike but admits that there is pressure involved in expecting him to do his best in everything that he does. Mike feels
the pressure in getting the grades his parents expect and doing homework right away but appreciates the encouragement to try new activities and challenges. Mike holds his feeling in when he is feeling pressure and can come out all at once in what Mary describes as an outburst. After which she can notice the tension leaving his body. She encourages Mike to talk about his feeling with her or her husband mostly suggesting her husband because she and Mike can often see things differently. Mary’s overall viewpoint is that she is encouraging Mike because her intentions are that he have a better life for himself. Mike feels the pressure to achieve no matter the intentions.

Mike feels his parents have been the biggest influence on his achievement and motivation to learn, outside of himself, because they identified his talent at an early age and pushed him into outside academic activities that he would have not participated in on his own.

Patricia and Puja Shaw

Patricia Shaw is a 15 year old girl attending a suburban high school in the Midwest. She likes to play sports and spend time with family and friends. She does not enjoy school at times, but she goes because it is required. She lives with her mom and dad and has one older sister who is starting college. Patricia states that her parents are hardworking, both working full time, and both were strong academically and played sports growing up.

I am fifteen and I am going to be a sophomore. I like to play sports. I don’t enjoy school all of the time but obviously it is required. I like to hang out with family and friends. I have one sister who is going to be a freshman in college and my mom and dad. My dad works at BMW, he figures out what people like in cars and stuff and makes new stuff I think, and my mom is a substitute teacher. My parents are both hard working and were both good academically. They also both played sports, I think.

Patricia’s mom, Puja, is a substitute teacher, with a degree in finance marketing. She describes Patricia as an active, athletic child who likes to be involved in sports and spend time
with her friends. Puja feels that Patricia likes school overall, and that until high school, it came pretty easy to her – definitely easier than it did to her older daughter. In high school Patricia has to work harder to achieve, and in subjects like math, she made appointments with her teacher or sought extra assistance from her friend’s mom to overcome some of the academic obstacles she has encountered. Puja thinks that Patricia likes being challenged but will not admit to that.

Patricia is an active, athletic kid, always has been. School comes pretty easy to her. She enjoys being outside all of the time. She enjoys sports. She enjoys spending time with friends. She likes to read...sometimes, if required. She does enjoy school overall. She likes being challenged, although she doesn’t admit it. Or she won’t admit it. School does come easier to her than my older daughter, so she doesn’t always have to work as hard. She didn’t have to work as hard until she got to high school. In high school she did find it challenging. Math became challenging, and she just had to work a little harder to accomplish the lessons she had to finish but saying that when she would take an exam or be tested, she did pretty well. If she struggled, then she went in to make an appointment with a teacher or a friend’s mom who is also a math teacher, and she got the help she needed, which would usually help her past the learning curve she might be stuck at, and she would get to the next point.

As a parent, I expect a lot out of my kids. I expect them to work hard. Be polite, be respectful but I expect them to overcome any challenges that they have academically and if they need to come to my husband or I or to get the help they need at school but we do expect a lot out of them and if they can’t follow through with that than we are more than willing to provide them the help they need to get them to the next point. Not to be better than anyone else but just to be able to get a good ground for themselves. We expect academically a lot out of them.

Patricia’s Perception on her Interests and Extra-curricular Activities

Patricia’s main extra-curricular activity is basketball. She had played for her high school varsity team as a freshman as well as for a travel/club team since she was in fifth grade. She liked that she can meet new people, the collegiality of the high school team, and liked to play because it is still “fun.” She also stated that she was better at basketball than other sports she played, which made her want to continue with basketball after she had quit the others. Patricia
also talked about the effect a coach can have on you as a young athlete. Her basketball coach helped her grow and develop as a player by using practice as a time for teaching new skills and implementing new plays and then in games would take the pressure off of her by telling her to perform without worrying about whether he would get mad at her if she did not perform well. Her travel soccer coach by contrast would get mad at her for making mistakes on the field, would hand out physical exercises as punishment for mistakes, and had a negative effect on her growth as a soccer player because she felt more hesitant.

My last basketball coach is one of the better coaches I have had. He was very good at teaching things in practice and implementing new plays and stuff. Then in games he would say even if you miss a shot I won’t get mad just take it if you are open”. So he was one of the better coaches I have had. …for soccer I quit playing because one coach that kind of just ruined it for me in travel. I just didn’t enjoy playing soccer anymore. He was really strict and if you messed up one little thing in a game or in a practice he would get really mad and you would have to do laps and stuff and run a lot. Obviously I did not like that and probably (played) worse because I was more hesitant.

Patricia’s only other organized activity is student council. Her mom believes that she should get involved in more activities because it would look better on her college application. Patricia spends the rest of her free time hanging out with friends, cleaning, and doing summer work.

I joined student council. That’s it for now, but my mom said that I should do more because it will look better on college aps or whatever, resume or something. But then she said to do Snowball, no not Snowball. There is something in school but I forget what it was. There is a lot of spending time with family and friends. Parties or graduation parties or just get-togethers. Also I spend time cleaning and doing summer work.

Puja Shaw’s Perception of Patricia’s Interests and Extra-Curricular Activities

Puja is getting used to Patricia’s ever expanding friend group. Since high school started Patricia has been adding friends to the core group she has hung out with since middle school.
Puja made sure that Patricia gave her the addresses and phone number of the parents of her new friends. She also discouraged Patricia from going on a longer trip with a new friend and her family because they did not know them as well as some of the friends Patricia has had for a long time. Puja is very involved in her daughter’s friendships and interactions.

She likes to go and hang out with her friends a lot. I need to know parents. That is one change I had get used to with her being in high school. She still hung out with the same core group of friends, but then slowly new friends trickled in. I needed to know who they were. I didn’t necessarily meet their parents but I had an address and phone number where she was located. Then if she was asked or invited to go somewhere further away like a trip that was an hour or more away. Because that happened and none of her core group of friends were going, I discouraged it because I didn’t know the parent’s and I didn’t know the families. Then she kinda came up with the “yeah I kind of agree I would be more comfortable if some of my other friends were going”. So I am very interested, very involved and try to stay involved so at least I know what is going on.

**Patricia’s Perception on Parental Rules and Expectations**

Patricia believed that she has the same expectations from her parents as most kids her age. They consist of getting good grades, studying and working hard in everything she participates in. Patricia’s mother also expects her to complete homework as soon as she gets home from school and expects Patricia to go to bed at a reasonable time. Patricia knows that her mother is not home when she gets home from school and uses this time to eat, unwind and sometimes sleep before starting her homework. She knows that this causes her to start her homework later, which in turn results in her not going to bed until midnight most nights. Patricia is purposely not following these two expectations of her mother, and Puja is completely aware that she is not following them because Patricia is required to do her homework at the kitchen table. Puja sees Patricia completing homework late into the evening each night. Even though
both daughter and mother know these expectations exist and are not followed, there is never any
correction about this.

They expect good grades, study, work hard as most parents I assume. I am supposed to
do my homework when I get home but usually I don’t, because my mom is never home.
So, I mean it is not a strict rule, but then she wants me to go to bed earlier but that never
ends up happening because I always do my homework late….Most of the time I start it
later. I would get home and I would eat and then I would sleep or something and then I
would do homework for two or three hours at the longest. I usually go to bed at twelve.
…Most of the time she (mom) does not realize what time it is when it is actually that late.
I have to do my homework at the table. Because I don’t have a desk in my room. So I am
not allowed to do it on my bed otherwise I might fall asleep.

Patricia feels her mother’s chore expectations are at a high level. Her chores include
cleaning the dishes, washing her clothes, and general housekeeping. Patricia is concerned that
since her sister is leaving for college, this will equate to a higher chore workload for herself.

“Most of the time my mom will tell me what chores to do. I usually have to wash the dishes,
wash clothes and clean up the table and stuff. Especially since my sister is going to be gone, I
have to do all of it now.”

Patricia did not feel that her mom had strict rules over her phone use. As a result, Patricia
uses her phone a lot to go on different social media to communicate with friends and to see funny
videos. She also uses her phone to watch Netflix and to check in with her mom when she is out
with friends. But Puja does not like Patricia being on the phone so much and will take her phone
away for periods of time if she misbehaves or does not follow directions.

I usually just go on social media, like Snapchat, Instagram and sometimes Twitter. Yeah
we [my friends and I] just like Snapchatting each other to communicate. On Instagram
there are random accounts where people post like funny videos or sports videos and stuff.
You can also follow athletes or celebrities. Sometimes I watch Netflix or something. I
am not sure how much time I spend on my phone. It is probably more time than I should.
Usually I text my mom to check in, like if I am at a friend’s house and she wants to know
what time pick-up is or something then I will text her and she will text me with other
details.
My mom doesn’t have like strict rules (about phone use) but she doesn’t like me being on my phone, which I am on a lot. So if she tells me to go clean something in the basement and she is upstairs, I’ll like sit on my phone and then she will realize that I am not doing anything and she will take my phone away. If it was something small, she usually takes it away just for the rest of the day or until I am finished with the thing that I was supposed to do. If it is something bigger or if I like got into a fight with my sister or something, it would be like a couple days.

Puja’s Perception of Parental Rules and Expectations

Puja expected Patricia to keep up with chores at home, to do her summer reading on her own, and to go to sleep at a normal time so she did not sleep in late in the day. Puja also wanted Patricia to be respectful and kind in her interactions with her family and other people with whom she interacts. She expected Patricia to work hard and to overcome any academic challenges that she has by getting assistance from them or someone at school. Puja expected a lot from her daughter academically so that she would have a good foundation to fall back on when she leaves for college and is more on her own.

I expect her to keep up at home with chores, do the dishes, help take out the garbage and not have her sister to do everything, do basic chores. I expect her to do her summer reading on her own. Go to sleep at a normal time because she likes to stay up late but she also likes to sleep until one in the afternoon. Guidelines are to be respectful, to be nice, to be a kind person in general when she responds to my husband or I and also to her sister more so. As a parent I expect a lot out of my kids. I expect them to work hard. Be polite, be respectful but I expect them to overcome any challenges that they have academically and if they need to come to my husband or I or to get the help they need at school but we do expect a lot out of them and if they can’t follow through with that than we are more than willing to provide them the help they need to get them to the next point. Not to be better than anyone else, but just to be able to get a good ground for themselves, we expect academically a lot out of them.
Patricia’s Perception on Grades and Learning

Patricia felt that school has always been easy for her, especially math. She tries to get A’s in all of her classes. She completes the homework and studies for tests. If she is getting lower than an A for a grade, she will talk to the teacher about extra credit opportunities. Patricia believes that she learns best through visual observation. Once she is able to see a problem or a question worked out, she is able to write it down and does not forget the process for solving the problem. Patricia likes to read but asserts that because her teachers have required her to annotate the text, it takes the fun out of reading. Even though she finds science interesting, she disliked biology because of the amount of memorization that it required. Her favorite class was ceramics because of the freedom of creativity she had in expressing herself, the lack of directions she needed to follow, and the relationship that she built with the teacher.

I strive for A’s pretty much…. Like if I just complete the homework and study for tests based off of the notes I have taken. Then I just try to get an A. If I get a B or lower I try to talk to the teacher to see if there is any extra credit that I can do….I learn best by seeing how problems are worked out, visually. Like if there is a math problem I can’t just listen to a teacher say what to do. They have to give an example of the problem for me to learn it better. Because then I can also write it down or I forget how to do it….School has been easy for me, for the most part. I mean there are some classes that I don’t excel in and sometimes it is harder for me to understand stuff. For some classes it is a lot easier and I learn it better than others. Math is easier, English I am not as good at…. I don’t like annotating for stuff because it just takes the fun out of reading….If the book is interesting I will read it in a couple days, but annotating I just dislike a lot. Sometimes like biology was a lot harder, but science was not hard for me. Biology I felt like was more memorizing. I had a tougher time with biology then I did with regular science. I really liked ceramics because there was more freedom and you got to create stuff without a lot of directions and the teacher was nice.

Patricia did not particularly like school in itself, but enjoyed seeing her friends at school and participating in the different classroom activities, specifically group activities. She asserted that while some people get less work done working with their friends, she feels good working in a group with her friends because they all work hard and get more work done working together.
School is…I mean there are some parts that are not fun obviously, but I enjoy going and seeing friends and doing different stuff every day….I like activities in class, not just sitting there and taking notes….Not so much projects, but I like activities where I can work in groups. I mean sometimes projects – it depends on what it is. I don’t like writing essays or stuff like that but power points are ok. It depends on the group you have, like if you get to choose your own partners then it makes it a lot better. Well for some people it makes it harder because then you don’t get any work done if you are with your friends. But for me I feel I get more work done and then everyone doesn’t need to rely on one person. Sometimes I am the leader, sometimes I take notes. It usually just goes back and forth between people in the group.

Puja’s Perception of Patricia’s Grades and Learning

Puja felt that Patricia was not challenged academically until high school. Elementary and middle school came, easy with the exception of some topics in algebra, which Patricia took in eighth grade. When Patricia was in elementary school, Puja asked her if she would like to be in the enrichment program the school offered. Patricia always told her that she was not smart enough and compared herself to two other students she knew who were in the program. Puja contemplated whether Patricia was worried about being rejected or the amount of work she would have to complete if she was in the program. The Shaws never pushed the issue, and Patricia was never tested for the enrichment program in elementary school.

At the high school level yeah, elementary school I don’t think she was challenged. In middle school it came easy. There were some topics in eighth grade algebra that sometimes she didn’t understand and needed more explanation or talk to a friend and work it out but there wasn’t too much challenge. Then I asked her in elementary school and at middle school if she wanted to be part of the enrichment program, should I ask about it and she said “no, I’m not that smart”. Then she compared herself to two other students that were in the enrichment program and said that “I am not as smart as they are”. So I always came back with “you are smart would you like to try it”? I don’t know if it was the fear of being rejected or the challenge of it might be a lot more work than what I am doing now, I am not sure.

Puja kept up with her daughter’s grades by talking with her and occasionally checking the online grading program. Overall, Puja believed that Patricia enjoys school despite not being
challenged and, in particular, her English class lacked rigor. Last semester Patricia received all A’s and a B in math. Puja and Patricia felt that her math teacher was not a very good teacher and did not see that a large portion of the students in her class were not understanding the concepts she was teaching. Puja worked with some other parents to get Patricia and some of the other students some extra help. Puja felt that outside of math, the rest of school came easily to Patricia and right now they are trying to find an elective class that might interest her.

I keep up with her grades, but I don’t check Power School often. I ask her what they are. If I remember correctly she did get all A’s and maybe a B in math, I want to say she got a B in math. She has enjoyed it. She hasn’t felt too challenged. English came pretty easy, the teacher didn’t require a lot. I think this year is going to be a really tough year, she got a really tough teacher. Math, again she liked it, but we did not feel the teacher was a great teacher so we went for outside help to kind of grasp some concepts because the teacher wasn’t so receptive to the fact that a lot of the kids didn’t get what was taught. That we dealt with on our own. Spanish and all of her other classes she is doing really well, it comes easy, she enjoys it and she is just trying to figure out what electives to take because she does not really have any special interest. She has tried ceramics; she has tried programming and she thought they were ok. She has not found that thing that really engages her yet.

Patricia’s Perception of Resources and Support

Patricia knows that her parents are interested in and support her in the sports she participates in. When they found out that a teammate of hers had a one-to-one trainer for basketball, they asked her if she wanted one. She said yes, and that is something they pay for on a regular basis along with the club basketball team she plays on outside of school and for her school spirit wear. Patricia’s parents have given a smart phone and an Xbox gaming system and her money when she needs it to go out with her friends.

Like if I do something good like if there is an award ceremony or something, then obviously if they can they will come. Most of the time my dad can’t because of work. I don’t usually have friend problems but for sports and stuff they usually just tell me to make up for it the next game. Work hard in practice. I mean like yes some of the time I
don’t really listen to them. Then by the end of the night I will forget about it. Sometimes it helps but there is not much you can do about it if it is a game.

Puja Shaw’s Perception on Resources and Support

Puja provides Patricia with extra academic support when needed. She paid for Patricia to have a math tutor when she started having problems in her honors geometry class, and when that did not help, she worked with a group of six to eight parents who coordinated a partnership with a district mom who was also a high school math teacher by profession. This mom provided study sessions before tests and quizzes and was also available to the students when they had individual problems or questions. Patricia was able to reach out for assistance through phone calls, text messages or in person.

So we tried a tutor and she didn’t really care for her. She was fine. She was a good tutor she just didn’t really teach her anything more. So we went to a parent mom, a district mom who is a math teacher at a high school. Then she started having study sessions with Patricia’s friend group, probably six to eight of them. I think a couple of us parents reached out and that mom also reached out [to us] and said “hey, how about I do this” because all of these kids have the same teacher and all of them were not so happy with the results of what was happening in class about the lessons and so she said “well why don’t I set up a study group before we have a test or a quiz and if they ever have questions random throughout the year and they have a homework question, shoot it to me, send it to me, call me, have them come over and I will help them.” So we kind of just set up sessions and the mom like during the final sent out a text and said “hey I’m going to have a study session, who can come? Let’s set it up and find a time that works for everybody.”

In addition to the parent tutor, they remind Patricia there is help available at school and that all of her teachers can provide extra assistance after the normal school day. They provide Patricia with a computer and a phone she can use for research as well as drive her to the library when she needs to get studying or research completed.

Puja finds extra support for Patricia not only in academics but also in athletics. For basketball, Puja found Patricia a coach for strength training outside of school. They also drive
her to the local rec-center whenever Patricia wants to practice and work on her skills. Patricia usually takes advantage of this because she enjoys basketball.

We do provide her a coach that we go to for training for strength training outside the high school. If opportunities do arise we will give her those opportunities to take advantage of to go for further training or practice or strength training for basketball or, well soccer no longer but for basketball now. Just to keep up and keep her skills up she will go to the Arc Center. We will let her go there and she will practice. Any of those resources that she wants to take advantage of we will drive her to and let her participate in those. A lot of it comes from her and then if we find an opportunity or hear of an opportunity we will suggest it and she usually takes that up because she really enjoys doing those activities.

Patricia’s Perception on Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions

Patricia feels encouragement from her parents. She believes that encouragement is positive and involves telling someone to do something that will be good for them, whereas pressuring is negative and consists of making someone do something that they do not want to do. Patricia said she feels no pressure at all from her parents and believes they are only trying to make her become the best person possible.

I feel all encouragement. They don’t really pressure me that I know of. They are just trying to make me a better student and better person in general. I was free to pick classes (for next year) but if I wasn’t sure about something then I would ask them for electives and stuff so they gave me ideas of what I would possibly like to do. Then for academic classes I get recommendations from my counselor so I just follow the recommendations.

Patricia explains that her mother asks for input on little decisions, but if people do not speak up quickly, she will make the decision herself. Her parents make the bigger decisions that affect the family without asking for input from the kids. Patricia states that her parents often disagree on the right course of action, and usually what her father wants will be the way the decision is made although sometimes her parents do negotiate a compromise.

Little decisions my mom usually asks everybody and if nobody gives her like a clear answer she will just decide herself. But bigger decisions just between my mom and dad. Usually, they both have different decisions on things. Like if, like this isn’t really a big
thing but we are emptying stuff from our basement and so if there is stuff that my mom kept. Like she kept stuff from her wedding or whatever but she never used it. So she wants to keep it but my dad doesn’t. So then she just ends up throwing it out. Some of the time they have to find an agreement between them two.

Patricia feels that her parents allow her to have control over her own decisions about hanging out with friends, when she goes out, when and how she is doing homework or summer assignments. She feels her parents are not strict and give her a lot of independence, but they also give her their input when there is a decision that they feel is important.

I would say I have a decent amount of control. I can decide what I want to do, like if I want to hang out with friends or if I should stay home and do homework or summer work. My mom obviously has a say in what I do. If it is something serious then she will have a bigger opinion I guess. It’s not like really strict. I’m pretty ok with what I have right now. They give me a lot of independence. I mean going out with friends not being with them obviously.

Patricia feels that academic issues cause her the most stress. Getting homework completed, studying for tests and getting ready for finals are all examples of items that she finds stressful. She can feel overwhelmed when she has schoolwork and health issues with family members. Participating in sports can also cause stress but not as much as academics. Patricia usually deals with stress by taking a break or getting away from the activity for a short time and coming back to the situation. Patricia feels comfortable talking to her mom when she feels stressed.

A lot of homework, a big test coming up, finals. If there was a family, member in the hospital or something with school or even without school it is still a lot to handle. Not as much as school does but yeah it still does a little bit. Sometimes I just take a break and go do something else for a little bit. Obviously in sports you can’t do that so maybe I just ask for a sub and take a little breather. Usually I just try to get away from the situation. (If stressed) I can usually talk with my mom.
Puja’s Perception on Encouragement, Pressure and Control of Decisions

Puja believed that she and her husband encourage Patricia. She defined that encouragement is when you guide and help a person attain one of their goals even if they are frustrated; you help them get to the next level. Pressure is when you are not advising but are telling someone what to do and not asking for their input. As parents, they talk with Patricia, let her know that it is okay to need help, and then are willing to provide her assistance. While they do expect good grades from her, there are no repercussions if she does not get the expected grades. They have also tried to teach her to be motivated from within – to push herself.

When you encourage someone you guide them. You help them get to the point they want to get if they are frustrated or if they are successful and just helping them get to that next level they are looking for. If you pressure someone you are telling them what to do. You are not advising anymore. You are just telling. You are not asking for opinion you are giving an ultimatum. I think we encourage her a lot and try to talk her through situations that she might need assistance in and even if she doesn’t need assistance, just to bounce ideas off of. Yes we do expect good grades but if you don’t get them there is no backlash that she is going to succumb to or be affected by…I expect them to, if they can, to get all A’s but if they can’t to at least to get a C or better to show that they have an understanding and if you are at a C, how can you get to a B or an A? I don’t expect straight A’s. It’s always ideal and nice to have straight A’s but it doesn’t measure who you are. I just want you to be able to be comfortable with what you know because it is only going to get harder. We hope we taught her that if you don’t do well you yourself need to push yourself a little bit harder but I don’t feel we pressure her or threaten her, not threaten her that’s a bad word. I don’t feel we pressure her in a negative way.

Emotionally Puja and her husband are there to support Patricia by attending her events and giving her positive praise for a job well done. When things are not going well, they talk to her and help her to identify the root of the problem and what possible solutions she might want to try.

Yes, so when things are going great we are there to support her and congratulate her or just be there on the sidelines. “Great job! You got an A.” or you studied hard or you helped a friend study or you did well in a tournament. And when things are not going good, you got a bad grade. Ok we need to study harder. What do we need to do? That
game went really bad and you guys tanked, what happened, what can we do? You hurt yourself, or you are pushing yourself too hard or you are not getting enough sleep. You are tired. Let’s work on that because that affects the rest of your day and how you are going to be, not at school but at home. So let’s work on that. So yeah, I am definitely there for the ups and the downs.

Puja has shaped Patricia’s behaviors when they have a disagreement. In the past when Puja and Patricia disagreed on an issue, Patricia would get mad and stomp away for a little while before coming back to finish the discussion. Now Patricia will usually do what she is asked to do quietly and then come back to talk with her mother. She does not yell or scream; she just processes the disagreement silently.

Well, it use to play out where she would need to stomp away for a while and come back when she calmed down and then we would chat. She does not react quickly to me because she knows that I won’t like it and we’ll have words. So she will go do her thing, get it out of her system and come back. Now she reacts a little bit better and she will understand it. She might do the chore or the activity in silence and then come back later and have calmed herself down. She doesn’t typically yell or scream about things. She just needs her time to process it, digest it, come back to the table and be okay. Sometimes it is a short time sometimes it is a little longer.

One of the things that Puja and Patricia disagree about is what time Patricia needs to go to bed. On school nights Patricia will stay up until her homework is completed, even if her parents suggest going to bed and getting up early to finish. If Patricia is having a hard time with her homework, her parents will attempt to help her or at least will stay up with her until she is done. In the summer Patricia stays up late playing video games and talking on her phone. She will often ask for a time extension when her parents tell her that it is time to go to bed. They will allow her 5-10 minutes longer and she will go to sleep.

So if it is a school night, it’s during the school year she will stay up until it’s done. Even if we say you need to go to bed and get up early and do it. Unless it is something that is not due for a day or two she will go to sleep. If it is something that is due and she is having a hard time, she will sit there and we will sit with her. We’ll crank it out or we will be awake to let her do it. So she will abide by that because she knows she needs sleep. In the summer different story, meaning she might stay up and we will say “you need to go to bed” and she will say “yeah, just a few more minutes”, but she will
eventually do it. Then the next day go “yeah I am really tired and I should have gone to bed”. “Oh wait, my cousin is on Fortnight”. OK fine you have five minutes and we will set a time parameter and she usually abides by that. She won’t go in her room and be on her phone and just, because her phone is allowed to stay downstairs. So it is not like she will stay up for hours.

Another disagreement that Puja has with Patricia is about her phone. Patricia would like to keep the phone in her room at night, but the rule in the house is that phones get kept downstairs on the counter when she is going to bed, and Patricia can get the phone in the morning when she wakes up. Patricia would like to use the phone as an alarm clock, but Puja and her husband are staying firm with the rule that the phone stays downstairs at night and all other electronics are also turned off as well.

So we do keep it downstairs, during the day it doesn’t, but when she goes to bed. Now we are getting the argument that it is an alarm. Which the house could blow up and she wouldn’t wake up so it doesn’t matter. Yeah, but the phone does stay downstairs for both of our daughters. It stays on the counter and then they can have it after that, just not at night. Computers need to be off. They don’t have to be downstairs but they do have to be put away.

Puja states that she asks for input from her family members on smaller decisions like what she wants for dinner. If she does not hear an opinion in a short period of time she will just make the decision herself. For bigger decisions Puja explains that they really do not ask for input from Patricia or her other daughter. A big decision, like what university or college Patricia attends will be based on Patricia’s visits, her own input, and on what colleges or universities she was accepted to. If the decision directly affects Patricia, such as attending a sports camp, then they will encourage Patricia to participate, but ultimately it is up to her.

So dinner usually in the summer I kind of throw it out there, hey what do you want. I will send a text. I’ll ask opinions. If I don’t get answers in a certain amount of time I will make my own decisions. Bigger decisions, for example a vacation I guess. We might decide on a place we want to go. I don’t know if we ever ask an opinion. No one has ever given a negative opinion. So usually it’s kind of like “Oh, ok that works.” I am trying to think of anything that is big that we might ask them. I guess if we were to buy a car we might say “hey what do you think? Let’s go for a ride.” We would look for an
opinion. College of course is not, that will be something where we will do college visits and depending on where she is accepted that would be her decision. We could say we want you to go here but it won’t matter. It has to be her decision. …when it involves her we do want to take her opinion into account. If she doesn’t want to go to the camp we will try to find out why but if it makes her be a better player, then we encourage it, but again it is up to her.

Puja knows that as Patricia gets older she will be increasingly more independent, and as her mom, she thinks that she will handle her daughter’s independence well. More importantly, she feels that she and her husband have made a concentrated effort to raise their girls so that they would be well rounded, independent thinkers who will be able to make good decisions in their lives.

My husband and I have raised, we hope, two independent well rounded girls, …I think she will do well and I think I will do well with it because we have experienced a lot and she knows right from wrong and she will be able to make those decisions and when she does something wrong she will know what is right.

Patricia’s Perception of who Influences her Achievement and Motivation to Learn

Patricia’s believed her parents have been a big influence on her achievement and motivation to learn. It is important to Patricia that she lives up to the high standards her parents have not only set but have also modeled their lives. She also knows that her parents will help her when she has a difficult time, and if they can’t help, they will provide the resources she needs to get her over any academic difficulty.

They have a lot of impact because I don’t want to let them down with bad grades or anything. I want them to feel that I can achieve what they have done and live up to their standards or whatever. If I am having a hard time with something they will always help me and if they can’t help they will get me the help.

Patricia plays a big part in her own achievement and motivation to learn. She is self-motivated to achieve good grades and supports this motivation by studying, paying attention in class, and asking teachers, friends or parents for assistance.
Like I always want to get good grades, so there is motivation there, like I don’t want to let myself down by getting bad grades. I study a lot. I pay attention in class for the most part. If I need help I would go into class (to get help from the teacher) or ask some of my friends. Parents are teachers too, so I could ask them for help.

Patricia’s friends are an influence on her achievement and motivation to learn as she surrounds herself with a close group of friends who are high achieving students. This both motivates her to keep up with her friend group’s achievement and also supports her by having study groups for big tests and final exams.

Patricia believes that teachers have good intentions in wanting students to achieve in their classrooms. She thinks a lot of teachers are not the best at teaching or do not build positive relationships with their students. Patricia gives an example of how her math teacher was not very successful at explaining math concepts, so she and her friends had to get assistance outside of school. Patricia believed that students work harder for teachers when there is a positive rapport because students do not want to let them down.

I mean every teacher always wants you to get good grades but I don’t think a lot of them …obviously they have an impact because they teach us. Some of them are not the best teachers or the nicest. They are not the best at explaining. For example my math teacher, nobody really liked her because she wasn’t that great at teaching or explaining stuff, she just gave us packets on top of packets. It was kind of just like, learn this on your own, then she will just give you the answers. I like teachers that can write stuff out and will explain it in more detail. So I wouldn’t say that she had the biggest impact on my grades and stuff in that class because I went to a friend’s mom for help and stuff. With a teacher you like you don’t want to look bad by getting like a bad grade or something so I would say you try harder for the teacher you like then for the teacher you don’t like.

Patricia Shaw’s Takeaway

Patricia’s main interest is basketball where she plays both on the varsity high school team and on a competitive travel team outside of school. She has stayed with basketball while quitting other competitive sports because she is having fun and still enjoys playing. Patricia said her
current coach has had a positive impact on her by teaching her concepts and being understanding of mistakes which has helped to build her confidence. For Patricia the love of the game and having a patient, understanding and informative coach has contributed to her building her talent. Patricia is a talented athlete in basketball, playing on the varsity team in her freshman year of high school and also playing on a club team. She was also part of student council but was disappointed in its operation compared to middle school. Patricia likes to hang out with friends in her free time. Puja supports her by attending her games, driving her to practice and paying for club basketball, strength and conditioning training and private basketball lessons.

Patricia feels she has the same expectations from her parents as most teenagers, get good grades, study and work hard in everything you do. She does not follow her mom’s expectation of getting started on homework as soon as she gets home because she wants to relax and get something to eat. This results in her staying up late working on homework each evening. Getting to bed earlier and getting up in the morning has become common topics of conversation between Patricia and her mom. Puja expects a lot from Patricia academically including overcoming any academic obstacle by getting help on her own or asking for help. Puja will push Patricia into setting up times to meet with her teachers before school if she doesn’t understand something. This is not something that Patricia wants to do but will do this once each time her mom asks her to do so she can comply with her mom’s directive. She also has housework expectations for Patricia. This came up a lot from Patricia and seems to be something she dislikes a lot. She has an older sister going away to college and her main concern about this is getting more chores assigned. Puja sees this as just normal help a student would do when both parents work.

School has always been pretty easy for Patricia. She studies, does her homework and will talk with her teacher if she doesn’t understand something. She is a visual learner who likes
to see how something works to really understand it. Puja agrees with Patricia and feels that Patricia has not been challenged in school until high school. Patricia doesn’t really like school but enjoys seeing her friends and participating in school activities. Puja believes Patricia does enjoy school. Puja keeps up with Patricia’s grades by checking the online grading program and expects Patricia to get all A’s. When Patricia did “struggle” (getting a B) in Honors Algebra, Puja hired a tutor for her. When their personalities didn’t seem to mesh Puja found a parent that was also a high school math teacher to give her and some of her friends in the class review sessions before exams. This shows the persistent support that Patricia’s mom gives her to help support her academic skills.

Patricia does not feel any pressure from her parents, only encouragement and knows that they want the best for her. Patricia’s parents encourage her by attending her events and praising her verbally when things are going well. When there are issues they help her identify the root of the problem. When it comes to making family decisions, Patricia’s has little input but when it comes to decisions Patricia needs to make in her own day to day life she feels that her parents give her a decent amount of control and independence. Puja will encourage Patricia to participate in outside opportunities that they find for her, but ultimately Patricia gets to decide which opportunities she participates in. Since starting high school Patricia has felt increased amounts of stress and can feel overwhelmed at times with homework, studying and preparing for exams. Puja believes that they have given Patricia the guidance and experiences to be a well-rounded, independent thinker who will do well once she goes away to college.

Patricia believes that her parents have had the biggest influence on her achievement and motivation. She is motivated by not wanting to let them down and tries to live up to not only the standard that they set for her but the one that they model for her in their life.
Patricia motivates herself by working hard, taking initiative and asking for help when needed. Patricia thinks that teachers that are detailed orientated and build relationships with their students are the ones that have the biggest influence on her achievement and motivation to learn.

The Shaw’s identified basketball as a talent domain and have given Patricia ample exposure, practice and opportunities to develop her skill and talent. This includes paying for her to be on additional club basketball teams, hiring private coaches and taking her to additional strength and conditioning sessions. This has followed a continuum from when she was a young child until present. This would make them very high on the Talent Development Framework for the domain of athletics.

In terms of complex families Patricia feels supported emotionally and through resources that her parents provide her. She looks up to them, and sees them as role models in terms of hard work and setting high standards for her to achieve. This would put the Shaws high in the concept of integration. Where they fall off is on the differentiation scale. While Patricia has been encouraged to participate in some enrichment programs and join other clubs she has neglected to do so. Patricia has not sought out challenges outside of basketball. If there is a problem in school even though Puja states she wants Patricia to overcome it on her own, she steps in to help and assists her in any way she can.

Interests Summary

All students were involved in extra-curricular interests with each playing at least one sport and three out of the four were involved in music with Patricia being the one exception. Both Mike and Kellan had strong interest in technology with projects in coding, programing, 3d printing, and drones with Kellan having a strong interest in photography.
Expectation Summary

Jessica, Kellan and Patricia all stated that their parents had high academic expectations but really no rules to speak of at home except for the rule that they needed to do homework first when they got home from school. Mike’s parents also had high academic expectations but also closely supervised his activities at home and enforced restrictions on homework, television viewing and when and how he spends time with his friends.

Grades and Learning Summary

All students have expectations to get straight A’s, which they all achieve with only one student getting a final grade of a B in Honors Geometry. Mike and Patricia never felt challenged at school until high school and Kellan still does not feel challenged. Kellan saw grades as a doorway to future opportunities and homework mostly as a waste of time, but a requirement he needed to complete. Mike, Patricia and Jessica each stated that grades were not the most important thing to them and that colleges were also looking at extra-curricular activities that they participated in and community service they completed.

Resources and Support Summary

All students felt that their parents provided all of the support and resources that they needed. This included financial support with extra money going towards lessons, sessions, teams and programs that would add to their academic and extra-curricular talent domain. Physically and emotionally the students felt supported by their parents by their presence at their activities and their verbal encouragement. Jessica expressed a lack of physical support from her mom
because of her busy schedule but did say that she supported her emotionally when they were together.

**Encouragement/Pressure, Control of Decisions Summary**

All students felt that they had control of the decisions that affected their daily life. Jessica also had almost an equal say when it came to her input in family decisions made with her family. Patricia was at the opposite end of the spectrum with her parents making most family decisions on their own. Mike and Kellan’s family participated in family discussions listening to their children’s input and weighing it into the final decision which parents would make. Kellan and Patricia felt absolutely no academic pressure from their parents and only encouragement. Jessica felt some parental pressure to complete homework and household chores and Mike felt parental pressure to do well in school and in gymnastics but encouragement to try new activities and opportunities. Jessica, Mike and Patricia all put pressure on themselves to do well in school.

**Influencing Achievement Summary**

Jessica, Kellan and Patricia all felt that their parents were the biggest influence on their academic achievement and motivation to learn. Mike felt that he was the biggest influence because he is the one doing the work.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to identify how talented students’ perceive the influence their parents have on their achievement and motivation to learn. This chapter includes discussion of the major findings related to the literature on talented students and their daily interactions, routines and experiences with their parents. This chapter also presents this study’s connection to the talent development and complex family theories. The chapter concludes with the limitations, areas for future research, and a brief summary.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do talented high school students perceive the influence their parents have on their achievement and motivation to learn?
2. What are the specific differences and similarities in the findings between the talented high school students?
3. How do the talented high school students’ perceptions differ from that of their parents?
Interpretations of Findings

Parents’ Influence on their Talented Child’s Achievement and Motivation

All of the students saw their parents as a big influence on their achievement and motivation to learn. Jessica described her parents’ influences as a team, in which her dad supported her academically and her mom supported her physical and emotional well-being. Kellan’s parents set up an environment that made learning accessible, providing encouragement and resources. Jessica and Kellan’s experiences with their parents align with the literature emphasizing the importance of parental assistance in material resources and emotional support (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). Mike’s parents identified his talent early and advocated for him to be in a school program. They also pushed him to pursue interests outside of school. Close parental supervision and advocating for their children in this manner is consistent with the literature in which Lareau (2003) uses the term concerted cultivation to refer to middle class parents consistently fostering and assessing their children’s talents while also not hesitating to intervene on their behalf. Patricia stated that her parents have been role models for working hard and setting a high standard and that she knows her parents are there to help her or will find resources to help her if they cannot. This aligns with literature like Winner (2000) that found that when parents are role models they also show their children how to set specific goals that are attainable and also raise their child’s motivation.

The Talent Development Framework emphasizes that abilities are domain specific and malleable. Having opportunities available and being accepted by the talented student are essential to the development of talent. The teaching of mental skills such as concentration, overcoming setbacks, and connecting effort to achievement are also part of the Talent Development
Framework. Social skills such as being courteous, and graceful as well as other skills that give students tools to build relationships are also part of the framework.

Identifying domain specific abilities, believing that talents can be developed, providing and taking opportunities, and developing mental and social skills are all consistent with my findings in that each parent identified more than one area of interest and ability of their child in different talent domains and provided opportunities and resources outside of school to contribute to improving their child’s achievement and motivation to learn. Parents in this study were able to positively influence their talented student’s achievement and motivation to learn by signing their children up for academic opportunities on the weekends and during summer break at the Northwestern Center for Talent Development and the Illinois Math and Science Academy. Registering and paying for their children to play on “club” teams, paying for private coaches, and driving them to extra practices and tournaments were ways these parents provided extra resources and opportunities for their child to increase their skills in an athletic talent domain. Having their child take dance lessons, getting them involved in playing instruments, and providing technology resources like computers, drones, and even 3D printers allowed their students to have extra opportunities to practice skills in these artistic and technology domains of talent. Even Kellan, who refused all outside of school formal opportunities to take academic classes, was on club sports teams, was in band, and had all of the technology resources he could wish for. On the extreme end of providing your child with opportunities were the Nelsons, who transformed two rooms in their house for Mike and his brothers and sisters so they could practice music or technology skills such as coding, programing, and creating print projects whenever they wanted.

Mental and social skills can be found in the conversations shared about the support the talented students felt from their moms. Jessica emphasized that those were the areas where her
mom supported her the most, not in the academic arena. Both the Nelson and Shaw families spoke to teaching and expecting their children politeness and respect to family, friends and teachers.

Evidence that the students actually developed their talent over time can be seen in the student’s academic success with thirty-nine A’s being earned out of forty for in their end of semester final academic class grades. Other areas of growth and achievement outside of grades can be found in the following paragraphs.

Jessica and Patricia showed success in the athletic domain by making their high school teams and club teams in volleyball and basketball respectively. Patricia even made the varsity team as a starter in her freshman year. The reason for her highly developed talent in basketball compared to Jessica in basketball could be related to the fact that she started playing and practicing basketball in elementary school, joined a club team, has been receiving consistent individualized private lesson coaching and outside of academics it is Patricia’s only area of focus. Jessica on the other hand started playing volleyball in middle school and joined a volleyball club team but also shares her attentional energies with piano and theater practice.

Mike and Kellan have shown evidence of talent development in the technology domain by both securing business opportunities at a very young age. In Kellan’s case he was proficient enough in drone photography that he was able to take pictures on his vacation and post them to his Instagram page which was then noticed by a local city’s tourism website who then purchased some of his pictures and hired him to take additional pictures. This only happened because Kellan was allowed by his parents to pursue his interest, buy the drones and photography equipment and dedicated time to practice using the equipment over a period of time to gain proficiency. In Mike’s case he was able to 3D print and assemble “fidget spinners” that were very popular at the time. He also able to sell them at school by setting an affordable price compared to a store bought item and
by using his sisters to illicit customers. This only was able to happen because Mike’s parents realized that he could not use the maker space at school due to scheduling restraints and decided to turn one of their rooms in their house into their own maker space, purchasing the 3D printer and other technology tools for Mike to practice on. Mike’s parents also pushed him to take an entrepreneurial class at the Illinois Math and Science Academy.

Jessica’s parents have enrolled her in piano lessons since she was six years old, this has enabled her to be the keyboard player in the school band as well as in her own “girls rock band” that she formed with her friends. Mike’s skill on percussions increased to the point of where the teacher talked to the parents about hiring a very specific private lesson teacher that he knew that could help him continue his talent development. Getting to that skill point took a lot of practice which he was able to do in the music room his parents made at home including purchasing a drum set and borrowing another from Mike’s band teacher. These are all examples that emphasize the importance that parents play in their children’s talent development process.

For children to transform their talent into expertise the support of the family is essential. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) define a family as complex when it has integration, a stable condition in which individuals feel a sense of support and consistency, and differentiation in which members are encouraged to develop their individuality by finding new challenges and opportunities for growth. In some families children have to use all of their energy just to deal with the problems happening at home.

Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) further outlined more specifically what behaviors would illustrate the concepts of integration and differentiation. Under the concept of integration the parents show support by focusing a significant amount of time and energy on the child, modifying their own plans on their child’s behalf and showing empathy towards their child’s behaviors.
Integration is also shown by having a harmonious household in which the house is organized, there are clear rules set, and family member behavior is consistent. Finally, integration is shown by the parents modeling a strong work ethic and by setting high expectations for their child.

Differentiation can be seen when parents provide challenges and opportunities for their child, promote independence, discourage idleness and encourage activities that require self-discipline. Differentiation can also be seen when children are not bogged down by family chores or obligations, when parents provide their children a quiet place to work and when children are provided privacy.

The families in my study described an environment that was loving, supportive and full of challenging opportunities. Each of the families in my study had two parents that were married, well educated, employed and reasonably well off. This gave the children in this study advantages of more parental attention to guide and challenge them. It also gave the children more leisure time to develop their skills in a safe environment. Teenagers who were able to be dependent on their parents that invested their time, energy and money into them were than able to benefit from extended periods of independence and exploration. The teenagers then need to spend this time of independence and exploration in a way that will encourage growth and development. The families in this study showed different variations of complexity.

The Smith family showed integration by having parents that modeled a strong work ethic and set high expectations for Jessica. Mr. Smith also dedicated a lot of time and energy attending a lot of Jessica’s activities and drove Jessica to all of her volleyball games and tournaments. The Smith Family showed differentiation through providing a large amount of independent challenges and growth producing activities such as piano, theater, and volleyball that Jessica was able to perform on her own. Being alone a lot Jessica often had a quiet place to work and had privacy.
The Dwyer family displayed integration by setting up the household environment as a place to learn. Kellan knows that his mom will consistently implement her mantra of letting him explore his curiosity without interference which provides a safe learning environment to function in. Kellan’s fierce independence in how he goes about learning new topics during his leisure time and his dedication to applying these learning techniques each day after school embodies the concept of differentiation. Kellan is able to work quietly in his room with almost unlimited privacy as his mom trusts him and his track record of spending his attentional energies on learning and developing his talents.

The Nelson family shows integration as the mom has put her career on hold so that she can be at home and focus her time and attention on meeting the needs of Mike and her other children. She is a knowledgeable resource for academics, spends a lot of time looking for new learning opportunities for Mike and sets high expectations for him by expecting him to give his best in everything he does. There are also very clear rules to be followed in the Nelson home including expectations for homework and limits on television watching. Idleness is definitely discouraged in the Nelson home. Mary really pushes Mike to take on new challenges that require self-discipline such as band and gymnastics. This show of differentiation can sometimes be limited as Mike’s independence is controlled by her close supervision of his progress in these activities. This can cause him to be stressed. An extreme example of differentiation would be how the Nelson’s transforming two rooms in their house just to be safe areas for their children to quietly practice music and technology skills whenever they wish.

Puja Shaw displays integration by modeling a strong work ethic and setting high standards for her daughter Patricia. Mom devotes time to helping Puja develop her talents by finding coaches, club teams, private lessons and strength training for basketball as well as finding tutors and study
groups for academic help. In the area of differentiation Puja limits the independence that Patricia develops by stepping in when there is any sign of academic problems. Puja has encouraged her to join clubs and different enrichment programs but Patricia has not wanted to take up these challenges with the exception of basketball related activities. Patricia also has to spend time on household chores and obligations that do limit her attentional energies she has to focus on developing her academic and athletic talents.

**Rules and Communication**

Parental influence can also be interpreted in how these talented high school students described the rules, communication, and routines their parents set in regard to their school work, grades, and homework. Jessica, Kellan and Patricia all felt that there were almost no formal rules set by their parents, but instead they had common sense understandings when it came to the expectations. This finding is inconsistent with the literature that stated parents of talented students usually have very set rules as part of their family structure, possibly as a result of the rules and discipline it takes for the family to manage a complex schedule (Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee & Thomson, 2014). Olszewski-Kubilius et al.’s finding was only true, for Mike, whose parents did employ a very structured approach to managing their children. Mrs. Nelson is a stay at home mom and uses that time searching for opportunities for her children, scheduling their activities and figuring out transportation. Jessica and Patricia’s parents both work which provides these talented students ample time at home unsupervised. This would make it extremely difficult to have a structured rule set that needs to be followed when there is not an adult at home to enforce them. Kellan is an outlier in the fact that he is so independently motivated that he follows his own routine
when he gets home. Eileen, who is home when he gets home from school, does not try to apply any rules to his already structured way of doing things.

Patricia and Kellan each expressed being able to talk with their parents in an open way and to receiving communication from their parents that was mostly positive and supportive. This finding is consistent with Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993), who found that a complex family provides consistent communication that showed love and support for their talented child. Jessica’s parents communicated to her in a very open and honest way and she felt that she could talk to either parent about any topic or problem she was having with the exception of talking about her friends. Through past experiences she felt that her parents overreacted to her discussions on this topic so she purposefully does not discuss this with them. Mike receives a lot of encouragement from his parents to take on new challenges and try new activities. He enjoys this communication and says that this has helped him gain experiences that he would not have tried out if his parents didn’t give him a little push. Mike however has a tendency to hold his feelings and communication in when he is dealing with a problem or feeling pressure. When he does talk, he usually talks with his dad because conversations with his mom in the past have led to them getting into disagreements.

One rule the students all acknowledged was that their parents emphasized that homework must be complete before they could do anything else. These students completed homework in a common area and also used a family computer in the common area to complete a lot of their academic work. Routines for the students involved getting home from school, often after a sport or activity, getting something to eat, and completing homework. None of the parents were active participants in completing the homework but were available if their child needed assistance.
In their investigation of talented teenagers, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) found that in complex families, teens showed more efficient attentional investment in productive activities showing both increased time and quality spent studying and doing homework.

This common rule of completing homework first is also consistent with Siegel’s finding (2013) of parents setting reasonable expectations on their talented child’s expected effort towards schoolwork, including possible rules about completing homework immediately after school and before watching television, playing video games, and using technology for social purposes.

Opportunities and Resources Outside of School

All four students were engaged in activities outside of school and said they were influenced by their parents’ choices of activities when they were younger in sports and other activities like band, theater, and dance. Early on the students were put into the activities by parent choice and because the parents felt the activity matched their child’s interests. As the participants became older, they had more choice in activities as they participated in and began to enjoy certain activities over others. These talented students had families that gave them early exposure to activities and programs that could develop their talent and skills. As the students grew older they have to make the choice and be motivated to continue to put effort and task commitment to these talent domains so that the Talent Development process can continue.

Siegel, Rubenstein, Pollard, and Romey (2010) found that student interest is one of the strongest self-reported predictors of achievement across a wide variety of domains. All of the students felt their parents encouraged them to try new activities outside of school. The students knew their parents would drive them to their activity, support their activity financially through travel/club teams or private coaches, and travel to the activity to support them. Some even built areas for
them to practice their skills inside their house. This finding of parental encouragement is consistent with Coleman and Guo (2013), who found that parent’s support and encouragement allow their children the time and motivation to pursue and develop their interests/passion.

This finding was also consistent with the findings of Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Arnold (2003), who identified that parents provide two essential resources to their child’s development of talent: money and time. Kellan was presented with many academic opportunities to challenge himself outside of school from his parents, but he turned most of those opportunities down. He took a different path to develop his talent thinking that he could best decide how to learn the material he was interested in through learning tools like watching YouTube and participating in online chat discussions. This path was outside the normal path of talent development as he wasn’t relying on traditional teachers or learning programs, instead relying on online experts and collaboration. Most importantly, he consistently followed this process to develop his talents and skills. Kellan’s work ethic in this area coincides with researcher’s belief that deliberate practice is a key factor in moving ones talent to the next level (Siegle 2013, Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007).

Control over Decision Making/Involvement of Parents

All of the students felt they had control over the daily decisions that affect them the most. This included control over the activities they wanted to participate in, going to practice on a daily basis, hanging out with friends, and academic time spent doing homework and studying. As a whole, the students were very happy with the independence they had on items that affected their life the most and were not looking for either more involvement or more independence from their parents. Having students foster their independence is important in talent development because it
allows students to follow their natural interests and curiosities. This can lead students to optimal experiences which increases engagement. Student’s memories of peak moments motivates students to keep improving in order to repeat the same intensity of the experience (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993).

When it comes to decisions that affected the entire family, each participant stated a family discussion took place. There was a range of responses from the participants about how much input they had on family decisions. Jessica and her mother Mandy both stated that because they have only three people in their family, Jessica almost has an equal say in family decisions. Kellan and his mother Eileen also stated that big decisions that affect the family are made collaboratively by all family members. Mary, Mike’s mom, expressed that while there is always a family discussion, input from their children is taken into consideration as they get older. This finding is consistent with Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, and Muellermore (1988) regarding an authoritative parenting style marked by warm and responsive parental behavior with open lines of communication that included the child in family discussions. This finding also aligns with research showing that children whose parents use an authoritative parenting style have higher achievement than their peers whose parents employ an authoritarian parenting style, which was high in demandingness but low in responsiveness and tended to be more controlling and punitive (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). The exception to this finding was Patricia and her mother Puja, who both expressed that Puja will ask for Patricia’s input on smaller decisions but does not ask for any of her children’s input on larger decisions that affect the family, leaving that for Puja and her husband.
Pressure and Encouragement

All four student participants felt mostly encouraged by their parents and only small amounts of pressure when it came to homework and grades. They felt emotionally supported by their parents, knew their parents came to their activities, could talk to their parents about problems, and knew that when their parents offered advice, it was because they cared about their child’s wellbeing. The students also said their parents also pushed them to try new activities outside of school. These findings are consistent with Bloom’s 1985 study in which talented students identified parental encouragement as an important environmental factor in turning potential into high achievement. Finding the balance between pressure and encouragement is a difficult task for parents, as Whitmore (1986) described, in that parents who put pressure on their talented children rarely produce sustained motivation in them. Baum et al. (1995) also found that emotional issues caused by dysfunctional family conditions contributed to the underachievement of students with high academic potential.

One of these conditions included parental pressure on their talented children to always achieve at high levels. The parents in this study achieved that balance between encouragement and pressure, which is also consistent with Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993), who found talented students are more likely to reach higher levels of achievement if parents find the balance of supporting their child at a high level without putting too much pressure or too high of expectations on their child. All four students interviewed received straight A’s in all of their academic classes every semester the previous year and in most subject areas were taking honors classes. The one exception to this was Patricia who earned a B in her honors Geometry class. Mike was excelling in band to the point the teacher suggested private lessons from a specific
instructor he knew would push him to continue developing his talent. Patricia’s basketball skills landed her on her varsity high school team as a freshman. Jessica’s volleyball skill has increased from playing for the first time in junior high to making the high school team and consistently starting on her club volleyball team where she receives consistent practice and opportunities to get better.

Mike did feel pressure in his competitive gymnastics and ended up quitting against his mom’s wishes. In this case it seemed that parental expectations took the fun out of the activity and he lost interest and motivation in continuing to develop that particular talent.

Other Influences: Self and Teachers

All of the student participants thought they played a major part in their achievement and motivation to learn. They acknowledged that their parents may present opportunities but realized it is up to them to take advantage of the opportunities. When it came to school and grades, they all felt that school had been pretty easy for them up to high school. They all reported having good habits of being disciplined, working hard, completing homework before it is due, paying attention in class, and going to see teachers if they had questions. These finding align with Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell’s (2012), who found that it was not enough to be presented with opportunities, but talented students have to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. This requires certain psychological skills like the ability to handle criticism and challenges as well as persistence, focus, drive and willingness to take strategic risks.

One surprising finding was that the talented students felt the least influence came from their teachers. One reason given by several of the participants was that teachers can actually negatively affect their motivation by using poor teaching strategies and talking down to their
students. All of the students mentioned that teachers who focus on a positive relationship, have engaging classrooms, and make learning interesting have had a positive influence on their achievement and motivation to learn. This finding is consistent with Hertberg-Davis and Callahan (2008), who found that students saw the relationship between the teacher and students was one of the two most important factors in an improved learning environment.

**Student Differences and Similarities**

What are the specific differences and similarities in the findings between the talented high school students? The talented students in this study shared a lot of similar experiences. They all participated in an extra-curricular sport and most played an instrument. This meant that a lot of their leisure time was spent on growth and skill increasing activities.

They all knew that their parents had high expectations for them and three out of the four students had very little rules to follow outside of getting homework done first. They were expected to get straight A’s from their parents which they did without much issue, but Kellan where Kellan saw grades as the gateway to future opportunities, the other three students emphasized the importance of grades but also thought extra-curricular and service was important for college. All four obviously are looking at high school in how it will best prepare them to get into the best college possible.

All of the students felt supported by their parents with resources financial and emotional, they felt encouraged from their parents to do well and to participate in outside of school activities and they felt independence in their personal decisions that affected their life the most. All of these findings provide the construct of complex families. The two forces of stability and pushing
towards growth and change allow the students to use their attentional energies to develop their talent and skills.

In terms of differences among these talented high school students, Jessica was an only child and spent a great deal of time home alone. Kellan was a much more independent learner than the rest of the students and created his own learning opportunities at home. He often refused the outside challenges and opportunities his parents suggested. Mike had more structured rules and guidelines controlling his life from an early age. Patricia had more chores to complete at home than the other talented students and expressed her dislike of these activities. In Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s study of talented teenagers they found that in complex families children were often excused from household routines such as chores so they would have more time and energy towards productive tasks such as homework and studying (1993). These differences show that even within the Talent Development and Complex Family framework, individual family dynamics are going to bend and change the frameworks to adjust to the needs of the family. The changes can result in variations in the complexity of the family and ultimately the achievement of the child. Using one of the examples from above, because there are increased household responsibilities on Patricia compared to the other students she has to use some of her attentional energies on those household duties which takes away from time spent on growth producing activities, lowering the differentiation and possibly her talent development.

Student and Parent Perceptions Similarities and Differences

Research question 3 asked how the talented high school students’ perceptions differed from that of their parents. The findings show the talented students and their parents had very similar perceptions of the areas of inquiry that we explored. However, there were a few times in
which the talented students and their parents saw the same situation differently. For example, all of the parents thought their children enjoyed school, when in fact the talented students told me that they only liked seeing their friends and went to school because they were required to.

Eileen stated that she had different perspectives on things than Kellan, but she and her husband let him make most of the decisions. Although she would like him to take on new academic challenges outside of school, he said he would rather learn at home on his own. Eileen’s prerogative to let Kellan pursue his interests on his own is backed up by the research of Baum et al. (1995) who state that the highest level of student achievement often results when students are engaged in self-selected studies. Allowing children to pursue topics of passionate interest often result in high levels of achievement.

Mary Nelson felt that Mike should return to gymnastics as a sport and believed he would eventually participate again. Mike acknowledged that his mom pressured him to stay in gymnastics until he was eventually allowed to quit. He feels pressure to get all A’s where Mary feels that they encourage him to stay at his “A” level. In Olszewski-Kubilius and Thomson’s (2015) research on talent development a family of a talented child who has expectations for exceptionally high levels of achievement can cause the child to struggle with anxiety. There is also a difference in perspective in pressure and encouragement when it comes to Mike trying new challenges and activities. Mike, however, does admit that if he was not pressured into trying these activities, he would not have participated in them and now some of these activities he really enjoys. Mary Nelson’s insistence on pushing Mike to try these challenges is consistent with the findings of Wu (2008) where parents believe the nurturance of talent, was more important than the ability their child was born with and can be explored more completely as parents realize the influence they can have over their children’s development of talent.
Puja wanted Patricia to work on homework as soon as she arrived home and to go to bed at a decent time, but Patricia did not want to work on homework when she came home, preferring to eat and take a nap, she then stays up late completing homework. Patricia feels pressure to get good grades, to do a lot of housework chores and to not be on her phone as much. Puja does not see these things as pressure but encouragement. Patricia expressed that she did not like having her phone taken away as a punishment. This is consistent with Garn, Matthews, and Jolly’s (2010) study which suggests that using extrinsic behavior modifications may actually make the problem worse and decrease a child’s academic motivation.

Interviewing and getting the perceptions of talented students and their mothers makes this study unique and valuable to the literature. By the child and the mother having similar perceptions on key issues strengthens the data and shows that they are communicating and acting in a way that is transparent with each other. In the cases where there was different perceptions between the child and their mother, each could be dissected to have different possible causes. In the case of liking school, my perspective was that the talented students actually did like going to school, seeing their friends and participating in their extra-curricular school activities. Even the learning aspect had positive experiences with teachers that built relationships, increased the rigor and had engaged hands on learning experiences. There were times when the students were not challenged, where they thought practices like annotating was a waste of time and when teacher behaviors caused them not to like a certain class.

Another example is when Jessica stated that she does not talk about friend issues with her parents. Her mom does not realize that her reaction to previous conversations on this topic with Jessica has caused a chink in her communication and trust with her daughter. Jessica mentioned
that she needs to bring this up with her mom. If she doesn’t, this is possibly something that can cause increased stress and distrust in the relationship.

A different kind of example is when the child and the mom know and are open about their different perspectives on a topic. An example is when Kellan and his mom have completely different perspectives on the topic of outside of school opportunities. She wants him to try some of these formal programs and he wants to use the time instead learning on his own. She does not force or put pressure on him to do these formal programs she just provides him with the opportunity and he continues to do individualized learning with the help of online message boards, books and YouTube videos. Because he continues to excel in school and in his online studies she never presses the issue. The trust between them is strong and their different perspectives coexist with each other without conflict.

Parents of talented students and talented students themselves may be able to find guidance in these finding. Both when the perceptions are the same and when they are different and use them to improve the achievement, skills and motivation of talented students.

Takeaways

One clear takeaway from my interviews with students and their mothers was that the students were not challenged academically until high school, with one student still not being challenged at the high school level. Schools need to do a better job of meeting the needs of talented students. The process of talent identification can start in elementary school and can be an ongoing process as student’s progress through middle school. In addition to starting the identification process earlier, schools should use a model similar to the talent development model in which students are exposed to a variety of opportunities and can be identified in a wider range
of talent domains. This process will give students who don’t have as many opportunities outside of school a chance show their interest and talent and will allow for a larger number of students to be identified in areas outside the normal domains of Math and English. At the high school level, AP and honors classes are a great start to challenging talented students. However, expanding opportunities in the arts, and technology areas would allow for students to develop their talent throughout the four years they attended high school and expanding community partnerships would open up more internships and expert mentor experiences.

A barrier that parents of talented students face is finding the right balance between supporting and challenging their child, which can be extremely difficult. Each of the families interviewed provided information that parents of other talented students could learn from. Exposing their children to a variety of experiences, opportunities and resources and allowing their children to be guided by their interest seemed to be a successful path to prolonged talent development for these families. Giving their talented children the freedom to make personal decisions, such as when they wanted to quit one interest or activity and try another allowed for increased independence and ownership of their talent domain they chose to explore. Parents were also able to challenge students by pushing them to at least try a different activity or class by making the decision to stick with the activity completely up to the child after they gave the activity a fair chance by making a short term commitment.

Talented students in this study used their attentional energies outside of school in areas of their interest and enjoyment. Whether it was basketball, computers, band, drone photography, piano, or 3D printing, students took their talent and applied effort to further develop their skill and achievement. These students knew that their parents did everything they could to give them the resources and opportunities they needed to learn and grow, but at the end of the day they
need to take those opportunities. In the words of Kellan it’s up to them to create the future out of their opportunities.

In the present, I want to have opportunities right now to be able to do what I like, like the photography thing. That was something I created for myself with Instagram. So I definitely have a role there on keeping myself focused on what has to happen.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of my study is that the pool of talented students I interviewed all came from upper middle class families with two college-graduated parents who were still married. While these are all positive aspects for these families, it did not provide much variation in the socio-economic status of these talented students. Parental education levels were shown to be a powerful predictor of educational attainment for their children. In the College Board/National Journal, Next America poll of over 1,200 people showed that students whose parents graduated from college were more likely than those whose parents did not obtain degrees to see college as essential to their success, have been encouraged by their parents to attend college, to have attended college and to have graduated from college (2014). Perhaps students who came from a lower socio-economic background or from families where one or both parents did not graduate from college would have had different responses and lead to different findings.

Another limitation is the small sample size of my participants. While conducting 12 interviews (each student twice and each mother once) for this study was a large task for me, interviewing a larger number of talented students and their parents would certainly add to the validity of the study. Including the interviews of both parents by including the talented students’ fathers would also strengthen the data by getting another perspective on the questions explored.
Another limitation in my study is that it is limited to the perceptions and recall of my participants. I believe that all participants were trying to give an accurate account but sometimes detail can be lost in memory. A final limitation in my study were that there were no low achieving high ability students in my participant selection. Having a student who was not achieving at a high level but equal in ability to the other students could have provided a variation in my findings.

Areas for Future Research

As mentioned in my limitation section, I think that expanding the scope of the identified talented students to include different socio-economic groups, parental education statuses, and family dynamics would definitely be an area for future qualitative research.

All of the students in my study ended up being successful academically and were earning good academic marks in their high school honors and advanced placement classes. Future studies could use purposeful selection to select both students who were academically successful and students who were not academically successful. This could possibly result in different findings between the two groups.

Another area for future research would be to further explore the balancing act that complex families need to practice in how much integration and differentiation they show to their children to make them achieve while being supported as a family but still expanding their individuality.

Finally, future research should continue to look at the different types of underachievement of talented students. You have talented students failing classes and talented students getting A’s in classes, yet both groups may be underachieving and for different reasons. Having interviews of a variety of underachieving talented students would be important in this future research.
Summary

This was a qualitative case study of four talented high school students and their mothers. All four students perceived their parents had a major influence on their achievement and motivation to learn, with three of the four students putting it above even their own influence. These talented high schools students felt their parents set high standards for them and also modeled those standards through the way they live, working hard to achieve their goals. Three of the students felt there were no formal rules to follow from their parents, just common sense. The students acknowledged their parents had provided opportunities to challenge them outside of school, influenced their activity choices early in their life, and provided extra resources (e.g., time, knowledge and money) to be successful in these activities/interests.

The students contended their parents had the final say when it came to decisions that affected the whole family and acknowledged there was a range in how their input was taken into consideration. The students described mostly encouragement from their parents and only noted pressure when it came to completing homework, getting good grades, and doing chores around the house. However, all four students stated that when it came to decisions that affected their own daily personal life, they had a lot of control and that the control increased as they became older. All four students believed that they have the right balance between supporting and challenging their children and did not want more or less involvement.

Besides their parents, they also acknowledged their peer group, coaches, teachers, and extended family also influenced their motivation and achievement. However, all of the students also expressed that while teachers can have a positive impact, they can also negatively affect the students’ achievement and motivation to learn.
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