

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL STRATEGIES:  
THE PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH SCHOOL GIFTED STUDENTS  
AND AIG DIRECTORS

by

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## ABSTRACT

MASHAEL ALHIBS. Social and Emotional Strategies: The Perspectives of High School Gifted Students and AIG Directors. (Under the direction of DR. CINDY GILSON)

Limited studies address high school gifted students' social and emotional needs (Knudsen, 2018; Kregel, 2015). Additionally, there is a lack of research regarding high school gifted students' and Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) directors' perspectives on the social and emotional strategies implemented locally within their school districts (Clinkenbeard, 2012; Kitsantas et al., 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was (a) to discover the services school districts proposed to implement to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students and (b) to explore high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about these services. Using purposeful sampling, this qualitative research included five participants from two school districts. The data collection methods implemented during this study were compiling school documents (i.e., 2022–2025 Local AIG Plans) and conducting five separate interviews. I used document analysis to analyze data from the Local AIG Plans and thematic analysis to analyze data from the interviews. Results from the document analysis yielded three themes: *program-level and curricula strategies, resources and support, and collaboration and counseling strategies*. Results from the thematic analysis of interviews yielded three themes on how schools implement social and emotional services from the participants' perspective: *social and emotional services, interaction, and gathering and sharing information*. Further, the thematic analysis of participants' in-depth perspectives about these services yielded three themes: *satisfaction and awareness, counseling, and limitations and improvements*.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Although researchers' and educators' attention has been on meeting gifted students' needs, most of that attention was on the elementary and middle school level (Kregel, 2015). Limited attention has been provided to high school gifted students. Further, there is a definite lack of attention regarding understanding high school students' social and emotional needs and how school districts respond to them proactively and reactively (Kregel, 2015). Although research has indicated the correlation between academic, social, and emotional needs (Meulen et al., 2013) and the influence of social and emotional needs on students' success in school and life (Blaas, 2014; Guignard et al., 2012), most of these studies focus on the elementary school level (Kregel, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2019), approximately 6–10% of students in American schools qualify as gifted. This percentage can be translated to an estimated 3 to 5 million gifted students in public schools (NAGC, 2019). Although the number of gifted students is increasing (NAGC, 2019), there is no agreement in the field of gifted education on a consistent definition of giftedness (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020). While the main criterion for labeling gifted students is based on high cognitive ability (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020; McBee & Makel, 2019; Peters et al., 2019), there are additional domains considered by schools in labeling students as gifted, such as creativity, leadership, and/or motivation (NAGC, 2015). Renzulli (1978) noted that giftedness "involves the interaction of three basic traits: above-average abilities, high levels of commitment, and high levels of creativity" (p. 7). Renzulli's definition has had a broad appeal but is not widely formalized into identification practice in schools.

By any definition, it is widely accepted that gifted students are unlike typically developing students in their cognitive ability or potential to achieve academically; at the same time, they are similar to their peers in a variety of other ways (Cross et al., 2019). Gifted students often exhibit a range of characteristics; however, it is critical to highlight that not all gifted students demonstrate all these characteristics (Koura & Al-hebaishi, 2014). Gifted students usually display advanced reasoning skills, broad knowledge, and language proficiency (Foster, 2017; Osokina, 2016), which allow them to move faster through the curriculum in the area of their giftedness (Cross et al., 2015). Many gifted students also demonstrate high levels of skill in organizing, analyzing, synthesizing information, and generating imaginative ideas; therefore, they need to develop these skills beyond the fundamental acquisition of information. In addition, gifted students are known for extraordinary problem-solving skills and can process many challenges they may face in school and/or life (Koura & Al-hebaishi, 2014). On the one hand, gifted students possess creativity and critical thinking skills that often enable them to reach productive solutions to any difficulties (Cross et al., 2015). Due to these characteristics, gifted students may have different experiences in school and life than typically developing students do (Cross et al., 2015). On the other hand, Like their peers, gifted students have a wide variety of educational needs. Because they may differ from typically developing students in their readiness levels, interests, and motivations, educators should be aware of these needs (Koura & Al-hebaishi, 2014).

### ***The Educational Needs***

Gifted students differ in their educational needs from their peers in many ways (Meulen et al., 2013). First, gifted students often require less time to learn new materials. Second, they demonstrate a strong memory, which makes repeating previously learned concepts unneeded.

Third, gifted students usually perceive the educational material at a more abstract and multifaceted level than their peers. Additionally, when gifted students become involved in specific subjects, they often do not move on to other subjects until they feel satisfied that they have mastered them. Finally, gifted students can concentrate on many classroom activities simultaneously without paying direct attention to them (Meulen et al., 2013). Denying these differences may result in inappropriate educational experiences and social and emotional issues, which may then lead to frustration, boredom, and even dropping out of the gifted program or the school (Koura & Al-hebaishi, 2014).

Education adaptations are required to meet gifted students' academic needs (Meulen et al., 2014). Gifted students should be provided with opportunities to work at more advanced levels of difficulty and depth and to carry their inspirational interests into the learning materials (Meulen et al., 2014). This can be done by providing effective and practical gifted programming (Russell, 2018). The heart of effective gifted programming lies in developing and implementing services and instructional strategies that improve and enhance gifted student achievement and social and emotional development (Callahan et al., 2015). Participating in gifted programs can improve students' outcomes by exposing students to high-quality gifted pedagogy (Bui et al., 2014; Card & Giuliano, 2014; Subotnik et al., 2011). Further, researchers on gifted programs demonstrate that participating in these programs may positively impact student achievement and social and emotional development (Card & Giuliano, 2014).

One well-known gifted programming option is enrichment, which involves alterations and additions to the regular curricula to meet gifted students' cognitive, social, and emotional needs (Renzulli et al., 2020). Enrichment programs can be implemented in various approaches, such as pull-out enrichment programs, summer enrichment programs, Saturday and afterschool

programs, summer meeting programs, and mentoring and online learning programs (Renzulli et al., 2020). In order to formulate these elements, it is necessary to properly differentiate content, skills, resources, and products (Kaplan, 2018). These programs provide gifted students with a richer and more varied educational experience than regular classes (Zoubi, 2014). Researchers have demonstrated that enrichment positively impacted gifted students' outcomes and improved their achievement (Stoeger & Sontag, 2012; Wigfield et al., 2015; Zimmerman, 2012). In a meta-analysis of 35 studies on enrichment, Aljughaiman and Ayoub (2013) found positive, statistically significant effects of such programming on gifted students' academic achievement. In addition to the effectiveness of enrichment in meeting gifted students' needs, other types of programming have also proven to be effective.

Another program option is acceleration, which refers to “a strategy of progressing through education faster or ages younger than the norm. This can occur through grade skipping or subject acceleration” (NAGC, 2016, p. 1). The acceleration approach supports more appropriate matching of above-grade-level or advanced curriculum, complexity, and pace with students' intellectual and academic abilities (Plucker & Callahan, 2020). As the definition implies, the phrase *acceleration* is utilized to refer both to acceleration as a service delivery approach (i.e., gifted students receive material at a younger-than-expected age) and as a curriculum model (i.e., gifted students receive curricular material at a faster rate; Plucker & Callahan, 2020; Southern & Jones, 2015). In addition, academic acceleration is often cost-free to schools and offers an opportunity for students to develop their leadership skills, which will lead to long-term academic success (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). Several studies have demonstrated the positive outcomes of acceleration programs on gifted students' academic performance,

achievements, and social and emotional needs (Kretschmann et al., 2014; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016).

The third option for supporting gifted students is differentiation, which is defined as programmatic, curricular, and/or instructional adjustments for students across various settings in response to formal and informal assessments of students' readiness, interests, and learning preferences (Kaplan, 1974; Maker, 1982; Passow, 1982). According to Hockett and Doubet (2021), differentiation is developed from a belief that curriculum and instruction encourage learning and development when they are connected to the specific, assessed needs and abilities of the students involved. According to Kaplan (2018), there are two principal elements for differentiated programs: depth (i.e., a deep understanding of a content of a specific domain) and complexity (looking at other elements, fields, or times of an issue). Differentiation has many benefits if it is effectively implemented (Hockett & Doubet, 2021). First, this approach increases students' motivation since it allows students to learn at their own pace through instruction and materials that are closely matched to their abilities and strengths. Second, in a differentiated instruction classroom, the time is allocated flexibly based on gifted students' needs. Finally, in differentiated instruction classrooms, many learning profile opportunities are offered for the students, and students are often directed toward making interest-based learning decisions (Hockett & Doubet, 2021). Researchers have illustrated the positive effect of differentiation on gifted students' academic achievement (e.g., Altintas & Ozdemir, 2015; Bennett-Rappel & Northcote, 2016).

Although it seems logical that gifted students learn differently and have various educational needs, there often is less attention to their social and emotional needs (Meulen et al., 2014). However, researchers have demonstrated correlations between academic, social, and



emotional needs. Therefore, it is important to take into account gifted students' social and emotional needs (Eklund et al., 2015; Szymanski, 2020), which are the focus of this dissertation.

### ***Social and Emotional Needs***

Although the main focus of schools has traditionally been on students' achievement, it is also important to pay attention to students' social and emotional development and needs. By addressing only the academic needs and not the social and emotional needs of gifted students', opportunities for success are not guaranteed (Cross et al., 2017; Rinn, 2020). Blaas (2014) stated not addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students may lead to underachievement. Therefore, addressing gifted students' social and emotional development and resolving any issues they may face is an emergent need (Cross et al., 2017).

Social and emotional development is the main phenomenon in personality development. Social and emotional development is defined as understanding one's self, feelings, and interactions with others (Rinn, 2020). This development is necessary to feel a sense of security in personal relationships, and growth in these abilities, knowledge, and confidence yields happiness. Therefore, social and emotional development is important in personal development and growth. Without understanding all students' social and emotional development, it is challenging for educators to support and enable students to thrive (Rinn, 2020). As in all individuals, gifted students' social and emotional development is as important as their intellectual development because it provides them with the skills required to experience, cope with, and efficiently handle the unique challenges they may face when interacting with others (Rinn, 2020).

Gifted students' social and emotional development has been a source of interest and discussion within the gifted education field (Lee et al., 2012; Rinn, 2020; Shechtman & Silektor,

2012). Empirical research findings regarding the social and emotional development of gifted students are somewhat mixed (Mendaglio, 2012). Regardless of the mixed results of research, a focus on the social and emotional development of gifted students is needed; denying it may lead to negative outcomes in school experiences, such as increased risk of school dropout and lower academic achievement, as well as perfectionism, underachievement, bullying, stress, anxiety, and suicide (Eklund et al., 2015; Rinn, 2020). Each of these issues is described in more detail in the following section.

### ***Social and Emotional Issues***

An important social and emotional issue some gifted students may face is perfectionism. Individuals with perfectionism have been described as developing unrealistically high goals, rigidly adhering to them, and defining their self-worth in terms of their achievement of these goals (Olton-Weber et al., 2020). Although this definition seems simple enough, perfectionism is not a simple construct to define or measure. There are several ways to conceptualize and measure perfectionism in the research literature, but most of them distinguish between positive and negative forms of it. Hamachek (1978) was among the first to distinguish between positive (or normal) perfectionism and negative (or neurotic) perfectionism. Positive normal perfectionism is characterized by principled efforts to strive for excellence in completing tasks, whereas negative neurotic perfectionism is marked by neurotic and obsessive-compulsive behaviors (Chan, 2012). Many researchers have suggested that gifted students could suffer from unhealthy perfectionism. For example, Guignard et al. (2012) found that gifted sixth-grade students had higher levels of perfectionism than typically developing students. However, Basirion et al. (2014) conducted a study of gifted adolescents and discovered only 11.8% were non-perfectionists, which again suggests the literature has mixed results.

In addition to perfectionism, the academic underachievement of gifted students has been a concern in the field of gifted education (e.g., Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015; Snyder et al., 2019). Researchers define underachievement as a significant discrepancy between potential and actual achievement (e.g., Snyder et al., 2019; Siegle & McCoach, 2020). To classify students as underachieving, the discrepancy between their potential and performance should not be a result of a diagnosed learning disability and must last over an extended period of time (Siegle & McCoach, 2020). Many researchers categorize underachievers into two groups: conventional underachievers and selectively consuming underachievers (Figg et al., 2012; Peters, 2012). Conventional underachievers show a discrepancy between academic performance and cognitive testing, and they are likely to underachieve across all content areas. Selectively consuming underachievers prefer not to perform for various reasons and often have high achievement occasionally in areas they find of interest (Ciancia, 2018). For example, Desmet et al. (2020) found that gifted students' achievement is disrupted when transitioning to high school since the stress of thinking ahead about going to college may negatively impact their achievement motivation.

Another issue discussed in the literature is bullying. According to Peterson and Ray (2006), bullying is "aggressive behavior with the potential to cause physical or psychological harm to the recipient" (p. 148). Cross (2011) defined a bully as an individual who utilizes approaches at his or her disposal, such as intimidation, positional authority, relational authority, and societal authority, to produce limiting effects on another's behaviors, thoughts, or feelings. Because gifted students may be viewed as being different, they may be targets of bullying (Peairs et al., 2019; Peters & Bain, 2011). Espelage et al. (2014) reported that 50% of middle school students had at least one bullying incident in the first year. Additionally, a 3-year study of

bullying among 6th to 9th graders found that 33% of the participants experienced bullying sometimes, and 48% of them reported repeated bullying (Pelchar & Bain, 2014).

While bullying is not a new issue, the widespread transit of bullying tactics in an online venue is a more recent phenomenon known as cyberbullying. It is defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 11). Cyberbullying may include the use of text messages and the internet, including websites, social media, and emails, to intimidate, harass, or humiliate another person (MacFarlane & Mina, 2018). Cyberbullying can be more volatile than traditional bullying because the bully can remain faceless, thus reducing social accountability (Guilbault & MacFarlane, 2020). Supporting positive social and emotional behavior (e.g., self-esteem) among all students, including gifted students, can help to reduce bullying.

More serious personal issues gifted students might experience that warrants more attention from researchers are stress, anxiety, and suicide. Stress is defined as the body's general reaction to any extreme physical, mental, or emotional demand (Haberlin, 2015). Most individuals inevitably experience it under some conditions (George & Baby, 2012; Suldo et al., 2018). Anxiety is associated with worrying beliefs and feelings of tension or fear and can be linked with physical changes such as raised heart rate or rapid breathing (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Chusid (2020) found a high level of stress and anxiety among high school gifted students. Often, anxiety is experienced when taking on new tasks, unknown challenges, or going through new transitions. Stress and anxiety can be a healthy source of motivation to do one's best, or they may prevent individuals from achieving their goals. Furthermore, suicide has been discussed as an unhealthy social and emotional issue facing some gifted students. Different terms and concepts must be discussed to fully understand the suicidal behaviors of gifted

students (Cross & Cross, 2020). There are three categories of suicidal behavior: suicidal ideation, suicidal attempts, and suicide completions. Suicidal ideation is defined as thinking about killing oneself. Suicidal attempts consist of unsuccessful efforts to kill oneself. Suicide completions are those that end in the person's death (Cross & Cross, 2020). The rate between these categories differs. In 2016, the American College Health Association conducted a survey among 95,761 college students. The results indicated that 9.8% of participants reported suicidal ideation, and 1.5% of them reported suicide attempts.

In sum, previous research shows that some gifted students may face social and emotional issues, including perfectionism, academic underachievement, bullying, as well as stress, anxiety, and suicide. As a result, gifted education experts, counselors, and researchers have developed various social and emotional strategies to address these issues.

### ***Social and Emotional Strategies***

Given that gifted students may face social and emotional issues that may in some way be associated with their characteristics and experiences in a gifted program, many strategies (e.g., specific curricula, counseling, and therapy) have been developed to address these issues. One strategy is bibliotherapy, a type of expressive reading therapy (Long & Erwin, 2020). Bibliotherapy has many definitions but is most often described as healing through sharing and reading books to gain insight into personal issues (Long & Erwin, 2020). It is an alternative strategy for helping individuals to deal with their issues and concerns by allowing them to realize that they are not the only ones facing these difficulties (Lucas & Soares, 2013), thereby reducing negative emotions related to their real-life issues (Long & Erwin, 2020). Rather than direct confrontation with social and emotional issues, bibliotherapy provides a less threatening way to face them by initiating the imagination of the reader through their interaction with the story

(Karacan-Özdemir et al., 2019). Previous research has showed bibliotherapy as an effective strategy to address gifted students' social and emotional needs. For example, McCullies and Chamberlain (2013) stated that bibliotherapy could be used as a coping strategy for gifted students who have been affected by devastating experiences such as aggression and bullying. In addition, İlter et al. (2018) found that bibliotherapy decreased perfectionism levels among gifted students. Despite the fact that previous research indicates the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, little attention has been related to high school gifted students' perspectives on this strategy.

A further strategy that has been addressed in the field of gifted education to meet gifted students' social and emotional needs is mentoring. This strategy has become a rapidly developing field of practice and investigation around the world (Mullen & Fletcher, 2012). It can be formal (i.e., more structured and typically using a matching technique to connect two similar individuals) or informal (i.e., natural mentoring relationships that arise more organically). A meta-analysis of 83 research investigations of the mentoring strategy found evidence of the effectiveness of this approach on academic, social, and emotional outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011). Van Dam et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis on the effect of informal mentors on students' outcomes ( $N = 63,327$ ) and found that the presence of an informal mentor was associated with positive outcomes (e.g., reducing academic, social, and emotional issues; positive social and emotional development). These findings suggest that mentoring can provide benefits to all students, including gifted students. Therefore, investigating the implementation of mentoring among school districts may determine what has been successful and potentially encourage other districts to utilize this strategy.

Moreover, mindfulness has been utilized as a social and emotional strategy (Alabdullatif, 2020). Mindfulness refers to the practice of paying attention to each moment of the present with

a nonjudgmental and curious frame of mind (Olton-Weber et al., 2020). Being mindful implies observing, participating, and accepting each moment's experiences (Albrecht et al., 2012). It involves the ability to control one's attention, accept, and be curious (Sharp et al., 2017). Researchers have established the positive effect of mindfulness on high school gifted students' social and emotional development (Alfodhly et al., 2021; Haberlin & O'Grady, 2018). Even though researchers investigated the effectiveness of mindfulness, none of them explored the perspectives of high school gifted students and/or school personnel about the implementation of this strategy. Additionally, no research has explored the implementation of mindfulness in Local Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) Plans, indicating a need for more research in this area.

An additional strategy is collaboration (Mofield, 2020). Collaboration allows two or more professionals to work together (Friend & Cook, 2007). Collaboration can involve working with different educators or professionals such as general education teachers, school counselors, teachers of English language learners, AIG directors'/coordinators, and parents to address the needs of gifted students, including social and emotional needs (NAGC, 2014). Collaboration is a broad term that includes many approaches, such as consultation, co-planning, co-teaching, and coaching. Consultation is a type of collaboration that involves two educators where the "consultant" (e.g., gifted education teacher) provides advice to the collaboration partner (Buettner, 2010). Co-planning is a collaborative approach that involves two teachers collaborating to develop differentiated instruction through the development of assessments, review of assessment data, decision-making for flexible grouping, design of tiered assignments, and curriculum adaptations (Mofield & Phelps, 2020). This approach may or may not lead to co-teaching. Co-teaching involves two professional educators "jointly delivering instruction to a

diverse group of students" (Friend et al., 2010, p. 11). Finally, coaching is a purposeful collaborative technique to improve teaching and learning for student success. Coaches assist teachers in refining goals, monitoring progress, and solving problems (Mofield, 2020). Studies have found that collaboration leads to meeting gifted students' academic, social, and emotional needs (e.g., DeKruyf et al., 2013; Mofield, 2020).

The final strategy is counseling, a broad term that can be used in many contexts and environments; thus, creating a singular definition has been a challenge for the counseling field (Wood & Peterson, 2018). Colangelo and Wood (2015) reported that there are traditionally three types of counseling service providers for gifted individuals. First, services that center on giftedness and talent highlight the significance of determining the unique needs of gifted students and placing the students in appropriate learning environments to meet these needs. Second, professional counseling refers to services provided by professionals and practitioners (e.g., psychologists, social employees, family therapists, and mental health counselors). The American Counseling Association (ACA) states that professional counseling refers to the "relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals" (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 368). Finally, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2019) defines the role of school counselors as offering programs that meet all students' needs and collaborating with other school personnel to maximize opportunities for gifted students.

School counselors provide gifted students with a variety of services, such as individual counseling, career and college counseling, group counseling, enrichment, and community partnerships (Wood & Peterson, 2018). Another role school counselors can play in supporting gifted students who may be facing social and social issues is to direct these students through a



study of social development and behaviors (Fisher & Kennedy, 2016). Many studies support the effectiveness of counseling services in meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs (DeKruyf et al., 2013). In general, counseling techniques for gifted students are not qualitatively different from approaches used for other students. However, small adjustments may need to be made when considering their needs, defining areas for support, and determining techniques for implementation (Cross & Cross, 2015; Fisher & Kennedy, 2016). In other words, almost all counselors already possess the essential knowledge needed to work effectively with gifted students; however, they may need to narrowly modify their techniques to tailor to students' needs (Wood & Peterson, 2018) and consider how giftedness may play a role in the students' issues and development. Although research exhibits the effectiveness of counseling on high school gifted students (John, 2021), most has focused on counseling services related to career and college, indicating a need for additional research. Further, since Local AIG Plans (i.e., the plans used in North Carolina that highlight the processes, procedures, services, and support related to gifted education within a given school district) in North Carolina provide information related to the services offered by the school districts to gifted students, analyzing these plans and gaining key stakeholders' perspectives about them will help determine the implementation of counseling in these districts.

Despite available social and emotional strategies for gifted students in the literature, most of these strategies were based on research involving elementary and/or middle school students (Ciancia, 2018). Limited research on social and emotional strategies at the high school level is available. This indicates a need for additional research in this area to provide more appropriate curriculum and instruction to high school gifted students. Further, to date, no research has investigated Local AIG Plans in terms of implementing social and emotional strategies among

gifted high schoolers (NC State Board of Education & DPI, 2018). Investigating Local AIG Plans has the potential to help determine the district's services for gifted students and what they may be lacking.

### ***Perspectives***

Although research suggests various strategies to enhance gifted students' social and emotional needs (e.g., bibliotherapy, mindfulness, and collaboration), it is important to consider how gifted students view these strategies (Kitsantas et al., 2017; Rogers, 2015). Limited existing information on high school gifted students' perspectives on these strategies indicates an area for future research (Kregel, 2015). Understanding students' perceptions of these programs and strategies may offer suggestions to researchers and educators in the field (Clinkenbeard, 2012; Kitsantas et al., 2017). In addition, exploring students' perceptions would help determine the effectiveness of these strategies. Coleman et al. (2015) claimed that researchers and educators should elicit students' perspectives on the services they receive to emphasize the effectiveness of these services in meeting gifted students' needs.

Further, the AIG directors can significantly impact students' needs, including gifted students (John, 2021). AIG directors, as leaders, can directly influence the strategies provided to students within the school. For example, they can support school counselors' ability to function within their given role in a school (John, 2021). Despite the important roles of school AIG directors, to date, no studies have addressed how they perceived social and emotional strategies provided to high school gifted students in their school district (Neumeister & Burney, 2011; Wood & Peterson, 2014).

In sum, researchers have investigated a variety of strategies to address gifted students' social and emotional needs. However, based on prior literature, these strategies have mainly been

focused on elementary and middle school students (Knudsen, 2018; Kregel, 2015). Limited studies address the needs of high school gifted students. Additionally, although high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perceptions and beliefs are important factors in meeting social and emotional needs (John, 2021; Kitsantas et al., 2017), limited studies have addressed how these stakeholders perceive such strategies. More study is needed to understand how the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of high school gifted students and AIG directors are associated with providing high school gifted students with effective services. Further, Local AIG Plans provide information related to the services offered by school districts in North Carolina; however, limited studies have analyzed these plans and explored the strategies school districts propose to implement.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

There is evidence suggesting a lack of research regarding the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, especially in terms of students' and AIG directors' perspectives regarding the social and emotional strategies implemented locally within their school districts. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to (a) discover the services school districts proposed to implement to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students and (b) understand high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about these services. The research questions to be answered in this study include the following:

1. According to the 2022–2025 Local AIG plans, what social and emotional practices did the school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students?
2. How are schools implementing the social and emotional services that are reported in their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans?

3. What are high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided by their school?

### **Significance of Study**

This study contributed to the literature in several ways. First, there is limited literature on strategies to support high school gifted students' social and emotional needs (Knudsen, 2018; Kregel, 2015). Most of the studies explored strategies for elementary and/or middle school gifted students (e.g., McDaniel & Besnoy, 2019; Meulen et al., 2014; Peterson & Lorimer, 2011). This study investigated the social and emotional strategies provided by school districts for high school gifted students, which will help stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which they are providing appropriate and successful strategies. Second, there is limited research on high school gifted students' perspectives related to social and emotional strategies (Kregel, 2015). Most of the available research assessed how gifted students perceived their academic educational experience (e.g., Lee et al., 2015; Mullet et al., 2018). Given the importance of incorporating students' perspectives to determine the effectiveness of a strategy, this study included high school gifted students' perspectives related to their social and emotional experiences. Finally, this study is the first to identify AIG directors' perspectives related to addressing the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. Perspectives from AIG directors may provide insights regarding the social and emotional strategies implemented for high school gifted students in their school districts, how they implemented these strategies, and their effectiveness. This study's findings can help stakeholders determine the effectiveness of the social and emotional strategies that will help to meet the needs of gifted high school students.

## **Delimitations**

Four delimitations may impact the findings or analysis of the study results. First, the data were collected from three school districts in one Region in North Carolina. Second, I conducted the interviews virtually due to the limited access to schools following the COVID-19 outbreak. This required all participants to have access to a Wi-Fi-enabled device, which excludes participants who may not have access to a computer. Third, document analysis (i.e., 2022–2025 Local AIG plans) was one of the data collection sources. These Local AIG plans change every 3 years (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020), leaving a limited window for evaluating participants' perspectives about their effectiveness before practices are changed again. Fourth, I did not directly observe the implementation of the social and emotional strategies; the data collection method to determine the effectiveness of these strategies was based on high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about social and emotional services.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used frequently in this dissertation, and it is important to understand them within the context of this study. Definitions of these terms are as follows:

### ***Educational Needs***

This means the particular academic or curriculum and subject-specific requirements of students, the fulfillment of which will provide them with appropriate educational opportunities to develop their knowledge (Griffith, 1978).

### ***Emotional needs***

A psychological and/or mental need that is often built on basic feelings like love, fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, frustration, and depression and involves the understanding, compassion, and support of one person for another (Knudsen, 2018).

### ***Gifted Federal Definition***

The term "gifted and talented," when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 [Title IX, Part A, Definition 22], 2002; 20 USC 7801[22], 2004).

### ***Gifted Education***

Specially developed instruction to meet the needs of a gifted student that is conducted in an instructional setting, provided in an instructional or skill area with no cost under the authority of a school district, by referral or by contract, provided by an agency, individualized to meet the educational needs of the student, reasonably calculated to produce meaningful educational advantage and student progress and provided in conformity with a Gifted Individualized Education Plan (Renzulli, 2015).

### ***High School***

It is a secondary school where teenagers are educated before starting college and/or getting jobs. Most high schools included four or five grades, from ninth to 13 (Philip, 1973).

### ***North Carolina's Gifted Definition***

Academically or intellectually gifted students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment compared to others of their age, experience, or environment. Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high-performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both the intellectual areas and specific academic fields. Academically or intellectually gifted students require differentiated educational

services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program. Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (Article 9B, N.C. Gen. Stat. 115C-150.5-.8, 1996, para. 1).

### ***Perspective***

Refers to the attitudes and responses provided by individuals about a particular topic and /or issue via interviews, focus groups, surveys, or a similar qualitative means (Waterhouse, 2011).

### ***School Counselors***

School counselors are certified/licensed educators who improve all students' success by collaborating with students, teachers, support staff, and AIG directors, providing services and instruction in support of needed students, and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs.

### ***Social and Emotional Needs***

Gifted and talented students may have affective needs that include interacting with people and developing relationships with others, such as acceptance, appreciation, belonging, and companionship, in addition to heightened or unusual sensitivity to self-awareness, emotions, and expectations of themselves or others, and a sense of justice, moral judgment, or altruism (Knudsen, 2018). Counselors working in this area may address issues such as perfectionism, depression, low self-concept, bullying, or underachievement (Knudsen, 2018; NAGC, n.d., p. 1).

### ***Social and Emotional Strategies***

These strategies refer to the processes via which individuals develop and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to understand and control emotions, set and

achieve positive goals, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, develop positive relationships, and design responsible decisions (Weissberg et al., 2015).

### ***Teaching Strategy***

These refer to methods utilized to assist students in learning the course content and being able to create achievable goals in the future. Teaching strategies determine the various available learning approaches to allow the teacher to develop the correct strategy to deal with the target group identified (Sarode, 2018).



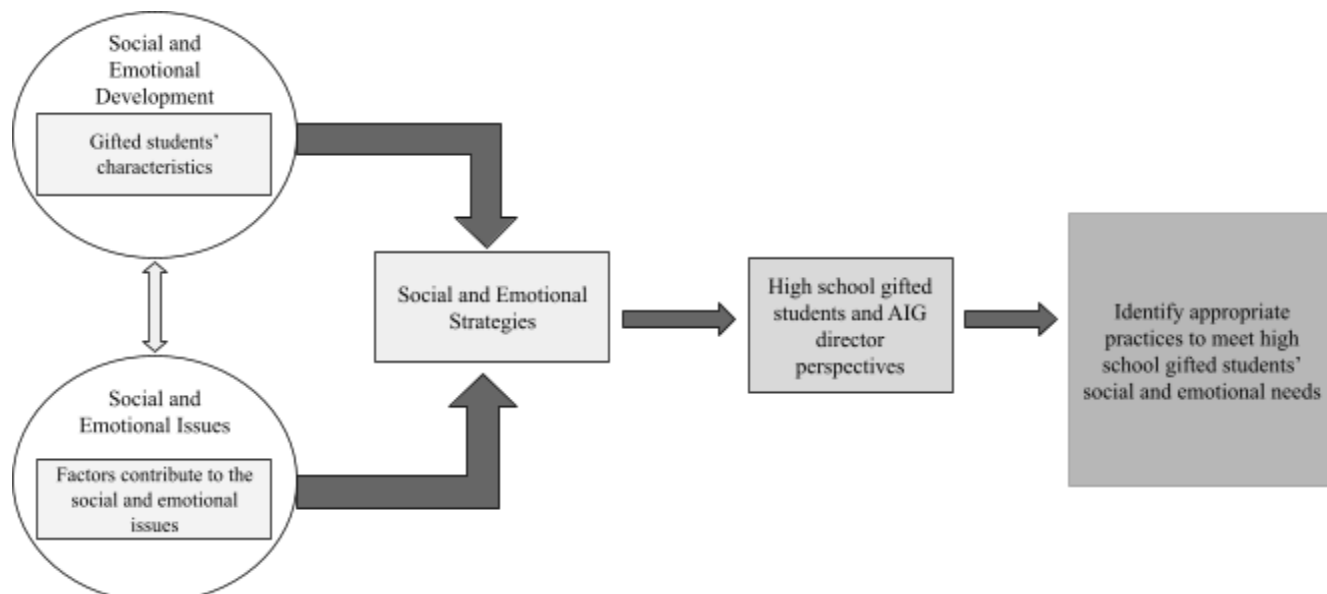
## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this dissertation is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students and (b) explore high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about these services. This chapter includes a review of the literature that provides the rationale and framework for this dissertation.

### **Logic Model**

Gifted students may face various social and emotional issues that could impact their academic achievement (Blaas, 2014). To address these needs, researchers have identified many effective social and emotional strategies (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Schmitt & Goebel, 2015). Although many schools commit to implementing social and emotional strategies to meet the unique needs of these students, the success of these strategies is unclear (Gilson et al., 2023). In addition, there is a lack of knowledge related to the perspective of high school gifted students and AIG directors about the social and emotional services implemented in their schools (Cross et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018; Leonard et al., 2015). Understanding their perspectives will support the effectiveness of these strategies.

Figure 1 exhibits the logic model for this study. The model illustrates the relationship between factors (e.g., gifted students' characteristics and social and emotional development) that may cause social and emotional issues. In addition, this model shows the importance of providing social and emotional strategies and displays high school gifted students' and directors' perspectives on these services.



**Figure 1**  
*Logic Model*

Based on the logic model shown in Figure 1, this chapter consists of three sections that address (a) giftedness, (b) social and emotional issues experienced by some high school gifted students, and (c) social and emotional strategies. The three strands of literature related to gifted social and emotional needs that will be discussed in this study provide the reader with a better understanding of the area being researched (i.e., meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students). It begins with an overview of definitions of giftedness. Next, Corso's (2007) conceptual framework is examined. The review of the literature also outlines the characteristics of gifted students. In this chapter, I discussed several social and emotional issues that may face gifted students as well as factors contributing to these issues. This is followed by social and emotional strategies for high school gifted students. Finally, I discussed the perspective of gifted students and AIG directors on social and emotional strategies.

### **Giftedness**

To understand gifted students' social and emotional needs and explore the effective strategies to address these needs, a brief look at gifted definitions and characteristics will support

more understanding of this topic. First, it is important to emphasize that the term gifted has several synonyms, such as “high ability,” though this phrase may be a bit broader. However, NC is the only state that uses AIG to describe this population.

Gifted education is a widely researched field of study with various definitions of giftedness. However, one commonly cited barrier to research in this field is a lack of a single agreed-upon definition (Carman, 2013; Gubbins et al., 2014; McBee & Makel, 2019; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). At inception, the definition was narrow and included only high scores on a test of general intellect, such as an IQ test (Carman, 2013; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). Recently, giftedness definitions have broadened and included several domains, such as leadership, creativity, talent development, and arts (Lee et al., 2015; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012; Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Subotnik et al., 2011).

With these variations of definitions, each state in the United States defines gifted students differently, but most states operate using the federal definition of gifted and talented:

The term "gifted and talented," when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 (Title IX, Part A, Definition 22) (2002); 20 USC 7801(22) (2004)).

Subsequently, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2020) defined giftedness as: "Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains" (p. 1).

Some states highlight performance, while others emphasize potential (NAGC, 2015). For example, North Carolina's definition, the setting for the current research study, includes both performance and potential:

Academically or intellectually gifted students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment compared to others of their age, experience, or environment. Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high-performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both the intellectual areas and specific academic fields. Academically or intellectually gifted students require differentiated educational services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program. Outstanding abilities are present in students from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2020).

Although there are a variety of giftedness definitions, all of them point to gifted students exhibiting abilities that are above grade or age-level peers (Nauert, 2021). In addition, giftedness is correlated with high intelligence and leads to an aptitude for innovation (Subotnik et al., 2012). In line with these definitions, several conceptual frameworks were developed in the gifted education field to understand this population and their needs.

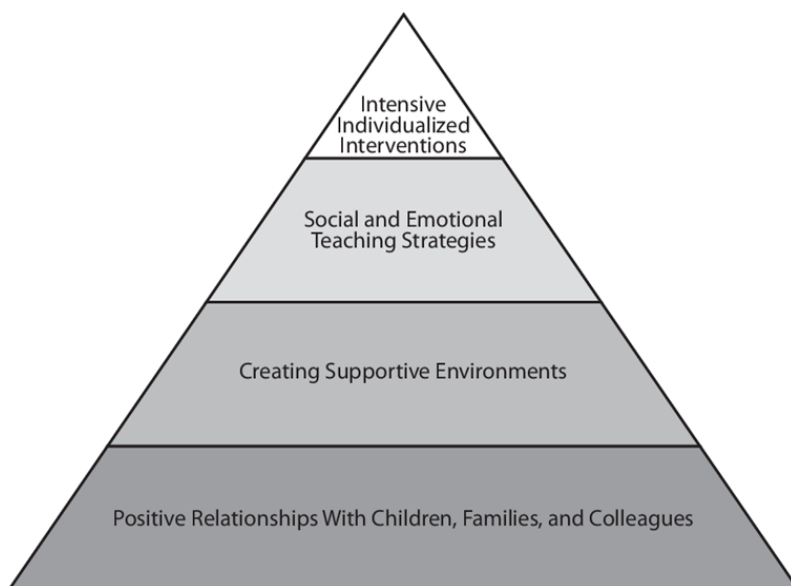
### ***Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework for this dissertation study was grounded in Corso's (2007) framework. In 2007, Corso adopted a model for developing and encouraging positive social and emotional behavior. This framework is based on social and emotional development for students and focuses on enhancing the development sets in various ways. Corso's (2007) framework emphasizes the importance of growing socially and emotionally, as well as intellectually (Elias et

al., 2010). Social and emotional issues have impeded gifted students' academic achievement (Elia et al., 2010).

Corso's (2007) conceptual framework is based on an earlier framework organized into a pyramid (see Figure 2) that was utilized by Fox et al. (2003). Like many educational pyramids, the top tier of this pyramid is related to intensive intervention and can be implemented when the other steps of the pyramid are ineffective. This pyramid consists of four levels. The base of the pyramid is related to relationships with others (e.g., families and peers). Corso emphasized the importance of having a positive relationship between a teacher and students. Additionally, Corso indicated the significance for a child to have a supportive relationship with the family, as well as other adults. Corso stated that strong and respectful relationships are built slowly over time. The second tier of Corso's pyramid is creating a supportive environment, which he defines as the social and teaching constructs of the classroom. A supportive classroom environment implies clear expectations, provides differential instruction, increases students' motivation, and provides meaningful and engaging learning (Corso, 2007). A classroom environment that differentiates for students and meets the needs of all students, including the gifted population, increases academic determination, self-motivation, and self-regulation (Bruce-Davis & Chancey, 2012). Social and emotional teaching strategies are the third tier of Corso's pyramid. According to Corso, approaching the top of the pyramid, teachers introduce particular students to several social and emotional strategies. Corso stated supportive educators who are planning to encourage students' social and emotional development provide a meaningful social system where students can practice different social skills. He emphasized the importance of identifying students' social and emotional issues early to develop appropriate interventions; otherwise, these issues may impact students' learning. Therefore, a team of counselors, teachers, AIG directors, and family members

is needed to develop an Individual Learning Plan (i.e., design a plan and implement strategies). By creating a team, a lot of information can be shared, which could be highly valuable when developing an intervention plan (Corso, 2007). According to Corso, teachers are often less knowledgeable about the top two tiers of the pyramid (i.e., social and emotional teaching strategies and intense individualized intervention); most of them had strategies in place that focused on relationships and the classroom environment.



**Figure 2**  
*Corso's (2007) Conceptual Framework*

In sum, there are multiple theories and frameworks for gifted students' social and emotional development (Gubbins et al., 2014; Plucker & Callahan, 2014), such as the social cognitive theory which is based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1989). Bandura (1977) stated emotional responses could be created by observing others experience painful and/or enjoyable experiences. Further, in Dąbrowski's theory of personality development, he (1964) pointed out that the levels of sensitivity along with the level of crisis in a person's life represent the ability to accomplish higher levels of developmental growth (Tillier, 2021). An additional theory is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) theory of

social-emotional learning (Ross & Tolan, 2018). This theory is based on five core areas: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. However, the present study is grounded on Corso's (2007) framework. This framework is appropriate because it helps researchers understand gifted students' social and emotional development, be aware of how they may differ from their peers, and determine effective strategies to enhance practical social and emotional skills. In addition, a glimpse into gifted students' characteristics and what may make them differ from typically developing students will help to understand their social and emotional development and needs.

### ***Characteristics of Gifted Students***

A look into gifted students' characteristics can provide an understanding of their social and emotional development. Gifted students display various characteristics and behaviors; however, no gifted student exhibits characteristics in every area. No two gifted students are precisely the same; each has its own unique patterns and characteristics. Gifted students vary tremendously in all these core characteristics (Neihart & Tan, 2016).

One of these characteristics is a passion for learning and curiosity (NAGC, 2019; Reis & Renzulli, 2010). Often, gifted students learn faster than their peers, understand deeply, and engage more in learning, especially if they are interested in the content (Coleman, 2011). In addition, some “school-house” gifted students are known for their hard work, strong organizational skills, and confidence (Renzulli, 2015). Research has shown a high association between school-house giftedness and obtaining high grades in school (Renzulli, 2015). According to Delisle (2018), teachers' descriptions of gifted students center on completing their work faster than their peers. Additional characteristics linked to gifted individuals are creative thinking and problem-solving skills (Renzulli, 2015). These cognitive, affective, and social skills

allow them to process any difficulties they encounter in achieving their goals (Saygılı, 2012). These skills are developed during growth periods and impact social adaptation and success in daily life (Piechowski, 2013; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018).

Other characteristics associated with giftedness include advanced language, reasoning, and impressive memory (Foster, 2017; Osokina, 2016). Generally, gifted students tend to have a high linguistic ability at an early age (e.g., advanced language, conversational skills, and a large vocabulary). This ability guides them to utilize language in receiving, understanding, and expressing information (Yunus et al., 2013). As a result of their high verbal competencies, gifted students tend to read widely and quickly at an early age (Foster, 2017; Osokina, 2016). Lu et al. (2017) analyzed the 2009 Student Questionnaire from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international education database, to examine gifted students' characteristics related to reading. Results indicated that gifted students read more materials than typically developing students (Lu et al., 2017). Furthermore, gifted students often exhibit strong reasoning skills and outstanding long-term memory. Usually, gifted students can recall information more quickly than typically developing students (Renzulli, 2015). In a meta-analysis, Naveiras et al. (2019) investigated the differences between gifted students and their peers in working memory. By analyzing 33 different studies, results showed significant differences in verbal and visual working memory. The effect size in studies that measured verbal working memory was  $g=0.969$  (95% CI: 0.697, 1.241), and heterogeneity  $I^2=83.416\%$ . In those evaluating visual working memory,  $g=0.674$  (95% CI: 0.443, 0.906), and the heterogeneity was 83.416%.



### ***Social and Emotional Characteristics***

For a long time, gifted students' social and emotional characteristics have been examined to get a deep insight into them and to raise awareness about any social and emotional issues they may face. Gifted students are described as either extremely well-adjusted both emotionally and socially, or inconsistent (Ciancia, 2018). Often students who demonstrate high levels of self-perception show desirable academic and educational traits (Hébert, 2016). Three areas with high levels of social and emotional characteristics typically exhibited by gifted students are self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem; they all fall into the category of self-perceptions, which are described next.

Self-concept is defined as “our attitudes, feelings, and knowledge about our abilities, skills, appearance and social acceptability” (Rinn et al., 2010, p. 369). It develops through social knowledge from one's understanding of personal experiences and reflected inspections (Hébert, 2016). Many studies have examined self-concept in various educational settings and found a positive correlation between self-concept and motivation, academic achievement, and relationships (Rinn et al., 2011). Lee et al. (2017) investigated the relationships between low competency testing, academic self-concept, and academic outcomes by analyzing the data of 200 gifted students (62.2% female) from two high schools. Results indicated a negative relationship between low academic competency testing and academic outcomes was mediated by academic self-concept. Students who possess high levels of self-concept tend to exhibit high academic achievement, high motivation, and positive mental health (Lee et al., 2017). Studies indicate that gifted students' academic self-concept is higher than their social self-concept (Lee et al., 2012), and their academic self-concept is significantly higher than that of their unidentified peers (Litster & Roberts, 2011).

An additional social and emotional trait exhibited by gifted students is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to engage in behaviors necessary to create specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Several studies have explored the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement and reported that self-efficacy promoted achievement either directly or indirectly (Azar, 2013; Klassen et al., 2008; Koura & Al-hebaishi, 2014). Koura and Al-hebaishi (2014) found that self-efficacy had direct positive correlations with achievement. Other research found that self-efficacy was a predictor of academic achievement (Azar, 2013). Similar to self-concept, self-efficacy corresponds to positive outcomes (e.g., emotional health and academic achievement; Koura & Al-hebaishi, 2014).

Moreover, self-esteem refers to feelings of self-worth or self-confidence. Gifted students often have high levels of self-esteem (Ciancia, 2018). Students with high self-esteem levels usually acknowledge that they can achieve their goals (Neihart, 2015). According to Casino-García et al. (2021), self-esteem is positively associated with motivation and academic achievement among gifted students. Kroesbergen et al. (2019) found high levels of self-esteem in gifted students. On the other hand, having low self-esteem can cause many social and emotional issues (e.g., depression and suicide).

Further social and emotional characteristics encompassed by many gifted students include motivation and task commitment. Motivation is a dynamic process driven by various factors, such as personal, sociopsychological, and contextual factors, that interact with each other (Kanfer et al., 2012). Motivation is divided into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to an internal desire to perform or stay in an activity. Intrinsically motivated activities are enjoyable and purposeful in nature since they develop from one's own personal

pleasure or curiosity (Pink, 2011). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity for external reasons like praise or a good grade. Gifted students can demonstrate either type or both types of motivation (Clinkenbeard, 2012). Several studies indicated that gifted students have higher intrinsic motivation than their peers, and their motivation was correlated with their achievement (Tortop, 2015; Topçu & Leana-Taşçılar, 2018). Topçu and Leana-Taşçılar (2018) examined the correlation between self-esteem and motivational components to determine the best predictor of academic achievement among 184 gifted students. Findings indicated significant correlations between self-esteem, motivation, and achievement (Topçu & Leana-Taşçılar, 2018). On the other hand, gifted students have more personal characteristics related to task commitment, which define the readiness, continuance, and self-confidence of an individual in a domain and their willingness to solve the issues they face. Task commitment is a concentrated aspect of motivation that allows an individual to work hard on a particular task. High task commitment among gifted students often contributes to higher performance (Tortop, 2015).

The field of gifted education has long been concerned about the social and emotional characteristics of gifted students (e.g., Wilson, 2015) since these characteristics may contribute to social and emotional development. This type of development is important because it is about enhancing the well-being of gifted students in society so they can reach their full potential (Ciancia, 2018).

### ***Summary***

Characterizing gifted students has long been a challenge and an area of interest in the gifted field. The lack of a common giftedness definition to capture all the potential characteristics of gifted students limits the research and the academic, social, and emotional

services provided to gifted students (Carman, 2013; Gubbins et al., 2014; McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). However, a number of researchers have sought to develop definitions and frameworks to assist in providing gifted students with appropriate academic, social, and emotional services. As a result, there are multiple definitions and theoretical conceptions of giftedness (Elias et al., 2010; Meulen et al., 2013). Some of these theoretical conceptions and frameworks focus on the academic side, whereas others emphasize the importance of the social and emotional aspects. Theories of social and emotional development, such as Corso's (2007) framework, have emphasized the importance of understanding social and emotional development for all students, including gifted students. Further, since gifted students display certain recurring characteristics (e.g., advanced language, creative thinking, problem-solving), understanding these characteristics is important to comprehend their academic, social, and emotional development (Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Renzulli, 2015).

### **Social and Emotional Development**

Researchers have examined social and emotional development as it influences school achievement, production, and workforce performance (Rinn, 2020). This development has been conceptualized as noncognitive skills or affective factors contributing to one's personality (Rinn, 2020). Researchers have named these noncognitive skills or affective factors differently over time, with terms such as work ethic, leadership, emotional intelligence, interpersonal and/or intrapersonal intelligence, character traits, personality, drive, and psychosocial abilities (Kyllonen et al., 2014). Social and emotional development is just as significant as cognitive abilities along the other development continuum and a host of environmental factors.

In the field of gifted education, researchers have also used a variety of phrases to describe the noncognitive skills and affective factors that influence gifted students' achievement and

success (Rinn, 2020). Researchers and educators in gifted education have used the term social and emotional development to discuss affective factors that contribute to the process of personal and psychological growth. Both terms (i.e., noncognitive skills and social and emotional development) have corresponding implications for gifted education (Rinn, 2020). Unlike the majority of their peers, gifted students may face some difficulties in their social and emotional development; at the same time, they are similar to their peers in many ways (Cross et al., 2019). Like their peers, gifted students may also experience typical developmental and psychosocial challenges (Cross et al., 2019). Sometimes, developmental milestones occur quite early among gifted students, which may cause social and emotional difficulties (Piechowski, 2013; Robinson & Reis, 2016). As with all individuals, gifted students need to be accepted and express healthy social and emotional development, yet their differences may inhibit acceptance among their peers (Cross, 2016).

Mixed results were found in the literature about how gifted individuals' social and emotional development compared to that of typically developing students, indicating a need for further research on this topic. Stalnacke and Smedler (2011) investigated the social and emotional development of 302 adults (mean age = 36,  $SD = 9.6$ ) who identify as gifted. Participants completed the Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC-13) and rated their self-theory of intelligence. Results indicated that most participants reported experiencing feelings of being different but not different enough to downplay their giftedness or adjust their behavior to be socially accepted. Many of them documented difficulties in terms of their social and emotional development during childhood (Stalnacke & Smedler, 2011). Recently, Alabbasi et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis to explore the relationship between social and emotional development and giftedness. Furthermore, the researchers sought to determine if gifted students are different

from typically developing students in this area by searching for studies in English and Arabic from 1990 to 2018. The results indicated that gifted students significantly outperformed their peers in social and emotional development. Other researchers, however, have found no differences in social and emotional development between gifted students and their peers (López & Sotillo, 2009). Both Lee et al. (2012) and Shechtman and Silektor (2012) found gifted adolescents rated themselves similarly to their average-ability peers with regard to a variety of social and emotional development, including measures of interpersonal competence and peer relationships.

Regardless of the semantic overlap, a focus on the social and emotional development of gifted students is needed across all domains of talent (Rinn, 2020) because it is necessary to understand the experiences of gifted individuals in order to support them best. Intellectual and academic abilities develop alongside social and emotional developmental crossroads and abilities; they impact and are impacted by the development of psychosocial skills. Furthermore, all types of development are affected by the environment in which one lives. High ability within a discipline is not enough; social and emotional development is an important aspect in transforming childhood potential and ability into success in adulthood (Rinn, 2020).

### **Social and Emotional Issues**

Typically, gifted students are identified by their academic ability; educators often focus on programs that provide opportunities to develop their academic potential (Szymanski, 2020). Academic needs are most frequently the focus of support efforts for all sub-groups in schools, including gifted students (JKCF, 2015; NAGC, 2015; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). It is critical to be aware of the development of the whole individual and provide support for academic, social, and emotional needs. By addressing only the academic needs and not the social

and emotional needs and issues of gifted students, they may not be successful in school or in life (Szymanski, 2020). There is a growing agreement that genuine actions are needed to address students' social and emotional issues, which are necessary for achieving higher developmental outcomes for students (Jen et al., 2016; Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013).

One reason for not addressing the social and emotional issues among the gifted population is the mixed results regarding these issues (Lee et al., 2012; Vogl & Preckel, 2014). It has been a contentious question in the field of gifted education whether gifted students face more social and emotional issues than their typically developing peers do (Cash & Lin, 2021). Experts on one side of this debate believe that gifted students face the same social and emotional issues (Bergold et al., 2018). This claim is supported by evidence demonstrating that gifted students do not differ from typically developing students in these areas (e.g., Lee et al., 2012; Shechtman & Silektor, 2012). The researchers on this side denied the idea that gifted students had different social and emotional needs from the typically developing students (Cross, 2011) because there is not enough evidence to support the idea that gifted students have different social and emotional needs.

Experts on the other side of this debate assumed that gifted students face more social and emotional issues than their peers (Bergold et al., 2018; Cash & Lin, 2021). Often this assumption is developed from a belief that gifted students' asynchronous development can cause them to be out of sync with their same-aged peers and within themselves (e.g., academic development may be advanced, but motor skills may be delayed; Bergold et al., 2018). A number of researchers supported the idea that some gifted students require additional support related to social and emotional issues. Researchers on this side believed that gifted students comprehend and manage situations far outside the normal sphere of typically developing students. This can be due to their

abilities to understand the complexities of the world beyond their normal age level, but generally, students may only have the emotional and social abilities for their age level, or even lower in some cases (McGee & Hughes, 2011; Rinn et al., 2010). In line with this belief, Dijkstra et al. (2012) examined the differences between gifted and typically developing students' personalities in terms of emotional intelligence, sensory processing sensitivity, and levels of well-being ( $N = 196$ ); Dijkstra et al. found that gifted students experienced lower levels  $F(1, 387)$  of well-being and social support than typically developing students.

Although there are mixed results, it is reasonable to assume that some gifted students do face social and emotional issues at some point in their development. According to the American Psychological Association (2019), an estimated 26% of individuals in the United States face social and emotional issues. Authorities in gifted education estimate that the prevalence of individuals' social and emotional issues like suicide is not markedly different for the gifted and general population (Cross & Andersen, 2016; Hébert, 2011; Mueller & Winsor, 2018; Peterson, 2018). If we assume that roughly 6% of students around the world could be considered gifted, then there are about 60 million gifted students worldwide of the 1 billion who attend school (Stoeger et al., 2018; UNSECO, 2014). This translates into 6 to 12 million gifted students globally who may show some type of social and emotional issues (Pfeiffer, 2021). Gifted students could suffer from some issues that typically developing students might not have to contend with (Phelan, 2018). Some gifted students were found to have difficulties in "initiating and maintaining relationships with others, resolving conflicts, communicating feelings...in appropriate and effective ways" (Corso, 2007, p. 53). Other experts noted that gifted students might suffer from more serious issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and bullying (Pfeiffer, 2021). Therefore, it is appropriate to acknowledge these issues in order to



provide gifted students with appropriate solutions while keeping in mind a broad understanding of who these students are in terms of both abilities and needs. The following section will include a discussion related to some of these social and emotional issues.

**Stress and Anxiety in Gifted Students.** Since 2007, the American Psychological Association (APA) has conducted annual surveys across the states to investigate stress and its effect on social and emotional development. According to the APA's 2013 report, stress levels among teens (i.e., aged 13 to 17) were higher than stress levels among adults. In addition, participants mentioned school as the main source of their stress; this stress affects their performance at home and school and causes these teens to receive lower grades than they are capable of earning. Recently, the APA interviewed 300 teenagers and found a high level of stress among them (APA, 2018). As of November 2019, individuals aged 18–21 years old reported the highest stress levels, and 91% of these participants experienced at least one physical or emotional symptom due to stress (e.g., depression, lack of motivation, and anxiety).

Though it is clear that adolescents as a whole are experiencing high levels of stress, gifted students tend to experience high levels of stress and anxiety too (Cross & Cross, 2015; Guignard et al., 2012; Renati et al., 2017; Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). Anxiety impacts approximately 9% of the American population; if we assume gifted students comprise 6% of the school population, an estimated 297,000 gifted students could suffer from anxiety (Gaesser, 2018). Additionally, rates of anxiety have been reported as being 25% higher in gifted individuals compared to the general population (Tetreault, 2019). Cross and Cross (2015) stated that gifted students' environment and lived experience are factors that contribute to their stress and anxiety. Causes of anxiety and stress in gifted students include recognizing a global problem and being

unable to solve it, feeling apprehension about peer pressure, and worrying about safety/violence (Coleman, 2012; Cross & Cross, 2015; Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011).

Several studies support the idea that gifted students may express a high level of stress. Harrison and Van Haneghan (2011) conducted a correlational study to examine overexcitability, anxiety, and insomnia among middle and high school gifted students ( $n = 73$ ) and typically developing students ( $n = 143$ ). Data collection instruments included a death anxiety questionnaire, a fear of the unknown scale, an insomnia scale, and the Overexcitabilities Questionnaire. Based on the results, gifted adolescents reported higher overexcitability, anxiety, and insomnia levels than typically developing students. Further, Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) investigated the levels of stress among gifted and non-gifted students. Specifically, researchers seek to determine whether participation in the International Baccalaureate [IB] program is associated with increases in stress and/or other social and emotional issues. A total of 134 high school students from three schools participated in this study; 112 students entered the IB program, and 22 students entered the education program. Data collection instruments included self-report questionnaires, and it was collected during the summer after eighth grade and the fall of ninth grade. Results show that students in the IB program reported a higher level of stress than students in general education. In addition, Feld and Shusterman (2015) conducted a cross-sectional survey to explore indicators of stress, the relationship between stress and student attitudes, and the coping strategies used to address these problems among 333 high school gifted students. Data collection instruments included Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, School Attitude Assessment Questionnaire-Revised, and assessments for stress-related indicators (i.e., eating, sleeping, and exercise). Results indicated that 20% of participants faced stress symptoms almost daily, like inability to begin work, lack of concentration, and constant fatigue; 50% of them

experienced mood swings, irritability, racing thoughts, restlessness, and sleep disturbance at least once a week. Further, high-stress levels were correlated with lower academic self-perceptions, happiness, and attitude toward school. Due to participants' time commitments, their eating and sleeping habits were less than ideal, which may cause a high level of stress (Feld & Shusterman, 2015). Since several studies demonstrated that some gifted students exhibit high levels of stress and anxiety, specialists must pay attention to these issues to find appropriate solutions.

**Suicide.** In 2017, a total of 522 young individuals ages 5 to 14 died by suicide in the United States, and 6,252 teens, ages 15 to 24, died by suicide around the world in the same year (Kochanek et al., 2019). The rate of suicide has been rising steadily over the past several decades (Drapeau & McIntosh, 2018; Hedegaard et al., 2018). In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death among young individuals aged 10 to 24 (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2017). The American Association for Suicidology (AAS; Drapeau & McIntosh, 2018) estimates that for every concluded suicide, there are 25 uncompleted attempts. These numbers could be underestimated (Cross & Cross, 2020). Hospitalizations of adolescents for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts have been growing over the previous decade (Plemmons et al., 2018). For the gifted population, the number and prevalence rate of suicide is unknown; the lack of giftedness definition could be one reason (Cross & Cross, 2020). An additional reason is that the present data gathered nationally about adolescent suicide does not include whether the victims were gifted or not (Cross & Cross, 2017). The situation is real; like their peers, suicide among the gifted population has increased (Cross & Cross, 2017). However, it is still unknown whether the incidence of suicide among gifted students is different from that of the typically developing students (Cross & Cross, 2017).

In a review of the research on gifted students and suicide, Cross and Cross (2017) found mixed results. For example, some studies found a positive correlation between IQ and suicidal behaviors (e.g., Lester, 2003; Voracek, 2009), whereas other studies found a negative correlation between them (e.g., Sörberg et al., 2013). Studies that employ gifted samples are rare (Cross & Cross, 2020). Cassady and Cross (2006) conducted a survey study to explore suicidal behaviors among gifted adolescents ( $N = 334$ ). Researchers collected data through the Suicide Ideation Questionnaire. Results indicated that the factorial structure of suicidal ideation was more complex in a sample of gifted adolescents than in their peers. Cross et al. (2018) extended the previous study by investigating the personality, perfectionism, and suicidal ideation among honors college students ( $N = 410$ ). Cross et al. collected data through the Big Five Inventory (BFI), the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), and the Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire online. Around 7% of the participants had high scores (critically high or multiple indicators) on the questionnaire. The highest percentage of these high scorers was found among students who are perfectionists (Cross et al., 2018). Some of the gifted students' characteristics, like sensitivity, perfectionism, or isolationism related to extreme introversion, may increase the risk of suicide, but there is no concrete evidence of these associations (Cross & Cross, 2017, 2018). Gifted students' exceptional and cognitive abilities may influence the way they think about suicide (Cross & Cross, 2017). Therefore, educators should be aware of these characteristics.

**Bullying.** Students who are perceived as being different are often targets of bullying or cyberbullying (Peairs et al., 2019; Peters & Bain, 2011); therefore, some gifted students could be at greater risk for bullying. Frazier et al. (2021) stated that gifted students could feel isolated in schools because of their high abilities or talents in academic domains, and this makes them

vulnerable to bullying. Gifted students may be considered different at various points of growth. They not only are more advanced than their peers intellectually, but also may experience asynchronous social and emotional development and, therefore, may be targeted by others (Hargrove, 2010). They may be viewed as too smart, using extensive high vocabulary, or craving teachers' attention (MacFarlane & Mina, 2018). These perceptions may influence others to bully them. Additionally, gifted individuals have a strong awareness of fairness, and when they are bullied, they do not understand why something unfair is occurring to them. Often, they feel ashamed or afraid to admit that they cannot control such situations (MacFarlane & Mina, 2018). They tend not to report these situations because they do not want to disappoint their peers by causing them trouble, which can cause even further anxiety (Vaivre-Douret, 2011). According to Cross (2011), the list of bullies that gifted students confront may include family members, educators, AIG directors, counselors, and even other gifted peers.

Although the evidence regarding whether the gifted population is more vulnerable to bullying from peers is inconclusive, some research supports the idea that gifted students face this issue. Peters and Bain (2011) sought to determine the differences between bullying and victimization rates among gifted high school students and their peers. Forty-seven gifted students and 43 typically developing students participated in this study. All participants attended Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The Reynolds Bully Victimization Scale for Schools and the Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire were the data collection for this study. Results indicated that 4.3% of the gifted students were classified as bullies, and 12.8% were classified as victims. Further, Peters and Bain (2014) investigated rates of bullying and victimization among gifted students who were in transition from elementary to middle school and explored levels of distress associated with bullying and victimization ( $N = 47$ ). The Reynolds Bully–Victimization

Scale showed a significantly higher prevalence of bullying among fourth graders before transitioning to middle school and significant correlations between bullying and distress (Peters & Bain, 2014). The researchers reported that bullying could lead to suicidal ideation, and the gifted may be at even greater risk, as their response to bullying and internalization was experienced differently than their peers. The effects of bullying have spanned academic, social, and emotional functioning. Bullying can decrease achievement and academic competence perceptions (MacFarlane & Mina, 2018). Thus, it is important for educators and parents to be aware that bullying of gifted students has increased during high school and can negatively influence their competence and achievement (Cross, 2011).

**Perfectionism.** Gifted students may be prone to perfectionism. English and English (1958) were among the first to define perfectionism as "the practice of demanding of oneself or others a higher quality of performance than is required by the situation" (p. 94). According to Kregel (2015), there are particular characteristics that perfectionists exhibit. First, perfectionists prefer to work alone since they care about their work quality and are unwilling to take risks. Second, perfectionists contest fiercely since they seek to be the best in their tasks. Therefore, they struggle greatly when it comes to collaborating with others since they believe every facet of life is a competition. Third, perfectionists usually focus more on negative comments than positive ones because they know the negative comments imply something is wrong and must be fixed, or else perfection is unattainable. Finally, they are quick to criticize others but often refuse to hear criticism of themselves since they believe criticism is equated to failure (Kregel, 2015).

Although research in this area is mixed, there is some evidence supporting that gifted students are more likely to exhibit perfectionistic behaviors than their peers (Chan, 2012; Guignard et al., 2012; Speirs-Neumeister, 2017). Mofield and Chakraborti-Ghosh (2010) noted

that perfectionism appears to be prevalent in gifted individuals. Chan (2011) investigated the system of perfectionism based on the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised. A total of 320 gifted students and 882 typically developing students aged 7–12 participated in this investigation. The results yielded three groups of students: unhealthy perfectionists, non-perfectionists, and healthy perfectionists. Unhealthy perfectionists had pervasively high scores on all three dimensions; gifted students exhibited higher rates of this type of perfectionism compared to typically developing students (Chan, 2011). Chan (2012) conducted a correlation study to explore the difference between healthy perfectionists and unhealthy perfectionists among 251 gifted Chinese adolescents. Data collection instruments included the High Standards and Discrepancy subscales of the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R). Unhealthy perfectionists scored significantly higher than healthy perfectionists, indicating that many participants struggled with unhealthy perfectionism. Margot and Rinn (2016) conducted a methodological replication to investigate the differences in perfectionism among gifted adolescents in relation to their gender, birth order, and grade level. A total of 96 high school gifted students participated in this study by completing the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. Results showed a high level of perfectionism among gifted adolescents with differences due to birth order, gender, and grade level. Regarding grade level, there was a statistically significant difference [seventh graders had lower scores ( $M = 2.205$ ,  $SD = .960$ ) than eighth graders ( $M = 3.062$ ,  $SD = .928$ )]. For birth order, there were statistically significant differences between first born/only children ( $M = 2.783$ ,  $SD = 1.025$ ), middle children ( $M = 2.213$ ,  $SD = .842$ ), and youngest children ( $M = 2.375$ ,  $SD = .770$ ). Regarding grade level differences, there was a significant difference between seventh ( $M = 2.205$ ,  $SD = .960$ ) and eighth graders ( $M = 3.062$ ,  $SD = .928$ ).

Understanding and acknowledging perfectionism in gifted students has been an important advance in the gifted field (Corson et al., 2018). The high self-standards and expectations from others may lead to serious social and psychological issues in gifted students' lives (e.g., feeling worthless, depressed, and failing). In addition, there is some evidence that perfectionism may result in suicidal risks in some gifted students (Cross & Cross, 2017). It is essential to pay attention to this issue and find appropriate solutions for it. Unfortunately, unhealthy perfectionism is not the only social and emotional issue that gifted students may face.

**Underachievement.** While gifted individuals are often believed to be perfectionists, some gifted individuals are referred to as underachievers. Gifted underachievement is a widespread issue across countries (Cavilla, 2017; Ferrer-Wreder et al., 2014; Matthews & McBee, 2007; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). It is estimated that there are 28% of underachieving gifted students in Spain, 12% in China, and 10% in the United States (Phillipson, 2008; Siegle & McCoach, 2020; Veas et al., 2018). However, Reis (2020) pointed out that around 50% of gifted students in the United States may underachieve at some time in their school years, but they may be unrecognized. Since underachievement is widespread across gifted populations, it is appropriate to classify it as content-specific and situation-specific (Siegle & McCoach, 2020). Just because a student is not successful in some subject does not mean that he/she is not successful in any endeavor (Kregel, 2015). Often, gifted students who are not successful in school are fairly successful in out-of-school activities (e.g., sports, art, music). Students who are underachievers in one subject could achieve well in other subjects (Kregel, 2015). When a gifted student is labeled as an underachiever, any positive behaviors that the student shows could be ignored. According to Kregel (2015), it is more useful to label the behavior rather than the



student, such as saying “underachieving in math or reading” rather than “gifted students who are underachieving” (p. 27).

Researchers have linked a variety of factors to underachievement among gifted students, such as low motivation, lack of parental support, and inappropriate curricula (e.g., Matthews & McBee, 2007; Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015; Siegle et al., 2017; Snyder & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013; Stoeger et al., 2014). Clearly, the underachievement of gifted students is a difficult phenomenon that is affected by both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Most factors revolved around school climate, including peer pressure, teacher character, teaching styles, stress, motivation, and depression (Bourgeois, 2011; Neihart, 2015). One of the main factors that contribute to underachievement is motivation, which is vital to the achievement of gifted students; therefore, it is not surprising that a lack of motivation is the most examined factor in their underachievement (Siegle & McCoach, 2020). Desmet et al. (2020) conducted a multiple-narrative inquiry study to discover the experiences of four underachieving high school gifted girls using semi-structured open-ended interviews. Results indicated that when transitioning to high school, students faced a sudden increase in curricular demands, resulting in disrupted academic achievement. The negative school climate, low self-perceptions, lack of learning skills, and poor relationships with teachers commonly contributed to the maintenance of underachievement. These results exhibit how each of these underlying constructs affected participants' motivation; therefore, motivation was the main aspect identified by these girls as a reason for underachievement (Desmet et al., 2020). Additional factors that may cause underachievement include low academic self-perceptions and self-efficacy (Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015), negative attitudes toward school (Çakır, 2014; Matthews & McBee, 2007); low goal rating (Çakır, 2014); negative attitudes toward classes and teachers (Abu-Hamour & Al

Hmouz, 2013), and low metacognitive skills (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2013; Ben-Eliyahu, 2019; Çakır, 2014; Obergriesser & Stoeger, 2015).

**Twice-Exceptional.** Since the emergence of twice-exceptionality research efforts, researchers have mostly focused on academic needs with much less attention on social and emotional needs (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2015). However, many areas are in need of further research, such as evidence-based interventions, addressing the needs of the whole child, increased understanding of diversity among twice-exceptionality, and providing resources for parents (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2015; Wang & Neihart, 2015). Unfortunately, with all these areas in need of additional research, there are still no federal requirements for identifying and serving this population in most states, including North Carolina (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Steinbrecher et al., 2013). This is likely to result in limited support, resources, and understanding for this unique population, and the interdependent relationships of policy, identification, and intervention problematize forward action in the field (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2020). Despite the huge efforts in gifted education to empirically consider the whole individual rather than only their achievement performance, the literature and findings continue to be inconsistent (NAGC, 2018). Beckmann and Minnaert (2018) conducted a systematic review of 23 publications examining noncognitive characteristics of twice-exceptional (2e) learners. The results showed negative emotions and attitudes, low self-perception, and adverse interpersonal relationships among these students (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018). In examining the connection between self-concept and academic programming, the interventions were positively related to self-concept for some gifted students (e.g., Lee et al., 2012), but not for 2e students (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2015). However, Foley-Nicpon and colleagues (2015) investigated the self-concept profiles of two groups of 2e students: gifted students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD;  $n = 53$ ) and gifted students with

specific learning disabilities (SLD;  $n = 11$ ). Self-concept (i.e., The Piers Harris-2) and Cognitive ability measures (i.e., The WISC-IV) were administered as a part of the data collection.

Researchers found views of popularity to be positively related to the processing rate among 2e students, indicating that students who are able to fast process social dynamics also felt more positive in their communication. Similarly, Wang and Neihart (2015) conducted a qualitative interpretative phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews to examine the perceptions of academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy in six high school 2e students. The 2e students displayed positive academic self-concept and self-efficacy. Although there are mixed results in the area of social and emotional needs of this subpopulation of gifted students, it is important to acknowledge these needs and develop appropriate interventions.

### ***Social and Emotional Issues of High School Gifted Students***

While the previous sections focused on social and emotional issues among gifted students in different grade levels, the following section will address social and emotional issues among high school gifted students. Research on gifted students' social and emotional needs tends to focus on the elementary school level, indicating a need for more research on high school gifted students, which the present study aims to investigate (Chusid, 2020; Go-Miller, 2018; Ogurlu et al., 2018).

High school students often face demanding and challenging changes (George & Baby, 2012). It is a time of quick development and growth (Auerbach et al., 2011; Go-Miller, 2018). In addition, it is a period of extraordinary learning, investigation, and opportunities (Yeager, 2017). Yet, it is also a time when social and emotional issues may emerge and could have negative consequences long into adulthood (Yeager, 2017). Therefore, students may need additional social and emotional support during this period. Gifted students may experience several social and

emotional issues, particularly during high school years (Blaas, 2014; Guignard et al., 2012; Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). As previously discussed, students' social and emotional development is directly correlated to school success (Blaas, 2014). One common issue gifted high school students may face is adolescent depression, which can be a result of perceived stress or negative peer relations (Auerbach et al., 2011). According to Cross et al. (2016), high school students are most vulnerable to peer influence. During the high school years, students spend more time with peers than their families (Cross et al., 2016). Further, students' sense of self is created in the school environment; it may be impacted by many factors (Cross et al., 2016). The social environment is crucial in the development of high school students (Reynolds & Crea, 2016). Peer support becomes even more significant during high school than parent support (Auerbach et al., 2011). Bocchi et al. (2014) emphasized that school climate is important during high school years, especially for some gifted students (i.e., due to their unique characteristics such as high sensitivity). Students who receive low levels of support in school may suffer from stress, which could, in turn, lead to depressive symptoms (Auerbach et al., 2011). Blaas (2014) argued that educators need to be aware of the factors that contribute to the poor social and emotional development of high school gifted students.

Transitioning from elementary to middle and/or high school is a rough time of adaptation (Cross et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2016). Often during this transition, students experience a loss of a familiar, nurturing one-teacher classroom and adjust to earning an academic identity in a new school environment (Cross et al., 2016). It is widely accepted that high school is a time of ongoing transformation (Cross et al., 2016; Rinn et al., 2011; Yilmaz, 2015). Cross et al. (2016) stated that students' social identities grow from relationships they have with others and from belonging to society. Social and emotional stability earned from social relationships is significant

during high school years (Blaas, 2014). Feelings of isolation and peer issues are common in gifted high school students; there is extreme pressure to conform during these years (Cross et al., 2016). Research has consistently found that peers are highly influential during the high school years (Cross et al., 2016; Yilmaz, 2015). High school is also the period when gifted students will either continue aiming for excellence, keep a less challenging path, or drop out of school completely (Mudrak & Zabrodska, 2015).

Lee and colleagues (2010) analyzed data from South Korean high school gifted students ( $N = 338$ ) to determine patterns of school stress. Lee et al. used a cluster analysis procedure and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (i.e., Student Survey). The data sources were MBI-SS and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Results indicated that South Korea's adolescents were at an increased risk for stress. Researchers categorized the participants into four groups based on their evaluation: distressed (25%), laissez-faire (33%), persevering (13.8%), and well-functioning (28.4%). Zhang et al. (2013) replicated these findings in Chinese high school students and found similar results (e.g., a high distressed amount students). Additionally, Lee et al. (2012) investigated the effects of the perceptions of gifted adolescents ( $N = 1,526$ ) on their interpersonal competence and peer relationships. Data collection instruments included the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire-Revised, the Socioemotional Survey, the Self Perception Profile, and the Social Coping Questionnaire. Results indicated that gifted adolescents had mostly positive perceptions of their abilities to form relationships with peers (Lee et al., 2012). On the other hand, Rinn et al. (2011) examined perceived social support and self-concepts of gifted adolescents; findings indicated that support sources did not have much influence on gifted adolescents' self-concepts (Rinn et al., 2011). Finally, Feld and Shusterman (2015) conducted a cross-sectional survey study to examine the stress level among high school gifted students ( $N =$

333). Participants completed the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, School Attitude Assessment Questionnaire-Revised, and assessments for stress-related indicators (e.g., eating, sleeping, and exercise). Results showed high stress levels among gifted adolescents, and these were correlated with lower self-perceptions of academic performance, overall happiness, and satisfaction with school. Given the fact that previous investigations were conducted about 10 years ago, more recent research is needed to get a deeper and more current understanding of these issues and the factors that may contribute to them to determine the appropriate interventions.

### ***Factors Contributing to High School Gifted Students' Social and Emotional Issues***

There are many factors that contribute to the social and emotional issues among high school gifted students; school climate is one factor, which is the social environment of a school (Gage et al., 2014; Low & Ryzin, 2014). It encompasses feelings of safety and the nature of relationships with peers, educators, and all school personnel (Espelage et al., 2014; Gage et al., 2014). Studies have investigated school climate in many ways, with agreement around definitions emphasizing interpersonal relationships, perceptions of school, and beliefs toward school (Steffgen et al., 2013). School climate is one promising area of inquiry when seeking to address social and emotional issues among gifted high school students. For example, studies found a correlation between bullying and student perceptions of school climate (Johnson et al., 2011; Steffgen et al., 2013). Researchers investigating the effect of school climate on school violence found that violence can cause schools to be sites of fear (Gage et al., 2014). Further, relationships with teachers and peers are significant in facing some social and emotional issues. Adult support, including teachers in reducing bullying, is key in bullying prevention programs (Huang & Mossige, 2012). Johnson et al. (2011) also stated the relationships between students and teachers could be a significant component of bullying prevention. Peers can either be

supportive by providing effective coping strategies when subject to bullying, or they can be the source of distress (Frazier et al., 2021). Generally, students who indicate a sense of connectedness with the school are more likely to display positive behaviors, while students who do not feel they belong are more likely to face social and emotional issues such as bullying (Gage et al., 2014; Hong & Espelage, 2012). Akkanat and Gokdere (2018) investigated the correlation between school climate, motivation, and creativity. They found that school climate was significantly related to and predictive of motivation and creativity.

Interactions with peers are of utmost importance in adolescents' social and emotional development (Cross et al., 2016). Peer relations offer a framework for cognitive, social, and emotional development (Ryan & Shim, 2016). According to Cross (2015), gifted students who are popular have likely learned social skills (e.g., reciprocation and negotiation). Contrarily, unpopular gifted students may face several social and emotional issues (e.g., bullying). In Peairs's (2010) study, gifted high school students were more popular than typically developing students; however, some experienced poor social skills and rejection. In a study by Eddles-Hirsch et al. (2010), positive social contexts (i.e., peer groups) correlated to educational achievement, motivation, stress, and willingness to learn and try new things.

The third factor that contributes to social and emotional issues is the parents/guardians of high school students. Families are very important regarding gifted students' social and emotional development (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). Most research studying parenting and gifted students demonstrates that gifted students often have positive relationships with their parents, yet their parents tend to set limits, have appropriate expectations, and be responsive (i.e., Rudasill et al., 2013). Likely, family environments that are supportive and respectful influence the social and emotional development of gifted individuals. On the other hand, unsupportive parents may be a

cause of some social and emotional issues (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2014). The family environment also has been linked to underachievement (Chang & Lin, 2017; Freeman, 2013).

Additionally, gender and race play a key role in gifted students' social and emotional issues. Some social and emotional issues could be tied to social pressures based on gender and race (Phelan, 2018). According to Neihart (2006), gifted girls want to be described as smart; however, they do not want to be too smart. Conversely, gifted boys may avoid trying to be smart because it may affect their friendships. Recently, Zhang and colleagues (2015) found gender differences in stress and the methods for dealing with it (i.e., girls have higher levels of stress than boys). In their study, girls received emotional support from friends to cope with perceived stress, while boys turned to physical activities to cope with perceived stress. On the other hand, research reveals that gifted minority students are at an even higher risk of school social and emotional issues than non-minority gifted students (Blaas, 2014). According to Lovett (2011), African American and Latino students may feel they should choose between being gifted or popular. As a result, minority gifted students sometimes drop out of gifted programming to fit in with their peers (Lovett, 2011). These students often face prejudice and rejection from peers and family members (Niehard, 2006). Social pressures placed on gifted minority students may lead to a number of social and emotional issues (Phelan, 2018).

The final factor is economic status. Gifted students exist at all income levels, yet the success rates of students from low-income backgrounds are often lower than those of students from high-income backgrounds (Reardon, 2011). Economically disadvantaged gifted students often face additional challenges due to a lack of resources (Blaas, 2014). Parents from low-income backgrounds are usually less encouraging and supportive than parents from high-income families. Often, parents from low-income backgrounds are unprepared to assist



their children with schoolwork or decisions about higher education since they are unfamiliar with the content (Koshy et al., 2013). In addition, the dropout rate among high school students from low-income backgrounds is five times higher than their high-income peers (Cross et al., 2018). There is a concern in the field of gifted education about these statistics, especially as there is evidence that gifted students from low-income families may not achieve their full potential or even drop out of high school (e.g., Cross et al., 2018; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

### ***Summary***

Meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs merits more attention. These needs are important because feelings of safety and belonging could help students engage in a friendly competition that elevates their goals and standards without compromising their social support system (Mullet et al., 2018). In addition, they may face high levels of stress, especially if they are striving for admission to college (Leonard et al., 2015). Moreover, gifted high school students may be at risk of depression and suicide if their social and emotional needs are unmet (Brody & Muratori, 2020). This situation can improve through better knowledge of factors that may contribute to these issues, as well as increased advocacy for gifted students (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Schmitt & Goebel, 2015).

### **Social-Emotional Strategies for High School Gifted Students**

Research has documented a positive association between gifted students' levels of social and emotional support, academic achievement, and social and emotional development (Doss & Bloom, 2018; Olton-Weber et al., 2020; Phelan, 2018). Appropriate support from educators, counselors, peers, and parents are positively correlated with engagement and academic motivation (Niehaus et al., 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2012), increased self-competence, and reduced social and emotional issues such as anxiety, stress, and peer issues (Cross et al., 2016). Given the

importance of social and emotional support for gifted students, I will discuss gifted programming, specific curricula, counseling, and therapy as social and emotional strategies for high school gifted students in the next section.

### ***Gifted Programming***

Gifted programming has positively influenced students' social and emotional development (Ciancia, 2018). Two meta-analyses have investigated the effects of gifted programming on social and emotional outcomes; conclusions from both indicate that gifted programming positively impacts the social, emotional, and psychosocial development of gifted students (Rinn, 2020). First, Kim (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies conducted between 1985–2014 investigating the effects of gifted programming (i.e., enrichment programs) on gifted students' outcomes. Results demonstrated that gifted programming had a positive effect on gifted students' academic achievement and social and emotional development (e.g., enrichment was found to lead to a positive attitude toward science, summer enrichment programs resulted in developing personal and social skills, and another study found enrichment programs resulted in increasing academic and emotional self-concept). Further, Woo et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies on the effect of gifted programming on the psychosocial well-being of gifted students from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds. Woo et al. concluded that "school-based gifted education programs have a positive impact on minority students' psychosocial well-being" (p. 211). Given the positive effects of gifted programming on the social and emotional development of gifted students, the NAGC (2020) Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards recommends learning environments for gifted students that positively influence their social and emotional development and encourage independence, motivation, and self-efficacy for all students.

**Enrichment.** Enrichment programs can be activities that take gifted students beyond the regular curriculum, challenging their abilities, fulfilling their interests, and occupying their time in meaningful ways. These programs assist gifted students in achieving their creativity in the cognitive processes; therefore, enrichment programs provided to these students should include suitable experiences and academic skill development that ultimately leads to improving students' academic, social, and emotional skills (Kregel, 2015). Al-Zoubi (2014) conducted a pre-post experimental design to discover the effect of enrichment programs on the academic achievement of 30 high school gifted students. An achievement test was created and implemented on the sample of the study as a pre- and post-test. The results included improved academic achievement, which may influence their social and emotional needs, such as increasing their motivation and self-esteem. Below, I will summarize studies across various enrichment methods, including pull-out enrichment programs, out-of-school programs (i.e., Saturday, summer, and after-school programs), and enrichment clusters.

***Pull-out Enrichment Programs.*** In pull-out programs, gifted students are homogeneously grouped outside their regular classroom for a portion of the school week (Renzulli et al., 2020). During this time, gifted students receive enriched curricula and activities with other similar high-ability students. This is a common approach to serving students identified as gifted and talented (Borland, 2013; Callahan et al., 2014). Gifted students are provided with appropriate educational opportunities to develop and learn through pull-out programs (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020). Several benefits that enhance the popularity of this approach include ease of implementation, cost-effectiveness, and enabling one educator to serve several gifted students, usually across multiple schools or classrooms (Renzulli et al., 2020). Researchers have determined positive participation results in enrichment pull-out programs for gifted students,

including increased motivation, academic achievement, cognitive ability, and positive attitude toward school and learning (Dimitriadis, 2012; Kim, 2016; Welter et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2012).

Meulen et al. (2013) conducted an exploratory study using a controlled open-trial design. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of a pull-out enrichment program on gifted students' social and emotional status, self-concept, enjoyment at school, and academic achievement. A total of 89 gifted students (grades 3–5) from 25 schools, 72 mothers, 70 fathers, and 20 teachers, participated in this study. The students' data collection instruments included the self-perception profile for children (SPPC), the School Questionnaire, the Non-Productive Thoughts Questionnaire, the questionnaire Quality of Sleep, and the Somatic Complaint List. The teachers and the parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) to explore the social, emotional, and behavioral problems among the students. Results indicated positive effects on students' self-concept dimensions, scholastic competence, and behavior. Parents reported decreasing social and emotional issues among their children. Finally, teachers reported improved academic achievement.

More recently, Cash and Lin (2021) conducted a cross-sectional survey to investigate students' psychological well-being in two different gifted programs. A total of 292 students (grades 5–6) and 12 teachers participated in this study. Participants were divided into three groups: no gifted services ( $n = 99$ ; 10 classrooms), the gifted math enrichment pull-out program ( $n = 103$ ; 6 classrooms), and the self-contained gifted program ( $n = 90$ ; 6 classrooms). Researchers implemented the Children's Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale, the School Liking and Avoidance Questionnaire developed, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS), and the Math Expectancy Scale. Students in the two gifted programs reported several patterns of psychological well-being compared to the control group.

These differences were related to math self-concept, loneliness, and maladaptive perfectionism. The results indicated a positive effect of two different gifted programs on students' psychological well-being.

***Out-of-School Programs.*** Out-of-school programs such as Saturday, afterschool, and summer programs are also popular methods of providing enrichment opportunities for gifted students (Renzulli et al., 2020). These programs consist of activities that expose students to a wide variety of disciplines, topics, occupations, persons, places, and events not commonly provided in regular classrooms (Jen et al., 2017; Kaul et al., 2016; Little et al., 2018; Renzulli & Reis, 2014). Out-of-school program participants identified challenge and a supportive learning environment as factors that contributed to these programs' success (Kaul et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009, 2015; Wu & Gentry, 2014). Other academic benefits from attending these programs included increased knowledge, skills, and academic performance (Little et al., 2018; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012). Social and emotional benefits included positive attitudes toward learning, increased self-confidence, increased self-regulation, and higher levels of interpersonal ability (Jen et al., 2017; Kaul et al., 2016; Tay et al., 2018). It is clear that research on Saturday and summer program effectiveness has grown recently. Desmet and Pereira (2022) conducted a qualitative pilot study to explore high school gifted students' perceptions ( $N = 21$ ) of attending a summer program. Data were collected via interviews and surveys. Findings indicated that 65% of students enjoyed and benefited from attending the summer program, especially in terms of talking about their experiences and social and emotional concerns with peers in small groups.

***Enrichment Clusters.*** The third approach is enrichment clusters, which provide an opportunity for groups of students from different grades and classes with a shared interest to

work together during in-school or out of school hours to produce an authentic creation, service, or performance for a real-world audience (Renzulli, 1994, 1995). This type of enrichment concentrates on the development of higher-order thinking skills, including critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving (Renzulli et al., 2020). Enrichment clusters motivate students to discover advanced content and utilize authentic processes as they investigate real-world problems (Renzulli et al., 2020). Researchers on enrichment clusters found positive perceptions of this form of enrichment from parents, students, and educators, leading to a positive learning experience for both educators and students (Renzulli et al., 2020). This enrichment type led to positive social and emotional development, enjoyment, and engagement in learning (Renzulli et al., 2020). By implementing a qualitative case study, Fiddymment (2014) examined the experiences and perceptions of two teachers who implemented enrichment clusters. Both participants had a positive view of this approach and believed that the effectiveness of clusters outweighed the work required. In addition, participants indicated that enrichment clusters increased students' enjoyment and learning motivation, which positively impacted their social and emotional development.

**Academic Acceleration.** An additional gifted programming intervention that supports students' social and emotional development is academic acceleration, which allows gifted students to move through an educational program at a rate faster or at an age younger than typical (Pressey, 1949). Several studies have shown the effectiveness of acceleration as a programming option for gifted students. Using nationally representative data (i.e., NELS; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), McClarty (2015) evaluated the effects of acceleration and subsequent educational opportunities on high school gifted students. The researcher implemented two approaches for identifying students who have skipped a grade. The

first approach was the parents' survey. Based on parents' reports, 213 students skipped a grade at some point. The second approach was the age-based approach; there were 108 students identified using this method. Results demonstrated that accelerated high school and college students often outperformed their peers and exhibited particularly high achievement.

With regard to the social and emotional impacts of acceleration, researchers concluded that positive social and emotional effect was associated with a careful choice of the program and families' and peers' support (Brody & Muratori, 2015). In an overview of research on acceleration, Wai (2015) concluded that gifted accelerated students were happier than gifted students who chose not to accelerate. In addition, Rogers (2015) found moderate social and psychological impacts of acceleration. Schuur et al. (2021) recently conducted a systematic review to evaluate studies on social and emotional characteristics and adjustment of gifted accelerated university students in comparison to nonaccelerated students. Based on a review of 22 studies, these authors concluded that acceleration does not affect students' social and emotional adjustment negatively. Additionally, several factors were found that facilitated social and emotional adjustment, such as self-efficacy, a positive self-concept, high previous academic achievement, and family support.

**Differentiation.** The third gifted programming option is differentiation, which is developed from a belief that curriculum and instruction encourage learning and development when they are connected to the specific needs and abilities of the students involved (Hockett & Doubet, 2021). Students may feel safe and motivated to engage in more challenging and creative tasks through differentiation because it provides them with the opportunity to have their voices heard, which can increase their motivation and allow students to experience meaningful learning (Groeger et al., 2018). Differentiation is critical for gifted students, and there are many reasons

for applying it widely in gifted education (Hockett & Doubet, 2021). First, gifted students often spend considerable time in regular classrooms; therefore, differentiating for these students can raise the chances that they will be served well (Groeger et al., 2018). Second, even within gifted programs and/or courses, curricula usually do not optimize everyone's growth or demand to all interests, preferences, and backgrounds. Gifted students are not a homogenous population. Therefore, the educational setting for gifted students requires teachers to differentiate. Third, the elements of differentiation drive teachers to account for factors that influence students' learning. Teachers can differentiate instruction via content, process, product, and learning environment (Kaplan, 2018); all these elements result in increased learning motivation. Finally, a differentiation-grounded rigorous curriculum supports the achievements and success of unidentified students when it is implemented in regular classrooms (Groeger et al., 2018).

Bennett-Rappel and Northcote (2016) conducted a qualitative case study to determine the effect of a part-time withdrawal intervention program on two high school underachieving gifted students and to identify successful teaching strategies for facilitating the potential in underachieving gifted students. The authors found that several teaching strategies facilitate the achievement of potential in underachieving gifted students, including one-to-one teaching, positive teacher identification, and differentiation.

Although gifted programming is offered to students in grades K–12, these programs mostly focus on elementary and/or middle school students, as concluded from the previous literature review. The most commonly gifted programming options or services for gifted high school students include Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment, and honors/accelerated/or advanced courses (Rinn et al., 2020). These programs are limited compared to the ones provided



for elementary and middle school gifted students. Therefore, this study will fill in the gap by conducting a study on high school gifted students.

### ***Specific Curricula and Instructional Strategies for Gifted Students***

Gifted students may need specific curricula and instructional strategies to meet their needs (McGee et al., 2011; Nelihart et al., 2002; Rinn et al., 2010). Schools need to provide appropriate strategies to meet their social and emotional needs. The three most documented strategies include bibliotherapy, effective curriculum., and mentoring (Karacan-Özdemir et al., 2019; Alabdullatif, 2020; Mofield, 2020).

**Bibliotherapy.** Bibliotherapy is one strategy that has been used to encourage social, emotional, and personality development (Karacan-Özdemir et al., 2019). Crothers (1916) created the term bibliotherapy and described it as the use of books to help individuals understand their issues (Akgün & Benli, 2019). There are some criteria when selecting books for bibliotherapy. According to VanTassel-Baska (2017), books should be appropriate for students' cognitive and emotional levels and should be related to the issues the students are facing. The use of appropriate readings that address related issues makes it possible for the reader to gain insight into the issue and identify the issue to be solved by the character. In addition to relating to students' social and emotional issues, book selection should allow for solutions that will enable students' creative problem-solving skills (İlter, 2018; Pardeck, 2013). Karacan-Özdemir et al. (2019) conducted a document analysis to examine the content of three books (i.e., *The Little Black Fish*, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and *The Little Prince*) regarding psychosocial difficulties experienced by gifted students and their appropriateness for bibliotherapy applications for these students. The concepts of these books were related to peer relationships, loneliness, self-esteem, and perfectionism. Results of the document analysis showed that the

main concepts in these books included relationship issues, loneliness, low self-awareness, and perfectionism, which were all issues gifted students might experience. Finally, the quality of books should be taken into account when selecting books for bibliotherapy; aspects for consideration may include paper and printing quality, book cover page and page layout, and type size. In addition, the pictures in selected books must have an artistic value, be free of stereotypes, and should be appropriate for students' independent thinking. The selected books should also include characters with whom students may identify and who share similar characteristics with the students (Akgün & Benli, 2019).

For typically developing students, bibliotherapy has been effective in developing positive attitudes, personal and social adjustment, positive self-awareness, respect and acceptance of others, and for examining the behavior values that can lead to personality development (McCullies & Chamberlain, 2013). For students who face anxiety, bibliotherapy can reduce the level of anxiety by allowing them to explore their fears through a character or situation in literature and then relate how the fears were faced and overcome in their own life (McCullies & Chamberlain, 2013). Thompson (2010) conducted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design study to evaluate the effects of bibliotherapy on anxiety among 10-years-old students ( $N = 9$ ). The researcher administered the Beck Anxiety Rating Scale inventory. The results showed a significant relationship between bibliotherapy use and lower anxiety levels. Moreover, bibliotherapy has been useful in assisting students who experienced depression and reducing the risk of future depression onset. Stice et al. (2010) investigated the effects of bibliotherapy on depression among 341 high school students. Participants were divided into four groups: cognitive-behavioral (CB) intervention (e.g., relaxation and stress reduction techniques, role-playing), supportive-expressive intervention, CB bibliotherapy, and an assessment-only

control condition. Results indicated that participants in the groups CB and CB bibliotherapy showed a decrease in depressive symptoms and negative cognitions and increased pleasant activities (i.e., they felt that the activities were pleasant). No change was noticed in the other two groups.

In addition to supporting typically developing students, research has demonstrated the effectiveness of bibliotherapy with gifted students (Aziz et al., 2018; De Vries et al., 2017; Heath, 2017). İlter et al. (2018) investigated the effects of bibliotherapy on perfectionism levels in 64 gifted students (grades 3–4). Participants were randomized to an experimental group (i.e., a bibliotherapy-based training program) or a control group. Participants in the experimental group received selected books at the beginning of the study; the researcher read these books from the smartboard in the classroom and implemented several reading activities (e.g., group discussions). Researchers administered the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and the Reading Attitude Scale (RAS). Results indicated that the bibliotherapy training program reduced perfectionism levels to a significant degree. Recently, Long and Erwin (2020) conducted quantitative research to explore the effect of IGNITE (i.e., a high school-based program using the Achievement Orientation Model, Maker Model, and bibliotherapy) on 56 underachieving gifted students. Over two years, two teachers trained the students to apply biographies as bibliotherapy and differentiation approaches of the Maker Model. The students met weekly with the project teacher (coach) for 10–20 min to discuss their progress. Results indicated that the IGNITE program increased gifted students' achievement. The Maker Model and bibliotherapy appeared to result in improvement in different elements, which suggested that both interventions were needed to encourage students to improve their self-perception and efficacy in different areas (Long &

Erwin, 2020). Given the positive effect of this strategy on gifted students' social and emotional outcomes, many researchers encourage the implementation of bibliotherapy.

**Effective Curriculum.** While scholars in the gifted field pay attention to the social and emotional issues of gifted students and even feature the social and emotional curriculum elements prominently, they usually consider these issues as an inherent part of being gifted rather than as emergent issues with talent development (Dai & Speerschneider, 2012; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008). Therefore, issues of coping with talent growth and development failures in creating personal strengths, meanings, ambitions, and identities are somewhat obscured, except for with some issues like underachievement (Dai & Speerschneider, 2012). Furthermore, while some social and emotional strategies focus on those negative emotions that gifted students may experience, an effective curriculum for these students requires a more growth-focused approach (Dai & Speerschneider, 2012; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008). Thus, a model of effective curriculum for gifted students fills this gap.

***The Autonomous Learner Model.*** One of the well-known models that include an affective curricula framework in the field of gifted education is the Autonomous Learner Model, which was developed by Betts (1986) to meet the needs of the whole gifted individual, including cognitive, physical, social, and emotional needs (Rinn, 2020). Five dimensions are in this model: Orientation, Individual Development, Enrichment, Seminars, and In-Depth Study; they were created to help grow the four domains of the autonomous student: physical, intellectual/cognitive, social, and emotional (Rinn, 2020). The first dimension, *Orientation*, is a foundation created related to the concepts of giftedness, and students explore more about themselves and how to work in a group. The second dimension, *Individual Development*, where students are given the opportunity to develop needed skills and attitudes for autonomous

learning. In the third dimension, *Enrichment*, learners are provided with the opportunity to investigate content outside the regular classroom. In the fourth dimension, *the Seminar*, students are given a chance to develop new knowledge while working in a small group and then present what they learned. The final dimension, *In-Depth Study*, allows students to develop comprehensive and thorough study in their passion. Pinto and Clare (2017) conducted an experimental post-test design with a random sampling technique to investigate the effect of the Autonomous Learner Model on the self-esteem of high school students. A total of 60 high school students participated in this study; they were equally divided into two groups (i.e., the Autonomous Learner Model group and the traditional method group). Data collection instruments included an achievement test in science and a rating scale on self-esteem. Results showed that the Autonomous Learner Model was significantly more effective than the traditional curriculum on the self-esteem of high school students. In addition, the Autonomous Learner Model and achievement had a significant interaction effect on self-esteem.

***The Peterson Proactive Developmental Attention Model (PPDA).*** This model is based on the belief that gifted students have a qualitatively different experience of growth than typically developing students; it focuses on both said differentness and the universal elements of development that apply to everyone (Rinn, 2020). Although the PPDA model was initially developed as a framework for counseling, it has been applied to affective curriculum for gifted students since the 1980s (Jen et al., 2017; Peterson & Lorimer, 2011). The main goal of the PPDA model is focused on social and emotional development. The PPDA model has three elements: proactive, developmental, and attention. Proactive and developmental are two aspects of the last component (i.e., proactive attention and attention to development). Peterson and Lorimer (2011) implemented the PPDA model in a private school for gifted students through

weekly development-oriented, teacher-led small-group discussions to investigate the impact of the PPDA on gifted students. A total of 260 fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade gifted students participated in this study for 5 years. In this mixed-methods longitudinal study, Peterson and Lorimer found that the students showed significant positive changes. Specifically, the implementation of PPDA through small groups allowed the students to express their social and emotional concerns and share them with their peers. Additionally, Jen et al. (2017) created a context-specific version of the PPDA model for a university summer program for gifted students called the GERI-Purdue Affective Model. Participants were assigned to groups based on their grade level (grades 5–6, 7–8, and 9–12). Jen et al. conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants ( $N = 101$ ). The small-group discussions improved students' summer program experience, strengthened their self-confidence, and allowed them to be more open to other people.

**Mentoring.** Mentoring has shown a positive effect on individuals in many situations (e.g., DuBois et al., 2011; Van Dam et al., 2018), and there is extensive documentation of the benefits of mentoring in gifted education. Mentoring of gifted students is a relationship between an experienced mentor and a less experienced gifted mentee with the purpose of development (Rinn, 2020). Grassinger et al. (2010) discussed three points regarding mentoring gifted students. First, there is no common type of mentoring, as each type includes different disciplines, various forms, and goals. Second, there is no universal definition of mentoring gifted individuals; the definition allows for the development of an ideal type of mentoring and characterizes individual ways of applying it. Finally, mentoring gifted students could be highly effective; however, because of different weaknesses of mentoring application, effect sizes are typically low to moderate.

Although there are a variety of mentoring models, the fundamental relationship between mentor and mentee has stayed consistent over the years (Rinn, 2020). One mentoring model that has received substantial attention is the cross-age peer-mentoring model, where an older high school mentor is paired with a younger mentee (e.g., elementary or middle school-aged). Benefits of this model include scheduling the meetings in familiar school settings, the opportunity for developing supported mentor/mentee relationships, and minimal age discrepancy between the mentor and mentee. Most literature on this approach related to gifted students has typically described gifted individuals as mentees learning from their mentors. Only a few studies have investigated the advantages for gifted students when they served as mentors for their peers (Gonsoulin et al., 2006; Manning, 2005). McDaniel and Besnoy's (2019) study was one of these; it investigated the effect of a year-long, cross-age peer mentoring program between gifted high school students and elementary students with risk factors related to socially and/or academically school failure. A total of 11 elementary students in third and fourth grade participated in this investigation as mentees; six high school gifted students participated as mentors. The mentoring was implemented weekly through the Crimson GUIDE (i.e., Going up in Dreams and Esteem) for a year. Researchers trained mentors in implementing the program. Positive results from implementing this mentoring program include improved academic achievement, self-efficacy, and social validity for all participants (i.e., mentors and mentees).

There is a gap in the literature on the effect of social and emotional curricula and instructional strategies for gifted students from their points of view. The previous literature review indicated that the effectiveness of these strategies was measured using different methods (e.g., scales and tests) but not including students' perspectives. Given the importance of

integrating students' voices in educational settings, the current study explored high school gifted students' perspectives related to these strategies.

### ***Mental Health and Counseling Strategies***

Mental health and counseling strategies use psychotherapy and problem-solving to work with individuals in solving their social and emotional issues (Tang, 2017). Some of the well-known mental health strategies are mindfulness, counseling, and collaboration (Alfodhly et al., 2021; Mofield, 2020; Wood & Peterson, 2018).

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness has been associated with improving attentional control, self-awareness, self-compassion, gratitude, well-being, empathy, and connectedness with others (Alfodhly et al., 2021), as well as increasing academic performance and emotion regulation (Tang, 2017). In addition, mindfulness can improve metacognitive awareness and help students be aware of their feelings and reactions, which may help prevent impulsive responses (Broderick & Jennings, 2012). The benefits of mindfulness for children and adults are substantial. Children and adolescents' levels of mindfulness have been positively associated with the overall quality of life ratings and negatively associated with social and emotional issues (Sharp et al., 2017).

Research focusing on the implementation of mindfulness has grown exponentially (Zenner et al., 2014). Hinterman et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the correlation between mindfulness, positive perfectionism, proactive coping, and negative perfectionism and rumination among 232 college students. Researchers implemented the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Responses to Depression Questionnaire, Costello–Comrey Depression and Anxiety Scales, and Proactive Coping Inventory. Results indicated a significant effect of mindfulness on perfectionism. The results also showed significant positive correlations between high levels of



mindfulness, self-esteem, proactive coping, and high satisfaction with life. Furthermore, there was a significant correlation between lack of mindfulness, negative perfectionism, and depression. Kuyken et al. (2013) investigated the effectiveness of a school-based universal mindfulness intervention on students' mental health and social and emotional development. A total of 522 high school students participated in this experimental study, and they were randomly assigned to the Mindfulness Schools Program (i.e., intervention) or the usual school curriculum (i.e., control). The Mindfulness Schools Program was offered in schools as part of the regular curriculum, typically replacing some classes (e.g., social studies). Results showed a positive effect of the Mindfulness Schools Program on students' mental health and social and emotional development. Participants in the intervention reported fewer depressive symptoms, lower stress, and greater well-being. More recently, James and Rimes (2018) conducted a pilot randomized study to compare Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) with a self-help guide based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) on students' negative perfectionism. Participants were randomly assigned to the MBCT ( $n = 28$ ) or the CBT ( $n = 32$ ). The MBCT participants attended 2-hour sessions for eight weeks; they were invited to engage in home practice with the use of recordings of mindfulness exercises. The CBT participants received a 50-page self-help booklet written by one of the study researchers; the booklet clarified how perfectionism could affect thinking and feelings and outlined a CBT maintenance model. Results indicated significantly lower levels of perfectionism and stress among MBCT participants than self-help participants.

Researchers have also documented the benefits of mindfulness on gifted students and the positive effect on their social and emotional development (Doss & Bloom, 2018; Haberlin & O'Grady, 2018; Sisk & Kane, 2018). For example, Haberlin and O'Grady (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore the effect of mindfulness practice on 24 gifted students. Researchers

implemented mindfulness-based techniques on the participants for 10 weeks and utilized interviews and observations. Participants practiced a new mindfulness-based technique for 30 minutes weekly for 10 weeks. Results showed increased enjoyment, heightened awareness, discomfort, and mindfulness competency among participants. Two-thirds of the participants reported enjoying the process of learning mindfulness, half of the participants reported that mindfulness practice resulted in feelings of calmness and increased awareness, and eight participants reported feeling some discomfort at times when learning some mindfulness practices. Further, in a quasi-experimental study of 42 gifted high school students, Olton-Weber et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of a 6-week mindfulness intervention on gifted students' social and emotional skills. Researchers administered the Child–Adolescent Perfectionism Scale and Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure. Researchers met weekly with the participants. Each session started with an introduction to the day's theme, followed by in-class activities related to mindfulness practice. At the end of the sessions, participants were given homework to practice what they had learned outside the school. Results supported the use of mindfulness as an appropriate technique to reduce self-imposed forms of perfectionism among gifted students. Finally, Alfodhly et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study to explore the correlation between mindfulness skills and social skills among 214 high school gifted students. Researchers implemented the Mindfulness Scale and interviews. The results indicated a positive, statistically significant relationship between the social skills scale and the degree of the mindfulness scale. Given the reality that some gifted students may face social and emotional issues, mindfulness practices offer a promising approach to assisting these students.

**Collaboration.** In the field of gifted education, several studies supported collaboration as an effective strategy to meet gifted students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Mofield,

2020). The NAGC (2010) specifically supports collaboration as a model for enhancing gifted students' learning. Many studies indicate the effectiveness of this strategy with gifted students. Lenard and Townsend (2017) conducted a study to examine the characteristics and impact of the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) co-teaching model that was driven by the AIG department. A total of 41 schools volunteered to implement co-teaching instructional strategies; 129 teachers completed a follow-up survey. Results indicated that students who were co-taught in science classes outperformed their peers who were not in co-taught science classes. In addition, 94.6% of gifted education teachers and 89.4% of classroom teachers emphasized the effectiveness of this strategy on students' social and communication skills. Recently, Mofield (2020) explored the perspectives of gifted education teachers and general education teachers on collaboration as a strategy to meet students' needs. Over 4 years, gifted education teachers and general education teachers ( $N = 16$ ) worked together to differentiate by (a) advancing the content by utilizing acceleration; (b) explicitly teaching critical thinking, creative thinking, higher-level thinking, and/or problem-solving; and (c) connecting content to a theme or overarching issue. Teachers met once a month to discuss and reflect on the collaboration. Researchers introduced collaborative service models, shared resources about co-planning and differentiated lessons, and introduced models of co-teaching. Participants completed the survey and interview questions. Results indicated many benefits of this strategy for both teachers (i.e., growth in teacher competency to differentiate for gifted students) and students (i.e., growth in student learning). Among the survey responses, 64% of the teachers indicated growth in their competencies, and 100% noted learning and social benefits for gifted students (e.g., students interacting with each other and making friends).

In addition to co-teaching with general education teachers, gifted teachers also frequently collaborate with school counselors to meet gifted students' social and emotional needs. In gifted education, there exists a substantial amount of research regarding consultation and social and emotional learning (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Gilson et al., 2023). It is widely agreed upon that school counselors play an important role in meeting all students' social and emotional needs, including gifted students (John, 2021). Colangelo (2002) stated, "no counselor will be in as much contact with gifted students as the school counselor" (p. 12). Without collaborating with school counselors, gifted students may be vulnerable in many social-emotional aspects, such as anxiety and depression (Chung, 2016). With support from school counselors, gifted students can more deeply develop socially and emotionally by allowing their challenges to empower them to be successful. When gifted students receive support from counselors through the development of their intellectual, social, and emotional growth, they can thrive in long-lasting healthy relationships with others (Smith, 2017).

The review of research on collaboration and co-teaching illustrates a range of information on addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students, as well as gaps in that information. All of the above researchers investigated the perspective of educators regarding this strategy to determine its effectiveness, overlooking the perspectives of other school personnel and students.

**Counseling.** Researchers in the gifted field recommend intentionally including counseling in gifted education programs (Wood & Peterson, 2018). One way of counseling this population is by providing career counseling and academic advising to middle or high school students (Gilson et al., 2023). Sufficient recommendations may assist gifted students in meeting challenges, developing college and career readiness, and achieving their goals. Although career

development is a continuous process, discussing it with high school gifted students is important, especially in terms of assisting them in choosing a major field of study (Wood & Peterson, 2018). Often school counselors have the training and knowledge required to help students during this process by linking academic planning and future career aspirations. Since high school gifted students and their families often request career counseling, school counselors need to be aware of the basic needs of these students and the factors that may contribute to talent development and career decisions. Educators may assume that gifted students do not need career counseling since they exhibit strong reasoning abilities and interests that enable them to grasp the process of career development (Muratori & Smith, 2015); however, this is often not the case. Although gifted students' abilities make some elements of career choice easier, they may face some challenges, such as committing to a career path before understanding it or not having time and opportunity to investigate the range of options available to them (Wood & Peterson, 2018).

Another benefit of school counselors is that they can provide gifted students with strategies that effectively address their social and emotional needs. These counselors assist in promoting understanding and awareness of the social and emotional issues that may affect gifted students, such as unhealthy perfectionism, stress, depression, anxiety, and underachievement (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). Many counseling approaches can be implemented to address gifted students' social and emotional needs (Suldo et al., 2019). One such method is solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), which can be helpful in addressing perfectionism (Kennedy & Farley, 2017). If a gifted student feels that not receiving an A is the end of the world, SFBT can help the student by considering broader ways of thinking about the issue and encouraging them to find solutions that focus on their strengths. Further, techniques designed for stress and anxiety may also be effective in supporting gifted students. School counselors may

implement techniques that focus on relaxation (e.g., meditation or progressive muscle relaxation strategies), which help gifted students relax when they are anxious, such as before or during an exam (Fisher & Kennedy, 2016). Another approach school counselors can utilize for supporting gifted students who may be facing social and social issues is to guide students through a study of social development and behaviors (Fisher & Kennedy, 2016). In this approach, a counselor could serve as a guide or coach, helping the students as they observe and report their findings. For example, a student facing peer relationship issues because of a lack of interest between the student and his/her peers may receive counseling sessions to help the student role-play some age-appropriate conversation topics (Kennedy & Farley, 2017).

Another role of the school counselor is to support parents of gifted students. For gifted students and their families, there is a strong reliance on school counselors (Wood et al., 2010). Counselors may provide parents with recommendations on meeting their child's social and emotional needs outside the school setting (John, 2021). In a study by Bishop (2012), 30 mothers of gifted students reported significantly higher levels of stress than mothers of typically developing students. This emphasizes the importance of school counselors' roles for gifted parents. With the many responsibilities of school counselors, it is important to explore their perspectives regarding meeting the needs of all students, including gifted students, in the high school setting, which this study aims to investigate.

### ***Perspectives***

Exploring the perspectives of different individuals on social and emotional strategies is important since it helps determine the effectiveness of these strategies. Having multiple perspectives enhances the stakeholder's ability to make knowledgeable choices.

Researchers have investigated gifted students' perceptions about their academic experiences and how these experiences led to meeting their academic, social, and emotional needs, as well as the positive and negative aspects of their experiences (Kitsantas et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2015). For instance, gifted elementary school students noted multiple educational advantages of the services provided to them through gifted programs, including more significant challenges, higher-level learning, increased motivation, choices, more interesting work, more projects, and experiments (Cross et al., 2016). Kitsantas et al. (2017) investigated 49 gifted students' perceptions of their gifted program and services. They conducted eight focus groups, with each group consisting of 4 to 10 students. The results indicated that students comprehended that the gifted program and services provided them with academic, social, and emotional affordances and enjoyment of learning. In addition, they perceived that instructional practices in gifted programs supported the development of and promoted self-regulated learning.

In addition, researchers have specifically explored gifted students' perceptions about how gifted programs and services support their social and emotional needs (Kitsantas et al., 2017). For example, Eddles-Hirsch et al. (2010) examined the perspective of gifted students on the service provided to meet their needs. A total of 27 fourth- through sixth-grade gifted students from three schools participated in this qualitative study. Participants believe that a challenging curriculum at school positively affected their motivation and encouraged more supportive relationships with peers and teachers. In addition, some students expressed that they received emotional support due to collaboration among educators (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010). Additionally, Lee et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative survey to discover gifted students' perceptions of social support within various learning environments (i.e., accelerated summer programs and regular schools). A total of 1,392 gifted students participated by completing the

survey. Participants attended summer programs at two university-based gifted education institutions; both institutions are developed to aid middle and high school students. The summer programs consisted of courses similar to first-year college seminars or lab courses. Results indicated that gifted students were generally favorable about the interactions with their peers in both the gifted programs and regular school classes. Further, gifted students believe that collaboration with and between teachers is a great source of social support.

Furthermore, it is important to take into account AIG directors' perspectives regarding gifted services. Research shows a gap in the literature exploring the extent to which AIG directors support gifted students, especially regarding their social and emotional needs (Callahan et al., 2017; McHatton et al., 2010; Steenbergen-Hu & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016). To fill the gap, it is important to reveal AIG directors' understanding of gifted students' needs and the practices implemented to meet their unique needs (Wood & Peterson, 2014). Research on gifted education demonstrates that AIG directors must support educators and counselors to provide an appropriate curriculum and support gifted student learning (NAGC, 2014). Positive leadership can ensure healthy school climates for all students, including gifted students (Wood & Peterson, 2018). According to Wood and Peterson (2014), "Principals who agree with and are invested in the district definition of giftedness and general program philosophy can offer crucial support for students and programs" (p. 633). Unfortunately, it is unknown how AIG directors express their roles and responsibilities in gifted education programs (Neumeister & Burney, 2011; Wood & Peterson, 2014). Limited research has been done in this area. Glenn (2021) conducted qualitative descriptive research to investigate the perspective of school AIG directors about their roles and responsibilities in gifted education programs. A total of 12 AIG directors participated in this study via semi-structured interviews, and five of them participated in focus groups. Results



indicated several challenges faced AIG directors in supporting gifted students, such as creating awareness, lack of knowledge of the gifted program and gifted students' needs, and awareness of weaknesses.

### ***Summary***

Researchers and educators may avoid many social and emotional issues by providing gifted students with appropriate strategies to meet their unique needs. Several studies have shown that gifted programs, specific curricula, instructional strategies, and counseling are effective in meeting gifted students' social and emotional needs (e.g., Haberlin & O'Grady, 2018; Long & Erwin, 2020; Mofield, 2020). Even though research has supported these programs and strategies, determining students' and AIG directors' perspectives on these strategies should be investigated. Understanding these perspectives on social and emotional strategies will help educators improve the learning environment and the strategies they implement (Lee et al., 2015).

### **Summary of the Review of Literature**

Students with high ability have been labeled in many ways. The term "gifted" indicates high intellectual and/or academic ability (Coleman et al., 2015). However, defining "gifted" is a challenging task. Over the years, a variety of definitions have been created by scholars and researchers (Coleman et al., 2015; Pfeiffer, 2021). Yet, there is no standard definition for this population across the nation. One key way classroom educators can broaden their understanding of gifted students is through knowledge of the general characteristics exhibited by these students. It may be easy to recognize the cognitive characteristics; however, these students may also exhibit social and emotional characteristics that could be more difficult to identify (Desmet & Pereira, 2022). Some gifted students routinely display academic, social, and emotional traits that

may be expressed as intense (Ciancia, 2018; Go-Miller, 2018). Therefore, keeping these characteristics in mind will help educators address gifted students' needs.

Some of these characteristics may impact the healthy social and emotional development of gifted students. Social and emotional development illustrates the shifts between two separate but related constructs that reflect characteristics, interactions, interpretations, and related demeanors in the lives of individuals that guide them to become adults (Cross et al., 2016). As individuals develop, they become increasingly sophisticated and versatile when it comes to social and/or emotional situations. In some cases, gifted students have unique characteristics and interactions with others; both could result in unexpected interpretations and behaviors (Cross et al., 2016). Over time, this can result, for some individuals, in several social and emotional issues such as stress, anxiety, bullying, and even suicide (Jen et al., 2016; Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013).

Solving these issues can involve providing gifted students with appropriate programs, curricula, strategies, and counseling services (Cross et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Rinn, 2020). Determining the effectiveness of these interventions can be done through research. In addition, exploring students' perspectives can assist educators in determining the significance of these practices (Lee et al., 2015). Collectively, the findings from studies of gifted students' perspectives on gifted programs and practices indicate that these programs and practices can benefit gifted students' social and emotional development (Lee et al., 2015). However, there is limited research on high school gifted students' perspectives on social and emotional practices provided by the school (Kitsantas et al., 2017). It is important to understand gifted students' and AIG directors' attitudes and feelings about the social and emotional support provided to them, as increased social support in specialized gifted programs and mixed-ability classrooms is often

proposed as a key benefit of and a rationale for their existence. A better understanding and further empirical documentation of the perspectives of gifted students about these practices, particularly in terms of promoting social and emotional support for gifted development, is needed (Lee et al., 2015).

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

In this chapter, I describe the methods and procedures used to (a) explore the services school districts proposed to provide to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students and (b) examine high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perceptions about these services. The chapter includes a description of the research design, participants and setting, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness. The three research questions presented in Chapter 1 guided the method selection. They are as follows:

1. According to the 2022–2025 Local AIG plans, what social and emotional practices did the school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students?
2. How are schools implementing the social and emotional services that are reported in their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans?
3. What are high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided by their school?

### Research Design

I implemented a qualitative design to gather and understand the research data and answer the research questions. I used a qualitative research design in this study because this approach is an integrated method and is sensitive to the natural environment (Antonio et al., 2020). Qualitative research allowed for an in-depth understanding by probing deeper into the responses given by the participants. Often, qualitative research focuses on exploring how individuals make meaning of their experiences through explanation and words rather than numerical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, qualitative data can provide a thorough description of events or circumstances that the researcher is seeking to investigate within their research (Miles et al., 2014). By engaging in qualitative research, researchers aim to get a better understanding of

the meanings people place on actions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Creswell (2013) stated qualitative research is utilized to "explore" a complex problem or issue (e.g., meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs) that requires in-depth understanding. To accomplish this, I used a document analysis design to answer the first research question and a basic interpretive qualitative design to answer the second and third research questions.

I conducted a document analysis to answer the first research question to identify how districts reported meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs in the 2022–2025 Local AIG Plans. Document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). In this approach, "Documents contain text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Document analysis requires researchers to review, code, and analyze text to classify and summarize their information. After reviewing several methods, I decided that document analysis would be appropriate for analyzing these district-based policy documents (Bowen, 2009; Cardno, 2018) because document analysis is helpful in understanding policy content across time and geographies, reporting processes, and triangulating with the interviews.

Additionally, I used a basic interpretive qualitative approach to answer the second and third research questions. In a basic interpretive study, researchers explore "social reality" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 215). This approach focuses on how individuals create their experiences and find meaning to form their reality (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Basic interpretive research seeks to understand and interpret how individuals make sense of their lives and experiences (Merriam, 2019).

The basic interpretive qualitative research method best fits this study because I seek to "understand how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon" (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 6). Specifically, I aimed to explore the "perspectives and worldviews" (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 6) of the participants in this study and how they view the social and emotional strategies implemented in their schools. By selecting a basic qualitative design, I included a research approach that focuses on investigating and understanding the effectiveness of the social and emotional strategies according to those directly experiencing implementing these strategies. With this qualitative research, I better understand how these social and emotional strategies are implemented in high school and how participants (i.e., high school gifted students and AIG directors) evaluate them.

### **Researcher Perspective**

I developed a subjectivity statement to limit researcher bias and reactivity, which are the two validity threats when conducting qualitative research. To address the threats of bias and reactivity, it is unattainable to completely stop the researcher's perspective and beliefs related to the topic of study during qualitative studies. However, it is necessary to understand the influence and appropriateness of the influence a researcher contributes to the research (Maxwell, 2005).

My subjectivity statement included personal experiences and goals. Maxwell (2005) emphasized the need for researchers to "...recognize your personal ties...[and]...be aware of how your personal goals may be shaping your research" (p. 108). One of my main goals in conducting this research was to fulfill the requirements expected to complete my Ph.D. in Special Education. A second primary goal of conducting this research was to learn how to better support high school gifted students. Additionally, I wanted to deepen my knowledge of gifted students' social and emotional needs and help determine effective strategies to meet these needs.

I worked at the university level for over 6 years, serving preservice teachers. My experiences included interacting with mentors at the university level, including mentors with limited knowledge of my career (i.e., gifted education). Often, I would be evaluated by individuals who had no experience in gifted education. I have always needed to define my career for others (e.g., friends, family members, and faculty members in the same department) and explain that gifted students need just as much educational, social, and emotional support as students with disabilities. When I do explain why my career is important for gifted students and families, responses from others are often comments like, “You have such a good heart” or “We did not know that is important.” All of my experiences with mentors have impacted the way that I support others in their careers today. However, I recognized that I had to be extremely aware of my own response to the participants' answers during the interviews. I may make assumptions about several areas as a result of my own experiences (e.g., specific environmental factors).

I utilized strategies suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000) to limit my own biases and threats to validity, such as collecting rich data, utilizing multiple sources of data to analyze results, and creating notes of personal interpretations of research findings. Writing my subjectivity statement for this study has assisted me in being more aware of assumptions, beliefs, and biases that I may have when conducting the study. Reviewing past experiences has helped me to become more self-aware. My aim in creating this subjectivity statement was to clearly demonstrate that threats to validity will be taken seriously in this study (Maxwell, 2005).

### **Participants and Setting**

For the purpose of this study, I used purposeful sampling to recruit the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Patton, 1999, 2002). Maxwell (1997) defined purposeful sampling as a classification of sampling in which “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately

selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). Purposeful sampling is a method widely used in qualitative research to determine and select information-rich cases for the most beneficial use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting knowledgeable individuals or those experienced with the issues being studied (Creswell et al., 2013).

This study was conducted in one Region in North Carolina and focused on high school gifted students. I conducted the research as a response to a local need represented by gifted specialists and directors at the district level about how to best meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of high school gifted students, which aligns with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s (NCDPI) Call to Action (see Action 3; 2021) on behalf of AIG students.

Three school districts participated in this study. School District #1 was a suburban school district. For the 2022 school year, there were eight public schools serving 5,362 students in School District #1. This district had one high school serving 1,619 students. The total number of gifted students in School District #1 was 390 (NCDPI, 2022). School District #2 was a rural school district. For the 2022 school year, there were 42 public schools serving 32,810 students in School District #2 and 11 high schools serving 10,685 students. The total number of gifted students in School District #2 was 4,475 (NCDPI, 2022). Finally, School District #3 was a suburban school district. School District #3 had 37 schools and 20,163 students. This district had 11 high schools serving 7134 students. The total number of gifted students in School District #3 was 1962 (NCDPI, 2022).

### **Participant Eligibility**

The participants for this study were drawn from (a) high school students who have been locally identified as gifted students in one of the school districts, (b) school counselors who serve



high school gifted students in these districts, and (b) high school AIG directors at one of the school districts in this Region.

### ***Participant Recruitment Process***

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol at UNC Charlotte was approved, I emailed all superintendents in the targeted Region in North Carolina to get permission to conduct the study within their school district (Appendix A). I got approval from three school districts. After receiving approval from the three school districts, I requested the superintendents to forward the recruitment emails to the AIG director, high school counselors, high school gifted students, and their parents (Appendix G). The recruitment emails included the AIG Directors and Counselors Letter and Consent (Appendix B), Parent Recruitment Letter and the Parent or Legal Guardian Consent (Appendix C), and Student Assent (Appendix D), which included my contact information and instructed potential participants/parents to reach out to me if they were interested in participating or had any questions about the study. Further, participants were eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the interview. All the messages were sent via emails in PDF form. This protected participants' privacy by not giving their information to the researcher unless participants reached out, as well as keeping individuals' decision to participate (or not) private from others. This strategy also avoided the coercion that may come from asking superintendents to actively recruit participants by asking them to simply forward the approved recruitment emails. I followed up with the school districts by email after 2 weeks.

Because participants were recruited via email, the primary method of obtaining consent was remote via DocuSign. Considering the recruitment method, I did not anticipate this being an issue for most participants due to availability of technology and accessibility of DocuSign. I sent

these forms via DocuSign after receiving an email from participants/parents expressing interest in participation. For student participants, assent forms were sent to parents' email addresses. I provided participants with an additional copy of the consent/assent form for them via email as an attached document to keep for their records.

There were five participants in this study (See Table 1). For School District #1, I did not receive any participants from them. For School District #2, I received 12 emails from high school gifted students and their parents showing interest in participating in the study. Ten signed the consent (and assent) forms, and four students attended the interviews. I did not receive any emails from the AIG directors or counselors in this district. For School District #3, I received only one email from an AIG director. I received no emails from any high school counselors in the three school districts.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Information*

#	Pseudonyms	Category	Gender	School District #
1	Ryan	High School Gifted Student	Male	2
2	Emily	High School Gifted Student	Female	2
3	Rebecca	High School Gifted Student	Female	2
4	Sofia	High School Gifted Student	Female	2
5	Sara	AIG Director	Female	3

## **Data Collection**

Based on the purpose of the study and the research questions, I used several methods of data collection to gather information related to the social and emotional services implemented in high schools and explore high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perceptions about these services. The methods of data collection that were implemented during this study were compiling school documents and conducting interviews.

### ***Local AIG Plans***

One of the data sources for this study was the three participating district's NC Local AIG Plans. North Carolina is one of the few states requiring identification and services for gifted students in schools (Article 9B, NC Gen. Stat. 115C-150.5-.8, 1996; Gilson et al., 2023; Rinn et al., 2020). The NC Local AIG Plans are considered local policy documents in North Carolina (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020). The NC Local AIG Plans must be submitted every 3 years to the local Boards of Education. When approved, the plan is then submitted to the NC Department of Public Instruction for review. If the plans are not supported, the school district typically resubmits them to the State with revisions (NCDPI, 2022). The NC Local AIG Plans are developed in a similar format, including an introduction, sources of funding, and districts' response to each standard and practice outlined in the NC AIG Program Standards. I acquired the three district plans from the NCDPI website, where they are considered public records.

To answer the first research question, I analyzed the 2022–2025 Local AIG Plans for the three school districts. I focused on Standard 2 Practice b (i.e., Delivering an AIG program with comprehensive services that address the social and emotional needs of gifted learners across all grade levels and learning environments through collaboration with a variety of personnel based on student needs) and Standard 3 Practice f (i.e., addresses the social and emotional needs of

AIG students through effective curricular and instructional practices). I chose Standard 2 Practice b and Standard 3 Practice f because they directly address gifted students' social and emotional needs. In addition, I did a systematic keyword search for each plan using several terms (e.g., social, emotional, psychological, bullying, anxiety, stress, depression, affective, counseling, and counselors) to ensure I analyzed all the social and emotional services mentioned in each Local AIG Plan. Further, I analyzed only the parts that are directly related to high school students (e.g., high school, grades 9–13).

The 2022–2025 Local AIG Plans ranged from 27 to 119 single-spaced pages for a total of 605 pages of text, with an average of approximately 50 pages each. School District #1 plan was 84 pages in length. Standard 2 Practice b was 15 sentences in length. Standard 3 Practice f is 13 sentences in length. School District #2 plan was 64 pages in length. Standard 2 Practice b was 20 sentences in length. Standard 3 Practice f was 13 sentences in length. School District #3 plan was 119 pages in length with 27 sentences for Standard 2 Practice b and 29 sentences for Standard 3 Practice f.

### ***Interviews***

In addition to the Local AIG Plans, I also conducted interviews to answer the second and third research questions. Interviews are the most commonly used qualitative data collection method (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Bengtsson & Fynbo, 2018; Fritz & Vandermause, 2018). The interview allows researchers to receive large amounts of data in a short time, providing a range of information related to the topic being studied (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Within the interviews, my intent was to verify the information present in the plans related to social and emotional services and explore participants' perspectives related to these services.

I conducted five interviews. Four of the interviews were with high school gifted students from School District #2, and one interview was with the AIG director from School District #3. No interviews were conducted with participants from School District #1. The interviews were 15–25 min in length.

I conducted the interviews via Zoom. I chose to collect the data online because online methods could be more convenient than in-person interviews due to features including comfort, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and flexibility. An essential benefit of Zoom is its ability to securely record and store sessions without recourse to third-party software (Archibald et al., 2019). After identifying the participants, I notified and reminded them via email of the interview sessions' time/date and the Zoom address. All participants were asked to sign a consent form by responding in an email affirming consent prior to beginning the interview. For the students, I received parental consent and student assent.

I used the protocol or topic guide during the interviews (Appendix E). A protocol consisting of interview questions and steps is a resource to use during the interviews to maintain interview consistency (Brotherson, 1994). For this study, the protocol was adapted from one reported by Taylor (2019). It consists of an introduction, the study's purpose, the interview's purpose, process explanation, ground rules, and questions. Additionally, during the interviews, I presented characteristics of the proposed interviewer, such as the capability to simultaneously think and listen and included a 5-s pause to allow the participant to interact (Brotherson, 1994). I also kept the identities and responses of the interviewees confidential by assigning them pseudonyms.

## **Interview Question Development**

I developed the interview questions for this dissertation in five steps. In Step 1, I reviewed published literature and articles on gifted social and emotional services and strategies. Relevant articles are those that contain information about meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, social and emotional services and strategies, and high school gifted students', school counselors', and AIG directors' perceptions about these services. In addition, I investigated related interview questions and checklists addressing gifted social and emotional services and strategies to determine similar instruments and questions that could be used to create a preliminary version of the focus group. Further, I reviewed the analysis of the 2019–2022 AIG Local Plans (Alhibs, 2022; Gilson et al., 2023) to inform the development of the interview questions.

In Step 2, I developed the interview questions based on current knowledge of social and emotional strategies and information received from the literature review. The interviews for this dissertation included two sections. One section was about the social and emotional services within the school (e.g., What services has the school implemented to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students?), and the second section included questions about evaluating these services (e.g., What successes and/or challenges have the school had in implementing social and emotional services?). Most of the questions were open-ended.

In Step 3, I had expert reviewers ensure the content validity of the interview questions. After developing the initial questions, I invited three experts to review the interview questions and provide me with feedback. The expert reviewers were two expert researchers in gifted education and a high school gifted student. The reviewers were asked to provide feedback on the clearness and coherence of the questions by responding to the guiding questions (Appendix F).

For instance, the reviewers were asked, “Does the focus group questions exhibit relevance and cover a given area of content or ability?” and “To what extent are the focus group questions consistent with the purpose of the study?” Recommendations from the reviewers were incorporated into the final questions (i.e., questions were either retained, deleted, revised, or added based on the experts' review). The expert reviewers' feedback helped inform practical changes to improve the questions and ensure their content validity (e.g., do NOT start a focus group with a question that is primarily a checklist, wording changes, and add a question about collaboration).

In Step 4, I conducted a cognitive think-aloud process, which is the concurrent verbalization of thoughts while completing a task (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). A doctoral student who is an expert in gifted education research and an honors student (i.e., an undergraduate gifted student) were asked to participate in a cognitive lab that involved thinking aloud about the interview questions (Guss, 2018). During this process, participants were asked to spontaneously document everything they think about while doing a task, and they were instructed not to interpret or analyze their thinking (Guss, 2018). No further revision was done since both participants' feedback indicated clarity of the questions.

In Step 5, I revised the instrument as needed. Based on feedback from the cognitive think-aloud process participants, I made additional revisions to the instrument, such as adding more questions and rewriting some questions for clarification.

### **Data Analysis**

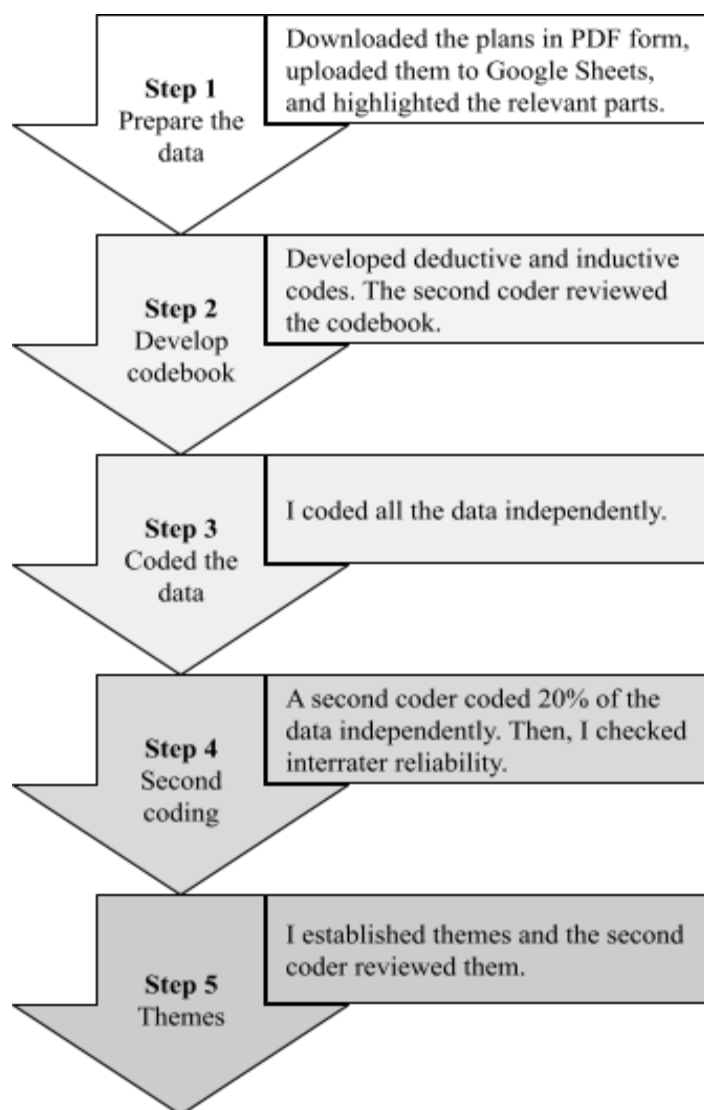
“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). In qualitative research, data analysis organizes words, language, and the initial meanings gained from reviewing the data (Patten, 2020). Data analysis processes align with other elements of

developing the qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). Walker and Myrick (2006) explained that qualitative data analysis aims to organize the data, categorize it into themes, and then lead to models or theories. For the purposes of this qualitative study, I implemented document analysis to analyze data from the Local AIG Plans and thematic analysis to analyze data from the interviews. In addition, I recruited two doctoral students (i.e., one coded the plans and the other coded the interviews) experienced in qualitative methodology to check over the codebooks that I established and the coding.

### ***Document Analysis***

Document analysis is a systematic approach to reviewing documents (Bowen, 2009). The text in the documents is “socially constructed realities that warrant study...” (Patton, 2002, p. 489). Through document analysis, researchers examine and interpret the data to elicit meaning, earn understanding, and produce empirical knowledge. Document analysis is often utilized with other qualitative research approaches as a tool of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). I followed five steps (see Figure 3) to generate main categories and themes to identify social and emotional services reported by the school districts in their Local AIG Plans and answered the first research question.





**Figure 3**  
*Document Analysis Steps*

First, I prepared the data. Documents used for this research came from the Local AIG Plans 2022–2025 for the three school districts. I downloaded the plans in PDF form from the NCDPI website and then uploaded them to Google Sheets. In addition, to prepare for analysis, I did a systematic keyword search in each plan using terms related to the topic, such as social, emotional, psychological, bullying, anxiety, stress, depression, counseling, and counselors, and highlighted all sentences within and outside of Standard 2 Practice b and Standard 3 Practice f.

This step was to determine the meaningful and relevant parts of the text related to the research (Bowen, 2009).

Second, I developed a codebook with 20 codes (i.e., differentiation, enrichment, acceleration, student collaboration, grouping, social-emotional curriculum, collaboration/EC teachers, collaboration/all staff, collaboration/counselors, collaboration/among AIG personnel, collaboration/general ED teachers or specialists, collaboration/administrators, family support, providing resources, implementing programs, social media, activities, individual meetings, professional development, and MTSS). I generated a list of mutually exclusive deductive codes established from a previous Local AIG District Plan 2019–2022 study (Alhibs, 2022; Gilson et al., 2023). The deductive code names, definitions, and examples were organized into a primary codebook (Patton, 2015). I reviewed the deductive codes to check for accuracy, coverage, and clarity. During the coding process, I also created inductive codes for the codebook; there were eight codes (i.e., counseling, interventions, flipbook, camps, mentoring, social-emotional support, goal setting, and technology). The inductive codes were derived from the plans as they emerged. Inductive coding refers to a data analysis technique whereby the researcher develops codes through interpretations based on data, and they are not predetermined before the analysis begins (Thomas, 2006). After developing the codebook, the second coder reviewed it and provided me with feedback.

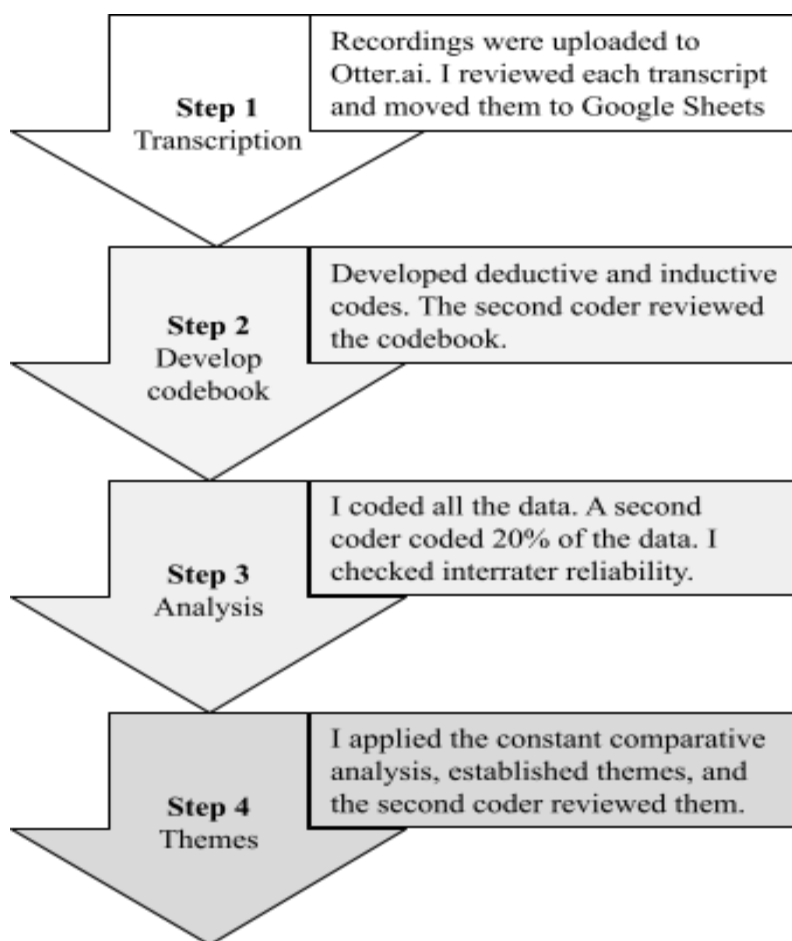
Third, I created a coding protocol that consisted of steps to follow for coding the data. The second coder and I reviewed the coding protocol each time before coding. Then, using Google Sheets, I coded all district responses to relevant practices within Standard 2 Practice b and Standard 3 Practice and any sentences previously identified from the text search of high school-related terms.

Next, in the second coding process, a second coder coded 20% of the data independently. Then, I checked interrater reliability (i.e., was calculated by dividing the number of coders agreements by the sum of both agreements and disagreements and multiplied by 100), discussed agreements and disagreements, and resolved discrepancies until we reached 100% agreement (Cooper et al., 2019).

Finally, I again applied a constant comparative analysis to regroup the finalized codes into major topics that answered the first research question. The second coder and I reviewed the themes and resolved any disagreements.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

Thematic analysis “involves the searching across a data set....to find repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as being a process for determining, analyzing, and reporting themes within data to provide rich detail about the participants’ voices. For data analysis of the interview data, I followed four steps: transcription, preparing for coding, analysis, and theme generation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). See Figure 4.



**Figure 4**  
*Thematic Analysis Phases*

Step one included transcription. Upon completion of the interviews, digital recordings were uploaded to a secure transcription service (i.e., Otter.ai). I browsed through the transcripts as a whole and made notes about first impressions in the form of analytic memos. Then, I reviewed each transcript again individually many times until I became completely familiar with the data. To check for accuracy, I listened to each interview while carefully reading and scrutinizing the transcripts line by line. I transferred all data into Google Sheets, gave each participant a pseudonym, and determined units as the basis for reporting analyses. The participants' individual responses to each question were considered a unit of data for coding. I highlighted all the parts that directly related to the second and third research questions.

In the second step, I developed codebook 1. First, I developed descriptive deductive codes with 11 codes (i.e., differentiation, enrichment, acceleration, collaboration, bibliotherapy, effective curriculum, mentoring, mindfulness, counseling, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy [SFBT], and relaxation). The deductive code names, definitions, and examples were organized into a primary codebook. These codes are ideas and concepts that were discussed in the literature review about high school gifted students' social and emotional strategies. Descriptive codes helped me identify the topics discussed by each participant that were linked to the literature, which assisted in the analysis of similarities and differences by group (Gilson et al., 2018). Then, I developed inductive codes for the participants' data based, in part, on my initial impressions when I read the data multiple times (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). There were 14 inductive codes in codebook 1 (i.e., positive feeling, survey, not only AIG, club, social interaction, meeting, prevent social and emotional issues, limited services, the need to be heard, follow-up, limited availability, counseling / academic, teacher support, and lecture). In addition to the codes from codebook 1, I identified seven more inductive codes (i.e., sessions, lack of training, coaching, and support, coping, parents, grouping, and challenges), which became codebook 2. Then, I identified additional inductive codes (i.e., resources, staff turnover, administrator support, separation of departments, limited spaces, awareness, and social clubs), which became codebook 3. The second coder assisted in developing codebook 3. Both of us agreed the codes in codebook 3 were inclusive enough to include the data in the category and exclusive enough to the other categories.

Step three was the analysis. The second coder and I used codebook 3 to code data independently, check our reliability, discuss discrepancies, and talk about agreements and disagreements. The second coder and I reviewed the coding protocol each time before coding.

The second coder coded the first 20% of the total data for intercoder reliability. The results of inter-coder reliability were 95%.

The final step is theme generation, which refers to selecting overarching themes and defining mutually exclusive themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, I established major categories by subsuming similar codes, which became the themes for each research question. I applied the constant comparative analysis; I grouped the codes into categories based on similar characteristics. I used color-coded transcripts to identify codes, connect them together, and develop themes. I developed tables using Google Sheets, and headings for each table cell were derived from identified theme titles. Each table included the codes related to each theme, the definition of each code, and participants' responses for each code. Then, I clearly defined each theme. Themes were identified based on their significance in answering the research questions for this study and the representation of the participants' voices. While the main themes that were identified overlapped somewhat, I subsequently created sub-themes to differentiate specific elements described for each main theme. For each research question, I identified three main themes, with each having two to three sub-themes. I developed a thematic map, which can be found in Chapter 4, to display the refinement of themes and connections found between the themes that were used in this study (Figure 5). The second coder and I reviewed the themes and sub-themes, and we resolved discrepancies.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the verification that the information shown in a study is accurate and valid (Creswell, 2003). It is characteristic of good qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). Maxwell (2013) recommends a number of strategies to help ensure reliability in qualitative

research. Strategies identified by Maxwell include second coding, memos, triangulation, and expert review. In this research, I used Maxwell's (2013) strategies for trustworthiness as a guide.

### ***Second Coding***

For both document and thematic analysis, I implemented Campbell et al.'s (2013) method of the intercoder agreement to provide consensus-building and accuracy in the coding process. For both analyses, the second coder and I reviewed the coding protocol and codebook prior to coding to ensure the consistency of our coding approach. In addition, to ensure the credibility of the findings, the second coder coded the first 20% of the total data independently. Then, I checked interrater reliability (i.e., 100–80%), discussed agreements and disagreements, and resolved discrepancies.

### ***Memos***

Maxwell (2013) pointed out that researchers have to memo throughout the data collection and analysis process because “memos not only capture your analytic thinking about your data but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (p. 105). I developed two analytic memos: one for document analysis and the other for thematic analysis. For both analyses, the second coder and I used analytic memos to help organize our thoughts on the data. Analytic memos “tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept . . . they are one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 96). Memos help to develop an audit trail to increase the reliability of the findings. I also documented methods memos to clarify the steps I took for the audit trail. This was throughout every part of the research. The aim of the memos was to provide context to the data that were collected and assist me in understanding how I perceived the information presented by the participants. These memos were written in Google

Sheets and kept secure, and entries were written after each interview. Further, I kept notes within the journal as I listened to the audio from my interactions with participants. These journals were not coded for the analysis.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation refers to using multiple approaches to gathering data (Maxwell, 2013). Gliner (1994) described triangulation as an approach of the highest priority in determining trustworthiness in qualitative research. For this study, the use of Local AIG Plans and interviews was important to the credibility of the research. The answers from multiple participants allowed me to compare what the participants said about the social and emotional strategies. Additionally, the triangulation of the methods and data sources was used to provide evidence that different sources of data delivered the same themes.

### ***Expert Review***

The strategy of expert review and consultations with a colleague to discuss the analysis process, data results, and possible interpretations was employed through the use of an outside reliability observer. Two expert researchers who are familiar with qualitative research served as the second coders through the analysis process. Having a second expert review the data helped me check my interpretations against the data. Since each researcher viewed the data through the lens of their knowledge and experience, having more than one coder helped to control this lens from obscuring participant experiences and meanings.

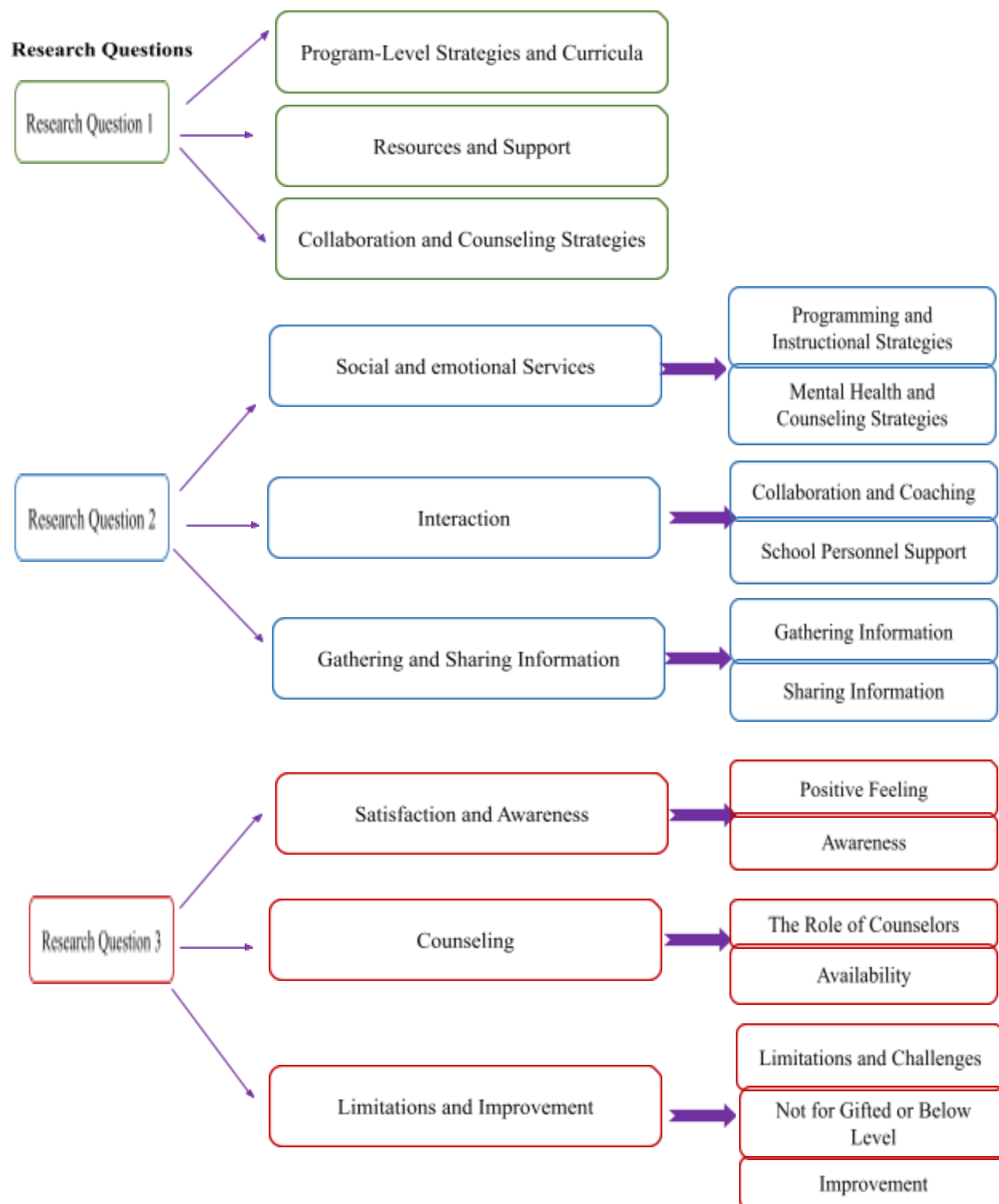


## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

This research study was based on a qualitative exploratory study, which was designed to discover the services school districts proposed to provide to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students and provide an understanding of the perspectives of high school gifted students and AIG directors about these services. Interviews and an analysis of the three NC Local AIG Plans were used to address the following research questions:

1. According to the 2022-2025 Local AIG plans, what social and emotional practices did the school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students?
2. How are schools implementing the social and emotional services that are reported in their 2022-2025 Local AIG plans?
3. What are high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided by their school?

This chapter includes the findings of the study in relation to each of the three research questions (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5**  
*Findings for the Three Research Questions*

### Results for Research Question 1

The analysis of the three NC Local AIG Plans yielded three major themes about the social and emotional practices school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students according to their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans. The themes are *program-level and curricula strategies, resources and support, and collaboration and counseling strategies* (see Table 2). The practices are presented in order of frequency.

**Table 2**

*Results for Research Question 1*

Theme	Initial Codes
Program-level and Curricula Strategies	Social-Emotional Curriculum Grouping Implementing programs Interventions Camps Mentoring Technology Differentiation
Resources and Support	Family Support Providing resources Social-emotional support Goal setting
Collaboration and Counseling Strategies	Professional development Collaboration/all staff Collaboration/Counselors Counseling Individual meetings

***Theme 1: Program-Level and Curricula Strategies***

This theme refers to the curriculum units, lesson plans, activities, and/or strategies that occur beyond the general course of study or regular curriculum, which extend or enrich gifted students' educational experience to meet their social and emotional needs. This theme is aligned with NC AIG Standard 2, Practice D, “Develops procedures for intentional, flexible grouping practices to facilitate the achievement and growth of AIG and other students with advanced learning needs;” Standard 2, Practice I, “Enhances and further develops the needs, talents, and interests of AIG students through extra-curricular programming;” and Standard 3, Practice F, “Addresses the social and emotional needs of AIG students through affective curricular and instructional practices.” Based on the analysis, I discovered seven practices related to this theme within the three AIG Plans.

All three districts mentioned *social-emotional curriculum*, which I defined as curriculum units of study, particular units of study or lesson plans that focus on the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, such as bibliotherapy. School District #1 AIG Plan included the following statement “A Social Emotional Curriculum, developed through research-based and state-made resources, is utilized throughout the district.” (p. 18); this plan further stated, “The district also provides a local module (10 months) on Gifted Education with one month solely focusing on the social-emotional needs of gifted students. Through the module, teachers are provided with knowledge on these needs and resources to help address these needs.” (p. 19). In addition, School District #3 AIG Plan stated, “The district also provides Social and Emotional Curriculum for all grade levels K–12. Teachers are expected to teach the social and emotional lessons appropriate for their grade level to encourage positive mental health and well-being of the student” (p. 40).

All three districts also had evidence of *grouping*, which refers to grouping gifted students to meet their social and emotional needs, such as cluster grouping. Grouping was primarily mentioned in these plans as practices led by the counselors, such as small counseling groups or support groups. For example, School District #1's AIG Plan included the following for offering grouping: "An AIG Specialist serves as a counselor for identified and nurtured students and holds small group or individual interventions to address social-emotional needs as they arise" (p. 36). School District #2 AIG Plan stated, "Some use this resource to plan and target small-group counseling sessions for gifted learners" (p. 16). Moreover, two districts mentioned *interventions* to address the social and emotional needs of high school-gifted students. According to the School District #1 AIG Plan, "As needed, the AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists meet with school counselors to develop support groups and/or interventions for identified students (i.e., anxiety, perfectionism, academic maintenance, etc.)" (p. 18).

In contrast, four practices were mentioned in only one district: *differentiation*, *mentoring*, *camps*, and *technology*. *Differentiation* refers to modifications within the curriculum for high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. School District #3 AIG Plan mentioned *differentiation* as a way to meet high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. According to their plan:

All teachers working with gifted learners receive this training titled Differentiation and the Learner. This training provides insight into both the positive and challenging behaviors that can exist with a gifted learner. It details how to recognize these behaviors and how to differentiate within the curriculum for these social and emotional needs. (p. 64).

In addition, while *mentoring* refers to providing high school gifted students with mentoring and/or peer support during the regular academic year to help them face social and emotional issues, *camps* mean offering high school gifted students after school or summertime extended experiences to help meet their social and emotional needs. According to School District #1 AIG Plan, “the district holds transition camps for rising 6th, rising 7th, and rising 9th graders to work on social-emotional needs and peer support prior to moving into a new building” (p. 28).

In addition, *technology* refers to implementing technology and/or using apps to meet high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. School District #3 AIG Plan included the following statement:

Students have access to applications such as the "Say Something App" that will alert school staff when signs of emotional and social harm may be present. These situations may include threats of suicide and bullying. The "Say Something App" is a way for students to alert a school adult at any time of the day. The use of "Gaggle" also alerts district staff when threats of self harm, suicide, or bullying are mentioned through email sharing or other technology communication between students. School staff can receive an alert through Gaggle and follow up with the students mentioned or involved. (p. 40)

### ***Theme 2: Support and Resources***

Based on the analysis of the three AIG Plans, Theme 2, Support and Resources, refers to providing support and resources (e.g., books, articles, and/or blogs) to the parents/guardians and/or all school personnel involved in AIG programs and services, including classroom teachers, instructional specialists, and school administrators, which help address gifted students' social-emotional needs. All three districts had direct evidence of family support, which I specifically defined as working with parents/guardians to support gifted students' social and

emotional needs. An example included having parent conferences. Supporting and partnerships with parents/guardians is directly aligned to the NC AIG Program Standard 5, Practice A, “Develops intentional, two-way partnerships with parents/guardians to support the following needs of AIG students: • academic and intellectual • social and emotional.”

A total of four practices were coded as *support and resources*. All three districts included direct mention of *family support* and *providing resources* through professional development, social media, and flipbooks for counselors, teachers, and/or parents to help them better understand the social and emotional needs of gifted students. For example, the School District #2 AIG Plan stated, “School District #2 County Gifted Program offers SENG (Social Emotional Needs of Gifted) parent groups each year.” (p. 17). In addition, the School District #1 AIG Plan described *family support* and *providing resources* as follows:

The district has a flipbook on social-emotional needs available for parents of gifted students with knowledge, resources, and tips and advice for meeting social-emotional needs of their students. This flipbook is provided on the district website and provided to all parents at their student’s DEP review. The district will also host two parent education classes focused on social-emotional needs of gifted students. (p. 19).

A common resource and support practice explicitly mentioned in the AIG Plans included *social-emotional support*, which I define as providing social-emotional support to high school gifted students as needed. According to the School District #3 AIG Plan, “Additional instructional resources for providing social and emotional support to gifted learners and applying this training in the classroom are made available to all School District #3 Schools staff through the ADR Resource Room” (p. 64). Surprisingly, only one district mentioned *goal setting* related to social and emotional skills. School District #3 AIG Plan stated, “The student then creates a

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Aligned, Results Focused, Timely) goal for improvement, which is not limited to academics. This goal can be focused on executive functioning skills, social/emotional skills, or other areas needing improvement” (p. 35).

### ***Theme 3: Collaboration and Counseling Strategies***

Theme 3, *Collaboration and Counseling Strategies*, was defined as school personnel working together to assist gifted students to succeed in the classroom and provide appropriate services to them in order to meet their social and emotional needs. Collaboration could be among gifted, general, special education, and/or related services professionals. In contrast, counseling refers to providing assistance and guidance to gifted students in meeting their social and emotional needs. Collaboration is aligned to Standard 2, Practice A in NC AIG Program Standard “Delivers an AIG program with comprehensive services that address the social and emotional needs of gifted learners across all grade levels and learning environments through collaboration with a variety of personnel based on student needs.”

Five practices were identified for Theme 3, *Collaboration and Counseling Strategies*. The most commonly applied practice across the three AIG plans was *counseling*, which refers to providing high school gifted students with counseling services or/and advisory time. According to School District #2 AIG Plan, “Middle and High School counselors have access to The Gifted Teen Survival Guide by Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle at each school. Some use this resource to plan and target small-group counseling sessions for gifted learners.” (p. 16). Additionally, School District #1 AIG Plan stated, “Coursework scheduling/guidance and social-emotional counseling are provided for identified students through a high-school AIG Specialist who serves as their counselor of record” (p. 16).



Other frequently mentioned practices were *collaboration/counselors and professional development*. These two practices were mentioned in two AIG plans. An example of collaboration/counselors practice comes from School District #1 AIG Plan that included the following statement “As needed, the AIG Coordinator and AIG Specialists meet with school counselors to develop support groups and/or interventions for identified students (i.e., anxiety, perfectionism, academic maintenance, etc.)” (p. 18). On the other hand, professional development supports professional learning and collaboration among educators to meet the social and emotional needs of high school-gifted students. School District #3 AIG Plan included the following statement:

School District #3 Schools provides teachers with training on the social-emotional needs of gifted learners during the Professional Achievement Certificate (PAC) courses.

Teachers who work with gifted students in core subjects will be required to take the PAC courses so they can deliver services appropriately. The Gifted Department also provides a Professional Development session, open for any school to register, on the social and emotional needs with a focus on overexcitabilities. (p. 38)

In contrast, a practice mentioned in only one district was the *collaboration/all staff*, which is about collaborations between several groups of educators in terms of social and emotional needs. According to the School District #2 AIG Plan, “In alignment with our multi-faceted approach to serving our gifted learners, the Gifted Education Department has partnered with several groups in order to address the social and emotional needs of AIG students” (p. 16). These groups are classroom teachers, school counselors, and SENG (Social Emotional Needs of Gifted; a nonprofit organization).

### ***Summary***

In summary of the first research question regarding the social and emotional practices school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students according to their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans, all three districts mentioned in their AIG plans curriculum units, lesson plans, activities, and/or strategies that occur beyond the regular curriculum as a way to meet high school gifted students social and emotional needs. In addition, all three districts directly mentioned providing support and resources to high school gifted students, their parents/guardians, and/or any school personnel involved in AIG programs and services. Finally, all the AIG plans reported various levels of collaboration and counseling to meet high school gifted students' social and emotional needs.

### **Results for Research Question 2**

To answer this research question, five interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed from recordings of each interview. The interviewees were with four high school gifted students from School District #2 (i.e., one male and three females) and one female AIG director from School District #3. The analysis of the interviews yielded three major themes about how schools implement the social and emotional services reported in their Local AIG plans from the perspective of the participants. Each theme contains two sub-themes. Table 3 lists the results of the interviews related to research question 2 organized into the three themes and their two sub-themes.

**Table 3***Results for Research Question 2*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Social and Emotional Services	Programming and Instructional Strategies Mental Health and Counseling Strategies
Interaction	Collaboration and Coaching School Personnel Support
Gathering and Sharing Information About Social and Emotional Needs	Gather Information About Social and Emotional Needs Share Information About Social and Emotional Needs

***Theme 1: Social and Emotional Services***

This theme refers to participants' perspectives regarding services, strategies, and/or plans schools provide to meet high school gifted students' social and emotional needs, such as affective curriculum, bibliotherapy, and mentoring. It also refers to counseling and mental health support using various therapeutic techniques. Under this theme, I further discussed two sub-themes: *programming and instructional strategies and mental health and counseling strategies*.

**Programming and Instructional Strategies.** When asked a question regarding the social and emotional services the school provides for high school gifted students, one participant mentioned his school implemented gifted programming to support students' social and emotional health. Ryan communicated in detail about one of these programs (i.e., advanced courses such as AP and honors courses) and how this program helps increase students' creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking abilities. Ryan explained further,

So I know that my high school, provides many services, such as like many classes for higher, more gifted students, such as like honors and AP. And these classes allow students to really push themselves and make sure they exceed to their highest level and prepared-for-college level.

Further, some participants reported instructional strategies that their school implements as social and emotional services for high school gifted students. Ms. Sara stated, “We have an SEL curriculum.” She also reported, “We've also done some things with bibliotherapy through different types of novels, sets, and texts and things like that, tapping into those social-emotional needs.” In addition, one participant mentioned general activities/programs that the school has (e.g., clubs and sports) as a strategy to develop social skills. Sofia shared that her school implements "clubs and athletics" and indicated that they "fostered that type of like social growth." She added, "Clubs because you gain more information as you're, like, climbing up the little leadership hierarchy. So that developed my leadership and communication skills.” A further strategy mentioned by the participants was grouping. Ms. Sara pointed out, “We've had some high schools that have tried to cluster their gifted students together into a homeroom so that they could use that time to work on social-emotional skills.”

**Mental Health and Counseling Strategies.** All participants indicated that their schools' main social and emotional service is counseling services. Sofia expressed, "Everyone's assigned [a] guidance counselor," and Emily added, "We have student counseling at my school." Several counseling techniques were mentioned by the participants. Techniques that focus on relaxation and coping help gifted students relax when anxious. Rebecca shared,

When I get overwhelmed and emotional, it's usually because I'm overstimulated and I'm experiencing in sensory overload. And sort of support they provide is getting me out of

the overstimulating situation, which is usually the classroom, and getting me into as calm place as possible, even though that's not always available in the school, and then what works best is they just sort of let me calm down.

An additional strategy that the participants mentioned is mindfulness. Ms. Sara emphasized implementing this strategy for high school gifted students by saying,

The second strategy that we've used, as I've actually already mentioned, it is where we've been able to work with high schools to actually use their homeroom time to engage those students. In some specific like, I was talking about those growth mindset type strategies how to deal with learning to deal with failure.

### ***Theme 2: Interaction***

This theme refers to participants' perspectives regarding meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs by interacting and collaborating between any school personnel and /or gifted students or their parents. This can be through meetings, coaching, teaching, and any social interaction. Under this theme, I further discussed two sub-themes: *collaboration and coaching and school personnel support*.

**Collaboration and Coaching.** Participants reported several approaches of collaboration as a service the school districts provide to meet students' social and emotional needs. Ms. Sara spoke at length about collaboration. She mentioned collaborating with counselors, "We also have counselor meetings monthly, where we're able to discuss needs." She also addressed collaborative partnerships between schools and outside organizations, "We have partnered with the College Board with our advanced placement courses, our North Carolina partnership," and collaboration at the school district level. Further, she explained the following:

We have lots of different opportunities for collaboration where, one thing that we do is we bring, every school in our district has what we call an AIG school coordinator. So that is sort of the main lead in each school that oversees gifted identification services to make sure that we are meeting those needs. We bring all of these folks together at least quarterly, sometimes more frequently, to meet and discuss what's happening, what's going on, what those needs might be, because those folks are, you know, their feet on the ground in those schools and they're able to bring that information to the district.

Another approach of collaboration mentioned by the participants was student collaboration or teamwork. Ryan shared,

Yeah, so I know that a lot of our teachers and students have this club is called Save club. And they like to send out letters to each student to write a letter to another student to show how like to show their gratefulness and their gratitude.

Moreover, participants mentioned coaching (i.e., teaching gifted students, parents, or even teachers strategies on how to deal with social and emotional issues) as one strategy. Ms. Sara pointed out,

Offer coaching and support to parents and the high schoolers to understand ideas and topics such as perfectionism, asynchronous development, those different types of things. So that they begin to understand maybe how to develop some coping skills and strategies, and their parents begin to also understand that it's okay. That, you know, even our gifted students are going to experience social and emotional needs that are sometimes unique to just gifted students, and how to have some ways of dealing with that and coping with that.

**School Personnel Support.** Participants indicated receiving support from school personnel. All of them mentioned receiving support from counselors. Ryan shared, "We have our counselors who are very supportive towards our students." Sofia added, "They're available if I'm having like an emotional issue." In addition to the emotional support, participants indicated receiving academic support and advice from the school counselors. Emily pointed out, "Counseling, personal counseling, and just advice given to me and help with my schedule for when I'm going to be graduating in class, and what I'm going to be taking."

Further, some participants indicated receiving assistance from other school personnel. Sofia stated, "We also have four administrators that we can go to for help as well." In contrast, Rebecca reported, "Some of my teachers have various varying levels of support for my emotional needs, where some of them have been helpful." She talked in depth about one experience by saying,

It would probably be my PE teacher, or PE coach, helping me through panic attacks. He had clearly have done with these sorts of things before and do you know what to do, he just gave me—helped me address the problem that was causing it. And then he gave me space to sort of ride through it and gave me time and stuff like that.

Another way teachers support high school gifted students is by referring them to a counselor to get the appropriate support. For example, Rebecca mentioned, "If the teachers are worried about you, they can refer you to them."

***Theme 3: Gathering and Sharing Information About Social and Emotional Needs.***

The final theme is based on participants' perspectives and is defined as gathering and collecting information about students' feelings regarding school and their social and emotional needs in order to meet these needs. This can be done by conducting surveys and/or focus groups

with the students. This theme also refers to participants' perspectives regarding providing information and resources to prevent social and emotional issues such as bullying and self-harm. Additionally, it refers to bringing awareness about social and emotional issues and providing information and resources about effective strategies for meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. Under this theme, I discussed two sub-themes: *gathering information about social and emotional needs* and *sharing information about social and emotional needs*.

**Gather Information About Social and Emotional Needs.** Participants shared that schools collect data on their feelings regarding school and outside school and their needs, including social and emotional needs. One way the schools collect the data is by conducting surveys. Rebecca reported,

At the beginning of each semester, they make us do a survey, about like how safe we feel in schools and how something there, but it's just sort of reads as like a checkbox off the to do list to make this school feel safe for minorities and for the emotional well being of their students.

Additionally, Ryan shared, "I know that our school has, like frequently, every few weeks or so have provided a survey for every student on how they're feeling towards their education and their day to day, school life."

Another approach schools use to gather and collect data on students' social and emotional needs is conducting focus groups with students. Ms. Sara stated,

Each year, as we asked those coordinators that I mentioned at the beginning to gather a focus group of students, and one of the questions that they asked them during that focus group is, Do you feel like your social and emotional needs are being supported? Do you



feel like you have an advocate in your building that you could go and talk to about academic needs or social-emotional needs?

**Share Information About Social and Emotional Needs.** Participants indicated schools share information with high school gifted students and their parents about social and emotional needs and provide them with resources and effective strategies for meeting them. One way schools do that is through clubs. For instance, Emily reported,

In my Save club, they, I believe, use the Sandy Hook Promise and see something, say something just to prevent bullying in high school students in high school and prevent self-harm and things like that. I know that they like they just they help bring awareness about them.

Moreover, participants reported that schools share information and strategies about social and emotional needs through different sessions. Ms. Sara talked about one session by saying,

Learn and lead sessions. These sessions are offered virtually in the evenings. And we also invite not just high school students but their parents to attend. And we've tried; not all of these sessions focus on social-emotional needs, but at least I would say 50% of them do.

Rebecca mentioned another session her school provided to teach them how to be emotionally intelligent. She stated, “Wellness Wednesdays every Wednesday during the second half of the third period. They have us talk about different character strengths and stuff.” Further, one participant indicated sharing resources (e.g., websites and books) with the high school gifted students and their families about social and emotional needs. Ms. Sara reported,

We have an what we call our gifted resource room. And in that room, we have lots of resources. And we do have some resources in there for social emotional learning needs. So most definitely, I'm able to share those with parents as well. And then a lot of times,

I'll refer parents and students to the the SENG website for a list of, you know, tools and resources, because that whole website is focused on the social emotional needs of gifted.

And they're able to get tools and resources from there as well.

### ***Summary***

All participants shared commonalities around the second research question on their perspectives regarding services, strategies, and/or plans schools provide to meet high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. All participants indicated several social and emotional services the school districts provided for gifted high school students. In addition, many participants mentioned collaboration and support from school personnel as a way to meet their needs. Moreover, participants shared their perspectives on gathering and sharing information about high school gifted students' social and emotional needs.

### **Results for Research Question 3**

The analysis of the interviews generated three themes that were established based on the data related to research question 3. The themes are *satisfaction and awareness, counseling, and limitations and improvements*. Table 4 displays a list of the results from the five interviews organized into the three themes and their corresponding sub-themes.

**Table 4***Results for Research Question 3*

Themes	Sub-themes
Satisfaction and Awareness	Positive Feelings Regarding Social and Emotional Services Awareness
Counseling	The Role of Counselors Availability
Limitations and Improvement	Limitations and Challenges Not for the Gifted or Below the Level Improvement

***Theme 1: Satisfaction and Awareness***

This theme shows the extent of participants' satisfaction with the social and emotional services provided to high school gifted students and their awareness of these services. Under this theme, I discussed two sub-themes: *positive feelings regarding social and emotional services*, and *awareness*.

**Positive Feelings Regarding Social and Emotional Services.** Participants reported their perceptions of the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students. Many of the participants showed satisfaction with these services. They expressed that in high school, they have been very good. For example, Ryan shared positive experiences, "I've had a great experience with our school services." In addition, some participants were satisfied with

counseling, which is the main social and emotional service for high school gifted students. Sofia stated, "I lucked out with my counselor." Participants also indicated the effectiveness of these services but believed in the need for some improvement. Emily shared, "I feel like they're pretty effective. I feel like they could be a little more effective and a little more, have a little more of an attention to detail." She added, "I like what we have right now. Like, there's just small things that they can improve, but I think ours is really good at my school." Further, many of the participants shared positive feelings about specific services the school provided them, such as college preparation. Sofia shared,

I'm very grateful to what they placed for me, especially in the college preparation. I'm grateful for all the resources they gave me. They have like a senior newsletter program that goes out once a month that's very helpful. That type of like care in the school community, and like information should be shared to all the grades.

**Awareness.** Four participants demonstrated low levels of awareness about the school's social and emotional services. Outside of what was discussed previously in this chapter, most of the students were aware only of counseling as a social and emotional service. Sofia pointed out, "I'm not aware of any like special ones for more like higher excelling students at our school; it's just the counselors." Participants reported they lacked information about most social and emotional services. By asking about specific social and emotional services, Ryan reported, "I don't have much information on that, as of right now." Also, Emily shared, "I don't really know what, what they help us specifically." She added, "I don't know exactly what strategy they use."

Furthermore, most participants mentioned several services, but they were not aware that these are social and emotional services and have limited information about them. For example, Emily pointed out, "I believe they have some clubs. Save club I know is one," and indicated, "I'm

not really familiar with most of the clubs, though." Importantly, having this conversation with the participants helped highlight and develop their awareness about their social and emotional needs and the services schools provide to meet them. Sofia expressed at the end of her interview, "You highlighted some stuff that made me think I got me thinking too. I appreciate it."

### ***Theme 2: Counseling***

This theme showed participants' perspectives about counseling (i.e., specialized services provided by a school counselor to students) as the main social and emotional service for high school-gifted students. Under this theme, I discussed two sub-themes: the role of counselors and their availability.

**The Role of Counselors.** Participants shared their perspectives about counseling services. They reported that the counseling program at their school districts mostly addresses academic needs. Sofia described counselors as "More like academic advisors." An essential role of counselors is to guide their students' academic decisions. Participants emphasized receiving assistance from their counselors about scheduling their classes. For instance, Emily reported, "It's mostly scheduling things like with my classes." Moreover, participants indicated counselors assist students in establishing academic plans and developing the skills to succeed after graduation. Emily talked about counseling meetings,

So we talk about what classes like what future classes I'm gonna be taking in, like, if that's going to be a good thing for me, like, if she thinks I'm going to do well, if she thinks I'm going to be too stressed, like an advanced class, like an AP class, just making sure that I'm gonna be able to handle the classes that we're going to be taking next year.

Furthermore, participants shared that school counselors promote student academic success. Rebecca shared that her counselor's responsibility is mostly to promote her success in

high school. Only one participant indicated meeting with the counselor once to address social and emotional needs. This meeting was based on teacher referrals. Rebecca talked about this meeting:

For two of them, I discussed my classes and stuff, but for one of them, my teacher referred me to them after I had a big meltdown. Because I was stressed and overwhelmed and overstimulated and we just sort of talked briefly about my needs in order to make high school easier for me when when I have a sensory processing difficulties. And it was very brief, very short, didn't really need to be super long.

One role of counselors is to support students working to overcome struggles, including issues in their personal lives, social pressures, or academic difficulties. Some participants acknowledged these roles. Ms. Sara stated, "We always start by, you know, recommending that they speak with their counselor first." Further, Rebecca said, "They're also trained to help you in with the social and emotional stuff if you need it." She explained further, "But really, they don't do much unless you reach out to them."

Although the counselors' role is to provide students with academic, social, and emotional support, participants reported their concerns about the nature of their support. Sofia expressed, "I never got an emotional counselor. I just got academically advice the past four years." She added, "I feel like I would have learned more about myself and my capabilities, knowing that I had someone that was talking just for me, and not my academic potential." In addition, participants expressed the need for social support, especially during certain times, such as during the senior year. Sofia shared, "Especially senior year, there was, an atmosphere and there wasn't like, much, like help with that, like, it was just very stressful." Further, participants indicated the need to be heard. For example, Emily mentioned,

I feel like students should just be able to have somebody to talk to because most of the time, that's really just, it's something that they don't have at home. And it's just, it's important to have somebody that they can talk to and express how they feel and know that they won't be judged.

**Availability.** Participants reported limited meetings with school counselors. Rebecca shared meeting with her counselor "three times this past school year," and indicated, "It's not a regular thing." Emily had a similar experience with counseling meetings, "Personally, I don't meet that often. I feel like I've met like a total of, like, three to five times with her this past year." She indicated the need for more meetings, "But sometimes I feel like maybe if we could be seen a little bit quicker, that would be better." In addition, Sofia reported having one in-person meeting with her counselor; she shared, "It's usually by email all contact" Sofia added,

And, um, I could see what they mean, by like, having one point of contact, it was easy to email him about a grade about needing a transcript. But then I felt bad if I, like, I never talked to him about like, how I'm doing like beyond that.

Furthermore, participants reported difficulty meeting with the counselors outside the schedule. Emily shared that when students submit a slip to meet with the counselor, "sometimes it takes a day or even a week before the counselor is able to see them." Participants also shared students avoid meeting with counselors outside the regular meeting times due to all the steps they have to go through in order to set a meeting. Rebecca explained, "If you feel like you need to talk to your guidance counselor, then you can always set up an appointment with them." She added, "No one really does that; no one really wants to. It's not really the widely done thing." Rebecca explained in detail,

Because there's this whole thing where there's a whole system where you need to go down to your office and check out all these sorts of forms in order to make sure that, like, they know the best time for you to pull you out of class. So you can talk, and there's just so many hoops you need to jump through in order to access your guidance counselor if they're not calling you to their office.

### ***Theme 3: Limitations and Improvement***

The final theme indicates the challenges and limitations of the social and emotional services provided to high school-gifted students, the level of these services, the most significant barriers to implementing them, and suggestions for improvement. Under this theme, I discussed three sub-themes: *limitations and challenges, not for gifted or below the level, and improvement.*

**Limitations and Challenges.** Participants shared their perspectives about the social and emotional services at their schools. Most participants indicated limited services in their schools. Rebecca spoke about these services by saying, "There's not that much." She further articulated, "Honestly, our school has no emotional services, and mental health services are a mess." In addition, Sofia claimed, "It's just the counselor." Rebecca shared concern about these services by saying,

There could definitely be a lot more. I know a lot of my peers are definitely struggling with a lot of stuff. I personally do well with the sort of hands-off approach. I have my own social and emotional resources, my therapist that my parents got for me, and stuff like that. So I don't really rely on the stuff the school provides. But I do agree from looking from this like this overhead perspective that there could there should be a lot more thought put into this and a lot more care for this social-emotional stuff at school.



Additionally, participants shared their personal experiences that emphasized limited services. Sofia spoke about college applications during the senior season "There wasn't a lot of like social support. It was just like, what colleges are you aiming for? This is what you need to send them. And then they sent us on their way." Rebecca communicated in detail how her experiences of getting overwhelmed and emotional at school and the support they provided to her. Rebecca explained further,

Whenever I have my breakdowns from sensory overload, like the, my teachers usually send me into the hallway because that's the quietest place they can get me to. But it's not it's an improvement from the classroom, but it's not the best place. It's still a lot of stuff in there it's really overstimulating, and it can still take me a while to calm down when I'm out in the hallway.

In contrast, participants reported challenges related to implementing social and emotional services. Ms. Sara indicated, "It is a hard area for us to feel like that we're covering well." She explained further, "Especially since the pandemic, I have seen an increase in needs. So that is definitely something that we are talking about often and trying to figure out better ways to meet that need." In addition, participants discussed several factors that may have contributed to the limited social and emotional services. One factor is the lack of training in this area by the school personnel. Rebecca spoke a significant amount about the lack of knowledge of some educators at her school regarding the social and emotional needs of the students. Rebecca mentioned some of her teachers "have directly ridiculed me for getting emotional as seemingly small inconveniences." She further stated,

Other teachers, they're empathetic, but they don't know how to handle whenever I get emotional; they don't really know what to do other than just to call the guidance

counselor. And some of them just don't care or at the worst, which is only one of my teachers, just annoyed when I get upset because it's disturbing everyone.

Another factor that may have contributed to the limited services is staff turnover. Ms. Sara spoke in great detail regarding this factor,

A big struggle that's impacting our social-emotional, and it might be kind of strange to say this, but it's staff turnover. So here in our county, we are experiencing a lot of staff turnover, in particular with our counselors. So we've lost we have one in high school that I can think of right now that has four counselors, but only one of them stayed for this year. So it was really like. So when you when you are impacted like that, it's really, really hard to catch that counselor up on everything that's going on in that school and how to meet those needs. So that has definitely been a huge struggle for us.

**Not for the Gifted or Below the Level.** Participants reported their perspectives related to the quality of the social and emotional services. Many of them indicated that these services are not designed for gifted students; they are for all the students in the school. For instance, Ms. Sara clarified the social-emotional curriculum is "For all of our students." She also discussed the monthly meeting with counselors and stated, "Not every meeting will focus on the needs of gifted learners." Ryan also claimed the surveys school implements are "For every student." In addition, Sofia spoke in depth about clubs at her school and pointed out, "This is for everyone." She further articulated, "Like, yeah, there isn't any specialized program that like meets would say like the top 30. Um, yeah, there's no like, specialized department specialized program for that, which I felt like could have benefited us."

Participants also shared their concerns about the level of these services. Several participants reported that these services are below their level and are designed for elementary or

middle school students. Rebecca spoke in great detail regarding the level of these services. She believed one of the social and emotional sessions her school implemented "didn't really work out." Rebecca explained,

It's alright if you listen to it, but I knowing my fellow high schoolers know that no one really cares about that. It's very like it's designed for elementary schoolers like to talk about different attributes like honesty and kindness, but I know that no one pays attention to them.

Moreover, Sofia discussed the Grade Point Average (GPA) clubs at her school and reported, "that like if you reach this certain GPA, then you're, you qualify for this club." However, she shared her concern about the level of these clubs,

And those clubs are like kind of weird to talk about because they don't do anything besides like service projects. The only time you hear from them is when they're like, your service project for the month is due, and then you donate something.

**Improvement.** Participants reported the need to improve the social and emotional services provided to high school gifted students. They shared several recommendations that might help to improve these services. Rayan recommended meeting individually with high school gifted students to discuss their needs "Instead of like having a wide variety survey." Emily shared several recommendations such as "following up with students more quickly," "mandate, like, time with a student counselor," and "do more surveys about, like, what they are feeling and how they are doing in school." In addition, Rebecca suggested providing "better education about mental health" and teaching gifted students "skills on how to deal with difficult emotions and telling us about places we can reach out to, in order to better take care of ourselves and stuff like that." Rebecca also recommended providing teachers with training on the social and emotional

needs of high school gifted students. Rebecca stated, "like better training for teachers and in how to respond to big meltdowns so that like the kind that I can have some time and how to respond to emotional students." Sofia also recommended training for counselors and shared,

Maybe even just to the counselors, just like emotional training, just knowing to act knowing how to help someone, before they get in trouble before there's an outburst? Just learning to see beyond the grades beyond what seems to be happening at home, and not having to be prompted to do to start something after an incident. Just getting out there before.

Further, Sofia suggested "separation of departments. I feel like having that division in roles, like having a specific emotional support counselor, you could say, and then what the counselor seems to be doing an academic advisor." Additionally, Sofia believes that having all the counselors in one office may limit students' comfort while talking with their counselors; therefore, she recommended the "separation of spaces like office spaces."

### ***Summary***

Participants shared their perspectives regarding the social and emotional services in their school district. Many of them showed satisfaction with these services. Nevertheless, most of the participants were not aware of the social and emotional services in their schools. Moreover, most participants shared similar experiences regarding counseling services. All of the interviews consisted of students experiencing limited meetings with the counselors and difficulties meeting with them outside the schedule. Finally, all of the participants indicated limited social and emotional services and challenges related to providing these services, yet they provided a variety of recommendations for improvements.

## **Summary of the Results**

In summary, the main objective of this qualitative research study was to discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students and explore high school gifted students and AIG directors'/coordinators' perspectives about these services. The research achieved its purpose through an analysis of three NC Local AIG Plans and semi-structured interviews. Five participants from two school districts in NC were interviewed. Although this study was based on a small sample, it has implications for advancement in meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. The results of the triangulation of data indicated the need for implementing effective social and emotional strategies and the need for more school personnel training in the areas. In Chapter Five, I will summarize the overall research and discuss how the results are connected to the literature, implications, and recommendations for further research or interventions.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

There is limited empirical research on social and emotional strategies for high school gifted students and the perspectives of high school gifted students and AIG directors related to these strategies (Knudsen, 2018; Kregel, 2015). Therefore, this dissertation aimed to (a) explore the social and emotional practices school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students based on their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans and (b) understand high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about these services. The study was grounded in Corso's (2007) framework, which emphasizes the importance of meeting students' social and emotional development and enhances the development of students in many ways. This framework supported the interpretation of the results. Using purposeful sampling, this basic interpretive qualitative research included five participants (i.e., one AIG director from School District #3 and four high school gifted students from School District #2). The current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. According to the 2022–2025 Local AIG plans, what social and emotional practices did the school districts propose to implement for the high school gifted students?
2. How are schools implementing the social and emotional services that are reported in their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans?
3. What are high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided by their school?

To address research question 1, I analyzed the 2022–2025 Local AIG Plans for the three school districts; to answer research questions 2 and 3, I conducted five separate interviews. This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the findings organized by research questions with

connections drawn from the research literature, as well as limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice.

### **Research Question 1**

Results from the analysis of the 2022–2025 Local AIG plans yielded three themes: *program-level and curricula strategies, resources and support, and collaboration and counseling strategies*. The results indicated several social and emotional practices for high school gifted students that the three school districts proposed to implement. Further, I found additional social and emotional practices that could serve as new ideas for districts and future research. Results related to the first research question will contribute to the limited body of literature on gifted education policy-related research (Gilson et al., 2023; Hodges, 2020; Matthews & Rhodes, 2020). In addition, findings related to this research question emphasize the need to provide details of the social and emotional practices since all three plans had limited information on most of them. The writers of the AIG plans need to label the grade level for each practice and include specifics about who should be in charge of implementing specific aspects of the plans. Although I did not collect data about the students' grade levels, I was able to infer their grade levels throughout the interview; this allowed me to realize that they have very different needs depending on where they are (freshman versus senior). For example, a student in her senior year indicated a need for emotional support during the college application process.

Many frequently reported practices were not entirely surprising, given that the deductive codes were derived from the NC AIG Program Standards. For instance, all three districts had evidence of implementing social-emotional curriculum and grouping (e.g., small grouping and counseling grouping), which is encouraging because the research supports these practices (Dai & Speerschneider, 2012; Pinto & Clare, 2017; Rinn, 2020; Wood & Peterson, 2018). Whereas

social-emotional curricula help to develop students' self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are necessary for school, work, and life success (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2021), grouping gifted students reduces perfectionism among these students (Grugan et al., 2021). In addition, all three districts mentioned counseling in their plans, which is also supported by research (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Fisher & Kennedy, 2016; Wood & Peterson, 2018). The previous research emphasized the role of counselors in meeting gifted students' social and emotional needs and discussed a variety of counseling services, such as individual and group counseling, enrichment, and community partnership (Wood & Peterson, 2018). Although all of the plans mentioned counseling, the information related to this practice was general, and there was a lack of details about this practice. Further, all three districts reported family support in their AIG plans, which was also supported by previous studies (Schuur et al., 2021).

It was surprising that not all districts mentioned collaboration in their plans, especially with teachers and/or counselors. As was mentioned previously, this practice is aligned with NC state's gifted education standards and supported by many studies (Mofield, 2020; Mofield & Phelps, 2020; NAGC, 2019). Further, it is noteworthy that collaboration with counselors was only mentioned in two plans, and collaboration with all staff was mentioned in only one plan. Collaboration is important to meet gifted students' social and emotional needs because when stakeholders work together, they can more effectively address challenges, share their knowledge and best social and emotional practices, and develop effective solutions (Mofield, 2020). Other noteworthy practices mentioned in only one plan included camps, mentoring, technology, and differentiation. This finding was entirely surprising given that previous research supported these practices (Hockett & Doubet, 2021; Rinn, 2020; Van Dam et al., 2018). These practices (i.e., camps, mentoring, technology, and differentiation) effectively meet gifted students' social and



emotional needs (Hockett & Doubet, 2021; Van Dam et al., 2018; Ziernwald et al., 2022).

Regardless if the practices were widely mentioned or not, exploring them could help school districts discover new practices other districts implement, which may help fill in gaps within their AIG Plans to develop more effective social and emotional strategies for high school gifted students (Gilson et al., 2023; NCDPI, 2018; NAGC, 2019).

## **Research Question 2**

Results from the thematic analysis of interviews revealed three main themes on how schools implement social and emotional services from the perspective of the participants. These themes are *social and emotional services*, *interaction*, and *gathering and sharing information*. The current study contributed new research findings to the limited literature on incorporating high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives and awareness of how schools implement social and emotional services (Kregel, 2015). In addition, these findings would assist the stakeholders in gaining a deeper understanding of the extent to which they provide appropriate and successful social and emotional strategies.

The *social and emotional services theme* aligns with findings from prior studies that also support these strategies (Alabdullatif, 2020; Karacan-Özdemir et al., 2019; Mofield, 2020; VanTassel-Baska, 2017). One participant indicated bibliotherapy as a social and emotional strategy for high school gifted students. This finding was supported by previous research (Aziz et al., 2018; De Vries et al., 2017; Heath, 2017). For example, İltir et al. (2018) found that bibliotherapy reduces the level of perfectionism among gifted students. Further, this study indicated the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum as a social and emotional strategy. Although previous research supported this strategy (Dai & Speerschneider, 2012; Rinn, 2020; Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2022), only one participant reported it. The AIG director

mentioned the SEL curriculum, which is aligned with the AIG plan, but none of the high school participants talked about this strategy, which indicated a gap between the AIG plans and the school system practices and students' awareness. Reducing this gap can be done by educating the school personnel who are in charge of implementing these practices and the students who should receive them.

In addition, this study emphasized that mental health and counseling strategies are ways to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students based on participants' perspectives. Previous research supports these types of strategies for meeting their social and emotional needs (Alfodhly et al., 2021; Mofield, 2020; Wood & Peterson, 2018). For example, the breathing techniques Rebecca mentioned receiving in her interview were recommended by previous studies (Fisher & Kennedy, 2016; Kennedy & Farley, 2018). According to Fisher and Kennedy (2016), techniques focused on relaxation, like meditation or progressive muscle relaxation strategies, help reduce anxiety among gifted students. Participants also reported mindfulness as a social and emotional strategy. This finding mirrors that of previous research, such as that conducted by Olton-Weber et al. (2020), which found the effect of mindfulness on reducing perfectionism levels among gifted students. Although research supports several mental health and counseling strategies (Doss & Bloom, 2018; Haberlin & O'Grady, 2018; Kennedy & Farley, 2017; Sisk & Kane, 2018), it was surprising that only two participants mentioned them (i.e., AIG director and student with social and emotional issues).

Additional findings of the current study for research question #2 focused on collaboration, providing support, and sharing knowledge as strategies to meet the social and emotional needs based on the participants' perspectives. These findings were consistent with those of previous studies that emphasized the importance of collaboration in meeting the social

and emotional needs of high school gifted students (Chung, 2016; Lenard & Townsend, 2017; Mofield, 2020), as well as with previous studies that also found the importance of providing support from school personnel and sharing knowledge related to the social and emotional needs (Go- Miller, 2018; Lee et al., 2015; Rinn et al., 2011; Zeidner & Shani-Zinovich, 2015). For example, Mofield (2020) conducted qualitative research to explore the perspectives of gifted education teachers and general education teachers ( $N=16$ ) on collaboration (e.g., co-planning and co-teaching). The results indicated that collaboration helped increase teachers' competency to differentiate gifted students' social and emotional needs. Further, these findings link to the conceptual framework of this study (i.e., Corso, 2007) that emphasized the significance of providing support to the students and having a collaborative team to develop an Individual Learning Plan (i.e., design a plan and implement strategies) for students in need. Although prior studies and the conceptual framework supported collaboration as a way to meet the needs of high school gifted students (DeKruyf et al., 2013; John, 2021), it was clear that students have limited information related to this strategy and other ones. One explanation is school districts did not mention collaboration frequently in their AIG plans, and the school personnel have limited knowledge in this area based on the participants' perspectives. Conversely, all participants reported receiving support from school personnel (i.e., teacher, counselor, or administrator). The importance of social support has also been noted by previous studies. For example, Zeidner and Shani-Zinovich (2015) found in their research that well-being in gifted adolescents is highly connected with social support. Another relevant study conducted by Lee et al. (2015) found that teacher support and encouragement helped gifted students meet their social and emotional needs. Corso's (2007) conceptual framework also emphasized the importance of having a supportive learning environment for gifted students' social and emotional development. The current study

also revealed that most of the participants report sharing (i.e., Outreach of social and emotional needs through providing different sessions and lectures) and gathering (e.g., surveys and focus groups) information as a strategy to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. Limited studies have investigated the effects of providing different sessions and lectures about social and emotional needs on preventing social and emotional issues and meeting these needs (Phelps, 2023).

Results from research questions 1 and 2 indicated a gap between the practices mentioned in the AIG plans and the participants' responses, especially the high school gifted students. The students could identify only one of the eight social and emotional practices School District # 2 mentioned in their AIG plan. This finding emphasizes the importance of increasing students' awareness regarding their school's social and emotional services. This can be done by providing professional development to the school personnel in charge of delivering these services (e.g., gifted education teachers), meeting with students and introducing these services to them, and /or publishing them through the school website. An additional approach to fill the gap is to increase the awareness of the individuals between the AIG Plans writer and the teachers working with students (e.g., building administrators and assistant principals) regarding the social and emotional services provided to the high school gifted students.

### **Research Question 3**

The results of this study revealed high school gifted students' and one AIG director's perspectives on the social and emotional services provided by the school district. The thematic analysis of participants' perspectives yielded three themes. The themes are *satisfaction and awareness, counseling, and limitations and improvements*. Although exploring the perspectives of high school gifted students and AIG directors on social and emotional strategies is important,

no research has been done on the perspectives of AIG directors, and limited research has been done on the perspectives of high school gifted students in this area (Callahan et al., 2017; McHatton et al., 2010; Steenbergen-Hu & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016). Therefore, one of the goals of this study was to examine high school gifted students' and AIG directors' perspectives on these services.

The interpretations of the interviews indicated that students lack awareness regarding social and emotional services, but they did show some level of satisfaction with what they were aware of. The students discussed several social and emotional services but did not recognize that they were social and emotional services. This might explain the findings where the participants appeared to have a limited understanding of their social and emotional needs. Educating the AIG specialists in the school about the social and emotional services mentioned in their school district's AIG plan can help increase students' awareness regarding these services. However, these findings align with previous studies that showed a high level of awareness of gifted students in terms of academic and cognitive development and a low level of awareness about their social and emotional development (Alamer, 2014; Aljughaiman & Ayoub, 2017; Faisal & Ghani, 2015). According to MacFarlane and Mina (2018), gifted students have a low level of developing their social and emotional awareness, especially when it comes to social and emotional issues such as bullying.

Additionally, the current study revealed participants' perspectives related to counseling services. Previous research emphasized the role of school counselors is comprehensive. For example, Wood (2012) stated, "By working together, school counselors and gifted educators could find themselves in a powerful partnership, a deep professional relationship, and as persuasive advocates in the service to gifted students and their families" (p. 273). In addition,

John (2021) found that counselors' primary role is to ensure students' successful academic, social, and emotional development. Contrary to the previous studies, the current study found that counselors' roles mostly meet the academic needs of gifted students based on the participants' perspectives. According to the students, counselors demonstrate a lack of knowledge about the comprehensive (i.e., academic, social, and emotional) needs of gifted students, which can explain the limited role of their school counselors. Another aspect derived from this study centers on counselors' availability. Most participants shared their concerns related to the availability of their counselors. The availability of counselors has been noted in previous studies. For example, John (2021) conducted a qualitative multiple-case study to explore six secondary school counselors' perceptions related to meeting gifted students' social and emotional needs. Results indicated counselors demonstrate strong skills but limited availability. Having more counselors who have training in gifted education in high school may help in addressing this issue.

The current study also found limited social and emotional strategies for high school gifted students based on participants' perspectives. Moreover, participants stated the social and emotional services in their school are either for all students or below their grade level. This finding is in line with the previous literature on limited strategies to support high school gifted students' social and emotional needs (Knudsen, 2018; Kregel, 2015). As mentioned previously, there are more strategies for gifted elementary and/or middle school students than for high school students (e.g., McDaniel & Besnoy, 2019; Meulen et al., 2014; Peterson & Lorimer, 2011). Additional findings of the current study center on the importance of providing professional development to school personnel in the area of social and emotional development of high school gifted students. Most of the participants recommended teachers and counselors receive training to improve the social and emotional services in their schools. This is aligned with prior studies

that emphasized the importance of professional development to meet high school-gifted students' social and emotional needs (Firmender et al., 2013; Lo & Porath, 2017; Weber et al., 2013). For instance, Gourgiotou et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-method study to evaluate the effect of an 8-month training program on the needs of gifted students in general education teachers' knowledge ( $N = 47$ ). The results indicated that most of the participants were satisfied with the training and considered it would help them effectively meet the needs of gifted students.

In sum, the interviews clearly showed the difference between the responses of the two groups of participants (i.e., high school gifted students and the AIG director). The high school gifted students have limited information about their school's social and emotional services, and they indicated limited services in the schools. All of the services they mentioned were not solely for gifted students. In addition, none of them mentioned social and emotional strategies except counseling that were in their AIG plans and were supported by the previous research, such as providing resources through social media (i.e., Facebook page), grouping, and SEL curriculum. Also, their responses showed a low level of awareness of most of the services and were unaware of their social and emotional needs. On the other hand, although the AIG director indicated the challenge in meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs, she shared various social and emotional services for high school gifted students and was more knowledgeable in this area. One possible explanation is that the two groups of participants came from two different school districts which may be influenced by policy differences and /or implementation differences. Nevertheless, high school gifted students must be more knowledgeable in this area.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study had several limitations. First, this study included a small sample size of participants (i.e., four high school gifted students and one AIG director). In addition, the two

groups of participants were from two different school districts. Future studies should aim to have different participants in different roles from the same district, which could help to confirm how practices were implemented. For example, having high school students, counselors, and AIG directors all from the same district may offer unique insights regarding what needs to be addressed for that school district. In addition, future research may aim for a more diverse setting, including different school districts across the country.

Second, one of the data sources of this study was the 2022–2025 Local AIG plans, which changes every 3 years (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020). Future research may investigate the new cycle of these plans and explore additional social and emotional practices. In addition, future research may replicate and expand the analysis of the AIG plans to other NC Regions to identify additional social and emotional practices.

Third, one of the main findings of the study was counseling services, and participants shared their perspectives related to these services in their schools; however, this study did not include any counselors. It will be beneficial if future studies include high school counselors and explore their perspectives on meeting high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. This was a limitation of the current study as recruiting a counselor was difficult.

Finally, the interviews were conducted virtually due to the limited access to schools following the COVID-19 outbreak. Limitations arose because it was restricted to participants who had access to the internet and had specific devices (e.g., laptop, smartphone). In addition, conducting the interview via Zoom did not allow for observing the participants' body language. Future research should consider using another interview type, such as face-to-face interviews, to recruit participants with different resources.



### **Additional Suggestions for Future Research**

There are several additional suggestions for future research. First, I identified several social and emotional practices from the analysis of three school districts' 2022–2025 Local AIG plans. Although these findings aligned with results from prior studies (e.g., Gilson et al., 2023), the correlations or differences between the practices implemented by school districts and student outcomes remain unknown. A suggestion for future studies is to explore the relationship between the number of codes represented in a district plan with many variables (e.g., student demographics, percentage of students identified as gifted, and type of district).

Second, since this study involved a small number of participants, it could be replicated by involving participants from various school districts. This study involved participants from only two districts. Further insight could be gained by studying smaller and larger districts to find if the social and emotional services change due to school districts' size.

Third, this qualitative study sought to explore the perspectives of high school gifted students and AIG directors on the social and emotional services at the school districts. The primary data collection tools were interviews. A larger quantitative study based on a survey with similar questions would provide information from larger participant groups could allow the findings to be generalized. A suggestion for future research will be to implement a survey and then follow up with interviews and focus groups to get a deeper understanding.

Fourth, including a series of observations of the social and emotional services implemented in high schools may provide a clearer picture of the services. The observations can provide an understanding of social and emotional services. For a more accurate representation of the scope of social and emotional services, more research, including observations, should be conducted in this area.

Finally, one aspect of this study that was left out is the perception of parents of high school gifted students on meeting the social and emotional needs of their children. Parents could provide an entirely different set of data that would influence social and emotional services in the field of gifted education. VanTassel-Baska and Brown (2022) included parents in their study because they are important stakeholders involved in the success of meeting the needs of gifted students. A suggestion for future research is to include the parents' perspective in meeting their children's social and emotional needs since they can provide a perspective that educators do not necessarily have access to and would have an entirely different type of experience.

### **Implications for Practice**

One implication that needs to be addressed is that the AIG Plans can be used by educators, students, and parents/guardians as a resource to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. These plans included several social and emotional practices that may allow these groups to implement them. However, this study indicated a lack of details in the plans regarding the social and emotional practices; more details and clear labeling about the practices might benefit the consumers of the AIG Plans.

Another implication that needs to be addressed is that more training in gifted education is needed for general education teachers, not only regarding the educational needs of gifted students but also on how to meet the social and emotional needs of these students through the implementation of evidence-based practices. Training general education teachers in evidence-based practices would provide them with cost-effective, practical strategies for meeting gifted students' social and emotional needs (Alharbi, 2021; Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015). Furthermore, teachers need training in recognizing the affective characteristics of high school-gifted students and how to assist these students in coping with any social and emotional

issues (Peterson, 2015). Moreover, high school counselors need specialized training on gifted students' social and emotional needs. This study indicated the limited role of counselors in meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. School counselors are crucial in helping all students meet their needs, including social and emotional ones. In the current study, many participants stated the lack of training of school personnel in meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students. Therefore, recommendations for further teacher and counselor preparation and training could be made to benefit the advancement of gifted students and the entire school system.

An implication that needs some serious examination is the availability of school counselors. In this study, the participants indicated their school counselors' limited availability (e.g., limited meetings, meetings via email). The limited availability of school counselors may limit the fulfillment of meeting the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students (John, 2021). Therefore, increasing the number of school counselors in each school building and having separate spaces for them may help address this issue.

A final implication that needs to be addressed is to increase collaboration among school personnel to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, which is one of the major findings of this study. Both the document analysis of the AIG plans and the thematic analysis of the interviews indicated collaboration as a strategy to meet social and emotional needs. In general, school personnel are often isolated and tend to solve issues themselves and often are unsuccessful at doing so (John, 2021). There is a significant and necessary opportunity to increase collaboration among school personnel. For example, high school counselors and gifted educators can collaborate on the roles they are to play, learning can take place

interdependently about gifted students' social and emotional needs, and counselors can play more of a role in gifted education than scheduling advanced level coursework.

### **Summary of the Discussion**

This study explored the social and emotional practices school districts proposed to implement for high school gifted students based on their 2022–2025 Local AIG plans and discovered high school gifted students' and one AIG director's perspectives about these services. Results from the document analysis yielded three themes: *program-level and curricula strategies, resources and support, and collaboration and counseling strategies*. The thematic analysis results related to research question 2 yield three themes: *social and emotional services, interaction, and gathering and sharing information*. Further, the thematic analysis of participants' perspectives also yielded three themes. The themes are *satisfaction and awareness, counseling, and limitations and improvements*. In contrast, based on the results and the limitations of this study, there is an extensive need for further investigation of high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. The expansion can occur by analyzing AIG Plans of districts from other regions. Further, other stakeholders' perceptions are necessary to see if there are any commonalities among the perceptions of the AIG directors and high school gifted students. Parents, teachers, and counselors could provide a strong sense of the realities of schools' services in meeting the needs of high school gifted students. Finally, professional development needs to be provided among high school counselors and teachers to understand the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER



**Department of Special Education and Child Development**  
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**t/ 704.687.8828 f/ 704.687.1625 [www.uncc.edu](http://www.uncc.edu)**  
**District Recruitment Letter to the Superintendents**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Mashael Alhibs, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education and Child Development at the University of North Carolina (UNC Charlotte). Dr. Cindy Gilson is my research advisor. I am reaching out to you today in hopes of engaging in a collaborative dissertation research opportunity with \_\_\_\_\_ district that will focus on understanding the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

As an educator in the field of gifted education, I realized that it is important to pay attention to high school gifted students' social and emotional needs. **The purpose of this study is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, (b) understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services, and (c) explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.**

There are no direct benefits to participating in this project. Cumulatively the study results may help schools to promote a better understanding of potentially effective strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

In this study, I am seeking to conduct **three online focus groups** with members of your district to explore purposes b and c listed above. One of the focus groups will be for AIG directors/coordinators, one with high school counselors, and the other one will be for high school gifted students. I am looking to recruit **one to eight participants** for each focus group. The focus group will last between 30 - 60 minutes. Adult participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card by email after completing the focus group or interview. Student participants will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses.

If you are interested in having your school district participate in this study and allow me to recruit from your district, I will kindly ask you to forward recruitment materials to potential participants. If you have any questions, please contact me at [malhibs@uncc.edu](mailto:malhibs@uncc.edu), 216-413-2261,

or email Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at [cgilson@uncc.edu](mailto:cgilson@uncc.edu). Thank you very much for your consideration in supporting this study!

Sincerely,  
Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education and Child Development  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

## APPENDIX B: AIG DIRECTORS AND COUNSELORS CONSENT



**Department of Special Education and Child Development**  
**9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001**  
**t/ 704.687.8828 f/ 704.687.1625 [www.uncc.edu](http://www.uncc.edu)**

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

Title of the Project: Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.  
 Principal Investigator: Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed., University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
 Co-investigator: Dr. Cindy Gilson, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please call me at (216-413-2261) or email ([malhibs@uncc.edu](mailto:malhibs@uncc.edu)).

### **Important Information You Need to Know**

- The purpose of this study is to explore the social and emotional services provided by your school district and to explore high school gifted students', AIG directors'/coordinators', and counselors' perspectives about these services.
- You have been recommended for participation in this study by the district supervisor of gifted education.
- You will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group for 30 - 60 minutes. I will video record each session and upload to a cloud-based service for the purpose of the research.
- The project is research, and participation is voluntary.
- The superintendent will be involved in recruiting process; however, the superintendents will not know your participation status, and your participation will not affect your employment status.
- The focus group will be conducted either before, after school, or during teacher work days.
- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.
- Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card by email after completing the focus group or interview.

### **Why are we doing this study?**

The purpose of this study is to:

- a. Discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

- b. Understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services.
- c. Explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.

### **Why am I being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you work with a high school gifted student.

### **What will I do in this study?**

You will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group for 30-60 minutes. Participation is voluntary. A focus group is a small-group discussion used to learn about opinions on a designated topic and to guide future action. A trained moderator (researcher) leads the discussion within the group that is designed to gather helpful information. For this study, the questions in the focus group will be related to the social and emotional services in their school and their perspectives on these services.

### **What risks and benefits might students experience?**

Participants might feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions and have the right not to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable about. In addition, the information provided could identify the participants, especially if they come from a small school district. To minimize any risk, I will use pseudonyms for the participants' names, school names, and cities.

The benefit of participation in this study is having an overview of the current high school gifted students' social and emotional strategies. Cumulatively the study results may help schools to promote a better understanding of potentially effective strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

### **How will information be protected?**

Reserchers will not use your name in any research summaries or presentations. Instead, we will use a pseudonym. We will immediately delete the video files and only keep the audio data. The audio recordings will be shared with the research team only. Paper materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and electronic materials will be stored in a university password-protected Google Drive folder that the research team can access. Only the research team will have routine access to the study information.

### **How will information be used after the study is over?**

The data may be shared through publications and presentations of our results. The data shared for publication will not include your names.

### **What other choices are there if I don't want to take part in this study?**

If you decline participation or choose to stop, you will not be penalized, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

Participating in this study is voluntary. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at

any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop once you have started.

**Who can answer my questions about this study and participant rights?**

For questions about this research, you may contact Mashael Alhibs at malhibs@uncc.edu or 216-413-2261 or Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at cgilson@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about research participant's rights or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704.687.1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

**Consent**

By signing this document, you agree to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered.

I consent to my participation in "Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students": \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

I consent to participate in a video and audio-recorded zoom focus group: \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (PRINT)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Signature of Research Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C: PARENT RECRUITMENT LETTER



**Department of Special Education and Child Development**  
**9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001**  
**t/ 704.687.8828 f/ 704.687.1625 [www.uncc.edu](http://www.uncc.edu)**

### **Parent or Legal Guardian Consent for Child/Minor Participation in Research**

**Title of the Project:** Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.

**Principal Investigator:** Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed., University of North Carolina at Charlotte

**Co-investigator/Research Advisor:** Dr. Cindy Gilson, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Your child/legal ward is invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to allow your child/legal ward to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have (using the contact information found at the end of the document) before signing/giving consent.

### **Important Information You Need to Know**

- The purpose of this study is to explore the social and emotional services provided by the school districts and explore high school gifted students', AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about these services.
- Your child/legal ward is being asked to participate in this study if he or she is a student in grades 9-13 and if their school district has identified them as a gifted student.
- Your child/legal ward will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group for 30 -60 minutes. Focus group sessions will be recorded via Zoom. The focus group will include 1-8 high school gifted students from the same school district.
- The focus group will be conducted either before, after school, or during teacher work days.
- Though you were forwarded this information by your superintendent, they will not know your participation status and your participation (or decision not to) will not affect your child's grades or status as a student.

- Your child/legal ward will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses.

### **Why are we doing this study?**

The purpose of this study is to:

- Discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.
- Understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services.
- Explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.

### **Why is your child/legal ward being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to allow your child/legal ward to participate in this study because he/she is a high school student and receives gifted education services in their school.

### **What will children do in this study?**

Your child/legal ward will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group for 30- 60 minutes. Participation is voluntary. A focus group is a small-group discussion used to learn about opinions on a designated topic and to guide future action. A trained moderator (researcher) leads a discussion within the group that is designed to gather helpful information. For this study, the questions in the focus group will be related to the social and emotional services in their school and their perspective of these services

The focus group your child/legal ward will participate in will be made up of 1-8 gifted students.

### **What risks and benefits might children experience?**

Participants might feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions and have the right not to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable about. In addition, the information provided could identify the participants, especially if they come from a small school district. To minimize any risk, I will use pseudonyms for the participants' names, school names, and cities.

There are no anticipated direct benefits of participation, but the study results may help schools to promote a better understanding of potentially effective strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

### **How will information be protected?**



Researchers will not use participant names in any recorded data. Instead, we will use pseudonyms. The video files created when recording the Zoom session will be deleted immediately and only audio data will be kept. Study results will be presented in a way that no individual participants can be identified. The audio recordings will be shared with the research team only.

Study results will be presented in a way that no individual participants can be identified. Pseudonyms will be used instead of names in any research summaries or presentations and demographic data will be displayed in aggregate.

Any physical consent documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and electronic materials will be stored in a university password-protected Google Drive folder that the research team can access. Only the research team will have routine access to the study information.

### **How will information be used after the study is over?**

The data may be shared through publications and presentations of our results. The data shared for publication will not include your child/legal ward's name or school.

### **What other choices are there if I don't want my child/legal ward to take part in this study?**

If you decline to have your child participate or choose to withdraw them at any time, you/they will not be penalized, and you/they will not lose any benefits to which you/they are otherwise entitled. This would not affect your child/legal ward's grades or status as a student in any way.

### **What are my child's/legal ward's rights if they take part in this study?**

Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to allow your child/legal ward to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop his/her participation at any time. You and your child/legal ward will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled. This would not affect your child/legal ward's grades or status as a student in any way.

### **Who can answer my questions about this study and participant rights?**

For questions about this research, you may contact Mashael Alhibs at malhibs@uncc.edu or 216-413-2261 or Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at cgilson@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about research participant's rights, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704.687.1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

The University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board approved this study. The Protocol number is # IRB-23-0303.

### **Parent or Legally Authorized Representative Consent**

By signing this document, you agree to your child's/legal ward's participation in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree for my child/legal ward to take part in this study.

I consent to my child's/legal ward's participation in "Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students": \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

I consent to my child participating in a video and audio-recorded zoom focus group: \_\_\_\_ Yes  
\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (PRINT)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Legally Authorized Representative Name and Relationship to Participant (PRINT)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Signature of Research Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D: STUDENT ASSENT



Department of Special Education and Child Development  
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001  
t/ 704.687.8828 f/ 704.687.2916 [www.uncc.edu](http://www.uncc.edu)

### **Student Assent for Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students**

My name is Mashaël Alhibs, and I am a doctoral student at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Research studies are done to find better ways of helping and understanding people or to get information about how things work. Your decision to be in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. You will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses. This form will give you information about the risks and benefits of this study so that you can make a better decision about whether you want to take part or not.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.
2. Understand high school gifted students', AIG directors'/coordinators', and counselors' perspectives about these services.

#### **Why am I being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a high school student and receives gifted education services in your school.

#### **What will I do in this study?**

In this study, you will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group for 30 - 60 minutes. Focus group sessions will be recorded via Zoom, and they will include 1-8 high school gifted students from the same school district. A focus group is a small-group discussion used to learn about opinions on a designated topic. The researcher leads the discussion within the group, which is designed to gather helpful information. For this study, the questions in the focus group will be related to the social and emotional services in your school and your perspective on these services.

Participation is voluntary. Your teachers will not know if you have participated, and your decision to participate will not affect your relationships with your teachers or your grades.

**What risks and benefits might I experience?**

The nature of the research topic may make you feel uncomfortable at times, especially if you open up about struggles you've experienced and things you do to help deal with those struggles. You have the right to skip any question you might feel uncomfortable answering. In addition, the information provided could identify you, especially if you come from a small school district. To minimize any risk, I will use pseudonyms for names, school names, and cities.

You may not get any direct benefits from being in this study. However, others may benefit in the future because of what the researchers learn from this study.

**How will information be protected?**

Researchers will not use your name in any recorded data. Instead, we will use a pseudonym. The video files created when recording the Zoom session will be deleted immediately, and only audio data will be kept. Study results will be presented in a way that no individual participants can be identified. The audio recordings will be shared with the research team only.

Any physical consent documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and electronic materials will be stored in a university password-protected Google Drive folder that the research team can access. Only the research team will have routine access to the study information.

**How will information be used after the study is over?**

The data may be shared through publications and presentations of our results. The data shared for publication will not include your name or school.

**What other choices are there if I don't want to take part in this study?**

If you do not want to participate or choose to withdraw at any time, you will not be penalized, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. This would not affect your grades or status as a student in any way. Your teachers will not know if you have participated or not.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop your participation at any time. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled. This would not affect your grades or status as a student in any way.

For further information about this study, please refer to the consent form discussed with your parent or guardian for this study.

This study has been explained to your parent/parents/guardian, and they have given permission for you to be in the study if you want to take part. If you have any questions about this study, please ask your parents/guardian or call me at (216-413-2261), or email (malhibs@uncc.edu) or

email Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at [cgilson@uncc.edu](mailto:cgilson@uncc.edu). You can also call the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or by email at [uncc-irb@uncc.edu](mailto:uncc-irb@uncc.edu).

The University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board approved this study. The Protocol number is # IRB-23-0303.

If you want to be in this study by participating in a recorded zoom focus group, please sign your name.

---

Name (printed) of Participant and Signature

Date

---

Parent Signature

Date

---

Signature of Research Investigator

---

Date

## APPENDIX E: PROTOCOL AND TOPIC GUIDE

### Focus Group Discussion Guide/Protocol

Adapted from Taylor (2019)

#### Introduction:

1. Welcome: Introduce yourself as moderator and the assistant moderator. Make sure everyone has signed the “Informed Consent” or “Student Assent” form.

*Review the following:*

- The purpose of the study and focus group
  - Who we are and what we’re trying to do
  - What will be done with this information
  - Why we asked you to participate
2. Explanation of the Process: Ask the group if anyone has participated in a focus group before. Explain that focus groups are often used in educational fields and human services research.

*About focus groups:*

- We learn from you (positive and negative)
- Not trying to achieve consensus; we’re gathering information.
- Purely exploratory research.
- We are trying to gain in-depth information from a smaller group of people in focus groups.

*Logistics:*

- The Focus group will last about 30 -60 minutes
  - Feel free to not answer any questions if you feel uncomfortable
3. Ground Rules: Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.
    - Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
    - Stay with the group, and please don't have side conversations
    - Turn off cell phones if possible
  4. Turn on Audio Recorder on Zoom

5. Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started, and address those questions.

The discussion begins, make sure to give people time (approximately 5 seconds) to think before answering the questions. Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed, but move on when you feel you are starting to hear repetitive information.

### **Materials and supplies for focus groups**

- Consent forms
- Focus Group Discussion Guide for Moderators
- Backup method if recording device fails to work
- Notebook for note-taking

### **Focus Group/Individual Interview Questions (AIG directors/coordinators)**

1. What services and strategies have your school implemented to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students?
  - a. Can you please describe these services in your school?
  - b. What social and emotional curriculum does the school use for high school gifted services?
  - c. How does the school implement collaboration as a way to meet social and emotional needs?
2. Does your school implement the following social and emotional services and strategies for high school gifted students?
  - a. Bibliotherapy (the practice of helping individuals grow and develop through books)
  - b. Counseling
  - c. Mindfulness
  - d. Mentoring
  - e. The Autonomous Learner Model
  - f. The Peterson Proactive Developmental Attention Model (PPDA)
  - g. Collaboration
3. Please describe your top three effective strategies for meeting gifted students' social and emotional needs.
  - a. Why did you choose these strategies?
4. What successes has the school had in implementing social and emotional services?
5. What challenges has the school had in implementing social and emotional services?

- a. How did the school address these challenges?
  - b. How will the school reduce these challenges?
6. What have been the positive outcomes for students of the school's social and emotional services?
7. What are some social and emotional services you would recommend to high school gifted students?
- a. Why would you recommend these services?
8. Is there anything you would like to add?

That was the last question, and this concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us.

### **Focus Group/Individual Interview Questions (Counselors)**

1. What services and strategies have the school implemented to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students?
  - a. Can you please describe these services in your school?
  - b. How does the school implement these services?
  - c. What social and emotional curriculum does the school use for high school gifted services?
  - d. How does the school implement collaboration as a way to meet social and emotional needs?
2. Does your school implement the following social and emotional services and strategies for high school gifted students?
  - a. Bibliotherapy (the practice of helping individuals grow and develop through books)
  - b. Counseling
  - c. Mindfulness
  - d. Mentoring
  - e. The Autonomous Learner Model
  - f. The Peterson Proactive Developmental Attention Model (PPDA)
  - g. Collaboration
3. Counseling services have been identified as effective social and emotional services for high school gifted students; tell me about these services in your school.
  - a. Is it different from typically developing students? How?
4. What successes have you had in implementing social and emotional services?



5. What challenges have you had in implementing social and emotional services?
  - a. How did you face these challenges?
  - b. How will you address these challenges?
6. Indicate your top three effective strategies for meeting gifted students' social and emotional needs.
  - a. Why did you choose these strategies?
  - b. Can you please describe them?
7. How would you recommend improving the social and emotional services provided in your school for high school gifted students?
  - a. What other strategies may you implement in the future? Why?
  - b. How will you determine the effectiveness of these strategies?
8. What other remarks do you have about social and emotional services in your school?

That was the last question, and this concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us.

**Focus Group/Individual Interview Questions (High school gifted students)**

1. What social and emotional services are available to you at school?
2. How do you feel about the social and emotional services available to you at school?
3. In what ways has your school been able to support your social and emotional needs?
  - a. What kinds of social and emotional support should be offered by your school? Why?
4. What are some other positive experiences you have of receiving the social and emotional strategies from your school?
5. What may the school do to provide better social and emotional support?
6. What other remarks do you have about social and emotional services in your school?

That was the last question, and this concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us.

## APPENDIX F: EMAIL TO EXPERT FOCUS GROUP REVIEWERS

Adapted from Chang (2021)

Dear reviewers,

I am writing to invite you to provide feedback on a focus group protocol for my dissertation research titled, “Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.”

If you are willing to help, please see the attachment to review the focus group questions and guide/protocol. When reviewing them, please respond to the following questions.

- Do the focus group questions logically appear to accurately reflect what it is supposed to measure (i.e., services schools implement to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students', counselors', and AIG directors'/coordinators' perceptions about these services.)?
- Do the focus group questions demonstrate relevance and cover a given area of content or ability?
- Do the follow-up questions align with the main questions?
- Do the focus group questions make sense to you? What are the difficulties you have encountered while reviewing the questions?
- What other suggestions do you have for improving this survey to ensure the research questions can be answered?

**Please send your thoughts/comments to me (malhibs@uncc.edu) by Dec/10/2022.**

Suggestions will be incorporated into the final focus group protocol. Thank you very much for your time and help with this survey study!

Sincerely,

Mashaël Alhibs, M.Ed.  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Department of Special Education and Child Development  
 University of North Carolina at Charlotte

## APPENDIX G: RECRUITMENT EMAILS



**Department of Special Education and Child Development**  
**9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001**  
**t/ 704.687.8828 f/ 704.687.1625 [www.uncc.edu](http://www.uncc.edu)**

**Email Title: UNCC Research Study**

Dear [Superintendents or School Principal],

My name is Mashael Alhibs, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education and Child Development at the University of North Carolina (UNC Charlotte). Dr. Cindy Gilson is my research advisor.

As I mentioned in the previous email, I am conducting dissertation research. **The purpose of this study is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, (b) understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services, and (c) explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.**

Please forward the attached messages to all high school counselors, AIG directors/coordinators, high school gifted students, and their parents. I've attached PDFs of the emails to this message, as well as PDFs of consent documents to be attached to the emails (each for a different group). These materials have been reviewed and approved by the UNCC IRB (23-0303). Please send these messages exactly as they are; including a message from you could cause participants to feel pressured to participate if they think the message is coming from you rather than being relayed through you. Adult participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card by email after completing the focus group or interview. Student participants will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses.

Thank you so much for your assistance and time; if you have any questions, please contact me at [malhibs@uncc.edu](mailto:malhibs@uncc.edu) or 216-413-2261, or email Dr. Cindy Gilson at [cgilson@uncc.edu](mailto:cgilson@uncc.edu).

Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Department of Special Education and Child Development  
 University of North Carolina at Charlotte

**Email Title: UNCC Research Study: High School Level AIG Directors and Counselors Recruitment**

Dear AIG directors and counselors,

You are invited to participate in a virtual research study (focus group) for 30 - 60 minutes titled Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.

My name is Mashael Alhibs, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education and Child Development at the University of North Carolina (UNC Charlotte). Dr. Cindy Gilson is my research advisor. I am contacting you to help by participating in a focus group as part of my dissertation research study. Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card by email after completing the focus group or interview. Participation is voluntary. **The purpose of this study is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, (b) understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services, and (c) explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.**

There are no direct benefits to participating in this project. Cumulatively the study results may help schools to promote a better understanding of potentially effective strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

Focus group responses will be kept confidential. Your supervisor/employer will not know your decision to participate or not and your participation will not affect your employment status.

The University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board approved this study. The Protocol number is # IRB-23-0303.

If you are interested in participating in the focus group or have any questions, **please email me at (malhibs@uncc.edu) to be sent a digital consent form (via DocuSign) or to set up a time to review and sign this form in-person. More information about the study can be found in the PDF of the consent form attached to this message.**

Thank you so much for your assistance and time; if you have any questions, please contact me at malhibs@uncc.edu or 216-413-2261 or email Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at cgilson@uncc.edu.

Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Department of Special Education and Child Development  
 University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
 malhibs@uncc.edu

**Email Title: UNCC Research Study: High School Gifted Students and their Parents.**

**Invitation to Participate in Research Study**

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Mashael Alhibs, and I am a doctoral student at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Dr. Cindy Gilson is my research advisor.

Your child/legal ward is invited to participate in a voluntary research study as part of a research project I am conducting at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The purpose of this study is to discover the social and emotional services provided by school districts and explore high school gifted students', AIG directors'/coordinators', and counselors' perspectives about these services. Your child is eligible to participate in this study because he/she is a high school student receiving gifted education services in their school.

In this study, your child/legal ward will be invited to participate in a virtual focus group for 30-60 minutes with other high school gifted students. Participants will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses. Participation is voluntary. A focus group is a small-group discussion used to learn about opinions on a designated topic and to guide future action. For this study, the questions in the focus group will be related to the social and emotional services in their school and their perspectives on these services.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this project. Cumulatively the study results may help schools to promote a better understanding of potentially effective strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

Focus group responses will be kept confidential. Your child/legal ward's school will not know their participation status and their participation will not affect their grades or status as a student.

The University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board approved this study. The Protocol number is # IRB-23-0303.

If you give permission to your child to participate in the focus group or have any questions, **please email me at (malhibs@uncc.edu) to be sent digital parental consent and student assent forms (via DocuSign) or to set up a time to review and sign these forms in-person. More information about the study can be found in the PDF of the consent form attached to this message.**

Thank you so much for your assistance and time; if you have any questions, please contact me at malhibs@uncc.edu or 216-413-2261 or email Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at cgilson@uncc.edu.

Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education and Child Development  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
malhibs@uncc.edu

**Email Title: UNCC Research Study: High School Gifted Students and their Parents.**

### **Invitation to Participate in Research Study**

Dear High School Gifted Student,

My name is Mashael Alhibs, and I am a doctoral student at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Dr. Cindy Gilson is my research advisor.

You are invited to participate in a voluntary research study as part of a research project I am conducting at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The purpose of this study is to discover the social and emotional services provided by school districts and explore high school gifted students', AIG directors'/coordinators', and counselors' perspectives about these services. You are eligible to participate in this study because you are a high school student receiving gifted education services in your school.

In this study, you are invited to participate in a virtual focus group for 30 -60 minutes with other high school gifted students. Participants will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses. Participation is voluntary. A focus group is a small-group discussion used to learn about opinions on a designated topic and to guide future action. For this study, the questions in the focus group will be related to the social and emotional services in their school and their perspectives on these services. There are no direct benefits to participating in this project. Cumulatively the study results may help schools to promote a better understanding of potentially effective strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students.

Focus group responses will be kept confidential. Your teachers will not know your participation status, and your participation will not affect your grades or status as a student.

The University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board approved this study. The Protocol number is # IRB-23-0303.

If your parents approve of your participation in this study and you **would like to participate** in the focus group **or have any questions**, please **have your parents** email me at (malhibs@uncc.edu) **to be sent digital parental consent and student assent forms (via DocuSign) or to set up a time to review and sign these forms in-person. More information about the study can be found in the PDF of the student assent form attached to this message.**

Thank you so much for your assistance and time; if you have any questions, please contact me at malhibs@uncc.edu or 216-413-2261 or email Dr. Cindy Gilson (responsible faculty) at cgilson@uncc.edu.

Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education and Child Development  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
malhibs@uncc.edu



Follow-up Email to the Superintendents or School Principal

**Follow-Up Email Title: UNCC Research Study**

[DATE]

Dear [Superintendents or School Principal],

Weeks ago, I contacted you to request that you forward emails to all high school counselors, AIG directors/coordinators, high school gifted students, and their parents in your district inviting them to participate in a focus group research study titled Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.

Thank you again for your support in helping to organize the recruitment of participants for my research study.

Please forward the attached messages to all high school counselors, AIG directors/coordinators, high school gifted students, and their parents. I've attached PDFs of the emails to this message, as well as PDFs of consent documents to be attached to the emails.

Please send these messages exactly as they are; as I mentioned before, including a message from you could cause participants to feel pressured to participate if they think the message is coming from you rather than being relayed through you.

Thank you again for your time and assistance!

Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education and Child Development  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
malhibs@uncc.edu

**Follow-Up Email Title: UNCC Research Study\_Participants earn a \$25 Amazon gift card:  
High School Level AIG Directors and Counselors Recruitment**

Dear AIG directors and counselors,

Weeks ago, I contacted you to invite you to participate in a research study - virtual focus group for 30 - 60 minutes titled Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.

This is a friendly reminder that I am still seeking participants for my dissertation study. Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card by email for their time after completing the focus group or interview. As mentioned in the previous email, **the purpose of this study is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, (b) understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services, and (c) explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.**

**Please reach out to me at malhibs@uncc.edu to send digital consent/assent forms (via DocuSign) or to set up a time to review and sign these forms in-person.**

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Mashael Alhibs, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education and Child Development  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
malhibs@uncc.edu

**Follow-Up Email Title: UNCC Research Study\_Participants earn a \$25 Amazon gift card: High School Gifted Students and their Parents**

Dear Parent,

Weeks ago, I contacted you to invite your child to participate in a research study - a virtual focus group for 30 - 60 minutes titled Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.

This is a friendly reminder that I am still seeking participants for my dissertation study. Participants will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses. As mentioned in the previous email, **the purpose of this study is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, (b) understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services, and (c) explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.**

If your parents approve of your participation in this study please **reach out to me at malhibs@uncc.edu before [5/8/2023] to be sent digital consent/assent forms (via DocuSign) or to set up a time to review and sign these forms in-person.**

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Mashaël Alhibs, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education and Child Development  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
malhibs@uncc.edu

**Follow-Up Email Title: UNCC Research Study\_Participants earn a \$25 Amazon gift card:  
High School Gifted Students and their Parents**

Dear Student,

Two weeks ago, I contacted you to invite you to participate in a research study - a virtual focus group for 30 - 60 minutes titled Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of High School Gifted Students.

This is a friendly reminder that I am still seeking participants for my dissertation study. Participants will be eligible to be included in a random drawing for one of three \$25 electronic gift cards after completing the focus group or interview. The gift cards will be sent to parents' email addresses. As mentioned in the previous email, **the purpose of this study is to (a) discover the services school districts report providing to meet the social and emotional needs of high school gifted students, (b) understand high school gifted students' perspectives about these services, and (c) explore high school AIG directors'/coordinators' and counselors' perspectives about the social and emotional services provided to gifted high school students at their schools.**

**Please reach out to me at malhibs@uncc.edu before [5/8/2023] to be sent digital consent/assent forms (via DocuSign) or to set up a time to review and sign these forms in-person.**

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration!

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