

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF HISPANIC ENGLISH LEARNERS  
IN GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS

by

Apolonio Trejo, M.A., M.Ed.

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Committee Members:

Melissa A. Martinez, Chair

Miguel A. Guajardo

Patricia L. Guerra

James W. Koschoreck

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate my dissertation to all the Hispanic English learners in the United States, whose educational journey has been one of accumulated disadvantage, who try hard to proceed through a marginalized educational system, who receive nothing but inadequate school resources, and who struggle through disheartened teachers who undermine their gifts, talents, and academic success. This Hispanic English learner te garantiza que sí se puede.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Description</b>
EEOA	Equal Education Opportunities Act
EL	English Learner
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as Second Language
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
GT	Gifted and Talented
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LEP	Limited English Proficient
LESA	Limited English Speaking Abilities
LPAC	Language Proficiency Assessment Committee
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
PEIMS	Public Education Information Management System
SI	Spanish Immersion
STSD	South Texas School District
TEA	Texas Education Agency
TPSP	Texas Performance Standards Project for Gifted/Talented

## **ABSTRACT**

Every school has students who possess exceptional abilities, who can be considered gifted and talented. Students with special gifts and talents come from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Cohen, 1990). Yet as the number of Hispanic English language learners increases across the country, the number identified as gifted remains the same (Brown, 1997; Esquierdo, 2006). Countless Hispanic English learners have talents that are valued within their own cultures, but regrettably, these bilingual students are commonly overlooked in programs. Historically, English Learners and students of color have been seriously underrepresented in gifted education (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh & Holloway, 2005). Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted programs nationally by 40% (Ford, 2012).

This qualitative case study identified and analyzed the current gifted and talented program nomination and identification process in a selected Texas elementary school district. The areas examined in this study included informal and formal nomination of students, teacher identification practices, and the evaluation procedures. Key findings were: a need to be inclusive of ELs' families, a presence of unconscious bias, a need for professional development, a need for increase fidelity and GT program review, and a need for transparency and disparities of the GT program. Recommendations for future research are also presented.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **Prologue**

La frontera is neither Mexico nor the United States. For me, fortunate enough to grow up in the border, la frontera is a place of linguistic pride and shame. For many years, I lived linguistically oppressed. Thus, against all oppressors, whatever or whoever that might be, I tell my narrative in both Spanish and English, or Spanglish. Because like Anzaldúa (1987),

I am my language...and until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself...Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate (p. 81).

I, too, will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I, too, will have my voice heard. I, too, will have my serpent's tongue. I, too, will overcome the tradition of silence.

### **My Narrative**

En los 80s fue mi primera experiencia con el sistema educativo de los Estados Unidos. Like many of us, I was brought to the United States to attend elementary school. Back then la gente de dinero, as my abuela, Alicia Cortinas Gonzales, hija del General Aurelio Cortinas, would say, sent their children to Mexican private schools or out of the country for a better education.

In 1980, I was 10 years old, and I was very happy attending la escuela primaria Licenciado Melchor Ocampo in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, México. I always got dieces or

straight As. All my teachers liked me. I had plenty of friends. My grandmother, as assertive as she was, convinced mami that we had to move to Eagle Pass, Texas. My mother, Tere, a single mother of five, wanted a better life for us. So, three of us, Isa, Checo, and I moved to Eagle Pass, Texas with mami. My other two sisters, Lourdes and Nora, estaban por empezar la prepa, so se quedaron en México. My grandmother offered to pay any fees and help with whatever gastos were necessary. I recall the tuition fee to attend school was \$80.00 per month, but fortunately we did not have to pay tuition.

“Why do I have to leave my friends? Why do I have to leave my school? I make good grades.” I asked myself in silence as my stomach turned. I was puzzled. Suddenly, although just across la frontera, I was in a different world and a different culture. I had gone from my school Licenciado Melchor Ocampo to Glass Elementary School. I was in fifth grade in México, but I was placed in a fourth-grade class in my new school. “Why was I placed in a fourth-grade class?” I asked myself. The school principal explained it in the following manner, “la educación de México simplemente no es igual; no está considerada al mismo nivel que la de los Estados Unidos.” I remember the school registrar telling my mom that I was going to be placed in cuarto grado because of my age. I was dropped one grade level. Additionally, there was the English barrier. English became my biggest distress. I remember this heat going through my body when any staff member called on me. The spotlight was on me, and I did not know how to express myself in the English language. English suppressed me.

My teacher was Mrs. Cly. She had the bluest eyes I had ever seen. She was Anglo but could speak “un poquito español” as she told me when she welcomed me into her fourth-grade class. There were 22 students in my new classroom, four White kids and the

rest were of Mexican decent. I rapidly noticed there were only two racial distinctions: if you were White, you were a “gringo;” if you were brown, you were a “Mexican-American.” I was neither; I was mexicano. I felt out of place; I simply did not fit in.

Although, I was just a bridge away, as simple as it may sound, the culture shock was inevitable. *Traté de adaptarme a mi nueva escuela diariamente, pero a veces era demasiado exhausto.* Los viernes became my favorite school day, but not because of the weekend or because I got to go back to México, but because it was “Enchilada Friday.” It was the only day I truly felt connected because I could order the cafeteria food without feeling embarrassed that I didn’t speak or understand English. The enchiladas made me feel at home. Those enchiladas represented my uniqueness, my culture, my México. In a culture clash, las enchiladas were a beacon of comfort in an oppressed educational system.

It was difficult for me, but I still managed to make some friends. I remember several of my classmates vividly for special reasons. I remember, Chava. How could I not? He called me *mojado* all the time. That was my first encounter with classism and the constant marginalization in American society. Chava was mean to me until I let him have my milk. He then became sort of a protector. Daily, during lunch that carton of milk became my safety net.

Mora, otra compañera of Mexican decent, had come to the United States when she was five, I believe. Mora hablaba inglés super bien. She was very pretty. She had long black hair and big brown eyes. She always translated for me. She even gave me my first Valentine’s card and translated the message for me on the back of the card.

But Cassy caught my attention. Cassy never paid attention in class, and, for what Mora told me, she knew a lot about everything. “So do I!” I thought to myself. I knew how to cook and bake. I could make corn tortillas from scratch. I could sew and continued clases de corte y confección throughout elementary school. I learned to make stuffed animals that I sold to my neighbors. I knew how to iron. I started ironing my uniforms in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I also delivered newspapers and read every single one of them as I was highly intellectual, and I felt the need to be informed of the latest news to be a better paper boy. Just like Cassy, I had gifts and talents that nobody in my new school noticed. I was an invisible gifted student.

Pero eso no fue todo. After a few weeks, I was going to be tested to be placed in another classroom. I remember their words clearly, en un salón para estudiantes de lento aprendizaje. As late as 1980, most English learners (ELs) were placed in special education classes as educators often misinterpreted the lack of full proficiency in English as low intelligence (Oller, 1991) or as a language or learning disability (Langdon, 1989).

The U.S. public education system was quite unfair to me, my brother, and my sister. I know my older sister Isa and my younger brother Checo were trying to cope with similar academic injustices. Luckily, I have a mother who has always believed in us. So, she pulled us out of Glass Elementary School, and we went back to México. I was the happiest little boy alive! I went back to where I belonged, to my roots, to my language, to my culture. I was no longer a dreamer lost in the American dream. I went back to making the highest grades. I once again became part of the escolta, an honor for exceptional students. I stayed in México and finished my elementary and most of my secondary education. Y todo con honores y las mejores calificaciones. I went back to the gifts and



talents everyone noticed. I went back to being visible. (See Appendix A for a complete version of my narrative in English).

**From Student to Teacher.** The educational injustice I lived as a child hardened me to see education differently; thus, I became an educator. I see my teaching experiences divided into two parts. The first part of my teaching experience as an educator in the U.S. public education system gave me knowledge. I spent many years as a bilingual education teacher in what is one of the poorest districts in Texas. There, I learned about the continuous struggles that bilingual teachers and English learners (ELs) endure attempting to receive a fair and equal education in this country. I observed teachers not speaking one word of Spanish to ELs due to the fear instilled in them as they, themselves, were corporally punished and verbally shamed as they spoke Spanish in their own elementary years; a fear led by an unjust educational system. I heard bilingual teachers that had over two decades of experience tell parents that the only way their children would succeed in the United States was by learning the English language, and thus, Spanish should not be spoken at home. Most of the academic concentration was focused on high stakes testing and on students learning English.

The second part of my teaching career as an educator has given me wings. I went from working at the poorest district in Texas to one of the wealthiest. At my current school district, I have learned that although the student demographics are very different, students are students no matter their social economic status (SES) – students have needs. We do not, at my current school district, focus on high stakes testing or pushing ELs out of our bilingual education program. We focus on the learning process, molding character, and, most importantly, academic success.

Aside from the abundance or lack of resources, I noticed a common theme in both school districts: the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in the gifted and talented (GT) program. The underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in the GT education program is a critical concern in both districts. This student population has been underrepresented and continues to be underrepresented in GT programs despite the fact that it continues to grow.

### **Contextual Background: Hispanic, English Learner, and Gifted and Talented Students**

As the Hispanic population in the United States and in Texas has increased, the demographics of schools have changed. According to Vespa, Armstrong, and Medina (2018), the number of Hispanic children under 18 years of age in the United States will continue to rise from one-quarter to nearly one-third over the next 40 years (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Projections 2020 – 2060: Percentage of Children by Race and Ethnicity (Under 18 years)*

Total Children Under 18: (Population in thousands)	2016	2020	2030	2060
White:	72.5%	71.7%	69.4%	62.9%
Non-Hispanic White:	51.5%	49.8%	46.9%	36.5%
Black or African American:	15.1%	15.2%	15.5%	16.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native:	1.6%	1.6%	1.5%	1.4%
Asian:	5.2%	5.5%	6.3%	8.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Hispanic:	24.9%	25.5%	26.5%	32.0%

*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020–2060

Furthermore, as the Hispanic population has increased, the number of ELs in schools has also increased (Esquierdo, 2006). This is because the majority of ELs in public schools are Hispanic and speak Spanish at home. In 2018, for instance, the U.S. Department of Education reported that Spanish was the home language of 3.7 million

ELs in public schools (McFarland, et. al, 2018). At the same time, the entire EL student population continues to grow. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), for instance, the percentage of public school students in the United States who were ELs rose from 8.1% of the total student population or 3.8 million ELs in 2000 to 9.5% of the total student population, or 4.8 million students, in 2015. It is significant to mention that Texas was among the states that reported the highest number of ELs among their public school students (see Table 2) (McFarland, et. al, 2018).

**Table 2.** *U.S. States with The Highest Percentage of ELs in Public Schools*

California	Texas	Nevada	New Mexico
21.0%	16.8%	16.8%	15.7%

*Source:* Data retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics

Students who are ELs are enrolled in language support programs or bilingual programs that help them achieve the English proficiency necessary to master the same academic content and academic standards that all students are expected to meet. Bilingual education implicates imparting academic content in two languages: in the student's native language also known as first language (L1) and second language (L2) or English with varying amounts of each language used in accordance with the program model adopted by the school district. Steered by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Pankake, Littleton, and Schroth (2005) provided a more comprehensive definition of bilingual education:

The use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organized program which encompasses all or parts of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the

mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures. (p. 97)

In addition, the Texas Education Code §29.055 defines a bilingual education program as:

A full-time program of dual-language instruction that provides for learning basic skills in the primary language of the students enrolled in the program and for carefully structured and sequenced mastery of English language skills. A program of instruction in English as a second language established by a school district shall be a program of intensive instruction in English from teachers trained in recognizing and dealing with language differences.

The common goals of bilingual education programs are: 1) proficiency and literacy in English and the native language; 2) acquire basic and higher order thinking aptitude for academic achievement and beyond; 3) growth of a strong self-concept; and 4) success of school, higher education, work, and community life (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). However, each model of bilingual education is unique. Each model is adjusted to suit the characteristics of a particular school and community. The goals, outcomes, and implementation of the models of bilingual education program differ. Table 3 provides the model, description, and the linguistic, academic, and cultural goals.

**Table 3. Models of Bilingual Education**

Model or Program	Description	Linguistic/Academic and Cultural Goal
Submersion	Academic instruction in L2 only for language minority students. No instructional support is provided by trained specialist. This model fails to meet the guidelines set forth in the Supreme Court decision in <i>Lau v. Nichols</i> .	Monolingualism and Full assimilation
Language-Based ESL	Language instruction in L2 only for language minority students. Typically, L2 language instruction, taught by second language specialist, is sequenced and grammatically-based.	Monolingualism and Full assimilation
Content-Based ESL	Academic instruction in L2 only for language minority students. L2 instruction is taught via a content-area by second language specialist. L1 used for concept clarification.	Monolingualism and Full assimilation
Early-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 language minority students only, with minimal emphasis on the L1. Typically implemented PK-3 <sup>rd</sup> grade. Continuous emphasis on L2.	Minimal bilingualism and Full assimilation
Late-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 language minority students only, with emphasis on the L2. Typically implemented PK-5 <sup>th</sup> grade.	Moderate bilingualism and Assimilation
Immersion Education	Academic instruction through both L1 and L2 for grades K-12. Originally developed for language majority students in Canada.	Biliteracy Pluralism
Dual Language Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 for either language minority or majority students or both together (two-way). Percentage of language instruction varies in 90-10 and 50-50 models.	Biliteracy Pluralism
Maintenance Bilingual Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 for language minority students only with emphasis on the L1. Typically implemented PK-6 <sup>th</sup> grade.	Biliteracy Pluralism

*Source:* Adapted from: Gómez, & Ruiz-Escalante (2005).

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in 2017, the number of students participating in bilingual programs in Texas increased from 14.4 percent in 2005 to 17.8 percent in 2015. In addition, the number of students identified as ELs in Texas increased

by 239,940 or 30.9 percent in the past 10 years (Wright, B., Lee, S., & Ryon, H., 2018).

In the 2017-2018 academic year, 18.8 percent of students were identified as ELs (Wright, Lee, & Ryon, 2018). Table 4 shows the number and percentage of students identified as ELs in Texas between 2007 and 2017.

**Table 4.** *Enrollment of Students Identified as ELs, Texas Public Schools, 2007 – 2017*

Academic Year	Number	Percentage
2007-08	775,432	16.6
2008-09	800,554	16.9
2009-10	817,074	16.9
2010-11	831,812	16.9
2011-12	838,418	16.8
2012-13	864,682	17.0
2013-14	900,476	17.5
2014-15	949,074	18.1
2015-16	980,487	18.5
2016-17	1,010,756	18.9

*Source:* Texas Education Agency Enrollment in Texas Public Schools

At the same time, the TEA (2017) reported that Hispanic students accounted for the largest percentage (52.4%) of total enrollment in Texas public schools in the 2016-2017 academic year. Furthermore, the percentage of students identified as Hispanic ELs was 18.9% percent in the same academic school year (Texas Education Agency, 2017). This data supports that the Hispanic EL student population will continue to increase; within the next 40 years, Hispanic ELs will become the majority in Texas classrooms (Elhoweris, Mutua, & Asheikh, 2005; Esquierdo, 2006).

Yet as the number of ELs in public schools increases, the number of GT ELs identified for the GT program seem to remain the same (Brown, 1997). The number of ELs in Texas increased by 239,940 students in the past 10 years (Texas Education Agency, 2018); however, the number of GT ELs remains low (Brown, 1997). Texas Education Code §29.121 defines a GT student as one:

who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic field; possess an unusual capacity for leadership; or excels in a specific academic field.

Giftedness is not a special gift possessed by a limited few (Bernal, 1981). All ethnic groups possess proportionate numbers of gifted individuals (Ramos, 2010; Valdés, 2003;). Unfortunately, there is a rising number of unidentified gifted Hispanic ELs (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were 3,329,544 students enrolled in GT programs in public schools in the United States in 2013-2014. More than 50% of all students enrolled in a GT program in the United States were identified as White, 18% Hispanic and 2.8% were identified as ELs (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Table 5 shows the number and percentage of students, by ethnicity, enrolled in GT programs in public schools in the United States.

**Table 5.** *Students by Ethnicity Enrolled in GT Programs in U.S. Public Schools 2013-14*

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
American Indian or Alaska Native	27,712	0.8%
Asian	319,129	9.6%
Hispanic or Latino	600,498	18.0%
Black or African American	330,774	9.9%
White	1,937,350	58.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	8,710	0.3%
Two Races or More	105,371	3.2%

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education Number and Percentage of Public School Students enrolled in Gifted and Talented Program

Gifted education in Texas emerged over forty years ago. In 1977, the Texas legislature passed the first legislation concerning gifted education (Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, 2018). However, it was not until May 1987 when Texas passed

legislation requiring all school districts to establish gifted and talented programs by the 1990-91 school year (Ayers, 1990). Some school districts in Texas have had gifted and talented education in place for years (Ayers, 1990). Since then, as previously noted, the demographics of the student population in Texas have radically shifted. However, GT programs have not reflected the changes in student demographic patterns (Esquierdo, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2008). Table 6 shows the number and percentages of students enrolled in GT programs for the past decade.

For decades, it has been argued that the GT identification process for Hispanic ELs has not been effective (Bell, 2012; Bernal, 1974; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Esquierdo, 2006; Hageman, 2008; Nichol, 2013; Thompson, 2013). Cohen (1990) hypothesized that giftedness manifests differently in Hispanic students from those of the dominant culture. More recently, it was found that Hispanic ELs are less likely to be nominated to gifted education (Warne, 2009). In addition, the assessments that are used to identify GT students are English language dominant causing Hispanic ELs to score poorly (Castellano & Frazier, 2011). Furthermore, because public schools are concerned with teaching ELs English, other academic areas such as gifted instruction are neglected (Esquierdo, 2006). Teachers also have low expectations for ELs (Hageman, 2008); consequently, the majority of GT programs more readily admit and serve White, middle- or upper-class students (Castellano, 1998).



**Table 6.** *Number and Percentages of Students Enrolled in GT Programs in Texas*

Year	Number	Percentage
2007-08	348,854	7.5%
2008-09	355,847	7.5%
2009-10	367,924	7.6%
2010-11	379,831	7.7%
2011-12	381,744	7.6%
2012-13	387,623	7.6%
2013-14	391,982	7.6%
2014-15	397,209	7.6%
2015-16	404,646	7.6%
2016-17	415,699	7.8%
2017-18	427,021	7.9%

*Source:* Texas Education Agency Enrollment in Texas Public Elementary School 2017-2018

As Table 7 shows in 2016, there were slightly more Hispanic students enrolled in GT programs than White students in Texas. Texas reported 1,015,372 (18.8%) students identified as ELs; 899,046 (88.5%) identified as Hispanic. Additionally, Texas reported 427,021 (7.9%) students enrolled in GT programs in 2017-2018. Of these students, 30,998 (0.6%) were identified as GT ELs (Wright, B., Lee, S., & Ryon, H., 2018).

**Table 7.** *Number of Hispanic and White Students Enrolled in Gifted and Talented Programs in Texas*

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Hispanic	177,779	41.6%
White	162,710	38.1%

*Source:* Texas Education Agency Enrollment in Texas Public Elementary School 2017-2018

The GT identification process begins with its definition mentioned above; however, the GT identification process is ultimately left to local standards (National Association for Gifted Children, 2018Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). School districts establish a process for identifying GT students as required by Texas Education Code §29.122. Texas state legislation does not stipulate how that identification of GT students is to take place (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005). Because the GT

identification process is a local responsibility and dependent on local leadership and not federal or state supervision, it creates circumstances of inequities of access for students living at the poverty level and who are also from racial and ethnic minority groups, ELs, and those with disabilities (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2018). Most methods for identifying GT students at local levels have been developed for middle-class native English speakers (Cohen, 1988; Esquierdo, 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every school has students who possess exceptional abilities or are gifted. Students with special gifts and talents come from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Cohen, 1990). Yet as the number of Hispanic ELs increases across the country, the number identified as gifted remains the same (Brown, 1997; Esquierdo, 2006). This is no different than at the two schools where I have worked.

Countless Hispanic ELs have talents that are valued within their own cultures, but regrettably, these ELs are commonly overlooked in GT programs. Historically, ELs and students of color have been seriously underrepresented in gifted education (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005). Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted programs nationally by 40% (Ford, 2012). When teachers lack cultural competence, they often hold low expectations for Hispanic students (Ford, 2012). This lack of cultural competence and limited understanding of the needs of gifted students from diverse backgrounds can result in fewer diverse students being referred by teachers to gifted and talented programs (Moon & Brighton, 2008).

For students who require additional services beyond the general education classroom, teachers decide whether they are ELs, if they need special education

resources, or if they are gifted. This often depends on the classroom teachers' ability to identify the student's learning needs. Teachers' views of students' needs are influenced by individual experiences of both the students and teachers (Szymanski & Shaff, 2013). In addition, McBee (2010) suggested that linguistic and cultural differences influence the perceptions and understanding of student behavior.

At the same time, we know that the Hispanic student population will continue to increase while the number of White students will decrease (Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012). Yet currently teachers receive minimum training or professional development (PD) to prepare them for today's diverse classrooms. As a result of the lack of PD, many teachers have minimum or no understanding of the characteristics and needs of gifted Hispanic ELs (Berman, Schultz, & Weber, 2012).

Furthermore, it has been argued that the identification of gifted ELs has not been effective (Esquierdo, 2006). Culturally and linguistically diverse students might possibly be overlooked because the process of measuring giftedness commonly favors the cultural norms of White and middle-class students (Esquierdo, 2006; Galbraith & Delisle, 1996). Methods for identifying gifted students in public education have been developed for middle-class English speakers and thus work best for identifying GT students from that population (Cohen, 1988; Esquierdo, 2006). The current GT identification process could lead to the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in gifted education (Esquierdo, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative for the current GT identification process in public schools be reevaluated, so that equal admittance to gifted education is provided to all students.

## **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The remarkable growth of the Hispanic student population in the U.S. public education system, specifically ELs, and the notorious educational issue of the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in gifted education is the fundamental topic of this study. The ambiguity surrounding the GT identification process of Hispanics, specifically among those who are ELs, has developed into a critical educational concern (Bernal, 2002; Esquierdo, 2006; Lara-Alecio, Irby & Walker, 1997). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify and understand the causes of why Hispanic ELs are underrepresented in the GT program in a school district in South Texas. It is crucial to educational democracy and equity to address and improve the GT identification process for gifted Hispanic EL students in today's public education system because there is an underrepresentation.

The main research question that guided this study is further confined to one case to ask: What values, beliefs, systems contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learners in the GT program at a two-way immersion dual language program at an elementary school in South Texas? This leads to several sub-research questions pertaining to the current GT identification process:

What factors contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in the GT program at this school?

What are teachers, staff, and district leaders' perceptions of the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in the GT program at the school?

How does the GT identification process influence underrepresentation?

What are the lessons learned that can inform equitable change?

## **Theoretical Framework**

I drew on constructivist theory (Crotty, 2012) and a socio-ecological model (Kilanowski, 2017) for my theoretical framework. Constructivist theory is based on the belief that all learning is contingent upon human practices, being constructed and transmitted within social context (Crotty, 2012).

A constructivist perspective proposes that knowledge is constructed as we engage and interpret our world and that learning is an active, constructive process. The learner constructs information. People actively construct or create their own subjective representations of objective reality (Crotty, 2012). Within the context of this study, constructivist theory provides an opportunity to examine how ELs construct their knowledge through experiences and how their invisible gifts can be nurtured through affirming cultural and linguistic lived experiences. Additionally, what happens in educational institutions also influences the construction of knowledge (Libman, 2010).

To make sense of my findings, I also used the socio-ecological model (SEM) first developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The SEM model is useful for understanding human development. This later became a formalized theory which I used to present my findings (Kilanowski, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model has been used previously to explore the obstacles faced by gifted minority students (Crawford, Snyder, & Adelson; 2020). The SEM has different systems which range from the individual to the chronosystem. This allowed me to categorize my findings in the different systems and helped me make meaning.

## **Brief Overview of Methods**

This study utilized a qualitative case study research design. A case study is a social science research method commonly used to investigate a current phenomenon in depth and in its everyday context (Yin, 2018). This case study was specifically descriptive, which is an empirical inquiry used to investigate and focus a contemporary phenomenon or particular issue within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). This method enabled me to understand the complexity of the problem.

I gathered multiple sources of data. This included interviews from two-way immersion dual language teachers, Spanish immersion teachers and GT certified teachers (Appendix B). Additional data sources included interviews with the school's bilingual coordinator and the district GT coordinator. School documents pertaining to the GT process, including but not limited to nomination, selection criteria, and the reassessment and appeals process as well as local and legal policies were also reviewed. I finalized with member checks. I also maintained a research journal over the course of the study.

As recommended by Creswell (2013), I conducted member checks by asking participants to check the accuracy of their accounts. I emailed the research participants asking them to comment on the accuracy of my report. This not only prompted them to inform me if the themes that I generated from the data were accurate but also opened communication which allowed them to recall additional information or provide clarifications. All feedback provided was considered with regards to my findings.

### **Study Site: South Texas School District**

This study took place in an elementary school district, otherwise known as “South Texas School District,” located in a large city in Texas. I am currently a teacher at this school district. In addition, South Texas School District’s leadership is interested in this research because diversity is important not just at the school level but district wide throughout its educational programs.

This city serves 340,238 students within 17 independent schools districts (Texas Education Agency, 2018). South Texas School District is within one of the 17 independent school districts in the city; therefore, it is important to present its demographic and enrollment data. At this school there were 892 students enrolled in the 2018-2019 academic year. The racial demographics of these students are presented below in Table 8.

**Table 8.** *Enrollment in South Texas School District by Race/Ethnicity in 2018-2019*

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	0.4%
Asian	42	4.7%
Hispanic or Latino	333	37.3%
Black or African American	18	2.0%
White	480	53.8%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	3	0.3%
Two Races or More	12	1.3%

*Source:* South Texas School District Student Enrollment in 2018-2019

There were 143 students enrolled in gifted education during this year at the school. Table 9 shows the number of students identified as gifted by grade level.

**Table 9. Enrollment in South Texas School District GT Program by Grade Level**

Grade Level	Number of Students
1	27
2	23
3	32
4	26
5	34

*Source:* South Texas School District Student Enrollment in 2018-2019

Out of the 143 students, there is representation among five racial/ethnic groups with the majority (White) being nearly four times the size of the second most prevalent group (Hispanic or Latino). Table 10 shows the number and percentages of students identified as GT by race or ethnicity.

**Table 10. Enrollment in South Texas School District GT Program by Race/Ethnicity in 2018-2019**

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.6%
Asian	9	6.2%
Hispanic or Latino	28	19.5%
Black or African American	0	0.0%
White	102	71.3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Two Races or More	3	2.0%

*Source:* South Texas School District Student Enrollment in 2018-2019

Furthermore, there were 113 students identified as ELs during the 2018-2019 academic year at STSD. The majority of ELs are Hispanic and Spanish dominant. Table 11 shows the number of students identified as ELs in grades 1 through 5.

**Table 11. Student Identified as ELs in South Texas School District by Grade Level**

Grade Level	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	White	Multiple	Number of Students	% of Grade Level
1 <sup>st</sup>	0	1	0	17	0	5	0	23	12%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	0	0	0	16	0	6	0	22	13%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	2	0	17	0	4	0	23	12%
4 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	0	19	0	4	0	23	14%
5 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	0	19	0	3	0	22	12%

*Source:* South Texas School District Student Enrollment in 2018-2019



Out of the 143 students identified as GT, only two are identified as ELs. These students are in a two-way dual language immersion program. One of the students is identified as Asian, and one identified as an Hispanic EL.

As the demographics reveal, there is a vast underrepresentation of ELs in the GT program at STSD. As the literature in Chapter 2 will discuss and the data presented above reflects, it is possible that the identification process of GT students is contributing to this underrepresentation. Indeed, the underrepresentation of ELs in GT programs is a critical educational concern (Andreadis & Quinn, 2017; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Ford, Davis, et al., 2020; Ford, Wright, et al., 2020; Hodges, et al., 2018; Peters, et al., 2019; Pratt, 2019;) because GT students require a personalized curriculum, more rigorous instruction, and ample opportunities for creative expression and enrichment (Ford & Milner, 2005); when it comes to this particular subgroup, their academic needs are being neglected.

At the local or district level, GT students have increased access to advanced placement classes and dual credit courses that are tailored to meet their specific gifts and talents allowing them more opportunities for higher education and an increased possibility of obtaining their degrees at a faster rate. In addition to academic opportunities, Ford and Milner (2005) proposed that gifted education provides help with psychological, social, and educational growth development. Gifted education helps students become more adept in making intelligent choices, engage autonomous learning, use problem-solving skills and self-initiated achievement goals. Gifted education also enables students to realize their potential and their contributions to self and society. Overall, gifted education provides GT students with consciousness and appreciation of

the relationships of all elements in the world around them (Ford & Milner, 2005).

Unidentified GT ELs miss the opportunity of all the advantages listed above.

### **Contributions and Significance of Study**

The findings of this study will add to the body of literature on GT Hispanic EL students by focusing on the underrepresentation of these students that has been largely unexplored. It is of value not only to educational scholars but also to Hispanic ELs, parents, teachers, schools, school districts, and the larger community. The findings will contribute to a more equitable identification process increasing diversity (increasing the representation of ELs) in gifted education within STSD. A more equitable identification process can help ELs recognize their potential and their contributions to self and society. Overall, a more equitable identification process will help GT Hispanic EL students with awareness and appreciation of the relationships of all elements within the community (Ford & Milner, 2005).

In addition, diversity has a tenacious hold on the public education system. Educational leaders and the public education system have not been receptive to the rapidly growing diverse communities in the United States. Educational institutions' response to diverse groups in educational programs such as the GT program is limited. This study will help educational leaders understand and potentially enact issues such as the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in gifted education.

### **Key Terms**

**Bilingual education.** Bilingual education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organized program which encompasses all or parts of the curriculum and includes the

study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the child's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures (Pankake, Littleton, and Schroth, 2005, p. 97).

**Limited English proficient.** The local school district in which this study will be conducted previously referred to bilingual students as limited English proficiency (LEP). The local policy defines LEP as “a student whose primary language is other than English and whose English language skills are such that the student has difficulty performing ordinary classwork in English (State and Local Policy 015901).

**English language learner.** English language learner (ELL) is a student who is in the process of acquiring English and is a speaker of a native language (State and Local Policy 015901).

**English learner.** English learner (EL) is a student who is in the process of acquiring English and has another language as the first native language (State and Local Policy 015901).

**Gifted and talented.** The state and local school district in which this study will be conducted defines gifted and talented as “a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment.

**Hispanic.** The United States Census Bureau defines Hispanic or Latino as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

**L1.** A child's first language (Cummins, 1979).

**L2.** A child's second language (Cummins, 1979).

**Native language.** A student's first language (Nieto, 2009).

### **Organization of Study**

This study is divided into five chapters. In chapter two, an exhaustive literature review is presented which explores past studies of GT ELs. Chapter two concludes with a more detailed description of the theoretical framework. In the third chapter, the methodology for this study is thoroughly presented in addition to details on how the data will be collected and analyzed. In chapter four, the findings will be presented. Chapter five is the concluding chapter where the research question is addressed and recommendations for future studies are made.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I introduce empirical studies found in the literature concerning the underrepresentation of bilingual students in gifted and talented (GT) programs, particularly Hispanic English learners (ELs). Furthermore, to better support this research, I introduce a concise synopsis including but not limited to:

- a brief history of bilingual education following a chronological order of Federal and State Law and Policy Impacting Language Minority Students retrieved from the Texas Education Agency (TEA)
- a brief history of GT education following a chronological order of key dates in GT education retrieved from the National Association for Gifted Children's (NAGC)
- a brief history of legislation in Texas regarding gifted education retrieved from TEA and the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT)
- a brief history of the underrepresentation of bilingual students in gifted education.

As this dissertation focuses on the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in GT programs, in presenting the research, this review of the literature focuses on relevant legislation, peer reviewed articles, reports, and studies published in scholarly journals and dissertations published that focused on the practice, screening and identification of Hispanic ELs for GT programs. This chapter concludes with a detailed description of the theoretical framework adopted for this study.

## **Evolution of Bilingual Education**

### ***Federal Policy Impacting Bilingual Education in the United States***

The first policies related to bilingual education in the United States first emerged in the 1920s (Texas Education Agency, 2004). However, it was not until the early 1960s that the gradual increase in the population of language minority students into the United States had a major impact on the public education system and bilingual education in particular (Nieto, 2009). This was because between the 1920s and 1960s, the only method of instruction for language minority students was English immersion, also known as submersion or sink-or-swim (Crawford, 1999; Cummins, 2000; Texas Education Agency, 2004). Submersion education is not a bilingual model. Submersion education is “submerging a language minority student in the second language pool (English) with no language assistance, and he or she either sinks or swims on his or her own” (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005, p. 102). This became a subtractive approach to language. Submersion was the only alternative prior to the Lau decision (presented later in this chapter) and targeted full assimilation. The absence of a meaningful education obstructed language minority students from full participation in school and society (Nieto, 2009).

It was not until 1963 when a semi-successful two-way bilingual program was first developed for Cuban refugee children in Dade County, Florida (Aldrich, 1984; Texas Education Agency, 2004). Since then countless civil rights movements have influenced the course of bilingual education. “The origin of bilingual education began with two significant pieces of federal legislation, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)” (Esquiedo, 2006, p. 15). Although, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not directly address bilingual education, it

was the ultimate initiative and foundation for bilingual education in the United States (Esquierdo, 2006; Nieto, 2009). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in all federal assisted programs (Crawford, 1999). Therefore, school districts that received federal financial assistance were required to ensure that minority students would have access to the same programs as non-minorities.

Also, during the Johnson administration, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was passed. This act brought national attention not only to the need to educate children from low income households, but also language minority students (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Prior to this piece of legislation, states such as California and Texas, and various local school districts around the nation, already had policies and programs in place designed to meet the needs of elementary and secondary students not fluent in the English language (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005).

The Bilingual Education Act, introduced by Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough in 1967, recognized the need for and value of bilingual education programs in the United States public education system (Petrzela, 2010). The Bilingual Education Act was certainly the ultimate federal law to recognize the needs of students with limited English or ELs (Stewner-Manzanarez, 1988). The purpose of the Bilingual Education Act was to provide school districts with federal funds to establish innovative educational programs for students with limited English-speaking abilities (Crawford, 1999).

Later in 1968, President Johnson signed Title VII also known as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 legitimizing the use of a student's first language as a tool to

develop academic success. President Johnson specifically articulated the case of Latinos across the Southwest:

Thousands of children of Latin descent, young Indians, and others will get a better start – a better chance – in school... We are now giving every child in America a better chance to touch his outmost limits... We have begun a campaign to unlock the full potential of every boy and girl – regardless of his race, or his religion, or his father's income. (L. Johnson, 1968 as cited in Petrzela, 2010, p. 406)

Title VII became the first piece of the United States federal legislation to recognize the needs of Els (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 did more than establish a federal policy for bilingual education for economically disadvantaged language minority students. The Act also allocated funds for innovative programs and recognized the unique educational disadvantages faced by non-English speaking students (Crawford, 1999; Petrzela, 2010; Schneider, 1976; Texas Education Agency, 2004). Additionally, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 changed the perception of Americans whose first language was not English (Crawford, 1999). Nieto (2009) noted that “the Bilingual Education Act has been considered the most important law in recognizing linguistic minority rights in the history of the United States” (p. 63).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968, although revolutionary, did not provide school districts with guidelines to follow (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Because of this, numerous revisions to the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 have been fundamental in the ramification of bilingual education. The Bilingual Education Act was amended in 1974 to explicitly define bilingual educational programs, as well as identify



goals, and stipulate the requirement of progress and feedback reports from the programs (Nieto, 2009). In 1978, the Bilingual Education Act was once again amended as in order to omit the label “Limited English Speaking Abilities (LESA) which was determined to no longer be appropriate. The new term that was adopted was ‘limited English proficient’ (LEP)” (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005, p. 98). The term limited English proficient or LEP not only considers a student’s speaking abilities, but it considers their reading and writing ability. However, this amendment pushed students into monolingual classrooms or English settings where their native language was not maintained as the Bilingual Education Act mandated (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994).

The 1980s also brought about changes to the Bilingual Education Act. In 1982, an adjustment to the Bilingual Education Act allowed native language continuance, provided program funding for LEP students with special needs, supported family English literacy programs, and emphasized the importance of teacher training (Nieto 2009; Schmid, 2001; Texas Education Agency, 2004). The Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized in 1984. “This amendment created three types of bilingual education programs: 1) the transitional bilingual education; 2) developmental bilingual education, and 3) special alternative language programs” (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005, p. 98). This amendment encouraged local school districts to decide what type of program was suitable to their respective needs. The main language learning goal of the transitional bilingual education program was to help students transition into an English-only classroom as quickly as possible; while in a developmental bilingual education program, students were taught primarily in their home language, as their English language proficiency increased, instruction in the first language decreased.

In 1988, another modification to Title VII increased the funding to state education agencies, expanded funding for special programs where only English is used, imposed a three-year limit participation in most Title VII, and created fellowship programs for professional training (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005; Texas Education Agency, 2004). However, this amendment did not approve funds for the development of bilingual education programs designed to maintain the native language (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005, p. 98). The main purpose of bilingual education became to provide instruction in the student's native language to ease student transition into mainstream instruction (Nieto, 2009).

In 1994, another educational reform under the Improving America's Schools Act, the Bilingual Education Act entailed the reconfiguration of Title VII programs (Nieto, 2009; Texas Education Agency, 2004). This amendment was the ultimate bilingual education legislation because it called for educating children through a dual language, enrichment, and additive approach versus a subtractive instructional approach (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005; Nieto, 2009). In addition, "it authorized and funded the establishment of dual language bilingual programs designed to develop and maintain the native language with the goal of biliteracy of ELs and native English speakers" (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Under this reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act the main purpose was to develop bilingual skills and multicultural understanding through teacher professional development and language maintenance and instruction (Crawford, 2004; Nieto, 2009).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. In addition, NCLB appropriated funds to states to improve the

education of ELs by assisting children in learning English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005; Smith & Rodriguez, 2011; Texas Education Agency, 2004). In addition, NCLB replaced the Bilingual Education Act with Title III, the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act, which removed the use of the word “bilingual” from the law (Crawford, 2004). Although the law did not impede bilingual education, “it imposed a high-stakes testing system that promoted the adoption and implementation of English-only instruction” (Nieto, 2009, p. 64). Title III accentuated English learning and required for ELs to take the same standardized test as native English speakers in the areas of math, science, social studies, and English language arts. Wright (2015) noted that Title III of NCLB made it clear that state programs for ELs were designed to ensure that ELs develop and attain English proficiency rapidly. Additionally, the focus of the law was to ensure that ELs acquire English as soon as possible, and no mention was made regarding the development of the first language (Pankake, Littleton, and Schroth, 2005).

In December 2015, President Obama authorized the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replacing NCLB. The main purpose of ESSA is to ensure that public schools provide a quality and equal education for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The Every Student Succeeds Act allows states to decide how schools account for student achievement. This includes the achievement of disadvantaged students such as students of color, low-income, ELs, students with disabilities and students who are homeless or in foster care (Cook-Harvey, Darling-Hammond, Lam, Mercer & Roc, 2016). This is the latest bill impacting bilingual education; the bill places accountability

for English learners (EL replaced the term ELL in ESSA) from Title III, which authorized assistance to state and local school districts for English language programs, to Title I, the federal program under which all other student groups are measured (Mitchell, 2016). “Moving ELs into the same accountability pool as all other students demonstrates the growing effect these students have on education” (Ferguson, 2016). Consequently, the term English learner (EL) replaced ELL (Ferguson, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The Every Student Succeeds Act requires states to have a reliable process for identifying ELs, providing them services to acquire English, and, later, placing them into general English education. Overall, the purpose of this change is to advance equity and excellence for all students (U.S Department of Education, 2016).

### ***Supreme and Federal Court Cases Impacting Bilingual Education***

Historically, in addition to federal policy reforms, several supreme and federal court decisions have impacted the education of ELs in the United States. Two notable cases were Mendez vs. Westminster in 1947 and Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954. Mendez vs. Westminster was the first case to declare school segregation unconstitutional (San Miguel, 2005). In 1947, this federal court case challenged Mexican remedial schools in Orange County, California. The United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit declared that the obligatory segregation of Mexican American students into separate “Mexican schools” was unconstitutional and illegal, not because Mexicans were “White,” as argued, but because under equal protection of the laws pertaining to the public school system in California, the same facilities, textbooks and courses of instruction were not provided to children of Mexican ancestry that were available to the other public school children regardless of their heritage (San Miguel, 2005)

The decision of Mendez vs. Westminster paved the way for a vast historic civil rights case, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954. Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka was a revolutionary U.S. court case in which the court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and White students to be unconstitutional (Crawford, 1999).

In the decades after these landmark cases many court decisions and federal policy reforms took place. The 1970s saw many federal court decisions that impacted bilingual education. The one that had the “greatest impact on bilingual education was undoubtedly Lau vs. Nichols” (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005, p. 99).

Lau vs. Nichols was a lawsuit brought against a San Francisco School District by Chinese-speaking parents who believed the school district violated their equal rights. The parents testified that their children were not receiving equal education because the instruction was in a language they did not understand. The school district claimed that the education was equal because the students had access to the same teachers, textbooks, and facilities as the other students. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs.

The Lau Remedies, as they came to be known, consisted of three parts. The first part is to Identify the needs of ELs and implement teaching methods to fulfil their needs. The second remedy is to provide adequate training for bilingual teachers and teach assistants. The third remedy is to communicate with parents in a language they understand (Crawford, 1999; Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005).

The Lau vs. Nichols decision of 1974 also overruled the lower courts. Including the 1972 case of Otero vs. Mesa County where in 1972 the courts had rejected the right to a specific bilingual education program (Moran, 1987, Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth,

2005). Though there was not a court decision, in 1977 *The Aspira of New York, Inc. vs. Board of Education of the City of New York* however, parties agreed to follow the Lau decision. In 1978, *Cintron vs. Brentwood*, the Federal District Court for the District of New York outlawed the Brentwood School district's proposed bilingual program because it violated the Lau Guidelines.

*Serna vs. Portales Municipals Schools*, also a significant case concerning bilingual education in 1974, ruled that students have a right to bilingual education (Crawford, 1999). Other court rulings in this era included *Keyes vs. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado* where a consent decree was approved to provide for the educational needs of ELs (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Other court cases such as *Rios vs. Reed* in 1978 supported bilingual education, while *Guadalupe Organization, Inc. V. Tempe Elementary School District No. 3* ruled that the Bureau of Indian Affairs was not required to offer bilingual education programs (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005).

Federal court rulings involving bilingual education also continued into the 1980s. These cases included the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in *Idaho Migrant Council v. Board of Education* that states have the authority and obligation to oversee bilingual education programs in public schools (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). The U.S. District Court for the eastern district of Texas, Tyler division, also instructed the Texas Education Agency to phase in mandatory bilingual education in all grades. This court decision also instructed specific requirements. These requirements included three-year monitoring cycles, identification of LEP students as well as a language survey for students entering school. The ruling also established the need for exit criteria (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

The 1980s also saw the introduction of the “Castañeda Test” which was the product of the most significant case affecting language minority students after *Lau v. Nichols* (Crawford, 1999). In *Castañeda v. Pickard* the plaintiff’s claimed that the Raymondville, Texas Independent School District’s language remediation programs violated the Equal Education Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals formulated the set of three basic standards that would be dubbed the Castañeda Test in order determine school compliance with the EEOA.

The three parts of the Castañeda test include theory, practice, and results.

Theory: The school must pursue a program based on an education theory recognized as sound or, at least, as a legitimate experimental strategy; (2) practice: The school must actually implement the program with instructional practices, resources, and personnel necessary to transfer theory to reality; (3) Results: The school must not persist in a program that fails to produce results (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

The Castañeda Test was later used as precedence in *Keyes v. School District #1 of Denver, Colorado* (Texas Education Agency, 2004) and *Gomez v. Illinois State of Education* (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005; Texas Education Agency, 2004).

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), bilingual educational programs were held accountable for ELs’ academic growth (Esquierdo, 2006). The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, provides funding to states “to improve the education of limited English proficient students by assisting children to learn English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards” (Texas Education Agency, 2004). In addition, NCLB was to improve the education of LEP students; it “did not officially ban bilingual

programs, but it imposed a high-stakes testing system that promoted the adoption and implementation of English-only instruction” (Nieto, 2009, p. 64).

### ***Legislation in Texas Regarding Bilingual Education***

In addition to federal policy and court rulings that have impacted bilingual education and bilingual students, it is significant to mention the legislation in Texas that has notably impacted bilingual education given the context of this study. The most relevant legislation was established in 1969 when the 61<sup>st</sup> legislature passed the state’s first bilingual bill, House Bill 103. House Bill 103 recognized English as the primary language of instruction in schools and allowed, but did not require, school districts to provide bilingual instruction through grade six (Texas Education Agency, 2004). In 1973, the 63<sup>rd</sup> legislature passed the Texas Bilingual Education and Training Act (SB 121). Senate Bill 121 required school districts in which 20 or more LEP students in the same grade level spoke the same language the previous year to establish a program of bilingual instruction beginning with the 1974-1975 academic year (Texas Education Agency, 2004). In November of 1978, the State Board of Education adopted the standards governing the implementation of special language programs for LEP students (Texas Education Agency, 2004). Senate Bill 477 passed in 1981, which reinforced the guidelines required and needed to implement the state bilingual plan and established the Language Proficiency Assessment Committees (LPAC) (Texas Education Agency, 2004). The LPAC’s responsibilities was to follow a cycle throughout the school year and monitor the identification of English learners, assessment and documentation review, placement, instructional methodologies, interventions, collaboration, annual review, reassessment and parental notification (Texas Education Agency, 2004).



The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 has indisputably endured countless changes that reflect, represent and underrepresent, and challenge institutions to meet the needs of LEP students in the United States. It has evolved from limited standards to concrete, fundamental set of regulations that allow school districts greater control of bilingual programs and its curriculum. Present Texas legislation encourages alternative bilingual education programs to enable LEP students to reach proficiency in English and their highest academic potential and success in mainstream classrooms. As noted, changes in bilingual education legislation are continuous as the United States accommodates new waves of immigrants. Though the evolution of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 has been contentious at times, it has definitely evolved in an effort to improve and meet bilingual students' needs.

#### ***Local and State Bilingual Education/ESL Policies and Programs***

Historically, the governance of schools is left primarily in the hands of local officials or school boards. While states are legally responsible for public education, authority to govern schools has mostly been delegated to elected school boards (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005). School boards review, revise, and restructure existing legal or state and local policies to address emerging educational models, special programs, and educational practices.

State and local policies guide school districts' day-to-day operations and decision making. State and local policies apply to all students as they are identified within the Public Education Information System (PEIMS). It is crucial for students to be identified or labeled within PEIMS because as students are identified then schools receive funding. Therefore, students must be provided with full, equal and inclusive educational

opportunities throughout their educational endeavors regardless of race, ethnicity, or language including and not limited to bilingual programs and gifted educational programs (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Texas Education Code Chapter 29, Subchapter B, under Adaptations for Special Populations for educating ELs, states that it “is the policy of the state that every student in the state who has a home language other than English and who is identified as an ELL shall be provided a full opportunity to participate in a bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) program” (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Texas Education Code §1.002(a) requires school districts to:

- Identify English language learners based on criteria established by state;
- Provide bilingual education and ESL programs as integral parts of the regular program as described in the TEC §4.002;
- Seek certified teaching personnel to ensure that English language learners are afforded full opportunity to master the essential knowledge and skills required by the state; and
- Assess achievement for essential knowledge and skills in accordance with the TEC, Chapter 39, to ensure accountability for English language learners and the schools that serve them (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

State and local policies are in place to ensure equal and full opportunity to all students (Wilmore, 2008). Special Programs Bilingual Education State Legal and Local Policy 015901state:

A. Title III Requirements – A district that receives funds under Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act shall comply with the statutory requirements regarding English language learners and immigrant students.

B. State Policy – It is the policy of the state that every student who has a home language other than English and who is identified as an English language learner shall be provided a full opportunity to participate in a bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) program.

c) Definitions – “Student of limited English proficiency (LEP)” means a student whose primary language is other than English and whose English language skills are such that the student has difficulty performing ordinary classwork in English. “English language learner (ELL)” is a person who is in the process of acquiring English and has another language as the first native language. The terms English language learner and LEP student are used interchangeably.

d) District Responsibility – Each district shall: 1) identify English language learners based on criteria established by the state; 2) provide bilingual education and ESL programs as integral parts of the regular program; 3) seek certified teaching personnel to ensure that English language learners are afforded full opportunity to master the essential knowledge and skills, and 4) assess achievement for essential knowledge and skills in accordance with Education Code Chapter 39 to ensure accountability for English language learners and the schools that serve them. (Legal and Local Policy 015901; Texas Education Agency, 2016)

State and local policy predetermine course of action, which is established to provide a guide toward the identification of bilingual students. State and local policy, as explained in the next section, also determines the identification of GT students.

## **Evolution of Gifted Education**

### ***Historical Background of Gifted Education***

Gifted education programs in the United States date back to the mid-1800s (Bhatt, 2011). But it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that intensive attention was given to gifted education in the United States (Karnes & Nugent, 2002; Reid, 2015). “At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, advancements in education and psychology brought empirical and scientific credibility to the field of gifted education,” (National Association for Gifted Children, 2018, p. 5).

Gifted education continued to evolve throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1901, Worcester, Massachusetts established the first special school for gifted children (Karnes & Nugent, 2002; NAGC, 2018). In 1905, French researchers, Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon developed the Binet-Simon Scale, “a series of tests to identify children of inferior intelligence for the purpose of separating them from normally functioning children for placement in special classrooms,” (NAGC, 2018, p. 2). In 1908, Henry Goddard, brought the Binet-Simon Scale to America in order to translate it into English and introduce it to the American education system and psychologists (NAGC, 2018). However, it was not until 1916 that Lewis Terman published the Stanford-Binet which rooted from the Binet-Simon Scale (NAGC, 2018).

The first pioneers of gifted education in the United States were Lewis Terman, considered the “father” of gifted education, and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, who established the

term “gifted” (NAGC, 2018; Reid, 2015). In 1921, Terman launched a study of gifted children with an original sample of 1,500 gifted children, which has “remained the longest running longitudinal study of gifted children in history” (NAGC, 2018, p. 2). In 1922, Hollingworth began a “Special Opportunity Class” at P.S. 165 in New York City for gifted students (NAGC, 2018). This “Special Opportunity Class” produced almost 40 articles, a textbook, and several blueprints for Hollingworth’s work at P.S. 500, the Speyer School (NAGC, 2018) brought attention to gifted education.

In 1925, Terman published *Genetic Studies of Genius*, the first volume of a five-volume study spanning nearly 40 years (NAGC, 2018). *Genetic Studies of Genius* concluded that gifted students were:

a) qualitatively different in school; b) slightly better physically and emotionally in comparison to normal students; c) superior in academic subjects in comparison to the average students; d) emotionally stable; e) most successful when education and family values were held in high regard by the family, and f) infinitely variable in combination with number of traits exhibited by those in the study. (NAGC, 2018, p. 3)

In 1926, Hollingworth published *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture* “which is considered to be the first textbook on gifted education” (NAGC, 2018). Then in 1936, she established the P.S. 500 also known as the Speyer School, for the gifted children ages 7 – 9 (NAGC, 2018). However, throughout history, Hispanic students were never included or considered as gifted, because GT programs were exclusively considered for White, middle, and upper-middle class students (Castellano, 1998).

### ***Key Dates Impacting Gifted and Talented Education***

Historically, federal policy reforms, as well as supreme and federal court decisions, impact and protect different educational programs. Unlike Special Education and Title I or Bilingual Education, there is minimum to no federal funding and oversight to guarantee or protect gifted education (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). This section describes federal court cases and legislation related to gifted education.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, ended segregation in schools and impacted gifted education remarkably (NAGC, 2018). “Separatism and equality were declared an impossible combination and therefore unconstitutional...educators and social and behavioral scientist placed the cause of disadvantaged children at the top of their priority list, even ahead of the gifted” (Tannenbaum, 1979, p.11).

In addition to diverting interest away from the gifted, the advocacy movement for the socially disadvantaged actually contested at least two features of special programs for the ablest: (a) the use of intelligence tests and other conventional measures of aptitude as a means of determining who deserves to be called gifted; and (b) grouping children in special classes for the gifted on the basis of their performance on these kinds of assessments. The intelligence test, a major instrument for determining academic potential ever since Terman initiated his monumental studies of genius in the early part of the century, came under heavy attack for being biased against some racial minorities and the socioeconomically depressed. It was charged that the problem-solving tasks, which are mostly verbal, favor children with experience in higher-status environments. Consequently, these children obtain higher scores, thus creating the delusion that they are

basically more intelligent and perhaps even born with superior intellect. As a result of these charges, some urban centers with large racial minorities, notably New York and Los Angeles, discontinued the use of such tests. (Tannenbaum, 1979, p.11)

In the same year, 1954, regardless of the setbacks, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) was founded under the leadership of Ann Isaacs (Karnes & Nugent, 2002; NAGC, 2018). The establishment of NAGC was of extreme importance by developing high-quality education, support, research, and advocacy that addressed the needs of GT children from different cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups (Roberts, 1999).

In 1957, the launching of Sputnik I by the Soviet Union startlingly motivated the United States to reconsider its human capital and the quality of the American education particularly in mathematics, science, and technology (Karnes & Nugent, 2002; NAGC, 2018; Piirto, 1999; Roberts, 1999; Tannenbaum, 1979). After Sputnik I, gifted individuals were considered a valuable resource and there was a need to be developed to the highest level (Roberts, 1999). Consequently, the National Defense Education Act passed in 1958 as an attempt to advance content in mathematics and science (Bhatt, 2011; Karnes & Nugent, 2002; NAAGC, 2018; Piito, 1999; Roberts, 1999). In addition, “the National Defense Education Act of 1958 made federal funding available to capitalize on interest in supporting programs to develop talents,” (Roberts, 1999, p. 53). The National Defense Act was the first major effort in the education of gifted children (NAGC, 2018; Reid, 2015; Roberts, 1999) In addition, the National Defense Act prompted special secondary schools for the gifted children and for universities to develop studies and

programs for the intellectually gifted students with the aim to develop creativity (Reid, 2015).

In 1969, the Congress of the United States requested U.S. Commissioner Sidney P. Marland, Jr. to conduct a study on education of gifted children (Bhatt, 2011; Reid, 2015; Roberts, 1999). The report entitled Education of the Gifted and Talented, also known as the Marland Report, was issued by the U.S. Office of Education in 1972 (Bhatt, 2011; Reid, 2015; Roberts, 1999). The Marland Report became the most important historic happening in gifted education (Karnes, F. & Nugent, S., 2002). The report was significant in two aspects: 1) it established awareness and 2) it provided the first formal definition of giftedness. This report established a low-level of awareness among educators about gifted children. In addition, the Marland Report established six categories of giftedness (Bhatt, 2011; NAGC, 2018; Reid, 2015; Roberts, 1999). These categories were: “1) general intellectual ability; 2) specific academic ability; 3) creative or productive thinking; 4) leadership ability; 5) visual and performing arts, and 6) psychomotor ability,” (Roberts, 1999, p. 53). In addition, the Marland Report provided the first formal definition of giftedness, which is still used today as the basis of definition of giftedness in the United States (Bhatt, 2011; NAGC, 2018; Reid, 2015; Roberts, 1999). In 1974 the Marland Report also prompted for The Office of Gifted and Talented housed within the U.S. Office of Education to be given official status (NAGC, 2018). However, in 1975 Public Law 94-142, The Education for all Handicapped Children Act, established a federal mandate which requires school to serve children with special education needs. However, it does not include children with gifts and talents (NAGC, 2018).



In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* reported “the brightest students in the U.S. failed to compete with international counterparts...the report included policies and practices in gifted education, raising academic standards, and promoting appropriate curriculum for gifted learners” (NAGC, 2018). *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was a report about the critical nation’s public education system released in April 1983 by The National Commission on Excellence in Education convened by President Ronald Reagan’s education secretary, Terrel H. Bell. The authors of the report used numerous indicators and statistics to draw a troubled portrait of the country’s public education system. The report also included an extensive list of recommendations to improve public schools. Recommendations included the adoption of rigorous standards, state, and local tests to measure achievement, stronger graduation standards, adequate financial resources, and curriculum changes to give students a solid foundation in basic subjects as well as art and computer science (U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

Thereafter in 1988, Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act as part of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NAGC, 2018). The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act provided school with tactics and strategies to educate gifted children (Bhatt, 2011). It also made it possible for research to focus on gifted education and funded model projects to implement strategies and support to state education reform in areas of need for children who are gifted (Roberts, 1999).

In 1990, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented was founded at the University of Connecticut and included researchers at the University of Virginia, Yale

University, and the University of Georgia (Roberts, 1999; Bhatt, 2011; NAGC, 2018). In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education published the National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent (NAGC, 2018). The report outlined how the United States neglected the most talented youth and provided a number of recommendations influencing and challenging the previous decade of research in gifted education (NAGC, 2018). The report also defined gifted students as:

children and youth with outstanding talent, perform, or show the potential for performing at remarkable high-levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment...the definition stresses that outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (Roberts, 1999, p. 55)

The recommendations and definition provided by the National Excellence report became the standards that states have used in developing their definition of GT children and the services they should receive (NAGC, 2018; Roberts, 1999). Accordingly, in 1998, NAGC published the Pre-K – Grade 12 Standards to provide guidance and support for programs serving GT students (NAGC, 2018).

In 2002, NCLB was passed as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Javits Act was re-sanctioned under NCLB (Bhatt, 2011; NAGC, 2018). In addition, the definition of GT is modified:

students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific

academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (NAGC, 2018).

Furthermore, NCLB also provided funding to gifted programs that served students who were traditionally underrepresented in gifted education (Bhatt, 2011).

In 2006, NAGC published the “national gifted education standards for teacher preparation programs and knowledge and skills standards in gifted education for all teachers” (National Association for Gifted Children, 2018, p. 5). The standards were later revised in 2013. These standards were put in place to guide gifted education. However, throughout the history of gifted education there is a continuous pattern of the exclusion of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from gifted programs as GT programs were originally created for White, middle and upper-middle class students (Castellano, 1998).

### ***Legislation in Texas Regarding Gifted and Talented Education***

Federal law acknowledges that children with gifts and talents that have unique needs are not traditionally met in regular school settings (NAGC, 2018). There are no specific provisions, mandates, or requirements to meet these needs. “Gifted education is a purely local responsibility and is dependent on local leadership” (NAGC, p.1, 2018). Pankake, Littleton, and Schroth (2005) stated that “unlike Special Education or Title I, there is no federal safety net to guarantee that schools provide services to gifted and talented students” (p. 132). Minimal attention, unmeasurable policies and standards have been set for school accountability. The vast majority and absence of legislation related to gifted education is from the states and created by state education agencies (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005).

Although, gifted education has been traced back to 618 BC (Karnes & Nugent, 2002) and in the United States back to the 1800s (NAGC, 2018), it was not until 1979 that the Texas Legislature provided state funds, on a competitive basis, for school districts that were willing to provided gifted services to GT children (Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, 2018; Texas Education Agency, 2009).

In 1988, the Texas Legislature mandated that all school districts in Texas must identify and serve GT students at all grade levels Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, 2018; Texas Education Agency, 2009). After this, funds for gifted education became possible for all Texas school districts. Funds became available on a formula basis (Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented, 2018).

In 1990, The Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented was adopted by the Texas State Board of Education (Texas Education Agency, 2009). This plan stressed “that services for gifted students build from and expand on the general school program provided to all students” (Dean, 2003, p. 1). This was a significant progress in serving GT students as the Texas State Board of Education committed to provide high-level learning opportunities for GT students through the following goal:

Students who participate in services designed for gifted/talented students will demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment. High school graduates who have participated in services for gifted/talented students will have produced products and performances of professional quality as part of their program services. (Texas Education Agency, 2009, p. 1)

In 1999, the 76<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature introduced Rider 69. Rider 69 was the catalyst which brought the initial development and the ongoing refinement of the Texas Performance Standards Project for Gifted/Talented (TPSP). The TPSP is a way in which school districts may reach the goal of serving GT students (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Since then all school districts have been mandated by Texas law to provide advanced level services for all students (Dean, 2003). The marginalization of minoritized students continues to manifest within the public education system (Elhoweris, 2008). This marginalization is visible in gifted education the as the underrepresentation of bilingual students in GT education is prominent (Bernal, 2002; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Walker, 1997; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005).

### ***The Underrepresentation of Gifted and Talented Bilingual Students***

Minoritized students continue to face biases within the public education system (Elhoweris, 2008). Amongst these biases is the underrepresentation of bilingual students in GT education (Bernal, 2002; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Walker, 1997; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Naglieri and Ford (2003) noted that “as of 1993, the U.S. Department of Education reported that Black, Hispanic, and Native American students were underrepresented by 50-70% in gifted education programs” (p. 155). More recently, in 2017, Sparks and Harwin also stated that bilingual students are underrepresented in gifted programs in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Ignorance and misunderstanding about giftedness and cultural diversity

contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanics (Ross, 1993). Therefore, GT programs are mostly comprised of White, middle- or upper-class students (Castellano, 1998).

Although this unequal representation of students in GT programs has been considered extensively and critically questioned, there are many factors, such as the identification process, that prevent bilingual students from being identified as GT (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Bernal, 1974; Hansford, Bonar, Scally, & Burge, 2001; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; McBee, 2010; Milner & Ford, 2007). At the center of this underrepresentation are ambiguous identification processes (Andreadis & Quinn, 2017; Ayers, 1990; Bell, 2012; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquierdo, 2006; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Ford, 2007; Ford, Davis, et al., 2020; Ford, Wright, et al., 2020; Hageman, 2008; Hodges, et al., 2018; Ramos, 2010; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Nichol, 2013; Peters, et al., 2019; Pratt, 2019; ). This identification process will be discussed in relation to the various steps involved including:

- the nomination or referral process
- identification criteria,
- assessments,
- selection committee,
- appeals.

This section will conclude with a discussion of the role of parents in this process.

### ***The Identification Process***

The process for identifying and serving GT students in Texas begins with the definition of a GT Student. As stated in the Legal and Local Policy 015901 §EHBB and Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.121, a GT student is one:

who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience or environment and who exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic field; possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or excels in a specific academic field. (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005, p. 91)

However, the identification of GT students is based on local standards (National Association for Gifted Children, 2018; Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Texas Education Code §29.122 allows school districts to establish a process for identifying GT students. Texas Education Code §29.122 establishes that:

using criteria established by the State Board of Education, each school district shall adopt a process for identifying and serving gifted and talented students in the district and shall establish a program for those students in each grade level. A district may establish a shared services arrangement program with one or more other districts. (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Chapter 89, Adaptations for Special Populations, Subchapter A, Gifted/Talented Education, Section §89.1 requires school districts to develop written policies on the identification of gifted student that are approved by the local board of trustees and disseminated to parents. The policies must:

“(1) include provisions for ongoing screening and selection of students who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment in the areas defined in the Texas Education Code, §29.121; (2) include assessment measures collected from multiple sources according to each area defined in the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students; (3) include data and procedures designed to ensure that students from all populations in the district have access to assessment and, if identified, services for the gifted/talented program; (4) provide for final selection of students to be made by a committee of at least three local district educators who have received training in the nature and needs of gifted students; and (5) include provisions regarding furloughs, reassessment, exiting of students from program services, transfer students, and appeals of district decisions regarding program placement.” (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

However, state legislation does not stipulate how that identification is to take place (Walsh, Kemerer, & Maniotis, 2005). The National Association for Gifted Children (2018) suggested that gifted education becomes local responsibility and dependent on local leadership; therefore, it “creates inequities of access for students in poverty, from racial and ethnic minority groups, English learners, and those with disabilities” (p.1). The identification process is subjective, which creates inconsistency among different racial groups in GT programs Esquiedo and Arreguín-Anderson (2012). The GT identification protocols neglect giftedness among low-socioeconomic status students, who may also have a culturally and linguistically diverse heritage (Ramos, 2010).



As the bilingual student population increases in the United States and in Texas, the number of identified GT bilingual students remain the same. Hence, the underrepresentation of bilingual students in GT programs is evident and is a critical educational concern (Andreadis & Quinn, 2017; Bernal, 2002; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Ford, Davis, et al., 2020; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Ford, Wright, et al., 2020; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Hodges, et al., 2018; Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Walker, 1997; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Peters, et al., 2019; Pratt, 2019). The core of this underrepresentation is ambiguity of the identification process Esquierdo and Arreguín-Anderson (2012).

The identification process under local policy §EHBB, Special Programs Gifted and Talented Students, in compliance with legal policy §EHBB, includes but is not limited to:

- nomination or referral
- identification criteria
- assessments
- selection committee
- appeals

**Nomination or referral.** The identification of GT students in Texas begins with the nomination or referral to the program. Local policy §EHBB states that students may be nominated or referred to the GT program at any time by teachers, counselors, parents, or any other interested persons. The nomination process typically begins with the teacher. Teachers, therefore, are the gatekeepers of gifted programs (Baldwin, 2005;

Bishofberger, 2012; Brown, 1997; Elhoweris, 2008;). Furthermore, teacher nomination is the strongest discriminator between gifted and non-gifted students (Perryman, 1986). Because teachers are key to the identification process, “it is important to determine whether those recommendations are based, in part, on stereotypic thinking” (Carman, 2011). Stereotypic views, beliefs, biases, attitudes, and expectations held by educators’ influence and prevent minority students from receiving gifted educational services (Carman, 2011).

Teacher nomination is the most common method of identifying gifted students (Carman, 2011). However, teachers are poor at identifying gifted and talented students (Carman, 2011). The fact that the majority of teachers in the United States are White presents cultural misunderstandings and disparities that may obstruct the selection of high-ability diverse children for gifted programs (Ford, 2003; Ross, 1993; Warne, Anderson, & Johnson, 2013). Accordingly, past studies have found that teacher referrals to gifted programs were related to students’ ethnicity (Plata, Masten, & Trusty, 1999; Carman, 2011). Teachers refer Asian and White students to gifted programs at a greater rate and with higher accuracy than Black and Latino students (Carman, 2011; McBee, 2006; Warne, Anderson, & Johnson, 2013).

Social class has also been found to be an obstacle for minority students to enter GT programs (Elhoweris, 2008, Rist, 1970). Students’ S.E.S influences teacher academic placement decisions (Carman, 2011; Elhoweris, 2008; Frey, 2002; Moon & Brighton, 2008; Rohrer, 1995). Rohrer (1995) identified SES as a major influencer in teachers’ perception of GT students. In fact, teachers were found to nominate students with high-socioeconomic-related characteristics to GT programs while children from low SES

backgrounds were underrepresented (Bishofberger, 2012; Carman, 2011; McBee, 2006; Rohrer, 1995). Furthermore, Moon and Brighton (2008) and Carman (2011) established that teachers believe that a student's SES is a predictor of giftedness. Teachers' beliefs combined with a cultural misunderstanding and negative attitudes towards diverse students damages the ability for educators to recruit minority students into gifted programs (Carman, 2011; Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Geake & Gross, 2008; George & Aronson, 2003).

Because of the teachers' beliefs, cultural misunderstanding and negative attitudes towards racially/ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse students, school districts are required to train bilingual and regular teachers to deliver appropriate curriculum instruction to meet the academic, linguistic, and social needs of bilingual gifted students (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). Teachers must also be qualified to differentiate instruction and classroom management strategies to maximize the learning environment for gifted bilingual learners. However, the number of teachers receiving academic preparation to work with culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students is minimal (Ford & Trotman, 2001). In addition, most teachers who are GT certified are English-only speakers who are not highly qualified to work with bilingual students (Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Walker, 1997).

Esquierdo and Arreguín-Anderson (2012) suggested that GT certified teachers must be trained and become aware of the characteristics of GT bilingual students so they can successfully serve them in the classroom. In addition, it is crucial for bilingual teachers to be trained to identify giftedness in children, as well as in gifted education philosophy, instructional approaches, and best practices. These conditions place GT

bilingual students in a double disadvantage academically. Overall, regardless of a student's ethnicity, culture or SES, teachers' beliefs, biases, attitudes, lack of cultural understating, and expectations highly interfere with minority students' participation in gifted programs.

**Identification criteria.** Under the identification criteria, local policy §EHBB, specific to legal policy §EHBB, ensures “fair assessment of students with special needs, such as the culturally different, the economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities.” Limited English proficiency limits student performance, especially on standardized test. Different ethnic background affects the pattern of mental aptitudes (Bernal, 1998). Pankake, Littleton, and Schroth (2005) stated, “English language proficiency is the major reason for minority students’ academic failure” (p. 101).

When it comes to the GT identification process, school districts must consider a student's background. English language learners tend to progress slower academically. In addition, Lara-Alecio and Irby (2000) proposed the consideration of the socio-linguistic and cultural aspect be added to identify giftedness in bilingual students because their reality and experiences are different from a mainstream student. Gifted bilingual students are not only highly capable to perform academically and artistically but also grow up in a socially, linguistically, and culturally diverse environment that enhances different talents and abilities.

Bernal (1998) suggested that members of different ethnic groups exhibit different patterns of intellectual ability. Giftedness manifests differently in Hispanic students (Andreadis & Quinn, 2017; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Ford, Davis, et al., 2020; Ford, Wright, et al., 2020; Hodges, et al., 2018; Peters, et

al., 2019; Pratt, 2019). In 1974, Bernal and Reyna identified several characteristics among gifted Hispanic students such as the ability to acquire basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), a tendency to prefer older playmates and adhering to traditional family responsibilities are characteristics of gifted bilingual students.

**Assessment.** The assessment process is a crucial part in the GT nomination process; however, gifted education challenges current philosophies of assessment and accountability (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Legal policy §EHBB requires for students to “be identified as gifted/talented in accordance with a written policy that includes...assessment measures collected from multiple sources according to each area defined in the Texas State plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students.” Local policy §EHBB requires:

data collected through both objective and subjective assessments shall be measured against the criteria approved by the Board to determine individual eligibility for the program. Assessment tools may include, but are not limited to, the following: achievement tests, intelligence tests, creativity tests, behavioral checklists completed by teachers and parents, student/parent conferences, and available student work products.

Assessment is a pivotal requirement; however, the underrepresentation of bilingual students in gifted education in part is the result of biased and ambiguous assessment practices (Andreadis & Quinn, 2017; Bernal, 1974; Castellano, 1998; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Ford, Davis, et al., 2020; Ford, Wright, et al., 2020; Hodges, et al., 2018; Peters, et al., 2019; Pratt, 2019).

Standardized tests, such as the Cognitive Abilities Test (aptitude test) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (norm-based achievement test) are the most common methods of identifying GT students (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005, p. 133). The tests utilized to identify GT students are designed by White, middle or upper-middle class experts whose academic and cultural backgrounds guided them to set standards that favor students with similar backgrounds (Bernal, 1998). Therefore, these tests are cultural and linguistically biased. Valdés and Figueroa (1994) stated:

when a bilingual individual confronts a monolingual test, developed by monolingual individuals, and standardized and normed on a monolingual population, both the test taker and the test are asked to do something that they cannot. The bilingual test taker cannot perform like a monolingual. The monolingual test cannot measure in the other language (p. 87).

As mentioned above, GT programs are filled with White, middle or upper-middle class students (Castellano, 1998). These are students whose socio-economic status provides them with enrichment opportunities and “linguistic experiences that enhance their natural abilities and aptitude in ways that allow them to do exceptionally well on standardized tests” (Castellano, 1998, p. 2). Culturally and linguistically bilingual students must overcome language and cultural difficulties before they may exhibit high intellectual potential and academic aptitude (Bernal, 1981). Furthermore, it takes a bilingual child between five to seven years to gain the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) to cope with academic demands. In addition, it may take a child with no prior instruction or support in a first language development up to seven years to

develop CALP (Collier & Thomas, 1995). Therefore, bilingual students in an effort to make sense of language perform poorly on assessments (Cummins, 2000).

**Selection committee.** Local policy §EHBB states that a “selection committee shall evaluate each nominated student according to the established criteria...the committee shall be composed of at least three professional educators who have received training in the nature and needs of gifted students, as required by law” (Local Policy §EHBB, 2011). This local policy does not require a highly qualified bilingual teacher to be part of the GT selection committee.

Harris (2002) suggested that school improvement requires building a positive climate. A positive climate involves participation. If highly qualified bilingual teachers are not involved, change will not occur (Harris, 2002). Bilingual teachers play an advocacy role in identifying the educational needs and identifying the best educational setting that will consider bilingual students as whole, including social, linguistic, and cognitive development (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). Through participation in planning and decision-making, bilingual teachers become the voice of bilingual students, without bilingual teacher participation, gifted bilingual students become “invisible” (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012).

**Appeal process.** Local policy §EHBB states, “a parent or student may appeal any final decision of the selection committee...the appeal shall contain justification for the appeal and provide new evidence to be considered.” Parents have the right to appeal unfavorable decisions made by the selection committee, and often chose to do so (Local Policy §EHBB, 2011).

School districts have the right to set their own requisites (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005); therefore, school districts may choose to accept external testing as a form of evidence to enter GT programs. Gifted and talented students identified through alternative assessments such as an intelligent quotient (IQ) test are often successful. However, IQ tests measure knowledge and learning skills an individual acquires in the curriculum of a culture or society (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994). An IQ test compares a child's intelligence to what his or her intelligence should be as compared to the child's age. When a student does not perform well in the school districts assessment process, parents rely on IQ tests to appeal the selection committee decisions. Parents provide the results to schools and the student is accepted into the GT program (Local Policy §EHBB, 2011). An IQ test however does not measure typical characteristics found among gifted Hispanic American children as identified by Bernal and Reyna (1974). This includes engaging adults with active conversations, having older playmates, taking parental responsibilities, and observing daily social interactions.

Alternative GT testing is quite a simple process; yet an IQ test is expensive. Intelligent quotient tests are costly and financially covered by the parent; therefore, the appeal process becomes biased and inequitable to many students including bilingual students. As mentioned above, GT programs traditionally recruit White, middle or upper class students (Castellano, 1998). One begins to question, what do low-income, bilingual students do? Often bilingual parents work two jobs to support their families. This creates a financial and time management barrier for the parents if they want to appeal the process. Socio-economic status obstructs a fair education (Rodriguez, 1999); educational



judgment is jeopardized. GT bilingual students are marginalized through biased school district local policy.

### ***Role of Parents***

Gifted students emerge from all varieties of home environments. Parents of gifted students require involvement. They must advocate for the educational needs of their gifted children (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). Parents play an important role in the identification of gifted children (Castellano & Frazier, 2011). However, legal and local policy §EHBB requires, yet limits parent involvement to consent, notification, and appeals.

The literature in the area of the parents' role in development of gifted children is sparse, however, parents play a role in the growth of their children (Castellano & Frazier, 2011). Parents are the first ones to acknowledge their children's giftedness (Castellano and Frazier, 2011). While minority parents might desire their kids to be identified as GT and to have access to rigorous academic programs, "it is kept a big secret and mystery" (Fleming, 2013, p.14). Parents who do not speak English, as one of the main factors affecting the success in identifying GT minority students (Baldwin, 1985). Although minority parents are interested in the education of their children, not all parents have the same resources (Gordon & Nocon, 2008). Many minority parents do not know how to nominate their children. "They often are limited in their access to advanced opportunities or their ability to navigate the educational system available" (Castellano & Frazier, 2011, p. 181).

A better identification process would not necessarily result in the equitable placement of minority students into gifted education programs. However, better processes

and assessment tools for assessing and identifying gifted minority students may provide an equitable education for all students. Race, minority status, SES, or language are not factors that predict students' giftedness. However, the identification of GT students has become a pattern of irrational educational assumptions shared by the majority (Morris, 2002).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The constructivist theory and the socio-ecological model (SEM) were the theoretical frameworks for this case study. Constructivist theory was the underlined philosophical foundation which this study was based. The SEM was readily used in my analysis. I selected this theory because it best supported my research question that focuses on the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in GT programs. The model has been successfully used in exploring obstacles by gifted minority students (Crawford, Snyder, & Adelson, 2020). Below, I provide specific details of the theory that comprised my framework.

Constructivist theory is predicated on the understanding that all knowledge and learning is constructed through experiences, which are often determined by social and cultural environments (Crotty, 2012). Therefore, all knowledge is dependent upon human practices and events that are created and transmitted within social context (Crotty, 2012; Piaget, 1953).

The philosophical founder of constructivist theory is John Dewey. Other notable theorists are Bruner and Piaget. Vygotsky is thought of as the major theorist amongst the social constructivists (Jones, Jones & Vermette, 2010).

As a teacher, I believe that knowledge is constructed as we engage in our world and interpret our experiences. A constructivist approach is predicated on the understanding that knowledge is constructed based on our engagement with the world and our own interpretations of this engagement or experiences (Crotty, 2012). This is no different for Hispanic ELs and those who teach them. Therefore, a constructivist approach will provide an opportunity to understand how educators working with Hispanic ELs view their gifts and talents. Based on my personal experience and my positionality in this case study, I selected to draw from the constructivist theory as Hispanic ELs construct their knowledge through experiences.

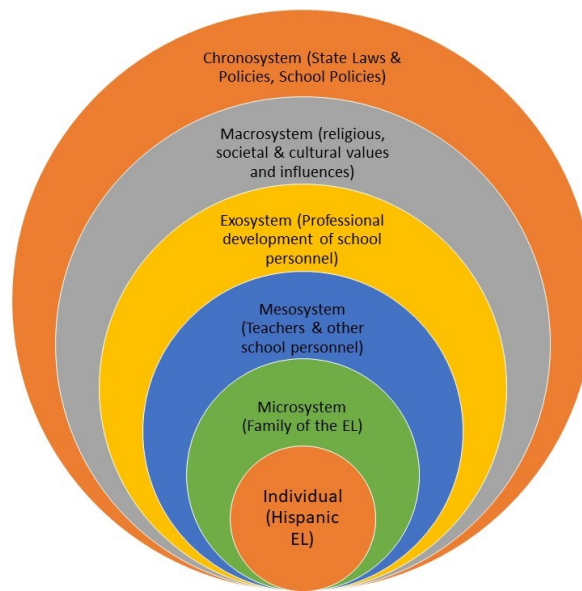
Constructivists believe that people seek understanding of the world in which they live and work through the subjectivity of their experiences. It is through this constructivist lens that I sought to make sense of the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learner s (ELs) in gifted and talented (GT) programs. However, since the constructivist standpoint is based on one's experiences, it does not go far enough in advocating for an action to help marginalized people. This transformative view must be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront educational oppression at whatever levels it occurs and, as a result, reform the institutions and lives of all involved (Creswell, 2014).

In order to help me, the researcher, make sense of my findings, I looked to the socio-ecological model (SEM). Urie Bronfenbrenner first introduced this conceptual model for understanding human development in the 1970s, and this later became a formalized theory (Kilanowski, 2017). This model is illustrated as concentric circles that have the individual at the center, incased by the other systems in which the individuals

are situated within their ecologies. The first level in the SEM is the individual. The individual level includes the characteristics that influence behavior. This includes but is not limited to knowledge, attitude, self-efficacy, race and ethnic identity, socio-economic status expectations, and stigma. For elementary school students, all of these would be present. Students are at all levels in this model (Crawford, Snyder, & Anderson, 2020). The second level is the microsystem which includes the strongest influences: family, friends, peers, coworkers, customs, or traditions. For elementary school students, this includes family influences as well as customs and traditions. The next level is the mesosystem which would include the direct contact that a student would have with teachers and other school personnel. For elementary school students, this is the daily contact within an institution. The fourth level is the exosystem which exerts both negative and positive interactive forces on the individual. For elementary school students, this would be the professional development and training of school personnel. The macrosystem, which is the fifth level, includes cultural values and influences. For elementary school students, this is reflective of the general student population. The chronosystem is the final level. This level contains internal and external elements of time and historical content and the influence of policy. For elementary students, this encompasses federal, state, and local policies (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Kilanowsky, 2017)

Outside of that is the exosystem which does not directly impact the individual students but exerts positive and negative interactive forces on the individual. The macrosystem comes next which includes religious, societal, and cultural values and

influences. Finally, the chronosystem contains both internal and external elements of time and historical context, including policy (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Socio-Ecological Model**

I applied the socio-ecological model to make sense of my themes. I then derived key findings from these themes. This is presented in chapter 5.

## **Conclusion**

As the literature presented in this chapter reveals, there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in GT programs (Bernal, 2002; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Ford, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Walker, 1997; Naglieri & Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005). This disparity of enrollment in gifted programs originated from racial dominance and social inequality (Castellano, 1998; Ford, 2014). Ambiguous identification practices have also contributed to this educational issue (Andreadis & Quinn, 2017; Coronado & Lewis, 2017; Esquiedo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Ford, Davis, et al., 2020; Ford, Wright, et al., 2020; Hodges, et al., 2018; Peters, et al., 2019; Pratt, 2019). Gifted and talented state

and local policies are very imprecise (Esquiedo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). Ignorance and misunderstanding about giftedness and cultural diversity contributes to the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs (Ross, 1993). The various issues presented in this chapter leave Hispanic ELs gifted students unnoticed (Valdes, 2003).

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I present an overview of my research design, site and participant selection, data collection procedures and strategies, and data analysis. I also present evaluation measures including trustworthiness and reliability, and limitations and delimitations of the study.

#### **Overview of Research Design**

There are three research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). For this research, I selected a qualitative research approach because it is the most appropriate approach to explore social interactions, systems, and processes. It also provides a comprehensive understating of the ways people come to understand and manage situations in particular settings without judgement (Creswell, 2014). Common characteristics of qualitative research are that this approach “focuses on qualities, such as words or observations, that are difficult to quantify and that lend themselves to interpretation or deconstruction” (Glesne, 2016, p. 299). Qualitative research includes various approaches or methodologies and tends to rely on participant observation and in-depth interviews (Glesne, 2016).

One qualitative research approach is case study (Lichtman, 2010). A case study is an in-depth analysis of a case, a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014). There are three types of case studies: explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive (Yin, 2018). For this research, I selected a descriptive case study. A descriptive case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates and focuses on a contemporary phenomenon or particular issue within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). A descriptive case study also includes “description only

such as providing a detailed account of what is happening in a particular program” without critical judgement (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012, p. 266). As such, this design was ideal to investigate the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learners (EL) in the gifted and talented (GT) program at South Texas School District (STSD) because it allowed me to collect and analyze the practitioners’ expressed knowledge about the GT identification process and effects on Hispanic ELs in gifted education. Moreover, this case study was confined to one school district in south Texas.

The primary research question that guided this study was, “What values, beliefs, systems contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learners in the GT program at a two-way immersion dual language program at an elementary school in South Texas?” This led to several sub-questions pertaining to the current GT identification process:

- What contributes to the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in the GT program at this school?
- What are teachers, staff, and district leaders’ perceptions of the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in the GT program at the school?
- What role does the GT identification process play in this underrepresentation?
- What are the lessons learned that can inform equitable change?

### **Site and Participant Selection**

This study took place at South Texas School District (STSD). I selected this school district primarily because I am employed as a teacher there. In addition, I selected this school district because of its effective dual language and GT program and reputation. The school district was awarded an “A” rating by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in



the 2018-2019 academic year. In addition, STSD was recognized for its educational innovation and accomplishments. Last year the school district was recognized as the “Best Small School District in Texas.”

South Texas School District is an affluent school district with 2,121 students enrolled in the 2018-2019 academic year in grade levels 1-5. The school demographics consisted of students who are 53.8% White, 37.3% Hispanic, 4.7% Asian, 2.0% Black or African American, 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.3% bi- or multiracial, and 0.3% native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

South Texas School District implements a dual language bilingual/immersion model. Dual language education offers instruction in both L1 and L2 for either language minority or majority students or both together or two-way (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005); the percentage of language instruction starts with 90% (English) and 10% (Spanish) in first grade and so on until fifth grade where the L1 and L2 are 50/50. South Texas School District is a dual language district with a significant number of Hispanic ELs. South Texas School District follows a two-way dual language model in which academic instruction is in both L1 and L2 for both Spanish speakers learning English and for English speakers learning Spanish. The percentage of language instruction is 90-10; English speaking students are learning Spanish, while ELs are learning English, which promotes biliteracy and biculturalism through the Pre-K-5<sup>th</sup> grade levels.

Additionally, STSD implements a gifted and talented (GT) “pull-out” program. Gifted and talented students are pulled out of the traditional grade level classroom environment and placed in a class exclusively for GT students for part of the day or a full

day according to the grade level. The GT curriculum at STSD focuses on learning processes which will help students meet the challenges of life-long learning.

Furthermore, I worked at STSD since 2011 and continued to do so while conducting this study, which provided access to my co-workers and GT programmatic data. As mentioned in the limitations, while I had access to the research participants because I worked at the research site, it was anticipated that participants might not be as open with their responses.

### **Data Sources**

To answer my research question and sub-questions, I collected data in various ways. This included conducting individual interviews, gathering relevant school and district GT related documents and maintaining a research journal. I collected data by using various methods to ensure the integrity of the data (Glesne, 2016); a process referred to as triangulation that contributes to the study's validity (Maxwell, 2013). Unfortunately, in Spring 2020 when I was conducting this research the global pandemic involving COVID-19 changed the world drastically and impacted school operations. Because of this, my data was limited, and I was not able to engage in a deeper document analysis and or conduct focus groups as originally planned. Due to COVID-19 public health mandates, the school district administration requested for me to follow these restrictions and cease all data collection as of March 2020.

I wanted to conduct individual interviews, also known as one-on-one interviews, with relevant school personnel at the three school sites; interviews are the most useful in educational research, though they are time-consuming. Individual interviews are ideal for interviewing participants that are not reluctant to share their thoughts comfortably

(Creswell, 2012). I used open-ended questions to provide a broader parameter within which the interviewees could formulate answers in their own words about the topic in question (Roulston, 2010). With open-ended questions, “participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

For this study, I invited via e-mail all highly qualified dual language teachers at STSD who work directly with ELs to participate; there were five, including one at each grade level (Appendix C). A highly qualified teacher, by federal law, is determined by three essential criteria: (1) attaining a bachelor's degree or better in the subject taught; (2) obtaining full state teacher certification, and (3) demonstrating knowledge in the subjects taught (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). I also invited STSD’ three GT certified teachers, highly qualified to work with gifted students, and STSD’ bilingual interventionist/ specialist, who worked directly with ELs, to participate. The three GT certified teachers instructed all GT students regardless of grade and language proficiency. Finally, I invited the district GT coordinator to participate as well. This coordinator oversees the GT program including the nomination, assessment, selection, and identification process. This professional also oversees the appeal process for admission into the GT program. Because I worked at my school for several years, I had a good rapport with the teachers. I also personally asked each participant face-to-face to participate in this study.

Therefore, I conducted a total of 20 individual interviews across the three elementary schools in the district; three at School 1; 11 at School 2 and six at School 3. Before every interview, participants were asked to fill out the Demographics and

Background Questionnaire (Appendix D) and to sign the Consent Form (Appendix E) before the interview. I reminded the participants that they were going to be audio recorded and asked if they had any questions before the interview.

All interviews were audio-recorded on two devices to ensure accuracy. All interviews were conducted in the participants' classrooms. This was done intentionally for the participants to feel comfortable in their own environment. All bilingual and dual language participants met the Texas law requirements and have received 30 hours of training in gifted education; thus, are eligible to teach gifted students and they have also received the six hours of training yearly to maintain that eligibility.

While conducting the interviews, I collected field notes making sure to record body language, gestures and the behavioral patterns of interviewees as these are valuable qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). After each interview, participants received a coffee gift card as appreciation for their participation. I transcribed all 20 interviews to engage in further analysis. Table 12 provides additional information about participants. Their specific school was not identified to protect their confidentiality

**Table 12.** *Demographics and Background of Interview Participants*

Position / (Pseudonym) *	Years of teaching	Years at current school	Years teaching ELs	Additional certifications**	Race/ Ethnicity	First language***	Gender
BL I (Aguilera)	15	7	13	BL, ESL	W	E	F
BL T (Spears)	16	5	15	BL	H	S	F
BL T (Perry)	15	8	9	BL, ESL	H	S	F
SI T (Turner)	17	7	10	BL	H	S	F
SI T (Cyrus)	7	4	5	BL	H	S	F
SI T (Trevi)	27	10	27	BL, ESL	H	S	F
SI T (Romo)	14	3	14	BL, ESL	H	S	F
BL I (Dion)	23	16	12	BL, ESL	H	S	F
GT T (Rubio)	15	5	0	ESL, GT	H	E	F
GT T (Quintanilla)	31	16	0	GT	W	E	F
DL T (Estefan)	11	2	11	BL	H	S	F
DL T (Summer)	6	3	6	BL, ESL	W	E	F
DL T (Parton)	6	5	6	BL, ESL	H	S	F
DL T (Knowles)	7	7	7	BL, ESL	H	S	F
BL I (Guzmán)	14	2	14	BL, ESL	H	S	F
DL T (Grande)	17	4	17	BL, ESL	H	S	F
DL T (Ross)	13	4	13	BL, ESL	H	S	F
DL T (Gomez)	10	3	10	BL, ESL	W	E	F
GT T (Lopez)	11	11	11	GT	W	E	F
GT T (Midler)	41	25	41	GT	W		F

\*SI refers to Spanish immersion, T refers to teacher, I refers to interventionist

\*\*BL refers to bilingual certification, ESL to English as Second Language Certification, GT to Gifted and Talented certification.

\*\*\*E indicates English, S indicates Spanish

Another data source included relevant school documents. I analyzed all data from documentation regarding the nomination and selection of students for the GT program. More specifically, I analyzed the number of nominations, student demographics such as ethnicity, number of students in dual language vs. monolingual, number of students accepted or denied, and number of appeals. I analyzed the appeal process documents and appeal resolution. I analyzed the selection/placement committee demographics such as ethnicity, certification, etc. According to Glesne (2016), “data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced” (p. 183). Creswell (2010) mentions that documents can consist of public or private records about a site or participants in a study. In this study, I analyzed the district GT local and legal policies and the GT Student Summary Placement Criteria Profile. Analyzing these documents helped me understand the central phenomena in this study (Creswell, 2010).

Throughout my data collection, I kept a researcher journal as well. In this journal I recorded and described observations, thoughts, events, conversations, ideas and reflections about patterns that emerged, and personal and participants’ reactions throughout this case study. In this journal, I collected both descriptive and reflective fieldnotes. Descriptive field notes captured what happened such as gestures, faces and body language of participants during the interviews. Reflective fieldnotes recorded how I was making sense of the participants and situation for instance, the internal process after the interviews.

## **Data Collection Process**

Upon approval from the Institution Review Board in mid-February of 2020 to proceed with my research, I contacted the STSD's human resources department secretary who asked me to e-mail her directly for approval. After receiving an informal approval from STSD's human resources, I was requested to contact the district's Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction for formal approval. I contacted the STSD's Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction secretary who scheduled a telephone appointment for me to discuss my research with the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction. This discussion occurred after school hours over the telephone for 20 minutes. The Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction advised me that she would informally approve my research, but she suggested for me to speak to the three elementary school principals, as my research was based on the GT program at the elementary level. She suggested I explain to them the purpose of my study in person before the formal district approval or asking teachers to partake in this case study. She confirmed that this was so that principals would be aware in case participants would question my presence at other campuses or the interview request. She added that my interviews and the process must be on my personal time and could not intervene with instructional time, and students or families should not be included, or contacted to participate in this research. All the above requests were followed entirely.

I then scheduled and met with the three elementary school principals individually for 15 minutes to discuss the purpose of my study. All three elementary school principals granted permission to conduct my interviews and suggested names of participants that they believed could be helpful and knowledgeable about my topic. All three elementary

school principals reiterated the need for my research and expressed excitement to see my findings.

After my meeting with the three elementary school principals, I received formal approval from the district's Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction (Appendix F). Following the approval, I e-mailed the invitation to participate in my research to 21 people across the three school sites and the district: two early-childhood bilingual teachers, one early-childhood bilingual coordinator/interventionist, 10 elementary dual language teachers, two elementary bilingual coordinators/interventionists, five elementary GT certified teachers, and one GT certified teacher/district coordinator. All participants were blind-copied in my request. Three out of the 21 participants approached me and agreed to do the interview; however, I asked them to reply to my e-mail directly.

After seven days, I had not heard from any participants. I followed up with a second e-mail, blind-copied all participants, to remind them of my research request. Within the week, I received several favorable responses; however, more than half had not replied. I decided to approach the participants in person to ask if they had received my research participation request. Several asked me to explain the purpose of my study, which I did. By the end of that week, I received 15 positive responses out of the 21 requests. Word of my study spread across my own campus, and other language teachers, Spanish Immersion (SI) instructors, who do not work directly with Hispanic ELs volunteered to participate in my study; however, they declined to be recorded.

In addition, I approached a dual language teacher three times and although the participant agreed to do the interview, the participant never replied to my request or schedule and instead provided me with justifications as how time was an issue. After my



fourth attempt, and since the study was voluntary, I decided to stop asking. Two dual language teachers never replied, but because they were at another campus. I was not able to approach them to ask about my e-mail invitation. One GT certified teacher never replied; however, it was expected as she had asked me before about the purpose of my study. When I asked her if she had received my e-mail, she asked me for an explanation of my research. After I explained the purpose of my study, she expressed that she did not agree with my research question. She stated, “I don’t think there’s a problem with our [GT] program; it’s those kids – they don’t speak the language.”

After a two-week window waiting for responses, I scheduled all my interviews. Since I am employed by the school district, I took two personal days off as requested. I scheduled all interviews on one day for two of the schools. For the third campus, since there were only two participants, and because of their early release schedule, the interviews were conducted after school.

As I walked into School 1, the Principal approached me and suggested for me to interview the bilingual pre-kindergarten teacher. The Principal thought this teacher would be of value to my research because of the age group of the students taught and how she is the first teacher to interact with Hispanic ELs. As suggested, I asked the teacher and she agreed and waited for me to interview her the same day. The principal and the campus bilingual coordinator also suggested for me to interview the vice-principal who is also the district’s bilingual coordinator. However, when I asked, she replied, “I don’t have time. I have to pick up my daughter.” She walked away. I e-mailed her before I left campus, but I never received a response.

My main goal was to conduct all individual interviews before spring break of 2020. I achieved this goal. I requested the GT assessment and placement of student data which had also been completed and compiled by the GT committee prior to spring break. However, after sending five e-mails requesting this data, I still did not receive a response. With no answer from any of the GT certified teachers or the district's GT coordinator, I contacted the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction for help. She e-mailed all involved and after this imperative e-mail, I received the data requested within a week.

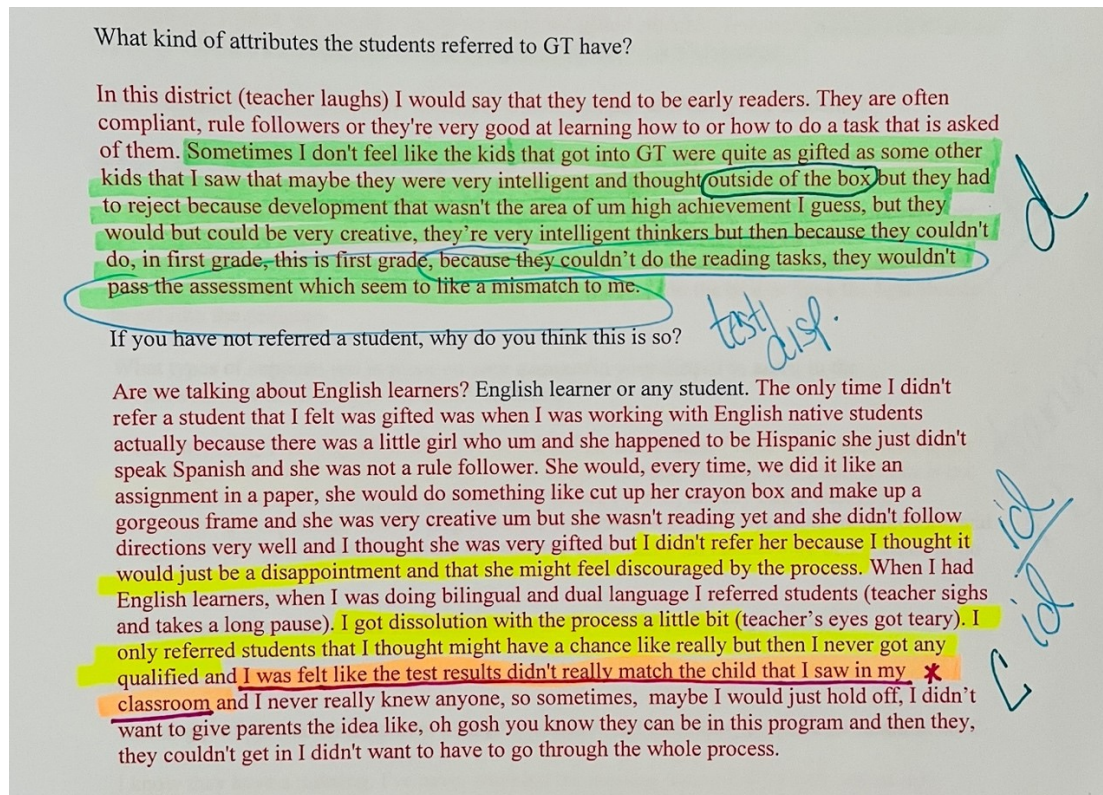
However, due to the global pandemic Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), all school districts in south Texas and throughout the nation were closed and continued online learning for the rest of the 2019-2020 academic school year. The school district Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction immediately contacted me via e-mail and asked me not to conduct any face-to-face interviews or try to retrieve any more data as schools were closed and teachers were not allowed to go into the schools. Therefore, I analyzed all data retrieved and collected from the 20 interviews and whatever data was available to me prior to the regulations related to COVID-19.

Participants, including faculty and staff affiliated with this study, were not identified by name on the audio-recorded interviews, transcripts, researcher's journal or field notes. There was no link to the responses and/or data collected to participants. Participants and their affiliated schools were given pseudonyms when transcribing the audio recordings as well as any and all mentions/references in any subsequent reports. The interview audio files and transcripts were stored electronically on a password, encrypted personal computer. All paper files including informed consent forms,

researcher's journal and field notes were stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. This data will be stored for three years.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher is the instrument, with the researcher's presence in the lives of the participants as being fundamental in qualitative methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I analyzed the data by listening to the audio recordings and by reading notes collected during my interviews. To have a deeper understanding of the data collected, I transcribed every interview on my own as suggested by Lichtman (2010). I printed the interview transcripts. Then, read one by one as a preliminary exploratory analysis to obtain a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2012). I read and explored the interview transcripts 10 times to identify descriptive codes which I wrote in the margins (Saldaña, 2009). For example, in figure 1, I used a lower case "id" to represent a theme. In this case "id" represented the identification process. Next, I organized my descriptive codes into categories using different color of highlighters. These categories helped me organize my data into themes (Saldaña, 2009). I identified themes and made note of them on the paper margins, which then became the findings. See figure 2 for an example of what this analysis process looked like utilizing the hard copy transcripts.



**Figure 2. Example of Transcript Coding**

The school documents which were able to be collected, as well as my researchers journal and field notes taken during the interviews were also examined and provided additional context in the process of reporting the thematic findings. I referred to this school documents as well as my journal and field notes as part of analyzing my data. This was beneficial in supplementing and supported my interviews.

### **Trustworthiness and Reliability**

Researchers recognize various methods for assessing the trustworthiness and reliability of qualitative studies (Blanton, 2016). For this case study, I followed Yin's interpretation of a descriptive case study. I used the strategies recommended by Yin (2018) to ensure reliability. Triangulation or the use of multiple methods of data collection determined the convergence of the data I collected from different sources of

evidence which boosted the quality and trustworthiness of this case study (Yin, 2018). I explored and analyzed data from local and state policy, bilingual, GT program teachers and campus GT program coordinator interviews.

According to Yin (2018), the purpose of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study. The objective of reliability is replicating the same findings and conclusions as the research is reconducted at a later time (Blanton, 2016; Yin, 2018). In assessing the reliability of my descriptive case study, I listened to the digital audio recordings before and after transcription. I verified all transcriptions to ensure that all information was transcribed verbatim. I analyzed all documentation such as local and state policy to verify accuracy and consistency.

After having a draft of the findings, I conducted member checks as recommended by Creswell (2012). Member checking occurred when I asked all participants to check the accuracy of the account as questions emerged. I prompted them to inform me if the themes seem accurate and if the interpretations were representative and fair. I also inquired if the description was complete.

### **Limitations**

The inability to generalize the findings is one of the primary limitations of any qualitative research study (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the study was limited to the interview responses of the bilingual teachers, the responses from the GT program teachers' interviews, the responses from the GT program coordinator and Bilingual specialist interviews and the review of GT state and local policy documents. Another study limitation includes the small sample of teachers who participated. However, the small number of participants was fundamental in order to conduct thorough interviews

and to analyze the extensive data that were collected from the participants' interviews (Yin, 2018).

I, as the researcher, in fact, another limitation in this case study. As an employee of STSD, I worked directly with the participants in this case study. However, my positionality as an insider was considered a strength to the research as well (Chavez, 2008). In this case study, my positionality as an insider helped me to equalize the relationship between me, the researcher, and the participants (Chavez, 2008). Another advantage to my positionality as an insider was related to how my insight and knowledge of the school and district context could benefit my data collection, interpretation, and representation. I was familiar with the: linguistic, emotional, and sensory principles of participants, knowledge of the field, and identification of participant behaviors, and unusual and unfamiliar occurrences (Chavez, 2008).

Contrary to the above advantages there were complications to my insider status. As the researcher and being familiar with the participants, my expectations of participants had the potential to affect my research. My perspective on political and moral issues and my social rapport with the participants could have been overwhelming, which could have led to a bias position. Additionally, my positionality could have affected my data collection, interpretation and representation negatively based on my role and cultural position (Chavez, 2008).

As the researcher, working directly with the participants, I emphasized that the study was separate from my work in STSD. I emphasized that participation in this case study was voluntary. I mitigated the limitations of my insider status by reminding participants of the confidentiality agreement that was part of the case study. I also

reminded participants that if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could choose to withdraw from the study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described in detail the research method and design of the case study. The plans for this qualitative descriptive case study utilized to investigate the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learner students in gifted and talented programs at an elementary level school in South Texas. The case study examined the data collected in the participants; interviews and compared to one another to determine why Hispanic ELs are underrepresented in Gifted and talented programs. My findings will be presented in the following chapter.

## **IV. FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to identify and understand what has been contributing to Hispanic ELs' underrepresentation in the GT program at South Texas School District (STSD). The findings presented in this chapter can be used by administrators in school districts when evaluating their GT programs. The chapter begins by looking at the schools and district data to provide an overview of the GT testing process, followed by a discussion of the four major themes identified: professional development, transparency, program disparities and unconscious bias. It is important to indicate that the data and quotes associated to the GT certified teachers interviewed was drastically less than the language teachers because the percentage of GT certified teachers was smaller than the percentage of language teachers in STDS. Within the theme of professional development are three subthemes: policy, the GT identification processes and teacher preparation. The theme of transparency had two subthemes: trust and outside testing. The exclusion of Hispanic ELs' families and GT faculty ethnicity were subthemes that appeared in the theme of program disparities. The fourth theme was unconscious bias and include three subthemes: 1) language discrimination, 2) racial discrimination, and 3) discrimination based on socio-economic status.

### **GT Identification and Testing Policies and Practices**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the GT identification process is left to local standards (National Association for Gifted Children, 2018; Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005;). School districts follow a process for identifying GT students as required by Texas Education Code §29.122. South Texas School District's GT identification process begins with the nomination/referral process. Students are nominated by teachers, counselors,



parents or other interested persons. The screening and identification process is provided at least once a year. Parental consent must be obtained before any assessment is conducted. All kindergarten students are assessed before entering elementary school and all fifth grade students are assessed upon exiting fifth grade.

The identification criteria are specific to the state definition and must ensure fair assessment of economically disadvantaged, culturally different, and students with disabilities. The data collected must be both objective and subjective. These data may include, but is not limited to, achievement tests, intelligence tests, creativity tests, behavioral checklists completed by teachers and parents, student/parent conferences, and student work products.

The selection committee evaluates each nominee or student for placement in the GT program. The committee must be composed of at least three educators who have received the training in the nature and needs of GT students. Parents of students who qualify receive a written notification. Parental consent is required before placing a student in the GT program. Denials to the GT program may be appealed by a parent, student, or teacher. A written appeal must be presented to the selection committee first no later than 15 days after a selection decision. The appeal must contain justification for the appeal and provide evidence to be considered (LOCAL EHBB – 015901).

During the academic year 2019-2020, 1017 elementary students at STSD were tested for GT. The students tested ranged from Kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. However, the number of students tested for GT did not include first grade students because first grade students were not able to be tested due to COVID-19. COVID-19 stopped the assessment

process as schools had to close and quarantined as mandated by the state of Texas. The table below shows the number of students tested by grade level and ethnicity.

**Table 13.** *Students Tested by Grade Level During the 2019-2020 Academic Year at STSD*

Race	K	1**	2	3	4	5	Total
American Indian or Alaska Native	2					2	4
Asian	17 (5)		3(1)	1	3	14 (4)	38 (10)
Black or African American	16 (2)		2		3	11 (1)	32 (3)
Hawaiian	3					1	4
Hispanic	177 (18)		27 (4)	29 (5)	16 (2)	146 (18)	395 (47)
Two or More Races	6		2	2	1	7	18
White	248 (2)		33	32	32	181 (1)	526(3)
Total	469 (27)	0	38 (5)	64 (5)	55 (2)	362 (24)	1,017 (63)

*\*Numbers in parentheses represent EL students*

*\*\*Due to COVID-19, data from Grade 1 was not available.*

## **Teachers' Understanding of the GT Policies and Identification Process**

Teachers' understanding of the gifted and talented policies and identification process was identified as a theme. Participants were asked about their knowledge of state and local policies regarding GT programs and the identification process. The data confirmed that all 20 participants were inconsistent and unclear about any state or local GT policies and had a different understanding how the GT identification process works.

**Policy.** One of the questions posed to participants related to their understanding of the policies or practices in place on their campus that ensure equitable access to GT identification and services. It is crucial for teachers to know, understand or be familiar with the educational policies that are in place. Gorton and Alston (2009) suggested that school policies are important because they help a school establish rules and procedures in order to function effectively, stay aligned and help staff make ethical decisions. I was surprised to find out that 100% of the participants were not aware or did not know of any local or state GT policies; however, they understood and could describe certain practices of the GT identification process.

Data revealed that none of the participants were aware of any policies in place. For instance, Ms. Aguilera mentioned, "I am not aware of anything like that," while Ms. Guzmán similarly answered, "I'm not sure exactly what the policies are." Ms. Dion replied, with a strong questionable tone of voice, "Policy? None." Ms. Midler, part of the GT program, asserted with an upset tone of voice and slamming her finger on the desk, "We do," when I asked her if there were any policies in place. However, she proceeded to describe the practices not the policy, which showed a lack of policy understanding.

As suggested by Gorton and Alston (2009) school policies are in place to guide educational judgment. The data presented above revealed that all participants, especially teacher/team leaders, were unfamiliar with district or school GT policy. However, the district GT policy and guidelines are posted on the school district website to support district personnel and the community to steer any educational decisions.

**The Identification Process of GT students.** Regarding the identification of GT students, in School 1 the responses from the three participants interviewed all varied; though the three are bilingual education faculty that work directly with Hispanic ELs. One certainty among them was that they did not fully understand the GT identification process and how it pertains to Hispanic ELs.

One of the three participants, Ms. Spears, had a broad understanding of how students are identified as GT, but based her answers solely on test results:

So as of last year, we started screening all students at [School 1] and this year we did the same thing. We screened everybody using the CogAT tool to assess everybody. And this year we did it whole group, where me and my assistant were monitoring students as they were doing the CogAT evaluation. And in the English classes, they do a proctored lead, so teacher leads the testing sessions and for my kids, Hispanic ELs, they were actually self-paced. So, they pretty much selected and went on through all those questions and it was up to a three-day process. It was a three-day process where the first hour of the day, we focused on different segments of the test and we were able to identify kiddos that needed to do small-group testing; most of them were in group, whole group, and Fridays were done for the make-up kids that missed.

However, Ms. Perry's response was much shorter and generalized, "Well we have a system and they come and do an assessment and they get it [assessed]." While Ms. Guzmán's answer reflected uncertainty about the process, "So, I think we have a couple of processes...Honestly, I feel kind of confused because the characteristics that I read or I hear about when I go to [GT] conferences or things like that don't really match ours." She explained how, "The way our identification process has worked in the district...I don't, I don't know that I could verbalize like what would the gifted student look like exactly."

None of the three participants in School 1 were clear about the GT identification process. The confusion, frustration and lack of clarity seemed directly related to the lack of clear directives on the part of the school and district on how to identify GT students.

In School 2, the responses from the six participants were also ambiguous and different. Participants included three DL teachers, the campus bilingual interventionist and coordinator, two GT certified teachers and the GT certified teacher and district coordinator. Ms. Grande for instance said, "There's a process that we go through, either parents can recommend their students for GT or a teacher can do it. They give us a timeline of when we can do it and then that's how we identify the kids here at school." Ms. Ross opened the interview with, "Yes, so I actually have the [GT Program manual] information for accuracy." At this point Ms. Ross read the information about the identification of GT students directly from district GT program manual. "I need this manual because I don't know all this stuff and how it really works by heart." Ms. Gomez commented, "At our school as far as I understand, they start or they can start as early as Kinder and first grade for screening, and they do test and stuff."

Ms. Lopez corrected herself after her initial answer, “Teachers, parents or sometimes even students themselves or counselors can refer a student to be tested in grades first through fifth. Oh no, I’m sorry through fourth.” Ms. Midler’s answer was expected to be more specific and detailed, reflective of her increased knowledge as she has been the school district GT coordinator for over 10 years. However, she responded, “Students are identified through a test. We give them an ability test and an achievement test, and we use a parent survey for primary children, and we use grades for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>. We use a teacher checklist (Appendix G).”

In School 3, which is my home school, the responses from the eleven participants interviewed were also inexact and reflective of an inconsistent GT identification process. Participants included four DL teachers, four Spanish Immersion (SI) teachers, two GT certified teachers and the campus bilingual interventionist and coordinator. Ms. Knowles, a teacher, first confirmed, “Students take different tests” then raised her shoulders and leaned in and whispered, “I don’t know.” Ms. Parton’s answer included inaccurate information, “So there’s different ways, but first, we as a teacher, we identify them.” “OK as far as, I know students are tested, given a test here in our campus, if they are or do good on it then they are accepted into the [GT] program,” was Ms. Estefan’s response. While Ms. Dion shared how she thought, “...part of the process for getting identification is either through a parent recommendation or a teacher recommendation, but who really knows.”

It is important to mention that the four SI teachers from School 3, Ms. Trevi, Ms. Turner, Ms. Romo and Ms. Cyrus, refused to be recorded because of fear of retaliation from district officials or the use of foul language. It is also significant to mention that SI

teachers serve mostly White students, not the Hispanic ELs which were the focus of this study. The data collected from these teachers also revealed a misconception of how students are identified as GT on their campus. All four of them used an aggravated tone of voice in their own individual interviews though their answers were precise and concise. All of them wrote notes on each question that they felt was important for my research so that I would not leave anything out, as I collected my own notes. Ms. Trevi made it clear that, “The GT [certified] teachers identified them [students]. They [the GT certified teachers] decide.” Ms. Turner’s response echoed that of Ms. Trevi’s, “There’s a process, but it’s all based on a test and of course they [GT certified teachers] decide.” In addition, Ms. Cyrus’ answer was more descriptive, “Students get nominated, tested and then the committee decides who gets in and who doesn’t.” Ms. Romo critiqued the process indicating that, “The process is inadequate, biased and unequitable...students can be identified, perhaps make it, but we all know the committee decides who is in and who is not (Ms. Romo made a sign with her hand which indicates money).”

As I began the interview with Ms. Rubio, a GT certified teacher at School 3, she asked for clarification regarding the focus of the study: “I have one question about Hispanic English learners. Do you mean students that their main language is Spanish first, and they're learning English? Or do you mean any Hispanic student whether or whatever their first language is?” Thus, I answered her question by paraphrasing the definition in Chapter One. Even though I clarified and restated the purpose of this case study before I asked the first question (Can you tell me about how students are identified as GT at your campus?) related to the identification of GT students, I was surprised that



although her answer was elaborate Ms. Rubio did not mention Hispanic English learners GT identification in her response:

Yes, there's an opportunity every year, [for students from] kindergarten through first grade to be identified as GT in [in the District]. All kindergartners are tested. So, we test every kindergartner. Then first through fourth grade, it's through teacher nomination, parent nomination and occasionally [we] have a student that nominates themselves, and then in fifth grade, once again our district tests every single student. Then I believe six through 12th grade, it's again, a nomination process. So, if a student or parent would like their child to be placed in GT courses at the secondary level then they can test during each school year, there's that opportunity.

Ms. Quintanilla was much more concise, “At our school we use an achievement test, the IOWA, and an abilities test, the CogAT.”

The data collected demonstrated that in all three elementary schools, participants did not fully understand the GT identification process in general. Participants were not able to identify any GT policies in place. In addition, participants were not able to specifically recognize any GT procedures as it relates to GT Hispanic ELs.

**Teacher Preparation.** The data also revealed that all 16 dual language and Spanish immersion teachers interviewed were not able to identify the attributes of GT students as they all responded that the main attribute of GT students is “thinking outside-the-box.” The second response was that GT students do well academically which is an attribute to any student in general. The third most common response was that they follow rules and do well on tests, again an attribute that can be applicable to all students.

As far as preparation in understanding how to identify GT students, 50% of the interviewees felt equipped or prepared. The three participants from School 1 felt prepared. For instance, Ms. Spears shared how she felt “very equipped to identify them.” While Ms. Perry, although she is not required to refer students to GT because of the age group she teaches, didn’t “...see it as a difficult process. I don’t get trained, but I can do it.” Ms. Aguilera new to School 1 and recognized that “the process is a little different here at [School 1], but I am confident about it.” At School 1, because of the grade levels served, all students are assessed for GT. This is a different process than the other two elementary schools in the district.

Additionally, four out of six participants at School 2 felt prepared to identify GT students. Two of the four participants who felt very equipped were DL teachers and the GT certified teachers. One of these was Ms. Grande who felt, “pretty good about it because I’ve been teaching for 17 years and I have recently attended the six-hour training.” She described the training she had attended: “First, I attended the GT trainings at [Education Service Center] and I had to do it again in the last five years. So, I think by attending those sessions, I was able to see and remember what attributes to look for in GT students.” Ms. Gomez articulated her sentiments,

I feel pretty equipped going through the trainings and things that you have to do with the 30 hours, plus the six-hour update course. I think, it really helps me be able to identify them and then for teaching so long and knowing which ones, and they’re different attributes that most of them have kind of in common.

Similarly, Ms. Midler proclaimed, “I feel like I’ve been teaching them [GT students] a long time and I can pretty much tell just by talking to a child. But I do, you

know, we use test scores, but test scores sometimes lie, and I can tell with working, you know, working with the child usually.” Although this data showed these participants feel prepared to identify GT students, it is crucial to mention that only two participants mentioned the requirements to be considered highly qualified in the State of Texas such as the 30-hour training and the mandated annual six-hour update in addition to their extensive teaching experience. Also, these participants did not know the GT policies in place and did not understand the GT identification process. The other two participants who did not feel prepared to identify GT students were a DL teacher and the bilingual interventionist/ bilingual campus coordinator at School 2. One of these was Ms. Ross who felt that “on a scale of one to 10, I am probably a three (teacher laughed). I don’t know what I am doing. I feel stupid.” Ms. Guzman also admitted, “I’m learning, so I’m getting better and because I’m part of this process on helping test and things like that, I do feel like I’m learning, but I don’t feel that I am very equipped.”

As previously mentioned, there were 11 participants in School 3, four DL teachers, four SI teachers, two GT certified teachers, and the campus bilingual interventionist and bilingual coordinator. One of the four DL teachers felt prepared to identify GT students. This was Ms. Knowles, who indicated that she felt “equipped” in part because she had her “GT certification, my 30 hours, and I go through the updates every year, a six-hour update. So, I feel pretty equipped and identifying those kiddos that might meet the gifted and talented criteria at our district.” However, the other three DL teachers did not feel as prepared. This was clear from Ms. Parton, who reluctantly indicated, “So to be honest, I don’t think we were trained for GT identification.” This was the same sentiment expressed by Ms. Summer:

I don't think [I am] equipped (teachers giggled sarcastically). I don't think specially at our school. I think that there's kind of a bias to who is referred, who is and what it actually means to be GT. I think that we have a stigma here of what it needs to be GT and I don't think as a whole campus we actually know what GT means.

Ms. Estefan, DL teacher, answered, “I don't feel I am like 100% able to do it. I was given a short, maybe 30-minute GT class here on our campus last year, but it was just basics. It wasn't a full class where I learned what to look for or what not to look for – things like that.” Ms. Dion stated, “Equipped? I don't think I should be able to make that decision. It's not my decision, because I don't have the background that I would want.”

Two out of the four SI teachers, who asked to participate in this case study, did not feel fully prepared to identify GT students, while the other two felt equipped. Ms. Trevi felt “somewhat equipped to identify some parts of a child's giftedness,” while Ms. Cyrus believed she was “Somewhat equipped.” However, Ms. Turner and Ms. Jimenez were confident about their abilities to identify GT students; “I've had a lot of experience” And “I think I can do a good job” were their responses.

Both GT certified teachers interviewed felt equipped to identify GT students; however, their idea of “equipped” differed. Ms. Quintanilla replied, “I feel really confident.” Ms. Rubio stated,

I think just from the years of experience being involved in education – teaching 31 years and [being a] gifted and talented specialist for the last 16 years. Plus, I have my Masters in curriculum and instruction but I have an emphasis in gifted and talented when I was working on my Masters. I feel like I'm pretty qualified.

Only one teacher, a DL teacher, justified her preparation to identify GT students as she detailed all professional development activities and requirements by the State of Texas to teach GT students.

Participants were also asked how equipped they felt other teachers on their campus were in identifying GT students. The four GT certified teachers in the district felt that teachers were equipped and prepared to identify GT students. “I think overall the [teachers] are pretty well-equipped to identify GT students,” Ms. Lopez offered. “I think the teachers on this campus have had a lot of training and they’re really good about identifying,” Ms. Midler added. “I think our teachers are great at identifying students,” Ms. Rubio affirmed. Ms. Quintanilla’s answer although differed still supported the other GT certified teachers. “I feel like they are. They’re trying. I don’t know, but they do,” she agreed; however, her answer was hasty, and her head affirmation was negative.

On the contrary, when the same question was posed to the language teachers (Bilingual, DL, SI) about the GT certified teachers, participants adapted their answers to include the identification of Hispanic ELs. A vast majority felt that although GT certified teachers were prepared to identify GT students, they were not equipped to identify GT Hispanic ELs. Ms. Grande, with a harsh tone of voice, declared, “They don’t know how to deal with our kids.” Ms. Ross, with a strong tone of voice, affirmed, “GT [certified] teachers do not know...GT bilingual students.” “I think it’s hard for GT [certified] teachers to see our kids,” told Ms. Guzmán as she shook her head. Ms. Knowles declared, “I think they try, but their lack of understanding of what a GT student is in dual language, I mean we had several conversations about this. It breaks my heart that they don’t get it or they don’t want to get it.” Ms. Trevi also mentioned, “I don’t think the GT [certified]

teachers are equipped to identify GT language learners or Hispanics. I wonder if they're certified to teach bilingual students or have ESL certification? I mean, we have to be certified to teach GT." Ms. Cyrus' answer was similar, "This is very frustrating. We are required to have 30 hours of GT training and six hours each year after that. Do the GT [certified] teacher know how to deal with Spanish speakers? Do they take any training?" Ms. Dion had an emotional response when she spoke, "No (slamming her hand on her table)! I don't think we have enough training to identify the characteristics of an EL in particular, especially those GT [certified] teachers."

The data presented above revealed that professional development across the district is critical. The variation and uncertainty about the identification of GT students in general manifested. This disparity hinders the proper identification of Hispanic ELs in GT programs.

### **Transparency**

Another theme that emerged in this research was transparency. Transparency can be defined as the visibility or accessibility of information especially concerning business practices (Merriam-Webster, 2020). In the context of this study, transparency indicates trustworthiness. Transparency allows all stakeholders to view the GT identification process. Therefore, transparency can lead to an increase in the trustworthiness of the process. Two subthemes emerged from the data related to transparency which were: trust and outside testing.

**Trust.** Gorton and Alston (2009) stated that "trust is the belief that one party will not take an unfair advantage of the other" (p. 101). Therefore, trust maintains integrity within institutions and the processes as a means of determining conditions for successful

learning communities within a school. The data collected revealed a lack of trust with regards to the GT identification process.

In School 1, all participants felt a distrust in the GT identification process and the GT team. For instance, Ms. Aguilera stated, “I always felt like the results didn’t really match the child that I saw in my classroom. It was like the GT tester manipulated the test results...I always felt that the GT [certified] teachers don’t even believe or support bilingual education, one of them told me before all students should just be in English, so what makes us think they would support this.” Ms. Perry stated about the GT staff, “they already have and come in with the idea that they, our bilingual students, are not GT because they are Hispanic and don’t speak the language. We don’t know what they do, right?” Ms. Spears also expressed a concern. She said, “I feel that GT [certified] teachers are not honest. They don’t really want to share much with us...it’s like they do not get our students and they’re afraid to put them in GT because they won’t know what to do with them. I mean they’re all White.”

In School 2, 50% of the teachers did not feel comfortable or trust the identification process. Ms. Grande stated, “We don’t know if they’re being identified or not for the right reasons. It’s so suspicious, the decisions they make.” Ms. Ross also felt distrust. She stated, “I don’t know what they do. It’s like they, the committee doesn’t want Hispanics in our GT program.”

In School 3, eight out of the 11 participants did not trust the identification process in part because they felt that the GT certified teachers were not being trustworthy throughout the process. Two participants that did not have objections to the identification process were GT certified teachers.

Ms. Knowles stated, “I have asked to see the Spanish test and results but from what and what the GT [certified] teachers have explained to me is that it’s a very confidential. It’s confidential.” Ms. Parton said, “I’ve seen a big gap...I’m not sure how this is working, but I don’t see it and they don’t explain what they, the GT [certified] teachers, look at it. They just say no.” Ms. Summer stated, “I just think of the whole process, the whole process is strange. None of it makes sense...hmmm it’s confidential? Or they’re hiding something?” Ms. Estefan said, “It’s crazy right...you can’t even trust the GT [certified] teachers, especially one of them...[she] doesn’t realize we’re not in the 50’s or 60’s.” In addition, Ms. Trevi explicitly stated, “I don’t trust the process, I don’t trust the teachers, I don’t trust the program.” In addition, Ms. Dion stated, “[The district] doesn’t take our kids serious, I mean English learner s...so you have to question the process from submitting the name for testing to the denial.”

As the data above suggested, trust is a vast obstacle in the identification of Hispanic English learners in GT programs. Gorton and Alston (2009) suggested that without trust institutions will suffer. In addition, acceptance, openness, and a high level of trust among the members of an institution and across programs is crucial as questions or disputes surface (Gorton & Alston, 2009).

**Outside Testing.** According to Local Policy (Appendix H), outside testing in this district is acceptable evidence of giftedness. When students are not accepted into the GT program because their test and teacher checklist scores do not meet standards set by the district for GT inclusion, parents have the option of getting “outside testing” or an IQ test done. These outside tests are often conducted by local doctors who advertise these services (Appendix I). Once tested, the parents bring the IQ test scores to the district to



determine if the student is accepted into the GT program. A participant who works directly with GT students suggested that “the district does not keep a thorough number of how many students are “outside testing.” However, according to a participant who also works with GT students and couldn’t accurately provide a number, “two, sometimes three out of a GT class are tested outside the school district. I have seen that throughout the years.” The same participant had at first provided a larger number, but then approached me and changed her numbers after she “did the math.” A dual language teacher also indicated that “One Spanish speaker has gotten ‘outside testing,’ but he was one of my kids from Monterrey; his dad is a doctor, I believe.” This outside IQ testing was mentioned by 90% of the participants as an obstruction for Hispanic ELs underrepresentation in the GT program due to the price and expenses that could not be covered by most Hispanic ELs’ families to access such testing. One participant suggested sabotage as she stated, “I heard it’s costly and what doctor is going to say no your child is not GT when they’re getting paid?” Thus, 90% of participants agreed that “outside testing” must end and must be removed from local policy.

### **Program Disparities**

Disparities in the GT program were also identified with sixteen participants, all bilingual teachers, out of the 20 participants feeling that Hispanic families of ELs were excluded from the GT identification process. In addition, they all considered the ethnicity of the GT certified teachers (White) and the limited racial/ethnic and linguistic diversity among students in the GT program as an obstruction. The certification and preparation of GT certified teachers to teach Hispanic ELs was also distrusted. Interviewees felt that

none of the GT certified teachers were highly qualified or had the required certification to work with Hispanic ELs; therefore, did not understand their gifts.

**Exclusion of Hispanic Families of ELs.** In all three schools, participants stressed that bilingual families were excluded from participating in any GT informational sessions presented by the school district. Participants felt that language, ethnicity inclusion and informational sessions were obstacles. For instance, Ms. Aguilera shared her hopes and critiques:

I would like [for there] to be better outreach for bilingual parent understanding of GT identification and process. I think at times a translation or interpretation has been provided at GT meetings, but with the English learner population that is not enough...their social instability and they are less confident so teacher and school relationships is very important so they understand the GT process, and they can, but we do not do enough to include them.

Ms. Perry asserted that bilingual families were excluded as well. She said, in a forceful voice, “No bilingual families do not get involved. They get pushed away it almost seems.” Ms. Spears shared the same feelings about bilingual families,

Well parents are asked to come to an informational session in the library. I believe it’s with the GT [certified] teachers that give training to parents or informational sessions about the GT process, but they are all White, parents are White, GT [certified] teachers are White, it’s in English, but not directed for bilingual parents.

Ms. Grande stated, “I know there’s informational sessions before the referral process, but I’ve never attended one. But the information is not necessarily in Spanish. So, if parents have students that are Spanish speakers, I don’t think the information is

given to them in their own home language...they lose.” Ms. Guzmán suggested that bilingual families are at a disadvantage as they are unable to get outside testing, something common in affluent White students that do not qualify for the GT program in the school district. She said, “Our bilingual kids can’t go and get outside testing, so they can get in.”

Some faculty shared their hopes and offered suggestions on how to address these exclusionary issues. Ms. Ross stated:

I would love to see our gifted program be more inclusive of our Hispanic students and their families...it would be great to have an advocate for the students and help bilingual parents navigate through the GT identification process. Overall, they are part of our district. The district gets funding for these bilingual kids, federal funding; so pull them, don’t push them.

Additionally, Ms. Gomez said, “As far as informational sessions for the family, I think that as far as I’ve seen that only really happens at a younger age and most of the sessions are English because we do not have bilingual teachers in our GT program.”

Ms. Dion suggested that bilingual families are pushed away because there is no Hispanic representation in the GT program. She stated, “There is a lack of communication in this district...informational sessions are not in Spanish...We don’t have any GT certified bilingual teachers.” Ms. Estefan stated, “Families are invited, and they’re given teacher information and stuff, but I haven’t seen a Spanish note from the [GT] program.” “GT [certified] teachers do have informational sessions for parents...however, my understanding is that there is no Spanish sessions...so I see a disadvantage with my bilingual families, so I would say that it’s not 100% equitable,”

stated Ms. Guzmán. Ms. Parton said, “The family’s role is to support the student through the whole process, but if you are excluded due to a language barrier...then you wonder.” “Well Hispanic families are not ‘inside involved;’ you know what I mean,” stated Ms. Summer as she made a sign with her hand which indicated money. Ms. Trevi also suggested that language is an obstacle for Hispanic families. She said, “The program and all information are geared to English speakers.” “Parents are responsible for a survey of interest and abilities in English though...,” stated Ms. Turner. Ms. Romo also suggested the same obstacles, “We do not have enough sessions for Spanish speaking parents or other languages. There’s not enough information provided to ELs’ parents. Bilingual parents can advocate if they’re not inform in their language.”

It is important to mention that when GT certified teachers were asked about the role of a student’s family, all four participants were very knowledgeable. However, they did not see a problem with the process, the language, or the involvement of ELs’ Hispanic parents. In the next section the ethnicity and certification of GT faculty is explored.

**GT Faculty Ethnicity and Certification.** The ethnicity and certification of GT certified teachers in the district was a vast concern. This is true in many school districts across the United States where teachers and principals of color are underrepresented (Grissom, et al., 2015). It is important to mention that all 16 dual language and bilingual teachers were concerned that a huge obstacle for Hispanic ELs to enter GT programs was the racial/ethnic background of the GT certified teachers and committee. All GT certified teachers on all three campuses are White, except for one who identifies as Hispanic, but Spanish is not her first language; participants saw this as a lack of cultural competence

and an obstruction for Spanish speakers to get into the GT program. Ms. Dion commented, “I call it the White committee...You hardly see a Hispanic making decisions in that committee. I mean you don’t see one that really knows our culture, how we work.” Ms. Trevi noted, “This committee, the entire GT program...they don’t even have somebody that speaks Spanish in the entire program. They are all White.” “I mean if the committee is composed of only Whites...who do you think will get in?” pointed out, Ms. Turner. The GT certified teachers mentioned above were all part of the GT committee this school year. In addition, a first year Hispanic counselor was invited. “I don’t know how this works yet. I am not familiar,” she affirmed as the selection process initiated.

In addition, all 16 bilingual and dual language participants were concerned about the GT certification teachers’ certification to serve bilingual students. “Sadly, GT [certified] teachers are not required to have bilingual certification. I don’t think, affirmed, Ms. Dion. All 16 participants mentioned that GT certified teachers are not highly qualified to teach, not just Hispanic students, but English learners or ESL students in general; they do not understand them. “Because they don’t have a bilingual degree, the GT [certified] teachers are not qualified to work with bilingual kids. They do not understand them,” declared Ms. Knowles. “I have to have 30 hours of GT certification, but the GT [certified] teachers don’t. DO they even have the ESL training?” questioned Ms. Parton. The same sentiments were suggested as one of the main reasons why there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in the GT program.

While dual language and bilingual teachers mentioned certification and ethnicity as a major concern, the four GT certified teachers interviewed did not have a concern with their certification and qualifications to serve any GT student. All GT certified

teachers mentioned that they did not speak the language to teach Hispanic ELs. “I wish I could teach them in Spanish...I wish I could test them in Spanish, but I never have to that’s what [bilingual interventionist] is for. She does that for us.” Ms. Midler acknowledged. “I don’t speak Spanish, so we let a Spanish speaker do that,” asserted Ms. Lopez. Ms. Rubio also acknowledged that Spanish has never been a concern as she made known that, “we don’t get a lot of ELs in [GT Program], so Spanish has never come up until now that you’re questioning it.” Ms. Quintanilla disclosed, “I don’t speak Spanish, but I don’t think that’s where we are in the district.”

In addition, as I completed my themes and I went through the data collected once again, I noticed a contradiction between language teachers and GT certified teachers. While language teachers, bilingual, dual language and SI, attributed the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in the GT program to a biased system, a flawed GT identification process and a prejudiced committee; all GT certified teachers mentioned that they actually have to “push bilingual teachers” every year to even nominate a student. In School 1, one GT certified teacher stated, “I have to go in specifically ask our dual language teachers to please identify, to please nominate someone from their class.” Another GT certified teacher said, “I have to go and ask [DL teacher] or [DL teacher] to please nominate.” In School 2, one GT certified teacher said, “I have to ask bilingual teachers to nominate. I don’t know why they don’t, but I think a lot of DL teachers are afraid to nominate and I’m not sure why.” The final GT certified teacher interview stated, “We’re asking them to do the referring to find the characteristics in ELs but they don’t.” As this data reveals, there is a vast contradiction, lack of communication and a judgement amongst all teachers.

## **Unconscious Bias**

One of the most controversial themes that emerged from the data collected was related to unconscious bias. I will call it unconscious bias; however, it is vital to mention that discrimination was mentioned and suggested by 85% of the participants at one point throughout the interviews when asked about their experience in the GT identification process of Hispanic English learners and GT in general. I chose to use the phrase unconscious bias over discrimination to give all participants the benefit of the doubt and to continue having faith in the public education system and in the GT program in question. “Unconscious bias, sometimes referred to as implicit bias or implicit cognition...is an automatic tendency for humans to perceive people, situations and events in stereotypical ways. These attitudes and stereotypes, in turn, affect our understandings, actions and decisions unconsciously” (Blank, Houkamau & Kingi, p. 13, 2016).

An unconscious bias towards Hispanic families, Hispanic ELs and others in the GT program was a main concern. Therefore, in order to protect the identity of all participants, since STSD is a small district, the data below will not be presented using any pseudonyms. In addition, the schools will not be labeled as 1, 2 or 3, so as to disguise the identity of participants. The narratives below could be perceived to show racism and resentment within the faculty and staff towards the GT program and the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs. I present the data or narratives in random order according to subthemes, which include: 1) language discrimination, 2) racial discrimination, and 3) discrimination based on socio-economic status.

## **Language Discrimination**

One of the subthemes that emerged under unconscious bias was language discrimination. Language, instead of an asset was viewed as an obstacle in the context of this study. Many of the participants told their stories of how they have witnessed Hispanic ELs and their families encountering language discrimination.

Participants shared how language discrimination towards students had been demonstrated in unconscious bias. One teacher spoke through watery eyes about her 11 years in the district and during that time only two of her students from her bilingual class had ever qualified for GT. “It saddens me,” she said, “because I know that I have [students] that are really bright...but for some reason they are not getting into the program. It’s like they don’t want to deal with the Spanish.” Another participant cried of disappointment, and shared the following with tears in her eyes,

I just kind of want to share or add the story about the committee thing. The GT coordinator and I had a great conversation about your topic. I argued about our bilingual kids in the [GT] program and I felt a little bit of resistance from the GT coordinator. The GT coordinator wasn’t on board I can tell but pretended as if she was.

Another instance that she shared with me was a conversation with a GT certified teacher. “The most experience GT [certified] teacher at [school] doesn’t even believe or support bilingual education, so what makes us think she/they would support this. She once told me that all students should be in English classrooms so they can learn English,” she stated as she continued her story with watery eyes.

One of the teachers shared concerns and examples about additional times where bias was demonstrated. “What I feel happens with our students is that we have this idea



that because a child is learning a second language – a child doesn't have the ability to be that smart. It's that stigma – you're bilingual, you don't belong here, you're not GT.” A similar story was shared by another participant.

I don't know what it is...they don't accept them in the [GT] program because they should receive the services in their native language. They are part of the bilingual program or dual language program. The [GT] teachers just don't want to let them in because they don't want to deal with their own language barrier; they have expressed they don't speak the language.

While another teacher shared her suggestions to combat such bias: “I think our bilingual kids need to be tested and graded by somebody that speaks their language or that has more experience with English language learners...I mean is not fair for the kid. It's not right. The [GT] teachers don't speak Spanish and that is biased.”

The GT identification process also demonstrated language discrimination. One of the participants shared her experience with the biased process. “Last year, I did have quite a bit of an issue with the GT process because there was a misunderstanding on the grading of the bilingual students and they destroyed the test or it disappeared...[One of my students] had to retake the test and by the time they found this out, it was the very last day of school.” She continued to say “bilingual students take a different test on a computer as opposed to like pen and paper like the rest of the students...so the last day is Field Day. The last day is a fun day. There's no instruction. My bilingual student had to go through the GT test on the last day of school.” She concluded by stating it was not equitable or fair for her bilingual student in terms of taking the actual exam.

One participant, who has been at the district for over 20 years, seemed unaware of her unconscious bias. With a confident tone of voice, she stated, “I think that from the time I came to this district...we have gone light years as far as identifying the non-English speaking students.” She added with a smile on her face, “it’s just amazing how far we have come from where we were when I started. Last week, we placed one. I mean we did have to go through a lot because of the Spanish.”

In addition, participants also shared how language discrimination towards Hispanic ELs’ families had been demonstrated in unconscious bias. One of the participants felt that the [GT] information sessions for parents do not include Spanish speaking families in general, “I think we need to try to make all the information available in whatever language those parents are referring to...They should have more information for parents in Spanish not only to inform them about the GT process to identify...they really don’t know what’s happening; they are left out.”

Another concern brought up by a participant was testing. She said, “I constantly have to be asking ‘when are my bilingual kids going to be tested?’...it’s like they’re the last ones.” She also felt that the student’s first language was an issue. “We feel like they have no time [to test Hispanic ELs] ...or already made a decision [about them] so leave them to the end.”

Another participant also cried as she shared what she considered her most disconcerting experience. “A few years back, I asked a [GT] teacher why one of the ELs I referred to [GT] did not make it. Her response shocked me. She said that bilingual kids are not that smart when it comes to taking those GT tests. They do not do well.”

“GT [certified] teachers do have an informational session for parents in order to better inform them of the process of identifying a gifted child...however to my understanding there are no Spanish-speaking informational sessions,” another participant stated as she shook her head. “So, I see a disadvantage with my bilingual families...it’s not 100% equitable just because the majority of the time we’re having to translate information that we know instead of having a formal presentation to our parents,” she added.

Figures 3, 4 and 5 corroborated what participants stated. The School District used English for all GT information sent to parents. However, schools translated and sent the GT information in both languages as shown in Figure 3, all links, videos and QR codes are in English and not available in Spanish or any other language.

**INFORMACIÓN PARA PADRES DE DOTADOS Y TALENTOSOS** - ESTUDIANTES DE 2do GRADO Se le invita a asistir a una reunión virtual de información para padres sobre la colocación en el programa [REDACTED] (GT). Explicaremos cómo se utilizan los resultados de las pruebas CogAT e IOWA para la colocación en el programa de estudiantes dotados de primaria.

El enlace para la reunión es [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WCNXUPYGZ-moa7v1M89Zv11HZy\\_WhEiR/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WCNXUPYGZ-moa7v1M89Zv11HZy_WhEiR/view). El siguiente es el enlace para nominar a su hijo/a <http://bit.ly/GTTesting>. Este formulario debe completarse **antes del miércoles 3 de febrero**. No se aceptarán nominaciones recibidas después de esa fecha. Las pruebas se llevarán a cabo en ambos campus en febrero y marzo. Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud, llame a nuestra oficina al (616) 666-6611.

**Figure 3. Gifted and Talented Information E-mail to Parents Utilized by Schools 1, 2, and 3.**

Figures 4 and 5 demonstrated that all links, QR Codes and videos related to the GT nomination process were only available for parents in English. This information was sent to parents via e-mail via school administrators.



**Figure 4. Gifted and Talented Parent Information Meeting**



**Figure 5. Gifted and Talented Nomination Form (QR Code/URL)**

Figure 6 shows that the GT nomination form was sent to parents in English only. Even though the original e-mail sent to parents was in both English and Spanish, the online GT nomination form was in English.

**Figure 6. Gifted and Talented Nomination Form**

The stories above revealed an unconscious language discrimination. Hispanic ELs faced language discrimination constantly in the GT program. The participants' narratives revealed how Hispanic ELs continue to face language discrimination.

### **Racial Discrimination**

Another theme within unconscious bias was racial discrimination. The data disclosed that most participants had witnessed racial discrimination towards Hispanic ELs. Participants described some of these experiences with great detail.

One participant brazenly stated, “the process is biased and controlled by the White committee. They say who is in and who is not. And guess who is out?” Another participant echoed the racial discrimination by stating, “I haven’t experienced it

personally, but in this [District], I know that different races or ethnicities had lower or higher scores than others.” A third participant felt that Hispanic ELs were not wanted in the program, “It’s like they, the GT committee doesn’t want Hispanics in the [GT] program. Is this a “Whites only?” It makes you wonder...Overall, these kids are part of our district, pull them, don’t push them.”

Some participants expressed that they thought that the GT committee was racist. One participant whose Hispanic EL’s GT test was misplaced and required that the student retest stated, “If this would have been a White kid, he would have been in without any additional or retesting.” Another participant stated, “I noticed that most of my Hispanic ELs [that are nominated] are not [considered] qualified for GT...I’ve seen the pattern in my [X] years teaching here...I’ve seen a big gap between ELs and English speakers. Are Hispanic students in general not gifted?”

The lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the program from the GT committee to the GT student population is evident from the perspectives of the participants in the study. Most participants witnessed racial discrimination amongst Hispanic ELs and were upset, in some cases visibly, about this.

### **Discrimination Based on Socio-economic Status**

Socio-economic status was another significant theme under unconscious bias. Many of the participants felt that the GT program is heavily influenced by a family’s financial resources. They felt that wealth was an influential hindrance for Hispanic ELs to get into the GT program.

“Money, money, money...money is the number one barrier for our bilingual students,” a participant stated. “The entire identification process is biased. If you have

money, you're in, if you don't, you're out. Giftedness has nothing to do with this program." This is the "country club kid" program; it's obvious," another participant stated as she made quotation marks gesture with her hands. "Students take a test to be identified, but we all know the committee decides who is in and who is not," while making a money gesture with her hand, another participant exclaimed.

Additionally, other participants also expressed socio-economics status hinders the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in the [GT] program. A participant who felt the GT program was not equitable stated, "The district has a lot of affluent families, a lot of families with resources and connections...they get outside testing and they're gifted [while making quotation marks with her hands around the word gifted]. Socio-economic status was brought up by another participant who stated, "They're all White most of them and a lot of them come from economically advantage families." "ELs are not being identified because they have a different representation or culture than where we are [district]. They are not White. They are not rich," stated another participant.

Similar answers by other participants about the impact of high socio-economic status in the GT program were shared with me. One concerned participant stated, "This will never change because parents donate a lot of money to the district...we get threaten with [appeal letters from attorneys] ...parents feel entitled. [The GT program] has become a social club, a joke." Another participant shared similar views, she stated, "Students get nominated, tested and then the committee decides who gets in and who doesn't...GT [certified] teachers are often biased about minorities. For [District] community, the GT program is a social status...a social club." "I don't want to get in

trouble, but this is discrimination, classism supported and allowed by the [District],” was a fundamental declaration by a participant.

The stories above revealed that many of the interviewees felt that the reason why Hispanic ELs do not get accepted into the GT program is caused by money. Many of the participants felt that the GT program is influenced by a family’s high socio-economic status. Participants felt that affluence obstructs Hispanic ELs to get into the GT program.

The data presented above relates the teachers’ narratives and their experiences within the GT identification process. These narratives were constructed and supported by their own experiences. These sentiments were reiterated in my own observations, as documented in my research journal. It is important to mention that behind any suggestion of discrimination within the school district and its’ decisions is the passion and leadership of teachers and the oppression of students that encourages educators to speak up and question the judgements made when identifying GT students especially Hispanic ELs.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the thematic findings generated based on the qualitative data collected. The themes in this chapter were presented in no specific order or cognizant pattern in mind just as themes developed and with the spirit of openness and the trust built between the researcher and the participants. All data reflected the complexity of views on the situation being considered. Chapter 5, the final chapter, will provide discussion on the meaning of these findings and the implications. Recommendations for further research based on the findings discovered through the data will also be presented in the next chapter.



## **V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The gifted and talented (GT) identification process for Hispanic English learner s (ELs) has not been effective for decades (Bell, 2012; Bernal, 1974; Contreras-Vanegas, 2011; Esquierdo, 2006; Hageman, 2008; Nichol; 2013; Thompson, 2013). Despite the extensive studies supporting the difficulties in identifying Hispanic ELs for GT programs, researchers still do not have a clear understanding of why or how to best identify Hispanic ELs for gifted programs (Nichol, 2013). Consequently, there is a vast underrepresentation of GT Hispanic ELs in GT programs.

Currently, the GT identification process is left to local standards (Pankake, Littleton, & Schroth, 2005; National Association for Gifted Children, 2018). School districts determine the process for identifying GT students as required by Texas Education Code §29.122. However, Texas state legislation does not require how that identification of GT students is to take place (Walsh, J., Kemerer, F., & Maniotis, L., 2005). Since the GT identification process is a local responsibility and dependent on local control and not under federal or state supervision, it constructs discrepancies for students from racial and ethnic minoritized groups, English learner s, and kids with disabilities (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative case study (Yin, 2018) was to identify and analyze the current gifted and talented program identification process in a selected South Texas School District (STSD). The primary research question that guided this study was: What values, beliefs, systems contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learners in the GT program at a two-way immersion dual language program at an elementary

school in South Texas? The sub-questions pertaining to the current GT identification process included:

- What contributes to the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in the GT program at this school?
- What are teachers, staff, and district leaders' perceptions of the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in the GT program at the school?
- What role does the GT identification process play in this underrepresentation?
- What are the lessons learned that can inform equitable change?

In-depth interviews with 20 Spanish immersion, dual language, bilingual teachers, and team leaders were conducted and served as the main source of data for the study, supplemented by a review of relevant documents that were available as well as a research journal and field notes. From data analysis four main themes were identified: professional development, transparency, program disparities and unconscious bias. Within the theme of professional development three subthemes were found: policy, the GT identification processes and teacher preparation. The theme of transparency had two subthemes: trust and outside testing. The exclusion of Hispanic ELs' families and GT faculty ethnicity were subthemes that appeared in the theme of program disparities. The fourth theme of unconscious bias included three subthemes related to: language discrimination, racial discrimination, and discrimination based on socio-economic status.

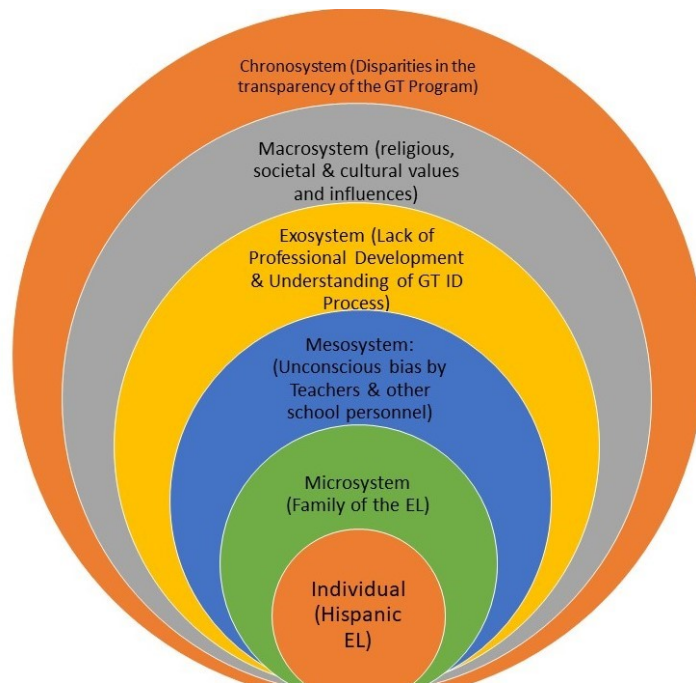
### **Key Findings**

Given the four themes identified, and as I explained in Chapter 3 on page 67, I used both the underlying constructivist theory and the socio-ecological model (SEM) to identify key findings from my study that responded to the overarching research question

posed to help uncover why there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic Els in the GT program at a South Texas School District. Those key findings are:

1. Need to be inclusive of Els' families
2. Acknowledging and attending to unconscious bias
3. Need for professional development for increased understanding of the GT identification process
4. Need for increased fidelity and GT program review
5. Addressing disparities in transparency the GT program.

In Figure 7 below, I incorporated my key findings in the socio-ecological model. While the individual is the Hispanic EL and all the traits mentioned in chapter 3, the individual goes in and out of each layer; thus, all layers affect the individual multiple times (Crawford, Snyder, Adelson, 2020). In the Chronosystem, which refers to state laws and school policies, I inserted disparities in the transparency of the GT program. The Macrosystem included societal and cultural values and influences. In the Exosystem, which deals with professional development of school personnel, I inserted the lack of professional development and understanding of the GT identification process. In the Mesosystem, which deals with teachers and other school personnel, I placed unconscious bias. In the Microsystem, I placed the family of Els. Lastly, in the center is the individual who in this case is the Hispanic EL.



**Figure 7. Socio-Ecological Model Demonstrating Key Findings**

***Key Finding 1: Need to Be Inclusive of Els’ Families***

Parental involvement is significant in education, but mainly in gifted education. Fundamentally, there are roles which the families of Els can perform: advocate; guide; mentor; educational aide; and developer. Participants felt that the families of Hispanic Els were excluded from all aspects of the GT program due to a language barrier.

***Key Finding 2: Attending to Unconscious Bias***

Unconscious bias is an automatic tendency for humans to perceive people, situations, and events in stereotypical ways. These attitudes and stereotypes affect our understandings, actions, and decisions unconsciously. Participants expressed bias and resentment towards the GT program and the underrepresentation of Hispanic GT ELs.

***Key Finding 3: Need for Professional Development***

As stated in Chapter 2, ignorance and misunderstanding about giftedness and cultural diversity contributes to the underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs (Ross, 1993).

Hence the importance of quality professional development is essential. Professional development is offered to all district employees; however, knowledge of the GT policy, identification process and teacher preparation was limited. Participants lacked knowledge of the GT policies in place. In addition, participants did not have a thorough understanding of the GT identification process.

Teachers received training or professional development (PD) to prepare them for diverse classrooms; however, they felt that the PD was limited; thus, they did not feel adequate to identify Hispanic GT ELs. As a result of the limitations of PD and as the data revealed numerous teachers lack the ability to identify the attributes of Hispanic GT ELs.

This theme was determined from the data analysis of the participants' interviews revealed that 100% percent of the participants had a different understanding of the GT identification process. This was best described by participants who were also language campus leaders.

#### ***Key Finding 4: Need for Increased Fidelity and GT Identification Process Review***

A lack of consistency in the GT identification process was uncovered. Although, local and state policies were in place, all participants were inconsistent about the GT identification process. The data revealed many disparities in the GT identification process revealing an infidelity that reaffirmed my research question. These disparities included: lack of understanding of Hispanic GT ELs, inclusion of Hispanic ELs' families, outside testing as a form of placement, and unconscious bias.

#### ***Key Finding 5: Transparency and Disparities of the GT program***

Transparency was found to be lacking in the GT identification process. Trust was a key factor contributing to this lack of transparency. Participants did not believe in the

GT identification process and questioned decisions made by the GT committee. In addition, program disparities were a crucial outcome. Participants felt that Hispanic families of ELs were excluded. Participants expressed a critical concern about GT informational sessions for parents, and the lack of a Spanish speaking teachers present at these GT parent informational meetings hindered the placement of these students.

Furthermore, outside testing was a vast concern as it promoted educational barriers for Hispanic GT ELs. Participants felt that by allowing students, who did not qualify through the school district's identification process, to be identified through external resources as a proof of giftedness which allowed an unquestionable and immediate GT placement was a vast disparity within the GT program.

### **Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research**

School districts continue to face the challenge of effectively identifying GT Hispanic ELs; therefore, add to their vast underrepresentation in GT programs. This case study validated that there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in GT programs. It also revealed that there are various critical concerns as it pertains to the GT identification process of Hispanic ELs from policy, teacher preparation and the identification process. This section articulates the needs and recommendations to improve the identification protocols for inclusion of all students.

#### ***Implications for Practice***

All the implications for practice are related to additional quality professional development for staff and faculty. This would be to understand policy, the identification process, referrals, and appeals. I have explained each of these implications below. In

addition to these that involve professional development, schools should also follow best practices, which I highlight below.

### ***Understanding Policy***

One of the key findings was that participants were unknowledgeable of local and state GT policies in place. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Gallagher (2015) suggested that in order to serve GT students, policies must be designed to be understood; therefore, I recommend an intensive, in-depth professional development across grade levels and schools on the understanding and implication of GT local and state policies. As previously suggested in Chapter 2, the understanding of educational policies is important because policies establish rules and procedures in order for educational programs to function effectively, ethically (Gorton & Alston, 2009). It will also intensify the trustworthiness to the GT identification process.

In addition to the 30 hours of GT training (Nature and Needs of Gifted Students, Identification and Assessment, Social and Emotional Needs, Creativity and Instructional Strategies, Differentiated Curriculum) and the six hours mandated yearly by the state of Texas (TEC §89.2), I recommend for this training to be reviewed yearly as student demographics change. This mandated training must also include the characteristics of Hispanic GT ELs. I recommend for this training to be in-person as digital or virtual training is not as effective.

The variation and uncertainty about the identification of GT students, especially Hispanic ELs, in general manifested. This discrepancy hinders the proper identification of Hispanic ELs in GT programs. Previous studies on GT programs have found that school staff and faculty lack the necessary preparation to recognize the unique

characteristics of gifted minority students (Elhoweris, Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996; Esquierdo, 2006; Masten & Plata, 2000; Mutua, & Alsheikh, 2005;). It is recommended that faculty and staff be adequately trained on the unique characteristics of Hispanic GT ELs.

As mentioned in the literature review, the state allows school districts to design and decide their own GT local policy, which includes the GT identification process. Since this, as my data revealed, has not been effective, I recommend for the TEA to revise the GT state and local policy and provide a written more just process. This policy appraisal would serve as a foundation to a more equitable GT program.

### ***The Identification Process***

The GT identification process in this district (Local Policy EHBB 015901) includes and is not limited to: nomination/referral and appeals. The data analysis revealed inconsistency in the GT identification process specifically in the nomination/referral step and appeals which obstructs the identification of Hispanic GT ELs. Previous research demonstrates that at the core of the identification of Hispanic ELs in GT programs are ambiguous and ineffective practices (Bernal, 1974; 1981; 1998; 2002; Bermúdez & Rakow, 1990; 1993; Bernard, 1985; Castellano, 1998; Cohen, 1998; 1990; Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012; Ford, Grantham, Whiting, 2008; Harris, 2009; Irby & Lara-Alecio, 1996).

I recommend that the STSD review the GT Program on an annual basis. This program review should refer to the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students which has guiding questions for a program review (Appendix J). This includes student assessment, service design, curriculum and instruction, professional development,



and family/community involvement. Multiple school district leaders, the GT Coordinator, teachers, and possibly parents can be involved in this review policy.

In addition, I recommend that STSD have diverse personnel in the GT program. I also recommend for the GT committee to include a highly-qualified bilingual teacher, Hispanic or minority preferred, in every identification placement decision. Lastly, I recommend a highly-qualified bilingual teacher, Hispanic or minority preferred, to teach in the GT program.

### ***Referrals***

The nomination or referral is the first step in the GT identification process. Typically, teachers nominate students that exhibit GT characteristics. The data revealed a lack of comprehensive identification measures. Eighty percent of the participants were not able to identify the attributes of GT students. The other 20% of the participants stated that bilingual teachers do not nominate students. Previous research implies that teachers do not know how to identify GT students, specifically minority students, and that teachers are not well prepared in what truly constitutes GT behavior; therefore, they do not nominate or refer low socioeconomic or minority students (Castellano, 1998; Elhoweris, 2008; Ramos, 2010; Valdes, 2003). My recommendation is to give teachers an extensive professional development on giftedness to improve and better understand GT identification characteristics of Hispanic GT ELs. In addition, I recommend professional development on cultural sensitivity and inclusion, and understanding how giftedness manifests in other cultures. I recommend this training to include the best practices mentioned and to include the 15 Tips for Identifying Gifted EL students recommended by the National Center for Research on Gifted Education (Appendix K).

## *Appeals*

Through the appeal process (Local Policy EHBB), parents may appeal or contest any final decision of the GT committee regarding the selection for, denial, or exit from the program. “The appeal shall contain justification for the appeal and provide new evidence to be considered (Local Policy EHBB, p. 2).” This evidence includes “outside testing.”

Ninety percent of the participants felt that “outside testing” obstructs the acceptance of GT Hispanic ELs into the program as the assessment is done by a private doctor which is expensive. Outside testing has become a pressing issue and a major contribution to limitations on true giftedness. In addition, participants felt that this “outside testing” was inequitable because of the doctor’s website promotion of this test (Appendix I). Participants felt that the doctor’s detailed internet promotion created a distrustful environment between parents and teachers. They also stated that it made the school district incompetent. As the internet promotion for outside testing stated, “You have expressed an interest in having your child evaluated for [GT program]...often the screening instruments used in the schools will not produce scores representing your child’s true abilities...these tests will provide a more accurate measure of a child’s innate intellectual abilities and academic achievement levels.”

My recommendation is for a state law that eliminates the possibility of outside testing as a diagnosis of giftedness. This law would ensure a more equitable and ethical GT identification process. It will also increase the opportunity for students of low socio-economic status and minorities, such as Hispanic ELs, to be placed in GT programs.

### ***Gifted and Talented Identification Process Best Practices***

Gifted and talented students have commonalities; however, a one size fits all model no longer relates. Gifted and talented students show different characteristics and attributes. All GT students exhibit their giftedness differently.

According to the National Association for Gifted Children, there are several practices to consider in the identification of Gifted students. These best practices include:

- Identification needs to occur over time, with multiple opportunities to exhibit gifts. One test at a specific point in time should not dictate whether someone is identified as gifted.
- Giftedness is represented through all racial, ethnic, income levels, and exceptionality groups. Underrepresentation is widely spread. It's estimated that African American, Hispanic American, and Native American students are underrepresented by at least 50% in programs for the gifted.
- Giftedness may be exhibited within a specific interest or category—and even a specific interest within that category. Professionals must seek ways to gather examples across various domains and contexts. Early identification in school improves the likelihood that gifts will be developed into talents.

In addition, Table 14 provides objective and subjective identification instruments that help schools districts with best practices as they identify GT students.

**Table 14.** Objective and Subjective Identification Instrument

Identification Instruments	
Objective	Subject
<b>Tests &amp; Assessments:</b> Individual intelligence and achievement tests are often used to assess giftedness. However, relying on IQ or performance results alone may overlook certain gifted populations.	Teacher Observations & Ratings: Learning & Motivation Scales Teachers may make observations and use rating scales or checklists for certain trait or characteristics during instruction.
Student Cumulative Records: Grades, state and standardized tests are sometimes used as data points during the gifted identification process.	<b>Portfolios &amp; Performances:</b> Portfolios or work that is collected over time should include student reflections of their products and/or performances. Portfolios may be developed for both academic (language arts, math) and creative (speech, arts, music) pursuits.
	Student Educational Profiles: While many forms may be used to identify gifted children, an academic or artistic case study approach can offer a more comprehensive process. Case studies may include data, observations, and growth demonstrated in various settings.

*Source:* Adapted from: National Association for Gifted Children

In addition, I recommend for STSD to follow the 15 Tips for Identifying Gifted ELs students published by the National Center for Research on Gifted Education (2014). These best practices are based on schools that have records of successfully identifying ELs for gifted programs (NCRGE, 2014). This includes adopting universal screening procedures, creating alternative pathways to identification, establishing a web of communication, and viewing professional development as a lever for change.

Additionally, I recommend for STSD to implement the following four practices to improve the identification of GT students of all backgrounds. This includes the inclusion of culturally, linguistically diverse populations, the inclusion of Hispanic parents of ELs in future training in their first language, continue and encourage conversations regarding

ELs' strengths, gifts and talents, and behaviors, and provide professional development on cultural responsiveness.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic ELs in the STSD gifted program. This being a qualitative bound case study, the findings cannot be generalized. However, the findings can be used in future studies to guide researchers with similar research questions. Further qualitative studies could be used to explore and discover knowledge on the topic and establish a foundation. The following are recommendations for future research.

My research demonstrated inconsistencies in the GT identification placement of students. I recommend that the utilization of outside testing in other school districts should also be studied. Prevalence of outside testing, as well as consistency and equity in the identification process should be key factors that future research should examine.

Future studies should investigate the number of students, and especially the number of Hispanic ELs identified and placed in gifted programs through outside testing. My study found inequities in acceptance of students that sought outside testing versus relying on the school district GT identification process. This should be studied for social justice.

I also recommend that future research also examines a more diverse sample of schools and educators from other parts of South Texas, Texas, and the United States. This study was limited to predominately White elementary schools in an affluent school district in South Texas. Future research at more diverse schools will add value to a more equitable GT identification of ELs.

In addition, I recommend for State policies to be more specific and aligned with school districts GT identification process and decisions. Also, GT local policies must be revised yearly as student demographics evolve. Consequently, the GT identification process and the program itself must follow the Texas State Plan and reviewed yearly to ensure accountability.

### **My Narrative: My Final Thoughts**

Como mencioné en mi narrativa, I, como muchos, was brought to the United States at a very young age. I was the son of a dreamer who dreamt of a better life for us. El hijo de una mujer fuerte que solo soñaba con darnos una buena educación and a chance to live the American dream. Little did she know, the American dream would become a nightmare between two cultures and two languages connected, yet disconnected, por un puente entre dos fronteras.

Later in life, we returned to Eagle Pass, Texas. We crossed the frontera daily back and forth. The Eagle Pass High School became a burning inferno full of bias, obstacles and oppression. Except this time, I was wiser. I understood that those biases would not stop me. Yet, the number one oppressor, my teachers, was still alive. I remember Mrs. G vividly. How can I ever forget her? She called me turkey often and she once hit me in the head with her knuckles as she said to me in front of the class, “You’ll never be anything because you don’t speak English.” Learning English became my vendetta or revenge. I went from ESL 1 to English 4 within semesters. At this point en mi vida, I have accepted that mis maestros never valued my gifts and talents as a child; however, esto me dio la fuerza to continue mi camino educativo. This invisible GT Hispanic EL once called a turkey esta frente a ti ya casi un doctor.

It is hard to say that throughout my research, my story has hunted me. However, I realize that these recuerdos of exclusion, humiliation, oppression and invisibility inspired my research goal which is to ensure that GT Hispanic ELs become visible. My goal is to give every GT Hispanic EL a voice and a place in gifted education. As I unveiled my research findings, my goal becomes a bit more visible. With this dissertation, me quiero asegurar that educators, here or there, learn to see and value the gifts and talents of Hispanic ELs. Those gifts and talents that are only valued in our cultures. ¡Quiero que sean visibles!

(See Appendix L for a complete version of my narrative in English).

## **APPENDIX SECTION**

### **APPENDIX A: MY NARRATIVE**

In the 80s I had my first experience with the United States educational system. Like many of us, I was brought to the United States to attend elementary school. Back then, upper-class people, as my grandmother, Alicia Cortinas Gonzales, daughter of General Aurelio Cortinas, would say, sent their children to Mexican private schools or out of the country for a better education.

In 1980, I was 10 years old, and I was very happy attending Licenciado Melchor Ocampo Elementary School in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico. I always made straight A's. All of my teachers liked me. I had plenty of friends. My grandmother, as assertive as she was, convinced my mom that we had to move to Eagle Pass, Texas. My mother, Tere, a single mother of five, wanted a better life for us. So, three of us, Isa, Checo and I moved to Eagle Pass, Texas with my mom. My other two sisters, Lourdes and Nora, were in high school, so they stayed back in Mexico. My grandmother offered to pay any fees and help with whatever expenses were necessary. I recall the tuition fee to attend school was \$80.00 per month, but fortunately we did not have to pay tuition.

“Why do I have to leave my friends? Why do I have to leave my school? I make good grades?” I asked myself in silence as my stomach turned. I was puzzled. Suddenly, although just across the border, I was in a different world and a different culture. I had gone from my school Licenciado Melchor Ocampo to Glass Elementary School. I was in fifth grade in Mexico, but I was placed in a fourth-grade class in my new school. “Why was I placed in a fourth-grade class?” I asked myself. The school principal explained it in the following manner, “Mexico’s education was simply not the same; it is not considered



at the same level as the United States' education.” I remember the school registrar telling my mom that I was going to be placed in fourth grade because of my age. I was dropped one grade level. Additionally, there was the English barrier. English became my biggest distress. I remember this heat going through my body when any staff member called on me. The spotlight was on me and I did not know how to express myself in the English language. English suppressed me.

My teacher was Mrs. Clay. She had the bluest eyes I had ever seen. She was Anglo but could speak a little Spanish as she told me when she welcomed me into her fourth-grade class. There were 22 students in my new classroom, four White kids and the rest were of Mexican decent. I rapidly noticed there were only two racial distinctions: if you were White, you were a gringo; if you were brown, you were a Mexican-American. I was neither; I was Mexican. I felt out of place; I simply did not fit in.

Although, I was just a bridge away, as simple as it may sound, the culture shock was inevitable. Daily, I tried to adapt to my new school, but it was exhausting at times. Fridays became my favorite school day, but not because of the weekend or because I got to go back to Mexico, but because it was “Enchilada Friday.” It was the only day I truly felt connected because I could order the cafeteria food without feeling embarrassed that I didn’t speak nor understand English. The enchiladas made me feel at home. Those enchiladas represented my uniqueness, my culture, my Mexico. In a culture clash, the enchiladas were a beacon of comfort in an oppressed educational system.

It was difficult for me, but I still managed to make some friends. I remember several of my classmates vividly for special reasons. I remember Chava. How could I not? He called me “wetback” all the time. That was my first encounter with classism and

the constant marginalization in society in America. Chava was mean to me until I let him have my milk. He then became sort of a protector. Daily, during lunch that carton of milk became my safety net.

Mora, another classmate of Mexican decent, had come to the United States when she was five, I believe. Mora spoke English well. She was very pretty. She had long black hair and big brown eyes. She always translated for me. She even gave me my first Valentine's card and translated the message for me on the back of the card.

But Cassy caught my attention. Cassy never paid attention in class and from what Mora told me she knew a lot about everything. "So, do I," I thought to myself. I knew how to cook and bake. I could make corn tortillas from scratch. I could sew and continued sewing lessons throughout elementary school. I learned to make stuffed animals that I sold to my neighbors. I knew how to iron. I started ironing my uniforms in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I also delivered newspapers and read every single one of them as I was highly intellectual, and I felt the need to be informed of the latest news to be a better paper boy. Just like Cassy, I had gifts and talents that nobody in my new school noticed. I was an invisible gifted student.

But that was not all, after a few weeks, I was going to be tested to be placed in another classroom. I remember their words clearly, "a special classroom for slow learners." As late as 1980, most English learner s (ELs) were placed in special education classes as educators often misinterpreted the lack of full proficiency in English as low intelligence (Oller, 1991) or as a language or learning disability (Langdon, 1989).

The U.S. public education system was quite unfair to me, my brother and my sister. I know my sister Isa, older than me, and my brother Checo, younger than me, were

trying to cope with similar academic injustices. Luckily, I have a mother who has always believed in us. So, she pulled us out of Glass Elementary School, and we went back to Mexico. I was the happiest little boy alive. I went back to where I belonged, to my roots, to my language, to my culture. I was no longer a dreamer lost in the American dream. I went back to making the highest grades. I once again became part of the standard bearer, an honor for exceptional students. I stayed in Mexico and finished my elementary, and most of my secondary education and graduated with honors. I went back to the gifts and talents everyone noticed. I went back to being visible.

## APPENDIX B: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The purpose of this interview is to get your perspective about the gifted and talented identification process at your school in general, and how it pertains to Hispanic English learners.

I'd like to remind you that to protect the privacy of our interview, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and I ask that you not discuss what is discussed in this interview with anyone else.

The interview will last about one hour and we will audiotape the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately. Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

### Questions Regarding the GT Identification Process

Can you tell me about how students are identified as GT at your school?

Who is involved in the process?

What is your role/a teacher's role in the process?

What is the role of a student's family?

Have you referred a student to GT and what was that process like?

What kinds of attributes do students referred to GT have?

If you have not referred a student, why do you think this is so?

How equipped do you feel in understanding how to identify GT students?

How equipped do you feel other teachers on your campus are to identify GT students?

What types of supports are in place on your campus/in your district to assist in the identification/referral/assessment of GT students?

Policies, practices that ensure equitable access to GT identification and services?

Training/professional development offered to teachers, informational sessions for families, etc.?

What types of challenges/barriers do you perceive to be in place on your campus/in your district that might impede in the identification/referral/assessment of GT students?

Questions regarding the underrepresentation of Hispanic EL students in GT

I will now focus my questions a bit more specifically to understand your perspective regarding Hispanic ELs in GT.

What has your experience been like in identifying/referring/and/or assessing Hispanic ELs for GT?

Has the process for identifying/referring/assessing Hispanic ELs for GT differed from non-Hispanic ELs, and if so, how?

What aspects of identifying/referring/assessing Hispanic ELs for GT are effective?

What aspects of identifying/referring/assessing Hispanic ELs for GT are not effective?

Is there anything you would change to improve the GT identification process in general, and as it pertains to ELs and Hispanic ELs in particular?

## APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR PARTICIPANTS

To:

From: Apolonio Trejo

BCC:

Subject: Research Participation Invitation: The Underrepresentation of Hispanic English Learners in Gifted and Talented Programs

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved or declared exempt by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Dear XXX,

I am conducting a research study on the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learners in gifted and talented programs. I would like for you to participate in this research because you are a highly qualified teacher who works directly with Hispanic English learners and you are a key part of the gifted and talented identification process. The goal of this research is to understand the GT identification process and what might be contributing to Hispanic ELs underrepresentation in GT. Your participation will be anonymous and all information provided will be confidential. The interview will be 30-60 minutes and it is strictly volunteer. You will receive a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card in appreciation of your participation upon completion of the interview.

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact me at 210-445-5461 or via e-mail at [at58162@txstate.edu](mailto:at58162@txstate.edu).

This project [insert IRB Reference Number or Exemption Number] was approved by the Texas State IRB on [insert IRB approval date or date of Exemption]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – ([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - ([meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu)).

#### APPENDIX D: Demographics and Background Questionnaire

Current teaching position \_\_\_\_\_

Total Years of teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_

Total Years teaching at current school \_\_\_\_\_

Total Years teaching English Learners (ELs) \_\_\_\_\_

Are you GT certified? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you bilingual certified? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you ESL certified? \_\_\_\_\_

Other certifications held: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Race/Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Your gender \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: The Underrepresentation of Hispanic English Learners in Gifted and Talented Programs

Principal Investigator: Apolonio Trejo

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Melissa Martinez

Email: [at58162@txstate.edu](mailto:at58162@txstate.edu)

Email: mm224@txstate.edu

Phone: 210-445-5461

Phone: 512-245-4587

Sponsor: N/A

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about the underrepresentation of Hispanic English learners in gifted and talented programs. You are being asked to participate in this study because you work directly with Hispanic English learners and you are involved in the nomination and identification process of gifted and talented students.

### PROCEDURES

By agreeing to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in:

1. An initial individual interview that will last approximately 1 hour and be audio-recorded.
2. An additional focus group that will last approximately 1 hour and be audio-recorded.

During your individual interview and possible additional focus group interview you will be asked to discuss the gifted and talented identification process in general, and share your perspectives of the process as it pertains to Hispanic English learners. I will help guide the discussion. To protect the privacy of participants, all participants will be provided pseudonyms in the process of transcribing all audio-recorded sessions. I also ask that you not discuss what is shared in the interview or focus group with anyone else.

#### RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

In the event that some of the interview/focus group questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating, you may contact Deer Oaks for counseling services at 866-327-2400.

#### BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide can potentially assist and improve the gifted and talented identification process for Hispanic English learners in the school, district, and inform other school districts.

#### EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this

study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. I, the researcher, and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

#### PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will receive a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card upon completion of the one-on-one interview.

#### PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Apolonio Trejo: [at58162@txstate.edu](mailto:at58162@txstate.edu).

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 –

([dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu)) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 -  
(meg201@txstate.edu).

#### DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Your participation in this research project may be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

---

Printed Name of Study Participant

Signature of Study Participant

Date

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

## APPENDIX F: FORMAL APPROVAL FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT

December 19, 2019

This letter is to certify that Apolonio Trejo has received permission from the [REDACTED] to conduct a qualitative case study titled "The Underrepresentation of Hispanic English Learners in Gifted and Talented Programs". Apolonio has been given permission to request one-on-one interviews as well as focus group participants from professionals at the [REDACTED]. Additionally, school data will be made available to him solely for the purposes of this research. The research may commence upon approval from the Institutional Review Board at Texas State University.

If you have any questions regarding the permission granted to Apolonio Trejo please contact me at [REDACTED]

Thank you,

[REDACTED]  
Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction  
[REDACTED]

# APPENDIX G: TEACHER CHECKLIST / RATING SCALE

Adopted 4/28/95

## Rating Scale Grades Kindergarten, One, Two

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher or person completing this form \_\_\_\_\_  
How long have you known this child? \_\_\_\_\_

Please read the statements carefully and place an X in the appropriate place according to the following scale of values:

1. If you have seldom or never observed this characteristic.
2. If you have observed this characteristic occasionally.
3. If you have observed this characteristic to a considerable degree.
4. If you have observed this characteristic almost all of the time.

	1	2	3	4
Has advanced language development.				
1. Utilizes a large vocabulary.				
2. Uses complex sentence structure.				
Displays a love for books.				
3. Enjoys being read to.				
4. Is reading above grade level.				
Possesses a wide range of interests.				
5. Is curious about many topics.				
6. Asks provocative questions (how, why)				
Works well independently				
7. Organizes and directs self; may not wait for instructions.				
8. Displays self-confidence, task taking.				
Learns easily.				
9. Learns rapidly with less practice.				
10. Has an excellent memory.				
Possesses keen powers of observation.				
11. Sees things others do not see				
12. Makes connections with past, present or future experiences.				
13. Perceives cause and effect relationships.				
Demonstrates spatial ability.				
14. Sees patterns in numbers and figures.				
15. Displays use of dimension, perspective.				
Exhibits originality in thinking and action.				
16. Has many ideas; resourceful.				
17. Shows ability to elaborate.				
18. Has good imagination.				
Displays a sense of humor.				
19. Uses puns; makes up words; plays with language.				
20. Enjoys and shares silly jokes; recognizes humorous situations.				
Demonstrates a high degree of sensitivity.				
21. Takes action to help someone in need.				
22. Shows unusual interest in and understanding of societal issues.				
Takes pleasure in school activities.				
23. Is motivated to learn and explore.				
24. Enjoys learning games.				

Add Column Total  
Multiply by Weight  
Add Weighted Column Totals  
Total

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Additional Comments:

# **Rating Scale** **Grades Three, Four, Five**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Teacher or person completing this form \_\_\_\_\_  
 How long have you known this child? \_\_\_\_\_

Please read the statements carefully and place an X in the appropriate place according to the following scale of values:

1. If you have seldom or never observed this characteristic.
2. If you have observed this characteristic occasionally.
3. If you have observed this characteristic to a considerable degree.
4. If you have observed this characteristic almost all of the time.

	1	2	3	4
1. Has unusually advanced vocabulary for age or grade level.				
2. Posses a large storehouse of information about a variety of topics.				
3. Has a quick mastery and recall of factual information.				
4. Has rapid insight into cause-effect relationships; shows strong interest in the how and why of things; asks many provocative questions.				
5. Understands underlying principles; makes valid generalizations, and looks for similarities and differences concerning events, people, and things.				
6. Is a keen and alert observer; usually "sees more" or "gets more" out of a story, film, etc. than others.				
7. Reads a great deal; does not avoid difficult material.				
8. Tries to understand complicated material by separating it into its respective parts; reasons things out; sees logical and common sense answers.				
9. Becomes absorbed and truly involved in certain topics or problems. (It is sometimes difficult to get the student to move on to another topic.)				
10. Needs little external motivation to follow through in work that is initially exciting.				
11. Strives toward perfection; is self-critical.				
12. Prefers to work independently; requires little direction from teachers.				
13. Is interested in many "adult" problems such as religion, politics, sex, race—more than usual for age level.				
14. Likes to organize and bring structure to things, people, and situations.				
15. Is quite concerned with right and wrong, good and bad; often evaluates and passes judgement on events, people, and things.				
16. Displays a great deal of curiosity about many things; is constantly asking questions about anything and everything.				
17. Generates a large number of ideas or solutions to problems and questions; often offers unusual ("way out"), unique, clever responses.				
18. Is a high-risk taker; is adventurous and speculative.				
19. Displays a good deal of intellectual playfulness imagines ("I wonder what would happen if..."); manipulates ideas, (i.e. changes, elaborates, upon them); is often concerned with adapting, improving and modifying institutions, objects, and systems.				
20. Displays a keen sense of humor and sees humor in situations that may not appear to be humorous to others.				
21. Criticizes constructively; is unwilling to accept authoritarian pronouncements without critical examination.				

Add Column Total \_\_\_\_\_  
 Multiply by Weight \_\_\_\_\_  
 Add Weighted Column Totals \_\_\_\_\_  
 Total \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment on any other particular strengths or weaknesses you have observed:

## APPENDIX H: LOCAL POLICY

015901

### SPECIAL PROGRAMS GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

EHBB  
(LOCAL)

<b>Referral</b>	Students may be referred for the gifted and talented program at any time by teachers, counselors, parents, or other interested persons.
<b>Screening and Identification Process</b>	<p>The District shall provide assessment opportunities to complete the screening and identification process for referred students at least once per school year.</p> <p>The District shall schedule a gifted and talented program awareness session for parents that provides an overview of the assessment procedures and services for the program prior to beginning the screening and identification process.</p>
<b>Parental Consent</b>	The District shall obtain written parental consent before any special testing or individual assessment is conducted as part of the screening and identification process. All student information collected during the screening and identification process shall be an educational record, subject to the protections set out in policies at FL.
<b>Identification Criteria</b>	The Board-approved program for the gifted and talented shall establish criteria to identify gifted and talented students. The criteria shall be specific to the state definition of gifted and talented and shall ensure the fair assessment of students with special needs, such as the culturally different, the economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities.
<b>Assessments</b>	Data collected through both objective and subjective assessments shall be measured against the criteria approved by the Board to determine individual eligibility for the program. Assessment tools may include, but are not limited to, the following: achievement tests, intelligence tests, creativity tests, behavioral checklists completed by teachers and parents, student/parent conferences, and available student work products.
<b>Selection</b>	A selection committee shall evaluate each referred student according to the established criteria and shall identify those students for whom placement in the gifted and talented program is the most appropriate educational setting. The committee shall be composed of at least three professional educators who have received training in the nature and needs of gifted students, as required by law.
<b>Notification</b>	The District shall provide written notification to parents of students who qualify for services through the District's gifted and talented program. Participation in any program or services provided for gifted students shall be voluntary, and the District shall obtain written permission from the parents before placing a student in a gifted and talented program.

DATE ISSUED: 10/10/2019  
UPDATE 114  
EHBB(LOCAL)-B

1 of 3



SPECIAL PROGRAMS  
GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

EHBB  
(LOCAL)

<b>Reassessment</b>	If the District reassesses students in the gifted and talented program, the reassessment shall be based on a student's performance in response to services and shall occur no more than once in elementary grades, once in middle school grades, and once in high school grades.
<b>Transfer Students</b> Interdistrict	When a student identified as gifted by a previous school district enrolls in the District, the selection committee shall review the student's records and conduct assessment procedures when necessary to determine if placement in the District's program for gifted and talented students is appropriate.  [See FDD(LEGAL) for information regarding transfer students and the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children]
Intradistrict	A student who transfers from one campus in the District to the same grade level at another District campus shall continue to receive services in the District's gifted and talented program.
<b>Furloughs</b>	The District may place on a furlough any student who is unable to maintain satisfactory performance or whose educational needs are not being met within the structure of the gifted and talented program. A furlough may be initiated by the District, the parent, or the student.  In accordance with the Board-approved program, a furlough shall be granted for specified reasons and for a specified period of time. At the end of a furlough, the student may reenter the gifted and talented program, be placed on another furlough, or be exited from the program.
<b>Exit Provisions</b>	The District shall monitor student performance in response to gifted and talented program services. If at any time the selection committee or a parent determines it is in the best interest of the student to exit the program, the committee shall meet with the parent and student before finalizing an exit decision.
<b>Appeals</b>	A parent, student, or educator may appeal any final decision of the selection committee regarding selection for or exit from the gifted and talented program. Appeals shall be made first to the selection committee. Any subsequent appeals shall be made in accordance with FNG(LOCAL) beginning at Level Two.
<b>Program Evaluation</b>	The District shall annually evaluate the effectiveness of the District's gifted and talented program, and the results of the evaluation shall be used to modify and update the District and campus improvement plans. The District shall include parents in the evaluation process and shall share the information with Board members,

015901

SPECIAL PROGRAMS  
GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

EHBB  
(LOCAL)

administrators, teachers, counselors, students in the gifted and talented program, and the community.

The District's gifted and talented program shall address effective use of funds for programs and services consistent with the standards in the state plan for gifted and talented students.

The District shall annually report to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) regarding funding used to implement the District's gifted and talented program. The District shall annually certify to TEA:

1. The establishment of a gifted and talented program by the District; and
2. That the District's program is consistent with the state plan for gifted and talented students.

**Community  
Awareness**

The District shall ensure that information about the District's gifted and talented program is available to parents and community members and that they have an opportunity to develop an understanding of and support for the program.

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## APPENDIX I: DOCTOR ADEVERTISEMENT

### *Detailed Information regarding Testing for [REDACTED] or Gifted & Talented (G/T) Placement*

*You have expressed an interest in having your child evaluated for [REDACTED] or enriched academic placement (e.g., Honors, G/T, A/P). Often the screening instruments used in the schools will not produce scores representing your child's true abilities. This may be due to the testing environment (large group) and/or the nature of the screening instrument used. As a psychologist, I administer intelligence (IQ) and academic achievement tests which are the gold standards in the field, are administered in a quiet setting on an individual basis. These tests will provide a more accurate measure of a child's innate intellectual abilities and academic achievement levels.*

*Details of what your child specifically needs in his or her assessment is available from the [REDACTED] or GT coordinator at your child's school.*

# APPENDIX J: TEXAS EDUCATION STATE PLAN FOR THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED/TALENTED STUDENTS STATE PLAN GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM REVIEW

## Guiding Questions for Program Review

The *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* (State Plan) forms the basis of gifted/talented (G/T) services and accountability. The plan offers an outline for services without prohibitive regulation. This resource document for G/T program review serves as a resource to the State Plan and provides guided questions to assist districts in their efforts to meet the compliance guidelines as they also strive to improve services to identified G/T students.

In Compliance	Proposed Guiding Questions
<b>Section 1: Student Assessment</b>	
<b>1.1C</b> Written policies on student identification for gifted/talented services are approved by the district board of trustees and disseminated to all parents (19 TAC §89.1).	<input type="checkbox"/> What written policies are in place regarding identification and assessment? <input type="checkbox"/> When were these policies last updated and approved by the board? <input type="checkbox"/> What methods of disseminating information ensure that parents are adequately informed of these policies?
<b>1.2C</b> Provisions regarding transfer students, furloughs, reassessment, exiting of students from program services, and appeals of district decisions regarding program placement are included in board-approved policy (19 TAC §89.1(5)).	<input type="checkbox"/> What written procedures are in policy regarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ transfer students (in-district, in-state, and out-state),</li> <li>○ furloughs,</li> <li>○ reassessment,</li> <li>○ exiting of students from services, and</li> <li>○ appeals?</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> When were these policies last updated and approved by the board? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the board-approved policies reflect current practices in your district?
<b>1.3.1C</b> Provisions for ongoing identification of students who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment in each area of giftedness served by the district are included in board-approved policy (19 TAC § 89.1 (1)).	<input type="checkbox"/> What written procedures are in policy for ongoing identification of students? <input type="checkbox"/> When were these policies last updated and approved by the board? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the board-approved policies reflect current practices in your district?

## APPENDIX K: 15 TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING GIFTED EL STUDENTS FROM THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON GIFTED EDUCATION

# 15 Tips for Identifying Gifted EL Students

from the National Center for Research on Gifted Education

### Adopt Universal Screening Procedures

1. Adopt a policy of universal screening of all students in one or more grade levels for the identification process.
2. Select assessment instruments that are culturally sensitive and account for language differences.
3. Assess the speed of English language acquisition and monitor the rate of mastering reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English.
4. Consider including reliable and valid nonverbal ability assessments as part of the overall identification process.
5. Use other identification tools to supplement results of universal screening.

### Create Alternative Pathways to Identification

6. Use native language ability and achievement assessments as indicators of potential giftedness, when available.
7. Maintain a list of multilingual school psychologists who are qualified to administer assessments in the student's native language.
8. Establish a preparation program prior to formal identification procedures that provides students with learning opportunities to enhance knowledge and academic skills necessary for a student to be recognized.
9. Create a talent pool list of students who exhibit high potential but are not yet enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Observations, daily interactions between teachers and students, informal assessments, and formal assessments provide multiple opportunities to gauge students' learning progress. Make identification of giftedness an ongoing process rather than a single event.

### Establish a Web of Communication

10. Establish an identification committee that includes representatives who have key responsibilities in various roles and departments.
11. Develop and implement intentional outreach to the school community, particularly parents/guardians/caretakers. This process should utilize multiple pathways in languages appropriate to the population.
12. Emphasize collaboration within and across specializations/departments (e.g., general education, English as a second language [ESL], special education, gifted education) so people view themselves as talent scouts.

### View Professional Development as a Lever for Change

13. Provide professional development opportunities for school personnel about effective policies and practices to support equitable representation of ELs in gifted and talented programs.
14. Develop a systematic approach to analyzing district and school demographics and the status of students identified/not identified for gifted and talented programs.
15. Promote efforts to diversify the teaching corps so that the adult community of a school reflects the student population.

Visit <http://ncrge.uconn.edu> for more information

This research was completed by the National Center for Research on Gifted Education (NCRGE) at the University of Connecticut under a contract with the United States Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). These recommendations are based on the NCRGE's research on the identification of gifted English learners (ELs) and the views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department. No official endorsement by the Department of any identification procedures, practices, and instruments mentioned is intended or should be inferred. This research was funded by the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, PIN/Award # E1305C140018. Visit the Resources section at <http://ncrge.uconn.edu> for the full research report from which these recommendations were made.

## APPENDIX L: MY NARRATIVE: MY FINAL THOUGHTS

As I mentioned in my narrative, I, like many, was brought to the United States at a very young age. I was the son of a dreamer who dreamt of a better life for us. I was the son of a strong woman whose only dream was to give us a better education and a chance to live the American dream. Little did she know, the American dream would become a nightmare between two cultures and two languages connected, yet disconnected, by a bridge between two borders.

Later in life, we returned to Eagle Pass, Texas. We crossed the border daily back and forth. The Eagle Pass High School became a burning inferno full of bias, obstacles and oppression. Except this time, I was wiser. I understood that those biases would not stop me. Yet, the number one oppressor, my teachers, was still alive. I remember Mrs. G vividly. How can I ever forget her? She called me turkey often and she once hit me in the head with her knuckles as she said to me in front of the class, “You’ll never be anything because you don’t speak English.” Learning English became my vendetta or revenge. I went from ESL 1 to English 4 within semesters. At this point in life, I have accepted that my teachers never valued my gifts and talents as a child. However, it gave me the strength to continue my educational journey and proudly say that this invisible GT Hispanic EL once called a turkey stands before you almost a doctor.

It is hard to say that throughout my research my story has hunted me. However, I realize that these memories of exclusion, humiliation, oppression and invisibility inspired my research goal which is to ensure that GT Hispanic ELs become visible. My goal is to give every GT Hispanic EL a voice and a place in gifted education. As I unveiled my research findings, my goal becomes a bit more visible. With this

dissertation, I want to ensure that educators, here or there, learn to see and value the gifts and talents of Hispanic ELs. Those gifts and talents that are only valued in our cultures. I want them to be visible!

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