

Public Abstract

First Name: Beth

Middle Name: Joelle

Last Name: Winton

Adviser's First Name: Sarah

Adviser's Last Name: Diem

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term: SP 2013

Department: Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis

Degree: PhD

Title: Reversing Underachievement Among Gifted Secondary Students

In the field of public education, calls for reform are ubiquitous, originating from multiple sources, and mostly focusing on the need to raise the achievement levels of American school children. The abilities and needs of the children who attend public school across the country are as varied as the recommendations being made to improve their education. Among the special populations of students walking the halls of our public schools every day, gifted children are less likely than any others to be the target of these school reform efforts.

This mixed methods research study analyzed a segment of the gifted student population, those who are not achieving academically. In an attempt to discern whether underachieving gifted students could be identified through data analysis, a quantitative investigation was conducted. In an attempt to analyze how to best meet the needs of underachieving gifted students, qualitative interviews were conducted with ten underachieving gifted students to ascertain their perceptions of the self and school.

By applying the motivational aspect of Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory, this study evaluated the effects of school experiences on the intrinsic motivation of gifted students. The data collected from this study produced several themes related to student descriptions of school that support their intrinsic motivation to learn, such as 1) effective use of time in class and at home, 2) teacher quality/characteristics that are motivating, 3) instructional strategies that focus on engagement and mastery, and finally, 4) the need for positive relationships with teachers and peers.

Recommendations for policy changes were made, as well as implications for additional research.