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he role of the principal as it relates to the education of gifted and talented children in programs and schools has been discussed in a variety of articles related to desired skills, competencies, or characteristics (Booth & Brown, 1985; Dart, 1986; Marshall, Ramirez, Plinske, & Veal, 1998; Norton & Zeilinger, 1983; Roeper, 1986; Taylor, 1987). Yet, the research is neither extensive nor recent, especially pertaining to the role of the elementary administrator of schools for gifted learners.

A brief summary of these articles focuses on the key features of the successful administrator in charge of running a gifted program within the school setting or running an entire school for gifted learners. Awareness is defined as a key responsibility because it impacts the administrator's knowledge about the traits of gifted children, sensitivity to the community, and whether or not the local curriculum is designed to meet the needs of its gifted learners (Booth & Brown, 1985). Collaborative administration, which empowers the teacher and encourages thoughtful risk taking, is viewed as a way to strengthen schools

(Dart, 1986). Administrators can also create conditions that enable gifted children to thrive by establishing a learning community where the articulation of learning principles and conditions can be shared (Marshall, Ramirez, Plinske, & Veal, 1998). The style of leadership of the principal and the change from being at the top of the hierarchy to a more facilitative role of group processes ensure that the administrator is an equal member of the community while still maintaining a leadership position (Roeper, 1986). Finally, Norton and Zeilinger (1983) identified in the literature 12 leadership role functions necessary for principals in programs for the gifted (see Figure 1). The functions ranged from planning and leadership, financing, and staffing, to communication and evaluawith specific competencies addressed for each.

Overview

In "A Tale of Two Principals" the role of the elementary school administrator is shared from two different perspectives. The reader is encouraged to

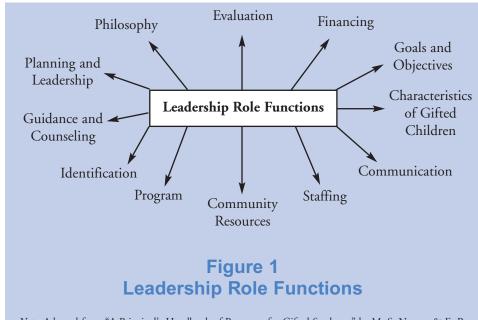
decide whether or not the two perspectives really do differ and, if so, how. Dr. Rosemary Colarulli-Daniels is principal of The Weiss School, a private school for gifted children in Palm Beach Gardens, FL. Ms. Jill Leinhauser is the principal of Jacksonville Beach Elementary, a public school in Duval County, Jacksonville, FL, which serves as a magnet school for gifted and academically talented students. Both administrators were asked to respond to a series of interview questions that would lead us to a better understanding of the skills, competencies, and characteristics necessary in their role as principals of elementary schools for gifted learners. Some of the topics covered include the unique skills needed to run the school, meeting the needs of gifted learners, what to look for when hiring a teacher, the role of parents, challenges of the position, and advice to administrators. "Final other Thoughts" section allows the principals an opportunity to reflect upon what they had written and provides a forum to express, without structured questions, the importance of their role and the impact they have had on gifted children.

The Two Principals

How would you describe your school?

Colarulli-Daniels: The Weiss School provides an educational setting for pre-K through eighth-grade students, utilizing strategies and a curriculum to best serve the needs of gifted students. A psychological evaluation and a portfolio are reviewed by the school administration prior to acceptance. A date is then set for the student to spend a day for behavior observation and a formal evaluation of his or her academic achievement. Once accepted, material is presented in ways that complement the student's learning styles. The appropriate level of instruction for each subject is determined for each student, and dual-enrollment is available for middle school students needing coursework beyond the four high school honor courses taught at the school. In addition to the four core subjects, the course of study includes foreign language, tae kwon do, physical education, art, and music. Students learn to play a musical instrument as early as the second grade and can join one of the five school bands. Teachers who have gifted endorsements in their subject area of certification teach all classes. The teachers, course of study, and pedagogy practices make The Weiss School an outstanding school center for students needing a gifted educational setting.

Leinhauser: Jacksonville Beach is a dedicated magnet school for gifted and academically talented students in grades K-5. All of the students who attend are part of the magnet program and have been accepted by submitting an application to the district magnet office and being selected through a lottery. The school population averages about 630 students, of which 81% are White, 8% African American, 4% Asian, 4% Biracial, and 3% Hispanic. Additionally, approximately 18% of the students who attend are eligible for free and reduced lunch.



Note. Adapted from "A Principal's Handbook of Programs for Gifted Students," by M. S. Norton & E. R. Zeilinger, 1983, NASSP Bulletin, 67(459), 102-106.

The gifted students make up about one-third of the total population. They are served in self-contained classes comprised of 20-25 gifted students that are taught by teachers who have certificates in gifted education. To be eligible for a gifted class at Jax Beach, students must meet the state's eligibility criteria for gifted education, that is, score in the very superior range (130+) on a standard IQ test and exhibit a majority of the gifted characteristics as identified on the Renzulli-Hartman checklist and matrix. Additionally, based on the state's Plan B criteria, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are eligible for gifted services if they score in the superior range of intelligence (117+) and exhibit gifted characteristics based on the checklist.

The other two-thirds of the student population at Jax Beach are called academically talented (AT) students. Although there are no specific criteria for inclusion in the AT program, we encourage parents to apply only if their child exhibits strong academic interest and aptitude since our program is designed to challenge and enrich.

How did you become the principal of your school? What led you to this position?

Colarulli-Daniels: I was teaching two of the five gifted endorsement courses for St. Leo's University in the summer semester of 1997. Enrolled in the course were three teachers from The Weiss School. They told me about the "headmaster" vacancy and asked if I would be interested in applying for the position. Upon giving proper notice to the Palm Beach School District, I accepted the offer.

Leinhauser: I was selected as principal for Jacksonville Beach Elementary in July 1998. At that time, I was principal at another Duval County school and was identified by the superintendent as a leader whose organizational and communications skills would be an asset at Jacksonville Beach. My experience and successful performance as a principal at three other elementary schools in the district, two of them with magnet programs, was, I believe, the basis for my assignment here.

What unique skills are needed to run a school implementing a program for gifted learners?

Colarulli-Daniels: In order for a school to have a successful program for gifted learners, the principal must be truly versed in the needs of the gifted student, be an excellent communicator, and have very strong people skills. The principal initiates and supports creative programming. She encourages the faculty to take risks and try new projects, techniques, and teaching strategies that stimulate academic growth in gifted students. Teacher training must be offered regularly, acquainting teachers with successful strategies, while reenergizing the excitement of the classroom. Through the expertise of the teacher, the academic environment becomes rich with activity and a haven for learning. A good principal sees the emotional/social growth of the gifted student to be equally as important as intellectual growth. Opportunities for student socialization and emotional strengthening become commonplace, and specific programs are developed to assure these factors.

Well-developed communication skills are a serious need for principals in a gifted setting. Parents of gifted children are usually more visible and demanding than those of other students. Teachers are highly active in areas beyond normal classroom preparation, and gifted students tend to be more vocal than their peers in the regular classroom. Meeting the demands and needs of these three key players fosters a need for a principal who is a keen communicator. Keeping the status quo does not work in gifted programming. The principal must be able to work with a variety of people, inspiring the ultimate in quality and motivating all players to buy into her mission. Sensitivity while maintaining a leadership stance and directing all players toward a common goal requires a good listener who skillfully maneuvers everyone toward a winwin situation.

Leinhauser: When I first arrived at Jax Beach, one of the first challenges I faced was to establish credibility as a leader with the parent community. Because of the outstanding record and reputation of the school, parents, especially parents of the gifted, were eager to know that I understood the nature and needs of their children, as well as the mission and focus of the school program. Thus, a superior ability to communicate—to speak, write, listen—was (and remains) critical.

Although I did not complete all of the coursework necessary for the gifted endorsement, I did take two gifted education courses as part of my master's program. This was extremely helpful as I began to discuss with teachers some of the best practices for integrating gifted curricular objectives into daily classroom activities. I believe that maintaining a true understanding of the state and district standards in both basic education and in gifted education is critical to success as an instructional leader.

How does your school meet the needs of gifted learners? Describe the philosophy: Who are involved, where, how, and why?

Colarulli-Daniels: The Weiss School, located in Palm Beach Gardens, is fully accredited by the Florida Council of Independent Schools and the Florida Kindergarten Council. Serving children in prekindergarten through eighth grade, the school gives children the opportunity to develop mentally, socially, and emotionally to their fullest potential. With small classes, individual attention is a priority. Students, teachers, and parents work together to map out individualized educational programs that build upon each child's special strengths and skills, while enhancing the child's self-esteem and self-concept.

The Weiss School philosophy. The philosophy of The Weiss School is shared by the administration, teachers, parents, and students. The philosophy states that classroom studies have no limits. Material is presented to the students in ways that complement their learning styles, incorporating upper level thinking skills and creativity. At The Weiss School, every individual student succeeds. Learning is transformed into an enjoyable, fulfilling experience. Each child develops the ability to communicate, to assimilate and apply new knowledge, to create ideas, and to reason. A caring environment fosters values that include personal responsibility, concern for fellow human beings, and the desire to function as a beneficial member of society.

An exciting, well-rounded curriculum built upon the philosophy. The core curriculum combines a firm foundation of skills and knowledge with the development of reasoning and thinking abilities that allow Weiss students to become lifelong learners. Students improve their skills and knowledge using an advanced networked computer system that includes terminals throughout the classrooms. All terminals have immediate access to one of the largest software libraries in the nation—for writing, reading, geography, history, anatomy, chemistry, zoology, art, desktop publishing, and multimedia. Internet access is available throughout the school on all computers.

Beyond the core curriculum, students delve into the exciting realm of special studies that allows them to seek knowledge and skills in areas of their special interests and abilities. Building on the work of the nation's leading educators and practices, The Weiss School has developed a unique program that stresses:

A Tale of Two Principals



Peer review and editing are routinely used in gifted writing class.

- Individual attention: A successful educational program requires attention to the individual abilities and aspirations of each child. The teacher, student, and parents work together to develop a true, individualized program, one that builds upon the strengths of each child, while working to enhance areas of nonpreference.
- Limitless learning: Learning must be open-ended. Many students are at a grade level beyond their peers in some subject areas. Students advanced beyond their gifted grade level are provided with appropriate curricular materials.
- Multidisciplinary teaching: Teachers of different disciplines come together to work as a team on special projects that combine science with math, art with social studies, or art and science. In this way, students not only learn each subject area separately, but also gain the ability to draw creatively from multiple subject areas in order to solve real-life problems.
- *Independent thinking:* Each child is encouraged to absorb and synthesize

- information in new ways, reach independent conclusions, and find novel ways to apply the knowledge.
- Practical application of knowledge: In a more traditional learning environment, isolated facts learned strictly by rote memory are soon forgotten. At The Weiss School, students are given the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice by applying what they have learned. For example, they build models of ideal societies, conduct original science experiments, simulate historical events, and create real business enterprises.
- Adaptation to individual learning styles: The Weiss School is a "learning styles" school. All students are taught through their learning styles, absorbing new and difficult material through motivational teaching methods that address their individual preferences for learning.
- Sharing of knowledge: At The Weiss School, students are given the opportunity to work with their peers in a cooperative setting, developing, exchanging, and creating new ideas.

Leinhauser: At Jacksonville Beach Elementary, we consistently strive for high academic achievement and to promote a love of learning. Dedicated and creative teachers, high expectations, a rigorous curriculum, and a wealth of enrichment activities help us to reach these goals. While teaching children to seek, explore, discover, and develop their minds to the fullest potential, we also impart the skills needed to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners. The unique learning needs of gifted students are met through:

 A differentiated curriculum: Students receive instruction and are provided activities in five areas beyond the traditional curriculum: social processes, critical appreciation, research meth-

- ods, creative expression, and scientific approach. These gifted objectives are integrated into the instructional approach in the classroom each day. Teachers carefully design learning activities that enhance the regular academic content. For example, a project that includes a group working together to research and present a report on endangered animals may incorporate social process, research, and scientific approach strategies. Our focus is not to accelerate or go beyond the grade-level content standards, but to delve deeper into the subject matter with the higher level thinking skills of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- Individual and small-group instruction: Although the self-contained setting helps to provide opportunities for teachers to go beyond the basics with each student, the individual strengths and weaknesses of the gifted learner are recognized and addressed. Small-group lessons, individual task folders, and teacher/student conferencing are all used to ensure that students are both successful and challenged.



Hands-on science activities integrate both science content standards and gifted curricular objectives.

Enrichment activities beyond the classroom: In addition to the gifted curriculum, students at Jacksonville Beach are offered a wealth of other activities to broaden their background of knowledge and interests. Through an enrichment lab program one day per week, students are introduced to Spanish, creative writing, great books, character development activities, computer keyboarding (typing), special art projects, and creative thinking. These are in addition to the weekly art, music, physical education, computer lab, and library time they already receive. An optional afterschool activities program also provides additional enrichment and includes classes in piano, violin, recorder, singing, physical conditioning, golf, sign language, storytelling, arts and crafts, and creative movement.

What role did you play in the development and implementation of the gifted program?

Colarulli-Daniels: A gifted program must have structure and organization without stifling creativity. The first year I came to The Weiss School, I began the lengthy task of putting together a curriculum in written form using a strand, standard, and benchmark format. Levels of mastery were determined for each grade level in each subject area. Scope and sequence took on a particular importance in assuring that no "holes" existed. Quite often, gifted studies lack sustenance and basic skills while overemphasizing "fluff."

With a written curriculum in place, the next task at hand was to choose textbooks, software, and teaching materials to support the curriculum. Since The Weiss School is a "learning styles" school, student manipulatives and



Enrichment activities such as Spanish, music, physical education, and keyboarding extend the curriculum at Jacksonville Beach Elementary.

demonstration materials are extremely important.

The final component to the successful development of the gifted program was the teacher training element. Weiss teachers have a weekly teacher meeting, and each meeting has a teaching component. Specialists are brought to the school, teachers share workshop and conference information, and I conduct an ongoing staff development program with a specifically designed focus. In addition, all teachers are required to attend two conferences annually and obtain their gifted endorsement within 3 vears of their start date.

Leinhauser: Although the official curriculum for gifted students is determined at the district level, implementation of that curriculum is the subject of constant scrutiny and reevaluation at the school level. As principal, I work with the 10 gifted teachers to examine and refine the emphasis of the gifted program for each grade level. This year's focus has been to identify specific pro-

jects, activities, field trips, and community resources to support the gifted program and that are unique to each grade level. Additionally, the county's focus on incorporating the NCEE (National Center on Education and the Economy) New Performance Standards at all grade levels has resulted in another challenge to gifted teachers. Since performance expectations have been raised for all students, it is an ongoing and ominous task to further enhance and broaden the learning of the gifted population.

What do you look for when hiring someone to teach gifted students?

Colarulli-Daniels: To teach at The Weiss School, teachers must be state certified in the area in which they received their college degree. I look for teachers who are risk takers and show their creativity in teaching standard, basic topics. When teaching new or difficult information, Weiss teachers must present the material in a variety of ways within the

same class to assure that all students learn.

I use a "targeted selection" format when interviewing potential teachers. I highly honor teachers who are flexible without forsaking professionalism. The relationship between the teacher and the student must never be condescending. With the strong emotional needs of gifted children, a respect and cordial working relationship with the teacher is an important requirement. A lust for self-knowledge in addition to a love for children is also essential.

Leinhauser: Probably the single most important attribute I look for in a teacher of the gifted is a love and appreciation for the uniqueness of gifted children. A really good teacher of the gifted values the curiosity, the challenge, unpredictable answers, insight, and creativity of the children. The teacher should have a broad repertoire of teaching strategies, support interaction and conversation among children, respect the unconventional approach to problem solving, and be warm and welcoming to the usually very involved parents of this group.

What role do parents play in the education of their gifted children?

Colarulli-Daniels: The School supports parent involvement in the education of our students. Research shows that working with the school in a team effort fosters greater academic achievement, increases the child's selfesteem, and enhances social skills development. Our parents are asked to agree with our mission and support it; to provide a study environment conducive to their child's learning styles; to communicate with us about their child; to attend meetings and events of the school and PTA; to seek involvement in appropriate ways; and to support our values and discipline procedures.

Parents with a minimum of an associate's degree and preferably a bachelor's degree can work as substitute teachers. Substitute teachers are responsible for carrying out the lesson plans assigned by the classroom teacher. They are paid temporary employees of The Weiss School.

Parent volunteers provide services that are above and beyond the capabilities of the staff of a small school. These services may involve time, save unnecessary output of school dollars, provide services beyond the capabilities of the employees, or increase the safety or flow of a school event. When working directly with the students, the parent volunteer's responsibility is to bring to the attention of a school staff employee students who may need help in carrying out a teacher's direction or school policy/rule; however, at no time is this role to be a disciplinarian or a policymaker. This presence enables greater opportunities to exist for our students.

Unique to The Weiss School is the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Two delegates from each grade level are voted into this position by the parents of the respective grade level. These parents act as a liaison between the parents and the administration to share concerns and help bring about changes in policy and procedures.

Leinhauser: Parents of gifted children are critical to their success in school and in life. In our school, these parents are generally very visible and highly vocal. They want their children challenged to meet high standards, yet they expect understanding of their special needs. Good communication is essential in helping parents to understand what we do and why we do it. The parents are wonderful advocates for their children and highly value a quality education.

Our parents are also a valuable asset to the instructional program. Parents volunteer to tutor students needing extra help, to read with primary children in

the classroom and hallways, to serve as guest speakers and "mystery presenters," and to assist teachers in the classrooms in any way they can be of service. Parents also serve as coaches for our Odyssey of the Mind teams, which compete in problem-solving competitions at the district, state, and national levels. In short, parents are an integral part of our successful school and program.

What challenges do you face in your job?

Colarulli-Daniels: The job brings endless exciting challenges. The nature of gifted students and their needs present unique situations of focused attention. The emotional aspect of gifted children, such as high sensitivity, multipotentiality, perfectionism, and feelings of insecurity, bring continuous need for guidance, expansion of course offerings, and extended services. Providing these services becomes more intensified when dealing with a small private school. With a small personnel and a limited budget, I am forced to find unique ways of meeting the needs of each of my students.

Working with gifted parents presents more challenges than working with parents of other populations. This especially shows itself in the private setting, where the demands of the parents are expressed in greater volume. Quite often, parents of gifted children fail to recognize their children as "children first, gifted second." Too many gifted parents see their children's gifted status as a badge of their own accomplishments. They constantly push their children, setting unattainable expectations and placing intense pressure on them. They attempt to live their lives through their children by giving them opportunities that they feel they were never offered. This parental pressure is a major factor in the emotional roller coaster that some children experience. Meeting the child's needs while guiding the parent brings a supreme challenge to the role of the principal.

Leinhauser: One of the biggest challenges in the job of principal at any school is the fragmentation that comes with being responsible to so many people for so many things. From buses to building maintenance, from cafeteria food to upset parents, the principal must monitor and be accountable for far more than the academic program and learning gains of students. My primary goal this year has therefore been to establish a distributed leadership team, which helps me to find more time to focus on the development of teachers as a community of learners. Trying to stay focused on helping teachers to help each other has been the biggest challenge.

What are the most significant accomplishments you have made in your job?

Colarulli-Daniels: As a teacher, I feel that I made a definite impact on my students; but, as a principal, I feel my impact has had a greater effect. I spend a great deal of time and energy working with my teachers and teachers of other schools providing successful pedagogy practices for gifted students in both gifted endorsement classes and workshop/conference opportunities. Many other schools send their teachers to Weiss to attend the numerous teacher workshops that are offered here. I have been quite successful in working with teachers to find teaching strategies and methods that are comfortable for them to incorporate into their teaching styles while catering to a wide variety of students' learning styles. I believe that, through my work with teachers, I have been able to influence the lives of many students.

Leinhauser: Careful scheduling of our wealth of resource teachers has provided blocks of common planning time for teachers. Each Thursday, I meet for 2

hours with the teachers of two grade levels for professional development and discussion, while the students participate in enrichment labs. I am delighted with the increase in conversation among teachers about teaching and learning. I am convinced that this results in the most significant development of teachers and provides us with the opportunity to really study and analyze best teaching practices.

Is there anything you would change about your job?

Colarulli-Daniels: I have worked in both public and private programs for the gifted. I am able to perform in a more effective manner in the private sector. The bureaucracy is not present. Change can occur at a faster rate, policy can be implemented as the need arises, and a greater flexibility in scheduling leads to increased student opportunities.

My one wish would be to restore the respect that the public once had for educators. Across the nation, support for teachers and school administrators is low. It is my professional opinion that parental questioning of school policies and discipline action, coupled with negative media exposure and societal changes, has greatly affected education.

Leinhauser: The evolution of the principalship from manager to instructional leader has been a real challenge. For many years, I espoused to "the buck stops here" theory and felt responsible to know a little about everything. While I am gradually letting go of many managerial tasks, I am still often called upon by teachers and parents to know the answer to every question. I am hopeful that, over time, it will be better understood that directing questions to other people is by design, allowing me to avoid fragmentation and stay focused on teaching and learning.

What advice would you give to other

administrators involved in implementing programs for gifted learners?

Colarulli-Daniels: My suggestion would be to do extensive research in gifted needs and elicit the expertise of specialists in the gifted realm. The course of study must be extensive to allow for the vast interest level of gifted students. A strong support system for social/emotional needs must be in place, and policy setting must involve parents, students, and teachers. There must be active participation by all participants of a gifted center in the planning and implementation process and day-to-day operating procedures.

Leinhauser: Stay in touch with what is happening in the classrooms. Invest time in getting to know the students so that you can better help teachers to grow continually and learn how to meet their needs. Encourage teachers to be thoughtful in their planning. It is important to keep a healthy balance of learning activities; to add depth, rather than merely accelerating grade-level curricular goals; and to remember that gifted learners, like all children, have social and emotional needs, not just academic ones.

Final Thoughts

Colarulli-Daniels: My effectiveness as an administrator changed dramatically when I moved from the public system to the private sector. As a private school administrator, I have been able to design a curriculum for my gifted population of students, rather than use the one-size-fits-all mentality of the public school system. In addition to having a curriculum specifically designed for gifted students, my students are placed into a grade level of study for each subject based on their ability. Gifted students sometimes show extreme ability in particular areas of study. These two major academic differences provide my students with their exact academic needs. My students feel challenged, boredom is reduced, and self-esteem is enhanced. Hence, my disciplinary and counseling duties are reduced significantly.

There is also greater flexibility in the parental involvement in the private school. At The Weiss School, parents actively participate in arranging field trips, working as classroom assistants, serving on the PAC, and doing many of the office chores. When parents have a say in policy, complaints and office visits are reduced. The result? More time for me to do what really matters: interact with the kids!

When an administrator has the freedom to bring about change without having to go through a bureaucratic system, implement an academic process that is specifically designed to meet the needs of the student population, and involve parents and give them an opportunity to "buy into" the school's mission, the result becomes an administrator's dream. My position is transformed from managerial to leadership. I know my kids, get my daily hugs, and work together with the teachers on a daily basis to make the students' experience at Weiss have meaning, direction, and infinite success.

Many administrators say, "My best days were when I was in the classroom." My comment to them is simple: "Then the best days should be today. Get back into that classroom. Get involved in the classroom activities and spend time with the kids."

Leinhauser: While educating the gifted population creates some unique challenges, generally, administration of this program is much like that of all school programs. Individualization of instruction through diagnostic/prescriptive teaching is the key. We continually strive to ensure that standards are high, are clearly defined for the students, and are consistently used to monitor and assess student learning.

In public school education, Florida's focus on "student learning gains" has created an even greater demand on teachers of the gifted. Teachers are required to document that these students who generally perform at a high level of achievement are making a year's growth while in their classrooms. This helps to ensure that we continue to explore new ways to challenge, enrich, and assist these very capable students in reaching their potential.

Conclusions

Although the responses reflect some differences in terms of the role of the principal in running a private versus public school for gifted children, there are some things that both Colarulli-Daniels and Leinhauser have cited as being important.

Both principals emphasized the importance of good communication skills and the importance of the social/emotional well-being of gifted students. Each felt strongly about the need to individualize instruction to ensure that the gifted learner is challenged, but, at the same time, receives help and direction in specific areas of weakness. Similarly, these administrators worked hard to ensure that the curriculum is continuously evaluated and modified to meet gifted students' needs. And, finally, both argued strongly about the need for ongoing professional development for teachers of the gifted, as well as for themselves.

The experiences and insights shared by Colarulli-Daniels and Leinhauser as they related to specific skills, competencies, or characteristics are supported in many aspects from the research literature. Yet, there are some things that the research could not quite capture. Both Colarulli-Daniels and Leinhauser exemplify the unique role of the elementary school principal in meeting the needs of gifted and talented children. Their insights provide us with a glimpse of their passion, dedication, love for, and belief in what they do. Although specific skills, competencies, or characteristics may be necessary in the role of the administrator, the joy in working with gifted children, teachers, and parents is evident in the variety of experiences shared by both. More research dedicated to this field is needed, and additional interviews with successful administrators are a must. GCT

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