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By

Dawn M. Westfall

December, 2010

**PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF
THE EFFECTS OF THE HIGH-STAKES TAKS TEST ON
THE HOME LIVES OF AT-RISK FIFTH GRADE
STUDENTS**

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

In Texas, fifth grade students are required to pass both the reading and math sections of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS test, in order to be promoted to the next grade level. The purpose of this study is to describe parents' perceptions of the influence of the high-stakes TAKS test on the family lives of at-risk fifth grade students. Parents of students identified as at-risk for failure on the TAKS test by their schools were given a 12-item survey with three components: the effects of TAKS on the student and family, the effects of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school, and parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of achievement.

A series of three one-way ANOVAS was used, comparing each independent variable (family, time, and fairness) to a series of dependent variables (gender, race, and attendance at a Title I school) to look for variability between these groups in their attitudes towards the independent variables. The results indicated that many parents perceive that the TAKS affects their families by causing their child and other family members to express concerns about passing the test and by causing the parent to worry about how their child is reacting to the pressures of the test. Parents perceived that the TAKS test affects how much time students spend playing with friends as well as watching television or movies. Many parents did not agree that TAKS is a fair measure of student achievement for their child or other children. The ANOVAs indicated statistically significant findings among race groups and their scores on "family" and "fairness." Asian/Pacific Islander parents indicated significantly less effect of TAKS on

their student and family than did white parents. Asian/Pacific Islander parents also perceived TAKS as fairer measure of student achievement than did white parents. As well, Hispanic parents also perceived TAKS as a fairer measure of student achievement than did both white and Black/African American parents.

Findings indicate that perhaps schools and teachers would be surprised to discover the amount of stress TAKS is causing families and students, particularly those at risk for failure as well as those groups that might not have previously been thought to “care” about school. The level of negativity caused by TAKS appears to be an undesirable unintended consequence of the assessment system, so educators may want to reconsider their policies and practices for TAKS-related parent engagement, homework, and test preparation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Go on to sleep now, fifth grader of mine,

The test is tomorrow but you'll do just fine.

It's reading and math, forget all the rest,

You don't need to know what is not on the test.

Adapted from Forster & Chapin, 2008

Introduction

Since school began, many students have had the assistance and support of parents and other family members in the preparation for school tests. Many of my colleagues share memories of sitting at the kitchen table practicing spelling words while being quizzed by a parent or reciting multiplication tables and state capitals while riding in the car. Refrigerators boasted the successful results of these tutoring sessions with papers displaying big gold stars and “100% Excellent!” written in bold red marker across the top.

But testing in schools, particularly in elementary schools, has changed dramatically over the last twenty years in response to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Most states and school districts have implemented high-stakes testing as a part of their accountability system in an effort to ensure student achievement. Scores on core curricular area tests such as reading and math are reported to parents, school boards, and state education agencies. Individual school and district passing rates are often published in newspapers and are even thought to have an effect on local property values (Goldberg, 2004). Even students as young as kindergarten are assessed on early literacy skills such

as rhyming and letter names and classified as meeting – or not meeting – set standards. Beginning in third grade, standardized tests are administered that may determine a child's placement in the next grade and continue through high school where not passing often may mean no diploma.

In the current educational climate, the term “high-stakes test” is used quite frequently. Ysseldyke et al. (2004) and Thomas (2005) maintain that state assessment systems are considered high-stakes when there are consequences for individual students such as grade retention or the withholding of a high school diploma if an assessment is not passed. Stecher and Barron (2001) describe Kentucky's state assessment system as high-stakes for schools because scores are published and schools may receive financial rewards for high scores but possible review and external intervention for low scores. Cizek (2001) differentiates high-stakes testing from other testing by the attachment of consequences such as promotion and retention, financial bonuses for educators, and the futures of low-performing schools.

As discussed, the identifying factor for an assessment to be considered “high-stakes” is the attachment of consequences to the result. High-stakes tests have intended or planned consequences as the result of the test such as promotion to the next grade, financial rewards, or remediation of skills. High-stakes tests also have unintended or unanticipated results of their administration (Jackson, 1968). Unintended consequences are not necessarily “bad.” For example, an improvement in content knowledge by teachers in preparation for high-stakes testing is generally considered a good thing. Thomas (2005) uses the term “collateral damage” to describe the unwelcome or unwanted results of high-stakes tests, particularly the unintended consequences from the

ways tests have been used in recent years. Unintended consequences, either “good” or “bad,” are outcomes or effects of the testing that were not originally anticipated by the developers of the assessment system. Jones, Jones, & Hargrove (2003) argue that it is difficult to separate intended from unintended consequences in testing as testing programs are embedded in complex political agendas which affect stake holders in a myriad of different ways. Stecher and Barron (2001) state, “One important step that should be taken is to study the consequences of the testing system as rigorously as we study the reliability and validity of the scores” (p. 280). Madaus, Russell, and Higgins (2009) advocate an independent monitoring body so that the stakeholders of testing, including teachers, parents, and students, can be assured that the tests are technically sound, the benefits outweigh the harms, and negative consequences are minimized, as well as errors and misuses.

A myriad of books and articles have been written warning of the negative consequences of the current high-stakes testing system in place in most public schools across America. For example, Alfie Kohn (2000), an outspoken critic of standardized testing in public schools, believes the tests are ruining schools and contributing to the privatization of public schools. Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, and Ness (2008) focus on what they believe to be the inherent unfairness of accountability mandates and the damage they do to poor and minority students across the country. James Popham (2001), a recognized leader in testing, laments the damage that unsound testing programs are doing to teachers and students. He believes that the advantages and benefits of educational testing are being missed because the tests being used are of such poor quality. David Hirsch (2008) criticizes current education reform in the guise of accountability,

high-stakes testing, and privatization as part of a larger effort by government and corporations to change their role in society to control individual welfare to promote economic growth. Hursch argues that the current education reforms threaten to undermine teaching, learning and the future of public schools. Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) and Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber, and Buese (2008) specifically discuss the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing by looking at how it shapes curriculum, impacts teaching practices, and effects motivation, special populations, and the teaching profession. Most recently, Diane Ravitch (2010), an early proponent of high-stakes testing as a means for school reform, demonstrates a radical “change of heart” in her latest book as she criticizes the turn public education has taken, including the reliance on high-stakes testing for both student and teacher evaluation. The list of publications denouncing high-stakes testing is endless but the authors are consistent in their concerns regarding the current accountability systems with high-stakes test in America’s public schools.

Need for the Study

Texas is certainly no exception to the high-stakes testing phenomenon and is actually viewed as a leader in the development of accountability systems (Haney, 2000 and Hursch, 2008). According to data issued by the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2008), in the spring of 2008 when I began my investigation of the effects of TAKS, 666,353 third and fifth graders took the first administration of a high-stakes TAKS reading test to determine if they would be able to advance to the next grade level, 98,978 students, or about 15%, did not pass. A year later in 2009, the numbers were slightly

improved (TEA, 2009). 682,480 third and fifth grade students took the first administration of TAKS reading with 97,495 students, or about 14%, not meeting passing standards. According to state guidelines, these students were eligible for extra tutoring and had two more opportunities to pass the reading test before being retained in their current grade level. The consequences for these 97,495 children and their families were serious. Retention research consistently shows that students who are retained show poor academic results, low self-esteem, and are more likely to drop out of school (Westbury, 1994). After the second administration of the reading test later that spring, 54,635 students in 2008 and 56,380 students in 2009 were still unable to pass the test (TEA, 2008 & 2009). These students and their families had the option of attending summer school and taking the test again or not retaking the test and have the student be retained. According to the cumulative passing rates provided by TEA (2008, 2009) after all three testing opportunities for third and fifth grade students, 45,457 students (6.7%) in 2008 and 44,088 students (6.4%) in 2009 were unable to pass the reading test. If a student failed on the third attempt, a grade placement committee made up of the school administrator, parent, and teacher would meet to determine the child's placement for the next year. Regardless of the outcome, the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing (Jackson, 1968) will have already done its harm.

As a veteran elementary school teacher and in my positions of reading specialist and, currently, assistant principal in an elementary school, I witnessed first-hand the effects of high-stakes testing on schools, teachers, curriculum, and students. My previous school was rated "exemplary," the highest rating attainable under the Texas accountability system. It was not left to chance whether or not this rating would be

maintained each year. Several months of the school year were spent preparing students to take TAKS tests in grades three through five. Even second grade began using TAKS-like reading passages and word problems in the second semester so students were exposed to the format. Curriculum was altered or even neglected as teachers felt pressure to drill students on test taking skills and strategies. Students completed packet after packet of TAKS practice sheets, and their progress was carefully monitored so “intervention” could quickly occur if a student faltered. The days and weeks leading up to the tests were stress-filled as both staff and students felt the pressure to preserve the school’s exemplary ranking, a source of great pride for the surrounding middle-class neighborhood. Right after the winter holiday break, practice TAKS tests consisting of previously released TAKS tests from TEA were given and students were identified for tutorials and assistance from instructional specialists based on their scores. Approximately twenty-nine students in grades three through five were scheduled for daily TAKS reading practice with me, the reading specialist.

I had already been working with a few of the students recommended for TAKS intervention since the beginning of the year for either dyslexia services or for general literacy support. As a result of the daily TAKS sessions I became well acquainted with the students as well as some of their parents. It was through my conversations with the parents I began to become aware of the influence TAKS was having on the home lives of my students. The parents shared their worries and frustrations with me about TAKS and we discussed at length how to best balance test preparation and the stress surrounding it for their children who were at-risk of failure. I learned that many of the students were no longer able to participate in sports or other typical after-school activities because

homework, especially TAKS homework, took up so much of their time in the evenings. Several of my students and their parents were having difficulty eating and sleeping and the general quality of their time together had deteriorated since TAKS preparation had begun.

The need for research in this area became painfully obvious as I searched with little success for literature discussing the effects of high-stakes testing on students and families outside of the school setting. Pushor (2007) states that educators, as holders of expert knowledge of teaching and learning, often design and control the school setting, usually in isolation from parents and community members. Educators “involve” parents by allowing them to help educate their children by reinforcing learning at home or participating in controlled activities at school such as fundraising or watching programs. However, Pushor believes that parent engagement is a much more fruitful approach to bringing schools and parents together. Parent engagement allows educators and parents to enter the school community together; fitting together their knowledge to make decisions, determine agendas, as well as celebrate the intended outcomes of their efforts for students, families, communities, and schools. This enables power to be shared and the agenda being served is mutually beneficial to all. It is critical to look outside the school as well as inside since children’s academic achievement is the product of a variety of factors from all facets of their lives. I believe it is extremely important for schools and other educational institutions to begin reaching out to parents as equal partners and become aware of the effects of high-stakes testing on all aspects of students’ lives in order to make appropriate educational decisions together for every student.

Statement of the Problem

The intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes tests, such as the TAKS test, are highly reviewed in educational literature. A search on an education data base such as ERIC will reveal literally thousands of professional articles and books addressing the topic. Implementation of the federal mandate *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in 2001 (Essex, 2006) which requires states to implement accountability systems, including high-stakes testing beginning in elementary school, has further fueled debate. However, the influence of high-stakes testing on the family lives of students, particularly those at risk of failure, remains little explored in most of the literature. It is important that school personnel be aware of the effects of high-stakes testing on all aspects of students' lives in order to make sound, moral educational decisions. The purpose of my study was to investigate parents' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of their fifth grade students at risk for failure on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

Research Question

Inasmuch as the purpose of the proposed study was to describe the effects of high-stakes testing on the home-lives of fifth grade students who are at risk for failure on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the study addressed the following research question: What are the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children?

Directional Hypothesis

As noted in the Review of the Literature section of this proposal, there is a substantial body of research that supports the negative effects of high-stakes testing. Therefore, this study tested the following direction research hypothesis: the high-stakes TAKS test has a negative effect on the home-lives of at-risk fifth grade students as reported by their parents.

Background of the Study

In the spring of 2008, I was working as a reading specialist in an elementary school and also taking an experiential research class. Much of my time at work was spent preparing students for the upcoming TAKS tests. As I reflected on my class reading assignments and discussions in a research journal, I began to realize my experiences as well as those of my students and their families with high-stakes testing could best be explored through narrative research. I decided to conduct interviews with the parents of my students regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of their children. With input from colleagues at the University of Houston and work, I developed a set of questions to use as probes to facilitate the conversations. I identified parents that I'd already built substantial relationships with as we discussed their child's progress and scheduled interviews with each of them. The responses from the parents were all very similar and supported my experiences in the classroom. This narrative data would later be used to identify possible items for a survey for parents about the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of at risk students. *See Appendix A.*

In the spring of 2009, I took a survey research course. Through class readings and discussions I could easily see the connection between the information I received from parents in my interviews and the development of a larger scale survey to measure the perceptions of a large group of third and fifth grade parents. I wondered if the experiences of my interviewed parents were reflective of a larger group of parents of at-risk students as well as the experiences of third and fifth grade parents in general. Further consideration of the narrative data led to the development of six latent variables and the brainstorming of approximately 120 potential items for the survey. This list was shared with two classmates at the University of Houston familiar with the TAKS test as well as the professor of the survey research class. Based on their comments and feedback, the latent variables were narrowed to two: the effects of TAKS on how students and families spend time at home and parents' feelings about the TAKS test and its effect on their children. The items were narrowed down to eleven for the first latent variable (time) and nineteen for the second latent variable (feelings) for a total of thirty items. After the appropriate permissions were obtained, the survey was distributed to 220 parents of third and fifth graders at the elementary school where I worked as the reading specialist. *See Appendix B.*

Overview of the Study

In the spring of 2010, I used information obtained from pilot studies conducted through coursework in narrative and survey research. I surveyed parents of at-risk students in fifth grade across a suburban school district in southwest Houston regarding their perceptions of the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on their children's home

lives. With the assistance of campus based reading specialists, a twelve question survey was distributed to 338 families of fifth graders identified by their school as in danger of failing the TAKS reading and math tests in 2010. The survey was administered directly following the first TAKS administration on April 7 and 8, 2010 as families had just had the experienced preparing for the TAKS test and any related effects would more likely be accurately reported on the survey.

Parents of fifth graders were chosen because this is the first grade level in which students must pass the reading and math TAKS tests to be promoted to the next grade, a milestone for most students as they will be entering middle school. This group had previously experienced high-stakes testing because, in previous years, third graders were also required to pass the reading section of the TAKS test to be promoted to fourth grade. In 2009, the 76th Texas Legislature removed that requirement scheduled to take effect in the spring of 2010. Parents qualified for participation in the survey if their child had been identified by the school as at-risk for failure on either or both the math or reading TAKS test due to previous TAKS failure, poor grades, low scores on released or practice TAKS tests, and/or attendance at TAKS tutorials.

The assistance of the 44 campus based elementary reading specialists was crucial to the distribution and collection of the surveys as they were familiar with students who are at-risk of TAKS failure. As a previous elementary reading specialist in the district, I hoped my colleagues would be more willing to participate actively in the research, thus ensuring an adequate number of usable surveys collected in a timely manner. I met with the group in person at a monthly district meeting to explain the research, the procedures, guidelines for parent participation, and their responsibilities, as well as answer any

questions or concerns that arose. The reading specialists were familiar with collecting various pieces of information so the task was a comfortable one for them. Suggestions were offered for motivating students to return the survey from their parents, but I left the specific incentives up to the individual schools so it was consistent with individual school practices. Reading specialists returning surveys received their choice of a \$5 Barnes and Noble or Starbucks gift card.

After the surveys were collected, a series of three analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for data analysis as there were three dependent variables; gender of the respondent's child, race, and whether or not the campus received federal Title I funds, for each of the three factors. Results and conclusions were given in a final dissertation and defense.

Definition of Terms

At-risk: Students are classified as "at-risk" by the state of Texas if they are currently at-risk of dropping out of school as defined by at least one of thirteen criteria set forth by the state (TEA, 2003). Some of the criteria are more likely to apply to older students but many would identify an elementary student as at-risk for eventually dropping out of school as well. The criteria include not performing satisfactorily on a readiness test in grades kindergarten through three, retention in a grade, failing a mandated state assessment, limited English proficiency, homelessness, in the care of Child Protective Services, or in foster care. In an elementary school, teachers and administrators often refer to students as at-risk if they have not performed well on practice TAKS tests or are otherwise in danger of possibly failing a TAKS test.

Family lives: The United States Census Bureau defines a family as “a group of two people or more... related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, p.4). The Ohio State University Department of Family and Consumer Services (Williams, nd) discusses quality family time as generally meaning “concentrated, uninterrupted time to spend with children, spouses, or friends” (p.1). For most students, their family time is generally time spent with friends and loved ones, usually outside of the regular school day. This may also include time spent engaging in activities such as sports, church choirs, scouting, or just playing by themselves in the yard.

High-stakes testing: Tests that have consequences for any stakeholder in the test results including, but not limited to, students, their families, schools, teachers, communities, and school districts.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB): The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, is the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. ESEA is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (Essex, 2006).

Student Success Initiative (SSI): SSI was enacted by the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999 and modified by the 81st Texas Legislature in 2009 and applies advancement requirements to the TAKS reading and mathematics tests at grades 5 and 8. A student may advance to the next grade level only by passing these tests or by unanimous decision of his or her grade placement committee that the student is likely to perform at grade

level after additional instruction. The purpose of the SSI is to ensure that every student receives the instruction and support needed to be successful in reading and mathematics (TEA, 2009).

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): TAKS measures a student's mastery of the state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). TAKS is currently administered for grades 3–9 reading, grades 3–10 and exit level mathematics, grades 4 and 7 writing, grade 10 and exit level English language arts (ELA), grades 5, 8, 10, and exit level science, and grades 8, 10, and exit level social studies. Based on the results of the TAKS test, students can receive the additional help they need to strengthen their knowledge and skills in core academic areas, and districts and campuses can evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional programs (TEA, 2008).

Texas Education Agency (TEA): The mission of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students. It is comprised of the commissioner of education and agency staff. The TEA and the State Board of Education guide and monitor activities and programs related to public education in Texas including text book adoption, the statewide curriculum, the statewide assessment program, data collection, school accountability ratings, compliance with federal guidelines, and distribution of state and federal funds (TEA, 2008).

Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged: The purpose of this section of NCLB is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on state academic achievement standards and assessments. This purpose is fulfilled by meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in the country's highest-poverty

schools by providing a variety of resources including extra funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe parents' perceptions of the influence of high-stakes testing on the family lives of at-risk fifth grade students. In order to do this effectively, it is important to understand the growth of high-stakes testing in the United States to put the current use of high-stakes tests in Texas into perspective. The unintended consequences of high-stakes testing in the school setting has been heavily documented, and it would be safe to propose that those unintended consequences extend beyond schools, and into the homes of students. The passage of the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation in 2002 moved the discussion of high-stakes testing beyond just the educational field, and the attitudes of students, teachers, parents, and the public towards this legislation and its effects are well-documented in the literature.

The review of the literature begins by putting high-stakes testing in a historical context both in the United States and in the state of Texas. Narrative stories surrounding high-stakes testing in schools are reviewed. Survey and interview research regarding the perceptions of school personnel, students, and parents towards high-stakes testing before and after the passage of NCLB is then reviewed. The chapter concludes with a summary of both the positive and negatives consequences of high-stakes testing revealed in the literature.

The Growth of High-Stakes Testing in the United States and Texas

High-stakes testing has been around since the first native people roamed the American continent. Textbooks and other historical references describe survival “tests,” often painful and dangerous, administered to boys so they may be recognized as men by the tribe. During colonial times, students who did not know their lessons were often beaten with a switch or forced to wear a dunce cap. The purpose of education during America’s early years was to learn to read the Bible and other religious writings. *Spiritual Milk for Babes* and its long-running successor, *New England Primer*, were used to teach children Biblical knowledge, intense Puritanism, original sin, awareness of early death and the importance of laying up treasure in Heaven (Meigs, 1969).

In the early years of the United States, the education of children was left to the discretion of local communities. Congress, under the Articles of Confederation, recognized the importance of establishing schools and guidelines outlining settlement of the Great Lakes region included the requirement that townships to set aside land for a school (Hayes, 2008). However, the United States Constitution, ratified in 1791, does not have any provisions regarding education. In the Tenth Amendment, national government is granted specific powers; all others are the province of the states or the people including the education of the people (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

Early Assessment

The modern public school system did not begin to emerge until the middle of the nineteenth century. Horace Mann, a Massachusetts lawyer, became the first Secretary of Education in Massachusetts (Winship, 1896). He began a public school system in Massachusetts which was used as a model for subsequent systems in other states. He

wrote in detail about the importance of a public education system for both individuals and the state as well as the importance of state financial support for public schools and teacher training. In 1845, Mann convinced the public schools in Boston to administer a written standardized test to its students instead of the traditional oral exams (Gallagher, 2003). He hoped to obtain objective information about the quality of teaching and learning in the public schools and compare schools and teachers across the city. The results indicated that students ranged widely in their skills as did the skills of their teachers. Mann proposed additional testing in the hope that a fail-proof method of determining student achievement would be developed. His methods were deemed so successful that they were adopted in cities across the country. In 1865 the New York Regents Exams were developed around Mann's assessment concepts. Noted curriculum historian Ralph Tyler (in Gallagher, 2003) commented about this early development in education:

At a time when the need for universal education was developed, the testing movement furnished both an ideological and an instrumental basis for the practice of schools and colleges in sorting students rather than educating them. It promoted the simplistic notion that important outcomes of schooling could be adequately appraised by achievement tests. (p.85)

Congress, in the Morrill Act of 1862, provided grants of land to each state to be used for colleges (Yell and Drasgow, 2005). Until this time most universities in the United States were private and/or religiously affiliated, located on the East coast, and only accessible by the wealthy. The Morrill Act made college accessible to more Americans, particularly in the Western states and the curriculums were more reflective of

the needs of the country at that time. For example, agriculture and mechanical studies were common courses of study at the newly created colleges. Admittance to college in the nineteenth century, not unlike today, was determined by scores on entrance exams (Applebee, 1974). The topics for the examinations were given a year in advance and dictated the curriculum of the preparatory schools. As the requirements for the exams changed, so did the curriculum of the preparatory schools. However, each college typically had its own entrance exam which made preparation very difficult for both teachers and students. In 1879, the first attempts to set requirements at the regional level were made. In 1892, the Committee of Ten was formed and eventually issued a report outlining a standard curriculum for high school. In 1894, the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English met for the first time and was joined in later years by the College Entrance Examination Board thus setting the guidelines for standardized testing for college entrance.

Intelligence Tests

In the second half of the nineteenth century, European scientists were studying individual mental differences and attempting to scientifically measure human behavior, including learning (Gallagher, 2003). American scientists took interest as an increase in America's population through immigration provided an impetus to sort students efficiently in the public schools. After the Committee of Ten, students began to take a wider variety of coursework making the task of student assessment even more complex which resulted in the growth of achievement tests as a method to sort students scientifically and efficiently.

At the beginning of the twentieth century urban schools throughout the country began using tests developed by E.L. Thorndike, a Columbia university professor. Thorndike believed that educational agencies were a great system for systematically identifying and classifying those who are good, intelligent, and efficient (Gallagher, 2003). At the same time, Alfred Binet, a French physiologist, was developing individually administered tests of intelligence including an intelligence scale or intelligence quotient (IQ) that identified the mental age of children in the hopes of eliminating retardation from school systems (Gallagher, 2003). In 1911, H.H. Goddard brought Binet's work to the United States, and in 1926, Lewis Terman of Stanford University revised the IQ test and renamed it the Stanford-Binet Test of Intelligence. Although initially intended to identify the "feeble-minded," the IQ test began to be used to determine educational placement as well as career tracking. Educators embraced the scientific evidence that poor performance in school must reflect an inherent inability to learn. Thus began the era of mass testing (Gallagher, 2003).

Achievement Tests

As World War I loomed, the United States army required a method to efficiently and effectively identify potential officers and place recruits in their most productive positions. Arthur Otis and Robert Yerkes developed the Army Alpha Test, a pencil-paper, multiple choice test that could easily be administered and scored for a large group of people. During World War I nearly two million men were tested and assigned or discharged using the Army Alpha Test which became the prototype for all subsequent standardized tests (Gallagher, 2003).

With ever-increasing enrollments, massive building programs, and the need for industrial efficiency, schools began to feel increasing pressure to use test results to describe student performance. The success of the Army testing program encouraged educators to search for more efficient ways to predict, diagnose, and explain learning differences (Gallagher, 2003). In 1923 the Stanford Achievement Tests were published and by 1929 more than five million tests were administered annually. The results were used to sort and classify students as well as track the instructional effectiveness of schools. In 1929, the University of Iowa developed the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED). Other states also began to use these cost-effective tests and for the next 50 years they were the most frequently used achievement test in the United States (Gallagher, 2003).

Aptitude Tests

Intelligence and achievement tests enjoyed wide popularity but were limited as they could only provide information about intelligence and past learning. Specific abilities and future performance could not be identified through these tests so there was a need for test which could predict a person's ability to learn given an opportunity. It was believed if people's future performance could be effectively predicted, people could be guided toward their strengths; thus human resources could be utilized more efficiently (Gallagher, 2003). Colleges and universities had a special interest in aptitude testing as they sought the best candidates for admission. In 1923 a consortium of college officials gathered to create the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) which created a test to be used as admission criteria for member colleges. In 1925, Carl Bringham of Princeton refined the CEEB test into the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and further

revised it in 1936 into a more comprehensive exam to provide a broader picture of student aptitude.

The non-profit Educational Testing Service (ETS) was established in 1947 to oversee SAT testing. The American College Test (ACT) was created in 1959 as an alternative to the SAT. Both tests have gone through recent revisions and continue today to be the most widely accepted admission tests for college entrance in the United States.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

The twentieth century brought to America increased industrialization and capitalism, new wars, a depression, and a heightened awareness of keeping a competitive edge over other countries. Cold War tensions, especially the launch of Sputnik in 1957, caused educators to increasingly use standardized tests to identify talented students. Performance on tests was also used to determine student promotion and retention, remedial placements, and award academic honors (Gallagher, 2003). The National Defense Education Act of 1958, in response to the Russian launch of Sputnik, infused money into the public schools for math and science instruction, thus beginning an increasing trend of federal involvement in public education (Kimmelman, 2006) which continues today.

In 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) was passed by Congress by large majorities as a way to ensure children of poverty were prepared to succeed in society (Hayes, 2008, McGuinn, 2006). One of the most important sections of the Act, known as Chapter I and later Title I when reauthorized in 1994, provided significant financial support for local schools in order to improve the math and literacy skills of low-income students. Schools

received funds based on their number of students receiving free and reduced lunch or participating in government welfare programs. Schools were required to administer standardized tests and submit their results to continue to qualify for federal funds each year. Test scores were used to systematically monitor the effectiveness of educational programs and methods of instruction (Gallagher, 2003).

In 1969, the federal government expanded the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which tests samples of students from all over the country in all subject areas in order to gauge student achievement nationally (Gallagher, 2003). Later referred to as “The Nation’s Report Card” because it reflects assessment data from almost every state in the country, it is still used to compare state performance as well as national performance with other countries.

A Nation at Risk 1983

In 1981, United States Secretary of Education Terrence Bell, under President Ronald Reagan, appointed a task force to recommend ways to improve the nation’s schools (McGuinn, 2006). *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) was released in 1983 decrying the dire state of America’s schools and emphasizing how far behind American students were from their foreign counterparts. The report captured the media and public’s attention and brought education to the national forefront as it had never been before. Recommendations were made to schools to adopt more rigorous, specific standards and monitor student progress towards those standards through a testing program. Test scores were to be made public in order to hold schools accountable for student achievement (Hayes, 2008). Many states, including Texas, began to develop curriculum standards, testing programs, and

procedures to hold schools accountable for student learning and by 1989, 47 states had responded to at least some of the report's recommendations (Gallagher, 2003).

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush gathered all the 50 state governors at the first National Education Summit (Yell and Drasgow, 2005). The governors reached a consensus on six educational goals to be achieved by the year 2000. Although Bush was not re-elected, President Clinton continued many of these goals during his administration. The Improving American Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), which also reauthorized and revised ESEA, continued the federal government's role in providing aid to schools serving economically disadvantaged students. IASA also supported the states' implementation of local and state standards-based reform including developing academic standards, aligning assessments, and accountability guidelines (Yell and Drasgow, 2005, McGuinn, 2006). Specifically, under IASA, assessments were required to be aligned with content standards and must be administered "sometime" between third and fifth grades, sixth and ninth grades, and tenth and twelfth grades (McGuinn, 2006). Student performance on the assessments were required to be disaggregated at the school, local, and state levels by gender, race, limited-English proficiency status, migrant status, disabilities, and economic status. IASA guidelines were a clear foreshadowing of future No Child Left Behind policies.

No Child Left Behind 2002

On January 8, 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law by President George Bush with the support of over 90% of the members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives (McGuinn, 2006, Perlstein, 2007). Considered the

most comprehensive federal education law ever written (Kimmelman, 2006), it basically requires individual states to set standards for high school graduation, attendance, safety, teacher competence, and student progress with the ultimate goal of all students passing state tests by the year 2014. The purpose of the law is to ensure every single student in the United States achieves specific learning goals while being educated in a safe environment by a highly-qualified teacher. NCLB also requires schools to close existing achievement gaps between white, economically advantaged students and economically disadvantaged, minority, limited-English proficiency students as well as students with disabilities (Yell and Drasgow, 2005). The four principles at the foundation of NCLB are making schools, districts, and states accountable for student achievement, ensuring research-based instruction is used in all public schools, increasing local flexibility in the use of federal education money, and giving parents choice when their public school is identified as low performing. According to President George W. Bush:

The No Child Left Behind Act sets a clear objective for American education.

Every child in every school must be performing at grade level in the basic subjects that are the key to all learning, reading and math. This ambitious goal is the fundamental duty of every school, and it must, it will be fulfilled. (June 10, 2003)

One the aspects of NCLB that has caused considerable controversy is the requirement that all students be tested in reading and math in grades three through eight and once again in high school. The assessments are required to provide data that is disaggregated by subgroups such as race and economic status so educators may make specific decisions to ensure all students meet the proficiency standards. Improvement of

a school's passing rate from year to year, referred to as adequate yearly progress (AYP), is measured by comparing the scores of students by subgroup in a grade level with the scores from the students in subgroups in that grade level the previous year. If a school has one or more subgroups of students not meeting the proficiency standards, it is identified as "in need of improvement" (Kimmelman, 2006). Local report cards are also required to be prepared by school district. These report cards include information on how students performed on state tests at both the district and school levels including the performance of sub-groups. The report cards must be easy to understand and made available to parents and other community members (Essex, 2006).

Although NCLB passed into law with overwhelmingly bi-partisan support, it has been fraught with controversy. It has brought sweeping changes to how students are taught and tested and their progress monitored across the United States. A myriad of books, articles, research, and discussions both supporting and deploring the results of NCLB have been published and it remains on the forefront of American politics at all levels. Because there is a provision in NCLB that states there is no deadline for reauthorization, the current law will stay in effect until the federal government proposes changes which must be approved by Congress and the President. In the meantime, the debates continue over most of the law's initiatives including assessment, AYP, curriculum, funding, merit pay, teacher effectiveness, choice options, flexibility, school sanctions, and closing the achievement gap. Regardless, the primary responsibility for implementing the law falls to the states, Texas included.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Since the research question is concerned with the effects of TAKS on the family lives of students, it is necessary to understand TAKS and high-stakes testing in the context of Texas public schools. The Texas assessment program is designed to accurately measure student progress toward achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies and science and to use the performance results as a gauge for school accountability (TEA, 2005). There are two main assessments: the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment (TELPAS). The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was mandated by the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999 to begin administration in the 2002 – 2003 school year (TEA, 2006). The TAKS measures the state curriculum in reading at grades three through nine, writing at grades four and seven, English Language Arts at grades ten and eleven, mathematics at grades three through eleven, science at grades five, ten, and eleven, and social studies at grades eight, ten, and eleven. Spanish TAKS is administered in grades three through six for students in Spanish bilingual education. TELPAS has two components that are designed to annually measure the progress that limited English proficient (LEP) students make in acquiring the English language.

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) was also adopted by the Texas Legislature at the same time as the TAKS test (TEA, 2005). SSI mandates that students must pass the Grade 3 TAKS reading assessment, the Grade 5 reading and math assessments, and the Grade 8 reading and math assessments in order to be promoted to the next grade level. In 2004 the commissioner of education clarified SSI guidelines which enabled campuses

and districts to consider past performance on state mandated assessments, extenuating circumstances, and a student's ability to participate in grade level instruction in making decisions for grade placement. In 2009, the 76th Texas Legislature removed the requirement for third graders to pass the reading TAKS in order to be promoted and implemented End of Course Exams in high school instead of TAKS.

In 2001, the Texas State Board of Education, in compliance with the Texas Education Code, developed guidelines for the participation of LEP students in the assessment program, including requirements for the development and administration of tests, testing accommodations and exemptions, test security and confidentiality, and the reporting of test results (TEA, 2005).

TAKS is the current primary assessment in the Texas assessment system; however, it evolved from over twenty years of periodic changes in legislation and policy (TEA, 2005; Haney, 2000). The first Texas state mandated test, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) was established in an attempt at equity in educational opportunities for minorities and was used from 1980 – 1985. TABS was a survey-type assessment with no consequences for students. In 1984, the Texas Legislature passed broad changes in Texas education at the recommendation of Ross Perot's Select Committee on Education. This landmark reform law included establishment of a statewide curriculum, the "no pass, no play" rule, teacher proficiency tests, and changes in the state-wide assessment system to mandate basic skills testing in odd-numbered grades. The Texas Educational Assessment of Minimal Skills (TEAMS) was implemented in 1985 as a result of the new education laws and included an "exit-level" test in 11th grade that must be passed for high school graduation. In 1990 the Texas legislature shifted the focus from basic skills to

academic skills with the introduction of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Several changes in content and grades tested were made during its tenure from 1990 – 2001 but students were still required to pass exit level tests in Grade 10 to earn a high school diploma.

During the 2002- 2003 school year, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced TAAS. The TAKS was designed to be more comprehensive and better assess the state mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). According to TEA, “TAKS was developed to better reflect good instructional practice and accurately measure student learning” (TEA, 2005, p. 7). TAKS, with some periodic updates, is still the test used for accountability purposes in Texas today.

At the end of January, 2010, TEA (2010) announced plans for the next generation of accountability tests for the state of Texas mandated by the state legislature. They are to be called STAAR or the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness and will be used for end-of-course tests in high school as well as grade three through eight assessments. The new tests will be used beginning in 2011-2012 and are said to be significantly more rigorous than previous tests as they will measure both a student’s achievement and academic growth. A new accountability system will also debut in 2013, a year after the new tests are introduced.

Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM) has been the primary provider of support services for the statewide assessment program since 1981. PEM and its subcontractors are responsible for distribution, security, scoring, and the reporting of data for all Texas state-mandated assessments. According to PEM, they are the largest comprehensive provider of educational assessment products, services and solutions,

helping support standards-based reform while using testing and assessment to promote learning and academic achievement. PEM operates as a business of Pearson Education, the world's largest education company, which in turn is part of Pearson (NYSE: PSO), an international media company.

Narrative Stories Surrounding High-Stakes Testing

Although high-stakes testing, particularly in the context of NCLB, has produced a large amount of literature, it is interesting to note there are relatively few personal narratives describing the effects of testing on those most affected, especially families. The narratives that are available usually focus on the experiences of teachers in the classroom.

Anne Grall Reichel (2009) describes the stories of experienced teachers in Northern Illinois as they grapple with the mandates of NCLB. Reichel began her work of bringing forward the voices of elementary teachers as part of her dissertation work. She made several attempts to get her work published after graduation in order to “bring the teacher’s voice to the discussion to better inform our future actions” (p. 133). After a “sea of rejection letters,” she sent her work to legislatures with similar limited success. A year after abandoning her quest to get teachers heard, Dr. Todd Price asked her to share her stories in a chapter of his book about the realities of NCLB.

Reichel’s conversations with teachers revealed they feel betrayed on several accounts by NCLB. She organizes the stories around these betrayals: a lost focus on the whole child, the silencing of teacher voices, and the frenetic pace of school, all leading to the need to trust their intuition in secret in order to survive and meet the needs of their

students. The teachers Reichel interviewed felt their students were being reduced to numbers and the tests were not capturing the individual strengths of the students, particularly those students who struggled with academic tasks. They lamented the loss of differentiated instruction due to test preparation and the idea that some teachers viewed less able students as liabilities to class test score averages rather than as challenges. All the teachers referred to feelings of frustration over the loss of engaging instruction that gave students the opportunity to think in creative ways in spite of their academic abilities.

When the subject of voice was approached with the teachers, Reichel noted that they all felt that their voices as knowledgeable colleagues had been diminished or even ignored and they were just expected to follow directives in order to achieve excellent test results. They did not believe their opinions were valued by administrators and they had become angry, bitter, frustrated, and had begun to retreat from professional discourse for self-preservation. The teachers did not feel they were contributors to a system which once valued their input. They also were concerned by the frenetic pace as more and more demands ate up their time. They felt they were overrun with assessments, and the pressure to cover all the objectives without the ability to slow down to ensure all students really understood the content in a meaningful way was extremely stressful for both teachers and students. They agreed it would be more beneficial to students if less was covered more thoroughly rather than covering a lot of information quickly and believed the quality of their teaching had been sacrificed to cover more material.

The teachers in the study revealed to Reichel that they often listened to their intuition to do what was right for children. However they used words like “cheating,” “guilty,” and “sneaking,” to describe their actions. Reichel concludes that schools have

become dark, dreary places where the focus rests on standardization and testing. The pressure for students to perform well on state mandated tests have forced teachers to adopt the test-taking curriculum and pay little attention to creativity, individual student needs, best practice, and the whole child. She encourages all her readers to reflect on the stories of these veteran teachers in order to consider the impact NCLB is having on students, teachers, and schools.

Lisa Ann McClard Bertrand, in *The Impact of the Texas Accountability System on Classroom Practices* (2006), shares the narratives of seven elementary teachers in grades three, four, and five in a successful east Texas elementary school in order to understand the impact of the Texas accountability system on classroom practices from the perspectives of teachers. As there is no mention in the text of the Student Success Initiative (SSI) which includes retention of students in grades three and five after failure of TAKS and there are no references published after 2002, it is assumed that the research occurred before TAKS became a high-stakes test with grade retention consequences for students. Bertrand organizes her text similarly to a research report or dissertation. She reviews the issue of accountability as well as the published literature surrounding it. She also describes her methodology, including participants and the data collection and analysis process. A large portion of the text is devoted to grade level narratives constructed around the experiences of the teachers in those grade levels. The teachers share their routines, teaching practices, materials used, planning strategies, assessment, motivational strategies, professional development, parent interaction, and their general beliefs about teaching and children. Bertrand identifies four themes related to the impact of the Texas accountability system that emerge from the narratives: a commitment to

high goals, a clear relationship between learning goals and assessment, pressure to ensure students achievement coupled with the sense of responsibility to meet the needs of every child, and continuous professional development. Bertrand also identifies six themes related to classroom practices that teachers use in successful elementary schools for student success on state-mandated tests: collaborative teams, continuous learning, data/results oriented, resources to support teaching and learning, learner-centered instruction, and shared vision and beliefs. Bertram also noted that, although not all of the teachers were positive towards the state accountability system, they were all embedded in the idea of responsibility – responsibility to their students to make a difference in their lives. In her concluding remarks, Bertram noted that in a time where the media is quick to point out what is wrong with public education, she felt obligated to show a group of successful educators who confronted the challenge of state mandated assessments in a positive way, with strong instructional practices and beliefs as they strived to make a difference in the lives of their students.

In *Tested: One American School Struggles to Make the Grade* (2007), Linda Perlstein chronicles the year in the life of one elementary school as its staff and students struggle to meet the demands of NCLB. Perlstein realized, through her work as an education reporter for *The Washington Post*, that the problems of education are exceedingly complex (Schwab, 1971) and cannot be described merely through test scores. Perlstein was granted complete access to Tyler Heights Elementary School, an impoverished elementary school in an affluent school district in Annapolis, Maryland. During the 2005 – 2006 school year, she immersed herself in the daily activities of the school: sitting in on classes, attending meetings and events, interviewing staff members,

students, and parents, and even sitting in the cafeteria and teachers' lounge talking with children and staff about the happenings at Tyler Heights Elementary.

Perlstein interviewed many students that represent the broad range of learners at Tyler Heights Elementary, including students from special education, second language learners, struggling students, socio-economically disadvantaged students, and "average" students. Their comments are heavily sprinkled throughout the volume, and although sometimes amusing, provide a clear picture of their confusions, frustrations, and feelings about the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and their days at school spent heavily preparing for the MSA. A third grader named Jamila, known by her teacher and classmates as a talker, is seen often. Jamila begins third grade thinking she lives in the state of Annapolis and she often eyes the science bins stacked in the back of the room with wonder but there is little time for hands-on science in a schedule filled with test practice. Although Jamila receives regular and explicit instruction on how to answer state assessment questions, she has difficulty with practice MSAs and ultimately fails the real test. Interestingly enough, Jamila thinks the test was easy and believes she did very well. It is unclear if she ever finds out her score as most students are passed to the next grade regardless of the assessment results. Jamila's mother works for a woman whose son goes to an affluent school in the district and she often wonders why Jamila does not have the same kind of fun activities and projects as that boy. Mateo entered the United States just a few months before starting school for the first time as a Tyler Heights Elementary third grader. Although he speaks little English, his time in ESL is spent learning to answer questions for the MSA. His teacher tells him to work harder so he can go to college, but

Mateo thinks “What’s the use of college when I don’t have my papers?” (Perlstein, 2007, p. 167)

Alongside their students, the daily lives of Tyler Height Elementary teachers are also shared. Perlstein shares, at the beginning of the book, that although the student and parent names are pseudonyms, the teachers chose to keep their real names because “they felt they had nothing to be ashamed of” (Perlstein, 2007, p. 38). She introduces the reader to many staff members including the principal, the ESL teacher, and the reading specialist. She devotes a whole chapter to describing a typical day for the school counselor, Jennifer Johnson, to enable the reader to understand the growing responsibility of schools to respond to the personal needs of students whose circumstances are often quite desperate, frustrating, shocking, and sad. Alia Johnson, the lead intermediate teacher, is often chronicled. As Alia struggles to teach the lowest group of third graders she has experienced in her five year teaching career, she also deals with the worries of a fiancé stationed in Iraq and an ailing mother. She knows her own difficulties are unimportant in the quest for high test scores.

The milieu of Tyler Heights Elementary and its surrounding neighborhood play a key role in Perlstein’s narrative. She describes the school as physically unremarkable, similar to many elementary schools across the country built in the early 1960s. The neighborhood surrounding it has large, expensive houses but the children living there usually attend private schools. Not far away are the modest to run-down row houses and two housing projects where most of the school’s students live. Perlstein discusses all aspects of the culture of Tyler Heights Elementary including the Code of Conduct, discipline, federal funding, parent involvement, conferences, reward systems, student

demographics, and even how students walk through the hallways (on the silver line). Tyler Heights is described as a warm place and the staff “in a litigious world, is brave enough to be generous with hugs” (Perlstein, 2007, p. 61). The emphasis on test scores is apparent as they are posted throughout the building, students are taught to recite them, and the school year begins with a pep rally emphasizing their improvement.

Perlstein makes it very clear throughout her book that the subject matter most taught at Tyler Heights is the curriculum that is going to be on the state test in the spring. Very little time is spent on science or social studies and often they are covered through reading passages on science or social studies topics. The district spent a lot of money on Open Court Reading and Saxon math and they compromise most of the district reading and math curriculum. The principal fully supported both programs, and their emphasis at Tyler Heights is evident through the adherence to the scripted lessons of both programs. Both are designed to be taught to a whole group regardless of the groups needs. Students who fall behind are often left behind (pun intended) because there is not time for remediation if the sequence of lessons is upheld. There was a visible gap between what the Open Court and Saxon Math curriculums included and the skills assessed on the MSA. Perlstein describes a frustrating meeting of third grade teachers in December as they try to figure out a plan to teach the MSA objectives before the March test. The principal comes in and looks at the check-list being used and comments “I love this process. At the end of the day you can say, this is where we’re going and this is where we need to go.... the language of the objective should also be the language of our questioning” (Perlstein, 2007, p. 96). After she left, the teachers fumed that students do not need to understand the language of teacher objectives but rather the what, why, and

who. In the end, the teachers often dealt with this disparity by asking for permission of the principal (which was granted) to spend time on test taking skills rather than the district curriculum.

School Personnel Attitudes Toward High-Stakes Testing (Surveys)

A variety of entities including educational researchers, government entities, private foundations, and doctoral students have surveyed the stakeholders in high-stakes testing. The results of the surveys are not always consistent as administrators, teachers, counselors, students, and parents share their perceptions of high-stakes testing systems both before and after the passage of NCLB in 2002.

Before NCLB

Even before the passage of NCLB in 2002, researchers were examining the perceptions of teachers towards high-stakes testing. Smith (1991) used data from a large qualitative study of the role of external testing in schools, which she co-authored, to narrow the focus of her subsequent writing of the effects of external tests on teachers. In the initial study, data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and during conversations in meetings and in the lounge. She identified six categories in which to organize the effects of external testing on teachers: the publication of test scores makes teachers feel shame and embarrassment as well as the determination to do whatever is necessary to avoid these feelings, beliefs about validity of the test, beliefs about the emotional impact of testing on students, the amount of time spent preparing students for the tests, the narrowing of the curriculum in order to focus on tested material, and the effect of multiple-choice testing on creativity in teaching. Smith concluded her

discussion by asserting that if external tests which focus on isolated skills rather than problem solving, exploration, discovery, and integration methods dominate the curriculum, teachers would lose the ability to be reflective practitioners or to be empowered to use creative methods to meet the needs of their students.

Perreault (2000) came to similar conclusions in his study of eight focus groups of teachers, divided between those who were successful on high-stakes testing measures and those who were not. Teachers felt significant pressure from state testing programs, believed the testing programs limited the curriculum, and that administrators were part of the overall controlling mechanism of the tests rather than instructional leaders. Perrault concluded that school reform was being dominated by standardization of curriculum and instruction and holding teachers accountable for student learning. Under these conditions teachers believe their professionalism, autonomy, and the options for students have been negatively impacted.

Stecher and Barron (2001) surveyed teachers in Kentucky, a state which uses milepost testing, a form of high-stakes testing where students are only assessed at certain grade levels on certain subjects. Their purpose was to determine if there were instructional differences in content between tested and non-tested grades. The teachers reported participating in professional development, emphasizing content, and planning specific instruction to improve student learning in tested areas. This led to large swings of exposure to certain subjects for students from year to year, depending upon which subjects were going to be tested.

National Board Certified teachers in Ohio were the subjects of a survey conducted by Rapp (2002). She surveyed their attitudes towards state education policies including

high-stakes testing, because she wanted to gauge the opinions of a group of educators whom politicians have often referred to as exemplary teachers and their opinions may carry more weight. In regards to high-stakes testing, 96% of the respondents believed that standardized tests are not the best measurement of student abilities and 91% believed teacher-made assessments were better. 94% believed students of color are experiencing less academic success because of standardized tests. The National Board Certified teachers surveyed were also highly critical of policies that penalized low test scores and financially rewarded high test scores.

Kaplan and Owings (2001) surveyed about 350 teachers from Virginia's public schools in order to determine their perceptions of the influences high-stakes testing on teaching and learning in order to provide information to principals so they may better support their teachers. Their findings were less clear than the previous studies. The teachers in the survey showed no clear consensus on the issue of whether or not the state testing program was taking schools in the "right" direction although most of them value high standards and accountability. Teachers indicated that when instructional best practices, on-going assessment, and struggling students have extra learning opportunities, high-stakes testing is taking schools in the "right" direction.

Principals also reported negative impacts from high-stakes testing. In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Reed, McDonough, Ross, and Robichaux (2001) reported on a qualitative study of principals' perceptions of the impact of high-stakes testing on empowerment. They interviewed 26 principals of Annenberg schools in southern Florida. The principals believed they have control over how their school was run, but the state had control over

the content in the school. They were concerned with the morale in their schools as influenced by high-stakes testing and the fear of the teachers that their students would not be successful. The principals worried teachers would “burn out,” and they would have difficulty replacing them. The study suggested principals in lower-performing schools focused their energies on improving test scores while principals in higher-performing schools were able to focus efforts on enrichment and teaching the “whole child.”

Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001), in the era of TAAS in Texas, surveyed members of the Texas State Reading Association in order to discover some of the ways in which the pressure of high-stakes testing may adversely affect excellence in teaching. The survey consisted of 113 items on a five-point scale including demographic information, general attitudes, perceived attitudes of others, test preparation and administration, uses of scores, effects of the TAAS on students, and overall impressions of TAAS testing. After data analysis, the researchers concluded that TAAS, indeed, adversely affected teaching and learning. Texas schools were devoting a large amount of time and resources preparing students specifically for the TAAS test, emphasis on TAAS was hurting more than helping teaching and learning, emphasis on TAAS was particularly harmful to at-risk students, and emphasis on TAAS contributed to high grade retention and drop-out rates. The respondents also reported that TAAS did not measure what it was purported to measure and was unfair to minority students. The respondents were also concerned that since many state policy makers regarded TAAS as successful, it would be expanded. In their discussion, the researchers continued with this idea by considering the impact of Texas on textbooks, curriculum, and assessment across the country. If Texas uses TAAS to drive instruction, instructional materials will be limited

and conform to testing formats and constructs thus becoming less responsive and adaptive to student needs. The researchers suggested several steps to stem the tide of high-stakes testing including developing a critical analysis of high-stakes testing by surveying the stakeholders including parents, teachers, and students.

Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) interviewed a limited sample of both teachers and parents in two states, one northern and one southern, about their perceptions regarding high-stakes testing. Both groups were interviewed about the same basic concepts: how participants learned about policies, standards, and related tests, and test preparation, as well as the value of the tests. Parents were also asked their perceptions about their children's schools. After the data was collected and analyzed, the researchers organized the teacher data along eight categories that emerged as commonalities: how teachers learned of the standards and tests, teacher perceptions of the rationale for the standards and tests, preparation for the tests, pressure exerted on teachers for students to perform well, instruction and curriculum changes due to test performance, teachers' accounts of children's responses to the tests, value of the tests, and effects of the tests. Parent data was organized around five categories: how parents learned about the standards and tests, parental perceptions of the rationale for the tests, parental pressure to ensure their children perform well, parental perception of children's responses to tests, and parental perception of the value and effect of the tests. The teachers in the study provided extensive descriptions about how they prepared students for the tests by directly teaching test content, using tests formats, teaching test taking skills, making test-taking activities a daily part of the schedule, discontinuing a variety of activities because of testing. Most of the teachers felt increasing pressure to ensure their students did well on

the tests and none of them believed that test preparation and taking the tests had any positive effect on students. Teachers reported that many children felt stress due to the tests and were disappointed that test scores were not an accurate picture of students' knowledge and skills. Teachers also reported that besides stress and anxiety, the tests also negatively affected teaching, the teaching profession, student learning, student achievement, and student self-esteem. They believed too much time was spent preparing for tests, their teaching had become worse instead of better, and were concerned that testing would drive good teachers away from the education field.

The parents in the study were familiar with their states tests and the rationale behind the tests: test scores were needed to prove that schools were doing a good job. The parents did not feel any pressure to ensure their children did well other than to provide a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast on testing day although some parents in the northern state wanted their high school children to do well because they would receive a \$2500 scholarship from the state. Although parents in both states helped their children with schoolwork, the parents in the southern state did little to specifically prepare their children for the test while the northern state parents were split, some helped specifically with test preparation while others did not like "the stress put on our kids" and did little. In both states, parents discussed the high levels of stress and anxiety the tests caused their children. Parents reported that even though their children were generally good students, the children worried excessively about failing and were often devastated with test results. Most of the parents criticized the tests and saw little value in them as they did not increase their child's learning. The researchers concluded that teachers and parents do not believe that state tests are good for students and learning. The researchers

suggest that teacher educators need to collaborate with classroom teachers and parents to inform policy makers about the value of good assessment, the effects of poor assessment as well as the realities of teaching and learning in our schools.

After NCLB

After the implementation of NCLB, more surveys regarding the perceptions of teachers and other school personnel began to emerge with a variety of results. Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) surveyed 12,000 public school teachers in 47 states with both low and high-stakes testing programs. About 4,200 responded to the mail survey. They reported teachers believe the pressure to raise student scores on high-stakes state-mandated testing programs can lead to instruction that contradicts their views of sound instructional practice. This included an emphasis on instructional strategies which focus on specific test formats and large amounts of classroom time devoted to test preparation, particularly in those states with high-stakes testing programs. Teachers also indicated the high-stakes testing environment contributed to low-teacher morale. The negative impact of these tests on students was also reported as many teachers believed that students can experience stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, decreased motivation, and frustration as a result of high-stakes testing.

Tracey (2005) designed and administered a survey entitled “No Child Left Behind: The Teacher’s Voice” which focused on whether teachers had observed positive changes in the instructional programs and practices at the school and classroom level as a result of NCLB policies. A wide majority of the teachers in the study believed sanctions and AYP requirements cause them to ignore important parts of the curriculum and focus

mostly on what will be tested. Teachers also agreed that NCLB policies encourage highly qualified teachers to transfer out of the most challenging schools in order to avoid being at a school identified for improvement. The findings of the study suggest that teachers do not believe NCLB accountability requirements or sanctions lead to school improvement.

In 2002, researchers at the RAND Corporation (Hamilton, et al., 2007), sponsored by the National Science Foundation, launched a longitudinal study to gather information about how school personnel at all levels were responding to the accountability systems instituted by NCLB. Data were collected using written surveys, telephone interviews, and in-person visits. In a report published in 2007, teachers in the study reported both positive and negative effects of NCLB policies on their instruction. Although there were efforts to align instruction and improve practices, teachers were also concerned about narrowing of the curriculum and instruction toward tested topics and even problem formats, focusing most on students perceived as “almost” proficient, and the reduction in learning opportunities for high-achieving students. About half the teachers found AYP and accountability guidelines to be difficult to understand.

Watanabe (2007) used two ethnographic case studies and interviews with thirteen teachers in middle school to further explore how high-stakes accountability programs play out in classrooms. She observed in English classrooms that test preparation, which teachers felt was necessary, narrowed the curriculum and forced teachers to displace other important, but untested, priorities that are supported by a well-established body of research. Participants in the research described how students receive fewer opportunities to appreciate and enjoy literature, work on communication and collaboration skills, and

“write like real writers” because of testing demands. This seemed to be even more prevalent for struggling students who are disproportionately from minority and low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The author wonders if this is the intent of the testing system, and if these are the practices that it wants to promote.

Jones and Egley (2006) compared the perceptions of 708 third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers and 325 elementary administrators towards test-based accountability systems in Florida. Almost all the teachers believed the students would learn the same amount or more in reading without the state test and 80% believed the testing program was not taking the public schools in the “right” direction. Only 6% of the teachers were able to cite positive effects of the test on teaching and learning. Teachers also believed testing did not develop appropriate practices for reading, cited negative effects on teacher and student motivation, and did not find the test helpful in assessing student strengths and weaknesses. Although many teachers and administrators thought high-stakes testing had negative impact on public schools, administrators mentioned more positive and fewer negative aspects than teachers. The findings indicated the perceptions of the teachers and administrators were, in part, based on their roles. Teachers were concerned about the effects of high-stakes testing on their teaching and student learning as opposed to a system-wide or big-picture view of the administrators.

Brown, Galassi, and Akos (2004) surveyed school counselors in North Carolina about their perceptions of the North Carolina ABC state accountability testing program. 141 counselors at their state association conference and an additional random sample of 139 school counselors were surveyed in the study. Over 80% reported they spend a considerable amount of time serving as their school’s testing coordinators. The authors

felt that serving as a testing coordinator was not compatible with the school counselor's role as testing coordinator is mostly clerical and diminished the positive impact a counseling program can have on students. Over 90% of the respondents indicated their participation in the ABC testing program had negatively influenced their ability to deliver counseling services in their schools including being less accessible to students. Many listed other negative impacts of their participation in the testing program including an increase in job stress, neglecting the needs of students, the need to rearrange schedules, inability to provide classroom guidance, inability to run groups, doing lower quality work, and lowered rapport with students. Almost 25% of the school counselors indicated there were no positive effects for students from the testing program, and an overwhelming majority believed student stress and anxiety had increased due to the testing program. However, some counselors believed the testing program had some positive effects including increased accountability, more students being encouraged to achieve, a greater consistency in teaching as teachers followed a common course of study, and a greater emphasis on the achievement of at-risk populations. Overall, the counselors in the study viewed their participation in high-stakes testing as having a more negative than positive impact on their role in the school, their functioning, and their relationships with students and teachers.

In a survey of 40 experienced third grade teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Arizona regarding school language and accountability practices, Wright and Choi (2006) reported that all the teachers supported the idea schools should be held accountable for ELL student learning. However, 78% disagreed or strongly disagreed that high-stakes tests were an appropriate measure for that accountability to occur and 90%

disagreed or strongly disagreed that high-stakes testing provided an accurate measure of ELL students' academic achievement. In summary, an overwhelming majority of the teachers in the study perceived the high-stakes testing system in use in Arizona was inappropriate for ELL learners. They believed it did not provide accurate measures of ELL achievement, was of little use in planning instruction outside of test preparation, increased pressure to teach to the test, took up too much instructional time, and paid little attention to the real instructional needs of the students.

Not all surveys and interviews of school personnel's perceptions of high-stakes testing were predominantly negative. Yeh (2005) reported that in interviews with 61 teachers and administrators in Minnesota, it was revealed that they believe their state accountability system, which includes passing a state test for graduation, was well-aligned with curricular goals. The Minnesota state assessment system focuses on critical thinking skills at the elementary level and basic skills at the 8th grade exit level. In a two to one margin, those interviewed felt the impact of the state testing program was appropriate. They reasoned that students need to know both critical thinking skills and basic skills in order to succeed outside of school. They felt the state tests were aligned with instructional priorities and well-designed to avoid construct under-representation thus avoiding a narrowing curriculum. The teachers claimed drill-based instruction did not improve test scores and engaged in very little of that type of instruction. From these results, the author suggests a properly aligned, well-designed testing program can avoid the negative consequences seen in other testing systems.

A study by Parke, Lane, and Stone (2006) examined the impact of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) and the Maryland Learning

Outcomes (MLOs) on elementary and middle school teacher, principal, and student beliefs, classroom practices, and student learning in reading and writing support the conclusions of Yeh (2005). The MSPAP and the MLOs are entirely performance based, and students develop written responses to complex tasks which often take more than one day to complete. Teachers are involved in the development and scoring of both assessments. A total of 86 principals, 505 reading and writing teachers, and 5,047 students completed the questionnaires. Principals, teachers, and students, overall, indicated they were supportive of the goals, format, and content of the assessments and believed reading and writing classroom practices were somewhat aligned to the assessments. They indicated the assessments had a positive impact on instruction and assessment, however principals had significantly more positive responses than teachers, and teachers had more positive results than students.

Jacob and Stone (2005), as part of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) studies on Chicago's policy to end social promotion, looked at the impact of high-stakes testing on the Chicago school system over a period of time using teacher surveys, principal surveys, student surveys, and personal interviews of teachers as data sources. The principal and teacher surveys from low-performing schools indicated they felt supported in their efforts to help students who had been retained as well as had adequate resources, information, and training to meet the needs of these students. They also believed the policies had a positive effect on student motivation as the threat of retention motivated students to work harder. Parents also seemed to have become more concerned about their child's progress. The lowest performing students in the survey indicated they received high levels of teacher support and were attending after-school

programs at higher rates than before social promotion reduction policies. Jacob and Stone believe these results indicate that high-stakes tests encourages teacher's to focus on the lowest-performing students, but schools need to find ways to minimize time spent on test preparation and support teachers so they have the capacity to meet the needs of their students.

As part of an effort to contribute to the discussion regarding what should be done to improve the nation's high schools, Noguera (2007) used survey and interview data obtained from 132 Boston tenth graders through a project called Pathways to Student Success. He noted that the students put forth reasonable common sense insights into why some programs are ineffective and others are worth pursuing. Among the topics addressed in the study was high-stakes testing. At the time of data collection, the tenth graders were preparing for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment of Skills. This was the first year students would be required to pass the assessment in order to graduate from high school. Students in all the schools surveyed overwhelmingly stated that they wanted the school to prepare them for life, not just a test. They did not like the idea that one test would determine whether or not they graduated and some felt they had not been adequately prepared for the test throughout their school careers. 36% of the students cited the emphasis on test preparation as the one aspect of school they did not like even though the test was not specifically mentioned in the question. However many student did acknowledge that there were benefits to the test such as increased school accountability. The author recommended that student perceptions and ideas about schools must be considered if school reform is to be successful.

Lattimore (2005) drew on the experiences of six African American students in an inner-city high school in Ohio in order to address the questions: How are students prepared for the mathematics portion of a high-stakes test and what do students suggest to improve the process? He chose inner-city African American students because they traditionally do not do well on high-stakes tests yet are the same students that proponents of high-stakes testing target with the belief that high-stakes testing will improve their achievement. The six students were interviewed six times for approximately an hour in the school setting. The researcher also used classroom observations and documents such as tests, attendance records, and scores from previous high-stakes tests. The students consistently shared, as well as was observed in the classrooms, that when instruction focused mainly on drill, practice, memorization, and rote, students became bored and felt disengaged. They viewed the test as another obstacle in a school experience full of obstacles and barriers. The students also noted that they received a negative message about math and their ability to be successful at it from their math teachers. The researcher recommends that policy makers and schools carefully consider the perceptions of students as they make decisions about high-stakes testing.

A study utilizing student drawings and writings to examine the perceptions of elementary students towards high-stakes testing was conducted by Triplett and Barksdale (2005). The day after a high-stakes test, 225 third through sixth grade students were asked to “draw a picture about your recent testing experience” and then invited to write to the prompt “tell me about your picture.” The drawings and writing together were analyzed for overarching themes and were then categorized into one of nine categories: emotions, easy, content areas, teacher role, student metaphors, fire, power/politics, adult

language, culture of testing, or not enough information. Two additional categories, accoutrements of testing and isolation were added because of their prevalence in student drawings but not supported in the writing. 32% of the students' pictures/writing focused on emotions. The most common emotions mentioned were nervousness and anger. The students had often drawn sad or angry faces and there were virtually no happy faces in the illustrations. 58% of the drawings included some sort of accoutrement of testing such as a booklet, clock, or pencil, and 56% of the drawings had an individual child in a desk with no one else around. The authors discussed the overwhelming negative themes evoked by the students in regards to high-stakes testing in the drawings and writings. They were surprised that elementary students had such negative feelings; they had supposed that most students would find the tests meaningless and perhaps strong students might even find them rewarding, but this was not the case. They recommend that educators make changes in classrooms and schools to alleviate the feelings of nervousness, anger, and isolation. They advocate changing the aspects of the testing culture which lead to these feelings and help students feel at least some relief by taking their shoes off or chewing gum as suggested in some of the drawings. At a systemic level, using a variety of assessments, both quantitative and qualitative in making retention and promotion decisions would also relieve some of the negativity surrounding the assessments. They also recommend that teachers change their roles to comforter and coach instead of drill sergeant and perhaps use the drawing activity as a way to debrief from the testing experience.

Moon, Brighton, Jarvis, and Hall (2007) conducted a two phase study for the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented with the purpose of investigating

the impact of state testing programs on schools, teachers, and students. For the first stage, they used survey methodology to determine the beliefs and self-reported practices of a national sample of 8,044 elementary, 2,259 middle school, and 2,556 high school (return rate = 16%) surrounding state testing programs. In the second phase, a qualitative methodology was used to discover student and teacher perceptions of the effects state testing programs had on curricula and the instructional process. Data from both the national survey and the qualitative phase of the study indicated that high-stakes testing influenced teachers; curricular and instructional practices. The researchers identified four themes which were prevalent across the data. Theme one addressed the high pressure associated with high-stakes testing across all school settings. To some extent, the pressure felt by teachers varies according to their experience, previous student success, and the expected consequences associated with the testing. Teachers also acknowledged that some of the pressure they felt was pressure they put on themselves in order to prove their effectiveness as well as hold themselves accountable for student performance. The second theme described a strong relationship between the perceived pressure associated with high-stakes testing and the curricular and instructional decisions made by teachers. Teachers frequently expressed frustration about the time spent on tested areas leaving little time to explore topics in depth, forcing them to skim over a wide range of skills. They also indicated that the intense focus on test preparation ended abruptly following the tests, and they felt “free” to focus on non-tested subjects and student interests. One teacher referred to this as “post-test curriculum.” The third theme explored the impact of high-stakes testing on disadvantaged schools and students. The perceived pressure to increase scores was felt most acutely by teachers from impoverished schools indicating a

differential impact of state testing on curriculum and instruction across economic levels. Teachers reported an increased use of “skill and drill” and formats that reflected testing formats to prepare students in impoverished schools for high-stakes testing. These teachers also reported significantly less time on projects, hands-on activities, and enrichment. This also suggests a link between high-stakes testing and student disengagement for the most disadvantaged students. Theme four centered on the impact of high-stakes testing on gifted and talented students. Many of these students reported feeling frustrated and resented the amount of time spent and the slow pace of preparing for high-stakes testing. Although teachers reported that many gifted students felt little pressure associated with the tests, others feel intense pressure to perform at a “perfect” level. The researchers reported that it seems that the curricular and instructional effects of high-stakes testing affect gifted students by encouraging a “ceiling” that is well below their abilities and deprives them of challenging and engaging school experiences. Overall, the researchers concluded that since it appears that high-stakes testing is going to continue, policy makers need to be aware of the implications of the testing at the school, classroom, and individual levels. Policymakers need to know that many teachers believe the current implementation of high-stakes testing is ineffective, unfair, and detrimental to both student and teacher performance. Although high-stakes testing has changed curriculum and instruction at many levels, it has often not developed in the direction of best practice in many settings, particularly with disadvantaged students.

Mulvenon, Stegman, and Ritter (2005) describe a multifaceted study on the perceptions of teachers, principals, counselors, students, and parents regarding test anxiety. The study was conducted during the week of state-mandated testing for 5th grade

students in a school district with a full spectrum of socio-economic conditions. Surveys were administered to each specific group to measure their attitudes, opinions, concerns, and perceptions about standardized testing. The survey results were then linked to student performance on the criterion-referenced state tests and a national norm-referenced test. Results from the student survey indicated that students' own anxiety had little effect on their performance, but rather, the climate of the school affected their performance. Student perceptions of negative pressure surrounding standardized tests decreased their achievement on the tests. It was also students' efficacy regarding their abilities in math and reading, not anxiety, which appeared to be accurate in predicting test performance. Most students actually reported they liked test week, and did not feel any pressure to perform well on the tests.

Results from the parent survey indicated that parents who have children who performed poorly on the tests reported feeling "pressure" to help their children and for their children to do well and felt the tests were relatively stressful for their children. Parents of students who scored high on the tests did not feel pressure or reported no stress for their children. Interestingly, when the relationship between student performance and the importance placed on the test was by parents was considered, parents of children who did poorly either believed the testing was very important or very unimportant. A similar pattern was discovered for parent involvement as parents of children who did poorly were either very involved or very little involved. The parent survey did not support the concept that parents are overly stressed about their children and testing but rather showed support for testing and its value in the academic process. The teacher surveys indicated that a negative attitude about testing is not associated with lower

student performance on the tests rather, teacher attitudes about testing and student achievement do not seem to be related. The small sample size for principals and counselors limited analysis of results. Overall, the author believes that the reporting of testing systems in schools as being problematic is over reported. Rather, students, teachers, parents, principals, and counselors identified testing as important in education which provides an important measurement of student achievement.

The Public Education Network, or PEN (2004), a national organization of local funds and individuals working to improve public schools and build public support for quality education in low-income communities, conducted a survey through its website on various aspects of No Child Left Behind. They received 12,000 responses from around the country and analyzed the data, which was disaggregated by state. In Texas, there were 499 respondents with 96% between the ages of 18 and 65, 80% white, 81% female, and 95% having at least some college. 57% of the respondents identified themselves as educators and 81% had children. The respondents were asked a variety of questions concerning all aspects of NCLB. When asked questions about testing and effectiveness, the respondents were not positive in their responses. When asked, "Does NCLB require too much testing, too little or just right?" 71% responded "too much." 93% of the respondents indicated that they did not believe a single test can tell if an entire school body needs improvement and 90% did not believe a single test could tell if an individual students was performing satisfactorily. 57% did not believe that NCLB had made any difference in access to information about schools, student performance, parental involvement, or teacher quality.

The Public Education Network (PEN), also held a series of nine public hearings across nine states about the effects of NCLB in 2004. Although there were many topics covered in the forums, the report focused on three that PEN felt were the most salient: accountability, teacher quality, and building community. At the hearing in San Antonio, Texas in September 2004, there were 36 witnesses from rural and urban areas including business and community leaders, parents, and high school students. There were several general themes that ran through the testimony including the concern that test-based accountability is skewing the curriculum and instruction towards an over-emphasis on test preparation and, despite requirements for full communication of student progress to parents, many parents believed they did not have adequate information or access to school decisions. PEN hopes the forums would broaden public debate about NCLB and the finding would be used by “decision makers” to help them determine which aspects of NCLB the public supports and what changes need to be made.

The 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa /Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public School (Rose & Gallup, 2006) surveyed the American public’s perceptions towards a variety of issues in public education including rating the public schools, choice through vouchers and charter schools, curriculum, governance, the achievement gap, teachers, time, testing, and NCLB. In regards to testing, respondents were asked if there is too much emphasis on achievement testing in public schools. 39% believed there was too much, 25% believed there was not enough, and 33% believed there was about the right amount. Of those surveyed their opinion about the current emphasis on standardized testing encouraging teachers to “teach to the test,” 67% responded that they believed it will encourage teachers to “teach to the test.” When asked if teaching to the

test was a “good” or “bad” thing, 75% responded that it was a “bad” thing. When questioned about NCLB, of those professing knowledge of NCLB (45%), 42% have a favorable opinion and 47% have an unfavorable opinion. According to Gallup, perhaps the most significant find about NCLB is that 37% say it has made no difference in school performance, 21% say the law has hurt schools, and 26% say it has helped schools. 69% agreed that the use of a single state test cannot provide a clear picture of whether or not a school needs improvement and 78% are concerned that the focus on reading and math achievement will mean less emphasis on other subjects. In conclusion, the poll showed a strong support for public schools with many respondents believing public schools are good but just need to get better.

A doctoral dissertation by Fred Connor (2002) at the University of Virginia focused on parents’ perceptions concerning the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), the state accountability system in use at that time. His dissertation had three purposes: to determine parent perceptions regarding the SOL, to determine if differences in parent’s perceptions are related to ethnicity, geographic location, level of respondent education, school accreditation status, and the school level of the respondent’s child, and to determine parent perceptions concerning what they wanted to communicate to the state board of education and local school officials about the SOL. The majority of parents disagreed with statements that SOL tests are an accurate measure of their child’s achievement, measure what their child should know, and are a good appraisal of teacher effectiveness. Connor discovered there were significant differences in parent perceptions about the SOL among parents with differing levels of education, level of school accreditation, school attendance zone, and ethnicity. However, there were no significant

differences in parent perceptions among parents with children from different school levels. Parents also shared several concerns about the negative effects of the SOL such as the level of anxiety it caused their children.

Summary

The survey and interview research focusing on the perceptions of school personnel, students, and parents affected by high-stakes testing indicates there are both positive and negative impacts of the testing. Some researchers reported such positive effects as improved alignment of curriculum, an increase in content knowledge by teachers, increased attention to the lowest performing students and students with special needs, and the motivation of some students to work harder in order to not be retained. States with well-designed testing systems which reflect good instructional practice reported positive support from teachers and administrators. However, many school personnel expressed concern over the negative influences of high-stakes testing. Teachers consistently reported a narrowing of the curriculum to focus only on tested objectives, increased time spent in preparing for high-stakes tests, poorly constructed tests, teacher and student anxiety, the loss of the best teachers to more successful schools and intense pressure to ensure student achievement on the tests although they did not believe the tests were accurately measuring the students' abilities. Counselors reported they had lost the purpose of their roles in schools in order to be test administrators. Many students also shared their anxiety and concern about high-stakes tests. Parents reported increased anxiety in their children and frustration with tests that they believed did not accurately measure the performance of their children. Regardless, all those surveyed indicated high-stakes testing had changed how America's schools functioned.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children. This section describes the methodology that was used in conducting the study. Specifically, this section presents a description of: (1) the research design; (2) the sample; (3) instrumentation; (4) instrument reliability; (5) the data collection procedures; (6) the data analysis procedures; and (7) the limitations of the study.

Research Design

Although the 81st Texas State Legislature (2009) changed the guidelines for using the TAKS test for promotion and no longer requires third graders to pass the reading TAKS test in order to be promoted to grade four, students in grade five are still required to pass both the reading and math sections of the TAKS test as part of the promotion standards for sixth grade. As sixth grade is often the first year of middle school in many districts, the possibility of being retained in fifth grade and unable to move to the next stage in schooling with peers may make the fifth grade TAKS tests particularly high-stakes for many children at-risk for failure. In order to determine the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children, a cross-sectional survey was distributed to a sample

of parents of fifth graders identified as at-risk for failure on one or both reading and math sections of the TAKS test in the spring of 2010 in a suburban school district.

Sample

The population for the survey was all parents or guardians of students in grade five at-risk for failure on the in the high-stakes TAKS test in a suburban Texas school district. The sample for the survey was parents or guardians of fifth graders identified as at-risk for failure on one or both of the reading and math TAKS tests in the spring of 2010 in twelve elementary schools in a suburban school district located southwest of Houston. Five of the campuses receive federal Title I funds based on their large population of economically disadvantaged students. The criteria for identifying students as at-risk for failure on TAKS was membership in one or more of the following groups: previous TAKS failure, low grades, low scores on practice TAKS tests and activities, and/or receiving extra TAKS tutorials.

According to the District web site (2009), the District encompasses 170 square miles of the county and is its largest employer. It is also one of the largest school districts in the state of Texas and serves approximately 69,000 students. It is considered a fast-growing district and regularly opens new campuses to serve the growing number of planned communities throughout the area. Currently, the District has 10 high schools, 13 middle schools, 44 elementary schools, a technical education center, an alternative high school, and the Progressive High School. The District considers itself a culturally diverse school district with over 90 different languages and dialects spoken by its students and their families. In 2009, the student ethnicity breakdown was as follows:

31.42% Black, 23.71% White, 23.02% Hispanic, 21.76% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.18% Native American. Approximately 32% of the students in the District meet the qualifications for economically disadvantaged. The District has many business and community partners, and an active volunteer program, as well as an education foundation for fund-raising (District, 2009).

For the 2008-2009 school year, the District was a “recognized” school district based on its TAKS scores (District, 2009). Across all grade levels that took TAKS tests, the District students, as a group, met or exceeded state averages on all tests. As well, 65% of its campuses received either “recognized” or “exemplary” ratings. The District and 62 out of 64 eligible campuses also met federal standards for AYP. Of the approximately 5,240 fifth grade students in the District in 2009, 89% passed the Reading TAKS test and a 88% passed the Math TAKS test during the first administration in the spring. After the final administrations of the tests in the summer of 2009, 93% passed Reading TAKS and 92% passed Math TAKS. The TAKS passing rates of fifth graders in the District are very similar to the passing rates of all fifth graders taking TAKS in the state of Texas. The TAKS passing rates and ethnic distribution of the sample make the results of the survey able to be generalized to the population.

The sample participants were identified by the reading specialist assigned to each campus. Each campus has its own reading specialist, and she is familiar with all the students at-risk for failure on TAKS as part of her assigned duties. Twelve campuses participated in the survey, five of which receive federal Title I funds, and 338 surveys were distributed.

Instrumentation and Reliability

The instrument used in the study was a cross-sectional survey (Appendix E). See Appendix B for the development and piloting of the initial version of the instrument. The survey had three factors that included a total of 12 items. Component 1, which was named the *Effects of TAKS on the Student and Family*, had six items with strong factor loadings on the rotated component matrix: *My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test* (.684), *My child struggles to pass the TAKS test* (.709), *My child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test* (.753), *My child has lost sleep over the TAKS test* (.809), *Other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test* (.797), and *I worry about how my child is reacting to the TAKS test* (.764). All these items had little association with other components and combined have a strong Cronbach's Alpha (.881).

Component 2, named the *Effects of TAKS on How Students Spend Time Outside of School*, had four items with moderate to strong factor loadings on the rotated component matrix: *Time spent on exercise or sport activities* (.521), *Time spent playing with friends* (.778), *Time spent participating in family activities* (.701), and *Time spent watching television or movies* (.653). All the items had little association with other components and combined had an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of .724.

Component 3, named *Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement*, had two items with very strong factor loadings: *The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement* (.865) and *The TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students* (.874). All the items had little association with other components and combined had a Cronbach's Alpha of .862.

Table 1

Factors and Corresponding Items

Item	Factor 1 Effects of TAKS on the students and family	Alpha	Factor 2 Effects of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school	Alpha	Factor 3 Parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of achievement	Alpha
My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test	.684	.881		.724		
My child struggles to pass the TAKS test	.709					
My child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test	.753					
My child has lost sleep over the TAKS test	.809					
Other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test	.797					
I worry about how my child is reacting to the pressure of the TAKS test	.764					
Time spent in exercise or sports activities			.521	.724		
Time spent playing with friends			.778			
Time spent participating in family activities			.701			
Time spent watching television or movies			.653			
The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement					.865	.862
The TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students					.874	

A 5-point Likert scale was used for each item. Items included in factors 1 and 3 used the scale *strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree*, and items included in Factor 2 used the scale *much less, less, no change, more, and much more*. The survey concluded with two demographic questions, the gender and race of the child, which the parent respondent circled. The campus based reading specialist provided information regarding Title I status.

Data Collection Procedures

After approval of the University of Houston's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, the participating district's Department of Research and Accountability, and the researcher's dissertation committee, the study ensued. Surveys were distributed and collected through the District's campus based elementary reading specialists. Each elementary campus has its own full-time reading specialist who is familiar with the students identified as at-risk for failure on TAKS as part of her assigned duties. As I worked with many of the reading specialists in past years, it was hoped my relationship with them would encourage them to collect and distribute the surveys on their campuses. At a district-wide reading specialist meeting, I gave a brief presentation about the research project and the expectations if the reading specialists chose to assist with the distribution and collection of the surveys. Reading specialists were also given suggestions for incentives for the students to return the surveys, but they were allowed to decide on their campus the appropriate incentives for students which were consistent with campus-wide or classroom management procedures. It is important to note that prior to my presentation to the reading specialists, a district human resource representative met

with the group regarding staff reductions for the following year due to the District's financial exigency. Several reading specialists were made aware that their positions were in danger of being eliminated, or they may be reassigned and this may have affected their willingness to participate in the research project.

After the presentation and a questions/answer session, reading specialists were given the parent consent form to be signed by their campus principal and returned to me with the number of at-risk fifth grade students on their campus if they chose to participate. A follow-up e-mail was sent the next morning thanking them for their time and encouraging them to contact me if they or their administrators had any questions or concerns. Another e-mail was sent as a reminder a few days later. A couple of reading specialists contacted me with some procedural questions which I answered.

Twelve campus reading specialists chose to participate and were able to obtain their principal's signature on the consent form. Other reading specialists were willing to participate, however, their campus principals chose not to have their campus distribute the surveys. Reasons shared for non participation included not wanting to offend parents, lack of time, burdening already busy teachers, administrator out on leave, inconvenient timing, concern that parents would not return the survey, and general non interest. After receiving the signed consent forms either through fax or intra-district mail, I sent the appropriate number of survey packets to be distributed on the participating campuses to the reading specialists. They were also given an information sheet with guidelines for distribution and collection and contact information. The survey packets included the survey, a letter of introduction, the consent form, and an envelope for participants to return the survey anonymously. Reading specialists had approximately ten school days to

distribute and collect the surveys on their campuses and return them via intra-district mail to me, and a reminder e-mail was sent to each of them as well as an e-mail indicating I had received their surveys and consent forms. Reading specialists also filled out a sheet indicating the campus name, the number of surveys distributed, the number of surveys collected, the incentive used, whether or not the campus received federal Title I funds, and any comments or concerns. Incentives used by the reading specialists to encourage students to return the survey included homework passes, fresh popcorn, pencils, tickets for a school drawing, school bucks, school reward tickets, and a lunch with a friend pass. One school did not give an incentive per the principal's request and only one survey was returned. Reading specialists who returned surveys received the choice of a \$5.00 gift card to either a coffee shop or bookstore. 338 surveys were distributed and 111 were returned for a 32.93% return rate.

Data Analysis Procedures

After collection of the surveys, each survey was numbered randomly and the data was entered for analysis into SPSS version 18.0. As a few of the respondents chose two descriptors under race, an additional category "mixed race" was added to the values. A total score for each factor was also calculated. A quantitative analysis followed beginning with a check for values falling outside the possible ranges by inspecting the frequencies for each variable. After the errors were corrected, a descriptive analysis was performed excluding cases pair-wise to determine frequencies for each item. As further analysis would include exploring the differences of groups regarding their perceptions on the three factors, I intended to use a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) as

there were three independent variables; gender of the respondent's child, race, and whether or not the campus received federal Title I funds, for each of the three factors used as dependent variables; the effects of TAKS on the student and family, the effect of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school, and parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement. A MANOVA compares the groups and provides data about whether the mean differences between the groups on the combination of dependent variables were likely to have occurred by chance. It shows any significant differences between the groups on this composite dependent variable as well as provides the univariate results for each of the dependent variables separately. The advantage of using MANOVA over a series of individual analysis of covariance (ANOVA) is that it adjusts for a Type I error, reducing the chances of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is actually true.

Before proceeding with the MANOVA, the data was tested to see if it conformed to the assumptions about the population from which the sample was drawn and the nature of the data: the sample size, normality, outliers, linearity, homogeneity of regression, multicollinearity and singularity, and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. The sample size of the population was adequate since as there were many more cases in each cell than the number of dependent variable. Normality, or the normal distribution of scores along the dependent variable – much like a bell curve, was tested by looking at both univariate normality and multivariate normality. Univariate normality for each factor, the effects of TAKS on the student and family called “family,” the effect of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school called “time,” and parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement called “fairness,” was checked by using

the Explore feature on SPSS 18.0. To determine if extreme scores were having a strong influence on the mean, the 5% Trimmed Mean scores were compared with the original means for each factor. For “family,” the original mean was 18.24 and the trimmed mean was 18.31, for “time,” the original mean was 10.37 and the trimmed mean was 10.33, and for “fairness,” the original mean was 5.62 and the trimmed mean was 5.57, all indicating that the extreme scores were having very little effect on the means.

Skewness and kurtosis were also checked to determine the distribution of the scores. Skewness provides an indication of the symmetry of the distribution. Skewness for the three factors were “family” at $-.137$, “time” at $.176$, and “fairness” at $.067$ with 0 being a “perfect” score. These results indicate a fairly symmetrical distribution of scores. Kurtosis provides information on the “peakedness” of the distribution. Kurtosis was calculated as follows: “family” at $-.941$, “time” at -1.18 , and “fairness” at $-.337$ with 0 being a “perfect” score. These scores indicate a flat line with scores distributed with too many cases in the extremes. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic for each factor was also determined: “family” significance value of $.023$, “time” with a significance value of $.078$, and “fairness” with a significance value of $p < .01$ with a significance value of more than $.05$ being a non-significant result. Both “family” and “fairness” suggest a violation of the assumption of normality.

Multivariate normality was checked by obtaining the Mahalanobis distance, which is the distance of a particular case from the centroid (the point created by the means of the variables) of the remaining cases. This statistic showed if any cases had an unusual pattern across the three dependent variables. The established critical value for three dependent variables is 16.27 (Pallant, 2007) and the calculated Mahalanobis

distance was 10.193, smaller than the critical value and indicating there were no substantial multivariate outliers.

A matrix of scatter plots was generated to determine linearity, or a straight-line relationship between each pair of the dependent variable. The scatter-plots did not show any obvious evidence of non-linearity. Homogeneity of regression was not needed as it is unnecessary to order the dependent variables and the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices would only need to be determined when the MANOVA was actually run.

As MANOVA is most accurate when the dependent variables are only moderately correlated, a correlation was run to check for multicollinearity (high correlations) as well as low correlations between the dependent variables using a Pearson correlation coefficient or Pearson r . The Pearson r between “family” and “fairness” was $-.408$, the Pearson r between “family” and “time” was $-.249$ and the Pearson r between “time” and “fairness” was $.234$. The strength of the relationships between “family” and “fairness” and “time” and “fairness” fell within the “small” range (Pallant, 2007, p. 132) thus indicating low correlations between those variables.

After the data was tested to see if it conformed to the assumptions about the population from which the sample was drawn, it was determined the data set did not meet the assumptions to run a MANOVA, including normality (Kurtosis and Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic) and the low correlations between “family” and “time” and “time” and “fairness” using a Pearson correlation coefficient. Therefore it was determined to use a series of one-way ANOVAS with planned comparisons using a more stringent alpha level for statistical significance of $.01$ to adjust for potential Type I errors.

Each independent variable (family, time, and fairness) was compared to a series of dependent variables (gender, race, and Title I school or not) to look for variability between these groups in their attitudes towards the independent variables. A total of three ANOVAs were run on SPSS version 18.0. A test for homogeneity of variance was computed for each ANOVA as well to ensure the variance of scores was the same for each group using a Levene's test for homogeneity. A significance value of .01 was used, and all ANOVAs had a significant value greater than .01 indicating the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. The significant value for each ANOVA was analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups and the t statistic was converted to an F value.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation to the present study is the limited generalizability of the results. The parent sample was all recruited from the same suburban school district southwest of Houston, Texas. Certainly school districts across Texas have a wide range of differences including size, racial diversity, and economic levels. Although other states may have high-stakes tests similar to TAKS, state testing programs vary greatly from state to state. Results may vary in other school districts across the state of Texas as well in other states across the United States.

The parent sample was only recruited by district reading specialists. If other specialists who work with at-risk students, including Title I specialists, intervention specialists, or math specialists, were invited to recruit parent participants, a larger or more representative sample may have been available. The survey was also only available in

English so parents who do not read or understand English were excluded from the survey. Of particular interest might be parents of students in bilingual programs or parents of English language learners.

The size of the sample (N=111) was also limited, particularly when broken down into race groups. White (N=15) and Asian Pacific Islander (N=16) were each quite low, making some statistical analysis limited.

Summary

This section describes the methodology that was used in conducting the study. Specifically, this section presents a description of: (1) the research design; (2) the sample; (3) instrumentation; (4) instrument reliability; (5) the data collection procedures; a (6) the data analysis procedures, including the determination to use a series of ANOVAS instead of a MANOVA; and (7) the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children. The previous chapter described the methods used to design the survey and collect and analyze the data for the study. A survey was developed and piloted and three factors were identified through factor analysis in order to answer the research question: Component 1, which was named the *Effects of TAKS on the Student and Family* (“family”), Component 2, named the *Effects of TAKS on How Students Spend Time Outside of School* (“time”), and Component 3, named *Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement* (“fairness”). This section includes the results of the data analysis for the study. Specifically, this section includes the results of the descriptive statistics and ANOVAS associated with the research question: What are the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children? The results and analysis begin with the participants and are then organized by each of the three components of the survey.

Results of Descriptive Analysis

Participants

According to the analysis of the descriptive data for the parent participants of the survey, a total of 111 surveys were complete and returned from the 338 surveys distributed for a 32.93% return rate. 45.9% (N=51) of the respondents were parents of a

boy and 54.1% (N=60) were parents of a girl, an adequate representation of gender distribution in the population. Race indicators reflected the choices used by the school district and state. 14.4% (N=16) participants indicated they were Asian/Pacific Islander, 42.3% (N=47) were Black/African American, 25.2% (N= 28) were Hispanic, 13.5 % (N=15) were white, and 3.6% (N=4) chose more than one race indicator. No participants indicated their child was Native American and one participant chose not to answer the item. The racial breakdown of the participants was somewhat similar to that of the school district, although there was a smaller percentage of white and Asian participants and more Black African American participants than in the school district. 45.9% (N= 51) of the participants had children attending schools which receive Title I funding, while approximately 32% of the students in the school district meet the qualifications for economically disadvantaged status. However, not necessarily all students attending a Title I school are economically disadvantaged as approximately half or more of the school's population has to be identified as economically disadvantaged through free and reduce lunch eligibility to receive Title I funds. Overall, the participants in the survey adequately represent the population of the school district.

Survey Items

An examination of the Likert scale items from the survey is discussed in Appendix F. Table 2 summarizes the means and distribution for each of the three components: Component 1, *Effects of TAKS on the Student and Family* (“family”), Component 2, *Effects of TAKS on How Students Spend Time Outside of School* (“time”), and Component 3, *Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement* (“fairness”).

The minimum and maximum values of Component 1 (“family”) revealed while some parents “strongly disagreed” that TAKS affected their student and family, others “strongly agreed” that TAKS affected their student and family. The mean of 18.24 fell just slightly above the midpoint with a standard deviation of 6.05, which demonstrates a broad range of opinion among the participants. The minimum and maximum values of Component 2 (“time”) revealed while some parents believed that their child’s participation in activities outside of school was “much less” since preparation for TAKS began, others believed that their child’s participation in activities outside of school was actually “much more” since preparation for TAKS began. The mean of 10.37 fell below the midpoint indicating the participants as a group believed their child was participating slightly less in the activities described in the items. A standard deviation of 3.02 showed less variability among the participants. The minimum and maximum values of Component 3 (“fairness”) revealed while some parents “strongly disagreed” that TAKS is a fair measure of student achievement, others “strongly agreed.” The mean of 5.62 fell below the midpoint, indicating the participants disagreed with the items. A standard deviation of 2.31, demonstrated a smaller range of opinion among the participants.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Each Component (N = 111)

	Min	Max	\bar{x}	SD
Component 1: The effects of TAKS on the student and family	6.00	30.00	18.24	6.05
Component 2: The effect of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school	4.00	18.00	10.37	3.02
Component 3: TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement	2.00	10.00	5.62	2.31

Results of ANOVA Analysis

The three independent variables in the study were gender, race, and attendance at a school receiving Federal Title I funds and the three dependent variables were the effects of TAKS on the student and family, the effect of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school, and parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement. As discussed in Chapter Three, the original research design included using MANOVA to analyze the data. However, when the data were tested to see if they conformed to the assumptions about the population from which the sample was drawn, it was determined the data set did not meet the assumptions to run a MANOVA, specifically normality (Kurtosis and Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic) as well as the low correlations between “family” and “time” and “time” and “fairness” using a Pearson correlation coefficient. (Please see Chapter Three for details of the analysis.) Therefore it

was determined that the appropriate analytical approach was to use a series of one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) with planned comparisons using a more stringent alpha level for statistical significance of .01 to adjust for potential Type I errors. Each independent variable (gender, race, and attendance at a Title I school) was tested against a series of dependent variables (family, time, and fairness) to look for variability between these groups in their attitudes towards the components. The ANOVA was run on SPSS version 18.0. The significance value of each ANOVA was then analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups.

Initial analysis of the ANOVAS revealed there was a statistically significant difference at the $p \leq .01$ in the “family” ($p = .001$) and “fairness” ($p = <.01$) scores by race as shown in Tables 3 and 4. There were no statistically significant differences at the $p \leq .01$ between any other groups.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance for Component 1: The effects of TAKS on the student and family

Source	df	F	<i>p</i>
Gender	1	.009	.925
Title school	1	.199	.657
Race	4	5.390	.001
Gender x Title school	1	2.753	.100
Gender x Race	4	.548	.701
Title school x Race	3	.308	.819
Gender x Title school x	1	2.061	.154

Race		
error	94	(31.803)

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean squares

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for Component 3: Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of

Achievement

Source	df	F	<i>p</i>
Gender	1	.773	.654
Title school	1	.007	.932
Race	4	29.577	.000
Gender x Title school	1	8.362	.142
Gender x Race	4	1.696	.776
Title school x Race	3	6.106	.194
Gender x Title school x Race	1	4.754	.267
Race			
error	94	(3.810)	

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean squares

Analysis of the post-hoc tests in the multiple comparisons table revealed four groups significantly different from one another at the $p \leq .01$ level as shown in tables 5 and 6. The “family” scores for Asian/Pacific Islander and white parents ($p = <.01$) had a mean difference of -9.20 indicating Asian/Pacific Islander parents felt less strongly that

TAKS effected their student and family than white parents. As well, the “fairness” scores for Asian/Pacific Islander and white parents ($p = .001$) had a mean difference of 2.92 indicating Asian/Pacific Islander parents felt more strongly than white parents about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement. Likewise, Hispanic families and white families had a mean difference of 2.76 where $p = <.01$ indicating they also felt more strongly than white parents about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement. The “fairness” scores for Hispanic parents and Black/African American and ($p = <.01$) had a mean difference of 2.26 also indicating Hispanic parents felt more strongly than Black/African American parents about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement.

Table 5

Means Comparison for Race

Component 1: The effects of TAKS on the student and family

Race	\bar{x}	SD	N
Asian Pacific Islander	13.94	4.538	16
Black African American	18.51	6.136	47
Hispanic	18.04	5.732	28
White	23.13	5.125	15
More than one race chosen	15.75	4.272	4
total	18.25	6.084	110

Table 6

Means Comparison for Race

Component 3: Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement

Race	\bar{x}	SD	N
Asian Pacific Islander	7.13	1.586	16
Black African American	4.70	2.146	47
Hispanic	6.96	2.027	28
White	4.20	1.781	15
More than one race chosen	6.75	2.500	4
total	5.64	2.318	110

Summary

This section reports the results of the data analysis for the study. Specifically, this section included the results of the descriptive statistics and ANOVAS associated with the components of the survey developed to explore the research question: What are the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children? The descriptive statistics indicated that many parents perceive that the TAKS affects their families by causing their child and other family members to express concerns about passing the TAKS test and causing the parent to worry about how their child is reacting to the pressures of the TAKS test. Parents perceived that the TAKS test affects how much time students spend playing with friends as well as watching television or movies. Many parents did not agree that TAKS

is a fair measure of student achievement for their child or other children. The ANOVAs indicated statistically significant findings among race groups and their scores on “family” and “fairness.” Further comparison of the mean differences among specific race groups scores on “family” and “fairness” indicated differences among the perceptions of specific race groups. Asian/Pacific Islander parents indicated a significantly less effect of TAKS on their student and family than did white parents. Asian/Pacific Islander parents also perceived TAKS as fairer measure of student achievement than did white parents. As well, Hispanic parents also perceive TAKS as a fairer measure of student achievement than did both white and Black/African American parents.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to describe the perceptions of parents of at-risk fifth grade students concerning the effects of the high-stakes TAKS test on the home lives of their children. As little research existed focusing on the effects of high-stakes testing outside of the school setting, the research study was an endeavor to highlight the effects of high-stakes testing on students and families outside of the school setting in order for educators to make appropriate educational decisions for every student. 338 surveys were distributed to parents of at-risk fifth graders in a suburban school district, and 111 were returned for a 32.93% return rate. The survey utilized three factors in order to answer the research question: Component 1, *Effects of TAKS on the Student and Family* (“family”), Component 2, *Effects of TAKS on How Students Spend Time Outside of School* (“time”), and Component 3, *Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement* (“fairness”). The previous chapters described the need for the study, the background of the study, the related literature, the development of a survey, data collection and analysis procedures, and the results of the survey. This chapter will review the current status of high-stakes testing in the United States and Texas, review the findings from the three components used in the survey, discuss implications of the study for school practices, as well as limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

Current Status of High-Stakes Testing

On both the national and state level, high-stakes testing continues to be a major component in the on-going discussion and legislation surrounding school reform efforts. In Washington D.C., federal lawmakers continue to advocate high-stakes testing as part of the legislation to reauthorize No Child Left Behind as well as the push for a national curriculum. In Texas, the state legislature announced plans for the next generation of accountability tests to be called STAAR, or the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

Reauthorization of the original No Child Left Behind or Elementary and Secondary Education Act was due in 2007. However, until it is reauthorized or another piece of legislation is put into place, the current law will stay in effect. The U.S Department of Education, under President Barack Obama's administration, issued *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010) outlining its proposal to build on reforms already made in response to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. It is developed around four key areas: improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader, providing information to families and teachers to help them evaluate and improve student learning, implementing college and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards, and improving student learning and achievement in the lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective instruction. According to the *Blueprint* (2010), the federal government hopes to shift its role in education from a focus on merely compliance to "allowing state and local innovation to flourish, rewarding success, and fostering rewarding and collaborative relationships with

states, districts, and nonprofit partners” (Department of Education, 2010, p. 39). Areas of priority across goals include technology, evidence of success, efficiency in the use of resources, support for English learners and students with disabilities, and support for rural and other high-need areas. For families of students, the *Blueprint* (2010) proposes to move parental involvement from a checklist of activities to family engagement as an integrated strategy taking place across multiple programs. This includes providing for a new Family Engagement and Responsibility Fund to provide grants to districts and nonprofits to manage programs that promote family engagement, empowerment, and responsibility.

In the area of assessment, the *Blueprint* (2010) proposes that state accountability systems recognize progress and growth rather than only identify failure, provide flexibility for local improvement efforts, and focus on the most rigorous support and intervention for the lowest-performing schools. Performance targets based on whole-school and sub-group achievement and growth as well as individual student growth and school progress over time will guide improvement towards the goal of all students graduating or on track to graduate from high school ready for college and/or a career by 2020. In comparing itself to the original NCLB accountability policies, the *Blueprint* (2010) alleges to focus on student growth and school progress rather than focus on a limited level of proficiency and reward high-poverty schools, districts, and states showing real progress. It also claims to develop and support the use of better assessments as well as look beyond just assessments to help determine what a school needs such as attendance, conditions for learning, and course completion for a more complete picture of a school as well as additional resources for a well-rounded curriculum.

Texas is preparing for the implementation of its new assessment system, STAAR. The system will continue to be based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills but have a greater emphasis on the standards established to prepare students for college and career success after high school as well as compete globally. In House Bill 3, the Texas legislature defined college readiness as the level of preparation needed for students to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry level general education course for credit in that same content area for a baccalaureate degree or associate degree program (Section 39.024a). In grades three through eight, the tests will be in the same subjects as TAKS, but in high school, TAKS will be replaced with twelve end-of-course assessments in the four foundation content areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and English. At this time, current SSI guidelines for student promotion will remain in place. In keeping with a “growing national consensus regarding the need to provide a more clearly articulated K-16 education program that focuses on fewer skills and addresses those skills in a deeper manner” (TEA, 2010, p. 1), the new assessment design for STAAR will maintain a “fewer, deeper, clearer” focus on content tested. As with TAKS, assessments in grades three through eight in mathematics, reading, writing, and social studies will continue to only assess TEKS taught in that grade level. The new science assessment in grades five and eight will address TEKS from multiple grade levels but focus primarily on TEKS associated with those two respective grades. The new high school end-of-course assessments will only assess TEKS from that given course.

TEA has identified the TEKS most critical to assess in order to better measure the progress of students as they move from elementary to middle and then high school. This set of critical TEKS to be emphasized are called readiness standards and are

considered essential for success in the current grade level or subject and important for preparedness in following grades or subject. The remaining TEKS are considered supporting standards, which will be assessed but not emphasized. An example from the assessment blueprint indicates while 30% of a given subject TEKS are identified as readiness standards and 70% are identified as supporting standards, STARR may assess 65% of its content on readiness standards and 35% on supporting standards. STAAR will contain a larger number of items that claim to have a higher level of complexity and be more closely matched to the cognitive level evident in the TEKS. In reading, a greater emphasis will be placed on critical analysis rather than literal understanding, and in writing, students will be required to write two essays over two days rather than one essay in one day. In social studies, science, and math, process skills will be assessed in context rather than in isolation and the number of open-ended (griddable) items will increase as well. Overall, STAAR is intended to be more rigorous and difficult than TAKS as part of the goal of ensuring all students are college and career ready when they graduate from high school.

As is evident from the current status of high-stakes testing in both the United States and Texas, high-stakes accountability systems seem to be in place for the long duration. Although at a national level there seems to be some attempt to improve the quality of assessments as well engage families in the education process, the state of Texas continues to embrace high-stakes testing as a key component of its accountability system for public education.

Findings from Component 1

Component 1 measured parents' perceptions about the effects of TAKS on their child, themselves, and the rest of the family. The minimum and maximum values of Component 1 ("family") revealed while some parents "strongly disagreed" that TAKS affected their student and family, others "strongly agreed" that TAKS affected their student and family. The mean of 18.24 fell just slightly above the midpoint with a standard deviation of 6.05, which demonstrates a broad range of opinion among the participants. The results of the survey indicated that over half of the parents perceive that the TAKS test does indeed affect their families by causing their child and other family members to express concerns about passing the TAKS test as well as causing the parent to worry about how their child is reacting to the pressures of the TAKS test. To a lesser extent, some even feel their child has lost sleep or experienced medical issues because of the TAKS test.

The results of the survey are consistent with the literature. Embedded in both the narrative and qualitative literature is evidence that there is a strong concern by both school personnel and parents for how students are handling the pressures of high-stakes testing. Researchers such as Reichel (2009), Perlstein (2007), Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001), Barksdale, Ladd, and Thomas (2000), Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003), Brown, Galassi, and Akos (2004), and Moon, Brighton, Jarvis, and Hall (2007) related how many teachers believed that students can experience stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, decreased motivation, and frustration as a result of high-stakes testing. Teachers also shared their concern that the high number of assessments and the pressure to cover large quantities of material quickly was stressful for students. Perlstein (2007) and

Barksdale, Ladd, and Thomas (2000) found that parents were concerned about the high levels of stress and anxiety the tests caused their children. Some parents reported that even though their children were generally good students, the children worried excessively about failing, and were often devastated with test results. Mulvenon, Stegman, and Ritter (2005) reported results from their survey indicating that parents who have children who performed poorly on the tests reported feeling “pressure” to help their children and for their children to do well and felt the tests were relatively stressful for their children. However, overall their parent survey did not support the concept that parents are overly stressed about their children and testing but rather showed support for testing and its value in the academic process.

Although there is a range of perceptions about the effects of high-stakes testing in the literature as there was in the range of responses from parents in the survey, the literature indicated there was a greater concern for the negative effects of high-stakes testing than was perhaps indicated in the survey. However, as the survey suggests that about half of the parents of at-risk kids do feel a significant level of stress on their families due to the TAKS test, it is important to address any negative effects TAKS may be having on families in our communities. Therefore there is a strong need for schools to take into consideration how their practices surrounding high-stakes testing, such as parent engagement, homework, and testing procedures affect families, particularly those identified as at-risk for failure, and adjust those practices accordingly.

Although one of the criteria for participation in the study was identification of being at-risk for failure on the TAKS test, only 51.3% of the parents “agree” or “strongly agree” that their child struggles to pass the TAKS test. This may suggest that a large

number of parents may not be aware or have a realistic picture of their child's progress in school. It may also mean that traditional methods of reporting school progress such as report cards are not adequate in reporting student progress towards tested objectives, or there is a disparity between grades and student achievement on high-stakes tests.

The ANOVAs indicated statistically significant findings among racial groups and their scores on the effects of TAKS on the student and families. Further comparison of the mean differences among specific race groups' scores on "family" indicated differences among the perceptions of specific race groups. Asian/Pacific Islander parents indicated a significantly smaller effect of TAKS on their child and family than did white parents. It is interesting to note that these are also the highest performing group on the TAKS test as they are combined into a sub-population of white for the disaggregation of test scores (TEA, 2009). There were no other significant differences in perceptions between any other race groups and their perceptions about the effects of TAKS on the students and families. As well, there were no statistically significant differences of parental perceptions of the effect of TAKS on students and families between parents of boys or girls or families attending Title I schools versus those who did not. Although there was little discussion of race, gender, or economic difference in regards to the effect of TAKS on students in the literature, this study suggests that TAKS affects students and families of at-risk students regardless of gender, economic status or most race groups. These results may not be consistent with previously held beliefs about particular groups of people and their interest or involvement in school, so schools should consider all students without relying on preconceived biases as they initiate TAKS policies and practices.

Triplett and Barksdale (2005) conducted a study utilizing student drawings and writings to examine the perceptions of elementary students towards high-stakes testing. The authors discussed the overwhelming negative themes evoked by the students in regards to high-stakes testing in the drawings and writings. They were surprised that elementary students had such negative feelings; they had supposed that most students would find the tests meaningless and perhaps strong students might even find them rewarding, but this was not the case. Perhaps schools and teachers would be surprised to discover the amount of stress TAKS is causing families and students, particularly those at-risk for failure as well as those groups that might not have previously been thought to “care” about school. Although schools certainly want parents and students to be concerned about academic achievement and take high-stakes testing seriously, it is hoped that they would see the level of negativity that is caused by TAKS to be an undesirable unintended consequence of the assessment system or even their school or classroom practices.

Findings from Component 2

Component 2 measured how parents perceive the effects of TAKS on how students spend their time outside of school. The minimum and maximum values of Component 2 (“time”) revealed while some parents believed that their child’s participation in activities outside of school was “much less” since preparation for TAKS began, others believed that their child’s participation in activities outside of school was actually “much more” since preparation for TAKS began. The mean of 10.37 fell below the midpoint indicating the participants as a group believed their child was participating

slightly less in the activities described in the items. A standard deviation of 3.02 showed less variability among the participants. A large number of parents of at-risk fifth graders indicated their child spent less time playing with friends, exercising or playing sports, and participating in family activities since preparation for the TAKS test began. At the same time many parents indicated their child spent less time watching television or movies as a result of the TAKS test. Perhaps this might be considered by many as a positive unintended consequence of high-stakes testing. However, one would have to consider if the activities engaged in, presumably TAKS homework, were actually “better” than watching television or movies.

Unlike the other components, the ANOVAs indicated there were no statistically significant differences between race groups on the effects of TAKS on student time outside of school. As with the other components, there were also no statistically significant differences of parental perceptions of TAKS between parents of boys or girls or families attending Title I schools versus those who did not. Since there is no literature that addresses the effect of high-stakes testing on how students spend time outside of school, it is difficult to draw any significant conclusions. As expressed earlier, these results may not be consistent with previously held beliefs about particular groups of people and their interest or involvement in school or value placed on homework, so schools should consider all students without relying on preconceived biases as they initiate TAKS policies and practices that affect how students spend their time outside of school, such as homework. These results may also indicate that schools and teachers are not aware of how their practices affect students’ participation in a variety of healthy activities including exercise and sports, play, and family activities after school hours.

Although schools and teachers typically want students to practice what is learned at school and develop the habit of completing their homework, do they believe it is beneficial for the amount of homework given to prepare for TAKS to be so great that students have time for little else? It seems unlikely that schools expect elementary age children, even those at risk for failure, to complete hours of homework each night to the exclusion of almost everything else. However, the results of this survey indicate that for some families of fifth graders at-risk for failure on TAKS, that is the case.

Findings from Component 3

Component 3 measures parents' attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement for both their child and most students. The minimum and maximum values of Component 3 ("fairness") revealed while some parents "strongly disagreed" that TAKS is a fair measure of student achievement, other "strongly agreed." The mean of 5.62 fell below the midpoint, indicating the participants as a group disagreed with the items. A standard deviation of 2.31 demonstrated a smaller range of opinion among the participants. The descriptive statistics revealed that only about a third of the parents perceive that TAKS is a fair measure of student achievement for their child or a fair measure for other children as well. 45.9% of the parents did not agree that TAKS was a fair measure of achievement for their child and 41.4% did not believe TAKs was a fair measure for most students.

In the literature, there were several studies which discuss concerns about high-stakes tests as a fair measure of student achievement which support the findings of this survey. Teachers in studies by Reichel (2009), Smith (1991), Barksdale, Ladd, and

Thomas (2000), Rapp (2002), Wright and Choi (2006), and Moon, Brighton, Jarvis, and Hall (2007) indicated that many teachers believe high-stakes tests did not capture the individual strengths of students and were not a fair measure of their students' abilities, particularly those students who struggled with academic tasks and ELL students. Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001) surveyed a large number of teachers who did not believe that TAAS, the high-stakes test in place at the time, measured what it was purported to measure. Barksdale, Ladd, and Thomas (2000), the Public Education Network (2004), and Connor (2002) included parents in their surveys about their perceptions regarding high-stakes testing. The parents criticized the tests, saw little value in them, did not believe they were an accurate measure of their child's achievement, and did not believe a single test could tell if an individual student was performing satisfactorily. As the findings were consistent across studies, there is a strong perception by both teachers and parents that high-stakes tests are failing to accurately measure student achievement. At the same time, these perceived "unfair" tests are used for high-stakes purposes, which likely further negate their worth in the eyes of teachers and parents. Although the tests may in fact be valid and reliable according to assessment standards, unless testing agencies convince parents and teachers otherwise, they will continue to doubt their value and perhaps begin to doubt other school practices and become less supportive of their child's school.

The ANOVAs indicated statistically significant findings among racial groups and their scores on parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement. Further comparison of the mean differences among specific race groups' scores on "fairness" indicated differences among the perceptions of specific race groups.

Asian/Pacific Islander parents perceived TAKS as fairer measure of student achievement than did white parents. Hispanic parents also perceive TAKS as a fairer measure of student achievement than did both white and Black/African American parents. Rapp (2002) and Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001) surveyed teachers who believed high-stakes tests were unfair to minority students. This is consistent with the views of the Black/African American parents, but not the Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander parents. Traditional perceptions of Hispanic and Asian families as being more respectful of schools and teachers, and Black/African American parents more suspicious of schools due to previous transgressions such as segregation and other disparities may be a way to explain the differences in result between the race groups. However, it is again important not to let stereotypes and biases distract from the need to ensure all parents, particularly those at-risk for failure on the tests, understand the expectations and validity of the high-stakes tests administered to their children. There were no significant differences in perceptions between other race groups, and there were no statistically significant differences of parental perceptions of TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement between parents of boys or girls or families attending Title I schools versus those who do not. Therefore, educators should not assume that particular groups of people are going to respond in preconceived ways about educational issues or have a limited interest or ability to understand these issues. Schools and teachers should provide clear information regarding their educational practices surrounding high-states tests for all families, including those at-risk for failure.

Implications of the Study for School Practices

The results of the study indicate that although there is a wide range of perceptions, many parents of fifth grade students at-risk for failure on the high-stakes TAKS test perceive that the test causes anxiety for their child and family, affects how their child spends time outside of the school day, and is not a fair measure of achievement for most students including their own child. Implications of the study for school practices include the areas of parent engagement, homework, and fair testing practices in an effort to relieve some of the anxiety and negativity surrounding high-stakes testing.

Parent engagement

As the results of the survey indicate that perhaps preconceived ideas of how certain groups of people perceive education are not necessarily accurate, the preconceived notions of how parents might participate in their child's education need to be re-examined as well. Traditionally, schools, as places full of expert educators, have been given the responsibility of enacting curriculum, policies, procedures, programs, schedules, and routines for educating the children of the community with some token involvement of parents and other community members (Pushor, 2007). Currently, in most schools, a traditional framework of parental involvement exists: schools invite or even expect parents to help them realize the system's educational goals for their children in predetermined ways such as volunteering in the school, assisting their child with homework, and fundraising. However, as the mission of educating all children has become increasingly complex with increased accountability and challenges, educators need to seek ways in which to engage parents as active participants of the education

process. Pushor (2007) describes parent engagement as enabling parents to take their equal place alongside educators in the schooling of their child where the agendas of school are mutually determined and mutually beneficial. The concept of parent engagement goes beyond parents just doing what is asked of them by schools to actually participating in the decision-making process, providing their expert knowledge of their child, and having a voice that is heard by schools and teachers about their child's educational experience. At the same time, the word "family" should be considered instead of just "parent" to better describe the variety of people who may play a significant role in a child's life at home.

As schools and teachers consider how they can move from parent involvement to family engagement, their mindset needs to change from "What can parents do to help us reach our goals?" to "How can we help families reach their goals for their children?" To begin the paradigm shift from "parental involvement" to "family engagement," Pushor (2007) believes that educators need to stop blaming certain groups of people for low family engagement and student achievement and consider how their own assumptions about these groups have shaped their expectations and practices. An important finding of the survey was that there were few differences between groups in their perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of students. Regardless of the gender of the child, their socioeconomic standing, and often race, a significant number of parents believed that TAKS was having a negative impact on their child and family life. With this in mind, policy makers, schools, and teachers need to honestly consider, "Why do we do what we do?" and explore what assumptions underlie their practices and change those which are having an unintended negative impact on families.

At a basic level, schools need to begin examining the types of programs and activities they currently offer, such as family literacy nights or open house, and review whether or not these programs and activities truly reflect the needs, mission, and goals of the school community or are they just an item on a parent involvement checklist? Instead of offering the same types of programs year after year, schools need to ask parents what would be most helpful to them, what would bring them to school, and when and how the needed services can be best provided. There are a multitude of resources available to schools and teachers who truly want to engage the families of their students in meaningful ways. The important thing is to not just continue with the same old schedule of parent involvement activities from year to year, but rather consider those activities carefully in terms of family engagement and adjust accordingly.

The proposed *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) specifically states that engaging families in education is critical to improving outcomes for all students, particularly those at risk for failure. It devotes a significant section to a plan for empowering and engaging families in their child's education rather than just participating in a series of activities. It even includes support and funding for districts and schools in their efforts to build capacity in continuous family and community engagement. With cautious optimism, perhaps educators may see these efforts at a national level have a positive effect on their own efforts to engage families in equal partnerships toward shared goals for all students, particularly those considered at-risk.

Homework

The results of the study indicated that a number of parents of at-risk fifth grade students perceived that preparation for the TAKS test affected how their child spent time

outside of school. Traditionally, the most common way for students to prepare for most kinds of testing would be through homework assigned by teachers. The effectiveness of homework on student achievement, particularly for elementary students, has been hotly debated and even crossed over into main stream media. However, perhaps the issue may not be whether or not to give homework, but rather ensuring the quality and relevance of the homework assigned, especially for at-risk students.

Teachers typically assigned homework on a regular basis irrespective of who the kids are, what they need, or what is being taught (Kohn, 2007). It has usually been decided ahead of time that everybody will complete a certain amount of homework each evening regardless of whether or not meaningful learning will occur. He believes that one of the greatest negative impacts homework can have is on a child's attitude toward learning. Following Kohn's logic, if at-risk students are expected to complete several hours of homework each evening after already spending the day struggling through difficult work at school, it seems likely they may develop negative attitudes towards learning, thus putting themselves even further at-risk. If students are doing large amounts of homework instead of other activities, such as sports or play, as the study suggests, it seems that even more damage is being done towards their attitude about learning.

Many educators make recommendations in regard to homework (Vatterott, 2010, Cushman, 2010, Cameron and Bartel, 2010, and Kohn, 2007). They advise that homework be purposeful, efficient, and provide some choice for students. Homework should be easy enough for students to complete independently, so for at-risk students, differentiation of homework assignments would make good sense. Differentiation could take place in the length, difficulty, complexity, amount of writing required, alternative

responses, use of graphic organizers, or even copies of teacher notes. Teachers need to be aware of not underestimating how much time a homework assignment will actually take to complete. Keeping at-risk students in mind, it often takes them significantly longer to complete assignments so perhaps working for a set amount of time rather than completing a certain number of problems would provide the practice they need without causing exhaustion or frustration while allowing time for other endeavors. The main recommendation by all the educators was that homework should not be “busywork,” but rather have a consequential connection to what is being learned in school. Educators also need to be willing to begin the discussion about homework and at least experiment by making changes for short periods of time before committing – or rejecting – new homework policies.

The results of the survey indicate that preparation for TAKS has changed how some at-risk students spend their time outside of school. Since homework assigned by school is the typical means for test preparation at home, schools and teachers need to examine their homework policies to ensure any homework assignment is a meaningful use of students’ time.

Fair testing practices

The results of the survey, as well as the literature, indicated that many parents do not feel that TAKS is a fair measure of student achievement for their child or most other students although the TAKS test has validity and instrumentation documentation available on the TEA website. Some parents may feel less concerned about the “fairness” of TAKS if teachers were better able to explain how the test is designed, what the results mean, and how they can use the results to better teach students. According to

Popham (2003), teachers need at least a rudimentary knowledge about measurement related skills in order to teach their students effectively. For example, teachers need to understand the language of curriculum and testing in order to understand the state curriculum standards and teach them accurately. Teachers also need to understand this language so they can relay teaching and testing objectives clearly to parents without using confusing jargon.

As the use of high-stakes tests in state accountability systems has increased dramatically, Popham (2003) states, “Teachers must become more familiar with the uses and misuses of externally imposed tests so they can recognize when an unsound test is being forced on their students, protest persuasively against such tests, and, over time, influence these tests’ revision” (p. viii). Since Texas has adopted a new high-stakes assessment, STAAR, Texas educators need to be able to understand the new testing blueprint so they can effectively teach the test content to their students. There will also be a myriad of new commercial testing materials designed to “help” educators prepare for the new assessment. Since initially there will be a limited amount of information available about the new test, it is likely that much of the new materials will not be of high quality. Teacher knowledge about appropriate and fair measurement practices will be needed so they can make informed decisions about the materials they use with their students.

Educators with knowledge about measurement related skills will be able to help parents better understand the expectations and results of high-stakes testing, perhaps reducing their perceptions that TAKs is not a fair measure of student achievement. They

will also be better prepared to make instructional decisions surrounding high-stakes tests for all of their students.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to describe the effects of high-stakes testing on the home-lives of fifth grade students who are at risk for failure on the TAKS test. However, there is a lack of research focusing on the effects of high-stakes testing outside of the school setting, specifically how high-stakes testing effects students and families, its effect on how students spend time outside of the school day, and parents perceptions of high-stakes testing as a fair measure of student achievement. As this study is limited to parents in a suburban school district in Texas, similar studies need to include parents from a variety of settings, including rural and urban, in a variety of states with high-stakes testing.

The dependent variables were limited to gender, race, and attendance at a Title I school and differences in perceptions were found amongst these groups when the data was analyzed. Subsequent studies should also consider the perceptions of other groups including parents of “regular” students, English language learners, immigrants and refugees, and special education students. As the number of students with disabilities, such as attention deficit hyper-active disorder or pervasive developmental disorder, are diagnosed, studies of the effects of high-stakes testing on these students may provide better insight on how to best support them both in and outside the school setting. As schools in Texas are rated in part according to their performance on TAKS, surveying parents from schools with different ratings may also provide additional insight. The

survey was only available in English, so similar surveys in other languages, particularly Spanish, are needed to consider the perceptions of parents of ELL and bilingual students.

This study was also limited to parents of fifth graders. Perceptions of parents in other high-stakes grades such as eighth and high school should also be surveyed to describe the unique perceptions of parents of students in those grades. As the new STAAR test is utilized, further research in all areas will need to be conducted to capture any new perceptions due to the new test. Future studies yielding differentiated data collection (e.g. pre-tests – post-tests and interviews) would yield deeper insight regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of at-risk students. Finally, as this research study began as a narrative look at the effects of high-stakes testing, further exploration of the stories of families would yield compelling personal accounts of student life in an era of high-stakes accountability.

Conclusion

On both the national and state level, high-stakes testing continues to play a major role in the on-going discussion and legislation surrounding school reform efforts, and it shows no sign of bowing out any time soon. The literature and this study indicate that many students, particularly those at-risk for failure, are feeling the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing at home in the form of stress and worry for both them and their family as well as the effects on how they are able to spend their free time. For educators, some of the results of this study may not be consistent with previously held beliefs about particular groups of people and their interest or involvement in school. However, since children's academic achievement and emotional well-being is not just the product of one place, but rather a variety of factors from all facets of their lives, educators

need to eliminate any preconceived biases as they initiate policies and practices that affect how students spend their time outside of school. This way, educators and parents are able to respectfully work together in order to meet the increasingly complex task of providing an exemplary educational experience for all students.

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APPENDIX A

SELECTED SECTIONS OF THE NARRATIVE STUDY

Selected Sections of the Narrative Study

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method of research that “embraces the assumption that the story is one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narrative researchers are free to use a variety of research approaches in their study of stories or descriptions of a series of events in order to gain a deeper understanding of those events. Narrative research is described by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) as a turn in thinking about the interactive quality of the relationship between the researcher and the subject, the use of stories as data, the focus on the local and specific rather than a general whole, and the understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience. Narrative inquirers also use different tools at different times for different contexts in order to interpret their stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the metaphor of a lathe to describe narrative tools. A lathe is used by many different people in many different places in a many different ways depending on the needs of the craftsman. The same way, different narrative researchers at different times and in different places may choose to broaden their field of inquiry, burrow deeper into a story, or re-story as new stories reveal themselves and become interwoven with each other. Narrative inquiry provides a fluid framework for understanding the effect of high-stakes testing on the family lives of at-risk students by allowing a researcher with a relationship with the students and their parents the opportunity to share their unique perspectives into the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing.

As the curriculum scholar Joseph Schwab (1969) foreshadows in his scholarship, narrative inquiry allows a researcher to go beyond measurable objectives (test scores) to

provide a detailed and accurate account of the effects of high-stakes testing on students and families. Schwab (1971) argues that it is the plurality of knowledge that lies at the heart of inquiry and by using narrative inquiry to hear the stories of the high-stakes testing through commonplaces (Schwab, 1971 & 1973) of the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter, and inquire about those stories, a fuller, richer understanding of the whole story of the effect of TAKS on schools can begin to be known.

Narrative Data

My Life as a Teacher

I came to Texas from Iowa as a brand-new teacher nineteen years ago. I was newly married and in another month I would discover I was also newly pregnant. There were many more “newlies” to come in the next several months. I was introduced to students newly entered into this country who did not speak English and students who were newly entered into the world of school and struggled to follow the rules, both hidden and known. I was young and loved my newly created life in Texas and welcomed each new challenge with the sunny optimism of a newly graduated teacher.

Then I was newly introduced to the Texas assessment system administered at that time through the TEAMS test. In my newly remodeled first grade classroom were several students who had been retained in first grade because they had failed the TEAMS test the year before. I was shocked as testing in Iowa elementary schools usually consisted of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) but there were no consequences for performance; certainly no one was retained for doing poorly! At that moment I honestly considered quitting my teaching position and finding a nice job in retail. But the reality

of newly acquired bills and a growing belly quickly convinced me to stick it out for at least a year. Besides, my wise, experienced teaching partner told me, TEAMS in first grade was over and if I stayed out of the TEAMS grades, I would not have to deal with the ugliness of high-stakes testing.

I managed to avoid the Texas version of high-stakes testing for the next twelve years other than an occasional stint as a monitor on test day. About seven years ago I accepted a position as the language arts specialist in a school of 1200 students, with approximately 85% of them qualifying for free and reduced lunch, over 50% speaking languages other than English, and an inexperienced staff. I was excited for the opportunity to develop curriculum and work with new teachers in their classrooms. I knew, of course, that test preparation would be a part of the job but I naively thought I would just help with test preparation for a few weeks in the spring. However, within the year I became an expert on teaching kids to pass the TAAS test and the following year I learned all I could about the new TAKS test. Within a few years we had our first taste of attaining the status of “recognized,” virtually unheard of with a student population such as ours. We worked hard to establish a culture of high expectations and quality instruction and I felt good about the work I was doing. Although there certainly was some TAKS preparation, it did not control our curriculum and students received a well-balanced education. Since most of the students came from difficult circumstances, we focused our efforts, particularly for TAKS, on what could be done at school. We knew our students had enough stress at home and we consciously made the decision not to add the pressure of TAKS as well.

When I decided to go back to school to pursue my doctorate, I made the switch to the school district where I live so I could better manage my family, work, and school responsibilities. I was able to obtain a fourth grade English Language Arts position at a highly sought after elementary school in middle class neighborhood. It took some time to get use to a new system but I was amazed at the abilities of my students and enjoyed teaching in my own classroom. I continued the same TAKS philosophy that I had held at my old school: focusing on good instruction and embedding TAKS skills as appropriate. In the weeks and months leading up to the TAKS test I noticed that my colleagues spent more and more time using practice worksheets. I considered joining them but decided against it and I didn't do any "real" TAKS practice until a week or so before the test. My students did well and I have to admit I enjoyed teaching in a school that was "exemplary." At the end of the year I was offered the position of reading specialist at the school and I accepted.

After the winter break, I immediately began working with 29 students who had been identified as at-risk for failure on either the third or fifth grade TAKS reading test. These students were identified based on classroom reading performance, results of a practice reading TAKS test, and previous TAKS performance. Most of these students had found literacy learning to be difficult from the beginning and there was plenty of documentation of various reading interventions, dyslexia, tutorials, Reading Recovery, and poor grades. All of the fifth grade students had been in some sort of TAKS tutorials each year since third grade, so this was certainly not new for them.

My groups were small and intimate. I made sure there was time for talk because I wanted the students to feel comfortable in order to make the hard – and often frustrating -

work feel easier. I had a “guideline” for the teachers from whose class the kids were pulled – I provide the TAKS homework and the kids would not have to do the class TAKS homework. I tried to schedule the kids to work with me when the rest of their class would be participating in small group instruction or TAKS practice so they would not miss direct instruction in their regular classroom that they would later be held accountable for learning. My homework corresponded with what strategy or skill we were working on and we did some each day so I could immediately tell if there were confusions. The text in the stories was usually below grade level so the kids could practice skills successfully without getting frustrated by the reading. Through conversations I discovered that many teachers were giving my students double homework – home work from both the regular teacher and me, in spite of my request, so the students were doing homework for several hours each night. I ask the kids how the homework was going at home and I heard stories of yelling, crying, no dessert, and general frustration.

During this time I was also having many conversations with concerned parents. Many tried not to put pressure on their kids, but most kids were definitely aware of how worried their parents were about their success. The parents often did not know how to help their child complete the vast amount of difficult homework and often resorted to desperate measures (hence the crying related earlier). Many families were also foregoing extra activities such as sports, music, and religious activities in order to ensure enough time was spent studying. We had long conversations about what they should say if their child failed, if outside tutoring was worth the money, and handling pressure from other family members and neighbors. Many of my students were offered rewards of money,

video games, and trips if they passed their tests. The parents were scared, confused, and frustrated. They seemed to have lost control of their family-life because of the TAKS test.

Through my own experience it was obvious that TAKS had an enormous effect on the family lives of students at risk for failure but this unintended consequence of high-stakes testing was going unnoticed and undocumented.

My Life as a Parent

My experience with TAKS as a parent has been very different than my experience as a teacher. My children have always attended the campus where I taught except for a couple of years where some of them attended a gifted program housed at a different campus. My oldest daughter took her first high-stakes test, a TAAS test, in 1999 when she was a third grader. At the time I was a Title I teacher and worked mostly with first and second graders so I had very little contact with TAAS. Her teacher explained at parent night that there would be very little TAAS homework because she preferred to work on it in school and have the students spend their time at home reading and learning math facts. My daughter must have done well because at the end of the year she received a trophy for her TAAS scores which still sits on her shelf today with all the other trophies she's received over the years. Today, due to confidentiality laws, students may no longer be awarded for TAKS performance and individual TAKS scores cannot be made public.

My other four children's experience with TAKS has been similar to their sister's. They seem to have a lot of TAKS homework in the elementary grades but do well on the tests. In middle school and high school, I hear very little about TAKS except for the student report at the end of the year. However it was a very different story for my niece.

I have received several frantic telephone calls from my sister over the years about the TAKS test. Although my niece struggles with both reading and math, she received very little help until she failed the first administration of a reading TAKS test. The first time Taylor failed, the principal called my sister at work to let her know that her daughter was one of two students in the third grade that had not passed her reading TAKS test. My sister had no idea what that meant for Taylor but I reassured her that Taylor had two more chances to pass before she could be retained and I would send her some materials she could use at home. I also directed her to the TEA web site for more information so she could see what a TAKS test actually looked like. I also asked my sister if she had spoken to her husband Tom yet, and she said no, she was not expecting him to be able to call for a couple of days because he was working off base that week. He was a sergeant in the army and he was nine months into a year-long tour in Iraq. We finished the conversation on a positive note and she felt much better than she had after speaking with the principal that afternoon. My sister and her daughter diligently worked on the TAKS practice book I had sent over the next several weeks and Taylor easily passed the reading test on her second try.

It was during this time I began to realize the true consequences and unfairness of the state accountability system. My sister had always done everything she was “supposed” to do to ensure her children’s success in school. She did a much better job than I of making sure homework was completed and reading was done each evening yet Taylor failed her reading TAKS test. How could an eight year old little girl worried about her daddy in Iraq be held accountable for failure on a test? Is that the kind of student accountability policymakers intended? The additional stress that TAKS placed

on a household already dealing with bigger and more important worries is troublesome. The following year Taylor squeaked by on all of her TAKS tests but in fifth grade she had difficulties with the math test. Her father had once again been stationed overseas a few weeks prior to the test day and Taylor was having a great deal of difficulty adjusting to his absence. This time the school was more responsive to Taylor and her mother's needs and provided positive support. Taylor's schedule was changed so she could see the "best" math teacher every day and my sister was given "fun" game-like materials to use at home. Taylor also received regular counseling by the school counselor to help her with anxiety related to her father's deployment. A much more relaxed Taylor easily passed on her next attempt.

The preparation for testing days at my house consists of early bedtimes and Dad making a hot breakfast each testing morning that includes grapes for brainpower. At my sister's house they spend weeks before the tests practicing problem-solving strategies and answering comprehension questions. Taylor and my sister find it difficult to sleep the night before and are barely able to eat breakfast on the mornings of the tests. As Dewey (1938) stated; miseducative experiences beget more miseducative experiences. Regardless of Taylor's future success on TAKS, the stress associated with her early experiences will be difficult if not impossible to undo.

Mrs. Barker's Story

Mrs. Barker is the mother of Helen, her only daughter. She has a step-son who spends time with the family on weekends but it is usually just Mrs. Barker, her husband, and Helen spending evenings together. Mr. Barker occasionally travels for his job. Mrs. Barker does not work outside of the home but volunteers several hours at Helen's school

each week and is a room parent and an officer for the school PTA. She is always at Helen's fifth grade events and is friends with several of the other mothers. She also enjoys doing volunteer work at her church and is active in several groups there. Mrs. Barker is an avid cyclist and participates each year in the MS 150 charity bicycle ride between Austin and Houston.

Mrs. Barker is obviously very devoted to her daughter and is willing to do about anything to help her be successful in school. I was Helen's classroom teacher in fourth grade as well as provided dyslexia services to her in fifth grade so I am very familiar with Helen's challenges in school. I have become quite close with Helen and her mother as we all worked hard to improve Helen's literacy skills. I am a part of Helen and Mrs. Barker's story as they are a part of mine.

We began our conversation with Mrs. Barker sharing Helen's background with school. Helen began formal schooling in kindergarten at the neighborhood elementary school when she was five years old and they noticed problems right away. The kindergarten teacher told them (Mr. and Mrs. Barker) that Helen was having a lot of trouble with reading, writing, and spelling and just getting her thoughts together and process information. The school determined quickly that Helen had dyslexia or some other learning disability but at first the Barkers just denied it. But eventually they started the course of getting her tested and trying to figure out what was wrong. They thought perhaps it was just the school being highly competitive and expecting too much. The Barkers' expectation was that it was going to get better and she was going to get past those hurdles. But of course she didn't; she continued to be the same and have slower progress than the other students. So at that point they pulled Helen out of public school

and found a small private Christian school for her to attend in first grade. Mrs. Barker described the private school as more hands on learning instead of seat work and book work. Helen “thrived” there and really loved it. A parent at the school provided Helen with the Neuhaus dyslexia program for a year. Helen attended the school for two years but unfortunately it only went through second grade so they decided to home school Helen in third grade. Mrs. Barker wanted to home school another year but Helen was an only child and missed the social interactions of school. They heard about Settlers Way, put in an in-district transfer, and feel it has worked out “really great.” It is a smaller school than the previous public school and it just seemed to fit Helen better. It was at Settlers Way that Helen received the official dyslexia diagnosis which Mrs. Barker knew was coming as dyslexia runs in her family. She told me several times during our conversations that she did not want Helen to have the same fate as her sister and niece. Apparently both had difficulty learning to read. The sister never graduated from high school and lives in a low-income housing project in Houston while the niece attends a “bad” school and doesn’t receive any help even though she is unable to read even though she is in middle school. So far Helen is doing well. She is still struggling but she is able to make it and so far they are happy. They know they have a long way to go but they are happy.

In previous conversations with Mrs. Barker she had told me that one of the reasons they had decided to home school Helen for third grade was because of the TAKS test. I asked her to talk more about that decision. She explained that they were concerned that since Helen had been out of the public school way of teaching for two

years so we were afraid that her level of achievement and what she was able to do would not be reflected in the tests she might take. She further explained:

... we just didn't know what that transition would be like and we didn't know how...how it would affect her going back into a public school system, and then being force fed at lot of this information on, you know, how to take tests, because honestly at her private school they didn't have tests. They had like little spelling tests and things like that, little math tests, they didn't have tests, per-se, like you would at a regular public school. So, that really weighed heavily into our decision not to put in that year. And we weren't really sure about fourth grade because we didn't know if her going to fourth grade was contingent upon her passing the third grade TAKS. But since she initially didn't have...didn't take it, it wasn't a requirement to go into fourth grade. So that...that actually gave us a year, as parents, to prepare and get her, you know, familiar with the TAKS test, for into fifth grade, now. So that gave us a good one year to do that. So. It's kind of at a good time for us.

We next talked about how the TAKS test has changed the Barker family. Mrs. Barker quickly told me that it was definitely more stressful than when they home-schooled. It reminded her of Helen's year in kindergarten when they felt pressure for her to pass the PAPI (the district early literacy assessment) and Helen ended up not enjoying kindergarten. She explained that the TAKS limits them as a family just in enjoying the school experience and learning. There is pressure to just learn it to pass. Mrs. Barker feels strongly that there is too much time spent learning to take a test instead of learning new information.

Mrs. Baker also explained TAKS has affected their family life in the sense that Helen has not been able to do a lot of things outside of school so Helen can focus on what she needs to focus on. She was unable to play soccer this spring because it was too much of a time commitment away from TAKS practice. Helen understood because she really wants to go to sixth grade. The family has also made financial sacrifices by paying for tutors, programs, and books. Mrs. Barker also explained she gave up her career so she would be able to “support Helen 100%.”

We talked about how the TAKS test has affected Helen:

I know that it's been stressful for her. She worries about it. Um, you know, she'll, I don't know if I can say this but, you know, when she prays, she prays that God helps her pass it... she worries that she won't move on with her friends. Um, she worries, um, what would be, even be a thing that she has, um, intimated to me, that, um, she'll feel like she's not smart enough.

I asked Mrs. Barker how she feels about TAKS and she replied with an emphatic, “I hate TAKS!” After we laughed I continued by asking her if she saw any good in it. She admitted it probably does some good but it seems that it is trying to make everybody fit the same way. It is definitely not good for Helen and other students with disabilities. She believes it is important to have “certain things” to know how schools are doing but the TAKS test doesn't measure the whole child. She admitted her feelings were probably so strong because it does not work for her family. She reiterated that she believes that the test is taking too much time away from other kinds of learning and it is just another way to label kids.

Mrs. Barker is very grateful for all the assistance the school has given Helen. She

believes that the teachers saw what a hard worker Helen is and accepted her for who she is and gives her all the support she needs to be successful academically and emotionally.

We talked about how some of the purposes for the TAKS test include accountability for

teachers and schools as well as identify students who need extra assistance. Mrs. Barker shared it had been her experience that it is important to have accountability, but it's not really necessary in the area we live in because there is lots of money and services.

However, she knows it is not the same in the school district where her sister lives. She believes that, unfortunately, it all boils down to money. Schools with more money are able to do a better job. She firmly reiterated her belief that the passing the TAKS in order to be promoted is unnecessary, particularly for students with disabilities. Mrs. Barker closed our conversation with these thoughts:

“...we're focusing so much on the TAKS that I think we're missing crucial learning: learning new concepts, learning new skills learning new, just, history for instance, you know, science. Everything is kind of at a standstill because we're...because...I don't even...because the teachers have to perform well but they have to make sure their students perform well and have to make sure that our students pass. So, I think that putting all these stringent rules on the TAKS test really hinders actual classroom learning... we're focusing on the TAKS at school and then we're focusing on the TAKS at home. I just feel like we're losing some learning time there.”

Mrs. Juarez's Story

Mrs. Juarez is the mother of third grader Esteban and his younger first grade brother. She is the science department head at an exclusive boys' private high school in the area. Her husband, a native of the Philippines, is also a teacher at the same school. Mrs. Juarez has a Masters degree in elementary education and has taught at various grade levels for a number of years. The family moved to the Settlers Way Elementary school zone specifically so their sons could attend the school. The family enjoys camping and traveling together as well as participating in Boy Scout activities. They were able to recently travel to the Philippines to visit family and friends.

Mrs. Juarez and I first met at the beginning of the school year at "Meet the Teacher" night. She knew there was a new reading specialist and she wanted to make sure I knew about Esteban and was going to provide the appropriate dyslexia services for him. She was very friendly but also very specific and firm about what she expected me to do for Esteban. I seemed to answer her questions correctly because she told the principal on the way out that she was satisfied with the new reading specialist.

Our next meeting was a little tense. Mrs. Juarez and her husband had just left a conference with Esteban's classroom teachers and were very upset because the teachers were not following the accommodations on his 504 plan. He had received failing grades on several assignments and when she asked them about it, they freely admitted they had not chosen to follow the accommodations because they didn't think he needed them. Apparently the conference had escalated and Mr. Juarez had decided to end it. I spent the next several minutes calming Mrs. Juarez and assuring her that Esteban would be able to redo his work, and I would speak with the teachers to make sure they understood the

legal requirements of following 504 plans. Mrs. Juarez left calmer and sent an e-mail apologizing for her behavior the next day.

My conversation with the teachers was frustrating. They really did not understand why Mrs. Juarez had become so upset and, although I thought we had gone over accommodation plans very thoroughly the first week of school, did not understand that following the accommodations was required and not a choice. Unfortunately, this was the first of several incidents where I ended up running interference between Mrs. Juarez and the classroom teachers. Eventually the teachers just gave Esteban good grades so they would not have to deal with Mrs. Juarez.

As the year progresses, Mrs. Juarez and I spoke often either through e-mail or in the parking lot when she picked her sons up from the school's after- school daycare program. I learned that Esteban had difficulty with literacy from the beginning. His mother reported he struggled in learning letters and sounds in pre-school and at home but they initially denied there was any problem. After working with him intensely, she knew he showed classic signs of dyslexia but knew it would be difficult to get a diagnosis for a child so young. Her brother was a developmental pediatrician and had made suggestions which were somewhat helpful. When he entered school, Esteban continued to struggle through kindergarten. At the beginning of first grade he qualified for Reading Recovery® services as one of the lowest performing first graders. He made slow progress in spite of the one-on-one tutoring provided through Reading Recovery ® so his parents decide to have him privately tested for a possible learning disability and attention issues. He was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia and began medication for the ADHD which he still takes today. According to records, Esteban began receiving dyslexia services at the end

of first grade. Mrs. Juarez noted that Esteban's IQ was high average – around 120 which she felt was “fine.”

When working with me, Esteban was the highest performing student in the group. He easily grasps new concepts and can be quite insightful when we discuss our reading. He still struggles with fluency and spelling and hates cursive writing but has discovered graphic novels for young readers and, according to his mom, is reading by choice instead of having to be forced. He asks a lot of questions about many different things and seems to have a variety of interests.

As the TAKS test approached, he became almost obsessive about understanding exactly how the testing situation was going to be handled. I often had to reassure him that he would be taking the test with me in my classroom, not with his homeroom teacher, and yes, I would not forget to read the proper nouns and the questions and answer choices to him. I assured him I would tell him if his bubbling became too messy and we would take breaks to eat our snack. It was quite obvious he was overly concerned about his performance and the consequences of not passing.

When I asked Mrs. Juarez to speak with me specifically about how TAKS has affected her family, she was enthusiastic! We arranged a convenient time after school on one of her in-service days.

Mrs. Juarez began our conversation by reviewing Esteban's early struggles with learning and their eventual decision to use medication to help with his ADHD and his private diagnosis of dyslexia. She was very forthcoming with information including sharing a diagnosis of mild Tourette's syndrome for Esteban.

I asked Mrs. Juarez how TAKS has changed her family. She responded immediately by sharing how interesting it has been because Esteban is obsessed with how he does on the TAKS test. They work on the packets on-line (TEA website for parents) every night for about an hour breaking it down sentence by sentence and then going through the questions using the strategies from school as well as others they thought might help. With the addition of the homework from school, they spend at least two hours each night studying.

Mrs. Juarez went on to describe the effect the test was having on her family, particularly Esteban:

So, you had him going to school during the day and getting, uh, an hour at home. You have a child who is on honor roll but is afraid he's not gonna pass to fourth grade. My family was unable to make summer plans until we knew whether he was going to pass the TAKS test, even though he is on honor roll. And the level of stress, um, and his tics increased dramatically, um, before the test. You know, he was gouging his eyes, again, picking at himself, um, and you know we had to take him back to the [doctor] to kind of address those issues, because I don't want him hurting himself.

I asked if there was anything else the family had to change in order to prepare for TAKS. Mrs. Juarez explained that because of the amount of regular homework in addition to their TAKS practice that Esteban needed to complete each night, he was unable to play fall or spring soccer and had to give up Tai Kwon Do. They have also spent less time with Esteban's younger brother. Fortunately he does not have the same

needs as Esteban and is pretty self-sufficient but they know it is not fair that he does not get the same attention as Esteban and feel guilty about it.

We talked about how Mrs. Juarez feels about TAKS. She explained that she understands the need for accountability. As a high school department head she knows there are “wide variations” between teachers and schools. However, she does not understand the stress at a third or fifth grade level. She also expressed concern over the effects on curriculum. She cited an example of a math problem that Esteban was working on with his father. He did not understand the concepts needed to solve the problem but used a trick his teacher had taught him to find the answer from the given answer choices.

Mrs. Juarez would let policy makers know that she believes TAKS is a valuable tool in middle and high school. However she would also want them to know how stressful it is for younger students who do not really understand how the test is administered. She felt the rules surrounding what teachers could and could not do are confusing to students and may cause them to worry about their teacher getting fired if she talks to them during the test! She would also want them to know that the test is not well-written, particularly the math section.

We talked about whether or not TAKS makes schools better. Mrs. Juarez reiterated her belief that TAKS is effective for high schools – it at least helps ensure that graduating students are able to read. However in the elementary schools it just puts teachers and students under too much stress as the main focus of elementary school should be beginning reading and math; not preparing for a test. She stated that students in the “middle” get left out because the low students get “tutored, tutored, tutored, tutored” and the high students are grouped together.

Mrs. Juarez is pleased with the support the school has provided for her son outside of the classroom setting. She did state that she wished the school or district would share more information about how the test was going to be administered, the “rules”, as well as the true consequences for failure so parents could reassure and prepare their children.

As we finished our conversation, Mrs. Juarez admitted that they were not really focusing on the math test because Esteban did not need to pass it to advance to fourth grade. Her final comments included:

I almost wish that parts of this test could be rewritten, um, and maybe incorporated into the curriculum and still check it. Uh, I also am...am, upset that so much time, in remediation, has to be spent on TAKS, because really that’s not the reason I’m sending my child to a public school. I’m sending them to a public school so that they can get the services they need.... But because so much pressure is put on the school district and they do rate schools by whether they’re exemplary and not exemplary and how many of their kids pass the TAKS test. Uh, that’s...that’s disturbing to me.

Mrs. Juarez is obviously very upset about the effects TAKS is having on Esteban and the rest of the family. She feels the test is poorly written and has a negative effect on curriculum, teachers, and students.

Commonalities

The parents in the pilot study all had strong feelings about the effect TAKS was having on their families. They believed that TAKS had added undue stress on their children as well as themselves. Time that should have been spent doing things together

as a family was instead spent preparing for the TAKS test. Mrs. Barker politely described it as “staying inside a lot.”

All the parents believed that measuring achievement, especially at such a young age, on one test, was wrong. They felt the assessment did not do justice to their children’s abilities and strengths and labeled them in unfair ways. They understood the need for accountability but did not feel TAKS was the right way to do it.

As a teacher I was concerned that the parents had all noticed what TAKS was doing to the curriculum. Most teachers realize that a fair amount of curriculum is given up in order to prepare for high-stakes testing. I did not realize to what extent this was obvious to parents and even students.

All the families were very frustrated by the negative effects TAKS was having on their families and wished policy makers would reconsider assessment in elementary school. Famed educator John Dewey (1938, p. 25) wrote, “The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative.” The stories of these parents show just how high-stakes testing can indeed be mis-educative in the name of accountability and equal education for all.

APPENDIX B
PILOT SURVEY

Survey Study

Attitude Instrument Development

Consideration of the narrative data led to the development of a survey with six latent variables and the brainstorming of approximately 120 potential items for the survey. This list was shared with two classmates at the University of Houston familiar with the TAKS test as well as the professor of the survey research class. Based on their comments and feedback, the latent variables were narrowed to two: the effects of TAKS on how students and families spend time at home and parents' feelings about the TAKS test and its effect on their children. The items were narrowed down to eleven for the first latent variable (time) and nineteen for the second latent variable (feelings) for a total of thirty items.

Likert scales for each variable were also developed. The items concerning the change in the amount of time families spent participating in various activities since the preparation for the TAKS test began needed a scale which described amounts of time so *much less, less, no change, more, and much more* was chosen from several sample surveys measuring time. The items for the second variable which describes how parents feel about the TAKS test and its effect on their children needed a scale which reflected the degree to which the parent agreed with a particular statement. Initially the scale *strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree* was chosen but a *neutral* choice was added for clarity, and to get a more continuous distribution during factor analysis as well as to match the number of scale choices of the first variable. The order was also reversed to reflect common survey scaling practice. A space for participants to write any

additional comments regarding the TAKS test was left at the end of the survey as requested by the principal of my campus where it would be distributed.

Pilot Sample

The population for the survey is all parents or guardians of students in grades three and five in the state of Texas who are taking a high-stakes TAKS test. The sample for the pilot survey are all parents or guardians of third or fifth grade students taking a high-stakes TAKS test at an elementary school in a suburban Houston school district. At the time of survey distribution there were 124 third grade students and 116 fifth grade students enrolled. All students were given a copy of the survey to take home to their parents or guardians.

The elementary school serves about 730 students in grades prekindergarten through fifth grade. The school is surrounded by single family homes and most of the students are within walking distance of the school. Three buses bring approximately 150 students from a newly built subdivision about 6 miles away. There is no multi-family housing zoned to the school. According to the 2008 Campus AEIS Report, the ethnic distribution is 10% African American, 15% Hispanic, 42% White, 0.3% Native American, and 33% Asian/Pacific Islander. 14% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged, 20% are limited speakers of English, and 32% of the students are considered at-risk. The mobility rate for the 2006 – 2007 school year was 8.5% although it is probably higher now due to the recent building of new homes in the area bussed to the school. The school has a very active PTO and school events always have a high attendance rate. Currently the school has a “recognized” rating for the Texas

school accountability system. The previously two years the school had an “exemplary” rating and there is pressure on the administration and staff to regain the “exemplary” rating.

The parents at the elementary school are known to be active and vocal participants in their children’s education. The economic status and ethnic distribution of the sample may not make the results of the survey able to be generalized to the population but should not affect the evaluation of the psychometric properties of the instrument.

Administration

Permission for distribution was obtained by the school principal and the district representative after completion of the district request forms. Third and fifth grade homeroom teachers graciously agreed to distribute and collect the surveys and release forms. It was decided that a packet containing the survey, the introduction letter, the release form, and an envelope for anonymous return of the survey would be distributed the Monday following spring break. Students were given one week to return the survey and each day a student from the class was chosen to bring the returned surveys and release forms to the my office. A total of 220 surveys were distributed and 140 were returned for a 64% return rate. 44.3% of the respondents had 3rd grade children, 51.4% of the respondents had 5th grade children, and 4.3% of the respondents did not give a grade level or misunderstood the question and gave unrelated information as mentioned previously.

Evaluating the Factor Structure of the Instrument Using Factor Analysis

Before factor analysis techniques can be applied, an assessment of the data for suitability of factor analysis must be completed by looking at the sample size and the strength of the intercorrelations among the items. When the data collected from the participants was analyzed using SPSS Version 17.0, missing values were addressed excluding cases pair-wise because very little data was missing so n would change only rarely.

The correlation matrix shows the strength of the relationship between two factors so each factor's individual relationship with all the other individual factors is given. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients with a value of 0.30 and higher and none of the values are 0.00. The determinant, the measure of the variability of the correlation matrix, is -0.000000589. Although this is an extremely small number and indicates there is not much variance in the correlation matrix, it is not zero. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value, which measures the sampling adequacy, is .803 which is considered excellent. There is a relatively small amount of unique variance in the correlation matrix. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant at < 0.01 which makes it statistically different than the identity matrix and the null hypothesis may be rejected. The communalities table, which shows the proportion of variance in a variable that is accounted for by the factors, also indicated factor analysis is appropriate as all the items have extractions from .535 to .845. The results of the correlation matrix, the determinant, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy, Bartlett's Test for Sphericity, and the communalities table indicate the appropriateness of factor analysis.

Initially it was expected there would be two constructs but principal component analysis revealed the presence of nine components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 25.75%, 8.49%, 7.09%, 6.13%, 5.36%, 4.18%, 3.92%, 3.58%, and 3.52% of the variance respectively. Upon analysis of the component matrix (Table 1), components 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9 did not have items with factor loadings which strongly associated with the component so those components were dismissed. Components 4 and 5 had some clustering of factor loadings with “medium” associations but those items also associated with other factors. Component 2 also had several moderate factor loadings with associations with other components but had one item with a strong factor loading to that component only. Component 1 had nine items with strong factor loadings and no associations with other components which makes it the only clear component according to the component matrix. Using just the initial component matrix, it was difficult to identify clear clusters of items measuring specific components so a rotated component matrix using Varimax and Kaiser Normalization was calculated.

Upon analysis of the rotated component matrix, nine components were once again identified with eigenvalues above 1 but components 7 and 8 had few associated items so they were easily discarded. Components 6 and 9 both had single items with strong associations and component 6 also had three items with moderate factor loadings but two of them associated to other components. As one item is usually not enough to measure a component and Components 6 and 9 only compromise 4.18% and 3.52% of the variance, they were also discarded. Component 5 had two items with very strong factor loadings which associated with no other component with a total variance of 5.36%. Component 4 had 6.13% of the variance and three items with strong factor loadings as well as two

other items with moderate factor loadings but also associated with other items.

Component 3 had two items with very strong factor loadings, one item with a moderate factor loading, and another item with a moderate factor loading with another moderate factor loading to another item. Its percentage of the variance was 7.09%. Component 2 had three very strong factor loadings as well as one moderate factor loading and another moderate factor loading associated with another component with 8.48% of the variance. Component 1 by far explains the variance with 25.75%. It has seven items with strong factor loadings and some moderate factor loadings associated with other components.

It is clear that component 1, with 25.75% of the variance should be extracted and likely that components 6, 7, 8, and 9 should be discarded. However, components 2, 3, 4, and 5 all have reasonably close eigenvalues and together explain 27.07% of the total variance. The scree plot shows an obvious bend between components 1 and 2 and another bend between components 5 and 6. The construct of high-stakes testing (TAKS) and its effects on families is complicated so it seems reasonable that several factors would be needed to explain a little over half of the total variance. Arguably components 2, 3, 4, and 5 could also be extracted for a total of a five-factor solution. However, when the reliability is calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, components 4 and 5, with Alphas of .587 and .686 respectively with little change occurring by removing individual items, must be discarded. Components 1 and 2 remain with Cronbach's Alphas of .881 and .724. Component 3 has a Cronbach's Alpha of .107 but when one of the items is removed, the Alpha jumps to .862 so it can also be included. The total variance explained by these three components is 41.33% for a three factor solution.

Component 1, which can be named the *Effects of TAKS on the Student and Family*, has six items with strong factor loadings on the rotated component matrix: *My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test* (.684), *My child struggles to pass the TAKS test* (.709), *My child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test* (.753), *My child has lost sleep over the TAKS test* (.809), *Other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test* (.797), and *I worry about how my child is reacting to the TAKS test* (.764). All these items had little association with other components and combined have a strong Cronbach's Alpha (.881) which remains constant when any of the items are removed. All of the items were also strong on both the correlation matrix and the original component matrix.

Component 2, named the *Effects of TAKS on How Students Spend Time Outside of School*, has four items with moderate to strong factor loadings on the rotated component matrix: *Time spent on exercise or sport activities* (.521), *Time spent playing with friends* (.778), *Time spent participating in family activities* (.701), and *Time spent watching television or movies* (.653). All the items had little association with other components and combined have an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of .724 which lowers if any items are removed. All the items were strong on the correlation matrix but only *time watching television or movies* had strong factor loadings on the original component matrix.

Component 3, named *Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement*, has 2 items with very strong factor loadings: *The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement* (.865) and *The TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students* (.874). All the items had little association with other components and combined have a Cronbach's Alpha of .862. Both items were strong on

the correlation matrix but did not have strong factor loadings on the original component matrix.

Validity

Validity, or “Is my instrument measuring what I want it to measure?” has been ensured through several ways. Prior to the writing the pilot summary I had completed a narrative research project on the same construct of the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of at-risk students last spring. I read several articles and books about the effects and history of high-stakes testing in American education. As part of my job as an elementary reading specialist, I spend much of my time preparing students for TAKS testing so I am very familiar with the topic. I also shared my initial survey drafts with other experts both in class and in my school district. The content validity of the survey is consistent with the literature and what experts in the field feel are representative of the content of high-stakes testing, specifically the TAKS test.

As the initial groundwork for this survey was done through a narrative research project, the advantages of mixed-method research designs may be invoked. Using a survey and narrative mixed method research design provide the researcher with an opportunity to obtain both a deeper and wider understanding of a research question. In the case of this survey, the data used from the narrative research adds validity to the survey research. The words, pictures, and narrative of qualitative methods can be used to add meaning to the numbers of quantitative research and numbers can be used to add precision to the words, pictures, and narratives of qualitative designs (Bell, 2004). The strengths and weaknesses of both methods need to be considered as the research design is developed and these strengths and weaknesses can be used to balance each other.

Conclusions

After completing factor analysis on my pilot survey concerning the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of students in grades three and five, I decided I have a 3-factor solution with 12 items. Factor 1 is the effects of TAKS on the student and families and 6 items with high moderate to strong factor loadings associate with it and have a combined Cronbach's Alpha of .881. Factor 2 is the effects of TAKS on how students spend their time outside of school. There are four factors associated with moderate to high factor loadings and a Cronbach's Alpha of .724. The final factor, Factor 3, is parent attitudes about TAKS as a fair measure of achievement with two strong factor loadings and an Alpha of .862. These three factors represent constructs often associated with the effects of high-stakes testing on students and families discussed by experts in the field and in the literature. The potential items which would be used on a survey are:

- My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test
- My child struggles to pass the TAKS test
- My child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test
- My child has lost sleep over the TAKS test
- Other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test
- I worry about how my child is reacting to the pressure of the TAKS test
- The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement
- The TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students
- Time spent in exercise or sports activities
- Time spent playing with friends

- Time spent participating in family activities
- Time spent watching television or movies

As discussed earlier, I had five possible components before an analysis of reliability using Cronbach's Alpha was completed showing factors 4 and 5 with unacceptable levels of reliability. Factor 4 would have been labeled *Parent attitudes about time spent preparing for TAKS and accountability* and Factor 5 would have been labeled *Time spent on homework*. Together these factors explain 11.49% of the variability so it would definitely be helpful if the questions could somehow be rewritten to increase the reliability. Time spent preparing for TAKS both at school and home and whether it is truly holding schools accountable for student learning are major issues regarding the TAKS test so it would be very helpful if they could be addressed in the survey.

The original survey was quite awkward and long (four 8 1/2" x 11" page booklets) and I wondered if all the participants truly attended to the questions at the end of the survey as they did to those at the beginning. It would also be easy for participants to just start circling without really considering the question. Twelve questions will fit on a smaller sheet of paper which may be less intimidating and certainly twelve questions is a reasonable length to maintain interest.

APPENDIX C

SURVEY INTRODUCTION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

April 2010

Dear Fifth Grade Families,

My name is Dawn Westfall and I am the Assistant Principal at Lexington Creek Elementary. I am also a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of Houston. I am currently completing my dissertation and have chosen a survey as part of my research methodology.

Attached you will find my survey regarding parents' or guardians' of 5th grade students attitudes about the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS test. Your participation is optional and your responses will remain confidential. This survey has been approved for distribution by Fort Bend ISD and your principal. This project has also been reviewed by The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human subjects (713-743-9204). My advisor Dr. Lee Mountain (713-743-4964) is sponsoring the project. The survey takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The purpose of the survey is to collect data about how 5th grade families who have students who may be struggling to pass the TAKS test feel about the TAKS test and its effect on their families. This information will not only help me fulfill my degree requirements, but give the Fort Bend Independent School District valuable information to help us meet the needs of our students and their families.

Attached you will find a consent form. Please read the form carefully and sign if you agree to participate in the survey. An envelope has been provided so you may confidentially return the survey. However, please keep the consent form separate from the survey. Do not put your name or your child's name on the survey. Classroom teachers have generously agreed to provide an incentive to those students who return the survey. If you choose not to participate, please return the blank survey, and your child will receive the same incentive. **Remember, your participation is optional, and your responses will remain confidential.** If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 281-634-5002 or dawn.westfall@fortbend.k12.tx.us .

Thank you so much for your assistance. It is a pleasure to work with the students and families in the Fort Bend Independent School District.

Sincerely,

Dawn Westfall

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE SURVEY

University of Houston/Fort Bend Independent School District Consent Form

Parental Perceptions of the Effects of the High-stakes TAKS Test on the Home Lives of At-risk 5th Grade Students

You are being invited to participate in a research project by Dawn Westfall from the Department of Education at the University of Houston. The project is part of a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Lee Mountain (713-743-4964). This form provides you with information about this study and the researcher Dawn Westfall can be reached at 281-634-5002 or dawn.westfall@fortbendk12.tx.us to answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part.

- Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your child are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.
- The purpose of the study is to investigate parents' perceptions of the effects of high-stakes testing on the home lives of their students in fifth grade who are at risk for failure on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).
- Parents or guardians are asked to complete a twelve item survey regarding their attitudes about the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The survey will be distributed to approximately 1000 fifth grade families in the Fort Bend Independent School District. The estimated time to complete the survey is 10 minutes.
- Identity of the participants will be kept confidential as the surveys are to be returned in the provided envelopes and participants are instructed not to write their name or their child's names on the survey. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.
- The results of the survey will be shared with Fort Bend Independent School District and the University of Houston.
- There are no perceived risks to the participants or their children for completing or not completing the survey.
- While you or your child will not directly benefit from participation, your participation will help investigators better understand how to assist students and their families.

- The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

Subject Rights

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that if I have any questions, I may contact Dawn Westfall at 281-634-5002 or dawn.westfall@fortbend.k12.tx.us . I may also contact Dr. Lee Mountain, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-4964.
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any questions.
7. **Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713-743-9204). All research projects that are carried out by investigators at the University of Houston are governed by requirements of the University and the federal government.**
8. Any information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no other than the principal investigator and Dr. Lee Mountain. The results can be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me or my child by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY. I RECEIVED A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY OWN RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Name of Parent _____ Name of Child _____

School _____ Teacher's Name _____ Grade _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Researcher Signature and Date _____

School Principal Signature and Date _____

APPENDIX E
SURVEY

Consider the following statements and indicate whether you *strongly disagree, disagree, are neutral, agree, or strongly agree.*

1. My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

2. My child struggles to pass the TAKS test.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

3. My child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

4. My child has lost sleep over the TAKS test.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

5. Other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

6. I worry about how my child is reacting to the pressure of the TAKS test.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

7. The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

8. The TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students.

strongly disagree disagree neutral agree strongly agree

Consider the following activities and indicate whether the amount of time your child participates is *much less*, *less*, *no change*, *more*, or *much more* since preparation for the TAKS test began.

9. Time spent in exercise or sports activities.

much less *less* *no change* *more* *much more*

10. Time spent playing with friends.

much less *less* *no change* *more* *much more*

11. Time spent participating in family activities.

much less *less* *no change* *more* *much more*

12. Time spent watching television or movies.

much less *less* *no change* *more* *much more*

Please circle.

My child is a: **boy** **girl**

Race:

American Indian

Asian/Pacific Islander

Black/African American

Hispanic

White

Thank you!!!

APPENDIX F
RESULTS OF DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS
BY COMPONENT AND ITEM

Results of Descriptive Analysis by Component and Item

Component 1: Effects of TAKS on the Student and Family

An examination of the Likert scale items for component one was undertaken to establish parental perception of the effects of TAKS on the student and family. There were six items that corresponded with the component: *My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test, my child struggles to pass the TAKS test, my child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test, my child has lost sleep over the TAKS test, other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test, and I worry about how my child is reacting to the TAKS test.* Parents were asked to consider the statements and indicate whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement. Table 2 presents the results from component one of the survey.

Of the 111 parents surveyed, 58.5% indicated they strongly agree or agree that their child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test, and 64.8% strongly agree or agree that they are concerned about how their child is reacting to the pressure of the TAKS test. Only 23.4% of the parents strongly disagreed or disagreed that their child has expressed concern about the TAKS and only 23.4% of the parents did not seem to worry about how their child is reacting to the TAKS test. 51.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that other family members besides the child were feeling stress due to the TAKS test. Only 17.1% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test and 27.0% agreed or strongly agreed that their child had lost sleep due to the TAKS test. Although one of the criteria for participation in the survey was having a child at risk for failure on one or

more of the fifth grade TAKS tests, only 51.3% agreed or strongly agreed that their child struggles to pass the TAKS test and 29.5% of them strongly disagreed or disagreed with that statement. According to the parents who responded to the survey, it seems that TAKS has had a negative effect on many of the students at risk for failure on the TAKS test as well as their families.

Table 7

Frequencies Component 1: The effects of TAKS on the student and family

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My child has expressed concern about not passing the TAKS test.	11.7%	11.7%	18.0%	29.7%	28.8%
My child struggles to pass the TAKS test.	6.3%	25.2%	17.1%	29.7%	21.6%
My child has suffered medical issues from worrying about the TAKS test.	48.6%	25.2%	9.0%	13.5%	3.6%
My child has lost sleep over the TAKS test.	29.7%	24.3%	18.0%	18.9%	8.1%
Other family members besides my child feel stress due to the TAKS test.	22.5%	14.4%	10.8%	27.9%	23.4%
I worry about how my child is reacting to the pressure of the TAKS test.	8.1%	15.3%	11.7%	35.1%	29.7%

Component 2: Effects of TAKS on How Students Spend Time Outside of School

An examination of the Likert scale items for component one was undertaken to establish parental perception of the effects of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school. There were four items that corresponded with the component: *Time spent on exercise or sport activities, time spent playing with friends, time spent participating in family activities, and time spent watching television or movies.* Parents were asked to

consider each activity and indicate whether the amount of time their child participates in that activity is much less, less, no change, more, or much more since preparation for the TAKS test began. Table 3 presents the results from component two of the survey.

Table 8

Frequencies Component 2: The effect of TAKS on how students spend time outside of school

Item	Much less	Less	No change	More	Much more
Time spent in exercise or sports activities	10.8%	36.0%	29.7%	17.1%	6.3%
Time spent playing with friends	12.6%	40.5%	33.3%	9.0%	4.5%
Time spent participating in family activities	8.1%	30.6%	45.0%	10.8%	5.4%
Time spent watching television or movies	13.5%	49.5%	24.3%	7.2%	5.4%

Of the 111 parents who responded to the survey, 53.1% reported that their child spent much less or less time playing with friends. 46.8% reported that their child spent much less or less time exercising or participating on other sports activities and 38.7% reported spending much less or less time participating in family activities. 63.0% parents reported that their children were spending much less or less time watching television or movies since preparation for the TAKS test had begun. According to the parents who responded to the survey, it would seem that preparation for the TAKS test has taken away time from other activities for many families of fifth graders at-risk for failure on the TAKS test.

Component 3: Parent Attitudes About TAKS as a Fair Measure of Achievement

A continuation of the examination of the Likert scale items for component three was undertaken to establish parental perception of TAKS as a fair measure of achievement. There were two items that corresponded with the component: *The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement* and *the TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students*. Parents were asked to consider each statement and indicate whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed. Table 4 presents the results from component three of the survey.

Table 9

Frequencies Component 3: TAKS as a fair measure of student achievement

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The TAKS test is a fair measure of my child's achievement.	19.8%	26.1%	18.9%	27.0%	8.1%
The TAKS test is a fair measure of achievement for most students.	13.5%	27.9%	25.2%	27.0%	6.3%

Parents who responded to the survey were very closely split on several of the indicators, particularly whether they agreed or disagreed with both statements with 27.0% agreeing to both statements and 26.1% and 27.9% disagreeing with the statements. Only 8.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that TAKS was a fair measure of their child's achievement, and 6.3% strongly agreed it was a fair measure of achievement for most students. 45.9% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the TAKS test is a fair measure of their child's achievement, and 41.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed or disagreed it is a fair measure of achievement for most students. Although TAKS is a

high-stakes test for their children, many of the respondents to the survey do not believe that it is a fair measure of achievement.