A MULTI-SITE CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING TEACHER PERSPECTIVES OF
STANDARDS BASED REFORM AND GIFTED STUDENTS

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the degree Doctorate of Education

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ABSTRACT

The push by the Federal government to directly increase and positively impact achievement since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) gave rise to the educational design known as standards based reform (SBR). This legislation impacted all sub-groups by measuring growth for sub-populations to determine yearly adequate progress. The growth of the sub-population of gifted students, however, was not included in the determination of a school’s or county’s success, so the impact of standards based reform on the gifted student is lacking. Therefore, this case study examined educators’ perspectives of standards based reform on the gifted child in three Georgia middle schools where the total immersion into standards based reform had occurred for at least four years. I interviewed a purposeful sample of teachers of gifted students as well as administrators from these schools. In addition, general education teachers who have students identified as gifted in their classes completed questionnaires. To conclude the data collection, I conducted focus group interviews with select participants. I used a cross-case analysis methodology to analyze the data and employed data triangulation, feedback, a member check and an audit trail to secure credibility in the findings. The research concluded that standards based reform is detrimental to the gifted child through due to SBR’s lack of rigor.

Descriptors: Standards Based Reform, No Child Left Behind, Gifted Education, Standardized Testing, Social Constructivism
Dedication

I would first like to dedicate this research to the memory of my sweet mother, Angie. She had always wanted her children to do more, achieve more, and be more. I hope my accomplishments make her smile in Heaven.

I would also like to dedicate this research to my three favorite faces, Rachel, Alex, and Austin. I hope my love of learning is something you all will inherit, and I pray that you will always have a natural thirst for knowledge. I love you all too much!

I would like to dedicate this research to my family who has supported me during the trials and joys of this process. You have listened to me complain and listened to me celebrate. It has been a tough yet rewarding journey, and you all have stood by encouraging and cheering me on. I love you all.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this research to the gifted students out there in classrooms across the country. I hope my research gives you all a voice.
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List of Abbreviations

Elementary and Secondary Education Acts (ESEA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Standard Based Reform (SBR)

U.S. Department of Education (DOE)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Standards Based Reform (SBR) and its landmark legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), changed the focus of American education. These two elements created the current focus on standards, accountability, and standardized testing in the educational climate in the United States today. Quantitative measures from standardized testing evaluate teachers, principals, schools, systems, and state each year to account for either success or failure. This increased accountability forces schools to operate under the strict guidelines of such accountability to determine learning success. As Fuller, Gesicki, Kang, and Wright (2007) stated:

Setting aside the spirited debate that now engulfs No Child Left Behind, most analysts agree on one basic fact; political leaders feel growing pressure to claim that this bundle of centralized reform is working, as Congress reviews NCLB’s impact and tries to craft a more effective federal role. (p. 268)

Despite this optimistic view of NCLB, there is a need for further research to delve into the true impact of such reform.

The direct impact of standard based reform (SBR) on gifted students needs to be examined. Are gifted students suffering from these reforms? Are gifted students excelling from these reforms? To answer these questions would require an evaluation of the federal system’s policies, its role in education, and in particular, to look at gifted education since the success of the gifted child is not part of the reform (NCLB, 2001). It is through such inquiry that a better, more inclusive and holistic picture of both SBR and NCLB and their relationship to gifted education should emerge. The background of standards based education; American education in general, gifted education, and the
relationship between SBR and the gifted are discussed in Chapter One. The theoretical framework, the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, limitations/delimitations, and overall research plan are also included.

**Background**

“The extent to which a society utilizes its human potential is among the chief determinants of its prosperity” (McKinsey & Company, 2009, p.5). When a society unsuccessfully utilizes the most precious human potential, it is both foolish and futile for all people involved. Currently, the United States sits on an ocean of precious natural resources, our gifted and high achieving student population. Without full realization of that natural resource, the United States will remain a sea teeming with unfulfilled potential (Aguilar & Lagana-Riordan, 2009). Due to laws, such as NCLB, the attention and resources of education reform focuses on those students who are on the verge of minimal success. Overall, academic growth with special emphasis on certain populations, such as special education, the socio-economically disadvantaged, and English Language Learners measure a school’s success. However, a school does not consider the gifted child’s academic growth when determining success (NCLB, 2001). While helping struggling students is both appropriate and necessary, it should not be the sole approach to educational reform. If the purpose of educational reform, in the form of standards based education and NCLB, is to leave no child behind, then the gifted child is one who too, should be pushed along (NCLB, 2001; Siemer, 2009).

The common phenomenon in gifted education is that it is both historically and continually underserved and underfunded (Assouline, Coangelo, & Gross, 2004; Eckstein, 2009; Grgich, 2009; Siemer, 2009). In fact, the major concern with SBR and
gifted education is that the two do not necessarily produce dynamically positive results. The literature collectively suggests that the merging of these two (high achieving students and SBR) fosters such claims as narrowing of the curriculum, test taking preparations replacing true, authentic instruction, and the stagnant achievement of the high achiever on high-stakes standardized testing result (Beisser, 2008; Burroughs, Plucker, & Song, 2010; Callahan, Scot, & Urquhart, 2009; Daggett, 2005; Siemer, 2009). When viewed as a whole, a cause and effect relationship between SBR and gifted education is firmly established.

**Situation to Self**

NCLB and SBR operates under the notion that their components are solid and positively affect the educational growth of today’s pupils in an equal and equitable manner that will result in the closing of the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education (DOE), 2009; Siemer, 2009). This educational philosophy has clouded both Washington and the classroom with standardized testing, teaching to the test, and assessments based solely upon numbers and percentages of those who simply meet standard. This emphasis on simple proficiency might have an effect on the gifted child. As a result, the motivation for this study lay in trying to discover how SBR has affected the gifted student from the perspectives of those who are in direct contact with gifted students, such as teachers and administrators.

My motivation to perform this research stemmed from my 12 years of experience as an educator. During this time, I have seen the slow immersion into SBR and the omnipresence of standardized test scores in the everyday functions of classroom curriculum, instruction, and assessment. I believe with the advent of SBR, the educator’s
focus is now on teaching what will be on the test, and the student’s focus is on how he or she can pass the appropriate test. As an educator of the gifted, I am very concerned with the goal of education becoming a positive outcome on a test. I have been teaching gifted students for the past five years and see the expectation of minimal competency. Most research focuses on success of SBR on test scores, but mathematical statistics is not the whole picture (Aguilar & Lagana-Riordan, 2009; America Diploma Project, 2010; Baker, Herman, Kortez, & Linn, 2002; Bridgeland, Diiulio, & Wyner, 2007; Burroughs et al., 2010; Duffett, Farkas, & Loveless, 2008; Gentry, 2006; Grgich, 2009; Hamilton, Naftel, & Stecher, 2005; Ho, 2008; Jerome, 2010; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2007; Stanley & Tognilini, 2006). To understand the effect of SBR for the gifted student further, I planned to examine the phenomenon from the perspectives of educators who have direct impact over the education of the gifted child.

For this study, three schools, within one North Georgia County, agreed to participate in the research. Currently, I am a 7th/8th grade Language Arts teacher for gifted students at site two, Creekview Middle School. I began teaching in the 2000-2001 school year and have worked in this school for the past 12 years. Most of my teaching experience is post NCLB, with all of my standards based training provided on-site. I have only a brief picture of teaching prior to NCLB and its focus on SBR; however, the slow immersion that accompanied the transition into SBR allowed me to get a picture of teaching both with and without SBR.

**Problem Statement**

The American educational community and politicians promote SBR because it focuses on the weaknesses of students and promotes the alteration of curriculum and
instruction to meet the needs to each child. The concept of SBR is that every child
receives instruction at his or her own academic level. One goal of NCLB, which implores
SBR, is to close the gap between disadvantaged minorities and Caucasian pupils, but it
provides little in effort to address the needs of children who are gifted (Siemer, 2009).

There is a dichotomy between SBR in philosophy and in practice, especially in
regards to high-achieving and gifted students (Assouline et al., 2004; Beisser, 2008;
Burroughs et al., 2010; Cloud, 2007; Gentry, 2006; Grgich, 2009; Jolly & Makel, 2010;
Siemer, 2009). The question that surfaced then is: does standards based reform benefit, or
is it detrimental to the education of the gifted child? In today’s schools, quantitative data
from standardized test scores determines the effectiveness of a school without any regard
to educators’ personal perspectives or anecdotes that share the qualitative side to the issue
(NCLB, 2001). It was imperative to examine the possible unexpected effect of SBR,
whether good or bad, from a qualitative perspective.

**Purpose Statement**

This multi-site case study examined the perspectives of both the teacher and
administrator regarding SBR and its impact on the gifted student. Their points of view on
related aspects of the topic, such as the barriers and successes of SBR on the gifted child,
as well as any unintended consequences that have accrued due to the change in policy
also contributes to the purposefulness of the study. By pinpointing these qualitative
perspectives, the unintended cost of the SBR movement on gifted education emerges.

**Significance of Study**

This particular study expanded on the already established point of view that the
presence of SBR has dramatically affected American education for all students, including
gifted children (Buettner & Dignath, 2008; Cauley, Certo, Chafin, & Moxley, 2008; Stanley & Tognilini, 2006; Valesey, 2002). Current quantitative research (Adams, 2009; Assouline et al., 2004; Beisser, 2008; Burroughs et al., 2010; Callahan et al., 2009; Gentry, 2006; Grgich, 2009; Jolly & Makel, 2010; Siemer, 2009) also examined the link between SBR and gifted education since the implementation of the reform and NCLB.

This study’s intent is to extend the knowledge and ideas about standards based education in connection with the gifted child by examining the perspectives of educators in the classroom through a qualitative lens. In addition, this study offers practical insight for the classroom teacher. Through this research, a teacher of gifted children was encouraged to utilize the social cognitive theory that encourages dialogue and a broad-based thematically rich environment when instructing gifted students so that they are academically pushed.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the research and subsequent data analysis:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?

2. What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?

3. What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SBR?

4. What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?
Research Plan

This investigation was a multi-site case study because it holistically looked at a phenomenon, the effect of SBR on gifted students within three middle schools. Specifically, this study employed the perspectives of both teachers and administrators of SBR on gifted children. A multi-case study approach was proposed with the following data collection tools utilized to gather the perspectives: open-ended interview of teachers of gifted students and administrators, open-ended questionnaires for general education teachers, and a focus group of teachers or administrators who participated in the research through either interview or questionnaire. The focus group helped confirm the merged findings by discussing the previously collected data and elaborating on ideas that needed further clarification.

To analyze the data, I used a cross-case analysis methodology designed by Stake (2006). Stake defined cross-case analysis as an examination of “what is common across the cases not what is unique to each” (p. 39). This study sought to ascertain the commonalities that exist across the cases. To begin the data analysis process, I used open coding to analyze the data collected from the interviews and questionnaires. Stake (2006) suggested the use of several worksheets that I edited for use in this study. By using these worksheets the data was structured, compared, grouped, and analyzed.

By closely following Stake’s (2006) analysis procedures, I first began by analyzing the data from the interviews and questionnaires from each case separately. Then, a cross-case analysis began to generate theme-based assertions found from each case to lead to merged findings pulled from all three sites. Once I secured the merged findings from the interviews and questionnaires, I conducted focus groups at each site.
The purpose of the focus group was to examine merged findings and offer clarification, insight, and possible interpretation from the merged findings, but it also served to elaborate and enrich the original data. The merged findings led and guided each focus group’s questions and discussions. Next, I added the focus group data to the merged findings and began to create final assertions. I repeated this process for each research question, which Stake (2006) calls a theme. The last step was the creation of final assertions. Final assertions developed by matching each assertion to the themes (research questions) in order to answer the study’s research questions (Stake, 2006). To establish credibility, I engaged in a peer review with selected participants to assess and validate the final assertions.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are boundaries that the researcher sets within the research; they are purposeful decisions that researcher makes to limit the study. Stake (2006) suggested, “boundedness, contexts, and experience are useful concepts for specifying the case,” so this case study included delimitations that set boundaries so that the case was specified and focused through a teacher’s content, academic level, and experience (p. 3).

First, the participants were comprised entirely of school personnel because these educators are responsible for the implementation of SBR and the academic success of the students, so their perspectives were vitally important. In addition, the participants of this study were limited to those who teach in the main four academic areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The use of academic teachers was necessary because they are the ones who prepare students to take the standardized tests, which determine success and learning. Their perspectives, then, were vitally important in assessing SBR.
The last delimitation focused on the participants’ experience and knowledge. These participants also had at least three years of experience teaching in their subject and were familiar with SBR and its components of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to participate. By choosing experienced and knowledgeable participants, the study rendered the most credible results.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

NCLB affected American education through its use of standards based reform, as well as the sole use of standardized testing to evaluate student achievement and school success. The immersions of these reforms have shaped American education in a manner that caters to the lower spectrum of academic abilities. By having minimal achievement the goal for all students, the instructional path to reach this goal becomes similar in expectation (Chapman, 2007; NCLB, 2001). With such a mindset in place, minimal achievement becomes accepted. As a result, the issue that arises from such a trend is what happens to the gifted child in such an environment. Gifted students tend to meet the minimal expectation without even trying, so promotion of minimal standards does not push the gifted student along in his learning and can actually stifle it. Consequently, the correlation between standards based reform and the gifted student is significant and needs exploration.

Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism appropriately provides a theoretical foundation for this research study because it questions the linear acquisition and assessment of knowledge promoted by SBR (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Rakow, 2008; Renzulli, 2002; Siemer, 2009; Tomlinson, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). The theory of social constructivism builds upon the concept that people develop knowledge and derive meaning from their own experiences that are dependent upon the interaction between people, namely the student and teacher (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). As a student matures, he or she discovers that knowledge is not set in stone, but rather, it is a construct created by individuals. The social constructivist theory relies on the principle that all knowledge builds upon previous
knowledge, and it is the integration of all knowledge that equates to true learning, (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). In this theory, learning in isolation is discouraged while learning through integration of reality and academic instruction is encouraged so that the skills and standards are meaningful and authentic for the students. According to Vygotsky (1986), “learning is the result of activity and self-organization that proceeds toward the development of structures” (as cited in Fosnot, 2003, p. 34). As students struggle with meaning, they begin to generate big ideas about knowledge. It is this big idea that is crucial for gifted students because they flourish in a holistic and broad-based classroom where standards of knowledge are cohesive—not isolated, separate, and unimportant (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Rakow, 2008; Renzulli, 2002; Siemer, 2009; Tomlinson, 2005).

Furthermore, Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory operates on the basis that learning forces cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) argued, “Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions” (p. 90). In other words, learning precedes development, so the social interaction between student and teacher is critical for this to occur because development is embedded in the social and cultural context. Higher functions of the individual have their origins in social processes. As a result, the interaction in a classroom between teacher and student is crucial for cognitive development. A teacher should provide support that extends the range of knowledge, so a student can reach maximum development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

Extending instruction just beyond the student’s capability is what Vygotsky calls working within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is “the discrepancy
between the child’s actual mental age and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 187). The ZPD equates to the mental functions that are not yet mature but are rather in the maturation process. Through assistance with an expert, namely the teacher, the student is able to grasp the higher mental functions. Learning that is only within the student’s current development is not desirable because it does not stretch the student’s academic muscles. Working within a child’s ZPD is, therefore, critical for true concept formation.

For Vygotsky (1986), concept formation is comprised of two phases. In the first phase, children unite diverse information into common groups to make sense of the previous learned information and develop new concepts born out of their struggle to understand and use previously learned material. The struggle is vital here because to gain a full understanding of a concept the child must work within his ZPD. The second phase is the process of creating new knowledge from the already mastered concepts from the first phrase. It is the connection between previous knowledge and new knowledge while working within one’s ZPD that creates authenticity in learning and produces the continuity of the development of higher-level functions. This pattern is circular in nature as evidenced by Vygotsky’s (1986) belief that students are able to grasp higher thoughts without having the lower level skills. He thought that if the child was able to understand the thematic vision of the concept, then the basic skills could easily fill in the gaps later and even more effectively, because the thematic vision is already established. This gives meaning and authenticity to the basic or isolated skills that students learn first. Learning basic and isolated skills without a holistic picture of their purpose is meaningless to the student because they cannot find a place within their knowledge base to put them. If the
holistic picture of the concept develops first, then the basic or isolated skills will then layer the child’s knowledge base with meaning and purpose. This holistic and thematic process is beneficial for all students, but especially for gifted students because they thrive in an environment that is broad-based and thematically challenging (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Renzulli, 2002).

Delving into the above definition of concept formation, one can note that the student must attain the appropriate academic rigor to create higher mental functions and these higher mental functions are only possible if a student works in his ZPD. Offering a child knowledge that he knows without assistance creates an instructional methodology that does not “utilize the zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 189). For the gifted child in a SBR classroom, working within his ZPD can be difficult because the emphasis is simply meeting the minimal standards. Typical instruction for meeting this minimal goal is through test preparation exercises and skill and drill worksheets (Daggett, 2005). If learning “makes no new demands on him (the student) and does not stimulate his intellect by providing a sequence of new goals, his thinking fails to reach the highest stages, or reaches them with great delay” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 108). Given such thoughts, it seems that it is imperative that the instructor assumes the responsibility to maintain the appropriate ZPD when teaching a class, because failure to do so results in a lack of concept mastery. To meet this responsibility, the teacher will need to deviate from the instructional method of strand-by-strand approach for students to attain knowledge that is common in SBR. This is especially true when working with gifted students who naturally benefit from a holistic view of how learning and knowledge is interconnected (Renzulli, 2002).
According to Vygotsky (1986), in a typical classroom, an expert teaches a concept by definition or regurgitation of premade verbal knowledge. Two issues, however, arise from this method. First, “rather than tapping the child’s thinking, it often elicits a mere reproduction of verbal knowledge of ready-made definitions” (p. 96). This reproduction of knowledge is not a full mastery of knowledge because it is a surface assessment of the “child’s knowledge and experience, or of his linguistic development” and not a true assessment of the “intellectual process” (p. 96). Secondly, using this reproduction of knowledge as instruction puts the learned concept on a “purely verbal plane,” which is not an authentic place from which a child learns; this is because the instruction has isolated the term rather than incorporated it into previous knowledge that is used as a foundation to build learning. By isolating a single standard of knowledge, the “relation of the concept to reality remains unexplored” and thus, it lacks authenticity (p. 96). For the gifted student to dwell in the cohesion of knowledge the strands of concepts must be firmly attached to the themes that are appropriate for the academic discipline.

Verbal definitions tend to test memory of facts and isolated words or concepts and not the true integration of concepts. This explanation of Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) view on learning directly tests the theory of true mastery in standards based classrooms. To achieve mastery, students need to be able to have the full integration of knowledge, not just the surface content examined by the standardized test. To think in a complex manner is to unify scattered impressions, and to do this, the student begins “by organizing discrete elements of experience into groups,” which “creates a basis for later generalizations” (p. 135). It is equally important to unite and to separate. Recreating and creating ideas solely in one mode, such as in isolation or in integration, is not appropriate.
It is the ability to do both, understand concepts in isolation as well as in integration that creates full concept formation, and it is this process that should be encouraged and assessed, especially for the gifted population who flourish in a thematically challenging classroom.

In order to create and maintain concept formation and eventual concept mastery, there must be an interaction between pupil, teacher, and culture. Rogoff (1990) called this interaction, guided participation, which falls under the theoretical framework of social constructivism. Guided participation is a concept that promotes the apprenticeship of thinking. By using guided participation, which incorporates “a shared understanding and problem solving,” children learn “an increasingly advanced understanding of and skill in managing the intellectual problems of their community,” and in such an environment, “students are safely navigated to their appropriate ZPD” (p. 8). Through understanding and exploring the social context of their learning, the students will gather the “big picture,” and by teaching and reviewing basic skills, the students have a proper knowledge base in which to put the isolated skills or standards. It is in this type of circular environment that the gifted blossom academically and that appeals to their natural inclination to learn.

In summary, social constructivism involves an interaction between the skilled partner and the student to create the appropriate ZPD from which concept mastery emerges. To be successful, this interaction needs to be rigorous, but it also needs to be holistic and incorporate critical thinking and synthesis rather than isolated, singular strands of knowledge common with SBR. This theory relies on the fact that the individual and the environment are inseparable. To develop apprenticeship in thinking, “shared
problem-solving—with an active learner participating in culturally organized activity with a more skilled partner—is central to the process of learning in apprenticeship” (p. 39). For, as Rogoff (1990) stated “neither the individual nor the social environment can be analyzed without regard to the other, as the actions of one have meaning only with respect to those of the other” (p. 191). This interconnected vision of reality or social context and the isolated educational fact or skill is the perfect academic garden from which the gifted child can bloom. In an environment, that fosters SBR, NCLB, and high-stakes testing, this holistic and cohesive view of curriculum, instruction, and assessment surrenders to a more linear direction that nicely molds into test taking.

**Review of Literature**

The impact of SBR on gifted students has thoroughly been researched, mostly quantitatively, in the literature (Adams, 2009; Assouline et al., 2004; Bridgeland et al., 2007; Burroughs et al., 2010; Cloud, 2007; Daggett, 2005; Gentry, 2006; Grgich, 2009; Jolly & Makel, 2010; Moon, 2009; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2007; Seimer, 2009). The purpose of the this qualitative multi-site case study is to explore the perspectives of educators on the impact of SBR on gifted students, so this literature review explores factors related to this connection between the impact of SBR upon the gifted student’s education. Thus, the subsequent review of the literature contains the following topics (a) the historical foundations of SBR, (b) characteristics of gifted child, (c) history and purpose of standardized testing, (d) noted unintended consequences, and (e) possible solutions to identified problems.
**Historical Foundations**

To visualize the connection and impact between SBR and the gifted population, it is necessary to examine the historical investigations that led to the current focus on the struggling or below average student. “A Nation at Risk” (1983) was one of the first documents to shine a bright light on an inadequate educational system. It also prompted a focus on helping the struggling or below average student because the report at the time described generalized, across the board mediocrity as the main problem with American education. With an intense focus on the struggling student, the populations of gifted students were less visible to policy makers and as a result, their educational needs were overlooked (Beisser, 2008; Duffet et al., 2008).

**A nation at risk.** In April of 1983, David Pierpont Gardner, under the authority of the then Secretary of Education T.H. Bell, created a document called “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform” that propelled the reformation of American education (DOE, 1983). This document was one that did not look for scapegoats or to whom to point a displeasing and guilty finger; instead, it looked at possible solutions to fix the errors in the educational system that existed at that time. Gardner’s (1983) most powerful statement to describe American education, at the time, was that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (p. 3). He later concluded that “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (DOE, 1983). These powerful comments affected the nation in a way that spurred the change in policies and the future of American education that followed.
Gardner’s (1983) study also gave rise to the change in content, standards, time in class, and teaching quality. In addition, this document gave rise to the beginning thoughts that eventually led to the start of SBR. The SBR movement began in the 1980s, but due to its infancy, not all elements of its reforms materialized at that time. The lack of full realization was mainly due to the haphazard delivery of its curriculum to schools independently, rather than nationally. It is with this unsuccessful attempt at early standards reform that the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts (ESEA) in 1994 and 2001 were produced, and it was from this point that the future of NCLB arose as the phoenix of accountability from which all schools are now liable. The main idea that arose from “A Nation at Risk” was the creation of a tide of mediocrity (DOE, 1983). Pushing mediocrity might pull struggling students up to the surface academically, but on the other hand, it also levels the gifted student, making it impossible for him or her to reach maximum potential, and so, the focus on the gifted child can sometimes be minimized in comparison to the average or struggling student. This issue deserves further exploration.

**History of gifted education in America.** One of the first efforts to educate the high achiever emerged in the 1950s due to America’s fear to falling behind the Soviet Union in the space race (Beisser, 2008). The Russian release of Sputnik in 1957 set the United States ablaze with investing in the high achievers in order to compete with the Russians. After the space race, which ended 15 years later, the U.S. once again started underfunding the high achieving student in any official capacity (Duffet et al., 2008). In an attempt to resolve the social inequalities that existed in education at time, the country
overlooked programs for the gifted. It was also during this time that gifted education became elitist in perspective, and as a result, disregarded (Duffett et al., 2008).

The next step in the history of gifted education surfaced in 1972 with the Marland Report. This report indicated that between 5-7% of American school children classified as gifted and were not getting the adequate educational challenge they needed and deserved (Beisser, 2008). Sidney P. Marland Jr., then Commissioner of Education, presented the Marland Report in 1972 in which he argued that American education lacked challenging programs and the rigor necessary for high achieving students. This report led to the addition of The Office of Gifted and Talented to the U.S. Department of Education in 1974.

By 1983, “A Nation at Risk” was published, and it, too, reiterated this notion that gifted was an underserved population. It equally indicated that as a result, American children were falling behind children of other nations in the realm of gifted, challenging curriculum (DOE, 1983). Ten years later, “National Excellence: A Case of Developing America’s Talent,” published in 1993, summarized that same notion and specifically, addressed how this is especially harmful to the economically disadvantaged (DOE, 1983). Because of dwindling funds for gifted enrichment, students, including disadvantaged students, lacked a rigorous curriculum in any specialized program. To help combat this issue, The Equity of Excellence Act of 2010 introduced increased funding for teacher effectiveness and gifted education through mandates on increased accountability of the advanced learner. By the end of 2010, however, most monies invested in funding gifted education were on the chopping block once again (Jerome, 2010).
The Gifted Child

Public and government officials might question why it is important to separately fund and educate the gifted child. Why is the gifted child separate from the rest? The answer lies in the fact that the gifted child is different in skill, intellect, motivation, and creativity than the average child, and the depth of curriculum, pedagogy, and pace of instruction need to be adjusted to accommodate his particular needs (Renzulli, 2002).

Characteristics of the gifted child. Renzulli (2002), renowned for this work with the gifted, identified three categories of gifted behaviors typical of students who may be found in gifted classes; they could have “above-average ability, high level of task commitment, and high levels of creativity” (p.19).

The above-average ability has two levels, general and specific. The general category “refers to the capacity to process information, integrate experiences that result in appropriate and adaptive responses in new situations and engagement in abstract thinking” (Renzulli, 2002, p.71). Examples of one who is functioning at this level might include superior ability in word fluency or spatial reasoning. Specific above-average ability is one that is particular to a certain field, such as mathematics or science only, rather than a holistic view.

The field of task commitment (Renzulli, 2002) refers to motivation and the will to learn. Those students gifted in task commitment possess such qualities as determination, diligence, and/or eagerness to learn. Due to their willingness to learn, they sometimes are also intrinsically motivated in the classroom as well. The third category of giftedness, identified by Renzulli, is creativity, which is an area that is broad and hard to test due to its inability to squeeze into an ordinary measurable test. Creativity encompasses the
ability to appreciate and construct originality of thought and a willingness to take risks in order to express it.

These abilities are not ones that only manifest on IQ tests, but they involve all aspects of human performance. Renzulli (2002) said that, “If there is ever any hope of expanding the conception of giftedness beyond that which can be measured precisely by tests, then we must also be willing to accept, and even revere, forms of identification information that are derived from nontest sources” (p. 72).

To accommodate the specific needs of gifted students, Renzulli (2002) advised that schools should provide services with “challenging and stimulating opportunities, resources, and experiences that will serve as vehicles for transforming potential into performance” (p. 72). This environment needs to be rich in synthesis, evaluative activities and instruction so that there is cohesion of thought in learning. Teaching isolated strands of knowledge is encouraged, but these standards of knowledge should connect and incorporate a holistic sense of the discipline as well.

**How the gifted learn.** Gifted students learn differently than their average intellectual peers. They can mentally process faster in a shorter amount of time, they can process information in a more analytical and complex manner, they tend to enjoy an intellectual challenge, and they readily enter each school year already knowing 50-60% of the curriculum (Jolly & Makel, 2010). In fact, most gifted elementary school students who enter school each year have already mastered 35-50% of the curriculum for that year, and the teacher is not prepared to add a sufficient amount of enrichment for them (DOE, 1993). The gifted child can often earn higher grades than his peers without much effort.
Tomlinson (2005) added, “Children who learn more rapidly than others will likely find curriculum and instruction a better fit if it allows them to move at a pace suited to their art of mislearning” (p. 14). Callahan et al., (2009) suggested that gifted students, therefore, need “open-ended enrichment” to help accelerate the content and thus their learning (p. 43). Instruction, such as teaching single strands of standards, is not an effective way to enrich curriculum for gifted students. A “broad-based thematically rich and challenging curriculum” is more effective for the gifted child (Rakow, 2008, p. 45). This coincides with Vygotsky’s view that students are able to grasp higher content without being exposed to basic knowledge first; for learning can be circular, and basic skills can fill in the gaps at a later date. For this reason, teaching strand by strand might not be the most effective way to teach the gifted.

The gifted population differs from school to school. For some, the gifted students learn in homogenous classes while others learn in heterogeneous ones. In Grgich’s study (2009), she observed that gifted students performed and scored better when situated in homogenous classes, not mainstreamed in heterogeneous ones. There was a 15-point difference in the mean between these two groups (homogenous and heterogeneous classes) in language arts and a 20-point difference in means in mathematics. This is due to the ability for the teacher to focus on the student’s giftedness and address those particular educational needs, rather than trying to keep the gifted kids entertained while she/he works with the lower or average student.

By having homogeneous classes, the teacher is able to skip concepts already mastered and move through material at a faster pace (Grgich, 2009). Also, the gifted students are able to use each other as gifted role models and are able to model productive
characteristics such as, “higher level thinking, problem solving, and can encourage a positive environment where students strive for success” (Grgich, 2009, p. 20). The conversations and group work associated within homogeneously gifted environments, therefore, are more enriched and challenging to the individual gifted students than those in a heterogeneous classroom.

Gifted students should not remain alone just because they are exceeding state standards; they, in fact, need to be pushed like every other child to meet their own personal achievement goals. When viewing the standardized test scores of gifted students, the gifted child looks like he has worked hard to achieve an exceeding mark, when in all actuality, that is not true because the gifted child meets and/or exceeds minimum competency upon entering a class. These children need to be pushed to reach their full potential, or they will fail to accomplish their maximum. “It is difficult to imagine that these students, who are poised to be leaders of the next generation, will have the skills needed to face issues of the globalizing economy” without being pushed by adults (Siemer, 2009, p. 546). Hence, Grgich (2009) proposed that we serve gifted students in homogeneous classes to fulfill their enrichment needs. It is unfair to make gifted children wait for others to catch up with them before they get enrichment. Grgich stated that gifted students” must not be left at low-performing schools simply to raise test scores” because all students, gifted children included, “deserve the chance to be challenged and to learn as much as they can” (2009, p. 22).

As seen above, SBR has directly affected the education of the gifted child. It has equally influenced curriculum, instructional, and assessment decisions. As a result, it is
important to examine the components of SBR in an effort to see the pieces that harm the academic success of the gifted student.

**Standards Based Reform Foundations**

The standards based movement emerged as a response to Gardner’s (DOE, 1983) declaration that American schools were unsuccessful, unchallenging and supported mediocrity in education. To help combat this assessment by Gardner, the standards based reform movement became dedicated to bridging academic gaps for all students. The solution to help all learners came in the form of standards based classrooms and the linear acquisition of knowledge for all students leading to concept mastery (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Rakow, 2008; Renzulli, 2002).

**Structure of standards based education.** The basic structure of standards based education operates on the principle that standards must be linear and scaffolded, and that students need to know the standards in order to learn them (Gentile & Lalley, 2009). With that said, the first thing that an educator must do is to clearly state and publish objectives for the course. In SBR, passively learning curriculum is not sufficient; students need to know what they are to learn, so they are accountable for that information. As educators assess students, they need to be mindful of which standards students have mastered. By doing this, educators will then need to revisit the curriculum to determine what needs to be re-taught and re-assessed to determine mastery, which occurs when the students know the material covered to the extent that they can prove it by correctly answering a standardized question or passing a standardized test. For this to work properly, one concept builds on another and vertical alignment is established to make learning easier, and the creation of standards should follow this pattern.
The second aspect of standards based education is gradually to increase the rigor of the curriculum based on the mastery of previously learned standards (Gentile & Lalley, 2009). For learning to occur, the rigor of the standards must also increase as skills are developed. For example, to achieve an ‘exceeds’ score at the beginning of the school year should be much easier than achieving an ‘exceeds’ score at the end of the school year. This climbing of rigor is supposed to provide the student with an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, not just a surface brushing, but the educational approach to this is consistently one strand at a time and does not provide true depth due to its razor sharp focus on the standard itself. The initial mastery of the learning is simply a stepping stone and beginning phase from which the student must build and excel.

Third, a well-defined standards based program must have multiple forms of criterion-referenced testing that incorporates corrective exercises and retesting to solidify the mastery of standards (Gentile & Lalley, 2009). The assessments constructed should evaluate the sole performance of a student and should individually measure the student against the standard. It is this single performance where the term criterion-reference testing surfaced because it is drastically different than the usual comparative norm-referenced tests that compares each child to a peer. In true criterion testing, student assessments individually evaluate the student’s ability up against the standard he or she mastered. This makes learning specific and individual based (Gentile & Lalley, 2009). Whether this test provides an evaluation in a single classroom or as a standardized assessment tool for the state, it still only provides a snapshot of single standards of knowledge that a student possesses, which is not a true assessment of the gifted child’s academic success (Rakow, 2008).
According to Gentile and Lalley (2009), the fourth and final step in a successful standards based program is incorporating incentives that encourage reaching beyond initial mastery and this one area is often the most overlooked. The most profound and often cited complaint by teachers on standards based education is that it teaches mediocrity because it does not offer any incentive for the student to progress beyond the “meets” category, and as a result, students accept minimal competency as success. Promoting a minimal expectation is detrimental to all children, especially to a gifted child who thrives on a challenge (Grgich, 2009; Renzulli, 2002). Fostering mediocrity opposes most gifted children’s natural enthusiasm for learning, which also hinders their ability for mastery of concept formation.

**Mastery of concept formation.** The goal of SBR and all instruction is mastery of concept formation. Most teachers know the frustration when a student masters a concept on a test, and then easily forgets it later in the school year. This is a common occurrence in schools everywhere. It is clear from research that “even when material is initially mastered to a high standard much will be forgotten in a few hours or days” (Gentile & Lalley, 2009, p. 28). The question is why is this happening? What makes the students not fully understand the strands of curriculum in a manner that permanently adheres within their knowledge base?

Mastery of concept formation is complete cohesion of thought, not just simple learning of standards. Hence, true concept formation is the integration of many strands of knowledge brought together to form a complete picture of a concept. As a result, when learning a new concept, the concept must be visible within the distance, and the standards become the path lighting the way to get there (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).
To Vygotsky (1986), the road to achieve mastery of concept formation divides into two types of concepts. First, there are spontaneous concepts that derive from a child’s experiences within his own life, then the synthesis of life experiences and the constructs that comprise it. Secondly, there are scientific concepts, which are structured knowledge given within traditional educational settings and are important because they provide the framework for new knowledge and other concepts (Vygotsky, 1986). True concept formation surfaces when spontaneous concepts connect with scientific ones while working within the correct ZPD.

In SBR, scientific concepts are the standards, but there is not allowance for cohesion with spontaneous concepts due to the culture that promotes only teaching the standards. This instructional focus, prompted by the encroaching use of standardized tests to measure success, does not allow full integration of both concepts (spontaneous and scientific), so simple strands of knowledge are learned without the mastery of the concept. One reason for this inability to grasp the full mastery of concepts (the connection between scientific and spontaneous concepts) is due to the child not working within his ZPD. For the gifted student, who thrives on a challenge and open-ended enriched curriculum, mastery of concept formation needs to focus on all three parts of the equation (spontaneous concepts, scientific concepts, and ZPD) so that information is permanently stored within their knowledge base and provides cohesion of information rather than disconnected strands of knowledge (Renzulli, 2002; Vygotsky, 1986).

**Standardized Testing**

One possible problem with the mastery of concept formation is due to the instrument used to determine its success. In today’s schools, standardized tests determine
the mastery of concept formation and subsequent success for students, teachers, and school. These tests are notorious for being the measure of low-level knowledge and skills, so their purpose, accurately to measure true student learning, might not be the most beneficial (Daggett, 2005).

**History of standardized testing.** Standardized testing started when James B. Conant worked to establish testing to help identify students who possessed the skills necessary to attend college in the 1950s (Linn, 2001). Standardized testing developed to identify gifted students, and by the 1960s, educators used standardized testing as one measure to determine the success for Title I and other federal programs. The 1970s and the early 1980s saw the inclusion of minimum competency testing. During this 10-year span, 34 states adopted a minimum graduation competency requirement. By the late 1980s, and on into the 1990s, testing was then used for accountability purposes. Standardized testing for accountability operated on the assumption that results on testing will equate to student learning. All of these measures were common before the implementation by law of accountability through testing.

Standardized testing has been around for more than 50 years. In today’s educational environment, however, the difference is its perverseness in education (Linn, 2001). Standardized testing is currently popular and widely used by policymakers because “It is relatively inexpensive compared to making program changes, it can be externally mandated, it can be implemented rapidly, and it offers visible results” (Linn, 2001, p. 1).

**The purpose of standardized testing.** Why high-stakes testing? One reason is because it promised rewards. The promise of rewards was to encourage teachers to work
more effectively and motivate students to learn. All of this testing was to increase student learning and achievement, especially those living in poverty or who come from the minority. This type of testing, nevertheless, might be detrimental to learning because it does not assess true concept formation but rather strands of information. High stakes testing, such as state assessment tests, are currently notorious for lacking rigor and relevance, so “academic excellence cannot be defined by passing the state test, but rather hinges on the teaching and learning students experience throughout their entire education process” (Daggett, 2005, p. 4). This thought is similar to Vygotsky’s mastery of concept formation because one isolated evaluation of standards cannot determine the true mastery of concept formation.

Most standardized tests are multiple-choice because they are less costly to produce and score. These state tests rely heavily on acquisition, the lowest level of knowledge, so they might not be a good indicator of quality learning. It is too cumbersome and expensive to produce true assessments that employ analysis, synthesis, and evaluation to assess a deeper level of educational knowledge, and it is this type of assessment that would benefit the learning evaluation of the gifted child (Daggett, 2005).

Baker et al., (2002) suggested that the purpose of standardized testing is to create an internal accountability check system that keeps the state in constant evaluation of itself, so, states should employ good testing measures. These good testing measures will need to include the use of multiple types of data to support a conclusion so that mastery of concept formation is measured, not disjointed strands of knowledge. Standardized testing has its place in assessment, but it is not the only true measure of student learning. It can be a piece of the puzzle, not the whole puzzle itself. By simply focusing on passing
a high-stakes test and simply teaching strands of knowledge, unintended consequences will arise, especially for the gifted students who are stifled by this method of instruction and assessment.

**Noted Unintended Consequences of Standards Based Reform/NCLB**

Consequences from any law or reform are inevitable. The purpose of such reforms or laws are always to improve the situation and in this case, the education of all American children, but to do so without issues, even unintended, is improbable. The unintended consequences are the following: the elusiveness of the achievement gap, the narrowing of the curriculum and instruction, and the disengagement and lagging motivation of the students.

**The elusive achievement gap.** To begin the quest into consequences of standards based reform, one needs to look at the achievement gap that was the catalyst for the educational reform. Historically, this gap has been between minorities and the majority population within the American education system. Standards based reform and NCLB were to close this gap and provide solid instruction and learning for all, but is the achievement gap closing due to SBR and NCLB?

Since the implementation of NCLB, American achievement has excelled in some aspects, which is positive because closing the achievement gap was a major priority of NCLB and SBR. For example, based on 2007 data, math and reading scores for both Blacks and Whites in the U.S. in grades four and eight were higher than those in the 1990s (DOE, 2009a). More recently, in mathematics, there was an improvement in eighth grade; there was a two percent increase from 2007 to 2009 according to the NAEP data,
but the mathematic scores of fourth graders once again showed no change between the years 2007–2009 (DOE, 2009b).

Nevertheless, the question that remains is what is causing the positive rise in achievement and the auspicious closing of the gap? Data shows that the achievement gap is closing to a degree, but it might not be because the lower level student is meeting the higher standards, rather it might be due to the advanced learners’ decrease in test scores due to a lack of rigor and challenge (Jolly & Makel, 2010). According to the Fordham Institute’s study (Duffett et al., 2008), children in the lowest percentile in reading and math showed solid growth from 2000-2007 while the high achieving students in the 90th percentile have made few gains. For example, since 2003, high-achievers have been performing at stagnate or slightly elevated rates while the lower achieving students have gained considerably in comparison (Burroughs et al., 2010, p. 28).

The achievement gap will close if the low achievers gain significantly while the high achievers make little or no gain; this gives the illusion that the gap is closing. On the other hand, the gap would get even bigger if both sides made significant gains in improvement. One side of the spectrum can only close at the expense of the other (Duffett et al., 2008). It is educationally unethical and immoral to “withhold any intervention from one group in order to benefit another” (Burrough et al., 2010, p. 31). Nonetheless, the phenomenon that emerges with intervention is that one group typically benefits more from the intervention than the other group.

American achievement scores tend to be rising, but the achievement gap is not necessarily any narrower. Since the gap is not closing, some educators mistrust that what the tests measures is authentic and a true measure of learning (Chapman, 2007; Burrough
et al., 2010; Duffet et al., 2008). In the quest to close the achievement gap, the gifted student has become stagnant in academic growth and is not reaching their full potential in the classroom.

**Narrowing of the curriculum and instruction.** The next logical question to examine is what might be causing this stagnant growth in the gifted population. The answer lies within the classroom and the instruction and curriculum taught on a daily basis. Instruction in American classrooms changed since the implementation of standards based reform and NCLB. This shift was due to the high-stakes testing requirement issued to account for the severe accountability measures that exist now. Because of these pressures, teaching can become test preparation, and this instruction thrives in the classroom every day. The drill-and-test preparation teaching that occurs in today’s classrooms might not help every child due to its rote memorization, low cognitive level, and lack of true authenticity (Daggett, 2005). This is especially true for the high-achiever who will remain unchallenged because this type of lack-luster instruction can occur every day due to the pressure of passing a high-stakes test.

For mastery of concepts, teaching students needs to be authentic, for students retain information better when it applies to real life and has authenticity. This once again connects to Vygotsky’s idea of teaching holistic concepts rather than rote learning of single pieces of information. As Rakow (2008) put it, “We seem to have lost sight of the more significant purpose of teaching and learning: individual growth and development” (p. 45). Instead, the joy of teaching and learning surrenders to the enormity of testing. Chapman suggested that since the implementation of the multiple choice test, teachers have stopped teaching “critical thinking and more complex forms of learning” because
these are less likely to be used as assessments since they are not used for high-stakes testing (2007, p. 13). This type of instruction, one that delves into the depth of the curriculum, is the most appropriate for the gifted learner, and without it, they suffer (Renzulli, 2002).

Currently, to meet testing obligations, teachers have narrowed the curriculum by only teaching the single strands of testable facts rather than teaching for depth and understanding. For example, Virture and Vogler (2007) explained that social studies teachers have to water down the social studies curriculum into simply memorable facts due to testing pressures. The discipline of social studies is one of complex thought and critical analysis, but in an effort to cover the material quickly before the test, complex thought and critical analysis remain unexplored (Virture & Vogler, 2007). There is a correlation between the time a teacher spends on teaching for a test and how severe the stakes are on that particular test, and with the severity of standards based reform and NCLB, the assumption is that this might take precedent in the classroom (Virture & Vogler, 2007). This increase in high stakes testing also might foster an environment of teacher-centered activities to make sure the teacher dispenses the necessary information. Teachers who use pacing guides and a list of standards find that this may lead to a narrowing effect. When information is not covered on the test or covered extensively, teachers may consider forgoing that aspect of the curriculum (Callahan et al., 2009). With such narrowing of the curriculum, creativity may be limited, and best practices might not be used because the focus is on test taking, not learning.

With such focus on teaching to the test, students may become disengaged and unmotivated to learn. Callahan et al. (2009) found that “the test has become more
important than the subjects we all are teaching” (p. 48). Short-term memory replaced long-term knowledge and instant gratification through instant feedback and computer generated test scores have replaced critical thinking and problem solving skills that take longer to cultivate. Often times, the most interesting parts of the subject remain uncultivated because they are not on the test. This can be devastating for the gifted child because this interest sparks learning for many of them (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Rakow, 2008; Renzulli, 2002). The elements of good instruction should focus on “essential facts, concepts, principles, and skills;” it should also guide students toward “their capacities as thinkers and their awareness of their capacities as thinkers” and promote learning that leads down a path of independent learning and opportunities for evaluation to occur (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 45).

It is obvious, therefore, that the implementation of NCLB and SBR led to the narrowing of curriculum. As Savage (2003) suggested, high stakes testing can:

- worsen student performance by narrowing curriculum, spending great amounts of instructional time on what is to be covered on the test rather than on what is important, implementing tedious drill and skill activities, misidentification of inferior and superior schools, and misidentification of good teaching and good teachers. (p. 202)

All of these aspects affect children negatively, including the gifted population, who are typically exciting about learning.

**The importance of motivation and engagement.** Directly connected to the intense narrowing of the curriculum is disengagement that can lead to lagging motivation. The combination of engagement and motivation usually equals success for most students,
especially the gifted student who thrives in a challenging environment and who
sometimes are internally highly motivated (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Renzulli, 2002). When
engagement soars, student motivation typically also soars, but with SBR, one wonders
whether full immersion in learning occurs for the gifted student.

The narrowing of the curriculum, as previously mentioned, affects engagement in
a negative way because this leads to teaching that only skims the surface without any
depth and implores the instructional strategies of drills and worksheets (Cauley et al.,
2008). This type of instruction is unsuccessful for the gifted population because it lacks a
holistic picture of learning that incorporates critical thinking and synthesis (Jolly &
Makel, 2010). Without a challenge, most children become bored, and this is equally true
for the gifted child, who if he remains unchallenged, will become disengaged and thereby
become unmotivated to reach his full potential.

Cauley et al., in their 2008 research, indicated that to increase engagement and
thereby motivation, it is important for students to be engaged in cooperative learning
activities, discussions, goal settings, and activities that embodied choice. In a standards
based classroom, however, there is a current obsession with covering the standards before
the test, which can lead to a rushed pace of singularly teaching standards through
worksheets, drills, and test preparation exercises (Daggett, 2005). This educational
environment tends to create lower engagement and crushes the intrinsic value of learning
because the shift has resulted in not learning for self-improvement but for passing a test.
This is counterintuitive for the gifted child because they tend to thrive through creativity
and are usually intrinsically motivated (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Renzulli, 2002). Teaching
the gifted should incorporate creativity, for as Burke-Adams (2007) stated “incorporating
creativity in the curriculum, which includes providing students with opportunities to practice nonconventional modes of thinking (outside of standardized testing), enhances motivation” (p. 59).

The connection between engagement and motivation is critical because they support authentic learning. Real achievement takes place when teachers give students the opportunities to excel in the process of learning. Rogoff (1990) stated, “Children’s own eagerness to participate in ongoing activities and to increase their understanding is essential to their thinking in social context” (p. 191). For that reason, engagement and motivation increase when a child’s academic needs become a primary concern. For the appropriate academic environment, a child must work in his ZPD. Most gifted children, however, are not working within their ZPD while engaging in test preparations or skill and drill exercises. Being in an inappropriate environment and receiving unchallenging instruction might weaken the engagement and the motivation of the gifted child. Thereby, a teacher must challenge the gifted child in his own ZPD, or his learning suffers (Jolly & Makel, 2010; Rakow, 2008; Renzulli, 2002). It is this tendency to brush the surface by teaching single strands of knowledge and inappropriately aligning ability with instruction that remains a constant hindrance for the gifted students in today’s post NCLB standards based classrooms.

American competitiveness. The final unintended consequence specific to the gifted student is concerning his own potential and subsequently, America’s future competitiveness. Funding and enriching the gifted students’ educational experiences are vital to the country as a whole. Our future might look grave if “the scholarship, inventiveness, and expertise that created the foundation for American’s high standards of
living and quality of life are eroding” (DOE, 1993, p. 1). It was well expressed and well-known that the low socioeconomic and minority child performs lower, but the middle class child is unaware that he/she might also be underperforming. These are the children, who statistically are capable of performing well, but are not fulfilling their economic promise (McKinsey & Company, 2009). As a whole, many American children at both ends of the achievement spectrum might be under performing.

A 2006 study by the McKinsey Company found that in 1995, America “was tied first in college graduation rates,” but by 2006, “this ranking had dropped to fourteenth” (McKinsey & Company, 2009, p. 8). This same report found that 17 low-income countries, such as Finland, Korea, Ireland, and Denmark out-ranked the U.S. in test scores (McKinsey & Company, 2009). In addition to this, the number of foreign students seeking American educational programs in the Ph.D. programs in science and engineering are decreasing. This is due to their own home countries developing an “emphasis on excellence and innovation through education,” and this “creates a strong competitive disadvantage to the American economy” (Burroughs et al., 2010, p. 29). As a result, over time this might have a substantial and negative impact on America’s economic competitiveness.

What is causing the discrepancies between the U.S. and the other nations? One idea presented in the literature (Burroughs et al., 2010; McKinsey and Company, 2009; DOE, 1993) is how schools are preparing the students and the rigor applied in that preparation. For example, most American students take multiple choice tests to assess achievement and for enrollment into college, and their contemporary counter parts in other countries are required to “write extensive essays on their college entrance exams”
Currently, the SAT is offering a writing portion to the test, and the SAT internal researchers found that the writing portion is more accurate when predicting student success in college than the multiple-choice portions (Inspiring Minds College Board, 2011). This writing portion surfaced in 2005, and colleges around the country are beginning to use it as a determining factor in student acceptance, but the full usage of this test for determining appropriately educated pupils is still a long way from full fruition (College Board, 2011). By creating tests with writing portions, some agencies are trying to strengthen the rigor in American education, but does SBR and its assessments follow suit? With such reforms as standards based, the U.S. educational system focused on making education more accessible, not challenging, and this directly affects the gifted population and the national competitiveness.

Possible Solutions to the Unintended Consequences

Looking at the above-unintended consequences of SBR and NCLB, it is natural to wonder what could help to remedy the situation for the gifted child. It also begs the question, is America ignoring the gifted, and if so, how can we repair it? Cloud (2007) stated that due to SBR and NCLB, “It has become more important to identify deficiencies than to cultivate gifts” (p. 2). If this is true, how can SBR meet the needs of the gifted child to not leave the high-achiever behind?

Is America ignoring the gifted, the importance of acceleration? Acceleration is one approach, for the existence of an acceleration plan is vital to the educating of the gifted. Research has proven that acceleration is effective and does not have a negative effect on a student’s social and emotional behaviors (Coangelo et al., 2010). Acceleration is the low-cost effective way to reach high achievers. This is due to the fact that high
achievers tend to be more socially and emotionally mature than those of their own aged peers, so acceleration might need to be used to “move students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate” (Assouline et al., 2004, p. 5). This acceleration can come in the form of subject acceleration, grade skipping, advanced placement (AP) classes, or early entrance into college or kindergarten. Without acceleration, the research indicated (Assouline et al., 2004, Colangelo et al., 2010) that when the academic needs of a child are not met, boredom sets in and this can lead to disengagement in learning.

As previously stated, in the world of SBR, the view that all should be the same has replaced equality in its true form. For example, “when educators confuse equity with sameness, they want all students to have the same curriculum at the same time. This is a violation of equal opportunity” (Assouline et al., 2004, p. 9). Thus, acceleration offers the high-achiever a way to enrich his own learning, for “like a muscle, raw intelligence can’t build if it’s not exercised (Cloud, 2007, p. 2). For the gifted child to excel in the future, it will be necessary to have reform changes that include their success within its plans.

**New reform proposals, can we be equal and excellent, too?** As the literature review suggests, the gifted population is underserved, and now, with SBR and NCLB, teachers need to find ways to enrich curriculum so that these students feel challenged and can reach their own particular potential. This is especially true for the gifted child since his growth is not a component to the current law (NCLB, 2001). The Commission on NCLB in 2007 recommended that the law add an individual student growth component to NCLB to help address this issue. Ho (2008) supported a growth model pilot program that would allow a student to make significant growth and still positively affect the school in accountability measures even without making the required cut-off score of proficiency.
He said, “Growth models remedy disproportionate attention to bubble kids by effectively locating all non-proficient students on the bubble and providing even the least proficient students with potentially attainable goals” (p. 359). This same thought process could also apply to gifted students.

Recently in 2010, the government submitted A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Its priorities for reform include improving teacher and principal effectiveness, providing information to parents to help their children and teachers to improve student achievement, developing and implementing College-Career-Ready standards and assessments and increasing achievement in the lowest performing schools with intense and effective intervention (DOE, 2010). This reform also called for rigor and fair accountability for all levels and for greater equity in education; this would mean the gifted mandates be levied and assessed for growth. Teacher and principal effectiveness and evaluations will use the students’ growth and progress rather than one single test measure. The rigor employed in this reform ensures the implementation of the college-career-ready standards. Proficiency will equate to college-career-ready; the goal is so that college entry students do not need remediation upon their arrival. It also supports measuring accountability through growth and progress, not simply through the lack thereof (DOE, 2010). This growth could help identify those gifted students who fall victim to the ocean of mediocrity that flows within the regular or typical American classroom. Programs, such as The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) program will also be supported in schools to increase rigor as well as proving grants for magnet schools to accelerate learning and provide access to gifted and talented services (DOE, 2010). As of 2010, thirty-one states
have aligned their high school standards to the college-career-ready standards, and in conjunction with this, Achieve American Diploma Project Network is also endorsing K-12 standards in English and Math that align to a more advanced curriculum that is benchmarked internationally (Achieve American Diploma Project, 2010). Programs such as these, could positively affect the gifted child’s academic growth.

With such initiatives, change is emerging, but full immersion is still a long way away. Burroughs et al. (2010) suggested that education is no more effective before NCLB, nor is it less effective. It is a law that should be evolving in a way that will respond to the “changing immigration pattern, the rapid improvement of education and economies in developing” because students in “developing and developed countries has drastically changed the playing field of American education” (p. 34). America needs to rise to the challenge by providing the best education for our high achievers.

**Summary**

As the literature suggests, most national academic endeavors omitted the gifted child. Past educational researchers have investigated the effects of SBR on the gifted population by looking at quantitative methods, such as test scores. Educational research has not examined the qualitative nature of this topic in regards to the classroom teacher’s perspectives on the reform, so this discrepancy makes up the gap that exists in the literature. For that reason, I wanted to extend the present research by examining the perspectives of teachers and administrators on the effects of SBR on gifted students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this multi-site case study was to examine both teacher and administrator perspectives of SBR on the gifted child. The findings of this study were generated from three north Georgia middle schools. A multi-site case study chronicled the perspectives on SBR on the gifted child. This chapter details the design, participants, sites, and context of the study. Data collection, data analysis, and factors of delimitation are also included in this chapter.

Research Design

Qualitative researchers “are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Interpretative research, such as qualitative research, “assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality; rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (Merriam, 2009, p. 10). This study, therefore, captured multiple snapshots of the three selected middle schools, its teachers and administrators, and their perspectives of SBR on the gifted child. By examining the teacher and administrator perspectives of SBR on the gifted child, the research focused on this layer of interpretative research.

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate methodology for this research study because it utilized a multiple methods approach in data collection, as well as an analysis from multiple perspectives to comprise a complete picture of the effects of SBR on the gifted child in a particular environment. Merriam (2009) defined case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 403). In addition, Stake
(2006) suggested that case studies “reflect complex, situated, problematic relationships” (p. 10). A case study has two distinctive parts, the bounded system and the case. The bounded system is “a single entity” or “a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). In this study, the bounded system was the focus of SBR on the gifted population solely. The case referred to an “example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Stake defined (2006), a case by the word “quintain,” which he characterizes as “an object of phenomenon or condition to be studied” (p. 6). For this case study, there were three sites, the three middle schools in North Georgia, and the case is the teacher’s perspectives of SBR on gifted students at each site.

More specifically, this study was a multi-site case study because it used three different sites (three separate middle schools in North Georgia) and it examined a case, that of the educators’ perspectives of SBR on gifted student. For a multi-site case study to function, it was imperative that I viewed the sites individually and then collectively. Both Merriam (2009) and Stake (2006) suggested that for a case study to be successful a common element must thread the study together. For a multi-site case study, one needs “a word repeating the collective target,” (Stake, 2006, p. 6). For this case study, there were two words, gifted and SBR, which connect the cases. Stake (2006) also reported that in a multi-site case study, the researcher must “study what is similar and different about each case in order to understand the quintain better” (p. 6). By examining the cases for each site individually, generalizations between the three emerged.

This multi-site case study was instrumental because it “goes beyond the case” (Stake, 2009, p. 8). This means that the conclusions derived from this research applied to
situations outside the specific cases used in this study. For this study, therefore, I sought to understand the phenomenon or program that existed in multiple settings, not just examine a single particular or individual case. By collecting similar data from all three sites on the same subject, the information derived remains consistent in that it provided information about SBR and its effect on the gifted population. This focus constituted the case or quintain for this study. This multi-site approach tried to “tease out how the situation at each of the several different sites influences program activity or the phenomenon” (Stake, 2006, p. 29).

**Research Questions**

To help focus the study, the following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?

2. What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?

3. What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SBR?

4. What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was Harper County, Georgia (pseudonyms for the setting were used in this study), an affluent North Georgia county. Harper County serves over 37,000 students and employs over 4,200 full-time employees. Harper County is currently the ninth largest school district in the state, with 35 schools—19 elementary, nine middle, and five high schools. To help meet the needs of all students, Harper County
also established two alternative schools, one night academy, and an online program
(Harper County District Website, 2011).

Harper County encourages and implements SBR in all of its schools. Each year
teachers participate in professional development on such topics as Understanding by
Assessment for Learning (Guskey, O’Connor, & Stiggins, 2007) and several of
Marzano’s (2000) high strategies. Because of such training and county commitment to
SBR, teachers are currently evaluated using the Georgia State Standards Based
Classroom Rubric.

To help ensure that educators followed Standards Based Design and that they met
test accountability measures, Harper County also employed benchmark testing at the 9th
and 27th weeks to ensure that all students are meeting the standards. Each school used this
data to examine student strengths and weaknesses to guide future instruction.

This study used three middle schools from Harper County; they were South
Harper Middle School, Creekview Middle School, and Big Hill Middle School. As a
district, Harper County Schools are predominately affluent in comparison to surrounding
urban counties in the state. There are, however, differences in SES, student
demographics, and percentage of gifted students served in the different schools that
comprise Harper County. For this reason, I chose three schools that represent the
variances that occur within this one county to encompass a complete picture of Harper
County middle schools. Each school has a different SES, variances in race, and
percentage of gifted students. For example, South Harper Middle School has the highest
SES, Creekview Middle School has the second highest SES, and Big Hill Middle School
has the lowest SES. When one views the three schools as a whole, a fairly well rounded representation of Harper County, as a complete district, was established. The demographics for each site are below.

**Site One, South Harper Middle School**

South Harper Middle School (SHMS) is a suburban middle school in Harper County. This school first opened in 1990, and it currently houses 841 students in grades six, seven, and eight. South Harper’s economically disadvantaged students comprise only around 5.72% (see Table 1) of the entire student population. South Harper also has a prominently White student population with Asian, Hispanic, Black and Multi-Racial sub-populations rounding out the total student. In addition, at South Harper Middle School, the gifted population comprises 35.20% (see Table 3) of the total student population.

In the area of academics, the school offered its population a variety of levels of instruction. There are general education classes as well as advanced, remedial, inclusion, and gifted classes offered in all four main academic areas of Language Arts, Science, Math, and Social Studies. In addition, South Harper Middle School also offers the student population electives, such as in physical education, art, music, musical theatre, computers, technology, careers, and newspaper. To help achieve student success at South Harper Middle School, the faculty offers extended day instruction and extra morning work sessions. The faculty of South Harper Middle School consists of 49 certified educators currently employed in a teaching role. The administration of the school currently consists of one principal and two assistant principals.

I chose this site, South Harper Middle School, primarily because this site has participated in full implementation of SBR in its everyday functions for three years now
under the current administration. Several county and on-site professional development sessions were part of the common experience for all teachers to ensure the transition into standards based learning. In addition to its full incorporation of SBR, I chose this school due to its higher SES. Between the three middle schools chosen, South Harper Middle School has the highest SES and the highest percentage of gifted students. This demographic served as a comparison between the other two middle schools.

**Site Two, Creekview Middle School**

Creekview Middle School (CVMS), is a suburban middle school in Harper County. Creekview Middle School opened in 1998, and it currently houses 1,166 students in grades six, seven, and eight. Creekview’s economically disadvantaged students comprise only around 11.33% (see Table 1) of the entire student population. Creekview Middle School also has a prominently White student population with Asian, Hispanic, Black, and Multi-Racial sub-populations rounding out the total student population (see Table 2). Also, at Creekview Middle School, the gifted population comprises 26.42% (see Table 3) of the total student population.

In the areas of academics, the school offers its population of students a variety of levels of instruction. There are general education classes as well as advanced, remedial, inclusion, and gifted classes offered in all four main academic areas of Language Arts, Science, Math, and Social Studies. This school also offered special instructional classes in reading and math for students who failed to meet standards on state accountability tests. In addition, Creekview Middle School also offered the student population, classes in physical education, art, music, computers, technology, and drama. The faculty of
Creekview Middle School consisted of 65 certified educators currently employed in a teaching role. The school also currently had one principal and two assistant principals.

I chose this site for similar reasons to South Harper Middle School. The first and most important reason was that this site, too, had participated in the full implementation of SRB in its everyday function for five years now under the current administration. Several county and on-site professional development sessions serve to help the transition into standards based learning. In addition to these county and state mandates, teachers, on-site at Creekview Middle School, currently post standards in the classroom, as well as incorporate them into teaching, so that students learn the verbiage of the standards. On-site professional training sessions have instructed teachers how to incorporate standards into learning activities and assessments. Since this training, the school adopted a no zero policy (a policy where teachers are not allowed to give a student a zero on an assignment) called The Power of “M” (the “m” standards for missing; the program allows for a tiered path for students to complete assignments) to ensure that all students learn curriculum and meeting standards. In addition to its full implementation of SBR, I chose this site due to its SES and percent of gifted population. Between the three middle schools used in the study, Creekview lied directly in the middle in the areas of SES and percentage of gifted students.

**Site Three, Big Hill Middle School**

Big Hill Middle School is the third site for this study. This school opened in 2006 and currently, houses 831 students in grade six, seven, and eight. Big Hill’s economically disadvantaged student population comprises 36.0 7% (see Table 1) of the total student population. Similar to Creekview Middle School and South Harper Middle School, Big
Hill Middle School has a predominantly White student population with Hispanic students and multi-racial students rounding out the total student population (see Table 2). Also, at Big Hill Middle School, the total gifted population accounts for 20.70% (see Table 3) of the total student population.

The current faulty at Big Hill Middle School consists of 55 certified teachers currently employed in a teaching role. This school has one principal and two assistant principals. In the areas of instruction, Big Hill Middle School also offers many levels of instruction. There are general education, remedial, advanced, inclusion, and gifted classes in all academic subjects. In addition, Big Hill also added Title 1 classes in the areas of Math and Language Arts; they also added a literacy (basic reading skills) class to help struggling students meet state standards on accountability tests. Due to the higher number of Hispanic students, administration also offered ESOL classes to help those students learning English. In addition to academic and support classes, Big Hill offers art, physical education, technology explorations, band, and chorus/music to its student population.

I chose this site for two main reasons. Being from the same county as South Harper Middle School and Creekview Middle School, this school has equally implemented standards based classrooms. Professional development and county expectations are similar in relation to how standards based reform materializes in this school so that teachers positively directly influence student learning. Big Hill Middle School, just like South Harper Middle School and Creekview Middle School, also participates in county on-site professional development to ensure the transition of teachers into standards based reform and its upkeep for years to come. In the classrooms, teachers incorporate standards into instruction and assessment. This happens on site as
well as through county driven professional development at various locations. Since this full implementation of the standards based classrooms, Big Hill Middle School has adopted many ways to ensure students do the work. For example, they created Thursday Academy, a program where students stay after school to complete missed work. Teachers also utilize early morning help sessions, after school detention, and parent contact to ensure the completion of work so that students master standards. In addition to the implementation of SRB, I also chose Big Hill Middle School due to its SES and percentage of gifted population. Big Hill Middle School had the lowest SES and the lowest percentage of gifted students served among the three chosen sites.
Table 1

_Economically Disadvantaged—Percentage of Participating Students_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Free Lunch</th>
<th>Reduced Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHMS</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVMS</td>
<td>9.06%</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHMS</td>
<td>31.24%</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)

Table 2

_Student Demographics—Percentage of Participating Students_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SHMS</th>
<th>CVMS</th>
<th>BHMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5.59%</td>
<td>7.12%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9.99%</td>
<td>3.43%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
<td>2.23%</td>
<td>3.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>78.48%</td>
<td>84.99%</td>
<td>81.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49.11%</td>
<td>47.68%</td>
<td>44.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.54%</td>
<td>53.23%</td>
<td>55.35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)

Table 3

_Gifted Students – Percentage of Participating Students_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SHMS</th>
<th>CVMS</th>
<th>BHMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals for Gifted Program</td>
<td>39.95%</td>
<td>29.67%</td>
<td>22.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Eligible for Gifted</td>
<td>35.55%</td>
<td>26.42%</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Served as Gifted</td>
<td>35.20%</td>
<td>26.42%</td>
<td>19.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)
Participants

The participants of this multi-case study were a purposeful sample of teachers and administrators from each of the three middle schools. The participants from each site fell into three different categories. The first sample from each school was teachers with gifted certification whose students were in a self-contained gifted class. The second sample consisted of general education teachers who have some advanced/gifted students in their classrooms, as well as students who are in general education classes. The third sample consisted of administrators who had an oversight of both gifted and average students outside of the academic classroom. This “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). For this reason, I selected teachers with both full time gifted experience as well as teachers with both gifted and general education experience so that my data covered a full range of educational classroom experiences. The experiences of a general education teacher versus a teacher who exclusively teaches students who are gifted might be different, so it was imperative to assess the perspectives of both. To secure the complete picture of various perspectives of SBR on gifted students at all three sites, I solicited feedback from one administrator of each school who had a different view and interaction with students on a daily basis.
**Table 4**

*Participants at South Harper Middle School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanche</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlene</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jo</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)

**Table 5**

*Participants at Creekview Middle School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maudie</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)
### Table 6

*Participants at Big Hill Middle School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Izzy</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexie</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callie</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teddy</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)

**Teachers for Interviews**

Stake (2006) suggested for qualitative research that the researcher “will usually draw a purposive sample of cases, a sample tailored to the study” (p. 24). For this study, I purposefully chose twelve teachers with gifted certification who taught self-contained, subject specific gifted classes in order to assess their perspectives of SBR on the gifted child. This purposeful sample was appropriate for this study because the teachers interviewed offered valuable information due to their extensive training and experience in the gifted classroom. At each site, approximately 6–10 teachers with gifted certification teach self-contained gifted classes. I chose three of these teachers per site to represent this small population. By having three teachers and one administrator to interview per site, saturation of the data occurred.

The interviews took place at each site, and they were audio taped for accuracy. I immediately took post-interview notes to record impressions or attitudes that the
participant might not have expressed verbally or that might not have transferred to the transcript. Merriam (1998) suggested that “These reflections (post-interview notes) might contain insights suggest by the interview, descriptive notes on the behavior, verbal and non-verbal, of the informant, parenthetical thoughts of the researcher, and so on” (p. 88). The interview used a set of open-ended researcher-created questions based upon the literature used in the study. The purposeful sample of teachers for these interviews represented all grade levels (6th–8th) at all three sites, as well as all core academic areas. I selected these teachers due to their knowledge and experience with gifted students as well as their knowledge and immersion in SBR, for each of these teachers had at least 3 years of experience in both gifted education and SBR.

**Administrators for Interviews**

To continue to assess perspectives of SBR on gifted students, I selected one administrator from each school for an interview. Each school has a three-administrator team—one principal and two assistant principals. For this reason, I purposefully selected this sample because by selecting one administrator per school saturation of the data from this perspective occurred.

I chose these administrators due to their number of years of educational experience and SBR knowledge, but also due to their leadership position within each school. The administrators selected had at least three years of experience in an educational leadership role. The interview questions were similar to the teacher interviews by using a similar set of open-ended researcher-created questions. These interviews were audio taped for accuracy, and in addition to that, I took supplemental notes.
Teachers for Questionnaires

Four general education teachers from each of the three schools completed a questionnaire that assesses their perspectives of SBR on gifted students. This sample, too, was purposeful as proposed by Stake (2006), for this sample was the equivalent to the sample of teachers that I interviewed. There were twelve teacher questionnaires, and this allowed saturation to occur with this data as well.

These four teachers from each site were general education academic teachers from all three grade levels (6th–8th). I selected these teachers due to their years of experience teaching and immersion in SBR, for they all had at least three years in both. I also chose these teachers because they, as teachers of general education classes, saw a variety of students (on level, below level, and advanced) on a daily basis and their perspectives might be different from those only immersed with gifted learners every day.

Procedures

Teachers and administrators from Harper County were the selected participants of this study. After receiving permission from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A) as well as consent from each principal of the three middle schools, I electronically contacted each principal to acquire a list of participants who met the specific criteria for the research. With a list established, I electronically contacted four general education teachers, three gifted teachers, and one administrator per school to seek their interest and permission to participate in the study. Most participants quickly responded with an affirmative; two participants declined, but with the help of the principals, I quickly found qualified replacements for those spots in the study. Those
who affirmed their desire to participate signed the appropriate Consent Forms 
(Appendices B, D, and E) formally indicating their intent to participate in the study.

I scheduled the interviews and questionnaires immediately (within 3 weeks). I conducted all interviews at each site during one day; this took a total of three days. Prior to visiting each school, I electronically delivered the questionnaires to each participant, and on the day of the school visit, I retrieved the questionnaires from each participant and asked them to initial the audit form. During the interview process, conversations were audio recorded on my iPhone to ensure all data represented the participants’ exact words and intent. Later, the same day of the interview, I downloaded the interview onto my computer and saved it to my password protected flash drive. I deleted all other recordings (except the one held on the flash drive).

Due to my personal employment at site two, CVMS, as a gifted Language Arts teacher, there was a chance for bias. Stake (2006) said, “It is an ethical responsibility for us as case researchers to identify affiliations and ideological commitments that might influence our interpretations” (p. 86). To overcome bias, I personally acknowledged my biases toward the topic and excluded them during the data analysis portion of the study. To do this, I took reflective notes during the data collection process and the data analysis process to account for my own questions, thoughts, and revelations (Appendix C). Being a teacher of gifted students, I saw the effects of SBR on my students every day in the classroom. Students in today’s standards based classrooms performed well on rote-memory information and any form of standardized tests but getting the gifted child to extend his or her knowledge in an area could be difficult due to the unfamiliarity of this type of exploration for the gifted student. I noted and acknowledged these biases so that I
could hear the participants’ feelings over my own thoughts and feelings. In addition to
the self-reflective noting, the focus group analysis and the peer review also served as a
member checking system to ensure that my personal biases did not cross over into the
data analysis.

After each school visit, I transcribed each interview and saved it on the password
protected flash drive. During the interviews, I took some notes to record any impressions
to the discussion, but the bulk of the information gathered from the interviews sourced
from the audio recordings, and subsequently, the transcript. Once I transcribed the
interviews, I emailed each participant the transcript to complete a member check of the
data collected. All participants responded with no to minimal revisions. For example,
three participants revised their interviews to clarify their thoughts due to the nature of the
stream of consciousness of a transcript.

After all interviews and questionnaires were initially analyzed using Stake’s
(2006) cross-case analysis approach by first looking at the individual cases and then
looking at all the cases together to create merged findings, I organized three focus groups,
one from each school. For the focus groups, I chose participants based on their initial
response (interview or questionnaire) to the study. I chose a participant because he or she
offered detailed information and was a rich source of data. I emailed these individuals to
invite them to participate in a focus group at their respective school. I invited a maximum
of four participants to join each focus group. The focus group meetings occurred at a time
that was agreeable for all participants. The focus groups in this study served a dual role of
providing new and varying perspectives to the data analysis discovered through the initial
interviews and questionnaires and it added elaboration to the data. These meetings were also audio recorded to aid in gathering precise data.

I added the new data from the focus groups to the merged findings. From there, I assimilated data from all cases to form assertions. The final stage in data analysis was the examination of the assertions in light of each theme (research question) in order to derive the final assertions and findings for this study. To secure credibility, I enlisted two participants, who showed the most interest in this research study, to join me in a peer review of the final assertions.

**Researcher’s Role**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that the

Human instrument is capable to grasping and evaluating the meaning of differential interaction. All instruments are value based on interaction with local values, but only the human being is in a position to identify and take into account these resulting biases. (pp. 39–40)

Creating a study using the human as the instrument for all aspects of the study can bring up the issue of bias. To begin, I am currently a faculty member of Creekview Middle School serving as a 7th/8th grade Gifted Language Arts teacher. I have worked within this school for the past 12 years. My teaching began in the 2000–2001 school year, so most of my teaching experience is post NCLB. All of my on-site training directly related to SBR with only a brief picture of teaching prior to NCLB and its focus on SBR. The slow immersion that accompanied the transition into SBR allowed me to get a picture of teaching with and without SBR.
In addition to the above, as a teacher of gifted students, I have personal experiences with the impact of SBR on the gifted population in terms of the change in instruction, curriculum, and assessment that has come since its implementation. Regardless, I collected, reported, and analyzed the data in an objective manner.

In addition, as a researcher in this study, I hoped to convey an environment of comfort and trust with my participants. I did this through my personal relationship (non-supervisory) with some of the participants, as well as through my level of expertise as a middle school teacher of gifted students for those who were unfamiliar with me. To accomplish this, I created a positive environment through my empathetic tone and intent interest in each participant’s perspectives.

**Data Collection**

Merriam (2009) stated that “data are nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment,” so “whether or not a bit of information becomes data in a research study depends solely on the interest and perspective of the investigator” (p. 84). Qualitative design relies heavily upon quotations, feelings, thoughts, and perspectives of participants, so for this study to capture these qualitative bits of information, this case study employed the use of interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups to gather data that led to solid research conclusions. Before I collected any data, I gained IRB permission and informed consent from each participant.

**Interviews**

Collecting data through interviews is “the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). The three main types of interviews according to Merriam (2009) are highly structured/standardized,
semi structural, and unstructured/informal. Interviews for this study were semi-structural because the questions will be “a mix of more or less structured interview questions” that uses flexibility and are “guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored” (p. 89). For the interviews with teachers and administrators, I used standard open-ended questions to facilitate the interview. These questions “reduced the bias that can occur from having different interviews from different people” (Patton, 1987, p. 13). The questions were truly open-ended due to their lack of predetermined answer selection. During the interview, I asked the questions exactly in order to keep uniformity in all the interviews, and I worded the interview questions (explained on pages 70–73) in a way that focused more on opinions and less on feelings (Patton, 1987).

For this study, three teachers of gifted students and one administrator from each site participated in interviews to examine their perspectives of SBR on the gifted child. During the interview, teachers addressed demographic information, such as the years of teaching experience, knowledge of SBR, years at the site, years of teaching gifted students or leading a school, and level of education. This was important because it solidified that the participants were qualified to participate in study. The interview with teachers and administrators were audio taped to aid in exact quotations and reliability issues, as well as to allow me to participate fully in the interview process. Immediately after the interviews, I recorded notes on impressions and behaviors derived from my time with the participants as this type of behaviors or impressions might not show up in transcriptions. Merriam (1998) suggested the “post-interview notes allow the investigator to monitor the process of data collection as well as begin to analyze the information
itself” (p. 88). I also transcribed and saved the recorded interview data in a password-protected folder that I will destroy three years from the completion of the research.

The interview questions (attached in the appendix F and G) consisted of the teachers’ and administrators’ knowledge and familiarity with SBR as well as their perspectives of how SBR affects American education, influences the curriculum and instruction, and impacts the gifted child in particular. These interviews sought to answer research question one (What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students on SBR on the gifted child?), research question two (What are the administrators’ perspectives on SBR on the gifted child?), research question three (What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SRB?) and research question four (What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?).

**Interview questions.** The following questions guided interviews with teachers and administrators. I designed these questions based on the literature collected for the study and led the interview process.
Table 7

*Interview Questions*

1. In your own words, define and explain what you know about standards based reform.

2. How has standards based reform altered American education? Do you find this positive or negative? Why?

3. What are you perspectives on how curriculum and instruction specifically have been altered due to standards based reform?

4. Has the overall change of standards based reform been positive, negative, or a combination of both? Please explain.

5. What are the unintended consequences or effects that have emerged since the implementation of standards based reform?

6. In your opinion, what style of teaching, curriculum, instruction, and manner of assessment do you feel is best for gifted students?

7. Do you feel that standards based reform addresses the needs of the gifted learner? Why or why not?

8. What effects do standards based reform have on the gifted child?

9. Do you find these effects to be positive or negative? Why?

The purpose of including a question pertaining to knowledge on SBR was due to the view that in American education there are numerous perspectives on how to interpret the standards based movement as well as its legislation NCLB (Berliner, & Nichols, 2008; Cauley et al., 2008; Chapman, 2007; Fuller et al., 2007; Gunzenhause, 2003; Valesey, 2002). The laws and legislation are open for interpretation by states, systems, and especially, by individual administrators and teachers. Different perspectives of the concept of SBR might be slightly different, so questions one and two aimed to get a base definition for each participant.
Questions three, four, and five also offered generalized impressions of the standard based movement. SRB has not only altered testing and accountability measures; it has also altered and changed curriculum and instruction (Gentile, & Lalley, 2009; Bridgeland et al., 2007; Daggett, 2005). To lump SRB into one general question solely would miss some key components to its build and function. Breaking apart the other pieces (curriculum and instruction) of SBR serves to identify specific areas that the participant feels are working or needs to change; therefore, question three hopes to do this. Questions four and five sought to uncover feelings specifically on SBR for the general population and allowed the participants to respond in a positive, negative, or neutral manner with explanation (Beisser, 2008; Neal, & Schanzenbach, 2007). In the current literature, unintended consequences are numerous and widely discussed. Therefore, the questions served to analyze the participants’ views of unintended consequences and compliment the current academic research used in this study.

Question six was included to allow for an easier and smoother transition between general questions over SRB’s effect on American education and the specific focus of gifted education. By allowing the participant to answer question six, he or she will have to shift his or her thinking to how the gifted child learns best. By solely focusing on the best instruction, assessment, and curriculum for gifted students, the participants were able to focus more clearly on the following questions that melded both aspects (SBR and gifted education) together.

The final three questions (seven, eight, and nine) sought specifically to address the perspectives of the gifted child’s experience due to SBR. The literature, too, suggested that SBR and NCLB lowered achievement of the gifted child and stifled their
academic growth (Assouline et al., 2004; Avery, Brown, Stambaugh, VanTassel-Baska, & Worley., 2006; Bridgeland et al., 2007; Burroughs et al., 2010; Callahan et al., 2009; Cauley et al., 2008; Cloud, 2007; Grgich, 2009). The participants’ perspectives of SRB in general might be one way, but their perspectives on gifted might be another since SBR’s and NCLB’s purpose was to help the lower end of the educational spectrum achieve success. Questions five through eight, thereby, allowed the participants to examine SBR on the gifted child by evaluating the curriculum and instructional changes as well as assign feelings, such as positive, negative, or neutral to their perspectives.

**Questionnaires**

Researcher created questionnaires assessed the general education teachers’ perspectives on SBR of the gifted student. Four general education teachers from each site completed this questionnaire (see Appendix H). Two qualitative research experts evaluated this questionnaire for reliability and a lack of bias. The experts indicated that some wording needed changing for clarity to solicit appropriate responses. I made the changes and sent the questionnaire back to the two experts for final approval.

The questionnaire focused on the general education teacher’s views of SBR and how it altered American education as well as how SBR had affected curriculum, instruction, and the gifted child. Participating teachers addressed demographic information, such as years of teaching experience, years at the site, and level of education in order to secure that the participants were qualified to participate in the study. The questionnaires were open-ended and asked for opinions or knowledge in a descriptive manner to capture authentic responses. The questions within the questionnaire had a structure and a sequence similar to the interview questions as stated above.
1. In your own words, explain what you know about standards based reform.

2. How do you think standards based reform altered American education?

3. What are your perspectives/opinions of standards based reform?

4. How have curriculum and instruction specifically been altered by standards based reform?

5. Do you think the overall change of standards based reform positive, negative, or both? Why?

6. Are there any unintended effects or consequences that you have seen since standards based implementation?

7. In your opinion, what style of curriculum, instruction, and manner of assessment do you feel is best for the gifted student?

8. Do you feel that standards based reform addresses the needs of the gifted learner? Why or why not?

9. What effects do standards based reform have on the gifted child? Do you find these effects to be a positive or negative change? Why?

Question one allowed the participant to express his or her knowledge of SBR; this is especially helpful because educators can sometimes interpret SBR and some of its components quite differently, so gathering the precise working knowledge of SBR of each participant is helpful. Questions two and three shifted the focus from the participant to a holistic view of SBR and how it had affected American education. This question also solicited opinions of the impact of SBR, and the assessment of the participants’ opinion was vital to interpret the participant’s perspective.
Question four allowed the participant to view the two main components of SBR (curriculum and instruction) separately rather than holistically, as previous questions do. By breaking up the two components of curriculum and instruction, participants had the opportunity to examine the specific changes that occurred and how their opinions had changed due to these two components. I viewed these two components separately because by solely addressing SBR’s impact on education in a generalized question, the participant also might overlook the individual aspects that comprise SBR; this question prevents that issue.

Questions five and six moved the participants’ thoughts to an evaluative state. The questionnaire asked the participant to quantify their perspectives on the SBR movement in a negative, positive, or neutral aspect. This allowed the participant to determine the true, according to the participant, impact of SBR’s effect on American education.

Questions seven, eight, and nine merged previous opinions and thoughts about SBR in general to the more specific realm of gifted education. Question seven began by asking the participants the best method, according to the participant, to reach the gifted. By forming an opinion on how best to teach gifted students, the participants then transferred their answers to question seven into their analysis on how SBR matches what is most appropriate for gifted students. With this answer in mind, the next two questions (question eight and nine), asked the participant to examine fully the relationship between gifted education and SBR. These final questions allowed the participant to merge their holistic thoughts on SBR’s effect on American education to those of a more specific area, gifted education. The flow of the questions in this questionnaire was appropriate because
the sequence of questions allowed the participant holistically to view SBR and its impact, and it then filtered the participant’s opinion into the more specific focus of how that change to SBR has directly altered gifted education in America today.

**Focus group**

Three focus groups served to complete the triangulation of my data. Carlsen and Glenton (2011) defined a focus group as “a method of collecting research data through moderated group discussion based on the participants’ perceptions and experience of a topic decided by the researcher” (p. 1). The purpose of the focus groups was to offer a different perspective on data analysis because the “emphasis is on the interaction between the participants rather than between the moderator or researcher and the participants” (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011, p. 1). Thus, the focus groups in this study also offered new and varying perspectives to the data analysis discovered through the initial interviews and questionnaires, but it also served to add elaboration to the data, so its purpose was dual. The focus groups for this multi-site case study comprised of no more than six teachers at each site (who have previously participated in the study through either interview or questionnaire). I chose the number and selection of participants based upon two factors: (a) those whose responses in the previous data collection tools have been the most helpful and might be able to enrich their responses even more, or (b) those whose responses in the previous data collection tools seem vague or needs further clarification. I did not invite administrators so that teachers would feel more comfortable in expressing their true thoughts and opinions.
Table 9

*Participants of the Focus Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHMS</td>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blanche</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVMS</td>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHMS</td>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Izzy</td>
<td>Teacher of Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>General Ed Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(District Website, 2011)

During each focus group, I gave the participants the merged findings (Worksheet Three, Appendix K) from the questionnaires and interviews as well as Worksheets One and Two (Appendices I and J) from their particular site to aid in discussion. I derived the guiding questions for the focus group from the data gathered through the questionnaires and individual interviews for the express purpose of ensuring saturation of the data. From their responses to the guiding questions and subsequent discussion, I collected new impressions and data on my research questions. In addition to taking notes on the participants’ thoughts, I also audio recorded this meeting so that I had accurate data that I could refer back to during my final post analysis. This last piece of data served to add validity to all four of my research questions.
**Focus group discussion.** To acquire the participants for the focus group, I emailed participants at each site to inquire about their willingness to participate. I purposefully selected the participants based on their eagerness in the study and their candid and detailed answers to my previous questions during the interviews or questionnaires. For the focus group at South Harper Middle School, there were three participants (all teachers of gifted students). Four participants joined the focus group at Creekview Middle School that included two teachers of gifted students and two general education teachers. Finally, at Big Hill Middle School, there were three participants (two teachers of gifted students and one general education teacher.

During each of the focus groups, I gave the participants a copy of the merged findings (Worksheet Three/Appendix K), their own school’s individual analysis (Worksheet Two/Appendix J), and a copy of the focus group questions (Appendix L). During the focus group, I took notes on impressions, and I voice recorded each focus group using an iPhone. After each focus group, I downloaded the voice recordings to my computer and then to a password protected flash drive. I deleted all other recordings, except those on the password protected flash drive. Using the voice recording, I transcribed each focus group, and later emailed the group a copy of the transcript for verification.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is “a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 177). Yin (1994) also defined it as the process of “examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise
recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 167). To Stake (2006), data analysis is categorical; it involves aggregation and then direct logical interpretations of that data. For the purpose of this study, I used Stake’s (2006) analytic procedure of cross-case analysis to interpret and generalize the study’s findings at multi-sites. Stake (2006) defined cross-case analysis as an examination of “what is common across the cases not what is unique to each,” and it is this holistic perspective that the study seeks to achieve (p. 39). The comparison that occurs in this data analysis is not to expose the differences in each case. For a multi-case study “is not a design for comparing cases” because “the cases studied are a selected group of instances chosen for better understanding of the quintain,” so the study examined what is similar at each site, in order to, better comprehend the quintain (Stake, 2006, p. 83).

**Individual Case and Cross-Case Analysis**

Merriam (2009) defined coding as “the process of making notations next to bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research questions,” and coding is described as open when “you are open to anything possible” (p. 178). For this reason, this study employed open coding to analyze data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. For example, when analyzing the questionnaires, interviews, and/or focus groups, I looked at each question individually and compared the responses per participant. I made notes on similarities of each participant’s answer and noted any gross differences in answers (there were few differences on occasion, but not many). To do this, I jotted down words, phrases, or full quotes that the participants used to answer the question and then to make form my findings, I focused on the similarities of the responses. I followed the procedure for each data collection tool.
Using cross-case analysis, the first step in data analysis was to create a worksheet; this worksheet was known as Worksheet One (Appendix I). This worksheet listed the themes of the research; these themes, as described by Stake (2006), were the same as the study’s research questions. I used Worksheet One periodically in the data analysis process as the need to compare the results back to the themes occurred. To begin the coding and categorizing of the data from the interviews and questionnaires, Stake recommended using a worksheet, known as Worksheet Two (Appendix J), and it analyzed each case separately; there were three separate worksheets, one for each site, for this step. This process helped in discovering the findings that Stake (2006) defined as the answers to the themes (research questions) discovered in each separate case. By using these two worksheets (1 and 2), I viewed each case separately to determine which case produced information that supported the answering of each theme, for some would provide better information for some themes than others.

Once the separate findings were secure in all three cases, the cross-analysis began. To do this, Stake (2006) recommended using a Worksheet, known as Worksheet Three (Appendix J). Worksheet Three generated themed based assertions from each case. This matrix of cross-case analysis used information from Worksheet Two led to merge findings from the cases overall, and it was at this point, that I gathered the analysis, thus far, and presented it to the focus group for further insight.

With the initial merged findings secured, I formed three focus groups, one from each site. I gave the participants at each focus group Worksheets One and Two from their particular site, as well as my initial merged findings found on Worksheet Three to help with group facilitation. The group discussed possible new meaning, importance, or clarity
of the information. The focus group also served to elaborate and enrich the data. All questions and discussions for the focus group focused on the merged findings from the interviews and questionnaires. I audio recorded all information gathered and took field notes.

**Focus Group Analysis**

Once the focus groups concluded, I reviewed the new data, and next, I re-evaluated the new information from the focus group using Worksheets 2 and 3. By adding the focus group’s input, the final stages, forming assertions, of the data analysis began. The focus group analysis also served as a form of member checking of the study and aided in credibility.

**Assertions**

To create the final assertions, I assembled all the data collected from the focus group and compared it to the questionnaires and interviews. I re-analyzed the merged findings again by using Stake’s (2006) suggested Worksheet Four (Appendix M), which is a worksheet that helps to devise theme-based assertions from merged findings and is a modified version of Stake’s (2006) Worksheet 5 B (p. 59). Stake (2006) defined assertions in a cross-case analysis as “findings about the quintain” (p. 42). Using Worksheet Four (Appendix M) allowed me the opportunity to do this and allowed me to aim at “emphasizing the common relationships across the case” (Stake, 2006, p. 39).

To complete this, I once again looked for common themes across the case. When this was complete, I ranked the assertions by importance and matched to the themes (research questions). I followed Stake’s (2006) reminder that assertions made about the quintain by taking “evidence from the case studies to show how uniformity or disparity
characterizes the quintain” (p. 40). This process was less coordinated, and it was a more “loose confederation or less a simple pattern and a more mosaic system” (Stake, 2006, p. 41). With the assertions matched and rated, finally, I used Stake’s (2006) suggested Worksheet Five (Appendix N), which is a multi-case assertion worksheet that lists the assertions, the theme, and then evidence to the sites, to create a final list of findings for the study. When I examined Worksheet Five (Appendix N), I scrutinized that modification, number, depth, and/or clarity were based on evidence and backed by evidence because “the evidence that persuaded the researcher needs to accompany each assertion,” and those assertions need to have “logical persuasion” (Stake, 2006, p. 41). When I secured the final assertions, I numbered the final assertions, such as assertion one, assertion two, and so on. With final assertions listed, numbered, and supported by evidence, the last step was to use the assertions to answer the themes (research questions).

Once all the final analysis was completed, I created a document with all my data and emailed it to two participants from site two, Creekview Middle School so that they could check my analysis in a peer review. I chose these two participants because they are my colleagues, and they would feel most comfortable offering advice on the study. In addition to this, they also represented the sample participants. For example, one colleague was a teacher of the gifted, and one was a general education teacher. This peer review allowed another perspective on my conclusions to see if I had made any inaccuracies or incorrect inferences. After taking their suggestions, I looked at my findings to make sure that the assertions corresponded to the general education teachers’ perspectives. Ten final
assertions emerged from this study. The last step in my analysis was to take the thematically matched assertions and use them to explain the final research themes.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness can be an issue in qualitative research due to its subjective nature; however, the activities such as “triangulating data, doing debriefing, and developing and maintaining an audit trail are all directed either to increase the probability that trustworthiness will result or to making it possible to assess the degree of trustworthiness after the fact” (Glaser, 2002, p. 44). Qualitative researchers should “practice reflexivity in qualitative inquiry” and should “consider how habits and dispositions might influence the decisions they make in carrying out their research” (Hunt, 2010, p. 70). The conscious implementation of this makes qualitative research more effective and reliable.

**Credibility**

In this study, I established credibility by the richness of the data gathered. To secure credibility, I employed open-ended questions in the interviews, the questionnaires, and the focus groups so that detailed descriptive answers surfaced to later inform research conclusions. Finally, following a well-known process designed by Robert Stake (2006), the data analysis served to increase the credibility of the study. In addition to the credibility of the data analysis process, the focus groups that acted as a check system of preliminary findings to ensure that the data was reliable and credible.

**Member checking.** I also continued credibility through member checking. Member checking is verification that the research’s data analysis is correct and that it occurred in the fashion that I reported. Shenton (2003) stated verification is a process that
evaluates “the investigator’s emerging theories and inferences as these were formed during the dialogue” (p. 68). For verification of this study, I solicited and received feedback from each participant in the analysis stage to check the accuracy of the interview notes, transcription, and summary. The participants reviewed these notes to ensure that the notes were accurate based upon their recollection about the interviews.

**Data triangulation.** Data triangulation is also important for credibility. The triangulation of data was important because for data to be supported in three different ways it needed to be saturated in the research. Stake (2006) stated that readers want assurance that the researcher is not oversimplifying the data and that the meaning interpreted is the one conveyed. By assuring that the correct meaning of data interpretation, there was data triangulation in the study. In addition to Stake, Merriam (2009) defined triangulation as “comparing and cross-checking data collected” (p. 216). With qualitative research, the researcher, instruments, and analysis all stem from the human instrument, which has bias programmed into it, so the triangulation of the data was important so that confirmability and credibility were determined (Shenton, 2003). For this research, I established data triangulation due to the use of multiple data collection tools and three different groups of participants. For example, there were three different groups of participants used in the study. They were teachers who solely teach gifted classes, teachers who teach general education, and administrators. The number of qualitative data analysis tools and number of participants used in the research was adequate to establish the credibility and dependability of the data collected and the interpretations of its findings.
Dependability

In addition to securing credibility, I also established dependability. I created the dependability of the study with the use of participating teachers and administrators who were entrenched in SBR and who had a stake in the education of gifted students. In addition to this, my role as educator (a teacher at site two, Creekview Middle School and a teacher within Harper County) and my personal, collegial and non-supervisory relationship with my participants also served as dependability for the study.

An audit trail, which I utilized, added more support for the dependability of the study. The purpose of this study was to examine thoroughly the qualitative perspectives of teachers and administrators on SBR’s effect on the gifted population. The use of interview transcripts, as well as interview and focus group summary notes were a very important as a source of data. Additionally, the accuracy of the times and dates of each interview, focus group, or questionnaire was equally important to firmly establish the trustworthiness of the study. For the interview data that includes field notes, I labeled them with times and dates as well as with participants’ signatures to verify that the interviews and focus groups occurred in an accurate and timely manner. I maintained these data in a notebook to keep track of the times and dates to ensure credibility and dependability. Also, included in the audit trail of the research were the times and dates of the delivery and return of the questionnaires from the teachers. With the audit trail, I had firmly established credibility because the participants verified the validity of my interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. Overall, the dependability of my research relied on context (my familiar role as educator), setting (participating schools that are
deeply entrenched in SBR with a high gifted population), and the audit trail of the data collection.

**Confirmability and Transferability**

Finally, in this study, I established confirmability by the richness of the data and the outline of the data collection and analysis methods so that another researcher could replicate this study in another area. I secured transferability though the richness of the data so that an outside researcher could perform the same research and expect similar results if that researcher deems the environment similar to the setting of this study.

Furthermore, by collecting multiple pieces of data, I secured saturation so that what one participant says resonates with other participants. After the interviews and focus groups were completed and transcribed, I also allowed for member checking by emailing the participants of the interviews and focus groups a copy of the transcription to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. Equally, I used an audit trail of times and dates of questionnaire retrieval, interview sessions, and focus group participation.

**Ethical Issues**

I addressed ethical issues while conducting the research. First, I established confidentiality. Confidentiality is the agreement that the researcher has with his or her participants on how to gather information and data. First, the study referred to all participants and locations using pseudonyms only. In addition, I secured the data gathered, written and audio taped, at my house in a locked closet. All electronic files stayed on a password protected flash drive. I will keep these files for three years, and I will then destroy them. In addition to this, if a participant had withdrawn from the study for any reason, I would have immediately destroyed all data pertaining to that individual.
to secure privacy. In addition, I secured IRB approval before any research began. As a researcher, I was an ethical investigator and reported only the truth of my study and my findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Standards based reform has influenced American education since its implementation; it has caused states, districts, schools, administrators, and teachers to be accountable for student success each year (NCBL, 2001). However, this reform has forgotten one important group of the academic population, the gifted learners. The law does not include their academic success nor does it mandate their academic growth (NCLB, 2001). By mandating the acquisition of minimal standards, skills and knowledge that most gifted learners have already mastered prior to entering the classroom each year, the mandate does not consider the academic rigor of these gifted learners in any manner. In this chapter, I describe the purpose of the study, the reasoning and processes for the data analysis, answers to the study’s research questions, and finally, a summary of the findings in general.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multi-site case study was to explore and summarize the perspectives of educators in three middle schools in north Georgia on SBR and its direct effect on gifted learners. This study examined and investigated the viewpoints of administrators, general education teachers, and gifted teachers to access a broader base of perspectives in the educational setting. Using a cross-case analysis to find the similarities among each of the sites, I secured the findings for the case (quintain). The quintain, as defined by Stake (2006), is “an object phenomenon or condition to be studied” (p 6). With this said, the study sought to determine the holistic perspective of educators at all three sites, specifically on their perspectives of SBR’s impact on the gifted student.
The information was gathered, analyzed, and organized to answer the following guiding questions:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?
2. What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?
3. What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SBR?
4. What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?

**Data Analysis**

**Analysis of Questionnaire and Interviews**

The questionnaires and the interview questions for both teacher of the gifted and administrators reflected the same questions, so the analysis of those questions are below organized by the anchored questions.

**In your own words, define and explain what you know about standards based reform.** Teachers and administrators were very knowledgeable about SBR. Harper County has secured great professional development and work sessions that helped teachers and administrators understand the new demands and expectations of SBR and any mandates that trickled down from the national level.

Most teachers defined SBR as a movement that secured the mastery of minimum, basic required learning standards and required a uniformed manner on which to assess those skills. This movement was in response to the achievement gap that existed within the country as well as within several districts within the same state. By having uniformity, students receive the same opportunity in learning regardless their location.
Jean, a teacher of the gifted student, stated that SBR was a “reform holding school accountable for teaching the state curriculum and/or standards with a goal of uniformity of curriculum and instruction.” Addison, a teacher of the gifted, added that SBR “made sure that we (the U.S.) had consistency across the grade so that we didn’t have one teacher who went very, very deep and another one who barely skimmed the surface.” Finally, Alexandra, principal at Creekview Middle School supported this by saying “the SBR effort is to level that playing field in some respects so that if you are living in a city with a great system, your kids are ready for college, but also if you are living out in the country, your kids are ready for college. It is that consistency in trying to make sure that everyone has that minimum.”

How has standards based reform altered American education? Do you find this positive or negative? Most educators found SBR to be positive in the sense that it helps with consistency of the curriculum and assists in keeping the country equal in regards to what each child learns at each grade level. Therefore, it helps with uniformity of curriculum and assessment. For example, Louise, a veteran teacher of the gifted learner at Creekview Middle School, stated, “I think it (SBR) has focused a lot of structure in some teachers,” and has “made them teach what the state and nation says should be taught.” Additionally, May, an experienced general education teacher also at Creekview Middle School, concurred that “It (SBR) has caused teachers to focus more on content instead of fluff,” which fosters uniformity in all classrooms possible, and that is positive for education. Teachers also viewed SBR in a positive light because it keeps all teachers accountable for the same standards, and it helps reign in those teachers who tend to stray away from teaching the unfamiliar or uncomfortable.
In addition to teachers, all administrators at the three sites also found SBR to be quite positive as well. Alexandra, principal at Creekview Middle School, concluded, “I think overall it (SBR) was necessary, and it was positive when you look at it overall in that broad perspective.” As a whole, administrators were more likely to view SBR in a more favorable light than teachers, and offered fewer criticisms of the reform than the teachers offer. I presented this discrepancy in viewpoints between teacher and administrators that emanated from the study to the focus group for further clarification and investigation.

On the other hand, teachers viewed SBR negatively as well. Teachers felt that the standards were constricting to them and restricted some creativity of the classroom because the pacing of the curriculum is hurried. Therefore, two main negative alterations that teachers noted were teaching to the test and the hurried pace of the curriculum. Lee, a general education teacher at Creekview Middle School, supported this by saying “SBR has altered education in a way that, as educators, we teach to a test based upon the standards, and this sometimes has not allowed us to explore certain topics in depth as wanted or needed. There is a pretty strict guide to follow.” Suzanne, an experienced general education teacher, also noted, “Teaching to the test is a terrible thing, but we all do it to some extent.” On the same note, Charlene, a general education teacher at South Harper Middle School, concluded, “Curriculum and instruction seem to be focused around the concepts that can be easily tested using a standardized test.” Equally, Sue, another general education teacher at Creekview Middle School, reiterated, “curriculum and instruction have been hurt by SBR as it requires a teacher of a specific subject to move quickly through the curriculum to be sure that all standards have been taught by
state testing window.” Therefore, the instruction has been altered to teach items on the test, and those items are often taught quite quickly so that all the standards can be covered in the allotted time frame of the school year. The fast-paced nature of coverage of all the standards emanated from the research as a detriment to the education. For as Louise, a teacher of the gifted, stated, “We should grab teachable moments. We have lost that because we gotta get those standards covered.” Additionally, Stephanie, a general education teacher, stated

I think that while it has caused some American educators to focus and sharpen instruction on critical skills and in many cases, it (SBR) can provide clear expectations for teachers and students, the goal of the vast majority of teachers to simply raise test scores without improving instruction. In fact, teachers who are focused on raising test scores often sacrifice quality instruction. Therefore, if teachers and administrators are only worried about raising test scores, instruction will take a hit.

To help with the consistency of the standards and the fluidity of the assessments and instruction, all schools in the district impose common planning and the use of common assessment on all departments. This issue surfaced as another negative alteration from SBR. Most teachers found creating common assessments across academic levels to assess all students equally to be an educational hindrance, for most teachers found it hard to create common assessments with teachers who teach different levels of the same subject. Rose, a teacher of the gifted, said, “With the gifted kids, we test them differently, so when you create that common assessment, it is not giving you the depth that I think you need for them.” Ella, another general education teacher, concurred, “The pressure to
make the grade is what steers the classroom instruction, and as we know, that is a simple, bubble test, not true application.” Therefore, generating a common test typically results in mimicking state standardized tests, which is not beneficial for the gifted students. All teachers felt that these common assessments were harmful to the gifted learner and were a great source of frustration for teachers of gifted learners, as well as the general education child. This frustration was mainly due to the inability to find common ground for both academic groups that usually resulted in the common assessment’s focus being more toward the general education student, making the assessment too easy for the gifted learner. By developing such common assessments, teachers found that this practice flies directly in the face of teaching gifted learners because teachers should assess gifted learners beyond the standard, not directly on it.

What are your perspectives on how curriculum and instruction specifically have been altered due to standards based reform? Has the overall change to standards based reform been positive, negative, or both? Taking the perspective from above, teachers mainly viewed SBR’s impact to curriculum and instruction as negative. First, the curriculum, which is the standards, was viewed as shallow, lacking rigor, and quite arbitrary. Since teachers viewed the standards this way, increasing the depth and breadth of the curriculum for the gifted child remains up to the classroom teacher. Mary Jo, an experienced general education teacher, offered the perspective that “each student should be challenged on his or her own level, not on a standard,” and Charlene, another general education teacher, suggested, “Gifted students should be expected to apply their knowledge, rather than just to regurgitate what they may have memorized.”

Administrators also agreed that the standards could be shallow and lack rigor. Alexandra,
the principal from Creekview Middle School, stated that, “I’d be lying if I didn’t say that the breadth and depth of the standards didn’t concern me. It is deeper than it used to be, but it still seems shallow.”

Teachers also viewed standards as arbitrary in nature. Jean, 30-year veteran of gifted education, stated, “I think the standards are very arbitrary; it is a crapshoot to what is on the test. When you do an entire year of history, how can you reduce it to 70 questions on a test and have any equity in that? It is really hard to do.” April, a general education teacher, thought that “too many times the teachers are teaching to the test and checking off standards gone over or taught and not really dealing with the big picture.” Additionally, Maudie, another 30-year veteran teacher of the gifted, also stated, “A lot of teachers say we have dumbed down our curriculum. I don’t think that is an appropriate description. We haven’t dumbed it down; we’ve isolated facts without including other relevant and necessary elements. We are leaving out, not dumbing down.” Here, Maudie also noted the arbitrary nature of the standards and how the holistic vision of education or a discipline is missing for today’s child. For example, Jean, who teaches history, stated that “another thing that hurts kids, especially the gifted one, is that our education is dominated by facts and stuffing things into their heads instead of dealing with controversy and evaluation,” which are more important and higher levels of learning, especially for the gifted learner.

To summarize above, teacher perspectives on how curriculum has been changed due to SBR is through the introduction of the standards, which most feel are shallow, lacking in rigor, and unnecessarily arbitrary. Therefore, standards that teachers teach directly influence their perspectives of instruction. Mainly, to reiterate the viewpoint
from question two, instruction has changed to focus on the standardized test. With standards focused on testable facts, teachers felt that the instruction now focused on testing and covering content known to be on the test as well. Stephanie, a general education teacher at Creekview Middle School, reported that “Many weeks of instruction are currently developed to skimming the surface of skills that commonly appear on standardized test. Teachers have become more acquainted with questions that commonly appear on standardized test, and much instruction time in wasted on test-taking skills.” Additionally, Julia, a general education teacher from South Harper Middle School, also surmised, “I think that while it (SBR) has ensured that all students are receiving the same information, it has also made teachers teach to the test and taken the creativity away from teachers.” Therefore, standardized testing is the light that is currently guiding the curriculum and instruction in the classrooms in Harper County, and from the teachers’ perspectives, it is negatively influencing education.

**What are the unintended consequences or effects that have emerged since the implementation of standards based reform?** Some of the notable unintended consequences of SBR are in the above discussion. These are such consequences as the changes to the curriculum through the instruction of the standards, which teachers viewed as shallow, lacking in rigor, and arbitrary. Another consequence from above is the use of common assessment to evaluate all students, which results in the assessments becoming easier so that all students are able to access them. Finally, the last consequence, as mentioned earlier, is teaching to the test and creating instruction designed to funnel and highlight testable facts known to be on the test.
In addition to these previously noted, unintended consequences, two smaller unintended consequences also emanated from the research. They are stress and the lack of fun and creativity in learning. First, teachers felt that SBR increases the amount of stress on both the teacher and student, mainly due to the pressure of high stakes testing. Julia, a general education teacher from South Harper Middle School, observed that “teachers are so scared about one day of testing that they just hammer kids with practice tests and memorizing facts rather than letting them really know the material.” Also, Rose, an experienced teacher of the gifted learner, stated, “I think it (SBR) overall is negative. They (students) have a lot of pressure.” Students are pressured to pass the test, and teachers are stressed that student will not do well on the standardized test because some standard was not covered or the standard was assessed differently than presented in class. Jean, a teacher of the gifted, supported this as well by saying “when their (a school’s) yearly assessment by the state and their validation as a school hangs in the balance, it becomes all about the test; it is not what is best for kids but looking good as a school.” This yearly and overall stress of testing pressures is a consequence of the SBR; the pressure was probably not intentional, but the effects of such pressure as teaching to the test surfaced as an unintended consequence.

The second smaller unintended consequence is a reported lack of fun, creativity, and passion in the classroom due to the rigid structure of SBR. Louise, a gifted teacher at Creekview Middle School, stated that SBR has produced “less creativity on the part of the teacher and the student.” Maudie, a teacher of the gifted with more than three decades of experience, commented, “Everything now is cold. The vitality, the life, the pleasure, the enjoyment, the excitement of teaching is curtailed by pulling this piece of
the puzzle out and cover this, and then pull this out and cover that.” Rose, another veteran teacher of the gifted, reported that due to some of the loss of creativity and fun in learning that “it (SBR) builds resentment for a love of learning; I just think over all it (SBR) is negative. We need to look at that population (the gifted population) and do something different.”

To summarize, there are numerous unintended consequences of SBR found in this study. They are teaching to the test that does not promote higher order thinking skills, classroom instruction being replaced by teaching insolated and testable facts known to be on the test, as well as set of standards that some see as shallow, lacking in rigor, and arbitrary. In addition to these, two other unintended consequences are the stress places upon teachers and students to pass one test is massive and can make or break a school or school system, and finally, a decreased amount of fun, creative, and vibrancy in the classroom. The last unintended consequences aimed at how SBR directly effects the gifted population, and I discussed these effects below in the last question.

**In your opinion, what style of teaching, curriculum, instruction, and manner of assessment do you feel is best for gifted students?** The curriculum most fitted to the gifted child is one of depth, synthesis, and exploration. All teachers supported the perspective that gifted students are best assessed and instructed in open-ended discussions, projects, essays, and/or other creative endeavors that appealed to the interest of the child. For instance, teachers reported that discussion and Socratic methods are best to pull out the depth of information that a gifted child retains. Izzy, a teacher of the gifted at Big Hill Middle School, suggested that teachers should use “more participatory discussions” and “higher order thinking skills and essays” to stir thinking. Dorothy,
another teacher of the gifted from South Harper Middle School, also added that instruction for the gifted should be “more student directed,” which makes the learning more participatory on the part of that gifted child.

For assessments, teachers and administrators alike discussed using projects and performance based assessment to evaluate learning as the best option for the gifted learner. For example, Alexandra, principal of Creekview Middle School, suggested that she “preferred performances assessments for all kids but certainly for gifted kids because you are drawing on that deeper level when you make them do a performance.” Sophia, assistant principal at South Harper Middle School, reported that she thought “project based assessment are great for gifted learners.” Similarly, Rose, a teacher of the gifted, stated that “for assessment, I’m not all about these tests, tests, and tests. I’m more about showing, the projects, portfolios, and having the kids passionate and talking about everything.”

All educators in the study agreed that teachers should assessed gifted students in open-ended discussions, projects, essays, and/or other creative endeavors. However, the instruction that reportedly occurs most often in class is test taking skills, teaching to the test, and the subsequent dumping of content and isolated facts known to the on the test. This type of instruction does not always allow the gifted students the opportunity to think critically or creatively and demonstrate what they know and can do. For as Rose, a teacher of the gifted shared that she understands that “we have standardized things (tests) too,” but it is the “work product that they (students) create that is really the true assessment.” For, as Meredith another teacher of the gifted stated that performance based assessments “let them (students) break out of the confines of that multiple choice exam
and to let them explore and do what they need to do.” Stephanie, a general education teacher, pointed out that “the gifted student must have a rich learning environment of complex and challenging cognitive activities and tests must contain the same components; testing should be required to reflect the complexity of the learning,” but most of the time, it is not. Assistant principal at South Harper Middle School, Sophia stated, “I’m just afraid sometimes that assessments are limiting again cause we are assessing on standards, and for gifted students, I just think they have that ability to go beyond the assessment.”

**What effects does standards based reform have on the gifted child? Do you find these effects to be positive or negative? Why?** This last question gets to the heart of my study because it directly reflects the viewpoints of educators on how all these reforms are affecting the subpopulation of the gifted student. Most educators answered the second part of this question with an unhesitating “negative.” Most found SBR to be more of a benefit for the general education or special education student, not the gifted learner. Since most found SBR not to meet the needs of the gifted child, they did report some effects on the gifted child due to this. The main effects were lack of time to explore an area of interest to fully mastery that can lead to disengagement of learning, little or no incentive to push the gifted student beyond the standard, especially in a heterogeneous class, and finally, less critical thinking on part of the gifted students due to the current culture of curriculum and instruction.

First, teachers reported that due to the hurried pace of the curriculum and fear of not covering one aspect that might show up on the test, teachers are hesitant to allow students to explore subjects in depth or to their own desirability. For example, Lee, a
general education teacher, stated “SBR has altered education in a way that, as educators, we teach to the test based upon the standards, and this sometimes has not allowed us to explore certain topics in depth as wanted or needed.” All teachers then agreed that gifted students should work in an environment where they can explore, but instruction such as test-taking skills and teaching to the test content does not provide that opportunity.

Suzanne, a general education teacher, offered that “teachers must teach to the test in order for students to pass the test, so we do not have the time to explore or slow down the curriculum to allow for more differentiation. Teachers are then teaching to the lowest level students and the gifted students are often left behind.” Charlene, another general education teacher, supported this, too, by saying “Gifted students should be expected to apply their knowledge, rather than to just regurgitate what they have memorized,” and teaching to the test often requires low-level regurgitation and rote memorization. These types of instructional strategies do not allow the gifted child to explore or really dig into the meat of the discipline in any meaningful and creative manner that is best for them.

Gifted students, when presented with unchallenging tasks, may become disengaged and less motivated to learn. Rose, a teacher of the gifted, has observed, a lot more staring and gazing” in class and suggested that the gifted students “are not really on board as much as they were when you (teachers) can do all these fun things; they (gifted students) need creativity for it (learning) to mean valuable learning for them.” Blanche, another teacher of gifted students, lamented, “It is so sad because I really believe it is such a disservice to our society and our future by not taking these gifted students and giving them what they need.”
When students become disengaged in learning, their motivation and achievement also suffer. Therefore, another effect of SBR on gifted students that surfaced was the acceptance of status quo of the gifted students and the lack of any incentive to push them beyond the standard. This is especially true when the gifted child resides in a heterogeneous class with general education and struggling students. “Many gifted students are ready to move beyond the basics of standard, yet there is little push or incentive for teachers to teach more than what the standard calls for,” stated Charlene, a general education teacher at South Harper Middle School. April, another general education teacher, reported that, “passing is acceptable to most of my students,” even her gifted ones who are capable of so much more. Christina, a general education teacher as well, stated, “Standards based assessments are training him (a gifted child) to do just enough to make an A, not to work hard to get the best education possible.” As a result, teachers might not enrich the curriculum for gifted learners in the general education class due to the sheer number to general education and struggling students that take precedent in that class. Even in homogeneously gifted classes, gifted students might not get consistent enrichment due to the vagueness and lack of appropriate guide for the teacher to enrich the gifted classroom consistently. The standards give the teacher the minimum standards, and the enrichment is subject to the teacher and his or her ability and knowledge of what enrichment of the standard means. Some teachers suggested that some sort of guide needs to be given to encourage the consistent and appropriate enrichment of the gifted classes, so that enrichment and extension is consistent and therefore meaningful.
Teachers reported feeling torn between extending the standards/exploring topics and the quick need to cover the numerous standards and testable facts that might show up on the test; therefore, enriching of the standards might suffer for some gifted students. Jennifer, a teacher of the gifted, stated, “Sometimes, I feel like if this is my curriculum, how deep do I need to go? I don’t really know how deep I need to go in that particular thing because it is so vague.” Administration deemed that the enriching could be more fine-tuned at an executive level through some sort of enriching guide, but most believed that the teacher could and should enrich the curriculum individually in the classroom. Alexandra, principal at Creekview Middle School, suggested that SBR could address the needs of the gifted learner if the teacher instructs beyond the standard and views the standards as the floor and not the goal for the gifted child. However, how to do this enriching is vague and open for interpretation by the teacher.

The final effect of SBR on gifted learners is a lack of focusing on developing critical thinking skills. With such instructional methods as teaching to the test and teaching isolated strands of knowledge, the students become less active in their learning. Louise, a veteran teacher of the gifted, stated that, “I think we are losing kids’ abilities to think for themselves. They are learning what we tell them to learn and to regurgitate.” If the instruction and standards make no new demands on the gifted child, critical thinking skills suffer. One reason why they are suffering is due to the items mentioned previously, such as a rushed pace and teaching testable facts. For example, Addison, a teacher of the gifted, says that SBR has created “an emphasis on putting too many standards on this one grade, so these kids who like to make connections and like to know the whys and wherefores, do not get as much time to do those explorations. I don’t get as much time in
math to do some really complex problem solving,” for “there is just too many standards to cover. If I do that, then I have to pick what other standards I’m not going to cover.” In addition, Jean, a teacher of the gifted who teaches history, remarked, “I have no time for historical novels. I think one of the best ways to learn history is through novels, but it doesn’t fit the culture of SBR. The gifted kids are hurt with the constraints and with less enrichment particularly in reading.” It is this struggle of enriching and worries over the coverage of numerous standards that hinders the development of true critical thinking skills in the gifted students.

**Summary.** As stated earlier, I conducted this study at three separate sites in an affluent county in North Georgia. All three sites, while in the same district, had relatively different levels of socioeconomics. For example, site three, Big Hill Middle School, was a Title 1 school, and South Harper Middle School and Creekview Middle School were not. However, despite some varying differences in the socioeconomics of their school the educators stated and reported similar answers to the interview questions and the questionnaire. With this said, overall, the variances of the three different sites did not produce different results. In fact, all findings from each site were consistent despite the discrepancies in the make-up of the school population.

**Analysis of the Focus Groups**

**Focus group questions.** Once I completed data analysis for each site, the next step in my data analysis was to scrutinize the individual school’s analysis for commonalities, differing opinions, obvious conclusion, or outlying factors. I did this by looking using Stake’s recommended Worksheet Three (Appendix K) that merged the
findings per site. I used the data from Worksheet Three (Merged Findings) to form the focus group questions. They are as follows.
Table 10  
.Focus Group Questions

1. SBR builds resentment on part of the gifted child. What do you have to say about this finding? Do you agree? Why or why?

2. SBR takes out creativity in the classroom, which is vitally important for the gifted child. The gifted child needs creativity to make the learning meaningful. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. Teachers know that the gifted students need enrichment beyond the standard, but some are hesitant to do so because they fear falling behind the pace of curriculum and covering some testable standard that might show up on high-stakes standardized tests. Do you agree? What are your thoughts and experience?

4. SBR does not give a guide in which to follow for gifted students. Do you think there needs to be some guide in how to enrich the gifted students? Why or why not?

5. SBR creates an environment that takes out the vitality, life, and fun of learning. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

6. SBR makes the teacher more reflective of her practice. Do you find this true? Why or why not?

7. SBR fosters the view that selected-response, such as multiple choice, is the best way to assess student learning, and this is unfortunate. What do you think about this?

8. The idea of collaboration has surfaced as both friend and foe. What are your thoughts on collaboration in the sense of common lesson plans, planning units, and common assessments?

9. The administrators tend to view the reform more in positive terms than teachers. What do you think about this difference? What could cause it?

I formed question one because the word “resent” surfaced a couple of times in the interviews and questionnaires in regards to how gifted students might feel due to the lack of rigor in the standards, a lack of creativity in assessments, instruction, and curriculum, and their personal use as peer tutors to help struggling students. I did not know if “resent”
was the right word. Was it too strong? I was not sure that the students themselves were aware of such factors affecting their education, so was this true resentment on their part? This gap in data made this question necessary to take back to the focus group. Question two was formed because the lack of creativity was mentioned several times. Creativity was lacking in assessments for gifted learners, the curriculum/standards for the gifted learner, and in instruction for the gifted learner. Since teachers mentioned this, I wanted to see why they felt that creativity was so important for the gifted learner and for their future academic success. Since the literature used in this study also concluded that gifted learners need creativity to make their learning authentic and meaningful (Burke-Adams, 2007; Callahan et al., 2009; Jolly & Makel, 2010; Renzulli, 2002). Question three was formed because all schools reported the rushed or hurried nature to the pacing of standards. Most teachers were torn between covering all the standards shallowly or forgoing some standards to truly explore more important ones. This is especially important for the gifted learner because the exploration and synthesis of information is so vitally important. I wanted to assess truly how many teachers actually forgo the depth of curriculum for the scope of it. I needed further clarification on this matter. I formed question four to ascertain the teacher’s opinion on getting a guide for enriching the curriculum. Most educators indicated that all gifted students needed to go beyond the standard, but the path to achieve such a depth of knowledge is vague at best; therefore, the inconsistency of how to implement the enrichment can be detrimental to the gifted learner. This too needed more clarification.

At some sites, some educators regretfully stated that SBR destroyed the love of learning or the vitality of the classroom by such a rigid regiment of standards. This
statement was scattered from site to site and seemed harsh. Therefore, I formed question five to ascertain the level of creativity and life of the classroom as felt by the teacher, for the teacher’s feelings will directly influence the student’s climate, and as previously noted, creativity is the lifeline of the gifted student. I formed question six because the notion of SBR increasing a teacher’s reflective practice was isolated at site three, Big Hill Middle School. Therefore, I felt it necessary to broach such a topic with all schools to see if they, too, agreed with this outlying factor. Next, I formed question seven based on a direct quotation stated from a general education teacher. All educators agreed that gifted students needed open-ended discussions, questions, essays, projects, and other creative endeavors to meet their academic potential; however, most assessments given to gifted students were selected-response in an effort to familiarize the student with standardized test format. This question served to explore this discrepancy. In the data collection, teacher collaboration surfaced as both friend and foe. Most gifted teachers discussed collaboration in relation to common lesson plans and common assessments as problematic, but many general education teachers did not comment, so I formed question eight to ascertain feedback from all educators once again. Finally, in my data collection, it was obvious that administrators were far less likely or more hesitant to discuss or name the negative aspects of SBR even in regards to gifted learner than teachers. This was evident at each site. Therefore, I formed this question to seek the perspectives of the focus group on this gap.

**Focus Group Findings**

After assessing all the data from the three focus groups, the focus group members clarified the following questions.
SBR builds resentment on part of the gifted child. What do you have to say about this finding? Do you agree? Why or why not? For question one, most teachers in the focus group thought that “resent” was the wrong word choice. Blanche concluded, “Resentment is the wrong word; that’s a strong word because I don’t know if they (the students) know there really is stress for them.” Most teachers deemed that the feeling that most students feel was a “frustration” or an “irritant.” Collectively, the teachers felt that this frustration stems from the lack of challenge for the gifted students and their individual academic progress, and this can happen when they did not explore a topic and dig deep into a concept. Jean stated, “They (gifted students) are frustrated that we can’t examine things that they are interested in.” Additionally, Rose stated, “They (gifted students) get frustrated when you (the teacher) are not providing value with the curriculum. You know they are hungry and thirsty, and you are giving them standards based, not performance; it’s all about performance, and how much can you perform on standard based.” Teachers deemed that gifted students are also frustrated when they are used as peer tutors, for this is helpful for lower level students, but it does little for the gifted learner. Addison commented, “If you are in a heterogeneous classroom, sometimes there is a tendency to make teachers out of the higher kids. I understand why that is being done, but I have also been the child where there was no effort to teach me; I became a de facto paraprofessional in the classroom, and I vastly resented that when I was growing up.” These irritants were a frustration for the gifted learner, and it fostered a lack of engagement in learning and subsequently, motivation. For example, Rose has observed, “I think that because the standards are so rigid that maybe they (gifted
students) are bored so early on” and the gifted students would then lack the “creativity and interest” needed to make their learning meaningful.

**SBR takes out creativity in the classroom, which is vitally important for the gifted child. The gifted child needs creativity to make the learning meaningful. Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

For question two, most educators felt that the lack of creativity in the classroom is dependent upon the teacher. Dorothy had observed that “having been with a lot of gifted teachers, I think there are some really dynamic at doing that (being creative) and some that aren’t so good; it depends on how the teacher sees himself as a gifted teacher.” Jean also stated, “They (gifted students) don’t have any room to be creative. I guess they could do it if they had an extension outside of the classroom and some of them would probably do that, but I think we, even as teachers, are bound with our creativity because of SBR.” One reported aspect that hindered creativity was common assessments. Most teachers felt that creating common assessment and common lesson plans can weaken the creativity of the teacher, but it was the teacher’s responsibility to work through such feelings and constrains in the classroom. Stephanie concurred that it “takes time for them (students) to learn and discover on their own; there is no time mainly due to the number of standards,” and Jean commented that the “process of learning” was also shorten due to the pace and depth of the curriculum. To further clarify, educators deemed that creativity can also be taken out because SBR did not allow time in the school year to purse such exploration of learning (that the gifted child craves) so that can definitely be stifled by SBR.

**Teachers know that gifted students need enrichment beyond the standard, but some are hesitant to do so because they fear falling behind the pace of**
curriculum and covering some testable standard that might show up on high-stakes standardized tests. Do you agree? What are your thoughts and experience? To clarify question three concerning a teacher’s hesitancy to enrich gifted students due to a fear to rush through the curriculum to cover all testable standards, all focus group members saw this as a possibility and that some teachers might surrender to the testable facts. Jean commented, “I feel torn all the time. You feel like you want to do things but is this going to show up at the end of the year; you are fighting with your own self whether to do an extension or not.” Most (at least in the focus groups), however, said they were aware of the standardized test and its known testable facts, but most stated that the upcoming high stakes test did not stop them from digging into a concept for the betterment of the gifted student. Blanche commented that, “I feel that if teachers are falling behind, they shouldn’t be teaching the gifted. They should be able to extend it and provide enrichment and offer them context or taking a situation and turning it into something creative.” Most teachers who stated type of viewpoint such as Blanche were teachers of gifted students in a homogenous class. If a gifted student is emerged in a general education class, this same scenario might be different due to the different ability levels in a general education class, and a teacher’s inability to differentiate all the academic levels within the classroom. For example, Christina, a general education teacher, stated, “It is different when you have mixed ability classes; that is a struggle for the gifted kids because I know their needs are not getting met. We are fortunate in this county to have many services for gifted kids, but in some counties where you might have one middle school those kids are not getting served, and they don’t get the opportunity to be in a class with gifted kids.” The placement in a homogeneous or heterogeneous
classroom greatly affected the creativity, enrichment, and exploration available to the gifted learner.

**SBR does not give a guide in which to follow for gifted students. Do you think there needs to be some guide in how to enrich the gifted students?** To clarify question four concerning the need for a guide to help teachers enrich gifted students, all members recognized the need for a guide of some sort or a suggested list so that teachers knew how to extend for the gifted child. For example, Dorothy stated, “My interpretation of creativity might be different from Rose’s, so to say, this is the ultimate goal you want to get to might help me more getting them to reach their goal; it would provide a framework for us.” However, if there was a guide, some members of the focus group thought that teachers across the country would take the guide as gospel and feel confined by such a document too. Rose too commented that “I think there should be something, but I would hate to pigeon hole (limit the teacher’s creativity in classroom instruction and creativity) because that is the whole point of gifted education.” Nevertheless, the overall consistence on this topic found that a guide would, at least, provide some consistency to the gifted program and validate its importance within educational policy. Izzy, a teacher of homogeneous gifted classes, reported that she “would like there to be one to recognize that there is a difference” between general and gifted education and to recognize that fact.

**SBR creates an environment that takes out the vitality, life, and fun of learning. Do you agree or disagree? Why?** Question five dealt with SBR taking out the vitality, life, and the fun of learning out of the classroom. This question rendered various responses from the focus group. Some teachers said “yes” immediately and some hesitated at first but then stated “no.” Addison reported that, “It can, but it doesn’t have
to.” The difference depended on the teacher. All teachers felt that SBR did take out some spontaneity and teachable moments and that the creativity was gone for some due to the amount of test preparations needed to review testable facts, but some felt that SBR did not have to take out the fun of learning if the teacher did not allow it to. Rose suggested that, “I think it challenges the fun; I don’t know if it takes it out. As a teacher, you really have to know your students.” Also, Dorothy supported this by adding, “It sounds like a crutch; like if you are not doing a good job as a teacher, you can say it is not my fault, it is the standards fault, and that is a sad way to look at it; you need to be excited to be there.”

**SBR makes the teacher more reflective of her practice. Do you find this true?**

**Why or why not?** Question six focused on SBR improving a teacher’s reflective practice. Most members of the focus groups felt this was not true because as a profession, teachers were always reflective and always adapting lesson plans and instruction. Addison commented, “I absolutely disagree because if you reflect, you are reflective no matter what.” Dorothy reiterated this sentiment by saying, “you can have the best lesson, but when you teach it to two different classes, you reflect because it went one way there and one way here. You just have to be flexible.” Teachers did note that teachers were required to dig into the data more now because of county dictation, but they noted that the data used for such analysis still sourced from standardized test scores; so once again, teaching and reflection focused on the test. May observed that, “We are always doing reflection. I think that since we are so data driven it does make us reflect a little deeper,” but Stephanie once again brought up the point that “it depends on how accurate the reliable the test and what it is testing” to deepen the success of that reflection.
SBR fosters the view that selected-response, such as multiple choice, is the best way to assess student learning, and this is unfortunate. What do you think about this? Question seven assessed the focus group members’ viewpoint on whether selected-response was the best way to assess student learning. Most educators did not feel that selected-response is the best way to assess, for as Blanche pointed out, “I don’t think there are a lot of educators that think that way.” All teachers agreed that selected-response is not good for gifted students because it did not allow them to explore and dig into the material in a creative and interesting manner that benefits the gifted child. Blanche also stated, “I think gifted students not having any knowledge about a subject can pass a multiple choice test by being good test takers and eliminating things so well given four choices.” It was this type of mentality; a mentality of teaching to the test with test questions and test preparation material, that stifled the gifted child.

The idea of collaboration has surfaced as both friend and foe. What are your thoughts on collaboration in the sense of common lesson plans, planning units, and common assessments? Question eight discussed the idea of collaboration as either friend or foe. All teachers agreed that collaboration was positive for sharing ideas. The negative side to collaboration surfaced when administration expected all teachers to assess all students in the same manner. Teachers did not like common assessments; directly teachers reported such comments as, “I hate it” and “robots, robots, robots” in reference to feeling like all teachers had to be the same in instruction and assessment. Jean expressed that she “hates being tied to everyone’s test; it is so restricting that you have to come together and that everyone’s tests in the department has to look the same because I feel like it is taking away your independence as a teacher to do what you think is best for
your kids.” Teachers expressed that it is very hard to share common tests between gifted and general education classes. Addison, a teacher of the gifted, stated, “I’ve tried to do a common assessment and everyone says your test is too hard, so it gets dumbed down.” Teachers noted that collaboration between the same ability groups would be ideal, for as Izzy, a teacher of gifted students, stated, “I would like to see more collaboration with gifted; it is a different mindset,” and it would render better results in common planning and assessments tailored directly to the gifted learner.

**The administrators tend to view the reform more in positive terms than teachers do. What do you think about this difference? What could cause it?**

Finally, question nine expressed the discrepancy between how teachers and administrators viewed SBR and its effect on education. Some thought that administrators got pressure from their superiors to accept SBR as the best light for education, so it might be more position than opinion. Blanche wondered, “If administration gets pressure from the county and their upper level, that this (SBR) was the way to go. In addition, teachers noted that SBR did provide an easy way to assess teachers’ and students’ successes, so it made the work of professional assessment easier to manage. Rose stated that she believes “it is an easy way to evaluate the teachers; if I’m looking for certain things, and if x, y, and z are doing them and z isn’t then it is easy to find the outliners.” Finally, some teachers thought that administrators had been out of the classroom for a while, so their viewpoint was different and removed. Addison commented that “I think a lot of administrators are not in the trenches anymore; I think that it is very easy for them to have a 10,000 foot view” of SBR and see it as mostly positive. Overall, the focus group saw that administrators
viewed SBR as good for all students in the sense of accountability and curriculum, and that perception funneled their viewpoint of SBR and the gifted learner.

**Final Assertions**

I established the final assertions by taking the collected data from the focus group and comparing it to the data found in the questionnaires and interviews. I used the recommended Worksheet Four (Appendix M) from Stake’s (2006) methodology to do this data analysis. The following are the ten final assertions derived from the study.

For theme one (What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?), there were two assertions. The first was that SBR is detrimental to gifted student, and the second is SBR has allowed gifted students to become apathetic in their learning. For theme two (What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?), there were three assertions. First, administrators feel that SBR is lacking in breadth and depth, which is a concern for gifted students who need more depth of knowledge then the easily accessed standard. Also, administrators believe that it is up to the teacher to enrich the curriculum for the gifted student, and administrators are less likely to see the negative effects of SBR on the gifted population. For theme three (What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SBR?), there were also three assertions. First, SBR produces an educational environment where standards are stranded, isolated, and easily testable and not connected to the big picture of learning, which is important for gifted learners who thrive in a thematic broad-based environment. In addition, SBR fosters boredom and a lack of engagement and motivation in the gifted learner due to a lack of
rigor, exploration, and creativity. Finally, SBR makes gifted students frustrated with education because they feel stifled by the lack of rigor, inability to explore topics of interest, and serving as tutors to help struggling students. The final theme, theme four (What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?), produced two assertions. They are the following: SBR has provided a guide for teachers to follow, which is positive because it establishes consistency in all classrooms, and using established standards makes teachers accountable for the material that they teach and that the students learn.

Once the final assertions were established, I arranged the peer review. The peer review was helpful in maintaining the credibility of the study. The participants in the peer review suggested including more of the general education teacher’s perspective of SBR on the gifted child in the general education setting. The one area that I found that needed improvement was in the aspect of teachers pushing gifted children beyond the standard and their ability to enrich the curriculum for the gifted learner. In a homogeneous gifted class, enriching the curriculum is easier because all the students are similar in academic ability. On the other hand, enriching the curriculum in a general education class would be more difficult because the gifted children get lost in a sea of lower level or general education students who might be struggling to grasp concepts. Therefore, the possibility of enriching the curriculum for the gifted child is different and sometimes non-existent and depends on which level of class (gifted or general education) he or she enrolls. This important difference needed to be included in my analysis.

The last step in my analysis was to take these ten thematically matched assertions and use them to answer the final research theme (questions). This information is below.
Findings for Research Themes (Questions)

In an effort to assess teacher perspectives of SBR on gifted students, I used a set of guiding questions or themes (according to Stake) to light the path of the research and finally to report its conclusions. I used the following guiding questions:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?
2. What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?
3. What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SBR?
4. What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?

Research question one: What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child? Teachers felt that SBR was detrimental to gifted students, and as one teacher, Blanche, metaphorically pointed out, “It (SBR) kinda clips their wings a little bit.” At another school, Addison, a gifted teacher, adamantly stated that, “For most gifted students, I think it (SBR) has been a detriment, and Teddy, a general education teacher, affirmatively said, “I find it (SBR) a negative. It is teaching them (students) to only learn what they have to know for a test and not pushing them to want to know more.”

Teachers reiterated these same sentiments on all questionnaires and on all teacher interviews. Teachers also felt that there was little to no incentive for the gifted child to reach beyond the standard because “meeting” standard was satisfactory for state and governmental requirements. For example, Christina, a general education teacher, felt that “Standards-based assessments are training him (a gifted child) to do just enough to make
an A, not to work hard to get the best education possible.” April, a general education teacher at the same school, also stated, “I see some students who are content with ‘Meets Expectation’ and are not interested in ‘Exceeding Expectation.’ The motivators are gone since there are no real consequences for failing; it is all about passing the bottom line. Passing is acceptable to most of my students.”

Since the academic growth of the gifted child was not vital to the big picture of accountability measures set forth by NCLB and SBR, most gifted children pass or exceed the state test, but was that still the goal for gifted children? Louise, a teacher of the gifted at Creekview Middle School, stated, “I think it (SBR) stifles them (gifted students). I think they are being dumbed down. They might be exceeding and in that respect it gives them a false sense of intelligence because they are getting pats on the back because they are exceeding, but they are exceeding a minimal standards test,” which should be easy for them and not the end goal. Overall, SBR had allowed gifted student to become apathetic in their learning. Louise furthers, “It (SBR) addresses the needs of the bottom of the barrel. It is making sure no child is left behind but no child is to go ahead either.”

**Research question two: What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?** Administrators also felt that SBR is detrimental for gifted students in the sense that the standards were lacking breadth and depth, which was a concern for gifted students who needed a more rigorous and holistically-thematic curriculum than the easily accessed isolated standard. Sophia, a relatively new administrator of 4 years, stated, “I think it (SBR) has been great for our on-level students, but I wonder how much
it has limited our advanced students.” Alexandra, an administrator with more than 20 years of educational experience, stated

I’d be lying if I didn’t say that the breadth and depth of the standards didn’t concern me. It is deeper than it used to be, but it still seems broad. We have kids who can excel, and it makes them look smart, but can they think, and can they take new information and synthesize it? If we are going to continue to succeed as a country, that is what we need to do…make kids think. We are doing them a disservice if it is all about regurgitation

Administrators concluded that SBR should be a jumping off place for gifted students in the classroom, and they believed that it is up to the teacher to enrich the curriculum for the gifted child and to go beyond the standard. By enriching the curriculum, this will fix the shallow nature of the curriculum for gifted students. One administrator stated,

I think it goes back to the teacher. If the teacher is using them (standards) as the ceiling then it has a negative effect; if they are teaching only the standards—no deeper, no higher—then it is bad for the gifted students. I think the effect depends on how the teacher views the standards and how they implement them in the classroom.

How to differentiate the standards for the gifted student was vague and often depended on the teacher’s interpretation; this inconsistent enrichment resulted in the gifted child’s inability to have their education extended.

As a whole, administrators were less likely to see the negative effects of SBR as opposed to teachers. This difference was because SBR movement had been positive for
all children collectively because it allowed all teachers to know exactly what to teach, and it had helped with uniformity of curriculum and assessment. Administrators stated the following to support this conclusion: Lexie said, “I think it is definitely more positive than negative,” Alexandra stated, “I think overall, it was necessary, and that it was positive when you look at it overall in the broad perspective. I do think it has been what was needed,” and Sophia concluded, “I definitely think that the SBR movement has been positive for all kids and for teachers too.”

**Research question three: What the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SBR?** SBR produced an educational environment where standards became stranded and/or isolated and easily testable rather than connected to the big picture of “why,” which was important to gifted students who thrive in a thematic broad-based environment. Jean, a veteran teachers of more than 20 years, stated, “I have... particularly seen, younger teachers that think all they can teach are the standards, and they do not see that ‘this is covered’ in addition ‘to that,’ so they just go for those standards and lose the context,” which is more important than the strands of knowledge.

Another veteran teacher, Maudie, felt that “We’ve isolated facts without including other relevant and necessary elements. We are leaving out information.” Similarly, Addison, a teacher of the gifted for 10 years described the detriment this way, “I do think is has disconnected the kids understanding about what and why we teach them from the content. Too many times we teach it because it is a standard and will be on the test.”

This type of curriculum was lacking in rigor, so the gifted student became bored and less engaged. As a result, SBR fostered boredom and a lack of engagement and motivation in the gifted child due to a lack of rigor, engagement, and creativity found in
the curriculum and classrooms. Teddy, a general education teacher at Big Hill Middle School, stated, “They (gifted students) do not get the opportunity to really dig into the depths of what they are learning.” April, a teacher at the same school, felt that “I do not have the freedom to spend more time in certain areas because I need to make sure I have covered everything they need to know before the state test is given; I would love to spend more time on things that were of more interest to the students.” By not allowing the gifted child to explore the depth of a topic, the gifted child did not academically grow.

Exploration and critical thinking had surrendered to teaching to the test and reviewing test taking skills. Stephanie, a teacher of 11 years, stated, “Over the past decade, I have observed teachers, including myself, shift from creative, thorough, and in-depth teaching of concepts and skills to superficially covering 13 pages of ambiguous listing of skills described in state standard.” On the same hand, Charlene, a general education teacher at South Harper Middle School, stated, “Teaching to the test is just a terrible thing, but we all do it to some extent. We do not have time to explore or slow down curriculum to allow for more differentiation” Julia, a teacher of eight years, agreed by saying, “Teachers are so scared about one day of testing that they just hammer kids with practice tests and memorizing facts rather than letting them really know the material.” Sentiments and instructional practices, such as these, cause the gifted child to lose interest in learning quickly. As a seventh-grade general education teacher had already observed, “The students have steadily declined in the participation of such learning.”

With a loss of engagement, gifted students can begin to feel frustrated with their education. SBR made gifted students frustrated with education because they felt stifled
by the lack of rigor, inability to explore topics of interest, and their personal use as peer tutors to help struggling students. Louise noted, “I think they feel that they are the ones who have to make up the test scores for the whole school. You know, we keep talking about scores, scores, and more scores.” With such an emphasis on testing and not learning, one gifted teacher observed, “There are super brilliant kids dropping out of high school because they are so bored because they are in a class where the teacher has to slow down the curriculum” to teach to the test.

**Research question four:** What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR? This research did not find a specific success for gifted children. All the successes of SBR encompassed the entire population and the institution of education itself. For example, SBR had provided a guide for teachers to follow, which was positive because it established consistency in all classrooms. Jean stated that it “has changed in it (SBR) has brought some of that consistency; in some cases, it is good because it caused people to beef up and teach some things they would have not taught, and it made sure we (teachers and students) had some consistency across the board.” Once again, these successes were not specifically a success for gifted children alone, but rather a positive for all children, including the gifted population because it provided a good, consistent foundation from which to enrich them.

In addition to consistency, SBR also made the teacher accountable for the curriculum and student learning. May noted.” It (SBR) has caused teachers to focus more on content instead of fluff.” At the same site, Louise, also noted that SBR “has focused a lot of structure in some teachers whereas in the past they might have spent six months on flowers because they enjoyed teaching flowers, and this (SBR) makes them teach what
the state or nation says should be taught.” Yet again, the research overall did not directly link the positive effects of SBR to the gifted population; mainly because this study found that the gifted population was the one group of students that was negatively affected by this reform.

**Summary**

Most educators in this study stated similar beliefs in their perspectives of SBR on the gifted student. Some educators were more adamant about the negative effects than others, and some tended to view the cause and effect relationship as one that could fixed by utilizing the current status quo, but adjusting the teacher’s viewpoint and enthusiasm in learning. The central theme that ran throughout this study was that SBR was detrimental to gifted students because it fostered apathy for education that was due to the lack of rigor, lack of creativity, lack of competition to excel, and lack of thematic connectivity in learning.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS

Summary of Findings

The answers to the question asked in this study (how does SBR affect the gifted learner in today’s classroom) was based on teacher perspectives. To understand this completely, I utilized a qualitative multi-site case study design to grasp how SBR directly affected the gifted learners. Ten final assertions emerged to answer the four research questions proposed in this study. First, the research found that SBR provided some positive aspects to education, such as a consistent focus and a common curriculum for students all over the country. However, overall, the assertions and findings suggested that SBR was negative when looking specifically at its impact on the gifted child. For one, SBR was detrimental to gifted students due to the standards lack of breath and depth of knowledge. Teachers viewed standards as arbitrary, lacking rigor, and focusing on easily testable facts. The study deemed these ineffective for gifted students. As a result, gifted students, within SBR, were found to be apathetic in their learning as well as unchallenged in the classroom, and these two main factors had a negative impact on the education of the gifted child.

Findings in Light of the Theoretical Framework

Focusing on the findings of this study, this research found that the assertions and implications of the study encompassed many of the characteristics established in Vygotsky’s (1986) social cognitive theory. First, Vygotsky’s theory (1986) focused on the fact that learning forces cognitive development, so in respect, learning preceded development, and the academic interaction between teacher and student was crucial for the learning to occur. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) suggested that a teacher should provide
support that extends the range of knowledge so that a student can reach maximum development. When a student extends the range of knowledge, he or she is also working within the ZPD. It should be a range that challenges a student, but one that a student can reach with the assistance of the instructor. Working outside of the ZPD or within a student’s current development was not desirable because it did not stretch the student’s academic muscles. Working within the ZPD was, therefore, crucial for true concept formation and mastery to occur.

With this said, the findings of this research support Vygotsky’s theory of social cognitive development. The simplified theme that ran throughout the study was that SBR was detrimental to gifted students because it lacked rigor and depth for the student. In this case, the gifted students were not working within their ZPD rather they were simply working at their current academic development, and this caused the learning of the gifted child to be stagnant. Vygotsky (1986) believed that students were able to grasp higher thoughts without having the lower level skills. He believed that if the child was able to comprehend the thematic vision of a concept then the basic skills could easily fall into place, and this would complete the thematic vision. The teachers also echoed this concept of holistic, thematic learning because they viewed the current environment of teaching to the test and teaching isolated, arbitrary, and easily accessible standards as inappropriate for gifted learners. This concept also promoted both low engagement and motivation. Offering a child knowledge that he already knew without assistance creates an instructional methodology that did not “utilize the zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 189). For gifted learners in standard based classrooms, working within his ZPD can be difficult, as teachers stated, because the emphasis was simply on
minimal standards or great test scores on a minimal competency test. Typical instruction used for achieving great scores on standardized tests was through test preparation exercises and skill and drill worksheets (Daggett, 2005). If learning “makes no new demands on him (the student) and does not stimulate his intellect by providing a sequence of new goals, his thinking fails to reach the highest stages, or reaches them with great delay” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 108). It was this level of failure to think and lack of stimulating a student’s intellect that the teachers saw as a great frustration for both the gifted learners and their teachers. The gifted students lacked a challenge to reach their full potential because most were working and learning outside their appropriate ZPD.

**Implications of Study to Educational Practice and Methodology**

The data from this study can further assist all educators as well as governmental agencies in understanding the potential influence that SBR had on the gifted population. Additionally, educators at all levels (general education, special education, and gifted education) can glean the positives and negatives of SBR and its effect on the student and can apply those successes and avoid those pitfalls when instructing future classes of students. The findings for this study were below.

First, the study found that the standards were not suitable for the gifted child, and it was the teacher’s responsibility to modify the standards to meet the specific needs of her gifted classes. As noted in the study, teachers needed to view the standards as the “floor” and most of the time, gifted students entered the classroom having already mastered the “floor” content. Therefore, it was important to adjust the rigor of the curriculum. As several teachers in the study noted, knowing how to enrich the curriculum was difficult because there was no documented support for such enrichment. With such
ambiguity in gifted enrichment established across the board, it was important to know that, as a gifted educator, it was your responsibility to research and collaborate with like peers to help remedy this issue until support or guidance surfaced.

The second finding was that SBR fostered the practice of teaching isolated, strands of knowledge, which was detrimental to the gifted child. Teachers should instead have supported a thematic-broad based learning environment for all gifted children that they taught. As noted in the study, this can be difficult because teachers battle between teaching to the test and doing what was best for students. Research had shown that a broad-based thematic environment and curriculum was best for gifted students, and as a gifted teacher, it was the most educationally responsible thing to as a teacher. However, the struggle between the two was still raging, especially with such pressure and accountability placed on standardized test scores (Burke-Adams, 2007; Callahan et al., 2009; Jolly & Makel, 2010; Renzulli, 2002).

Additionally, SBR created a hurried pace of instruction for the teacher, and this was due to the sheer number of shallow and arbitrary standards attached to it, and as a result, teachers quickly moved through the curriculum so that all every one of those standards we taught before the end of the year’s standardized test. This quick pace of instruction and assessment did not allow time for gifted students to explore topics of interest that would have increased their academic engagement and motivation. The teachers of gifted students in this study consistently addressed this point. They reported that gifted students get excited about a topic, and when denied the opportunity to explore and investigate that topic, their enthusiasm for learning diminished. By solely focusing on rote memory, easily accessible and testable standards, gifted students lost interest quickly
and with that interest went their engagement and motivation. This type of apathy can have a domino effect for the gifted child and can cause them to become frustrated with education and learning in general. Therefore, it was greatly important for the gifted teacher to allow time for that exploration to increase the engagement and motivation of her gifted classes because with increased engagement and motivation comes increased academic achievement.

Finally, the above findings correlate directly to the research themes (questions). However, one finding surfaced from the study that did not correlate to the research questions. This finding dealt with the lack of consistent enrichment that currently occurs in standards based classrooms. The present enrichment for gifted students is entirely dependent upon the teacher’s interpretation of extending the standard. Since there is not a guide or other resources specifically designed to address the needs of the gifted child in relation to SBR, teachers merely guess on how deep a student needs to venture into a concept, especially when the standardized test will not assess this level of knowledge.

Due to this implication found in the research, teachers of the gifted do need in-service or training on how to go beyond the standards. Districts should provide training for teachers on how to take a rather shallow standard and then go beyond it by extending the knowledge base and cognitive level of that standard. By doing this, the gifted students will be able to access the curriculum in a true authentic manner because it would now be tailored to their academic ability, and gifted students would be working in their appropriate ZPD. Teachers need this type of training on how to provide that consistent enrichment or going beyond the standard so that gifted children get the appropriate curriculum and instruction that they need. Therefore, the research found that teachers do
need a guide (not a dictated mandate) or suggested list and most certainly in-service or training to help remedy the inconsistency in enrichment and going beyond the standard found in today’s classes for the gifted learner.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The need to examine the perspectives of educators on SBR as well as the current reform Common Core was vital given the growing need to assess the success, failure, or combination of both of a reform. The replication of this study in a different geographic location both socioeconomically and demographically, could provide information not found in this study.

In addition to a change in demographics, another researcher could also replicate this study to assess the value and positivity of the new national standards, called Common Core, which most states have currently adopted. Common Core standards are national standards that “provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn” and “are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers” (Common Core Standards, 2012). These standards strive to prepare students for the future so that “our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy” (Common Core Standards, 2012). Currently, 45 states and three territories have already adopted these standards and are in the transitional period of integrating them into their current state standards. Georgia adopted Common Core on July 8, 2010, and in Harper County, this was introduced to the teachers in the Spring of 2011. Right now, Georgia is in the transitional period; currently, teachers teach 85% of the Common Core standards and 15% of Georgia Performance Standards. The school
year of 2014-2015 will be the first year with instruction and assessment completely evaluating 100% of Common Core Standards. Therefore, a similar study conducted using Common Core Standards would be important in the future to test the validity of the new standards to investigate if they have provided some benefit to gifted students.

There continues to be a need for education to not only meet the requirements of gifted learners but also to acknowledge, appreciate, and support the intrinsic characteristic of these students concerning both their educational progress and giftedness. Underrepresentation of gifted students in current reforms and mandates continues to be an issue in the educational world today. The future of the United States is dependent upon the productivity and contribution of its citizens. If gifted students continue to be victims of neglect and indifference, then the United States suffers at its own hand. As Ella, a general education teacher, concluded,

Often times, I think the gifted learner is left to fend for himself because education concentrates so much on the low-level learners. In actuality, the concentration should be on the average student to push them harder, and the gifted learner to see new heights of learning because as we know, it will be the gifted learner who will one day discover the cure for cancer and run the Fortune 500 companies.

All educational reforms should include the needs of the gifted child so that the United States does not lose a generation of our best and brightest. As Christina, a general education from Big Hill Middle School, stated, “I wonder what these people (government officials) are thinking about the future of our country when we aim for mediocrity; it is not how we got to the top and not how we won World War II. We didn’t win World War II on the back of mediocre people, and we are training gifted children to be mediocre.”
This study provided an understanding of educators’ perspectives of SBR on gifted students, and future studies should continue to look qualitatively at the perspectives of educators on mandates and reforms brought about to improve education and to give a voice to those teachers who work with students every day to help make them productive members of the future society.

Limitations

Using the human instrument did create a myriad of experiences and perspectives. Through a qualitative multi-site case study design, I accomplished an in-depth analysis of views, attitudes, and opinions related to SBR, giftedness, and education using 24 educators from three middle schools in an affluent north Georgia district with a high percentage of gifted students. These very specific attributes of my sample population coupled with the various experiences of each of the individual participants themselves reduced the generalizability of the participants’ perspectives from being applicable to other educators in similar positions in other settings such as rural communities, urban communities, or communities with high minority populations. A larger sample of teachers from other types of communities might have helped to generalize the findings across the board. In addition, another possible limitation might have been a possible personal bias because I was a vested member of site two, Creekview Middle School. Stake (2006) said, “It is an ethical responsibility for us as case researchers to identify affiliations and ideological commitments that might influence our interpretations” (p. 86). To account for this, I personally acknowledged my biases and separated them from the data collected during analysis my memoing and note-taking (Appendix C). In addition, focus group analysis and the peer review also served to ensure that my biases did not
cross over into the assertions of the study so that all data derived from the research was honest and truthful.

**Summary**

This study looked at the effects of SBR on the gifted child. Using triangulation, the data collected reported that SBR has had a negative impact on the gifted child in both the homogeneously gifted classroom as well as in the general education classroom setting. In the study, teachers viewed the standards as weak and arbitrary, and the simple nature of these standards precisely attributed to the negative impact on the gifted child. Gifted children needed a creative and holistic education, and based on the research, SBR was not providing them with such an education.
REFERENCES


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National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk:


APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

Dear Amy,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor
Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011
APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO PERFORM RESEARCH

August 23, 2011

To: ****

*** ***** ********

****, ** *****

Greetings,

This is a formal letter to acquire permission to conduct my dissertation research at ****. I am currently a student at Liberty University pursuing my doctorate in Teaching and Learning focusing on teacher perspectives of standards based reform on gifted students. As part of my research plan, I am seeking find three teachers for face-to-face interviews, ten teachers for written questionnaires, and one administrator for a face-to-face interview. All research will be conducted under the scrutiny of the university review board policies, which should afford guarantee about the validity and success of this study. If you could please send me a letter granting permission to conduct research, I would greatly appreciate it. The “intent to participate” letter needs to be on school letterhead and contain your signature. If you have any questions about my research, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Amy Valadez
APPENDIX C: REFLECTIVE MEMO

A Sample from the Research

April 13th: Interviewed my first two participants at site two today, Louise (at 8:00 am) and Alexandra (at 3:00 pm). Louise is a gifted teacher, and Alexandra is the principal. Louise has been teaching gifted for several years now, and she was offered the same perspectives that I have heard many teachers say; most of her opinion was negative in regards to the topic and the effect of the gifted students. Her opinions do reflect my own at times since we do both teach and work in the same environment. Alexandra, being the principal, was more positive in regards to the reform; she did note some concerns that I know teachers have stated for years at site 2; thought the burden to enrich was on the teacher. Being my own principal, I wonder if her ideas were filtered through that scope.

April 19th: Interviewed Jean today at 12:57 pm during planning. Louise and I have been teaching beside each other for several years now, so I felt that I knew how she would respond to most of the questions. We talk and vent quite frequently about this topic. However, she was very prepared for the interview and offered new insight that I didn’t expect. Her idea about standards being “arbitrary” (love this word) is great and something I had not really seen probably because I’m in Language Arts where our standards are more circular in some aspects, and she is in Social Studies, where the standards are cut and dry. I was surprised by how much the Social Studies standards are this way. New information and perspective for me.

April 19th: Interviewed May at 3:45 pm after school today. May has been teaching for a while and is considered quite versed in her subject by her peers. May is typically quiet so I didn’t know exactly how she would answer the questions. May was very well prepared, and she often read from notes she had taken and prepared during the interview. She did seem a little uncomfortable at times; I think she didn’t want to think on her feet, so the notes helped for say what she wanted to. She told me that she might not say what I want her to say, but I said just said say what you think. Her answers were consistent with the others and my own for the most part. She did have view on SBR that I didn’t have since she has been teaching so long and teaching without such government regulations. She hated being told how and what to teach; she felt is took her professionalism away. New thought to me because I haven’t really had the experience of teaching what I want without all the regulation. She did also comment that standards are “arbitrary” as well and that the whole idea that students master anything is ridiculous; that is different thinking.

April 23rd: Went to South Harper Middle School today to do all the interviews.

Rose and Dorothy: Met in the morning. Noticed that Rose, who had been in the county longer, saw more issue with SBR and the gifted students. I wondered about this difference? Is it personal or is it due to how the county handles the reform? It is left up to interpretation. I did notice that Dorothy had taught both Language Arts and Social Studies, and she found that SBR was harder on SS than LA. Something that Jean said the other day. Brought up how to enrich? re
Blanche: meet in the afternoon; she is a gifted teacher. She was very easy to answer the questions; though she did want to know if the principal of her school would be reading this, and I told her of course not. She teaches SS too, so her perspectives were right on track with the other SS teachers.

Sophia: meet in the afternoon; she is the assistant principal who is also doing her dissertation. She having been in administration less than others saw more impact on the gifted students, but she still did not fully respond as teachers have been doing so far. This seems to be a trend.

SHMS: overall, this place seemed more positive about the kids and their worries were that with such reforms as SBR, gifted kids are not being educated properly. Different from CVMS where the tone was harsher.

**April 24th:** Went to Bill Hill Middle School today to do all interviews.

Meredith: she is a science teacher of gifted students, and she seemed quite positive about the reform; her responses were more in line with the administrators that I had interviewed so far; very unusual and an outlier. I wondered if the rest of the participants at this school would feel similar. She did mention that SBR does make you look at what you teach more, and I find her to be correct, and this is a new thought that hadn’t occurred to me.

Lexie: she is principal of the school, and she was an old principal of mine. Her comments were very positive; she didn’t really see too many negatives about SBR. Her comments were comments were consistent with the other administrators. Brought up how to enrich?

Addison: she is a gifted math teacher. She offered both positive and negative comments, which was first. Her idea about the standards not being correctly aligned to the student’s cognitive level is good and unique. No one else has said that, so wondered if it would come up.

Izzy: she is a gifted teacher who also had been teaching for a while; her comments were similar to those of May who had similar previous teaching experiences. She seems very negative about SBR; I got the feeling that she gets reprimanded for not strictly following standard guidelines, and this is probably coloring her thoughts as well.

Overall, this school was more negative in terms of how SBR is affecting gifted students. They were similar to CVMS in that regard. Meredith was the one outliner in her response.

**April 26th:** Looked at the questionnaires today; these seemed similar to the interview questions, even the general education teachers feel the same way. Started to gather my thoughts on the focus group questions:

- Each question answered similarly; my thoughts are typically similar.
- Discussion about apathy (been thinking this for years)
- Lack of learning and fun in room (haven’t thought about that)
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS
A Multi-Site Case Study Investigating Teacher Perspectives of Standards Based Reform and Gifted Students
Dissertation Study
Amy Valadez
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study examining the perspectives of standards based reform on gifted students. You were selected as a possible participant because you have experience in both teaching and standards based reform on gifted students. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Amy Valadez, who is a doctoral student from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Background Information
The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of educators, teachers of the gifted, teachers of the general population, and administrators, of standards based reform on gifted students and education in general. Standards based reform along with No Child Left Behind has changed the face of American education in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, so this study will analyze one piece of that change, the impact on the gifted child as told from the teachers’ and administrators’ points of view.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
I will interview you about your perspectives of standards based reform on gifted students. The interview questions are open-ended and will solicit your feelings on the subject. I will be audio taping these interviews. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript when finished.

Also, you may be asked to participate in a focus group with other participants from your school. If you are selected to participate, you will be sent an email. The focus group will last between 30 minutes to an hour on one selected day.

The benefits to participation are: You will be participating in a study about education, which is your field of study, and you will be able to express your feelings, impressions, and ideas and be heard.
Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risk involved in this study is no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Participants will not receive any direct benefit from the study, but there may be a benefit for society. Participants will not be compensated for their participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All my records will be kept in a locked cabinet/closet at my house, and I will keep all electronic data on a password protected flash drive. All data will be kept for three years, and then it will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with the primary researcher in this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. If for any reason, you decide not to participate in the study; all data gathered from you will be destroyed immediately.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Amy Valadez. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them 770-377-0158 or at avaladez@liberty.edu or amyfancyshoes@aol.com. You may also contact the researcher’s advisor if needed, Dr. Gail Collins. Dr. Collins’ email is glcollins@liberty.edu and her number is 423-667-4855.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_______________________________________ Date: __________

Signature of Investigator:__________________________ Date: __________
You are invited to be in a research study examining the perspectives of standards based reform on gifted students. You were selected as a possible participant because you have experience in both teaching and standards based reform on gifted students. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Amy Valadez, who is a doctoral student from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

**Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of educators, teachers of the gifted, teachers of the general population, and administrators, of standards based reform on gifted students and education in general. Standards based reform along with No Child Left Behind has changed the face of American education in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, so this study will analyze one piece of that change, the impact on the gifted child as told from the teachers’ and administrators’ points of view.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

I will give you a questionnaire in which you are to answer honestly. Simply, circle the rating scale that most fits you impressions and feelings of the questions being asked. The questionnaire can be completed in 10-20 minutes.

Also, you may be asked to participate in a focus group with other participants from your school. If you are selected to participate, you will be sent an email.

The benefits to participation are: You will be participating in a study about education, which is your field of study, and you will be able to express your feelings, impressions, and ideas and be heard.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The risk involved in this study is no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Participants will not receive any direct benefit from the study, but there may be a benefit for society. Participants will not be compensated for their participation.
Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All my records will be kept in a locked cabinet/closet at my house, and I will keep all electronic data on a password protected flash drive. All data will be kept for three years, and then it will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations Liberty University or with the primary researcher in this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. If for any reason, you decide not to participate in the study; all data gathered from you will be destroyed immediately.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Amy Valadez. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them 770-377-0158 or at avaladez@liberty.edu or amyfancyshoes@aol.com. You may also contact the researcher’s advisor if needed, Dr. Gail Collins. Dr. Collins’ email is glcollins@liberty.edu and her number is 423-667-4855.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH TEACHERS OF GIFTED STUDENTS

Name: ____________________________________________________

Position: _________________________________________________

Years of Teaching Experience: ______________________________

Years of Leadership Experience: _____________________________

Years of Leadership at this Middle School: ___________________

Level of Education: _______________________________________

1. In your own words, define and explain what you know about standards based reform.

2. How has standards based reform altered American education? Do you find this positive or negative? Why?

3. What are your perspectives on how curriculum and instruction specifically have been altered due to standards based reform?

4. Has the overall change to standards based reform been positive, negative, or a combination of both? Please explain.

5. What are the unintended consequences or effects that have emerged since the implementation of standards based reform?

6. In your opinion, what style of teaching, curriculum instruction, and manner of assessment do you feel is best for gifted students?

7. Do you feel that standards based reform addresses the needs of the gifted learner? Why or why not?

8. What effects does standards based reform have on the gifted child?

9. Do you find these effects to be a positive or negative change? Why?
APPENDIX G: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH ADMINISTRATORS WHO HAVE OVERSIGHT OF A SCHOOL WITH A PROGRAM OF GIFTED EDUCATION

Name: ________________________________________________

Position: ________________________________________________

Years of Teaching Experience: ______________________________

Years of Leadership Experience: ______________________________

Years of Leadership at this Middle School: _________________

Level of Education: _______________________________________

1. In your own words, define and explain what you know about standards based reform.

2. How has standards based reform altered American education? Do you find this positive or negative? Why?

3. What are your perspectives on how curriculum and instruction specifically have been altered due to standards based reform?

4. Has the overall change to standards based reform been positive, negative, or a combination of both? Please explain.

5. What are the unintended consequences or effects that have emerged since the implementation of standards based reform?

6. In your opinion, what style of teaching, curriculum instruction, and manner of assessment do you feel is best for gifted students?

7. Do you feel that standards based reform addresses the needs of the gifted learner? Why or why not?

8. What effects does standards based reform have on the gifted child?

9. Do you find these effects to be a positive or negative change? Why?
APPENDIX H: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

(TO BE SENT TO GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TO BE COMPLETED AND RETURNED BY EMAIL)

Name: __________________________________________________________

Position: _________________________________________________________

Years of Teaching Experience: _________________________________

Years of Leadership Experience: _________________________________

Years of Leadership at this Middle School: _________________________

Level of Education: _____________________________________________

Vocabulary: Standards Based Reform is the educational concept where students are taught government/state issued standards and assessed using standardized testing to determine excellence.

1. In your own words, explain what you know about standards based reform?
2. How do you think standards based reform has altered American education?
3. What are your perspectives/opinions of standards based reform?
4. How have curriculum and instruction specifically been altered by standards based reform?
5. Do you find the overall change to standards based reform positive, negative, or both? Why?
6. Are there any unintended effects or consequences that you have seen since the standards based implementation?
7. In your opinion, what style of teaching, curriculum instruction, and manner of assessment do you feel is best for gifted students?
8. Do you feel that standards based reform addresses the needs of the gifted learner? Why or why not?
9. What effects do standards based reform have on the gifted child? Do you find these effects to be a positive or negative change? Why?
### APPENDIX I: WORKSHEET ONE

**Worksheet One: Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme One:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme Two:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme Three:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of SRB?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modified from Stake’s Worksheet Two (Stake, 2006, p.43)
### Overall Impressions of the Case:
For the most part, teachers found the reform to be positive in the sense that it helps with consistency of what is taught and helps keep the country on the same playing field in regards to what each child is taught. It helps with across the board uniformity. On the other hand, teachers also felt that the standards were constricting to teachers and took some of the fun and creativity out of the classroom. Standards can be arbitrary, especially for content heavy subjects like science and social studies. Standards lack rigor and are quite shallow, and it is up to the teacher to increase the depth and breadth of the curriculum but how to do this is vague. Instruction is geared toward testing and covering content known to be on the test. There is no incentive to push the gifted child beyond, and as a result, they sometimes no pushed very hard. This push is total depend upon the teacher.

Administration also agreed that SBR might have resulted in a lack of rigor for the gifted population. This information was given with hesitation. Overall, administration feels that SBR is positive when looking at the big picture of education, but it needs some tweaking of the sub-populations, like gifted students, in order for a more perfect fit to be met.

### Case Findings:
**Teachers:**
1. Resentment for learning in the following aspects: peer tutoring and love of learning
2. Creates an academic ceiling
3. Less engagement and motivation for the gifted due to boredom from the lack of rigor
4. More stress on students, especially gifted who raise test scores
5. Less fun and creative
6. Teacher hesitates reaching beyond the standard because there is no incentive
7. There needs to be a push for progress not a cut score
8. Undermines the teacher’s professionalism
9. Encourages to teach to the test, such as practice tests and memorizing facts
10. Need for gifted standards to help with a teacher’s ability to reach beyond the standards and enrich curriculum for the gifted population.

**Administrator:**
1. For SBR to reach full immersion, students need to have ownership of their learning, and this has not happened yet.
2. SBR might be holding back the gifted child because you never know what a gifted student might do if given more open-ended or lee-way with standards.
3. SBR could be helpful for the gifted if there were some gifted reform and melding of it with SBR to get best results for learning; however, this has not happened yet.
4. SBR stifles and holds back the gifted child.
**Both:**

1. All agree that it does stifle the gifted child.
2. All agree that gifted students need to be pushed beyond the standard.
3. All agree that gifted students work best in an environment where they are allowed to explore.
4. All agree that gifted students are best assessed in open-ended questions, essays, projects, discussions, and other creative endeavors.

**Positive:**

1. SBR provides better coverage/pacing of curriculum due to guide.
2. It is good to have standards to follow.
3. SBR can put the teacher in mode of facilitator if the teacher reaches beyond the standard.

**Relevance to Themes:**

Theme 1 __x____  Theme 2 __x______  Theme 3 __x______  Theme 4 ____x____

**Uniqueness of Case:**

The following were stated in isolation:

1. Gifted students need creativity to find and have value in learning.
2. Increases laziness in world of re-teach, re-learn, and re-test.
3. All students are encouraged to be equal and the same, not better.
4. Common assessments are not good because they treat everyone the same and does not differentiate for the gifted learner.

**Commentary:**

Many teachers found stress to be an issue for both students and teachers, and due to this stress, teaching focuses on standards and knowledge that is covered on standardized tests. All teachers understand that gifted students need to be pushed, but due to the stress of high-stakes tests, enrichment can be hit or miss in an effort to make sure that all gifted students exceed the state tests. Teachers also indicated an increase in possible resentment on part of the gifted student for such things as being used to pull up a school’s test scores and/or used as peer tutors. Administration felt the frustration of the teachers and expressed the same concerns between SBR and gifted students but was hesitant to fully agree and overall saw many more positives of SBR than negatives.

Modified from Stake’s Worksheet Three (Stake, 2006, p. 45)
APPENDIX K: WORKSHEET THREE

Worksheet Three. Merged Findings:
A Map on which to make Assertions for the Final Report
A Sample from the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Harper Middle School</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBR helpful for all students in the sense that it keeps the country on the same playing field in regards to what is taught.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR is detrimental to students.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBR creates a ceiling affect for gifted kids.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBR creates more stress on students, especially to raise test scores.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBR produces less engagement and motivation for the gifted child due to boredom from the lack of rigor</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBR makes education less fun and creative.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers hesitate to reach beyond the standard because there is no incentive.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR encourages teachers to teach to the test, which is memorizing facts and practice tests, which is counterproductive for gifted kids</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no need to push for progress; there is a cut score.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum is surfaced.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creekview Middle School</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBR destroys the vitality and life in a classroom; it destroys fun and creativity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR lacks rigor and is a brushing of skills.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBR creates a rushed and rapid pace to curriculum.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBR creates less writing, critical thinking, and individual thinking, which is harmful for gifted kids</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR increases stress on gifted kids</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards can be seen as arbitrary and not connected to the big picture of learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR stiles the gifted child and is therefore detrimental.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR is good to keep all teachers on the same playing field.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Hill Middle School</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBR creates curriculum that is rushed and hurried with little time to explore, enrich, and investigate topics that interest students; all bad for gifted; if time is taken to explore, then another standard might be left out</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction is geared toward the test and involves teaching stranded standards.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are limited in their desire to learn</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low motivation due to boredom; gifted students doing enough to get by, not grow or get better</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More stress on teachers and students</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR stifles the gifted child; it is detrimental.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR is good in that it provides the same framework for all teachers to follow.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modified from Stake’s Worksheet Five A (Stake, 2006, p. 51)
APPENDIX L: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. SBR builds resentment on part of the gifted child. What do you have to say about this finding? Do you agree? Why or why?

2. SBR takes out creativity in the classroom, which is vitally important for the gifted child. The gifted child needs creativity to make the learning meaningful. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. Teachers know that the gifted students need enrichment beyond the standard, but some are hesitant to do so because they fear falling behind the pace of curriculum and covering some testable standard that might show up on high-stakes standardized tests. Do you agree? What are your thoughts and experience?

4. SBR does not give a guide in which to follow for gifted students. Do you think there needs to be some guide in how to enrich the gifted students? Why or why not?

5. SBR creates an environment that takes out the vitality, life, and fun of learning. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

6. SBR makes the teacher more reflective of her practice. Do you find this true? Why or why not?

7. SBR fosters the view that selected-response, such as multiple choice, is the best way to assess student learning, and this is unfortunate. What do you think about this?

8. The idea of collaboration has surfaced as both friend and foe. What are your thoughts on collaboration in the sense of common lesson plans, planning units, and common assessments?

9. The administrators tend to view the reform more in positive terms than teachers. What do you think about this difference? What could cause it?
### APPENDIX M: WORKSHEET FOUR

**A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions from Merged Findings Rated Important**

**A Sample from the research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merged Findings</th>
<th>From Which Sites</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBR is detrimental to gifted students.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR establishes a curriculum that is narrow, lacking in depth, and focused on testable facts.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR creates a ceiling affect for gifted students.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do not see a lot of incentive in pushing gifted students beyond the standard due to the pressure of stellar performance on high-stakes testing that focused on isolated skills.</td>
<td>All; but not all participants</td>
<td><strong>Theme 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR produces an educational environment where standards are stranded or isolated, not connected to the big picture of “why,” which is important to gifted students who thrive in a thematic broad-based environment.</td>
<td>All; but not all participants</td>
<td><strong>Theme 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR creates more stress on gifted students because they are expected to raise test scores for the whole.</td>
<td>All; but many at site one</td>
<td><strong>Theme 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR fosters boredom and a lack of engagement and motivation in the gifted child due to a lack of rigor, engagement, and creativity.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR encourages teaching to the test or teaching standards known to be on the test</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators are less likely to see negative effects.</td>
<td>All; but mostly sites two and three</td>
<td><strong>Theme 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators feel that SBR is lacking in breadth and depth, which is a concern for gifted students who need more depth of knowledge than the easily accessed standard.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators believe that it is up to the teacher to enrich the curriculum for the gifted students.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR does not offer any insight on how to enrich the curriculum for the gifted child; it is left up to the teacher to interpret.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 1 &amp; 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBR has provided a guide for teachers to follow, which is positive because it establishes consistency in all classrooms.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using established standards makes teachers accountable for the material that they teach and that the students learn.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td><strong>Theme 4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modified from Stake’s Worksheet Five B (Stake, 2006, p. 59)
APPENDIX N: WORKSHEET FIVE

Worksheet Six. Multi-case Assertions for the Final Report
A Sample from the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertions</th>
<th>Related to Which Theme</th>
<th>Evidence From Which Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| SBR is detrimental to gifted students.                                     | Theme ONE               | Teddy: “I find it negative. It is teaching them to only learn what they have to know, and not pushing them to want to know more.”
|                                                                             |                         | Tammy: “Limits the gifted learner from thinking ‘outside the box’.”
|                                                                             |                         | Beth: “They want you to teach to the test because the minute you do not teach to the test then you get hauled in front of your administrator and are told you must do it like everyone else or else.”
|                                                                             |                         | Izzy: “I feel like it forces us to dummy down the curriculum b/c we are forced to teach to a test, which considers what is important based on GA standards.”
|                                                                             |                         | Addison: “For most gifted students, I think it has been a detriment.”
|                                                                             |                         | Louise: “No, it addresses the needs of the bottom of the barrel. It is making sure no child is left behind but no child is going to go ahead either.”
| SBR produces an educational environment where standards are stranded or isolated and easily testable, not connected to the big picture of “why,” which is important to gifted students who thrive in a thematic broad-based environment | Theme THREE             | Teddy: “I believe that students are not being prepared for the real world. Instead, they are being prepared for a test that is taken at the end of the year.”
|                                                                             |                         | April: “I think too many times that teachers are teaching to the test and checking off standards gone over or taught and not really dealing with the big picture.”
|                                                                             |                         | Addison “I do think it has disconnected the kids understanding about why things are important and why we teach them from the content. Too many times things that we teach is because it is a standard.”
|                                                                             |                         | Meredith: “Sometimes I feel like well if this is my curriculum how deep do I need to go. I don’t really know how deep I need to go in that particular thing because it is so vague.”
|                                                                             |                         | Meredith: “I love performance based assessments for gifted kids. I think it lets them break out of the confines of that multiple choice exam and to let them explore and do what they need to do.”

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SBR fosters boredom and a lack of engagement and motivation in the gifted child due to a lack of rigor, engagement, and creativity</th>
<th>Theme THREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| April “The students’ have steadily declined in the participation of such learning.”
Callie: “It has taken some of the creativity away from what and how we teach. We are tempted to teach to the test, so standards are met.”
Izzy: “More participatory discussion for all students but particularly for the gifted, less lecture, more related curriculum on their interest b/c they will buy into it; more assessments on higher thinking skills and essay.”
Izzy: “B/c of the time element it is taking away more time from things that they enjoy doing and the methods by which they enjoy learning, which is many more verbal discussion and input into choices that they have as to how they want to show what they have learned.”
Meredith: “Generally, they do that and really want to learn more and find out the answers of hows and whys. When you have performance based assessments, I think that give them the opportunity to do more of that.”
Louise: “I think it takes away some of the creativity and some of the in-depth studies that could be happening because we are like ‘gotta go’.”
Louise: “We should grab teachable moments, and we have lost that b/c we gotta get those standards covered.” “I think there is less depth; I think we are losing kids’ abilities to think for themselves. They are learning what we tell them to learn and to regurgitate.” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SBR makes students frustrated with education because they feel stifled by the lack of rigor, inability to explore topic of interest, and being used as tutors to help struggling students.</th>
<th>Theme THREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teddy: “They (gifted students) do not get the opportunity to really dig into the depths of what they are learning.” “I think that often times, students want to know more, but do not have the opportunity because they are having to move too quickly through the pacing guides.”
April: “I do not have the freedom to spend more time in certain areas because I need to make sure I have covered everything they need to know before the state test is given. I would love to spend more time on things that were of more interest to the students than I do at this point” |
| Teachers do not see the gifted child reaching beyond the standard because there is no incentive for him/her. | Theme ONE | Christina: “Standards-based assessments are training him (a gifted child) to do just enough to make an A…not to work hard to get the best education possible.”
April: “I see some students who are content with ‘Meets Expectation’ and are not interested in ‘Exceeding Expectations.’ The motivators are gone since there are no real consequences or ‘failing’ that goes on for the most part. It is all about the bottom line. Passing is acceptable to most of my students.”
Callie: “It limits students from trying to go above and beyond; they become limited in their desire to learn.”
Louise: “I think it stifles them. I think they are being dumbed down. They might be exceeding and in that respect it gives them a false sense of intelligence b/c they are getting pats on the back b/c they are exceeding, but they are exceeding a minimal standards test.” |
| Administrators feel that SBR is lacking in breadth and depth, which is a concern for gifted students who need more depth of knowledge than the easily accessed standard. | Theme TWO | Sophia: “I think it has been great for our on-level and traditional students, but I wonder how much it has limited our advanced students b/c sometimes they go so far beyond the standard that if we are just holding onto a standard you never know what they might do if they were given a more open-ended or lee-way with the standard.”
“I’m just afraid sometimes that assessments are limiting again cause we are assessing on standards, and for gifted students, I just think they have the ability to go beyond the standard.”
“I just don’t know if they have been pushed as far as they can or given the opportunity to explore as deeply as they might be able to. I just wonder how much we might have stifled or held them back as a result of SBR.”
Alexandra: “I’d be lying if I didn’t say that the breadth and depth of the standards didn’t concern me. It is deeper than it used to be, but it still seems broad. We have kids who can excel, and it makes them look smart and all that, but can they think, and can they take new information and synthesize it? If we are going to continue to succeed as a country, that is what we have to do to make kids think.”
“We are doing them a disservice if it is all about regurgitation” |
| Administrators believe that it is up to the teacher to enrich the curriculum for the gifted students. | Theme TWO | Alexandra: “If you are using them (standards) as the goal for the kids to reach, then it does not serve the gifted kids well. I think it goes back to the teacher. If the teacher is using them as the ceiling then it has a negative effect; if they are teaching only the standards—no deeper, no higher—then it is bad for gifted students.”
“I think the effect depends on how the teacher views the standards and how they implement them in the classroom.” |
| Administrators are less likely to see negative effects | Theme TWO | Sophia: “I think it is definitely more positive than negative; my personal opinion I think it is positive.”
Alexandra: “I think overall it was necessary and it was positive when you look at it overall in that broad perspective. I do think it has been what was needed.”
“It has been necessary and positive.”
“On the positive side of consequences and effects…”
Lexie: “What comes to mind is not a consequence but a challenge”
“I definitely think the SBR movement has been positive for all kids and for teachers too.” |
| SBR has provided a guide for teachers to follow, which is positive because it establishes consistency in all classrooms | Theme FOUR | Addison: “To make sure everybody was getting things that made sense for them to get at their level of cognitive development that fit into the vertical alignment well and made sure that we had consistency across the grade so that we didn’t have one teacher who went very deep and another one who barely skimmed the surface.”
Addison: “It has changed in it has brought some of that consistency; in some cases, it is good b/c it caused people to beef up and teach some things that they wouldn’t have taught.” |
| Using established standards makes teachers accountable for the material that they teach and that the students learn | Theme FOUR | Louise “I think it has focused a lot of structure in some teachers whereas in the past they might have spent 6 months on flowers b/c they enjoy teaching flowers, and this makes them teach what the state or nation should be taught.”
May: “It has caused teachers to focus more on content instead of fluff.” |

Modified from Stake’s Worksheet Six (Stake, 2006, p. 73)
APPENDIX O: WORKSHEET ONE:
USED TO CREATE THE CONCLUSIONS FOR THE STUDY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme One:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the perspectives of teachers of gifted students concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Teachers feel that SBR is detrimental to gifted students. They also feel that there is not an incentive for the gifted child to reach beyond the standard because meeting standard is satisfactory for state and governmental requirements. Their academic growth is not vital to the big picture of accountability measures.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Two:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the perspectives of administrators who have oversight of gifted programs concerning the effects of SBR on the education of the gifted child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Administrators also feel that SBR is detrimental for gifted students in the sense that the standards are lacking breadth and depth, which is a concern for gifted students who need a more rigorous and holistically-thematic curriculum than the easily accessed isolated standard. SBR is a jumping off place for gifted students, and they believe that it is up to the teacher to enrich the curriculum for the gifted child and to go beyond the standard, and this will fix the depth of curriculum issue with SBR and gifted students. Exactly how to differentiate for the gifted student using the standards is vague and varies on teacher and it is here that the problem lies in extending the gifted child academically. As a whole, administrators are less likely to see the negative effects of SBR as opposed to teachers; mainly due to the fact that as a whole, SBR movement has been positive for all children collectively because it allowed all teachers to know exactly what to teach and it has helped with uniformity of curriculum and assessment.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme Three:

What are the negative consequences for the gifted child that surfaced because of SRB?

*SBR produces an educational environment where standards are stranded/isolated and easily testable and are not connected to the big picture of “why,” which is important to gifted students who thrive in a thematic broad-based environment. This type of curriculum is lacking in rigor, so the gifted student becomes bored and less engaged. SBR, therefore, fosters boredom and a lack of engagement and motivation in the gifted child due to a lack of rigor, engagement, and creativity found in the curriculum and classrooms. With a loss of engagement, gifted students can begin to feel frustrated with their education. SBR makes students frustrated with education because they feel stifled by the lack of rigor, inability to explore topics of interest, and their personal use as peer tutors to help struggling students.*

Theme Four

What successes for the gifted child surfaced because of SBR?

*SBR has provided a guide for teachers to follow, which is positive because it establishes consistency in all classrooms. This is not specifically a success for gifted children alone, but rather a positive for all children, including the gifted population because it provides a good foundation for all students. It also makes the teacher accountable for the curriculum and student learning. The overall positive effects are focused not on the gifted population solely, for the teachers and administrators did not identify any isolated positive effect for gifted students.*