Teachers' Perceptions of Testing for Students in a Standards-Based Public Education Setting

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of testing for students in a standards-based public education setting. The survey participants were all fourth grade, eighth grade, and tenth grade teachers that taught two or more courses in the subjects of English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Social Science courses.

The research was based on a survey provided to the teachers of one school district, and includes the responses of 48 out of 118 survey participants. The survey was conducted during the fall of 2005. The study took place one mid-sized school district in the upper mid-west.

The research examined teachers' perceptions on standards that are in place in their school district as well as testing in their state. The results of this study offered valuable insight regarding the perception teachers have about their understanding of the standards, their teaching methods, and what they teach. The study also gave us information on teachers' knowledge about

the state's testing format, required scores for satisfactory progress, as well as the morale of the students and teachers in the district due to standards-based education and testing.

The information gathered in this study will hopefully result in the school district finding was to be proactive and to assist teachers in understanding the standards and how to align curriculum with the state tests effectively.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is Wednesday morning, the clock strikes ten o'clock and the teacher tells her class to put their spelling books away. "It is now time for our lesson in mathematics," she says; however, this is a day that many students in the class have been dreading as the teacher slowly strides up and down the aisles dropping a test on each desk as she goes. When she comes to the end of the rows, she returns to the front of the classroom, stands next to her desk, and starts to dictate instructions to her third grade class. She reminds them that this is the test on multiplication. "There are 50 problems and you have five minutes to complete the test. When time is up everyone must stop where he/she is on the test and exchange tests with the person sitting next to him/her in order to be graded." The teacher shows the class an egg timer and says that when they hear it "ding," they are to put their pencils down. She then proceeds to turn the dial on the timer and says, "go."

Testing, as described above from years past has evolved and has become extremely prevalent in our educational system today. With each year, testing increasingly becomes an issue of concern. There are many ways that testing is affecting our students' learning environment. In addition to a narrowing curriculum of what students are learning and a drilling method of teaching used by teachers, the students' attitude towards learning have changed for the worse. They display greater anxiety and the evidence supports soaring drop out rates.

One study of board certified teachers in Ohio (Rapp, 2002, p. 216) found that 97% said testing has negatively affected their students' "love of learning." It also found 83% of all teachers believed that the quality of education for students has diminished. Another study of

teachers in North Carolina (Jones, et al., 1999) reported that teachers were being directed by their principals and superintendents to teach math, reading, and writing to prepare students for testing, even if it meant teaching less science or social studies. Jones et al. also reported that 61% of teachers observed that their students felt more anxiety.

Many concerns arise around the issue of testing. One of the concerns includes whether or not teachers are aware of the standards and scores that are established for their students to meet. Another concern is how teachers are to ethically teach their students so students learn the content that is required. Also, do teachers feel free to use a teaching philosophy they agree with, or are they pressured to adhere to a teaching philosophy they disagree with for the sole purpose of maximizing test scores? There are reports of teachers leaving the field or requesting a transfer to a grade that is not tested because they feel that the tests are having adverse effects on instructional methods and working conditions (Rotberg, 2001).

Other concerns may include rewards handed out to students, teachers, and schools who meet their goals and sanctions handed out to those students, teachers, and schools who do not. This punishes those schools that would benefit from additional help by withholding it. It also narrows the curriculum where students and teachers spend more time on tested subjects to the detriment and near exclusion of other important subjects and skills. Measurement driven instruction distorts the curriculum, "narrows it, deflects it, trivializes it, and causes it to stagnate" (Shepard, 1991, p. 233). Parents, teachers, and other school personnel need to understand the potentially harmful effects on a student's education when it comes to these issues. Understanding these effects could be an important factor in ensuring a comprehensive education, while at the same time saving the integrity of education for all students. It may also help prevent

us from venturing further down this path where minimum competencies become the maximum we attempt to reach.

In 1983 The National Commission on Excellence in Education created a nationwide panic when it released its report *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education). This account to the nation and the Secretary of Education reported that we are a nation at risk due to the mediocrity in our schools. That mediocrity threatened our future as a nation because students in American schools were testing lower than their counterparts from around the world (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). However it was not until 2001 with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act that education was seemingly taken out of the hands of educators. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No.107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002) is legislation that required improvement in certain subject areas and this was to be documented through testing.

As both A Nation at Risk and the No Child Left Behind Act declared, they were going this route so every student is able to learn to the best of his/her ability. If this is truly what our leaders want for the students, testing them and saying that they must be at a certain level contradicts the original statement of wanting student's to learn to the best of their ability. Furthermore, the entire notion that all students will learn at the same rate so that they all meet certain test scores at certain levels goes against years of educational philosophy of how students learn.

Teachers already face many difficult issues in their efforts to provide every child with a quality education. Teachers have to find ways to effectively teach students whose second language is English, and deal with a student's home life, which could have a significant impact on a student's mental and emotional well being. Also, many schools do not have qualified teachers in their classrooms. A study completed by The National Commission on Teaching and

America's Future (cited in Grossman, 2003, n.p.) reported that as of 1996, "more than 50,000 people lack the training required for their jobs have entered teaching annually on a emergency or substandard license." All of these items will have an impact on a student's ability to learn. Testing is simply one more man-made, self-imposed variable that teachers must confront, one that could bring severe consequences. The issues that surround testing compound an already difficult situation and the likelihood of effective learning taking place is severely lessened. But most of the people who pass the laws know little of the daily reality of school (Wagner, 2003). One of the biggest problems with testing is that of the standards. Standards are not well defined from the state house down to the school house (Marzano, 2001).

Imagine the impact that our current testing environment could have on an individual. A student's educational self-image could be destroyed, which could be a tremendous factor in determining his/her attitude towards further schooling, ultimate education level, and likelihood for success in life. We need to be cautious and consider the potential negative long-term affects testing could have on a student's life.

Examining k-12 teacher perceptions of testing and issues that surround this topic may give us an understanding of what is really going on in our classrooms. This may be an essential component to providing a complete education to all through an appropriate method of delivery. Results of this study will be used to increase teachers' awareness about the issue of testing, to encourage schools to take proactive measures to prevent teaching to the test in their schools, and to improve the quality of the curriculum.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to document the teachers' perceptions of testing for students in a standards-based public education setting. Research will be conducted in one mid-sized

school district in the upper mid-west. Data will be collected through the use of surveys which will be completed by those teachers that teach in grades that the state has designated as testing grades. Surveys will be given to teachers at one grade level at the elementary, middle, and high school level. The surveys will be sent out and returned in the month of October of 2005.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer twelve questions. They are:

1. Is there a clear understanding among teachers of the required standards in their school district?

2. Do teachers feel they are offered adequate training and preparation by the school district in aligning the curriculum with the standards?

3. Do teachers feel they have an important role in developing curriculum?

4. How familiar are teachers with the tests' format and required scores?

5. Do teachers feel pressure to utilize a teaching method they do not agree with for the sole purpose of achieving a required test score?

6. Do teachers feel pressure to raise test scores and if they do not raise test scores should there be sanctions?

7. Do teachers notice a change in their teaching methods as the test approaches?

8. Do teachers feel that they are a better teacher because of standards and testing?

9. Do teacher feel that students are receiving a more comprehensive education through the use of standards and testing?

10. Do teachers feel that the morale of students and teachers has gone down because of standards and testing?

11. What are teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding standards and testing in the school district they are employed?

12. How do teachers view the concept of accountability for their profession?

Definition of Terms

This study includes six terms that need to be defined for clarity and understanding. They are:

Accountability: the responsibility of a school (district, teacher, or student) to parents, taxpayers, or government (federal, state, city, or district) to produce high achievement test scores (Smith & Fey, 2000).

Assessment: measures to determine student progress towards goals (Greenlee, 2002).

High-Stakes Testing: when a state uses test results for multiple purposes, including diagnosis or placement, student promotion, high school graduation, school and district performance accountability, and program assessment (Goertz & Duffy, 2003).

Narrowing: when a teacher or school focuses primarily on basic knowledge and skills included on a high-stakes test at the expense of important skills not typically tested (Worthen, 1993).

Standards: what students at every grade level need to know and be able to do (Greenlee, 2002).

Testing: legislation which mandates national testing in certain subjects in certain grades (Sloane & Kelly, 2003).

Assumptions and Limitations

This study includes five assumptions. It is assumed the school district has defined what the standards are to be met in the curriculum and that the teachers understand what they are. It is

assumed that the teachers are familiar with the tests that are given and the score required for meeting the standards. It assumes that teachers understand and abide by ethical teaching and testing practices. It assumes that teachers understand the benefits and consequences of their students passing these tests. It assumes that all teachers are answering the questions in this study honestly.

The study includes four limitations. One limitation to this study is that it does not take into account some issues that may affect a student's learning, such as education level of parents, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. Another limitation is that only one school district in the upper mid-west is being studied. The third limitation is that this survey does not take into account years of experience teaching. The last limitation is that only teachers in the grades where tests are administered (4, 8, and 10) will be surveyed, not all teachers within the district.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to explore the issue of testing within the standards-based educational setting. This chapter will include a legislative approach to achieving a high quality education, a discussion of the impact testing has on students and teachers in education, followed by the psychometric concerns of relying too heavily on tests, and the importance of addressing testing. This chapter will conclude with alternative ways which schools can assess students to ensure that they are learning what the standards deem as necessary.

Legislative Approach to High Quality

In the current educational environment that the United States is in, one will often hear words such as "high quality" and "standards" used ad nauseam. Though these terms have become everyday language for educators and politicians alike, we need to know if everyone has the same understanding of these words. More importantly we need to ask, "What legally constitutes an adequate public education?"

One would think that the nation's state legislatures would be able to answer that question through explanation of their state constitutions. A review done by De Villier (2003) of the fifty state constitutions regarding their definition of "an adequate public education" found that all but four states used words like "thorough," "efficient," "general," "stable," and "adequate" to describe their education system. Only four states used the words "high quality" in their description.

Based on how most states define adequate public education, one could make the assumption that a high quality education is not a right of the citizens of most states, or that it is even a goal in most states.

Although it may not be reflected in most state constitutions, for more than twenty years there has been a movement for high quality education for all students. The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983) is frequently identified as the impetus of the focus march toward accountability and high-stakes testing (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). This report recommended the strengthening of graduation requirements, setting higher standards for schools, and increasing the time students spend on learning tasks. Testing appeared to be the logical approach to identify students who did not meet expectations, as well as the teachers of these students (Haertel, 1999).

The reason for even forming this committee was that the United States felt that its students were falling behind the rest of the world when comparing its students to those in other countries and was concerned about continued American prosperity, security, and civility. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983) reported that some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension. Not only that, but they also concluded that many 17 year olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect from them. In the report's opening paragraph, it stated that if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war *A Nation at Risk* (National Commissions of Excellence in Education, 1983).

Since 1983 individual states have attempted to create standards that were reasonable in order to achieve the goal of students receiving a high quality education. However, since that

time more and loftier goals have been put into place. In 1989 President George Bush set in place Education Goals 2000. Among these goals were, that all children will start school ready to learn, that the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%, that all teachers will have the knowledge and skills they need, and that U.S. students will be the first in the world in math and science (Paris, cited in North Central Regional Education Laboratory, 2005).

Then in 2002 President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. In doing so President Bush said that every child deserved a high-quality education and created a new goal for education. However, just like A Nation at Risk, the way to measure the outcome was through more standardized testing. The No Child Left Behind Act takes an old and simplistic idea of limited usefulness and amps it up to absurdity by setting in stone the silly notion that standardized test scores are all that matter in schooling (Marshak, 2003).

The problem with this type of industrialized environment is that not all students can fit into a narrow structure of learning. What makes the NCLB Act unreasonable is its view that states, districts, and schools that improve achievement will be rewarded, and failure will be sanctioned. The NCLB Act goes on to link performance outcomes to federal money given to schools for various programs in order to ensure improved results. One example of this is Title I, which is supposed to assist in improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. By linking performance outcomes to federal money, the NCLB Act could do the opposite of what it intended to do, and that is educate every child to his or her full potential, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No.107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

Knowing that there could be consequences if students do not perform to the level that they need to, it would be very easy for a school to set the bar quite low. This almost ensures that students perform at the level needed. A state official in Massachusetts noted that a student could

get just 40% of the answers right and still pass (Meier, 2002). If this is an example of a high-quality education, then the NCLB Act is not accomplishing what it set out to accomplish.

The Impact of Testing on Education

Testing has had and continues to have a negative impact on students' educational lives. Testing brings with it a high cost for its students who become victims of policy created by politicians who usually are not familiar with how students learn, or what is important for them to learn. The leaders and policy makers of the United States of America need to stop viewing education as a business. They can no longer ignore research that speaks of "best practice" in the classrooms (Calkins, 1994; Hyde & Bizar, 1989).

Testing affects the performance of students from childhood throughout their lives. These students are casualties of a misguided political policy. Johnston (1998) said it was not helpful to teachers and that it has detrimental effects on teaching due to the pressure to assure high test scores.

Testing could very well have an adverse impact on students' ability to achieve in school. By continual exposure to the mechanism of testing, students are being profoundly affected in a negative way. Students are not only being affected academically, but also psychologically by what students think these test scores say about them. Many students lose hope and drop out of school or worse, lose confidence in themselves. Smith and Fey (2000) reported that research conducted on the effects of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) showed the drop-out rates were at 25% overall.

While students across the country are dealing with a heavy burden that has been placed upon them and may play a critical role in their plans for the future, they are not the only ones who are affected by the widespread use of testing in education. Teachers are also quickly

becoming fatalities in the era of testing and accountability. Teachers who experience standards and testing after already having established a philosophy that they believe in and agree with are changing their minds about their choice of profession. "These tests frustrate high-energy teachers. They will deplete the talent base causing talented teachers to leave" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, p. 392).

Many teachers struggle with the strict guidelines and with the curriculum they are mandated to teach that is often misaligned with their personal philosophies of how young children learn best (Chaille, 1999-2000). Due to this conflict, there are reports of teachers leaving the field of education or leaving a district where they feel pressured to teach in a way contradictory to their beliefs. This was the case of Mary, an elementary school teacher in Texas, who left the district she was in because she felt pressured to be more academic in teaching young children than she needed to be (Adcock & Patton, 2001).

To suggest or believe that teachers agree or even like testing because it makes their jobs easier and makes bad teachers better would be a gross inaccuracy. While many teachers agree with the need for higher standards, many do not see tests as having the effect of improved learning. In fact, testing gives bad teachers an excuse to continue doing what they have always done-lots of skill and drill (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). When it comes to asking if a heightened national discussion of education has made schools better, those who work on the front line say "no" (Coeyman, 2003).

National data says that students are doing better on test scores thereby saying that teachers are doing a better job teaching, but those very teachers themselves say that students are not really smarter or learning more than they have in the past. What we are seeing and hearing is a false impression of students' achievement. When we witness a miraculous turn about in test

scores, everyone must examine that issue regardless of what annual statistics state and what news paper articles say to see what the real reason is for it.

The reason test scores can jump so rapidly is that teachers are narrowing the curriculum by teaching only the subjects that are to be tested. This leaves out many other areas that are critical in the development of a student. Teachers are also teaching to the test and with this "drill-em" attitude, students are not allowed to explore. From Massachusetts to Texas and many places in-between, teachers are depriving students of their talents.

In a study conducted by Passman in a large urban midwestern district, he found that the school's principal ordered everyone, "Don't teach anything that isn't on the Iowa test" (2000, p. 13). According to one teacher in Texas, the principal said, "When you make your lesson plan, ask yourself if what you are planning is going to help students on one of these tests. If it isn't going to help on the tests, don't do it" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, p. 390). Finally, in Massachusetts, according to teachers in one district, many felt a tightening control over what teachers can do in their classrooms, presumably in an attempt to improve student scores by forcing teachers to teach to the test (Luna & Turner, 2001).

Fixing the problem is not as simple as telling teachers not to teach to the test. Teachers are responsible to the students and their parents, but they are also held accountable to their boss, the school principal. Placing blame on school administrators is also not fair, as they are responsible for what is taking place in their school districts. What is happening is a domino effect from the President of the United States on down.

Like teachers, school administrators are scared. They worry about test scores because they need to keep their funding, their accreditation, and avoid sanctions that could be handed out for not meeting the set standards. School administrators already face enough problems without

having to worry if teachers are teaching and students are learning. Unfortunately, school administrators need to prove accountability and they need to do so with a seemingly ever shrinking budget. The easiest way and the most cost effective way for them to accomplish this is through the use of standardized tests and controlling the curriculum.

Each year students are being tested more and more and at an earlier age and each year schools are placing higher stakes on those tests. The pressure we are laying on our students is unbelievably high. If students do not receive a passing score, they might not be able to move on to the next grade. This approach has gone on long enough and there is enough evidence to prove that it may not be the best way to educate our youth. Imagine how you would feel if you received mostly A's and B's in high school, but could not graduate and follow your dreams because you could not pass one test, even though you have already proven you can do the work. This may seem like a small problem, but it is not and it needs to be seriously addressed before we end up even further down the wrong path. In 1997 Kelly Santos a high school student in the state of Texas who had always achieved decent grades and had planned on attending Sam Houston State University to pursue a career in law enforcement. However, a different scenario was unfolding for Kelly's life as Kelly had failed to pass the math portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Test before she was scheduled to graduate. Passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Test is required to receive a high school diploma. In all Kelly took the test eight times and failed to pass each time. Kelly lost friends and her self confidence because of not being able to pass this test. One year after Kelly would have graduated from high school and been attending college, she was working part-time at two different jobs, one as a life guard and one as a hostess at a restaurant (Sacks, 1999).

In an even more extreme case the Associated Press reported on February 17, 2000 (cited in Montgomery, Ranney, & Growe, 2003) that a little boy had hung himself with his belt from his bunk bed after leaving a note apologizing for a bad report card. When one hears about these cases, it can make one wonder if the schools are teaching the students what they need to know in order for them to pass these tests? It also raises the question of why so much weight is given to these tests and little to everyday work? It is easy to see why students give up hope, act differently, and even drop out of school. These students are losing confidence and are feeling abandoned by their schools. They feel dumb because of a score they received on a test.

Psychometric Concerns About Testing

In order for teachers to monitor student growth in what they are learning in the classroom it is a necessity that teachers have tools that can assess a student's growth from the point they started from, to the point they are at currently. Not only are these tools of assessment important for giving teachers information about their students' progress, they can also be a powerful device that can aide teachers in evaluating their instructional methods and assist them in improving as a teacher.

The use of testing as the sole means of evaluating students' learning is dangerous. Tests as indicators of educational attainment are inevitably fallible (Smith & Fey, 2000). Futhermore, psychometricians are careful to point out that not all forms of achievement are able to be measured (Gunzenhauser, 2003). According to Porter (1995), the test score is at best only a sample or an approximation of the underlying trait being measured, and it gives the appearance of objectivity, neutrality, and fairness.

To see why we need to be careful with the use of tests, we need to understand what tests set out to measure versus what actually gets tested, and how tests can be manipulated to show

greater gains than may actually exist. Many states test their students in the traditional three "R"s: reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the past few years many of these states have added sections to their test that have included natural science and social science. Fine art, physical education and music are being neglected because so much time is focused on other areas (Montgomery, Ranney, & Growe, 2003). Not only are many subject areas reduced or put on hold, but many topics within a tested subject area may also be ignored.

It is fascinating to read that some subjects are being neglected and that in other situations certain topics within a subject may be left out of the curriculum. The reason that this is so intriguing is because that was not the original intent. The original intent was to have all students master all of the standards that were proposed. However, with all of the standards that were being proposed by legislators, professional organizations, and others, the task of educating a student in such a way became an incredibly daunting task. A high school diploma would require as much classroom time as has historically resulted in a Master's or Professional Degree. Even the brightest students would need nine additional years of schooling to master the nearly 4,000 benchmarks experts have set in 14 subject areas (Marzano, Kendall, & Gaddy, 1999).

There is really no way to test every student on every standard. Educators and schools still need to show that their students are progressing satisfactorily, and one way to do that is to focus on only the areas that are deemed the most important, another way is to start with the areas that the students must be tested in. When we speak of a narrowing of the curriculum we are referring to just that, subjects that at one time were considered an important part of education are now given very little attention or no attention at all. But the problem is not simply reducing or ignoring certain subjects, it is also that teachers are being selective with the topics that are taught within a subject.

Koretz (2002) said that this process is often conceptualized as having four stages, each of which entails a narrowing of the focus of the test. First, one must define the "domain" about which one wishes to draw inferences and the domain will generally be narrower than the range of possible domains. The second stage of sampling, which entails a further narrowing of the domain, is the definition of a framework that delineates the specific content and skill to be measured. The framework is then further narrowed in developing test specifications, which detail the mix of item types (such as multiple choice or short open-ended). The final stage of sampling entails selecting specific items to match the test specifications. Koretz (2002) went on to say that the domains selected for testing leave many important goals of education unmeasured.

What this means is that there are many crucial topics that could be left out the curriculum due to the fact that only a small portion of it will actually be tested. In our quest to test students for a particular skill we are sacrificing deep understanding and problem-solving of a broader curriculum. According to Kortez (2002), studies that have explored the generalizability of scores or gains show that if instruction is sufficiently narrowed, apparent mastery will often fail to transfer to different types of problems or even different formats of test items. Because of this, learning has become rudimentary with students learning isolated facts. Without context there is no meaningful way to cluster or organize information and make it easy to remember (Shepard, 1991).

What is really happening is that many schools are setting the bar extremely low so that they can almost assure that the test scores of their students will show improvement. This will prove to both parents and legislators that schools are doing their job. Unfortunately as a result of this practice students are doing less thinking and instead looking to answer a question by following a format (Luna & Turner, 2001). According to Shepard (2002), what is more

significant is that teachers will most likely never know how well a student understands the material.

Another problematic area when it comes to designing the format of a test and deciding what the most important concepts that should be tested on is the differences in schools, students, and their socioeconomic background. This is one realm of research within standards and testing and although it is not the main focus of this research paper, it needs to be addressed as it shows the awkwardness of having a "one-size-fits-all" approach to education.

One reason that test results are questionable when it come to telling us how our students are doing is that they do not take into account the above issues. Public schools are thought by many to be a level playing field, but they are not. Not all schools have the same resources. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (cited in Biddle & Berliner, 2002) nearly half of the funding for public schools in the United States is provided by local taxes, generating large differences in funding between wealthy and impoverished communities. These funding differences can have a huge impact on how a student would perform on a standardized test. The student's performance would supposedly tell us how smart that student is and as a result how strong that school is. This financial disparity would account for not only the quality of the school building and facilities, but also for the curriculum, equipment for instruction, teacher experience, qualifications, class sizes, and auxiliary professionals (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

Schools that are stronger financially are typically able to focus on the job at hand which is educating students. Also, students only have to worry about learning. In these schools classes can be smaller which allows for more one-on-one time between teacher and student. Not only that, but the schools that have more money, have the ability to attract more qualified teachers.

Just because a school has more money does not mean that their students will do better in the classroom or on tests, but they are definitely putting themselves in a situation where the likelihood of that happening is better. If we as a country are really concerned with the welfare of all of our children, then we need to prove it and give every student in public schools the opportunity at a great education by distributing funds equally. Analysis done by Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine (1996), "showed that school resources are systematically related to student achievement and that those relations are large and educationally important" (p. 384).

Greater funding and the education level of parents are just some of the explanations as to why some schools and students seem to be not only meeting, but exceeding the minimum standards that are set for students. Another explanation for this outcome is more time on instruction, hard work, more effective teaching methods, and new tests. However, due to the expectations that schools will raise test scores, teachers have found ways to manipulate these tests which result in great gains made by students. This is commonly referred to as teaching to the test. This practice, while fairly common, can range from coaching to cheating. When everyone is expected to achieve success or the schools are held accountable, the development of a new kind of test that could be directly taught to was obvious (Meier, 2002).

While coaching is considered acceptable instruction, it can also be considered cheating. A primary form of coaching is tailoring instruction too closely to the demands of tasks used in the test, without actually teaching the specific tasks in the test (Koretz, 2002). This behavior can increase scores, however we have no idea that students are actually learning and achieving due to students continually practicing these tasks.

While coaching or teaching to the test seems to be accepted practice among teachers, it is not necessarily endorsed. Many teachers feel that they are doing more drilling with students and

having them memorize versus having them learn. As one Massachusetts English teacher stated, "You know, we're not really teaching them to write. We're teaching them to follow a format" (Luna & Turner, 2001, p. 83).

A study conducted by Stecher and Barron (1998) found that teachers in Kentucky's accountability program allocated instructional time differently across grades to match the demands of the testing program. They also found that instructional strategies, such as open-response questions with multiple correct answers, were allocated differently across grades to match the testing program. A study conducted by Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) reported that one-fourth of teachers in high-stakes testing states said that instructional time dedicated to non-tested areas had decreased significantly.

If teachers shift a resource such as time spent teaching a tested subject away from an area that is not tested, then test scores should rise. Not only that, but if teachers adjust their instructional methods so that the curriculum is almost like a mirror image of the test, again test scores should rise. However, studies have that have explored the generalizability of scores or gains show that if instruction is sufficiently narrow, apparent mastery will often fail to transfer to different types of problems or even different formats of test items (Koretz, 2002).

In severe cases teachers are flat out cheating. In a recent case, investigators in New York City charged that dozens of educators have cheated over a period of five years by giving students answers to the mathematics and reading tests that are used in promotional gates and in ranking schools. Educators told students which answers to change, had them write their initial answers on scrap paper and then correct them before transferring them to the answer sheet, and gave them practice tests containing questions from the operational test (Goodnough, 1999).

Rises in test scores can also be explained with familiarity with the test. As teachers and students get used to the format of the test, scores will rise. This happens due to extensive practice on the kinds of questions that appear on the test in precisely the same format as the test (Shepard, 1991). We as a society want all of our children to be well educated. Therefore, it is disheartening and troublesome to find out what is actually going on in some of our schools and classrooms. At this time we are raising scores, but we seem to be doing so without increasing learning. Instead we are sacrificing real learning for a test score to prove our children are learning. As we have seen, no test is perfect, nor will it ever be perfect. If we understand that, then we will be able to find a way to truly measure student learning, achievement, and instructional methods.

The Importance of Addressing Testing

In the current educational environment, we seem to have reached a point where testing has become the sole tool we rely on to gauge how our students are progressing in school. What's unsettling about this is the fact that it almost blatantly ignores the growth and development of an individual student on a day-to-day basis. There are simply too many factors included in assessing a student's knowledge and ability that cannot be accounted for on a yearly test.

According to Mehrens (cited in Luna & Turner, 2001, p. 79) educational measurement scholars assert that the empirical evidence demonstrating either a positive or negative relationship between high-stakes testing and improved teaching and learning is "insufficient" and "equivocal." If there is no data that shows any benefits of improved learning, then we as a nation need to have an open discussion as to why we continue to test our students. FairTest (2002) recently noted that the United States already tests more children more often than any other nation.

According to Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000), many teachers expressed dismay that children's test scores were not accurate reflections of children's actual knowledge and skills. If this is true, then we must see if we have gone too far and become more concerned with what our students learn versus how our students learn. Thomas (2001) stated that learning is continual and far more complex and sophisticated than isolated instruction. It is also dependent on the growth of the learner. So we must decide what our goal is. Is it for our students to master specific tasks? Is it for our students to develop their problem-solving ability? If it is the former, then education has become robotic at best and dehumanizing at worst (Thomas, 2001). If it is the latter, then we as a society need to stop recycling past reforms that do not allow us to reach that goal and implement significant reforms that will.

Testing is not inherently a bad thing. Testing has played and will continue to play an important role in assessing a student's growth, development, and understanding from one point to another on a given subject over a period of time. However, testing is but a tool to be used by a professional. Currently we have gotten to a point where tests drive the curriculum and encourage the teaching of skills in isolation (Shepard, 1991). When this occurs, the teacher is forced to make instructional decisions that are not based on prior professional experience, what is of academic importance, or what is in the best interest of the student. Instead, decisions are made on what is most likely to be included on a standardized test (Shepard, 1991).

Sadly, what is happening is that we have let test results make decisions for us about people. It is no different than it was 50 years ago when educators gave I.Q. tests and based on test scores would tell students if they were going to take vocational courses, or if they were going to take academic courses, thus deciding their future for them. We need to ask ourselves, do we want to stay on a path of instruction in which decisions are made about student intelligence,

teacher ability, and school value based on a one-time test of general knowledge (Steeves, Hodgson, & Peterson, 2002), or do we want our students to develop higher order thinking abilities?

Testing and its results have the ability to inform us how students in a large group are doing in a subject in comparison to another group in the same setting, but in a different year. However, student achievement suffers because these once-a-year tests are incapable of providing teachers with the moment-to-moment and day-to-day information about student achievement that they need to make crucial instructional decisions (Stiggins, 2002). In essence, testing today makes a mockery of the important and time-honored role that educators' clinical judgments and diversity of opinion have played (Worthen, 1993).

Speaking out and communicating the issue of testing is the first step to improving not only the current educational environment in this country, but also the psychological well being of our students. Traditional paper and pencil tests, while still valuable tools, will never again be regarded as a sufficient means of profiling student achievement. Rather, we must rely on a broad array of assessment tools to depict a broad array of valued outcomes (Arter & Stiggins, 1992).

Alternative Assessments and Methods

Surveys conducted by the American Association of School Administrators show that parents want a supportive and engaging social and educational environment along with solid academics for their children (Neill, 2003). If we take a close look at our schools right now in this test heavy setting, would we see students being social and engaging one another to solve a problem in order to learn? According to much of the research (Luna & Turner, 2001) with information provided by teachers from across the country, this would not be the case. Instead, we would see more repetition, memorization, and strategies about how to pick out the correct

answer. When this happens it becomes recognition, not learning, and it has the potential to narrow what a student could actually gain in a classroom. Real gains in learning, not just test score gains, should be the measured outcome (Shepard, 2002).

The goal of education should really be to broaden a student's horizon, not to limit it or reduce it to memorized facts. Students should have the opportunity to engage with teachers and students about the subject being studied more in-depth instead of being drilled. We need to remember that the goal was to have well educated students and testing was the means to show just how well our students were learning.

Testing though is not the only tool at our disposal for this purpose. There are other ways of seeing what a student has learned that can provide more accurate data. Even a combination of assessment tools gives an educator a better understanding of a student's ability.

Proponents of alternative assessment prefer the above to more traditional assessments because sampling tiny snippets of student behavior, they point out does not provide insight into how students would perform on truly worthy intellectual tasks. They believe that alternative assessments can measure complex, higher order abilities that are difficult, if not impossible to assess with traditional measures (Shepard, 1993).

One country has already seen that multiple measures, not one, should be used to assess performance and has shifted their paradigm. England has adopted an assessment system that focuses on teacher informal assessments, ongoing performance assessments, portfolios, teacher recommendations, and standardized testing (Montgomery, Ranney & Growe, 2003). Combined, these different sources will allow for educators to make better and more valid decisions about their students. The first alternative to relying solely on a multiple choice test is the use of the open-ended answer format. Using open-ended questions will allow a student to compose a

written response of a certain length in order to measure a student's cognitive ability (Goertz & Duffy, 2003).

The next alternative is the use of portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment would allow students to include what they feel are examples of their best work done in the class (Goertz & Duffy, 2003). Generally speaking, a portfolio is a systematic collection of a variety of teacher observations and student products, collected over time, that reflect a student's developmental status and progress made (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991). The benefit of using portfolios is that they are not random like a one-time test would be. A portfolio would show work and growth over time. Not only that, but a portfolio could include many items such as papers, journal writings, reflections, summaries, and projects. This would allow the student to display a greater amount of his/her abilities.

Another alternative is what is known as a project-based system. The premise is that students can reach clearly defined, integrated standards through the use of projects. The students complete personalized learning plans designed by themselves, their parents, and their teachers, and that they can achieve at the highest level possible without being shackled to a desk to study. In fact there are no formal courses, and textbooks are just one of many resources for learning (Newell, 2002).

Still another alternative that could be considered is authentic assessment. According to Wiggins (1989), authentic assessment should elicit the actual performances that we want to measure. Authentic assessment tasks should be complex and embedded in context; they should test for mastery of concepts and insights central to the discipline. They should demonstrate students' habits of mind, for example, how they frame a question as well as how they solve it. In a similar approach John Frederiksen and Allan Collins (1989) argued for a direct assessment that

would involve students in extended tasks requiring demonstration of the cognitive skills intended as the goals of instruction.

Along with different ways that teachers can assess their students, there are also different ways that they can teach the information to their students besides drilling them. One such way is a student-centered approach to teaching and learning, or social-constructivism. With this approach the teacher takes on a different role and becomes more of a coach guiding the students who become responsible for their own learning (Passman, 2000). Using this approach, the relationship between student and teacher is that of a partnership versus a dictatorship. As one teacher in Texas stated after switching to this teaching method, "It's amazing how smart kids get when you teach 'em this way," (Passman, 2000, p. 11).

Another approach is modeling. When teachers model, they demonstrate to their students what curiosity looks like and they show students how to think about the world around them through science, history, geography, math, art, literature, and literacy. This approach also shows students that knowledge is interconnected and is available from many different sources (Grace, 1999).

Many things students learn simply cannot be tested with a paper-and-pencil test. In a high-quality education, students conduct science experiments, solve real-world math problems, write research papers, read and analyze novels and stories, deliver oral presentations, evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of fields, and apply their learning to new situations. In fact, standardized tests largely cannot evaluate these important kinds of learning. If instruction focuses on the test, students will not learn the skills needed for success in college and in life (Neill, 2003). Being able to actually see what students can do with their knowledge is more important than knowing what their percentile score is (Newell, 2002).

In summary, educational practices today seem to be far too industrialized. As a society we are viewing our students as a product to be turned out as quickly and efficiently as possible. While there are controls in place to assure everyone of high-quality, those very controls are potentially doing more harm than good for the students as well as the teachers. When people outside of a classroom dictate what needs to be taught and to what degree without knowing the environment of that classroom or the abilities of its students, those same people are causing unnecessary pressures, unrealistic expectations, and false gains in achievement. By ignoring what researchers have found about how students learn we are only setting ourselves up to fail by the continuation of this approach to education.

Research has already occurred in many states across America, this research project is important and necessary in order to get an understanding of how some teachers in the state of Wisconsin perceive testing in a standards-based public education setting is affecting education in the state of Wisconsin. By conducting this research I hope to find what those people on the front-lines of education think of the laws and policies they need to adhere to in their profession.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The contents of this chapter will include information on how the subjects were selected for this study, as well as a description of the population used in the study, followed by a detailed description of the instrument used and a description of how the data was collected and analyzed. This chapter will conclude with the limitations in the methodology used.

Subject Selection and Description

The participants of this study were all fourth grade regular education teachers, all eighth grade regular education teachers, and tenth grade regular education teachers who taught at least two courses at the tenth grade level in the subjects of English, Mathematics, Natural Science, and/or Social Science in one mid-sized upper mid-west school district. Surveys were distributed to all teachers and the sample for this study included those of the 120 teachers who returned the survey. During the period that the survey was administered, the school district being studied employed 33 fourth grade teachers in 12 elementary schools, 42 eighth grade teachers in 3 middle schools, and 45 tenth grade teachers in 2 high schools. This information was obtained from the Executive Director of Student Services in the district where the research was conducted.

Instrumentation

The survey used in this study was created by the researcher. The survey was printed on 11 x 17 resume paper and folder in half to create a booklet. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix A. For the purposes of this paper, an actually copy of the survey distributed to participants could not be placed in this paper due to the 11 x 17 format. The questions used in the survey were influenced by prior research on the subject which was reviewed by the

researcher. The 27 item survey consisted of 20 questions by which the participant marked an "x" next to the statement that best answered the question. The twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh questions were both open-ended questions for the participants to briefly answer. These questions attempted to determine awareness, thoughts, feeling, and practices teachers have when it comes to the use of standardized testing in a standards-based public education setting. The first question asked on the survey had the participants circle which grade level they taught. The second question asked the participants which subject(s) they taught. Question three asked participants how many years they had been teaching. Question four asked the participants how many years they had been teaching at this school. Question five asked participants how many years they had been teaching in their current position. Question six asked participants if they had a clear understanding of the required state standards in their school district. Question seven asked participants if they felt they played a role in developing curriculum to meet the required standards. Question eight asked participants if they felt they were offered adequate training by their school district to align the school's curriculum with the state standards. Question nine asked participants if they felt they were offered adequate preparation time to align the school's curriculum with the state standards. Question ten asked participants if they were familiar with the state's testing format. Question eleven asked participants if they knew the score the state required for satisfactory progress. Question twelve asked participants if they felt pressured to teach to the test so that their students achieved satisfactory progress. Question thirteen asked participants if they felt pressured to raise test scores from the previous year. Question fourteen asked participants if they noticed their teaching style change as they got closer to test time. Question fifteen asked participants if they felt they gave greater attention to areas of the curriculum that were tested. Question sixteen asked participants if they used tasks that

resembled the test as an instructional method. Question seventeen asked participants if they used commercially-made test preparation materials as part of their instruction to help prepare students for the tests. Question eighteen asked participants if they felt pressured to utilize a teaching method they do not agree with for the sole purpose of raising test scores. Question nineteen asked participants if they felt that testing limited the focus of instruction. Question twenty asked participants if they felt that students were receiving a more comprehensive education through the use of standards and testing. Question twenty-one asked participants if they felt that student moral had gone down because of testing. Question twenty-two asked participants if they felt they were a better teacher because of standards-based education. Question twenty-three asked participants if they felt teacher moral had gone down because of required standards and testing. Question twenty-four asked participants if they felt that using test scores was appropriate for rewards and/or sanctions on students, teachers, and schools. Question twenty-five asked participants if they felt it was still necessary for teachers to receive a four-year degree in order to become a teacher when standards of what to teach and what is considered satisfactory progress is already in place. Question twenty-six asked participants to answer briefly what their attitude was towards standards and testing in the school district where they were employed. Question twenty-seven asked participants to answer briefly how they believed the accountability of teachers doing their jobs has changed with the emergence of standards and testing.

Surveys were printed on one color of eleven by seventeen paper since participants were asked to circle which grade they taught, therefore no differentiation was needed.

Data Collection

After receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wisconsin-Stout to conduct this study, the researcher met with Executive Director of Student

Services of the school district in which he wanted to conduct his study and received permission to conduct the study. At the request of the Executive Director of Student Services of the school district, the school district will remain confidential and not be named anywhere in the study. For the purposes of this study, the participating school district was referred to as a mid-sized school district in the upper mid-west.

Before the surveys were delivered to each school, the Executive Director of Student Services provided the researcher with limited demographic information as to how many teachers were in each grade at each school so that the appropriate number of surveys could be copied and delivered.

On October 3rd, 2005, the researcher delivered the surveys and cover letters to the principals at every public elementary school, middle school, and high school in the participating school district. In order to achieve confidentiality, the principals at each school in the mid-sized district distributed the surveys and cover letters into all of the teachers' mailboxes who were asked to participate. Those choosing to participate did on a voluntary basis and were allowed to choose not to complete the survey. The researcher also placed a labeled envelope in the main office of every public elementary, middle, and high school in the participating district where teachers who decided to participate in the study could return the completed survey. The teachers were given until October 21st, 2005 to return the survey. One week before the survey was to be returned, the researcher delivered a reminder to every school in the district which the principal then placed in the participating teachers' mailboxes with additional copies of the survey available in case they had misplaced it.

Data Analysis

All appropriate descriptive statistics were run on the data. The valid percent and frequency responses for each question were calculated based on how many participants answered the questions. The results will be reported in chapter four. For the calculation of the descriptive statistics, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to calculate frequency counts and percentages for all survey questions. The final two items on the survey were tabulated to look for any occurring themes.

Limitations

This study may have factors that are considered limitations. Possible limitations to the collection of the research data included that only one school district participated, therefore any results needed to be used carefully as not to infer to other school districts or the state as a whole. Another limitation was that the survey was designed for this study and had no documented measures of validity or reliability. The final limitation was that there was no way to determine that the participants' responses were truthful.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of the Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the results of a testing survey taken by fourth grade, eight grade, and tenth grade teachers in a mid-sized school district located in the upper mid-west. This chapter includes a description of the data collected and the statistical information of the results, and any additional noteworthy items. This chapter will conclude with a brief summary.

Demographic Information

The survey was administered on October 3, 2005 to all fourth grade, all eight grade, and tenth grade teachers who taught two or more courses in the areas of English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences in a mid-sized school district in northwestern Wisconsin. In the district being researched, there were 33 fourth grade teachers at 12 elementary schools, 42 eight grade teachers at 3 middle schools, and 45 tenth grade teachers who taught two courses in English, Mathematics, Natural Science, and Social Science at two high schools. There were a total of 120 teachers who were asked to participate in the study. Of the seventeen schools in the district, there was one elementary school that chose not to participate in the study. With one school choosing not to participate, the total number of surveys that were distributed was 118. Out of the 118 surveys that were distributed, 48 were returned. This constituted a 40% return rate.

Table 1 indicates what grade level was taught, the number of teachers in each grade level who received the survey, and the total number of responses by each grade level.

Table 1: Grade level taught, number of participants, and number of responses

Grade Level	Number of Teachers	Number of Responses
Fourth Grade	31	16
Eight Grade	42	9
Tenth Grade	45	23

Results indicated in Table 1 show that the number of participants who responded to the survey was fairly evenly spread between the elementary (fourth grade) and high school (tenth grade), but that it was not evenly spread when it came to the middle school teachers (eighth grade).

In the district being studied, the total years of a teachers' experience ranged from 1 year to 33 years, with the mean being 16.937 years and the mode being 20 years of total teaching experience. When teachers asked how many years they have been teaching at this school, the answers ranged from 1 year to 32, years with the mean being 11.312 years and the mode being 9 years. Finally, when teachers were asked how many years they have been teaching in their current position, the answers ranged from 1 year to 32, years with the mean being 10.95 years and the mode being 8.5 years of teaching.

The teachers in the district being studied taught several different subjects: 35.4% of the teachers taught all subjects, 22.9% of the teachers taught English, 10.4 % of the teachers taught Natural Sciences, 16.7% of the teachers taught Mathematics, 10.4% of the teachers taught Social

Science courses, 2.1% of the teachers taught Mathematics, Reading and English, and another 2.1% of the teacher taught Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

Research Questions

This study was intended to answer twelve research questions. Research question number one asked, "Is there a clear understanding among teachers of the required standards in their school district?" Survey question number six was asked in an attempt to answer this research question. Results were that 91.7% (n=44) of the participants indicated that there was a clear understanding among teachers in the school district of the required state standards, while 8.3% (n=4) indicated there was not a clear understanding among teachers in the school district of the required state standards.

Research question number two of the study asked, "Do teachers feel they are offered adequate training and preparation time by the school district to align the curriculum with the standards?" Survey questions number eight and nine were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question number eight were that 81.3% (n=39) of the participants indicated that they were offered adequate training to align the curriculum with the standards, while 18.8% (n=9) indicated that they were not offered adequate training to align the curriculum with the standards. Results of question number nine indicated that 56.3% (n=27) of the participants felt that they were offered adequate preparation time to align the curriculum with the standards, while 43.8% (n=21) of the participants felt that they were not offered adequate preparation time to align the curriculum with the standards.

Research question number three of the study asked, "Do teachers feel they have an important role in developing curriculum?" Survey question number seven was an attempt to answer this research question. Results were that 79.2% (n=38) of the participants indicated that

they have an important role in developing curriculum, while 20.8% (n=10) of the participants indicated that they do not have an important role in developing curriculum.

Research question number four of the study asked, "How familiar are teachers with the tests' format and required scores?" Survey questions number ten and eleven were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question number ten indicated that 100% (n=48) of the participants were familiar with the state's testing format. Results of question number eleven were that 60.4% (n=29) of the participants indicated they were familiar with the required test scores, while 39.6% (n=19) of the participants were not familiar with the required test scores.

Research question number five of the study asked, "Do teachers feel pressure to utilize a teaching method they do not agree with for the sole purpose of achieving required test scores?" Survey questions number twelve and eighteen were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question number twelve were that 39.6% (n=19) of the participants indicated that they felt pressure to teach to the test, while 60.4% (n=29) of the participants felt that they did not experience pressure to teach to the test. Results of question number eighteen were that 20.8% (n=10) of the participants indicated that they felt pressured to utilize a teaching method they did not agree with for the purpose of raising scores, while 79.2% (n=38) of the participants indicated that they did not feel pressured to utilize a teaching method they did not agree with for the sole purpose of raising test scores.

Research question number six of the study asked, "Do teachers feel pressure to raise test score and if they do not raise test scores should there be sanctions?" Survey questions number thirteen and twenty-four were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question number thirteen indicated that 72.9% (n=35) of the participants felt that they were pressured to raise test scores from the previous year, while 27.1% (n=13) of the participants felt that they did

not feel pressure to raise test scores from the previous year. Results of question number twenty-four were that 100% (n=48) of the participants indicated that they did not feel it was appropriate to use test scores for rewards or sanctions for students, teachers, or schools.

Research question number seven of the study asked, "Do teachers notice a change in their teacher methods as the test approaches?" Survey questions number fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question fourteen indicated that 37.5% (n=18) of the participants felt that they did notice their teaching style change as the test got closer, while 62.5% (n=30) of the participants felt that they did not notice their teaching style change as the test got closer. Results of question fifteen were that 39.6% (n=19) of the participants indicated that did give greater attention and more time to areas of the curriculum that were tested, while 60.4% (n=29) of the participants indicated that they did not give greater attention and more time to areas of the curriculum that were tested. Results of question sixteen indicated that 62.5% (n=30) of the participants felt that they did use tasks that resembled the test as an instructional method, while 37.5% (n=18) of the participants felt that they did not use tasks that resembled the test as an instructional method. Results of question seventeen indicated that 35.4% (n=17) of the participants said that they used commercially made test preparation materials in their instruction to assist in preparing students for the test, while 64.6% (n=31) of the participants said that they did not use commercially made test preparation materials in their instruction to assist in preparing students for the test.

Research question number eight of the study asked, "Do teachers feel that they have become a better teacher because of standards and testing?" Survey question number twenty-two was an attempt to answer this research question. Results indicated that 33.3% (n=16) of the participants stated that they were a better teacher because of standards and testing, while 66.7%

(n=32) of the participants indicated that they where not a better teacher because of standards and testing.

Research question number nine of the study asked, "Do teachers feel that students are receiving a more comprehensive education through the use of standards and testing?" Survey questions number nineteen and twenty were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question nineteen indicated that 60.4% (n=29) of the participants felt that testing limited the focus of instruction, while 39.6% (n=19) of the participants felt that testing did not limit the focus of instruction. Results of question twenty indicated that 79.2% (n=38) of the participants felt that students were not receiving a more comprehensive education through the use of standards and testing, while 20.8% (n=10) of the participants felt that students were receiving a more comprehensive education through the use of standards and testing.

Research question number ten of the study asked, "Do teachers feel that the morale of teachers and students has gone down because of standards and testing?" Survey questions number twenty-one and twenty-three were an attempt to answer this research question. Results of question twenty-one indicated that 31.3% (n=15) of the participants felt that student morale had gone down due to standards and testing, while 68.7% (n=33) of the participants felt that student morale had not gone down due to standards and testing. Results of question twenty-three indicated that 62.5% (n=30) of the participants felt that teacher morale had gone down because of standards and testing, while 37.5% (n=18) of the participants felt that teacher morale has not gone down.

Research question number eleven of the study was an open-ended question. Research question eleven of the study asked, "What are teachers' perceptions and attitude regarding standards and testing in the school district where you are employed?" Survey question number

twenty-six was an attempt to answer this question. Forty-two participants answered the question and results varied. Answers indicated that more than two-thirds of the participants' attitudes towards standards were positive. The feeling among the participants indicated that standards let teachers share ideas to improve the curriculum, let them critique and analyze their teaching methods, and that it brought focus, consistency, and balance to a school's and a district's curriculum. Participants also felt that it was appropriate and logical to use standards as a blueprint. While the majority of the participants felt that standards were a positive item in their district, there was a smaller percentage who indicated standards were overemphasized, lead to ineffectual teaching methods, consumed too much time, and were seen as a necessary evil. In addition to this, all participants overwhelmingly viewed testing in a negative way. The results indicated that testing should not be used as the only factor to measure success, nor should testing drive the curriculum. The participants felt that the results of a test were not a true reflection of a student, teacher, or a school. The participants indicated that they were frustrated with testing, that it made students nervous, and brought little benefits to anyone. The participants felt that it was unfair and unrealistic to have one measure for all students and that test results did not tell them anything they didn't already know.

Research question number twelve of the study was also an open-ended question. Research question twelve of the study asked, "How do teachers view the concept of accountability for their profession has changed with the emergence of standards and testing?" Survey question number twenty-seven was an attempt to answer this research question. Forty participants answered the question and results varied. Answers indicated that just over one-third of the participants felt that accountability for teachers had not changed at all with the emergence of standards and testing, while a larger percentage of the participants felt that accountability had

changed in a detrimental way by adding more stress, receiving a lot more scrutiny, and greater pressure for better results. One participant said he/she felt as though big brother was constantly watching him/her.

Noteworthy Item

There was one additional survey item that up until now has not been accounted for through the research questions. On the survey there was one question which asked participants if they felt it was still necessary for a teacher to obtain a four year degree to become a teacher when standards of what to teach and the scores for satisfactory progress were already set in place for teachers. Survey question number twenty-five was an attempt to address this issue. Results indicated that 100% (n=48) of the participants claimed that it was still necessary to obtain a four year degree in order to become a teacher.

Summary

In summary, this study was able to report what teachers from one mid-sized upper mid-west school district have to say when it comes to the issues of standards and testing in their district. Their understanding of the test, scores, teaching styles, results, pressure, and morale were measured. Out of 118 surveys there was a strong return rate of 40% (n=48) and in chapter five these results will be compared to other research results.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter five will include a discussion of the results of this study and how those results compare and contrast to the literature on testing in a standards-based educational setting as discussed in chapter two, followed by some and general conclusions. This chapter will conclude with the researcher's recommendations for future study related to this research.

Discussion

This study involved an examination of teachers' perceptions of testing for students in a standards-based public education setting. The teacher participants responded to questions regarding their clear understanding of state standards in their district, the role they play in developing and aligning curriculum, the state's testing format and scores, teaching methods used, teacher and student morale, if it is appropriate to offer rewards and sanctions in testing, as well as teachers' attitudes regarding standards and testing in the district where they are employed, and finally how teacher accountability has changed with the emergence of standards and testing. Overall the study yielded positive results.

Results from question number twenty-one of the survey do not concur with what Rapp (2002) said in the literature. Rapp (2002) found that 97% of teachers said that testing had a negative affect on their students' love of learning. In this study, 68.8% (n=33) of the participants said that student morale had not gone down because of testing.

Results from question number nineteen of the survey did concur with what Shepard (1991) said in the literature. Shepard (1991) said that testing caused instruction to stagnant. This

study found that two-thirds of the participants who responded indicated that testing limited the focus of instruction.

Results from question number twenty-three of the survey concurred with what Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) said in the literature. Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) said that these tests frustrated high-energy teachers, causing talented teachers to leave. In this study over two-thirds of the participants who responded indicated that teacher morale had gone down because of testing.

Results from question number twelve of the survey do not concur with what Passman (2000) and Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) said in the literature. Passman (2000) found that in one large urban mid-western district that a principal ordered everyone to only teach what was on the state exam and Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) encountered a principal who said if it isn't going to help us on the tests, don't do it. In this study, 60.4% (n=29) of the participants indicated that they did not feel pressure to teach to the test.

Results from question number fifteen of the survey do not concur with what Montgomery, Ranney, and Growe (2003) said in the literature. Montgomery, Ranney, and Growe (2003) found that many teachers neglected areas of the curriculum that would not be tested. In this study, 60.4% (n=29) of the participants indicated that they do not give greater attention to the subjects that would be tested, while 39.6% (n=19) said that they did give more attention to the material being covered.

Results from question number eighteen of the survey do not concur with what Adcock and Patton (2001) said in the literature. Adcock and Patton (2001) said that many teachers felt pressured to utilize a teaching method that they did not agree with. In this study, 79.2% (n=38)

of the participants who responded indicated that they did not feel pressure to utilize a teaching method that they did not agree with.

Conclusions

While there were some differences in the findings of the research, overall, the results of the study reinforced important points in concurrence with the literature in regards to teachers' perceptions of testing for students in a standards-based public education setting. This study yielded positive results in contrast to many states across America that the teachers in this district understood the state standards, that they felt they played a role in developing the curriculum, and that they had adequate training and preparation time to align the curriculum. Not only that, but these teachers were familiar with the required scores for satisfactory progress and they did not feel pressure to teach to the test. For the most, part teachers did not change their teaching style, nor did they limit instruction. One of the more disheartening findings was that due to standards and testing, teacher morale had gone down significantly.

While the sample for this study was not large, this study was useful for the district to examine areas for improvement.

Recommendations for future research

Based on the data gathered from this study, the following recommendations have been made for future research in the area of standards-based testing:

1. Because the state of Wisconsin changed the grades that students are tested in just before the time of this study, more research should be conducted which would include the following grade levels: third grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, and seventh grade teachers.

2. Modify the instrument so that it would allow for teachers to be interviewed over the period of one hour; in order to get more detailed responses.
3. Conduct a survey that deals with a specific grade as teachers in different grades have different concerns and issues.
4. Conduct a survey in one specific subject area such as Mathematics or English.
5. Conduct a comparative study within the state but at different school districts in order to gauge any similarities or differences on the subject.

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APPENDIX A

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Testing Survey

Thank you for your time and honesty in filling out this survey. Please **DO NOT** write your name on this survey.

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS SURVEY BY FRIDAY NOVEMBER 21, 2005

1. What "grade level(s)" do you teach? 4 8 10

2. What "subject(s)" do you teach? _____

3. How many years have you been teaching? _____ years

4. How many years have you been teaching at this school? _____ years

5. How many years have you been teaching in your current position? _____ years

Please mark an "x" next to the following statement that best describes your thoughts/feelings of each item asked.

6. Do you, as a teacher, feel that there is a clear understanding of the required state standards in your school district?

   ____Yes, I feel that there is a clear understanding of the required standards.

   ____No, I do not feel there is a clear understanding of the required standards.

7. Do you, as a teacher, feel that you play a role in developing curriculum to meet these standards?

   ____Yes, I feel that I play a role in developing curriculum.

   ____No, I do not feel that I play a role in the development of curriculum.

8. Do you, as a teacher, feel that you are offered adequate training by the school district in how to align the school's curriculum with the state standards?

   ____Yes, I feel that I am offered adequate training in aligning the school's curriculum and standards.

   ____No, I do not feel that I am offered adequate training in aligning the school's curriculum and standards.

9. Do you, as a teacher, feel that you are offered adequate preparation time to align the school's curriculum with the state standards?

____Yes, I feel that I am offered adequate preparation time to align the school's curriculum with the state's standards.

____No, I do not feel that I am offered adequate preparation time to align the school's curriculum with the state's standards.

10. Are you, as a teacher, familiar with the state's standardized testing format?

____Yes, I am familiar with the state's testing format.

____No, I am not familiar with the state's testing format.

11. Do you, as a teacher, know the scores that the state standards require for satisfactory progress?

____Yes, I am familiar with the scores for satisfactory progress.

____No, I am not familiar with the scores for satisfactory process.

12. Do you, as a teacher, feel pressure to teach to the test in order to achieve satisfactory progress for your students?

____Yes, I feel pressure to teach to the test.

____No, I do not feel pressure to teach to the test.

13. Do you, as a teacher, feel pressure to raise test scores from the previous year?

____Yes, I feel pressure to raise test scores from the previous year

____No, I do not feel pressure to raise test scores from the previous year.

14. Do you, as a teacher, notice your teaching style change as you get closer to the designated test time?

____ Yes, I do notice my teaching style change as the designated test time approaches.

____ No, I do not notice my teaching style change as the designated test time approaches.

15. Do you, as a teacher, feel that you give greater attention and more time to areas of the curriculum that are tested?

____Yes, I feel that I give greater time and attention to areas of the curriculum that are tested.

____No, I do not feel that I give greater time and attention to areas of the curriculum that are tested.

16. Do you, as a teacher, use tasks that resemble the test as an instructional method?

____Yes, I do use tasks that resemble the test as an instructional method.

____No, I do not use tasks that resemble the test as an instructional method.

17. Do you, as a teacher, use commercially made test preparation materials in your instruction to assist in preparing your students for the mandated test?

____Yes, I do use commercially made test preparation materials as part of instruction.

____No, I do not use commercially made test preparation materials as part of instruction.

18. Do you, as a teacher, feel pressure to utilize a teaching method you do not agree with for the sole purpose of achieving satisfactory progress?

____Yes, I feel pressure to utilize a teaching method I do not agree with.

____No, I do not feel pressure to utilize a teaching method I do not agree with.

19. Do you, as a teacher, feel that testing limits the focus of instruction?

____Yes, I do feel that testing limits the focus of instruction.

____No, I do not feel that testing limits the focus of instruction.

20. Do you, as a teacher, feel that students are receiving a more comprehensive education through the use of standards and testing?

____Yes, I feel that students are receiving a more comprehensive education.

____No, I do not feel that students are receiving a more comprehensive education.

21. Do you, as a teacher, feel that student morale has gone down because of testing?

____Yes, I feel that student morale has gone down because of testing.

____No, I do not feel that student morale has gone down because of testing.

22. Do you, as a teacher, feel you are a better teacher because of state standards-based education?

____Yes, I feel I am a better teacher because of state standards-based education.

____No, I do not feel I am a better teacher because of state standards-based education.

Please see the back side.

23. Do you, as a teacher, feel that teacher morale has gone down because of required standards and testing?

____Yes, I feel that teacher morale has gone down because of the required standards and testing.

____No, I do not feel that teacher morale has gone down because of the required standards and testing.

24. Do you, as a teacher, feel that using test results is appropriate for rewards and or sanctions for students, teachers and schools?

____Yes, I feel that using test results are appropriate for rewards and or sanctions for students, teachers and schools.

____No, I do not feel that using test results are appropriate for rewards and or sanctions for students, teachers and schools

25. Do you, as a teacher, feel it is still necessary for teachers to still obtain a four year degree to become a teacher when state standards of what to teach and scores for satisfactory progress are already set in place for teachers?

____Yes, I feel it is still necessary to obtain a four degree in order to become a teacher.

____No, I do not feel that it is still necessary to obtain a four degree in order to become a teacher.

Please briefly answer the following questions:

26. As a teacher, what is your attitude regarding standards and testing in the school district where you are employed?

27. With the emergence of standards and testing, explain how you believe accountability of teachers doing their job has changed?

Thank you for filling out this survey completely.