

Teacher Perceptions of High-Stakes Testing

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A Special Project

Presented to

Dr. Gretta Merwin

Heritage University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree of

Master of Education

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Serena M. Perkins

2011

FACULTY APPROVAL

Teacher Perceptions of High-Stakes Testing

Approved for the Faculty

\_\_\_\_\_, Faculty Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_, Date

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing in Washington State. The researcher collected data by conducting a survey of 22 teachers who taught at three different schools within the same district in Southeast Washington. The results of the survey showed that a majority of teachers, no matter how many years they had been teaching, felt their teaching was impacted by the state-mandated test. A majority of the survey participants who taught prior to the implementation of Washington's state-mandated test also believed that their teaching had changed as a direct result of the implementation of the test.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Background for the Project

The United States' reliance on high-stakes testing began in the 1950s after the launch of the Russian satellite, Sputnik (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Americans felt they were falling behind other countries and called for increased rigor in the school system. In the 1970s, this concern of falling behind other nations spurred politicians to implement a minimum-competency test, ensuring that students would be prepared to become contributing citizens (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). However, these tests fell out of favor with teachers by the 1980s when it was discovered that the tests created lower expectations for students (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Some teachers began to only expect their students to master skills and concepts that were on the test, rather than hold high expectations of their students and encourage to them to reach their full potential. The release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) caused a renewed interest in standardized testing, this time prompting the implementation of high-stakes assessments rather than minimum competency tests (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was enacted with the goals of increasing student achievement across the nation, closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students, and ensuring that all teachers were highly qualified

(Ryan, 2004). No Child Left Behind required that all students would be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014 (Dever & Carlston, 2009). In order to hold schools accountable, states were mandated to test students annually in certain subjects, and sanctions were imposed on schools and districts not making Adequate Yearly Progress, as measured by the test. When a school did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress, they were first given assistance. If the school continued to not make Adequate Yearly Progress, they could lose Title I funding. Many politicians also attached high stakes to their state's tests for accountability purposes. Jones and Egley (2004) defined high-stakes tests as "tests that have serious consequences for students, teachers, schools, and/or school systems, such as student retention, school ratings, and monetary incentives" (p. 2).

### Statement of the Problem

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing. The researcher particularly looked at how teachers thought the implementation of a state test had changed or affected their teaching.

### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project was to gain more information about teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing and how it affected their teaching. Although many teachers were directly affected by testing policies in their everyday jobs, most teachers had little or no input in the creation of testing policies. Teachers were expected to implement state standards into their teaching and to prepare

students for the state test, so the researcher believed it was necessary to gain insight into how teachers felt about these policies. Without teacher buy-in, top down directives could be ineffective at reaching their goal.

### Delimitations

The study was conducted with 22 teachers at three different schools within the same school district in Southeastern Washington. One school was an elementary school with over 800 students and demographics of 58% White, 31.6% Hispanic, 1.9% Black, 4.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.6% Asian, and 0.5% American Indian/Alaskan Native. There were 39.7% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The percentage of transitional bilingual students was 8.4% and the percentage of migrant students was 1.2%. The teachers at this school had an average of 10.2 years of teaching experience and 59.5% held at least a Master's Degree.

The second school was an elementary school with approximately 724 students and demographics of 1.0% White, 96.2% Hispanic, 1.8% Black, and 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. There were 95.7% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The percentage of transitional bilingual students was 73.3% and the percentage of migrant students was 20.0%. The teachers at this school had an average of 12.2 years of teaching experience and 58.5% held at least a Master's Degree.

The third school was an elementary school with approximately 558

students and demographics of 3.6% White, 90.7% Hispanic, 2.4% Black, 0.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. There were 95.2% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The percentage of transitional bilingual students was 62.7% and the percentage of migrant students was 10.4%. The teachers at this school had an average of 13.2 years of teaching experience and 55.9% held at least a Master's Degree (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2010). The study took place in the Winter of 2011.

### Assumptions

The teachers involved in this study were all highly qualified teachers according to NCLB standards. Each of the teachers had taught at least one year in which they were involved in administering a state test to their students. The teachers were assumed to be honest and forthright in their answers to survey questions.

### Research Question

What were teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing, and how had testing impacted their teaching?

### Significance of the Project

The study looked at the opinions of the teachers whose work was directly impacted by testing policies set at the state level. This information should be of interest to policymakers who made revisions and improvements to Washington's

state-mandated test. If the results of the survey showed positive perceptions of the tests by the teachers who administered them, it could help to serve as confirmation that the test was effective. If the survey results showed negative perceptions of the test, this could be considered by policymakers as they worked toward making improvements on the test.

### Procedure

The study was conducted through a survey of elementary teachers. The teachers who were selected for this project taught grades and subjects where their students took the Measurements of Student Progress in the spring. Surveys were sent out and completed by all teachers involved in this study. The survey participants included elementary teachers from three different elementary schools. The surveys were collected, the data was analyzed, and conclusions were drawn and recorded.

### Definition of Terms

adequate yearly progress. Adequate yearly progress was the measure by which schools, districts, and states were held accountable for student performance under the No Child Left Behind Act.

high school proficiency exam. The High School Proficiency Exam replaced the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in 2010. The exam measured the proficiency of students in high school and served as Washington State's exit exam in reading, writing and science.

high-stakes test. A high-stakes test had serious consequences for students, teachers, schools, and/or school systems, such as student retention, school ratings, and monetary incentives.

Measurements of Student Progress. The Measurements of Student Progress was a high-stakes assessment which replaced the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in 2010. The assessment measured student achievement in grades three through eight in the subjects of reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. The No Child Left Behind Act required each state to establish state academic standards and a state testing system that met federal requirements.

Washington Assessment of Student Learning. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning was a high-stakes assessment used to measure students' mastery of the standards outlined by the Essential Learning Requirements between the years of 1997-2009. Assessments were given in grades three through eighth and tenth grade, and included assessments in reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

## Acronyms

AYP. Adequate Yearly Progress

HSPE. High School Proficiency Exam

MSP. Measurements of Student Progress

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Selected Literature

#### Introduction

There had been a great amount of emphasis placed on schools to produce high test scores in recent decades. Families made important decisions, such as where to live, on schools' test scores (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Real estate prices fluctuated with the rise and fall of scores (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). The allocation of money hinged on test performances. Schools felt the pressure to perform well, and high-stakes tests became a substantial part of American public education (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). In chapter 2, the researcher reviewed and summarized literature pertaining to the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing.

#### Narrowing of the Curriculum

Many studies have been conducted on the impacts that high-stakes testing had on the American education system. Some unintended consequences have been found that were direct results of high-stakes testing. One consequence was the narrowing of curriculum (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, & Rideau, 2010; Dever & Carlston, 2009; Jones & Egle, 2004; Mabry & Margolis, 2006; McNeil, Coppola, & Radigan, 2008). Teachers were under so much pressure for their students to perform well on tests that they focused their curriculum mainly on the concepts that were being tested. Jones and Egle (2004) described the concerns of teachers in Florida who felt they were forced to exclude non-tested subjects



and focus mainly on reading, writing, and math. The teachers were concerned that the test didn't cover enough knowledge and skills for students to gain a well-rounded education. Mabry and Margolis (2006) found similar circumstances in Washington State. Teachers reported being pressured to wait until after the state test was conducted in the spring before teaching non-tested subjects such as art, social studies, and science. In a focus group conducted in a large urban school district in Texas, students reported that much of the curriculum in their classes was dominated by test preparation (McNeil et al., 2008). The students estimated that the ratio between drilling on test preparation knowledge and other activities was "about fifty-fifty". The teachers confirmed that most of their curriculum was driven by the state test (McNeil et al., 2008).

Not all teachers viewed the narrowing of the curriculum as a negative. In an interview with teachers in Minnesota, Yeh (2005) found that a majority of interviewees (by a two-to-one margin) expressed that testing had a positive impact on curriculum. One teacher stated that breaking the test down into strands helped teachers to focus their curriculum. The teacher felt that the strands from the test contained important content for students to know and the test helped teachers to be more intentional about teaching all of these concepts. A principal who was interviewed by Yeh (2005) agreed, stating:

Some of those fluffy extraneous things [have been eliminated from the] curriculum – people just doing what they want to do because it's fun. So I

think that's been a plus, and I think that we're focusing on what needs to be done for kids to have their skills for future lifelong use. (p. 11)

#### Negative Effects on Students' Understanding of the Curriculum

A second concern about testing was that some states' tests covered so many standards that the teachers were not able to teach any skill or concept to mastery (Jones & Egley, 2004). In a survey of teachers in Florida, many teachers reported frustration at having to touch on all the standards prior to the test in March (Jones & Egley, 2004). The teachers felt that students were never able to gain a deep understanding of the concepts taught in such a short period of time, instead memorizing information in preparation for the test.

Teachers in Washington State also reported frustration at the number of Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) they were required to teach (Mabry & Margolis, 2006). One reported: "[With] the sheer number of [GLEs] I'm expected to teach . . . if you don't start in the first week and just go for it, you simply cannot teach to all of them" (p.14).

A study by Marzano and Kendall (1998) likewise concluded that one of the problems that educators faced was that there were far too many standards. "If American educators were to adequately cover all of the knowledge identified in the current set of standards for the core subject areas, it might take as much as 22 years of schooling (literally!) within the current structure" (p. 1).

### Validity of High-stakes Tests

Many teachers expressed concerns about the use of state tests as a single measure for providing rewards and sanctions. According to Mabry and Margolis (2006), interviews with teachers in Washington State revealed that the test may be measuring student motivation rather than achievement. Teachers reported instances of students who were quite capable, but chose to turn in nearly blank test booklets or write “I don’t know how to do this” on every question. Another teacher suggested that Washington’s state test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), was not always a valid source of data. “You can tell a lot with classroom assessments, and there’s no trickery. But not everything they’ve learned shows up on the WASL” (p. 25). Lamb (2010) also uncovered a concern that brought the validity of high-stakes tests into question. According to Lamb, students who had difficulties with both reading and mathematics struggled more at experiencing successes in mathematics as compared to students who solely had difficulties in mathematics. This was because students were required to solve complex mathematical problems in addition to computation. These complex problem solving skills were generally assessed through reading and writing. Therefore, mathematics tests were often measuring reading and writing skills as well.

In a focus group interview with primary grade (K-3) teachers, Dever and Carlston (2009) found that many teachers were concerned that student growth

over time was not taken into account. One teacher in the focus group stated, “A low student will work so hard, and maybe they are in third grade but they went from [grade] one to [grade] two. That is A effort for that child and I like that focus!” (p. 72). The teachers discussed how multiple measures throughout the year showed tremendous gains, yet the state test failed to measure growth, and only measured each child’s proficiency at one point in time during the year.

Another issue concerning the validity of high-stakes tests was that the narrowing of curriculum could cause artificial score inflation. According to Stecher (2002), large-scale tests could only ask a limited number of questions that were meant to reflect students’ knowledge of a broader domain, such as language arts or mathematics. However, when basing a student’s understanding of large content areas on the outcomes of a test which contained a limited number of questions, the validity could possibly be questionable. If the curriculum of a broad content area was narrowed to cover only the content that would appear in test questions, it may be inferred from the test scores that students had mastered the full curriculum, when in reality the students had only received narrowed instruction of a broad domain.

#### Instances of Cheating by Educators

The high stakes attached to testing have put tremendous pressure on educators to produce high test scores. This pressure has caused some teachers and principals to cheat on state tests in order to raise their test scores (Amrein-

Beardsley et al., 2010). In a study conducted in Arizona, teachers were asked in a survey about their knowledge of their colleagues' cheating behaviors. The most common incidents of cheating reported were encouraging students to redo test problems (39%), giving students extra time (34%), writing down questions to help prepare students for future tests (24%), writing down vocabulary words for the same purposes (23%), and reading questions aloud when they were not supposed to (23%). When the teachers were asked to admit to cheating practices that they themselves had engaged in, the numbers were much lower. Only 1% of teachers admitted to outright cheating behaviors, such as erasing student answers and filling in the correct answer, giving students the correct answer, and changing student identification numbers so the tests of low-scoring students would be invalid (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010). A larger number of educators (11%) reported having cheated in more subtle and less premeditated manners, such as encouraging students to redo a problem as they were taking the test; rewording questions or explaining vocabulary; and leaving resources around the room or on the walls. Some of the motivating factors for cheating were humiliation, reward, competitiveness, reputation, and survival. One participant in Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, and Rideau's (2010) study stated:

I don't think teachers would do this if the nation weren't so obsessed with test scores and the media feeding frenzy that comes with reporting the scores, getting the labels, sending letters home to parents admitting shame,

embarrassment, failure. If the sanctions were removed, the behaviors would go away. (p. 26)

### Summary

The focus of this chapter was to address the literature available related to high-stakes testing and the impact that it has had on our educational system in the United States. Several unintended consequences were discovered as results of high-stakes testing. Some teachers felt pressured to exclude non-tested subjects until after the state test was conducted in the spring or to narrow a broad content area to focus only on the material which would be tested (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010; Dever & Carlston, 2009; Jones & Egley, 2004; Mabry & Margolis, 2006; McNeil et al., 2008). Some teachers felt there was too much content to cover prior to the test and too little time for students to gain mastery over the content (Jones & Egley, 2004; Mabry & Margolis, 2006; Marzano & Kendall, 1998). The validity of the state tests was brought into question by researchers when considering that one test taken over a short period of time may not have been an accurate indicator of a student's knowledge (Dever & Carlston, 2009; Stecher, 2002). Instances of cheating by educators could also corrupt the validity of the tests (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010).

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology and Treatment of Data

#### Introduction

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush led the nation's first education summit, during which six broad goals were set for the purpose of improving education (Marzano & Kendall, 1998). These goals included the mandate for educators to identify content standards for core academic areas. State standards were created and schools implemented new curriculums that aligned with these standards. High-stakes tests held teachers accountable for teaching the standards. However, these changes also brought consequences that were not necessarily intended by the policymakers (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010; Dever & Carlston, 2009; Jones & Egley, 2004; Mabry & Margolis, 2006; McNeil et al., 2008). This study was intended to investigate the beliefs and opinions of teachers relating to high-stakes testing and how it impacted their teaching.

#### Methodology

The study was conducted at three elementary schools, all in the same district in Southeastern Washington. The method used was qualitative research. Qualitative research meant that methods were based on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The qualitative research used in this project was a survey. This method was chosen

because the researcher felt it was the best way to gain insight into the perspectives of educators.

### Participants

The participants in this study were 22 third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers from three different elementary schools within the same district in Southeastern Washington. The participants all had at least one year of teaching experience in which they administered the WASL or the MSP. A selection of teachers who had been teaching prior to the advent of the WASL as well as teachers who began teaching after the advent of the WASL were purposely chosen. The purpose of the two selections was to examine whether or not differences existed in the opinions held by the two groups of teachers about high-stakes testing.

### Instruments

The instrument used to conduct this study was a survey. This instrument was chosen as a means for gathering qualitative data because it allowed participants to openly express their opinions. The survey was developed by the researcher and included demographic questions, open-ended questions, and Likert scale questions. The survey was emailed to the research participants with instructions to complete the survey within one week.

### Design

This qualitative study used a survey research design (Gay et al., 2009).



This research design was selected in order to elicit responses from teachers about their perceptions of high-stakes testing. The survey consisted of both structured and unstructured items. Each participant was given an identical survey.

### Procedure

In February 2011, the researcher contacted all of the third through fifth grade teachers at three elementary schools to ask if they would be willing to participate in the research study. Once participants were selected and informed consent was obtained, a survey was emailed to them and participants were informed of the date by which the survey needed to be returned. A second email was sent to participants to remind them of their participation in the study, and the date by which the survey was due. At the end of the allotted time period, the participants were asked to return their surveys to the researcher.

### Treatment of the Data

The completed surveys were categorized into common themes that reflected the beliefs expressed by multiple teachers. The researcher compared the surveys of newer teachers with those of veteran teachers who had taught prior to the implementation of a high-stakes test in Washington to see if there was a difference of opinion in the themes. The data was discussed and displayed using a table.

### Summary

The qualitative research that was conducted for this study included a

survey of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers at three different elementary schools in a Southeastern Washington school district. The 22 teachers involved in the study all had at least one year of teaching experience during which they administered either the WASL or Washington's new test, the MSP. The survey asked participants about their opinions and perceptions of high-stakes testing and how it had impacted their teaching. The researcher purposely chose teachers who had been teaching prior to the advent of the WASL as well as teachers who began teaching after the advent of the WASL. The researcher then looked at themes that emerged from the surveys, particularly examining whether or not there was a difference between the perceptions of newer teachers and veteran teachers. The survey results were analyzed, the data was displayed, and conclusions were drawn.

## CHAPTER 4

### Analysis of the Data

#### Introduction

This study examined elementary teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing in Washington State. The researcher collected data by conducting a survey of 22 teachers who taught at three different schools within the same district in Southeast Washington. After the surveys were collected, the researcher examined the responses for common themes.

#### Description of the Environment

The study was conducted in February 2011 by means of a survey. The participants included 22 third through fifth grade teachers from three elementary schools in a Southeastern Washington district. The participants had between 1.5 and 38 years of teaching experience with an average of 11.6 years. Of the 22 participants, nine teachers had been teaching prior to the implementation of the WASL in 1997, while 13 participants began teaching after 1997.

One school was an elementary school with over 800 students and demographics of 58% White, 31.6% Hispanic, 1.9% Black, 4.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.6% Asian, and 0.5% American Indian/Alaskan Native. There were 39.7% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The percentage of transitional bilingual students was 8.4% and the percentage of migrant students was 1.2%. The teachers at this school had an average of 10.2 years of teaching

experience and 59.5% held at least a Master's Degree.

The second school was an elementary school with approximately 724 students and demographics of 1.0% White, 96.2% Hispanic, 1.8% Black, and 0.1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. There were 95.7% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The percentage of transitional bilingual students was 73.3% and the percentage of migrant students was 20.0%. The teachers at this school had an average of 12.2 years of teaching experience and 58.5% held at least a Master's Degree.

The third school was an elementary school with approximately 558 students and demographics of 3.6% White, 90.7% Hispanic, 2.4% Black, 0.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. There were 95.2% of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch. The percentage of transitional bilingual students was 62.7% and the percentage of migrant students was 10.4%. The teachers at this school had an average of 13.2 years of teaching experience and 55.9% held at least a Master's Degree (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2010).

### Research Question

What were teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing, and how had testing impacted their teaching?

### Results of the Study

The results of the survey revealed that 95% of participants indicated that

their teaching was impacted by the state test. Of the nine participants who had been teaching prior to the implementation of the WASL in 1997, eight (89%) stated that their teaching had changed as a result of the test. A majority of teachers surveyed (59%) reported that they spent at least 30 hours or more per year preparing their students specifically for the state-mandated test, while 14% of teacher spent 21-30 hours, 14% spent 11-20 hours, and 14% spent 1-10 hours. No teachers indicated that they spent less than 1 hour preparing their students for the test.

When asked to what extent they agreed with certain statements, a majority of teachers (77%) answered that they disagreed with the statement that the state-mandated test was an accurate measure of what students knew and could do. A majority of teachers also either disagreed (55%) or strongly disagreed (41%) with the statement that scores on the state-mandated test accurately reflected the quality of education students had received. The statement “My district's curriculum is aligned with the state-mandated testing program” yielded more varied results, with 5% of teachers having strongly agreed, 41% of teachers having agreed, and 27% of teachers each having disagreed or strongly disagreed. Finally, 27% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that the state-mandated test led to higher levels of student learning, while 55% of respondents disagreed and 18% agreed with the statement.

*Table 1 - Survey Results*

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The state-mandated test is an accurate measure of what students know and can do.	2	17	3	0
Scores on the state-mandated test accurately reflect the quality of education students have received.	9	12	1	0
My district's curriculum is aligned with the state-mandated testing program.	6	6	9	1
The state-mandated test leads to higher levels of student learning.	6	12	4	0

Findings

The results of the study revealed that a majority of teachers, no matter how long they had been teaching, believed their teaching was impacted by the state-mandated test. Of the teachers who had taught prior to the implementation of the WASL in 1997, all but one indicated that their teaching had changed as a result of the test. The single participant, a fifth grade teacher, who indicated that her teaching was not impacted by the state test and had not changed as a result of the implementation of the WASL, simply stated “we still teach.”

One common belief expressed by several participants was the feeling of

pressure to teach every state standard in the tested areas and to limit the amount of time spent teaching non-tested subjects such as science and social studies. A fourth grade teacher explained that “due to the overwhelming amount of state standards tested on the MSP I feel that most of my time teaching is to get them ready for the test. I often find that there is not enough time to fit everything in including important material for social studies and science.” Another participant stated, “I have no problem with assessment, but the depth and grade level appropriateness of the MSP does not lead to good results. Especially in math, the time we have to teach such deep concepts is not sufficient. I cannot teach mastery of ordering fractions and decimals on a number line in 5 weeks.” However, others responded with a more favorable outlook of the state standards. One fourth grade teacher stated “my teaching is more direct and meaningful according to what the standards expect us to teach.”

Another common theme which became apparent to the researcher was that teachers felt frustrated that students’ primary languages weren’t taken into account on the test. Several of the survey participants taught in bilingual classrooms in which much of the instruction was in Spanish, while the state test was conducted only in English. A majority of the survey participants (86%) believed that the state-mandated test was not an accurate measure of what students knew and could do. One participant who taught in a third grade bilingual class articulated, “I think the test would [give] me a more accurate measure of

what my students know if they could speak English better. Since they are in a bilingual class I do not feel the test gives me anywhere close to an accurate level of what they can do in Spanish.”

### Discussion

The results of this survey research were consistent with the findings of many other researchers referenced in chapter 2. Several of the survey participants stated that they limited the amount of time spent teaching non-tested subjects such as science and social studies in order to focus on literacy and math in preparation for the test. This narrowing of the curriculum was consistent with the findings of Jones and Egley (2004) as well as Mabry and Margolis (2006) in their research, as discussed in chapter 2. The survey also revealed that several teachers were concerned with the large number of state standards they needed to teach in a limited amount of time. This finding was similar to that of Jones and Egley (2004), Mabry and Margolis (2006), and Marzano and Kendall (1998). Finally, the validity of the test was brought into question by the teachers who were concerned that the test was not representative of what their students who were still learning English actually knew and could do.

### Summary

The research was conducted through a survey of 22 third through fifth grade teachers at three different elementary schools. The researcher wanted to examine teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing in Washington State, and



whether or not teachers felt that their teaching was impacted by the test. The survey revealed that a majority of teachers believed that their teaching was impacted by the state-mandated test.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Introduction

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, states were required to test students annually in certain subjects. Recent research had shown that some unintended consequences resulted from high-stakes testing. The researcher wanted to gain more information about teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing and how it impacted their teaching.

#### Summary

The researcher investigated how teachers perceived high-stakes testing and the impact the test had on their teaching. The research was conducted through a survey of 22 third through fifth grade teachers at three different schools in a southeastern Washington school district. The survey included questions that gathered demographic data about the participants, open-ended questions, and Likert-scale questions. The participants were informed of the survey through email, consent was gained, and the participants were given one week to complete the survey via a survey website. Once the surveys were completed the researcher analyzed the results and conclusions were drawn.

#### Conclusions

The survey revealed that a 95% majority of teachers believed their teaching was impacted by the state-mandated test. Eight of the nine participants

who taught prior to the implementation of the WASL in 1997 felt that their teaching had changed as a result of the state test. Some teachers expressed a positive view of the test, stating that it helped them to become more intentional about teaching the state standards. However, many concerns about the test were also expressed. One concern was that teachers felt pressure to focus on tested subjects, leaving little time for non-tested subjects such as science and social studies. Another concern was that the students' primary language was not taken into consideration. Many participants felt that the test did not accurately measure what a student who was not fluent in English actually knew or could do.

#### Recommendations

The researcher recommends that another survey of a larger magnitude be conducted to gain more information, using participants from multiple districts throughout the state. This information should then be given to policy-makers and should be taken into consideration when decisions are made about education reform and school accountability.

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## APPENDIX

### High-Stakes Testing Survey

1. What grade do you currently teach?
2. How many years have you taught in your current position, including this year?
3. How many years of teaching experience do you have at the elementary level, including this year?
4. Did you teach in Washington State at the elementary level prior to the implementation of the WASL in 1997? (If no, skip to question #6.)
5. Do you feel that your teaching has changed as a result of the implementation of the state-mandated test? (Please answer this question only if you answered YES to question #4)
6. Do you feel that your teaching is impacted by the state-mandated test? Why or why not?
7. Approximately how many hours per year do you spend preparing students specifically for the state-mandated test?
  - 1-10
  - 11-20
  - 21-30
  - More than 30

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

8. The state-mandated test is an accurate measure of what students know and can do.
  - Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
9. Scores on the state-mandated test accurately reflect the quality of education students have received.
  - Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree

10. My district's curriculum is aligned with the state-mandated testing program.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
11. The state-mandated test leads to higher levels of student learning.
- Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
12. Additional comments about the relationship between state-mandated testing, classroom instruction, and student learning.