

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE MINNESOTA BASIC  
STANDARDS TESTS ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

by

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standards in order to graduate. All of these new requirements for graduation have the potential to affect the way students are taught in the classroom.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not teachers believe changes have been made in the curriculum and teaching methods used in the classroom since the implementation of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests as a requirement for graduation.

All high school and junior high school teachers in District 834 were surveyed using the Survey of Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests. The survey consisted of six statements that the subjects rated using a five-point Likert Scale. Surveys were distributed to teacher mailboxes. Sixty-three teachers responded.

Almost two-thirds of the subjects in this study believed the curriculum had been narrowed since the implementation of the Minnesota Basic Standards Test. Fifty-four percent of the subjects believed the curriculum had been strengthened in some way, while 45.2% did not believe it was strengthened.

One interesting finding of the present study was that, while 71% of respondents at least somewhat agree that teachers have less control over the curriculum, almost 94% believe that teachers are allowed to use their own judgment to plan how lessons will be used to meet basic standards.

While it does appear that some level of “teaching to the test” may be occurring, the teachers in this sample do not seem to feel powerless in the changes that have been made. Recommendations for future research include surveying a larger sample of teachers and including individual interviews in the research process.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Mandatory graduation tests seem to be an inevitable reality of the future for many students as government and school officials look to schools to be more accountable for what students are learning. The purpose of graduation tests is to ensure that all students leave high school with at least a minimal level of basic skills necessary to succeed in life (Bond & King, 1995). The use of graduation tests became more widespread following the publication of *A nation at risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983.

*A nation at risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) reported that students were graduating from high school without learning the higher order intellectual skills that are expected of them in the workforce or military. Business and military leaders had to spend millions of dollars to provide remedial education and training programs to make up for the basic reading, writing, spelling, and computation skills young people were lacking. Eight states began high school graduation tests following publication of this report (Bond & King, 1995).

In 1999, Secretary of Education Richard Riley started a campaign to require all high school students in the United States to pass a graduation test in order to receive a diploma (Riley calls for mandatory graduation tests, 1999). Twenty-two states already had graduation tests in place by this time to determine which students would receive high school diplomas and at least five other states were in the planning stages of developing a graduation test (Natriello & Pallas, 1999). Minnesota was among the states where graduation testing had already begun.

Minnesota's graduation requirements consist of two components. The Basic Standards consist of reading and math tests first administered in eighth grade and a writing test administered in tenth grade. Students who do not pass the tests are given the opportunity to retake the test at least once a year until they do pass. The Basic Standards define the skills identified by the state of Minnesota as being necessary to live and work in today's society (Natriello & Pallas, 1999). Students graduating in the year 2000 and beyond must pass the Basic Standards tests in order to receive a diploma (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 1998).

The second component of Minnesota's graduation requirements, the High Standards, is required for all students in the class of 2002 and beyond (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 1998). The High Standards consist of forty-eight standards in ten learning areas and students must complete twenty-four of the standards in order to graduate. Completion of the High Standards portion, also known as the Minnesota Profiles of Learning, demonstrates that a student has reached an advanced level of achievement (Natriello & Pallas, 1999).

While proponents of graduation testing believe the tests will lead to an increased level of basic skills knowledge of the students, test critics are concerned about what will happen in the classroom. Both the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English have spoken out against high stakes testing (International Reading Association, 1999; Allender, 1999). The teachers involved in these groups are concerned that such tests will cause teachers to narrow their curriculum to focus only on what will be tested, thus robbing their students of valuable instruction time and a more varied curriculum.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, however, believes that high-stakes assessment can be beneficial to students when it is handled correctly. Teaching to the test can be positive when the test compares students to a set of well-defined standards, not other students (Briars, 1999).

As is the case with the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, there is much disagreement over the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and instruction. Some believe such testing will be harmful for students because the curriculum may be narrowed to focus primarily on basic skills (Allender, 1999; International Reading Association, 1999; Natriello & Pallas, 1999). Others believe using standards to define what will be tested will help to align curriculum and instruction, giving students a more well rounded and comparable education across the board (Briars, 1999; Grogan, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher perceptions of the effects of mandatory state graduation tests on curriculum and instruction. This study will focus on the perceptions of high school and junior high school teachers in District 834, located in Stillwater, Minnesota. The perceptions of these teachers will be measured using a survey instrument designed by the researcher. The survey will be conducted in the Spring of 2002.

This study will examine teacher perceptions regarding, one, whether the curriculum has narrowed to focus on graduation standards and, two, changes teachers have made in the methods they use in the classroom since the implementation of graduation standards.

## **Definition of Terms**

Terms needing to be defined and clarified to aid in understanding of this paper include the following:

**Graduation Tests:** Standardized tests mandated by the state that determine whether or not a student will graduate from high school.

**High Stakes Tests:** Tests used to make decisions regarding the future of a student, such as grade promotion or graduation. Graduation tests are a form of high stakes testing.

**Low Stakes Tests:** Tests that have little or no impact on the future of a student.

**Minimum Competency Tests:** Standardized tests that stress the mastery of basic skills. The minimum level of competency required to pass is determined by the agency in charge of testing. Minimum competency tests may be either high or low stakes, and can include graduation tests.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that the teachers in District 834 will represent the opinions of teachers in all of Minnesota regarding the effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Test on curriculum and instruction. This assumption limits the ability of the results to be generalized to teachers in other districts or other states.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

High stakes graduation testing is a relatively new phenomenon in the world of education. Because of this, research on this topic is relatively limited. This chapter will focus on three areas of research regarding high stakes testing: the effects on students, the effects on curriculum and instruction, and the controversy of “teaching to the test.”

#### **Effects of High Stakes Tests on Students**

It is not surprising that the implementation of graduation tests, or other forms of high stakes tests, and standards have the potential to impact many different aspects of student life. Research on how these tests actually affect students is not conclusive at this time, but examining this research can help to shed some light on the impacts of high stakes tests on students. This section will review current research related to the effects of high stakes testing on course selection, school attendance, self-concept, skills improvement, school transfers, and drop out rates. For some of these categories, the amount of research available to review consisted of only one study. This alone is evidence of the need for further research into the effects of high stakes and graduation tests.

#### **Course selection**

MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) conducted a very thorough study of the effects of minimum competency tests on students. MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) followed a large cohort group of students for several years to determine the differences that existed between those who passed and failed the minimum competency test. The researchers found that students who failed were more

likely to enroll in more remedial and required classes, while those who passed had the freedom to choose more elective classes. While it could be argued that students who fail minimum competency tests need more remedial classes to catch up to the level of those who pass the same tests, it could also be argued that failing the test keeps these students in classes where expectations are lower. Studies have shown that low teacher expectations can lead to lower levels of performance (Tauber, 1998; Strong, 1998; Hess, 1999).

### **Attendance**

MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) also researched the effects of minimum competency tests on school attendance. The study showed that students who failed the test missed more school than those who passed. The study design did not allow for a causal relationship to be determined so it is unknown whether students who failed the test did so because they missed more days of school or if they missed more days of school because they failed the test.

### **Self-concept**

A student's self concept can be broken down further to include both academic self-concept and non-academic self-concept. Academic self-concept would include how a student views his or her ability to achieve in school, while non-academic self-concept includes how a student views his or her appearance, relationships, and emotions (MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, & Hemsley, 1990).

According to MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) academic self-concept was more likely to be affected by the minimum competency test than non-academic self-concept. Students who passed the test had more favorable views of their

general academic and math abilities than those who failed, but the two groups did not significantly differ in their self-concepts of their verbal abilities (MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, & Hemsley, 1990). The two groups showed no significant differences in measures of non-academic self-concept. As expected, students in this age group were able to differentiate between their academic and non-academic abilities.

### **Skills improvement**

One of the main goals of implementing graduation tests is to ensure that all students leave school with a certain level of basic skills (Bond & King, 1995). It would be reasonable, then, to expect students in states with such testing programs to improve their skill levels. However, research in this area has produced conflicting results (Frederiksen, 1994; Neill, 1998).

Frederiksen (1994) found that students assessed by the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills showed a significant increase in basic skills, but the improvements only took place over a two-year period. After the initial two years of the testing program, there were no further significant changes in attainment of basic skills. One promising finding of the same study was that students classified as low achievers showed significant gains in acquisition of both basic and high-level skills (Frederiksen, 1994).

In a study comparing scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math tests, Neill (1998) found that students in states without high stakes testing programs scored better than students from states with high stakes testing programs. Neill (1998) concluded that these results were due to a narrowing of the curriculum in states with high stakes testing in order to prepare students to pass the

mandated test. This possible effect of high stakes testing will be discussed in the following section.

### **School transfers**

MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley (1990) found that students who failed the minimum competency test were more likely to transfer to another school than were those who passed. While it is impossible to conclude with any certainty, the researchers hypothesized that the students transferred to districts where graduation tests or standards were not as stringent as the district in which they started.

### **Drop out rates**

The effects of graduation or minimum competency tests on student drop out rates is perhaps the most widely researched of all the effects of testing programs. While researchers have not yet found a causal relationship between testing and dropping out, some relationship does seem to exist (MacMillan, Balow, Widaman, and Hemsley, 1990; Reardon, 1996; Clarke, Haney, Madaus, Lynch, & Lynch, 2000).

Researchers examining data from testing agencies and educational institutions have concluded that a relationship does exist between high stakes tests and an increased dropout rate, especially when low-income students are involved (Reardon, 1996; Clarke et al., 2000). Clarke et al. (2000) found that of the ten states with the highest drop out rates, over half had high stakes tests in place. In Reardon's 1996 study of the effects of minimum competency tests on drop out rates, it was discovered that urban high schools with high populations of low income, minority students were more likely to be subjected to minimum competency tests. The same schools also had higher drop out rates than schools with lower concentrations of these populations.

Catterall (1988) used interviews with teachers and student surveys to investigate the same question. The teachers he interviewed, however, did not think such tests would cause students to drop out because the tests are too basic to provide much of a barrier to student progress. The students surveyed, however, believed the tests could cause some students to drop out.

### **Summary**

The research presented shows that high stakes testing programs, such as graduation tests, are capable of greatly affecting many aspects of a student's life. Everything from the courses a student takes to the likelihood they will finish high school can be impacted. The limited research available for review is evidence that further exploration into the effects of high stakes tests on students is needed.

### **Effects of High Stakes Tests on Curriculum and Instruction**

The majority of research in the area of testing focuses primarily on the effects on students, but any change in curriculum or instruction because of testing, potentially could greatly impact a student's experience in the classroom. Because research on the effects of high stakes testing on curriculum and instruction is extremely limited, this section will focus on only one study that is directly related to the purpose of this research.

Corbett and Wilson (1987) surveyed and compared the beliefs of teachers and administrators in two states with different policies regarding testing. One state required passage of the test for graduation, while the other state did not. Respondents in the state that required passing a test for graduation were more likely to believe that there were differences between what they felt should be taught and what was emphasized by the test (Corbett & Wilson, 1987). Fifty-three percent of the educators in the state with the high-

stakes test reported that teachers had made major or total changes in the content of their classes due to the tests, while only 8% of educators in the other state reported the same level of changes (Corbett & Wilson, 1987). Another major difference between educators in the two states was the degree to which they believed the curriculum had been narrowed because of the testing. Two-thirds of the respondents in the state with the graduation test believed the curriculum had been moderately to totally changed, whereas two-thirds of respondents in the other state believed there was no change in the curriculum (Corbett & Wilson, 1987).

Educators in the state where the test was required for graduation did report some improvements caused by the testing. They believed the curriculum was more structured, coordinated, focused, and systematic since the testing began (Corbett & Wilson, 1987). The respondents also believed that the testing “created a consciousness about what was being taught” (Corbett & Wilson, 1987, p. 32).

### **The “Teaching to the Test” Controversy**

“Teaching to the test” is a phrase often brought up when the subject of high stakes testing is discussed. Critics of such tests use this term to describe a situation where teachers alter the material taught in class to include only materials on which students will be tested. Proponents of high stakes testing argue that “teaching to the test” is not the negative concept that is often implied.

Opponents of high stakes testing fear that imposing narrow and rigid standards for education will reduce the intrinsic motivation of students and teachers and lead to a reduction in the desire to learn (Natriello & Pallas, 1999). One study on the effects preparing students to pass a high stakes assessment found that relevant class discussion

were often cut short by students when they realized they had strayed from the standards that were being discussed (Grogan, 2001). It would appear that students in that study had already begun to lose their intrinsic motivation and desire to learn for the sake of learning, or at least were willing to forego more interesting conversation in order to prepare for the test.

Supporters of high stakes assessment argue that when such tests are based on solid standards that are clearly defined and understood by both teachers and students, then “teaching to the test” is the same as good teaching (Briars, 1999). If the standards are accepted by teachers as being important, then preparing students to take an exam on those important standards should not be much different than what they would normally be teaching (Grogan, 2001).

### **Summary**

High stakes assessments, which include graduation tests, clearly have the ability to affect the experience of both students and teachers in school. Whether the changes caused by such assessments are positive or negative is still open for debate. As relatively little research has been done on the subject, it is impossible to draw a conclusive judgment at this time. The purpose of the present study is to examine the effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Test, a high stakes graduation assessment, on curriculum and instruction to get a better understanding of how the experience of teachers is different with the test in place. This study will attempt to better understand the “teaching to the test” controversy.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions regarding the effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Test on curriculum and instruction. In order to do this, teachers in District 834, in Stillwater, Minnesota, were surveyed.

#### **Selection of Sample**

Teachers in Minnesota District 834 were chosen to participate in this study because of the size of the district and the availability of access to the schools. In Minnesota, students take the reading and math sections of the Basic Standards Test for the first time when they are in eighth grade. In tenth grade they take the writing section. If a student fails any section of the test, they are given the opportunity to retake that section at least once a year. Because of this schedule for test administration, teachers in both the junior high schools and the high school were surveyed.

Two hundred-fifty teachers at two junior highs and one high school were invited to participate and were informed of the purpose of the study. Sixty-three surveys were returned, for a return rate of just over 25%. Of the 63 respondents, 52.4% (n=33) were junior high teachers and 47.6% (n=30) were high school teachers.

#### **Instrumentation**

The survey instrument (see Appendix B) used in this study consisted of six questions developed by the researcher. The respondents were able to rate their level of agreement to the questions using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. The questions were designed to examine

teacher perceptions of the effects of the Basic Standards Test on the curriculum and methods of instruction used in the district.

### **Research Procedures**

After receiving permission from all building principals, surveys were distributed to teacher mailboxes in the three schools. A letter (see Appendix A) was attached to each survey to familiarize the teachers with both the researcher and the purpose of the study. Teachers were also instructed to return the completed surveys to a box located in the main office of each school building.

Completed surveys were examined and responses to each question were recorded for both the junior high school and high school teachers. For each question, the frequency and percentage of responses across the Likert scale were recorded. Findings were reported and followed by a summary and recommendations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Introduction

This chapter will present the results of the Survey of Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests. The results for each question on the survey will be reported individually, with the subjects split into subgroups of high school and junior high school teachers.

#### Question 1

**The district's curriculum has narrowed to cover the basic skills assessed by the tests.**

#### High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 2 6.7%	f=10 33.3%	f=12 40%	f=5 16.7%	f=1 3.3%

#### Junior High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 3 9.1%	f=7 21.2%	f=12 36.4%	f=11 33.3%	f=0 0%

Sixty-five percent of the subjects agreed to some extent that the district's curriculum had in fact narrowed to cover basic skills. Among the junior high teachers who responded to the survey, the number who felt the curriculum had narrowed rose to 70%, while 60% of high school teachers agreed.

**Question 2**

**Teachers have less control over the curriculum used in their classrooms.**

**High School Teachers**

<b>1 Completely Disagree</b>	<b>2 Disagree</b>	<b>3 Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>4 Agree</b>	<b>5 Completely Agree</b>
<b>f= 1 3.3%</b>	<b>f=5 16.7%</b>	<b>f=16 53.3%</b>	<b>f=7 23.3%</b>	<b>f=1 3.3%</b>

**Junior High School Teachers**

<b>1 Completely Disagree</b>	<b>2 Disagree</b>	<b>3 Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>4 Agree</b>	<b>5 Completely Agree</b>
<b>f= 2 6.1%</b>	<b>f=10 30.3%</b>	<b>f=13 39.4%</b>	<b>f=7 21.2%</b>	<b>f=1 3%</b>

Over 70% of all the subjects agreed that teachers have less control over the curriculum since the implementation of the basic standards test as a requirement for graduation. The number of high school teachers who agreed with this statement was slightly higher at 80%. Of the subjects who agreed with this statement, the majority (46%) only somewhat agreed, while 25.4% agreed or completely agreed.

**Question 3**

**The district's curriculum has been strengthened.**

**High School Teachers**

<b>1 Completely Disagree</b>	<b>2 Disagree</b>	<b>3 Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>4 Agree</b>	<b>5 Completely Agree</b>
<b>f= 2 6.7%</b>	<b>f=12 40%</b>	<b>f=11 36.7%</b>	<b>f=5 16.7%</b>	<b>f=0 0%</b>

### Junior High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 2 6.25%	f=12 37.5%	f=14 43.75%	f=4 12.5%	f=0 0%

The subjects in this study were basically split on whether or not the curriculum had been strengthened since the basic skills tests have been in place. Just under 39% of all subjects disagreed with this statement, while just over 40% somewhat agreed. The numbers in the two subgroups were very similar.

#### Question 4

**More focus has been placed on basic skills instruction.**

### High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 1 3.3%	f=7 23.3%	f=11 36.7%	f=10 33.3%	f=1 3.3%

### Junior High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 0 0%	f=2 6.1%	f=17 51.5%	f=11 33.3%	f=3 9.1%

Over 93% of junior high teachers in this study agreed to some extent that more focus had been placed on basic skills instruction. Forty-two percent of those teachers

either agreed or completely agreed. Of high school teachers, 73.3% agreed with this statement.

### Question 5

**Teachers have less freedom to use new and innovative teaching methods in the classroom.**

#### High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 4 13.3%	f=14 46.7%	f=6 20%	f=6 20%	f=0 0%

#### Junior High School Teachers

1 Completely Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Agree	5 Completely Agree
f= 6 18.2%	f=15 45.5%	f=5 15.1%	f=5 15.1%	f=2 6.1%

Approximately 62% of all subjects disagreed with the idea that teachers have less freedom to use new teaching methods in the classroom. This means that the majority of subjects felt that they could still use a variety of innovative teaching methods to teach their classes. These numbers were very similar for both high school and junior high school teachers.

**Question 6**

**Teachers are allowed to use their own judgment in planning how lessons will be taught to meet basic standards.**

**High School Teachers**

<b>1</b> <b>Completely</b> <b>Disagree</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Disagree</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Agree</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Completely Agree</b>
<b>f= 0</b> <b>0%</b>	<b>f=3</b> <b>10%</b>	<b>f=7</b> <b>23.3%</b>	<b>f=16</b> <b>53.3%</b>	<b>f=4</b> <b>13.3%</b>

**Junior High School Teachers**

<b>1</b> <b>Completely</b> <b>Disagree</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Disagree</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Agree</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Completely Agree</b>
<b>f= 0</b> <b>0%</b>	<b>f=1</b> <b>3%</b>	<b>f=4</b> <b>12.1%</b>	<b>f=22</b> <b>66.7%</b>	<b>f=6</b> <b>18.2%</b>

Of junior high teachers, almost 85% either agreed or completely agreed that they are allowed to use their own judgment in planning how lessons will be taught to meet basic standards. This is quite a bit higher than the 66.6% of high school teachers who felt the same way. When reviewing all the subjects' responses, however, 93.7% at least somewhat agreed with this statement.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Introduction

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the results of the study, followed by some conclusions that can be drawn from the results. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research in this area.

#### Discussion

In their study, Corbett and Wilson (1987) found that two-thirds of the respondents in the state with the graduation test believed the curriculum had been moderately to totally changed, whereas two-thirds of respondents in the other state believed there was no change in the curriculum. The subjects in the present study had a similar opinion. Almost two-thirds of the subjects in this study, conducted in a state with a high stakes graduation test, believed the curriculum had been narrowed. In this case, the results of the present study concurred with the Corbett and Wilson (1987) study. There was only a minimal difference of opinion between the high school and junior high school teachers in this study, with junior high teachers agreeing at a rate of 70% and high school teachers agreeing at a rate of 60%.

In the present study, Corbett and Wilson's (1987) finding that the curriculum had been strengthened in the state with the graduation test was not supported. Corbett and Wilson (1987) found that 72% of the educators surveyed in the state with the graduation test believed that the curriculum had improved moderately to totally. The results of the present study show that 54.8% of the subjects believed the curriculum had been strengthened in some way, while 45.2% did not believe it was strengthened. There were

no discernible differences between the responses of the high school and junior high school teachers.

One interesting finding of the present study was that, while 71% of respondents at least somewhat agree that teachers have less control over the curriculum, almost 94% believe that teachers are allowed to use their own judgment to plan how lessons will be used to meet basic standards. Even though the teachers do not feel they have control over the curriculum, they still feel in charge of how that curriculum is presented to their students.

Of all the respondents to this survey, 84% at least somewhat agreed that more focus had been placed on basic skills instruction since the implementation of the basic skills test. Among junior high teachers, this number rose to 93.4%. These findings would indicate that teachers in this district believe that there is some degree of “teaching to the test” occurring. It is not surprising that more junior high school teachers that report this occurrence because the majority of students in high school have already passed the reading and math sections of the test by the time they leave eighth grade.

## **Conclusions**

While it does appear that some level of “teaching to the test” may be occurring, the teachers in this sample do not seem to feel powerless in the changes that have been made. The respondents in this study reported that they were still able to use their own judgment in planning how to meet the basic standards requirements. They also felt free to use new and innovative teaching methods in their classrooms. Over half of the respondents also felt that the curriculum had been strengthened since the use of the basic standards test. Because the sample size was rather small, it is difficult to draw any

conclusions that can be generalized to larger samples of teachers. According to the respondents in this study, however, the Minnesota Basic Standards Test may have caused changes in the curriculum used by the district, but the teachers still have the freedom to determine how to use the curriculum in their own classrooms.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several recommendations for further research in the area of high stakes graduation testing. The first would be to survey a larger sample of teachers. Surveying a sample of teachers from all schools in Minnesota is highly recommended. Similar research would also be helpful in other states where graduation testing is in place.

Another recommendation would be to survey students in Minnesota to determine whether their perceptions of the effects of the tests are similar to those of their teachers. Since students are perhaps most affected by high stakes testing, it would be important to understand their opinions on the matter.

A final recommendation would be to add individual interviews to the survey method of research. The survey can give an understanding of what teachers see happening, but individual interviews would help researchers to better understand how teachers feel about the changes that they report. It would also be helpful to identify the academic subjects taught by the teachers to better understand how individual subjects are affected by high stakes testing.

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## APPENDIX A

April 15, 2002

Dear Stillwater Teachers:

I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in the School Counseling program. Since January, I have been working as a practicum counselor at Stillwater Area High School with Susan Tennyson in the Grade 12 Center. As part of the requirements for receiving my degree, I am conducting a study on teacher perceptions of the effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests on the curriculum and teaching methods used in this district.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. **If you wish to participate, simply complete the attached survey and return to the box located in the main office at each school by Wednesday, April 24.** By completing and returning the survey, you give your informed consent to use your responses in this study.

There is very little risk involved in participating in this study. Responses to this survey may have the potential to upset other teachers and administrators, but all information will be collected in complete anonymity to protect the rights of all participants.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at (651) 267-4354. Thank you for taking a few minutes to complete the survey. If you would like to know the results of this research, you can also contact me at the number above.

Thank you,

Kjurstin Eichman  
Practicum Counselor

Dr. Lyle Koski  
SAHS Principal

## APPENDIX B

### Survey of Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests

This questionnaire is designed to examine teacher perceptions regarding the effects of the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests on the curriculum and teaching methods used in this school district. Please read the following statement before completing and returning the questionnaire.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. I further understand that by returning the/this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I am aware that there is very little risk involved in participating in this study because the information is being sought in a specific manner so that confidentiality is guaranteed.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Kjurstin Eichman, the researcher, at (651) 267- 4354.

My primary job responsibilities are at the \_\_\_\_\_ junior high level.

\_\_\_\_\_ high school level.

Since the implementation of the Basic Standards Tests as a requirement for graduation ...

- The district's curriculum has narrowed to cover the basic skills assessed by the tests.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewha	Agree	Completely Agree

- Teachers have less control over the curriculum used in their classrooms.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Completely Agree

- The district's curriculum has been strengthened.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewha	Agree	Completely Agree

4. More focus has been placed on basic skills instruction.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Completely Agree

5. Teachers have less freedom to use new and innovative teaching methods in the classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Completely Agree

6. Teachers are allowed to use their own judgment in planning how lessons will be taught to meet basic standards.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Completely