

Parent Perspectives on Sending Their Children to College Early

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Nancy B. Hertzog¹ , Kristen N. Lamb²,
and Sakhavat Mammadov³

Abstract

Early entrance to college, a form of academic acceleration, is an educational alternative that opens pathways for advanced students to have challenging, stimulating, and relevant learning experiences. Children who choose this option enter the adult world several years earlier than most of their age peers. This involves extra growth, adaptation, and a nontypical route through adolescent developmental milestones. These changes may be a great challenge for children and their families. In this study, we report findings from semi-structured interviews with 36 parents whose children participated in one of two different early entrance to college programs at the University of Washington. We explored reasons and motivations behind families' decisions for early entrance to college, their expectations, concerns, and overall experiences during the transition period and beyond.

Keywords

academic acceleration, early entrance to college, highly capable, parents, gifted education

Families looking for educational environments to challenge their children may face a decision on whether to accelerate them academically by sending them to college early.

¹University of Washington, Seattle, USA

²The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, USA

³Valdosta State University, GA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Nancy B. Hertzog, Learning Sciences and Human Development, University of Washington, 322 Miller Hall, Box 353600, Seattle, WA 98195, USA.

Email: nhertzog@uw.edu

Academic acceleration is defined as, “matching the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student” (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 1; National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.), and it can range from subject-acceleration and grade-level acceleration to more radical forms of acceleration such as early entrance to college (missing 2–3 years of high school). In fact, the Acceleration Institute (n.d.-a) defines up to 20 different types of academic acceleration. In this study, and for the purposes of this article, the term acceleration refers to early entrance to college.

Although academic acceleration has been an advocated, research-supported practice for decades, concerns linger when families find themselves trying to decide if radical acceleration, such as early entrance to college, is best for their children. Research pertaining to academic acceleration typically addresses the benefits of acceleration (Brody et al., 2004; Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011), academic and lifelong outcomes (Boazman & Saylor, 2011; NAGC, n.d.; Park et al., 2013; Wai et al., 2010), students’ satisfaction with their experiences (Lee et al., 2010), and concerns regarding students’ social-emotional needs (Brody et al., 2004; Hoogeveen et al., 2012; NAGC, n.d.). In essence, research pertaining to academic acceleration has focused on students’ experiences and outcomes (see Wai, 2015, for a brief review) as opposed to parents’ experiences. Studies related to parents of gifted students typically include topics such as parents’ influence, parents’ perceptions of highly capable children’s abilities, and parents’ satisfaction with advanced academic programming (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). Research regarding the challenges and overall experiences families face with educational experiences for their academically advanced children (Morawska & Sanders, 2009), specifically those related to families’ decisions to enroll their children in programs of radical acceleration and their experiences during the decision and transition processes, are less studied or understood (Noble et al., 2008). Despite acceleration as a suggested best practice, parental concerns regarding acceleration practices, such as early entrance to college, are still abound (Boazman & Saylor, 2011; Colangelo et al., 2004; Hoogeveen et al., 2012; Noble et al., 2008; Siegle et al., 2013; Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011).

Previous studies have reported numerous positive outcomes of early entrance to college for students’ academic experiences and long-term careers (Hertzog & Chung, 2015), yet little research has explored the perspectives and experiences of parents when their children transitioned to college early. However, “often, through their personal experience, students and parents can understand and appreciate the short-term benefits of acceleration” (Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011, p. 50), and by extension, parents may begin to understand and appreciate the benefits of acceleration through the shared, lived experiences of other parents whose children have experienced radical acceleration.

Parents are often more knowledgeable regarding “appropriate educational options for gifted students than the school decision makers” (Vialle et al., 2001, p. 17), and find themselves advocating for educational opportunities beyond what is traditionally offered by school institutions (Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Robinson, 2004; Rubenstein et al., 2015; Vialle et al., 2001). However, parents still noted concerns

about acceleration that often revolved around the child's social and emotional development (Mammadov et al., 2018; Robinson, 2004; Southern & Jones, 2004; Vialle et al., 2001). Brody and colleagues (2004) suggested concerns regarding academic acceleration are a result of researchers not making the case for successful outcomes "compelling" enough (p. 104).

In this study, we sought to learn from parents about their experiences and roles during their children's early transition to college. The following overarching research question guided this study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the experiences and perspectives of parents whose children have transitioned to college early?

We hope to contribute to the literature through these parents' voices by illuminating their experiences, challenges, and the benefits they thought their children gained by going to college early. To help us understand the perspectives of parents, the literature review will highlight several themes: the role of parents in typical adolescent development, parental relationships with children identified as gifted or advanced academically, concerns related to acceleration options, and existing research regarding early entrance to college.

Literature Review

Adolescents' Development and Early Entrance to College

Adolescence may be a particularly difficult stage of development for many young people. It is a time when their decision-making function of their brain is still developing (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health, 2018). Entering college early (as young as 15 years) may affect not only the child but also the family, as parents must navigate the move toward their child's independence earlier than developmentally (or typically) expected. In addition, college may bring early exposure to a range of experiences especially in social and emotional domains that the child otherwise might not face until their late teens. These experiences and changes may be a great challenge for children and their families.

Parental Roles in the Lives of Academically Advanced Children

Parents play an important role in the lives of their children. These family relationships have a key impact on the child's achievement and talent development (Hébert et al., 2009; Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Wu, 2008). For instance, Hébert and colleagues (2009) looked at 10 father-son relationships and identified six positive themes that influenced the son's talent development. Fathers in these relationships unequivocally believed in their son's abilities, had a strong work ethic, and maintained high expectations for their son while also cultivating determination. The fathers in this study also encouraged their sons and showed pride when their sons accomplished something. Finally,

both father and son demonstrated a mutual admiration and respect for one another (Hébert et al., 2009).

Sayler (2015) examined the impact of family support and relationships through the lens of parenting styles as a factor prior to and after their children enrolled in the Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science (TAMS)—an early entrance to college program. He found that students' grade point average (GPA) increased during their time in TAMS when they had parents who had an authoritative style of parenting (i.e., parents who are responsive and nurturing but also set rules and boundaries for their children); whereas TAMS students' GPA decreased when they had parents who had an authoritarian (i.e., strict rules with very little or no explanation) or a permissive parenting style (i.e., few limits/rules accompanied with greater emphasis on responsiveness). Sayler concluded that parents were important to students' early entrance success as well as their increases in academic performance.

In another study, Wu (2008) interviewed five Chinese American parents of children enrolled in a gifted and talented program to explore their personal beliefs and practices in terms of their children's talent development. These parents felt a responsibility for good parenting as well as high levels of confidence in their child's future. More specifically, Wu found that a parent's desire to be a good parent was related to the level of involvement by the parent and the expectations he or she had for the child. Moreover, these parents felt responsible for finding and securing opportunities for their children. Family relationships impacted children's academic and talent achievement as well as their social-emotional development (Hébert et al., 2009; Wu, 2008).

Parental involvement: Supporting their child. When asked to reflect on their experiences, children who have accelerated academically have reported that their parents' advocacy and support have been critical to their success (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Mammadov et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2009). These high achieving individuals reflected on their parents as providing them with support, while also giving them the room to develop their own "sense of direction" (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 80). In a two-part study, researchers interviewed 34 graduates from an early entrance to college program in China. When asked about their relationships with their parents, 30 graduates reported having a good relationship with their parents (Dai et al., 2015); and that their parents, though devoted to their education, gave them autonomy in their early years (Dai & Steenbergen-Hu, 2015). Most of the graduates interviewed also shared their exposure to acceleration experiences in their early years (i.e., primary and secondary school), some of whom had parents who "deliberately promoted" these early acceleration experiences (Dai & Steenbergen-Hu, 2015, p. 16). Similarly, in a two-phase study, researchers surveyed more than 150 alumni from an early entrance to college program and subsequently followed up by interviewing 26 of the alumni originally surveyed (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Mammadov et al., 2018). Overall, findings from the two-phase study reflected the decision to attend college early as a student-driven decision, but alumni also communicated the supportive role of their parents throughout the early entrance to college process. Although findings from these studies reflect the nature of parents' roles as one that provides support while also granting autonomy to their

children; these findings reflect the child's perspective of their parents' roles rather than those of the parents.

Parent involvement can take multiple forms such as advocacy roles (Rubenstein et al., 2015; Vialle et al., 2001), expectations or influence (Jolly & Matthews, 2012), and social support (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Parents' educational involvement has been directly tied to their children's academic achievement as well as their attitude and behavior toward school (Jolly & Matthews, 2012). In addition, parental support has been identified as an influential factor for a child's successful transition to college early (Colangelo et al., 2004; Sayler, 2015).

Parents searching for appropriate education. Researchers have suggested that parents of gifted children have experienced unique challenges, some of which were attributed to issues experienced in traditional academic settings (Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Similarities have also been found with parents of twice-exceptional and gifted children, in that these parents expressed frustration pertaining to inadequate preparation of teachers and schools to provide an educational experience or environment that was appropriate for their child (Rubenstein et al., 2015; Young & Balli, 2014). As a result, parents experienced frustration when confronted with the realization that traditional academic settings were unable to meet the needs of their children. In addition, parents reported reaching beyond school personnel to search for information regarding resources and educational alternatives for their children (Rubenstein et al., 2015).

Many parents have considered early entrance to college as a result of their dissatisfaction with their children's current school experiences (Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Noble et al., 2008), or because their children were dissatisfied or bored at school (Mammadov et al., 2018; Sayler, 2015). Moreover, parents reported discontentment with school personnel's lack of understanding related to the needs of their children and how to address those needs (Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Rubenstein et al., 2015).

The role of school personnel in academic acceleration. School personnel play an important role for families considering academic acceleration. Vialle et al. (2001) surveyed ($n = 27$) and interviewed ($n = 10$) school principals regarding early entrance to college; they found that 20 principals reported being aware of an acceleration policy yet were unfamiliar with the accompanying recommendations. Of the 20 principals surveyed, four were found to be in opposition to the policy. Vialle and colleagues found that school principals often attributed a child's non-enrollment in acceleration services to his or her immaturity and physical size and often commented that parents' desires for their children were to fit in with peers and progress at a normal rate. Vialle et al. concluded that social and emotional concerns served as a key barrier for early entrance to college and suggested that more work ought to focus on professional development in the area of academic acceleration.

In another study, Siegle and colleagues (2013) surveyed 152 educators regarding their concerns and beliefs on acceleration. Based on their findings, they concluded that

educators generally did not have academic concerns pertaining to acceleration; however, educators reported mixed concerns when asked about social/emotional concerns. For instance, 33% of educators surveyed were unsure when asked about the emotional adjustment of accelerated students, and when asked if students would experience negative effects socially, approximately half of the educators reported no concern whereas the other half were either undecided or held concerns for certain social aspects. In addition, most of the educators reported being qualified to identify student candidates for acceleration, but more than half reported having more information on acceleration could benefit their practice. Finally, although teachers illustrated support of acceleration practices, teachers believed other stakeholders would not, suggesting that potential barriers to acceleration could lie in the perceptions of others' beliefs as opposed to their own (Siegle et al., 2013).

Researchers have also surveyed school counselors concluding that the majority of school counselors lacked formal training in gifted education yet were often utilized as consultants when considering educational options, such as acceleration for students (Wood et al., 2010). In their study, school counselors also reported feeling more comfortable recommending some acceleration practices (i.e., dual enrollment) over others (i.e., grade skipping). Finally, social/emotional factors were cited among key considerations when making the decision to recommend (or not) a student for academic acceleration (Wood et al., 2010). Otherwise stated, students often were denied acceleration opportunities due to social and emotional concerns rather than academic concerns.

Decision-making factors. Parents have reported wanting and needing more information regarding educational options for their academically advanced children (Morawska & Sanders, 2009), and for parents supporting their children's decisions to enroll early in college, clear and accessible information on educational programs was critical to the decision-making process. For instance, Colangelo and colleagues (2004) emphasized the importance of providing parents with comprehensive, transparent information regarding acceleration and early entrance to college. In addition, it is important to ensure families have access to research-supported information (Colangelo et al., 2004; Siegle et al., 2013; Vialle et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2010), an area in which the field has made considerable progress (Acceleration Institute, n.d.-b; Assouline et al., 2015; Davidson Institute, n.d.; NAGC, n.d.; Robinson Center for Young Scholars, n.d.). Making information and resources available to parents can benefit families trying to decide on the best acceleration option for their children.

The decision to enroll early in college is a big decision for children and their families, and the inclusion and involvement of the child's parents in the decision-making process is an advocated practice for those considering academic acceleration (Colangelo et al., 2004). Overall, individuals who accelerated academically reported a sense of autonomy in their decision to enroll early in college; however, the decision was not made without their parents' input or consideration (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Mammadov et al., 2018; Noble et al., 2008). In fact, families looked into early entrance to college in hopes that the college environment would provide a more academically challenging experience for their children (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Mammadov et al.,

2018). Families also considered early entrance to college due to the child's unhappiness with social networks in a traditional school setting (Noble et al., 2008) or unhappiness and boredom with current curriculum and pacing (Mammadov et al., 2018; Saylor, 2015).

In 2008, Noble and colleagues surveyed 95 parents of children enrolled in early entrance programs to understand parents' perspectives as they experienced the early entrance to college. They queried parents as to why they chose early entrance to college for their children, how satisfied parents were with early entrance programs, their perceived advantages and disadvantages of the early entrance process, and the perceived impact early entrance programs had on their family relationships. Key findings from the study indicated that the primary reasons parents enrolled their children in college early were because their children wanted to enroll, were dissatisfied with the academic rigor in their previous schools, and their children were generally unhappy at their previous schools (Noble et al., 2008). Parents also shared their primary concerns considered social impacts due to their children's young age upon college enrollment, potential difficulties related to career and life goals, and their children's abilities to navigate the college system. In addition, Noble and colleagues (2008) reported that the early entrance process had impacted family norms such as changes in curfew and trouble dealing with their children's increased autonomy and freedom. Parents also noted impacts on sibling relationships and mixed results regarding family and friends' support of their decision to enroll their children in college early. Although parents voiced concerns and challenges experienced as a family; overall, 67% of parents were satisfied with the early entrance to college experience (Noble et al., 2008).

Lingering Concerns Regarding Academic Acceleration

Despite existing research supporting the benefits of academic acceleration, educational stakeholders, such as parents and educators, still hold reservations regarding acceleration and even more so when considering more radical forms of acceleration, such as grade skipping and early entrance to college (Colangelo et al., 2004; Siegle et al., 2013; Vialle et al., 2001). Although concerns are often related to the social and emotional development of the child (Colangelo et al., 2004; Vialle et al., 2001), studies have supported social/emotional benefits for academically accelerated children (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016; Steenbergen-Hu & Moon, 2011). For instance, Steenbergen-Hu and Moon (2011) found slightly positive effects on accelerated children's social/emotional development. Moreover, when comparing accelerated students to on-level students, Colangelo and colleagues (2010) found commensurate levels of social/emotional adjustment stating, "there is no evidence that acceleration has a negative effect on a student's social-emotional development" (p. 181).

Regardless, concerns linger and can play a pivotal role in the decision to accelerate or not. For instance, in addition to emotional concerns, parents have noted social concerns regarding their children being separated from their same-age peers (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016) as well as concerns their children would miss traditional school experiences such as high school prom and graduation (Noble et al., 2008).

Research addressing social/emotional concerns related to academic acceleration has suggested that apprehension surrounding acceleration practices could be alleviated if more research-based information were accessible and training/professional development opportunities were available (Colangelo et al., 2004; Siegle et al., 2013; Vialle et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2010).

Most of the existing research has focused on students' experiences related to academic acceleration as well as factors related to their academic experiences (e.g., concerns, benefits, parental support). However, it is important to note that research regarding parents' concerns pertaining to academic acceleration is limited (Noble et al., 2008), when compared with the amount of research available on educational practitioners' concerns (Siegle et al., 2013; Vialle et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2010). Moreover, research pertaining to parents of gifted children has focused on parental roles as they pertain to *students'* academic experience. What is missing from the research are studies that focus on *parents'* perspectives and their overall experiences related to sending their children to college early.

Purpose

This study was designed to address an evident gap in the literature: parents' perspectives related to their children enrolling in college early. Taking a phenomenological approach, this study extends upon survey findings from Noble et al. (2008), to explore, through parent interviews, the experiences of parents whose children entered the university through early entrance programs. Typically, in phenomenological studies, interviews are conducted with participants who have firsthand knowledge of their experience. Researchers sought to understand what a certain experience—early entrance to college—was like from parents' points of view. The goal of this approach is to accurately describe the “phenomenon under study, not to generalize to theories or models” (Krefting, 1991, p. 91). Specifically, the goal of this study was to understand the early entrance to college experience as perceived by parents of current students. It was believed that a phenomenological approach would provide the greatest insight into these perceived experiences. More specifically, the researchers of this study were interested in learning about parents' experiences during their children's transition from the K-12 school system to college, how parents allowed (or agreed to the decision by) their children to choose the early entrance to college option, how this decision impacted their family life, and parents' thoughts regarding the long-term impact of the program, including what they perceived as challenges and benefits.

Method

Context of Study

The Early Entrance Program (EEP) and the UW Academy are two different types of early entrance to college programs at the University of Washington.

The EEP Program is a two-stage program consisting of 1 year of intensive college preparatory classes taught on-site in the Transition School, followed by full matriculation the following year when they enter the EEP Program, usually at the age of 15 years. This program has been in existence since 1977, and it facilitates early entry to the university for a selected cohort of approximately 16 highly advanced students that enter after seventh or eighth grade. Students who enter the Transition School skip all 4 years of high school. Transition School is designed to bring their academic skills from a middle school level all the way to being ready for college in 1 year. The program prepares them for the academic rigor as well as the quantity of work they may experience in their first year of college. Parents and their children are interviewed as part of the admissions process for this program.

The UW Academy Program offers academically advanced students the opportunity to enter the university as freshmen after their tenth grade year of high school. Each year, 35 to 40 students are selected for the cohort based on a holistic review of their college applications. At this writing, the UW Academy is 18 years old. Both early entrance programs are commuter programs, and most of these students live with their parents when they become freshman because they are too young to live in the dormitories on campus. Other research has shed light into how they experience college life differently than students who matriculate into the university after their senior year in high school (Hertzog & Chung, 2015).

Researcher Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge researcher bias in qualitative studies. All three researchers were connected to the Center that houses the early entrance programs. This may have impacted both positively and negatively the way the participants responded to the interviewers. Some parents may have had close and positive relationships with the Center staff and researchers, and therefore, their responses may have been more positive. Knowing and understanding the context and participants may have contributed to insider information that strengthened and enhanced the honesty by which participants provided their views and perspectives, knowing that the researchers could be trusted with the confidentiality of the research. However, some parents may not have agreed to be interviewed if they did not have positive experiences or relationships with Center staff or interviewers. This is noted in the section “Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions” as it pertains to bias in participant sampling.

Participants and Procedure

Parents of current early entrance students were recruited by email and provided consent through a *Qualtrics* survey in which they provided their contact information and availability for an interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from July 2017 through January 2018 using an interview protocol. Invitation emails were sent out to 219 parents. In total, 52 parents responded indicating their interest in participating in the study. Researchers interviewed all 36 parents (20 EEP, 16 UW Academy)

Table 1. Demographic Information of Parent Participants by Program.

Program	Parents (n)		Ethnicity	
	Father	Mother	White	Asian
Transition School	1	6	4	3
EEP Program	1	12	9	4
UW Academy	4	12	12	4
Total	6	30	25	11

who responded, consented, and were available. Seven participants still had children in the Transition School, and therefore, these parents had not experienced their child being fully matriculated into the university. Six of the total were interviewed in person based on the participant’s preference (see Table 1). Those who interviewed by phone gave permission to have their interview recorded. Their consent is included at the start of each transcript. Notable is the high percentage of mothers (89%) who participated in this study as well as the skewness of participants’ identified ethnicities (69% White, 31% Asian).

Researchers designed the interview protocol to build upon prior research with early entrance to college students which focused only on student experiences (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Mammadov et al., 2018). Researchers wanted to explore whether parents had similar perspectives about their children’s desire, needs, and motivation for entering college early. Researchers asked parents about their decision-making process, their experiences during the transition process from middle school to the preparatory program for EEP, or from high school to UW Academy, their expectations for their children, their children’s academic and social/emotional needs, and the ways parents provided support for their children. Researchers also inquired about the long-term impact that parents believed the early entrance to college program may have on their children and families. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The authors independently coded all transcriptions. Each transcript was coded line by line, and in chunks of meaning by all three authors. Data displays were created in coding tables that included interview identification numbers, page numbers of excerpts, and quotations that matched the coding. These coding tables were discussed at research team meetings and facilitated discussions that promoted consensus coding. Discrepancies were handled by examining data displays and coming to consensus on excerpts that presented differences in coding. In this way, authors strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. A priori codes (fixed) included the themes of each interview question such as the decision-making process to apply for and enroll in the early entrance to college program, reasons why parents or their children sought out the opportunity to come to college early, ways in which family life changed as a result of the transition, parent methods of supports, challenges experienced, and benefits of

early entrance to college. An example of the coding for student decision-making and autonomy can be found in Appendix B. Emergent codes were identified during the analysis process and also defined through consensus among the authors. The process of coding was iterative and required multiple readings to group parents' perspectives and experiences into larger themes. In the final phase of coding, researchers derived salient themes that mirror selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Authors also examined the clarity and salience of the codes and themes with respect to previous research (Hertzog & Chung, 2015; Mammadov et al., 2018; Noble et al., 2008).

Trustworthiness and Transferability

This study used purposive sampling as researchers wanted to learn about a phenomenon from a specific perspective (Petersen, 2019). Overall, multiple participant voices attest to the credibility and trustworthiness of shared emergent themes identified by the researchers. This study had 36 total participants, who were interviewed for approximately 1 hr and it resulted in more than 500 pages of transcript data. According to Hunt (2011; as cited in Petersen, 2019), "the focus in [qualitative] manuscripts should be on how and why participants were selected and, on the length and depth of interviews" (p. 152). In addition, the researchers of the present study provided information regarding context of the study so that other scholars and educational stakeholders may "determine if there is sufficient empirical evidence of similarity and congruence of context" for transferability of the findings (Petersen, 2019, p. 155). Given its context, this study may have applicability (Krefting, 1991) where other early entrance to college programs are concerned as well as other forms of radical acceleration.

To enhance trustworthiness, "manuscripts should include acknowledgment of personal biases (i.e., conscious and unconscious inclinations or preferences that inhibit objective judgment) at all stages of the research" (Petersen, 2019, p. 149). Researchers provided an acknowledgment of potential bias in discussing researcher reflexivity, and again in the limitations.

Finally, the researchers in this study provided clear presentation of how data were gathered and analyzed (see data displays in Appendices B and C). Three independent coders came to consensus and identified and chunked quotations that illuminated emergent themes. As such, it is important to note, the findings in this study were not meant to generalize, but to reflect transferability, so that the reader may apply findings from this study to similar situations (Petersen, 2019).

Findings

Researchers identified similar themes of parent experiences regardless of the early entrance program that their children attended. Thus, this section is organized to report the similarities first. Similar themes between programs included parents' satisfaction with their children's college academic experience, how children made their decisions to enroll in early entrance programs, and concerns about their children's age in relation to social development and their children's educational environment. There were also

differences that emerged, and were especially prominent as they related to families' experiences supporting their children during their children's time in Transition School.

Similarities Across Programs

Thriving in the academic environment. Almost all parents observed increases in academic rigor, and also stated that their children loved the college academic experience and appeared to thrive in it. Parents across both programs also commented that the academic experience in college allowed their children to explore more options, pursue their interests, and find their niche. Parents liked that their children had the opportunity to take courses they were excited about and commented that the college-level experience met their children's needs in ways high school could not. For instance, one parent of an EEP student stated,

It has only impacted me in the most positive way because she comes home grinning from ear-to-ear even though I know she's very tired; her eyelids are droopy and she falls asleep at the dinner table sometimes but she's happy, very happy. (EEP parent interview, January 18, 2018)

Although the college-level experience was viewed as challenging, parents were happy to see their children thriving in ways they had not experienced in a traditional school setting.

College as an appropriate environment. In almost all cases, the transition to college was described by parents as an easy one, seldom reporting struggles with academics. Mostly, when they talked about difficulties, it was related to social aspects because their children wanted to stay on campus for clubs or late-night activities and could not stay because they had to return home, or parents had to provide their transportation. Because their children were too young to live in campus dormitories, several parents felt that their children were attending a different type of high school each day and returning home at night. Although some parents across both groups wanted their children to find friends and be social, they recognized the complexities of finding friendships in the larger university community. Most parents, especially parents of the EEP Program students were grateful for the cohort communities at the Center.

Parents said they also discussed the implications of going to college early, missing high school, missing their friends, and in some cases, not being able to apply to Ivy League schools. Yet, even when all of those topics were discussed, their children preferred to leave high school for a college environment. Children's academic experiences in their previous schools were one of the primary reasons for families to consider early entrance to college as a viable option. Parents indicated that there was a lack of challenge that led their children to feel frustrated and bored. One parent noted, "He was so frustrated before, the thought of three more years of high school was sort of more than he could bear," (UW Academy parent interview, August 10, 2017). Parents reported that their children were looking for environments where other students were

as motivated about learning as they were and ones in which they could find more challenging curriculum and instruction.

Student autonomy and decision-making. Another common theme of responses from parents who have children in either program was the way in which they described how their children made the decision to come to college early. Unlike what we typically hear in the media about parents pushing their children, these parents said that it was their children who were interested in going to college early, and that it was truly their decision. For example, one parent noted, “We weren’t even involved other than I asked him to please e-mail me when he submitted [the application] so that I could know, but it was all, it was all him” (UW Academy parent interview, August 10, 2017). Although children were granted autonomy during the decision-making process, 88% of parents interviewed indicated that they had open conversations regarding the pros and cons of going to college early. Cons typically included children giving up their extracurricular activities such as music, clubs, and sports as well as traditional high school experiences like prom. One parent noted, “also, he would miss kind of this social thing that happens to American students in high school,” (EEP parent interview, August 10, 2017). The most common pro mentioned by parents focused on their children being with like-minded peers in a challenging environment, “I mean the real pro, I think for me, was that he would be with a cohort of like-minded kids, which I think has been very difficult for him to find” (EEP parent interview, December 1, 2017). Regardless of the variance within the decision-making process, parents resoundingly shared that the decision to attend college early was a child-driven decision.

As their children directed the decision-making process, 69% of parents interviewed said that they assumed a supportive role. For instance, parents expressed the magnitude of the decision as a primary reason for taking the passenger seat, “We can’t actually make the decision as parents and we always supported her” (Transition School parent interview, January 18, 2018). Another parent shared, “I didn’t want to talk about it too much, because I was afraid I would influence her one way or the other, and I wanted it to be her decision” (UW Academy parent interview, August 15, 2017). Other parents noted playing devil’s advocate with their children. One commented, “We asked him questions, and we would push back and things like that, but we wanted him to take the lead” (EEP parent interview, November 20, 2017). Although some parents noted different ways in which they were involved in the decision-making process, it was clear that parents viewed their role as one of support.

Common factors that led families to consider early entrance to college as an educational alternative included their children’s unhappiness with their previous school experiences, lack of challenge, and the desire to be with like-minded peers. Parents referred to the early entrance to college program as the “right choice” (EEP parent interview, August 10, 2017) as a result of their children’s long history of academic work being “too easy” (EEP parent interview, January 18, 2018). Many parents shared similar sentiments stating their children were “miserable” (EEP parent interview, January 18, 2018), had “finished everything that they had in math” (UW Academy parent interview, August 8, 2017), and “wanted to be surrounded by kids who were

equally motivated and equally interested in going deep on subjects” (Transition School parent interview, January 26, 2018). Parents also noted that the early entrance program was “the kind of place where you recognize that these are [the child’s] people” (Transition School parent interview, January 9, 2018). Another notable factor (though not as common) involved families receiving a referral from an educator or provider, and parents listed information sessions, where panels of current early entrance students answered questions, as beneficial in helping them to feel better about supporting their children’s decisions to accelerate radically.

Age across programs. Age was not typically listed as a point of concern for blending in as a college student as long as the child physically appeared older, or had a greater likelihood of blending in. For instance, one parent shared, “Well, first of all, he’s six foot two and 200-something pounds like most kids look, unless it comes up in the classroom no one is going to know” (EEP parent interview, August 11, 2017). To that end, many of the parents also commented that their children withheld their age unless it was necessary to share or brought up by someone. One parent stated, “She’s found that her best strategy is to just keep her mouth shut about age” (UW Academy parent interview, November 2, 2017), and another parent responded, “With my child she doesn’t want people to know that she’s different, you know, she wants to fit right in” (EEP parent interview, January 26, 2018). Overall, parents referred to the physical attributes of their children and the importance of fitting in for their children.

Parents also encountered some college-level experiences where they had to step in and provide permission for their children to participate in a college-level activity (e.g., internships and lab assistantships). In some cases, parents’ concerns were related to their children’s age and lack of experience as it pertained to preparation for graduate school (medical school was frequently mentioned) and/or internships. For instance, one of the parents shared, “Well, she was interviewing for an internship, and then the guy asked can you drive, of course, so she cannot do that yet” (EEP parent interview, January 4, 2018). In sum, parents’ age-related concerns typically focused on logistical issues (e.g., transportation) and social-emotional experiences (e.g., dating relationships).

Concerns related to social and emotional development—Friendships. Although parents were not concerned about their children’s age in terms of academic performance, parents did have some concerns regarding their children’s age and whether they were ready for university-level social and emotional experiences. One parent shared, “I was a bit reluctant, because my bigger concern was that he was going to be with older students and how that would impact him in the long-run” (EEP parent interview, November 30, 2017). Overall, parents struggled to let go as children developed a heightened sense of independence earlier than parents had originally anticipated.

Many social-emotional concerns for their children who entered early into college related to frequency of and the type of exposure to social interaction. To illustrate, one parent noted, “The social aspect was of course the biggest concern for us, as parents” (EEP parent interview, December 1, 2017). Some parents were concerned about the child’s ability to balance academics and social activities. More specifically, parents

were concerned that due to the intensity of the workload, their children would overly focus on academics and forget to make time for their social lives. One parent stated, “I do [worry] a little bit just because so much of her time is spent studying, and I think she misses out on a lot of social experiences because of that” (Transition School parent interview, January 9, 2018). Another parent expressed her concern regarding the lack of organized social interaction experiences at college, “It’s possible to go through the whole day in college and have no social interaction, I mean little social interaction” (UW Academy parent interview, November 20, 2017).

Parents described newfound tension with their children due to new social experiences at college, “That’s actually maybe the first time [she] and I ever butted heads because of the social scene within a sorority” (UW Academy parent interview, July 31, 2017). Some parents questioned if their children were socially ready for an adult college experience. For example, an EEP parent shared her concern regarding her son’s readiness for “an adult situation and not having the experience and the wisdom to do the right thing all the time” (EEP parent interview, January 18, 2017). Another parent shared this concern, “We were worried about her getting caught-up in a world that she wasn’t ready for and that was definitely a concern for us” (EEP parent interview, November 21, 2017). Parents worried how their children would react in social situations where alcohol may be present, or worried about their children being left out if a college study group were to meet at a bar. They voiced some concerns about their children’s dating relationships, one parent sharing, “Well, one of the things that I am really concerned about is, being a young male on campus, that he doesn’t have a chance to meet anybody his age for a relationship” (EEP parent interview, November 30, 2017). Other concerns varied by gender, “some of the risks that come along with a big college institution, particularly for a female” (UW Academy parent interview, September 1, 2017), and “worried about the dorm and what would it be like with him living with older kids and, you know, girls” (UW Academy parent interview, January 25, 2018). Essentially, parents were either concerned about the type of social experiences their children may encounter or the lack of having more typical social college experiences.

Parental expectations. Most parents wanted their children to do their best and to follow their passions:

I can tell you that I really want him to like what he does. I want him to be interested in what he’s studying. I think with, I think if he could be passionate about it, I think the child could change the world in whatever it was that he was interested in. (EEP parent interview, January 18, 2017)

They also wanted their children to live happy, balanced lives, “The expectation was that she wasn’t just in an academic setting, that the social was just as important” (EEP parent interview, November 21, 2017). Some parental expectations showed up in areas of the child’s responsibility and success. For example, one parent stated, “I mean my expectation is that he’ll get a degree and find a career that he can support himself” (UW Academy parent interview, January 25, 2018), whereas another parent’s expectation meant,

get[ting] things done on time and that's what life is all about and that's how we live every day, we have to get to things on time, . . . if you're not ready to do that then we need to choose something else, a different program. (Transition School parent interview, January 26, 2018)

Other parents' expectations centered on their children applying to and attending graduate school.

Long-Term Impact

Parents noted that they expected positive long-term impacts in academics as well as social/emotional aspects on their children. Some positive aspects that were mentioned included more time and choice as it related to their children starting college earlier, "I think for my daughter, because of this early education, I think long-term she has more choices in her life . . . So, because of that I just think she has more flexibility. I mean she can even afford to fail a few times" (EEP parent interview, November 8, 2017); and another parent shared, "The one thing that's nice about doing all of this so early is he doesn't feel the pressure of time" (EEP parent interview, October 23, 2017). More specifically, some parents looked to future opportunities, like graduate school or "fellowships and grants" (Transition School parent interview, January 10, 2018), as having the most consequential long-term impact on their children, "I think for her as we look further down the road we talked a lot about the impact more at the graduate school level than anything else" (UW Academy parent interview, November 21, 2017). Overall, parents focused on the earlier start as an advantage to opening future doors for their children.

Other parents focused on the long-term impact the program had on social/emotional areas. These parents included social/emotional aspects such as increased confidence and personal growth. For instance, one parent shared that the program was, "giving him a lot of confidence in himself" (UW Academy parent interview, October 30, 2017). Another parent noted similar observations as her daughter was in the midst of the preparatory program:

It has definitely given her a much stronger sense of self-confidence and validation . . . she can handle really tough work and she can overcome challenges [which] gives her confidence in a number of other ways, and that will have the biggest lasting impact that she might not have gotten if she hadn't gone. (EEP Preparatory Stage parent interview, January 26, 2018)

An EEP parent shared,

I really think that having this much chance to grow in these early years is only going to help him in the future, in testing himself, what he's capable of is only going to help him as far as where he's going to be. (EEP parent interview, August 10, 2017)

Overall, it was apparent that although parents acknowledged the challenge and rigor found in both the early entrance programs, they expected the long-term impact to be positive based on the confidence and growth already evident in their children.

Perceived Differences Between EEP and UW Academy

Challenges and stress about the preparatory program. Parents in the EEP Program all commented on the tremendous work load and stress that their children had in Transition School before matriculating into the university. One parent shared, “It was hard for the family in seeing how busy he was and how stressed he was and just the amount of work he had to do and give up the expectation of family dinners or weekend outings together” (EEP parent interview, December 1, 2017). Yet, at the end of the program, these parents felt that their children gained confidence and found the transition to college easy after having such rigorous course work expected of them the year before entering college. “[It was] kind of thrilling and invigorating and just being faced with that amount of challenge I think really [it] kind of motivated him to want to do well and boosted his confidence” (EEP parent interview, December 1, 2017).

Parents whose children attended Transition School shared experiences of how they had to change and adapt their family lifestyle. They talked about reducing their social activities to give their children time to study. They said how difficult it was to see their children lose sleep and stress over the quantity of the work. Parents spoke about how they supported their children by insisting on taking breaks, feeding them well, and not expecting them to do their ordinary activities they once did with the family. For example, one parent shared,

I was always up at five in the morning with her, because even if I was downstairs in the kitchen and she was in her bedroom we felt like it was a very isolating year and it was our job as parents to make her feel a little less isolated and a little less lonely and a little less on her own. (EEP parent interview, November 21, 2017)

These parents also shared how difficult it was not to know how well their children were doing because they were used to keeping track of their grades in a middle school setting—at the university level, parents are unable to obtain their children’s grade information. Letting go of knowing their children’s grades or trying to help them with their homework was extremely difficult for some parents. Researchers noted that parents whose children struggled in the Transition School spoke more negatively about the early entrance to college experience than those whose children did well consistently throughout the preparatory year.

Changes in family dynamics and lifestyle. Although parents across both programs did share that their time spent together as a family had become more intentional (family meal times, or structured weekend walks and hiking activities), many of the differences centered on their children’s living arrangements. UW Academy parents felt as if they had to let go of their children sooner due to on campus living arrangements,

whereas EEP parents felt as if they had to let go of their children sooner due to the intensity of the workload in their preparatory year. Many of the parents remarked on household changes like fewer expectations regarding their children's chores and responsibilities, "I will say she's probably gotten by with doing less chores around the house and you know I've probably picked up the slack on that just because I know she's so busy" (Transition School parent interview, January 9, 2018). EEP parents also felt that they had essentially lost a child for the year he or she was in Transition School: "I will say that during that preparatory year, we as a family felt, me in particular, I felt like we lost a year as a family" (EEP parent interview, November 21, 2017). However, after the students matriculated into the university, parents seemed to feel a sense of normalcy return in their families. Thus, parents had a more difficult time with the transition to Transition School than they did to the university.

Themes With Various Types of Responses

Disruptions in sibling relationships. One theme that emerged in our findings was that sibling relationships across programs were impacted. However, the effect on these sibling relationships varied among families and program. For instance, some families experienced sibling rivalry when an older child enrolled in college only to have the younger child leapfrog over the high school years and join them at the university. For instance, one family shared that one of the largest impacts on their family was on her children's relationship with one another:

Well the oldest of the two boys had a bit of a testy time because my older son worked extremely hard in high school and then here comes his younger brother who hasn't done all that high school work and got in at the University of Washington just the same. So, he was resentful of that; his brother coming as he saw it, sailing in without doing all the work, because it is competitive to get into the University of Washington and the kids know that. So, he was pretty frosty about it and he actually left the University of Washington last year and he's somewhere else [now]. (UW Academy parent interview, October 30, 2017)

However, other families noted a sense of loss when their older child accelerated and still had younger siblings at home:

His younger sister was a freshman last year and looking forward to being in high school with her brother but then he went off to college, so she has missed him tremendously because they're close and they sat and did homework together for years and suddenly he's gone sooner than she was expecting. As she said, I expected to lose the older brother, I didn't expect to lose both my brothers at the same time. (UW Academy parent interview, October 30, 2017)

Another family experienced the opposite reaction by their child's younger siblings. This parent noted,

This year she moved into the dorm, and her younger siblings actually were super excited that she was going to be gone, because she takes up quite a bit of time at the dinner table, she's an extremely vocal kid, she loves to talk and she loves to teach everybody what she's just learned . . . her siblings were really excited that she was going to move out into the dorms because they'd finally have a chance to talk at the dinner table. (UW Academy parent interview, November 2, 2017)

One EEP family noted that the younger child in their family started to express a sense of measuring himself up to his older brother who entered college early:

The other part that we are trying to work with my [younger] son, [he] loves what he's doing but sometimes when he's frustrated with something the first thing that he says is, "Oh because you want me to do it exactly the same as [the older brother] is doing!" You know? That's I think part of the age too because he's young and I have the feeling that he has the pressure of his [older] brother too. (EEP parent interview, November 6, 2017)

Overall, parents noted changes in sibling relationships that related to competition between siblings or challenges in missing their sibling who enrolled early in college.

Parents' advice. In addition to asking parents about their experiences, researchers also asked parents for advice regarding ways in which early entrance to college programs could be improved to better meet their needs. Parents who had children in the Transition School and EEP expressed a need for more training and support for their children that enabled them to handle stress and manage their time better. Parents who had children in the UW Academy, expressed a need for more support and training to teach their children how to advocate for themselves more and how to use the university resources available to them. They also expressed a desire for the Center to incorporate more social activities with the intention to build stronger student cohorts.

An emergent theme that arose from the parent interviews was their desire to be included in a stronger parent community, suggesting specific examples such as parent mentoring as they go through the early entrance to college process. One parent shared, "just talking with some of the other parents was helpful because it made you realize that it wasn't just hard for your kid, it was hard for most of them" (EEP parent interview, December 1, 2017). In fact, some parents expressed a sense of loss over their past parental peer communities when their children left the traditional high school setting to enter college early. One UW Academy parent echoed a similar sentiment among parent participants:

It definitely changed my social world, because he was in high school and his younger brother was still in middle school, and I no longer had—I mean I don't hang out at the school all the time—but I do volunteer and participate and you know I'm an involved parent. So there certainly is a population of friends who I see because we're doing those kinds of projects together and the next thing you know he's in college and so you know that was a bit of a challenge. (UW Academy parent interview, November 20, 2017)

Another parent shared that most of the family's "social connections in our community [were] through her and through her activities so that was a big change as well" (UW Academy parent interview, August 15, 2017).

Although some parents felt a sense of loss for former parental peer relationships, an EEP parent recalled criticisms received from their former parent cohort:

I've had parents specifically say "oh, I would never want that for my kid," you know, like, they're not ready for college at that age. It's like, I'm not gonna get into a debate about that—this is right for some kids and maybe not right for yours, like I'm not, I just prefer to not even go there. (EEP parent interview, January 26, 2018)

Regardless of program, parents expressed a sense of loss for their former parent cohorts, and expressed a strong desire for opportunities to form new parent cohorts with other parents of children who enrolled in college early.

Discussion

Parents interviewed for this study illuminated several issues that are addressed in studies about acceleration: social and emotional readiness, academic rigor, the optimal educational environment, and family relationships during adolescence. They reported their critical and supportive role that they played in the decision-making process and overall experience. As illustrated by the findings in this study, the decision to accelerate is largely driven by the student, but not without parental support. Similar to Noble et al.'s (2008) study, parents often noted that their children's enrollment in early entrance to college programs was because their children wanted to enroll, and that taking a supportive role was more important for their children. This also aligns with prior findings that have identified parental support as a key factor for students' success in early entrance to college programs (Colangelo et al., 2004), and the effect parental involvement in their children's education can have on their academic achievement and attitudes toward school (Jolly & Matthews, 2012).

Parents also remarked that their children were dissatisfied with their previous school experience, and they cited this as an influential factor to look into academic alternatives, including acceleration, thus mirroring another finding from Noble et al. (2008). Dissatisfaction typically served as the catalyst to exploring academic options for both parents and their children. Other similarities to the 2008 study by Noble and colleagues included parents' social concerns, changes in family lifestyles and dynamics, and parents' challenges with letting go earlier than expected. For instance, parents' social concerns echoed prior research that noted parents' concerns about their children navigating a more adult experience at a younger age (Colangelo et al., 2004). In this study, parents often cited concerns about their child missing traditional school social events like prom, paralleling others' findings in prior research (Noble et al., 2008). Although parent participants in this study recounted their challenging experiences, they also noted happiness with their decision and their overall satisfaction with the

early entrance to college experience, further supporting previous research in this aspect (Colangelo et al., 2004; Noble et al., 2008).

When asked to list supports parents found beneficial to them as they navigated the early entrance experience, they frequently mentioned parent group meetings hosted by the Center. More specifically, they noted that having the opportunity to meet other parents, essentially involvement in a parent cohort, was an important support. In some cases, parents referenced the challenge of losing existing parent cohorts when deciding to accelerate their child and move them from the traditional school setting. Parent comments regarding the importance of a parent cohort provided some preliminary insights to the importance of looking at community factors in gifted education (Jolly & Matthews, 2012).

The Center has embraced working with parents to ease the transition between K-12 and college. The participants inferred that parent cohorts are as important as student cohorts when making such critical life transitions. For parents who are told that when their children enter college, they are no longer allowed to see their children's academic records without their children's permission (FERPA laws), they may feel that they have to "let go" and "back off" of all things related to parenting. On the contrary, parent support during the adolescent years is critical for all young people. In response to the findings revealed by this research, the Center designs monthly programs to bring parents together to support their transition with their children. Book studies with parents have included *Mindset* by Carol Dweck (2016) and *Gift of Failure* by Lahey (2016). Topics such as communicating with your child, parental expectations, social media, ways to be an activist, and when not to solve your child's problems have all been topics of discussion with groups of parents. Parents who are supporting their young children to be in an adult environment also need support.

The differences between the way parents described the transition into the preparatory program and the transition into the university was concerning, and has led to substantial changes in the preparatory curriculum to reduce the work load and stress on students. Weekly "check-ins" were designed to create space for students to talk about how they were managing their time, their work load, or to talk about their well-being. This check-in time is facilitated by the Academic Advisor for both early entrance programs. A health and wellness class taught by a school psychology student is now being offered to students while they are in Transition School. This is important because too often radical acceleration is a programming solution for the academic strengths of the children and not necessarily designed to address asynchronous development in all domains of growth. When designing early entrance programs, administrators and parents should not only focus on the academic preparedness for college but also on the "whole" student and the well-being of the student to navigate the college environment. A structured time to focus on well-being is an important new component to the program.

Parents have expressed the desire for increased access to more information (Morawska & Sanders, 2009) and should have clear, comprehensive information pertaining to early entrance to college available to them (Colangelo et al., 2004). The results of this study support prior research in this regard, revealing in particular,

parents found research-based information and discussion to be beneficial to them during the decision-making process and their overall experience. Furthermore, the findings from this study address this gap in the research and provide an in-depth view of the early entrance to college process as perceived by the parents. This phenomenological approach to the early entrance to college experience provides additional insight for other parents who may find themselves considering early entrance as an academic alternative.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

The findings of this study shed light on the type of environment that advanced students are seeking as well as the parental experiences of early college entrants. If teachers in middle and high schools could create contexts that allow students to develop intellectual autonomy, recognize and satisfy students' need for challenge, and provide peer groups where students felt that they belonged, then they may not seek an alternative high school experience such as early entrance to college. Takeaways of this research include the following conclusions:

1. Parents support their children who generally drive the decision-making process to attend college early.
2. Although parents were worried about their children's social lives, they reported that their children were mostly happy with their social lives.
3. Parents reported that their children gained more self-confidence after experiencing the struggles of the rigorous pre-college program, or the entrance into the university. But going into the preparatory program was particularly stressful for both students and families. It could be that there is an optimal level of challenge and perhaps 14 year olds may be more at risk to enter college early than older students. Programs similar to the Transition School may need to support not only academics but also the social and emotional growth, including attention to stress and coping with an overload of work. Perhaps educators should reflect upon and evaluate whether or not radical acceleration (missing all 4 years of high school) is a viable option for healthy growth and development.
4. In the literature, parents reported that they need more information to help them become comfortable with the idea of their children attending college early. The experiences of parents in this study may illuminate assurances for parents that their children will be OK, or they may generate questions for parents to think about before making the family commitment to come to college early.
5. Parents reported that they need a cohort too—they need to share their experiences with other parents whose children are going through similar experiences. The implication of this conclusion is for educators who are planning early entrance to college programs, they should include programming for parents that brings them together to form their own community.

All of these takeaways have implications for families, students, and educators. However, there are limitations to this study. These early entrance programs are specific to this context, and these parents may not represent the views or experiences of parents whose children are participating in other types of early entrance programs.

Parents who volunteered to participate in the study may have had more positive experiences or may have wanted to share their experiences with others as compared with those who did not respond to the invitation to participate. This is always a limitation when asking for volunteers because they may offer biased feedback.

The demographics of the participants in this study mirror the local demographics of children in gifted programs in the state of Washington and in the early entrance to college programs in this university. These skewed demographics are, of course, limitations to understanding perspectives from a more diverse group. Through a critical lens, one may wonder why there are not more diverse student populations taking advantage of early entrance into college programs.

The researchers are interested in pursuing a similar study with other early entrance to college programs to see if the experiences and perspectives of parents in this study are similar to other groups of parents (who may be more diverse) whose children chose to enter college early.

Although parents were concerned about their children's social and emotional well-being, their ability to make friends, and their ability to "fit into" the college environment, parents appeared to navigate those issues with their children, and did not relay that those concerns distressed them or their children during their college years. One hypothesis for this may be that students did not discuss their social lives with their parents once they entered into the college environment. More research into this aspect of the experience would shed more light in this area.

Findings on sibling tension echoed those of Gross (2004) who advocated for the importance of not only the support of parents and family members, but "particularly siblings'" support (p. 93). Gross further described the importance of sibling support,

where the younger child may "leapfrog" an older brother or sister, as well as what families can do to support sibling relationships, families where the individual strengths of each child are valued and praised but where it is realistically accepted, and discussed, that the exceptionally gifted child requires a radically different educational program, are less likely to have problems with sibling rivalry than families where the other children are not allowed to be involved in their brother, or sister's educational planning. (p. 93)

Although tension in sibling relationships was not experienced by all families in this study, this theme of sibling tension/rivalry was prevalent enough (43% of parent responses) to emerge as a subtheme in our findings and warrants further inquiry into this phenomenon.

Finally, at the time of the interviews, parents could only hypothesize about the long-term impacts of their child's accelerated college experience. This study focused

more on the transition process of the students from K-12 to college, and a future study may need to focus on the experiences and perspectives of parents well after their children have graduated.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

If you have more than one child who has been in the early entrance programs, please answer related to one child at a time, unless experiences are the same.

Personal information

Which program is your child currently in?

Which year did your child enter?

How old is your child?

1. Decisions to come to the Early Entrance Programs

Tell us about your decision-making process to send your child to college early.

Prompts:

- What was your role?
- What were the criteria—benefits and costs?
- Motivation?

2. Transition Process

Could you please describe the transition process—from middle school to Preparatory Stage Program, or from HS to college?

Prompts:

- What changes were made in the family dynamics?
- What changes in lifestyles? Or time spent with child?
- What challenges did you as a family or as a parent have?
- What challenges did your child have?

3. Parental Expectations

In our Alumni Study, we asked students about parental expectations. Could you describe your expectations you hold for your child? Could you describe in more detail how these expectations were conveyed to them?

Prompt:

- Did these expectations influence you or your child’s decision to enter this program?

4. Academic Needs

Could you describe how this program is attending to your child’s academic needs?

Prompts:

- Do you have any comparisons between your child’s previous school experiences, and those that he or she is having at the University?
- Do you have any concerns about your child’s academic growth or progress at the University?

5. Social and/or Emotional Needs

Could you describe how this program is attending to your child’s social and/or emotional needs?

Prompts:

- Do you have any comparisons between your child’s previous school experiences, and those that he or she is having at the University?
- Do you have any concerns about your child’s social and/or emotional growth or progress at the University?
- Could you talk about your child’s social relationships before the program?
- Can you describe the current social relationships of your child in the program and outside?
- Could you discuss how their age may play a role in their general experiences related to going to college early?
- Could you name specific supports that you see in the Robinson Center programs?

6. Long-Term Impact

- What long-term impact do you believe the early entrance program may have on your child and family?
- What do you find the most advantageous part of this program now, and what do you think the advantages will be in the future?

Closing questions

Do you have any advice for us?

In what ways do you think that the program should be improved to better help our children?

Appendix B

Data Display: Decision-Making-Autonomy.

ID	Program	Date	Page(s); line(s)	Transcript excerpt
328612	UW Academy	February 22, 2018	2; 19–20	So, I felt like it was the children's decision anyway.
331450	UW Academy	November 20, 2017	2; 19–22	So, between his freshman and sophomore year of high school he came home one day and said, I set up a meeting today with [program director], and we talked about the UW Academy.
331450	UW Academy	November 20, 2017	3; 3–6	So, you need to put on the calendar that you're going to that. He wasn't that rude about it, but he heard about it, he was excited about it and I wasn't that enthusiastic about it.
339631	UW Academy	July 31, 2017	3; 18–22	It was the best decision ever and it was her decision; it was really not ours' so much, and I know that it might be different for other families that want to get into [university] earlier or whatever; this was just a perfect opportunity for the perfect student.
340320	UW Academy	August 8, 2017	26; 11–13	Because it truly was his decision and probably there is a little bit of a difference because [child] is fairly independent and I traveled.
345551	UW Academy	January 16, 2018	1; 19–21	It was her decision. We told our daughter that we are not pushing her and we put no pressure on her; it's her call and she decided to go.
345551	UW Academy	January 16, 2018	2; 1–5	That is why we think going to college at an early age is a good move and it requires some degree of maturity, and if she couldn't make it on her own whether she wants to go or not and maybe she should not be going is what we all think.
347401	UW Academy	September 1, 2017	1; 18–20	She found out about it, and got herself enrolled to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) test and then let me know that she wanted to do it, and we reviewed it.
353371	UW Academy	November 30, 2017	2; 17–22	Well you know this was mainly driven by his own interests. We didn't know about the program; we didn't know much and we never actually mentioned it to him and then one day he came up from school saying that he had heard about it the program and he wanted to apply, and he was very eager to do so.
353371	UW Academy	November 30, 2017	3; 3–6	He insisted and he wanted to do it and you know he essentially argued that he didn't know what he'd be doing in the last two years of high school.
353371	UW Academy	November 30, 2017	3; 15–20	I mean they say well you know it's a great program and the kids are well taken care of in terms of their social life and the integration into college and eventually we were convinced that it was probably the thing for him. He was so adamant about it that we decided, well you know, he should do this, so that was how it came about.
353371	UW Academy	November 30, 2017	9; 1–5	Once we sort of saw that he was really deciding to get into it and that you know we realized there was no point in trying to persuade him not to quit high school and get into the program we were really embroiled with it.
355441	UW Academy	October 30, 2017	5; 12–15	Ultimately we let him make the decision and we didn't tell him you will do this or you can't do that because he is old enough to take ownership of his future and so we allowed him to make the decision.

(continued)

Appendix B. (continued)

ID	Program	Date	Page(s); line(s)	Transcript excerpt
357411	UW Academy	November 2, 2017	3; 4–6	We just saw that our daughter, that's what she wanted, she wanted a more adult experience with her learning and she's very self-motivated.
357411	UW Academy	October 26, 2018	3; 7–8	We just didn't get in her way of making a decision.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	3; 9–10	We didn't make the decision, we let her make the decision.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	4–5; 17–3	She kind of went back and forth about it, and then in December, almost at the last minute, she decided she wanted to apply, she also met some other people in the program, she works at the Science Center and at the Discovery Core Youth Program they have there, and so she had already met some people and she told me, before I even mentioned the program to her, that she had looked it up on line and had looked at the UW Academy on line and then she kind of waffled back.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	5; 6–9	So, she took the SAT and she cried and um, you know, kind of you know let her make the decision about whether—or to stay in high school or whether, whether to go.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	5; 12–13	She was the one who made the decision ultimately.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	8; 6–9	Ultimately, I think she made the decision and ultimately, I don't really know why, I didn't really push her a lot on it because I wanted her to feel like it was hers.
358630	UW Academy	November 21, 2017	2; 18–20	She actually is the one who found and researched the program herself and came to me with the information.
358630	UW Academy	November 21, 2017	3; 8–16	Yes, she actually looked up boarding schools prior to high school and in her exploration for boarding schools she found information on the internet about the Center program at that time. She went to and applied for four elite schools for boarding school for high school, but because of my income level she was waitlisted for all of them and decided to pull herself off those lists and enroll in high school locally with the concept of then pursuing the Center Program.
358630	UW Academy	November 21, 2017	5–6; 22–2	Yeah, so most likely she really drove this search; this was—as a parent I don't want to push her towards something she's not prepared for so I allow her to drive her own educational program.
361521	UW Academy	January 25, 2018	6; 19–20	You know mom, I think I do want to apply.
361521	UW Academy	January 25, 2018	7; 1–5	He said at that point, you know, like let's just apply and then we can kind of keep seeing how it feels, you know. So, it was sort of an ongoing, let's go to the next step and then we'll, you know, evaluate after that, you know kind of thing.
364352	UW Academy	August 10, 2017	2; 12–14	He actually came to us a couple of years ago and said that um, high school was not working for him.
364352	UW Academy	August 10, 2017	3; 11–12	So, he had been putting a plan together and he financed it himself and he planned it himself.
364352	UW Academy	August 10, 2017	10; 6–10	He did the application fully on his own, and he was in France actually, when he did it so we had no, we weren't even involved other than I asked him to please e-mail me when he submitted it so that I could know, but it was all, it was all him.

(continued)

Appendix B. (continued)

ID	Program	Date	Page(s); line(s)	Transcript excerpt
364352	UW Academy	August 10, 2017	11; 6–9	It wasn't a lot of pro's and con's he made the plan, he came to us and said I'm done being in high school and here's the plan that I've laid out and we said that that seems solid.
369202	UW Academy	February 23, 2018	2; 1–7	It's mainly her decision because I think she feels the high school, like she was taking some Advanced Placement (AP) classes and she didn't think it was challenging or exciting enough and she went to [university] to listen to some of the courses and she really liked it, so I think she wanted to give it a try so that's mainly her decision to go to take on the Early Entrance Program to enter.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	2; 6–8	We involved [child] in the decision-making, but we basically informed her and presented her with this option if she wanted to do it.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	2; 18–22	We were a little bit apprehensive, but we basically went with her, what she wanted, because it was really what she wanted to do and that she felt she could deal with the pressure and also the expectations.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	5; 3–11	Well, we basically knew that this was really what she wanted and it's true that she would be accelerated not only for one year, but her whole life really. But even during the summer she would request that I and my husband would give her extra college-level courses with college professors for example, because from the very start she was very interested in neuroscience and neurobiology, and so she practically begged us to have a tutor come and discuss medical journals with her.
107660	EEP	January 10, 2018	2; 16–17	She found out about it and it was really totally led by her, our child.
111132	EEP	November 6, 2017	6; 12–16	So, if I understand that correctly it was mainly [child's] decision and motivation to come here because he was unchallenged in middle school; is that why? [Parent]: Yes it is.
112020	EEP	December 17, 2018	3; 17–18	[Child] was the one that was convincing both of us, my husband and myself.
112070	EEP	November 8, 2017	3; 5	We just went ahead to support her decision.
112440	EEP	January 26, 2018	4; 18–22	My child got very excited as soon as she found out about it and she took the lead on all the stuff she needs to do to apply and so we just did the list that she made for us and, um, followed her lead kind of, I guess you could say.
112500	EEP	January 4, 2018	3; 9–11	Not really, the second child doesn't want to be the shadow, she really decided on her own and she wants to pursue a different path.
112500	EEP	January 4, 2018	5; 8	It's always the child so just provide them with the options and scenarios.
112840	EEP	October 23, 2017	9; 12–20	Part of the reason I mention that is I think we tried to really let our son decide whether he was going here or not, so it wasn't us saying you have to do this or we want you to do this. But I think for us that worked out really well, because even though the Transition School was very, very stressful, throughout it all our son consistently said, you know, I wouldn't want to be doing anything else, I'm glad I made this choice, whatever the outcome is this has been a good experience.

(continued)

Appendix B. (continued)

ID	Program	Date	Page(s); line(s)	Transcript excerpt
I13611	EEP	August 10, 2017	2; 17–19	You know just for me it's about giving him the information and then to have him explore the options and think about the pros and cons.
I13611	EEP	August 10, 2017	3; 4–10	I don't know whether I conveyed that or not; I tried not to. I mean he seemed really excited, especially after he had the interview here, so I think he had decided after he had the interview here that he wanted to go and when he did sit in the classes and stuff. So, I was just to support him either way whatever his decision was.
I13612	EEP	July 25, 2017	2; 12	Well he decided.
I13871	EEP	December 1, 2017	4; 3–4	Our son was super-excited about it and said that's definitely what I want to do.
I14111	EEP	August 11, 2017	4; 3–4	He just kept telling me that it's not who I am; it's not what I want.
I14111	EEP	August 11, 2017	4; 14–18	We did leave the final decision to him being that this was his life and that first year of transition school is definitely not something to be undertaken without full buy-in by the student.
I14111	EEP	August 11, 2017	5; 3–5	He made the decision, it was his decision, but I think that it had to be his decision. It's not something you can make for your child.
I14472	EEP	November 20, 2017	2; 18–19	I remember when he was early in Eighth Grade coming to me and it was really very [child]-driven.
I14511	EEP	November 21, 2017	2; 5–7	[Child] found this program on her own and she became determined that this was her path.
I14511	EEP	November 21, 2017	4; 13–16	I think that we were not supportive of it and then as the ball started rolling she was the one who did the application, she was the one who signed up for the ACT, she was the one who prepared for the ACT.
I14511	EEP	November 21, 2017	4–5; 19–2	We saw that she never wavered; she was very, very clear that this was her path and I think my husband and I sort of had to come to that understanding and reconcile the fact that the path we had laid out for her wasn't necessarily the path that she was choosing for herself, and that at some point in time we didn't have a choice.
I14511	EEP	November 21, 2017	5; 5–12	For [child] the moment she got accepted it was never about < . . . ? 00:06:40> she knew this was what she wanted. She was really clear this was the right place for her. Any questions she might have had in her mind were resolved the day that she came in for that interview when she sat in the [preparatory program] class and saw the level of this course happening and she was incredibly clear this was the right place for her.

Appendix C

Data Display: Sibling Relationships.

ID	Program	Date	Page(s); line(s)	Transcript excerpt
339631	UW Academy	July 31, 2017	5; 18–23	So, she has a sibling, a younger brother, and that has made an impact so he's two years younger and so he's always had to follow in her footsteps, so I guess as a parenting issue, but he really respects her so they don't fight or anything. Maybe it's because of her maturity but they've never been just two years apart.
339631	UW Academy	July 31, 2017	6; 9–11	Yeah, so he's very pleased that she's here and actually she brought him to school last quarter and he had a great time here on campus.
339631	UW Academy	July 31, 2017	11; 15–19	He missed her; they're close and he missed her, yeah so there was some. The house is a little quieter and [child] is not very neat so the kitchen floor as she comes in the room, you know her shoes and her coat and her backpack—that's all cleaned out.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	13–14; 19–4	Her older sister I think was a little taken back, because she was like this is my year, I'm graduating, I'm sorry I'm getting emotional, um, I mean she felt like something was taken from her, um, by having her sister kind of have go through this—you know leave college, you know leave high school early and get all this attention, so it was hard like trying to honor her graduation that she had worked hard for and her college experience which is also valid.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	14; 12–19	I think that was probably hard for her because she—in—she doesn't have—she's not going to high school with a sister because [child] left before she started um, so, we you know don't talk about it a lot, but I imagine that you know was kind of—a little hard to um, because it was a little more abrupt, it wasn't something—this wasn't like something we anticipated or planned on it was a little abrupt, transition.
358111	UW Academy	August 15, 2017	43–44; 22–2	I mean I think the long-term impact is probably mostly, the person who's probably most effected was her younger sister, and who you know is not—doesn't have [child] around as much.
364352	UW Academy	August 10, 2017	11; 18–21	[Child's] younger sister is fifteen and they are exceptionally close um, and in fact they've never ever had a harsh word between them, it's really kind of strange, and so for her it's hard.
355441	UW Academy	October 30, 2017	10; 5–9	As a family the impact was the biggest on his siblings because his older brother was going off to college and now the kid brother is following right behind him which he wasn't happy about.
355441	UW Academy	October 30, 2017	10; 12–20	Other impact as far as his siblings is his younger sister was a freshman last year and looking forward to being in high school with her brother but then he went off to college, so. She has missed him tremendously because they're close and they sat and did homework together for years and suddenly she's gone sooner than she was expecting. As she said, I expected to lose the older brother, I didn't expect to lose both my brothers at the same time.

(continued)

Appendix C. (continued)

ID	Program	Date	Page(s); line(s)	Transcript excerpt
355441	UW Academy	October 30, 2017	11–12; 11–5	Well the oldest two boys had a bit of a testy time because my older son worked extremely hard in high school and then here comes his younger brother who hasn't done all that high school work and got in at the University of Washington just the same. So, he was resentful of that; his brother coming as he saw it, sailing in without doing all the work, because it is competitive to get into UW and the kids know that. So, he was pretty frosty about it and he actually left the University of Washington last year and he's somewhere else because he—I can't say that's because his brother was there because I don't think it's that direct correlation, but it did have an impact on the two of them. They're getting past that but you know last year my oldest son was pretty resentful that his younger brother just got in kind of for free, if you will, meaning without doing all the hard high-school work and SATs and worrying about the GPA and you know all the activities and clubs. So that was an impact.
357411	UW Academy	November 2, 2017	15; 2–7	This year that she moved into the dorm, and her younger siblings actually were super excited that she was going to be gone, because she takes up quite a bit of time at the dinner table, she's an extremely vocal kid, she loves to talk and she loves to teach everybody what she's just learned.
357411	UW Academy	November 2, 2017	15; 17–19	Her siblings were really excited that she's was going to move out into the dorms because they'd finally have a chance to talk at the dinner table.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	7; 1–6	The thing is [child] and [child] have five years between them and so from the very beginning, even before Transition School it always felt like we had two only-children anyway. So [child] would have his own interests and [child] would have her own so it didn't really affect their interaction too much.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	21; 11–14	It did have an impact on our son because we try not to praise our daughter too much in front of him because he is a very sensitive child and we're just afraid that we would be instilling some kind of expectation onto him.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	21; 15–17	But even with us less praising her and you know with him present we feel that he is somehow pressured to do as well, if not better, as his sister.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	22; 1–4	But he was under a lot of pressure and he's only nine-years-old, and we basically told him that it was unhealthy; that this is not the kind of competition we want in our family.
107110	EEP	January 18, 2018	22; 7–14	He was—we do homework together and he would just break down and cry and he would say, you know I wish I was more like [child]; I'm dumb. So basically, he would cry and he would show is frustration, but I did set-up a meeting with his teacher and his counselor and we talked it out and I remind him every day is that all we want for him is to do his best and not to basically look at his sister as a yardstick.
112440	EEP	January 26, 2018	16; 6–10	For my two younger kids it was a really tough year for them and they, um, I, I remember specific moments of them both crying, literally crying, the younger siblings that she doesn't love them anymore because she never does anything with them.

(continued)

Appendix C. (continued)

ID	Program	Date	Page(s), line(s)	Transcript excerpt
I12440	EEP	January 26, 2018	18; 7–11	You can invite me but don't be made if I can't come, you know, and that's what we did, well we did our best not to take it personally you could say. You know, my other two kids sometimes take it personally.
I12840	EEP	October 23, 2017	19; 19–21	I think another thing, I don't think we managed the situation with my daughter as well as we probably could have.
I12840	EEP	October 23, 2017	20; 1–5	I mean I think [sister] still has a certain level of resentment for being pulled out of her environment. You know there were multiple reasons why we made the transition back here, but the primary driver was our son being admitted into this program.
I12840	EEP	October 23, 2017	20; 5–9	So even just this morning she was saying something about how oh my brother is the real smart one and she's gotten a sort of negative self-image in a way, I don't think we've done anything to encourage her to think that way.
I12840	EEP	October 23, 2017	20; 20–22	So, [sister] took the test but she did very badly, so she didn't get bumped up, which is good; I don't want them to advance her if she's not capable of it.
I12840	EEP	October 23, 2017	21; 3–7	But I think that has kind of impacted her too, especially because her brother is so skilled at math. So still thinking about how to deal with her self-image issues in relation to the dynamics between them.
I13871	EEP	December 1, 2017	9–10; 23–7	I think there is a part of me that thinks it was hard for his younger sibling, who is three years younger and they do not have a very close relationship but a part of me thinks well that's kind of why he's the gulf between there because the three years essentially became six or seven years in terms of how they're experiencing life, so I don't think that helped their relationship any.
I13871	EEP	December 1, 2017	10; 16–18	But I think at that age where it's just a really large gulf and this may be widened it a little bit.
I14511	EEP	November 21, 2017	7–8; 19–1	My husband and I were very, very conscious of the fact that he is as bright as she is so we needed him to understand that this was not the expectation; this was not the goal and this was not the bar that our family was setting for success.
I12020	EEP	November 6, 2017	12; 8–11	Then the other thing is because of what [child] is doing I started feeling that my youngest son was always thinking that he had to be like [child].
I12020	EEP	November 6, 2017	12; 16–22	The other part that we are trying to work with my son, [child] loves what he's doing but sometimes when he's frustrated with something the first thing that he says is, oh because you want me to do it exactly the same as [brother] is doing! You know? That's I think part of the age too because he's young and I have the feeling that he has the pressure of his brother too.
I07330	EEP	January 20, 2018	16; 11–15	The oldest child was pretty proud of [child], so both of them were proud. The middle child I think felt a little bit that may be even a shadow, you know how everybody comes and says oh [child] you're super smart, and < . . . ? 00:29:43 > is not super smart?

Note. UW = University of Washington; GPA = grade point average.


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ORCID iD

Nancy B. Hertzog  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6471-7463>

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About the Authors

Nancy B. Hertzog, PhD, is professor in the area of Learning Sciences and Human Development and former Director of the Robinson Center for Young Scholars at the University of Washington. She received her master's degree in gifted education from the University of Connecticut, and her PhD in special education from the University of Illinois. In addition to studying the outcomes of Robinson Center alumni, her research focuses on teaching strategies designed to differentiate instruction and challenge children with diverse abilities. Specifically, she has studied teachers' implementation of the Project Approach in classrooms with both high-achieving and low-achieving children. From 1995 to 2010, she was on the faculty in the Department of Special

Education and directed University Primary School, an early childhood gifted program, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has published three books and several chapters on early childhood gifted education, and numerous articles in gifted education.

Kristen N. Lamb, PhD, is post-doctoral research associate for the Robinson Center at the University of Washington. She earned her doctorate in Educational Psychology with an emphasis in gifted education and creativity from the University of North Texas and previously served her community as a K-12 public educator. She studies equity issues in advanced and accelerated academics, the role of creativity in talent development of high ability students, and classroom conditions conducive to developing creative thinking and advanced academic achievement. Dr. Lamb is the co-author of *Developing Creativity in the Classroom: Learning and Innovation for 21st-Century Schools* (Kettler, Lamb, & Mullet, 2019), and she has published a number of articles and invited book chapters on the topics of creativity and equity in gifted education. She is currently an associate editor for the *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*.

Sakhavat Mammadov, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, & Technology at Valdosta State University (VSU). He worked as a postdoctoral research associate for the University of Washington's (UW) Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars prior to his appointment at VSU. His research interests include social and emotional experiences of gifted students, motivation, personality, and creativity.