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HIGH-STAKES TESTING UNDER THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT:  
HOW HAS IT IMPACTED SCHOOL CULTURE?

by

RaShel Anderson Tingey

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations

Brigham Young University

July 2009

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Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

### HIGH-STAKES TESTING UNDER THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT: HOW HAS IT IMPACTED SCHOOL CULTURE?

RaShel Anderson Tingey

Department of Educational Leadership & Foundations

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of high-stakes testing under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on school culture. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with first grade through sixth grade teachers and principals from two of Nebo School District's schools located in Utah. Their responses were categorized into twelve themes. Most of the teachers and principals reported that high-stakes testing negatively impacted student and teacher motivation, teaching and learning, and curriculum. They also discussed negative effects of the application questioned the accuracy of high-stakes testing. Fewer teachers and principals communicated positive effects of high-stakes testing. Among these positive effects were that testing data provided some useful information about teaching and learning and provided some accountability. Implications regarding these findings are discussed. This in-depth case study analysis of two elementary schools will add to the growing number of qualitative studies about the effects of high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Public education has been given many responsibilities. The first is to fulfill the promise to provide a “balance-wheel” for American democracy, educating and preparing all students to contribute to a democracy, regardless of their socio-economic status or ethnic background. Horace Mann was the principal advocate of this nineteenth-century school movement being the catalyst for tuition-free public education. Mann’s contribution, made it possible to have a democratic society rather than a government by elites (Cremin, 1988). Second, schools serve an economic function in preparing a competent workforce. Third, schools cultivate values by which the students learn how to express themselves and be compassionate. Fourth, schools provide students with the ability to problem solve and think for themselves (Goodlad & McMannon, 1997).

The school culture plays an important role in achieving the goals of public education. Barth (2001) describes school culture as follows:

. . . complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the school. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act. (p. 7)

Numerous studies of school change have identified school culture as crucial to successfully improving teaching and learning (Fullan, 1998). School culture can imprint a set of unwritten rules which can be extremely powerful in establishing behavior, thus affecting the organizational performance of the school (Daft, 1999). Positive school

culture correlates with increased student motivation and achievement and increased teacher productivity and morale (Matthews & Crow, 2003).

### Role of Public Education

Jefferson argued that "the people" could be prepared to govern responsibly through a public education system that would build up an intelligent populace. Public schools would prepare citizens to debate about competing ideas, to weigh the individual and the common good, and to make judgments that could sustain democratic institutions and ideas, which would enable the people to make sound decisions and withstand the threat of tyranny (Goodlad & McMannon, 1997). John Dewey (1916) believed a democratic society could only exist and function effectively if its members were well-educated and contributed to its improvement.

Under Jefferson's and Dewey's argument, the freedoms of all Americans depend on the survival of democracy, and the foundation for democracy is public education. This puts a great responsibility upon public schools to instill in all students the knowledge, skills, and understanding that teaches free thought and the importance of contributing to a democratic society. Educators must help all students develop in such a way that they will have important ideas to share in a democratic society (Dewey, 1938).

Gary Fenstermacher (1999) emphasizes that the reason we have public schools in the United States is to develop and maintain a democratic community and to produce economic opportunity. He believes the key to teaching democracy is building positive relationships between teachers and students. Fenstermacher (1999) points out the benefits of leadership programs such as the Associates Center for the Improvement of Teacher Education and Schooling (CITES) program (which is being implemented throughout the

nation) which brings together public educators and college representatives to engage in implementing a plan to reinforce democracy in schools. I have participated in the CITES program and agree with Fenstermacher that through the program, participants realize the value of engaging in careful conversation with thoughtful people in different educational settings (Smith & Fenstermacher, 1999).

Under the current demands of high-stakes testing, the participants of the CITES program are given the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the importance and fragility of democracy and the need to take active measures to sustain it. Roberta Ahlquist (2004), professor in the School of Education at California State University wrote:

With all the talk about raising the quality of thinking and writing skills, it is amazing how the “powers that be” are able to dupe people into thinking that the current accountability movement is a step in the directions of more critical, more questions, more democratic and more active citizens. The opposite is the case. What is it we want from public schooling for our children, regardless of their skin color, language and their social class? This is the question that the citizenry needs to address if we are to educate rather than train our population. (p. 47)

The federal 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has raised the stakes of testing nationwide. Research has shown that high-stakes testing has created pressure among teachers to narrow their curriculum. More classroom time is spent teaching subjects that are found on the test, while less time is spent on subjects or topics that are not found on the test. Curriculum contains more drill and practice and is narrowed to a test-driven curriculum that prepares students for multiple choice tests. In addition, Jones’

(2003) research shows that many high-stakes tests focus on lower order thinking skills. As a result, some teachers are spending more time teaching lower order thinking skills so their students can perform well on the tests they are required to take. Many fear that this time is taking away from the opportunity for students to develop higher order thinking skills that are needed to participate in a democratic society (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004; Jones, 2003; Taylor, 2004).

According to Smith and Fenstermacher (1999) the mission of teaching should include the moral dimensions of enculturating the young in a democracy, providing equal access to knowledge for all students, practicing a nurturing pedagogy, and serving as moral stewards of schools. Stewards (principals, teachers, support staff, parents, and community members) actively direct affairs to safeguard and improve something precious, and in doing so earn a sense of fulfillment and distinction. This sense of fulfillment comes from being moral stewards of the schools knowing that they have had a part in enabling young people to create a better tomorrow for our democracy as they engage in group discussions about democracy with their students (Smith & Fenstermacher, 1999). This study will look at how NCLB has affected school culture and the mission of teaching.

Dewey (1938) also emphasized the role of communities in education. He felt it was important to have a shared vision, to value social harmony, and to respect diversity. John Gardner believes schools should foster communities that provide individuals with a sense of wholeness, generate new traditions, and forge meaningful and supportive relationships among a diverse population (as cited in Kahne, 1996, p. 63). Simply stated, we need to work toward the common vision of the "good life" (Kahne, 1996).



Unfortunately, in public education, teachers, who are the professionals in the area of student learning, are not given adequate opportunity to determine what information is going to be taught and how it is going to be assessed. Rather, as Berliner and Biddle (1995) point out, education is inherently political. The laws that govern public education are determined by our elected officials. Many elected officials try to dictate what will be taught, who will teach, the methods used to teach, and the outcomes of teaching (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Regrettably, people with the most power in these political settings often do not have the expertise to make effective decisions regarding education although these decisions have the potential to impact school culture and ultimately our nation's democracy.

#### Overview of the NCLB Act

A good example of politicians' with little educational background making educational decisions is NCLB. In 2001, President Bush enacted the federal NCLB Act, which became a law in 2002. The NCLB Act requires a great deal of additional testing and accountability. Many teachers have communicated that their purposes are now being dictated to them by the legislators who passed the NCLB Act (Ahlquist, 2004). School test scores are made public and schools receive a passing grade or a non-passing grade depending on whether their students make adequate yearly progress (AYP). Since the NCLB Act, educators are more challenged to provide students with a sense of wholeness when almost all of their time is spent preparing them to pass their language arts and mathematics tests. The arts, sciences, social sciences, and physical education do not receive adequate teaching time because they are not featured on the standardized tests. Furthermore, many tests are culturally biased, which puts additional pressure on minority

groups (Jehlen, 2006; Jones, 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove; Jones, 2003; Smith 1991).

In order to comply with the NCLB Act, Utah's State Office of Education implemented a plan titled *Utah Performance Assessment System for Students* (UPASS) which addresses student attendance, the criterion-reference tests all students take at the end of their school year, the cut scores determining proficiency, and the number of students counted in each subgroup. Educators agree that such processes of assessing regularly and using data to help more students is important. However, one of the concerns educators have with NCLB is that individual student progress is not being measured, but rather every child is required to be proficient at the same level regardless of individual learning disabilities, language barriers, homelessness, and other individual challenges. The Utah School Board Association (2006) calls attention to some of the problems with the NCLB Act:

Because of some basic flaws in the law such as requiring that every child be proficient in reading, writing, and math by 2014 despite the uniqueness of each child, and requiring disabled students to test at their age level, not their instructional level, every public school in the nation will be labeled as 'failing' by 2014. (p. 9)

#### *Adequate Yearly Progress*

Several schools throughout the country have been labeled as "failing" and the number continues to increase. For example, nearly a third of all Illinois public schools failed to hit rising test targets during the 2007-2008 school year, with 1,196 Illinois schools missing the mark (Malone, 2008). NCLB mandated that in the year 2004, every

state was to identify which schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Student achievement under AYP measures student performance on math and reading. Each state sets increasing achievement goals on math and reading assessments until all students meet the state's standard as "proficient" by 2014. If a school's students perform at or about the state goal in a given year, it is designated as making AYP. If student achievement scores are below the standard, the school does not make AYP and is listed in the newspaper as a failing school under the NCLB Act.

AYP is not determined by the school's average tests scores. Rather, it is calculated by the number of students who attained a proficient score in each select subgroup including low-income students, students with limited English proficiency (LEP), minority students, and students with disabilities. A school that fails to show improvement in any subgroup does not make AYP. In addition, to make AYP, schools are required to test 95 percent of all subgroups and 95 percent of the entire school population (Wiener & Hall, 2004).

According to principal Rosemarie Smith from Amelia Earhart Elementary in Provo School District, it is unfair to ask special education students to pass a test at grade level when they are taught throughout the year to meet individual objectives at a lower grade level. "The law says students get services for special education if they are 40 percent below their grade level," she said. "This is one federal law against another because now you are asking them to pass the grade-level test. It is a slap in the face to the children who need the most understanding" (Fellow, 2004, p. A6).

According to Tony Pallegini (Utah Elementary Principals' National Association Representative) a paradigm shift needs to occur. "It is not public education's fault that

there are problems with society. You cannot win by shaming and blaming, which is what our government officials do often. Washington has never funded NCLB. They say they believe in education, but do they believe in funding it?" (Pallegini, 2003)

School cultures nationwide have felt the impact of the NCLB Act. Creating and maintaining a positive school culture focuses on things that are not necessarily in alignment with high-stakes testing. The attitudes, beliefs, and values of a positive school culture respect and revere the art of teaching and learning. Their behaviors and traditions focus on creating an enjoyable and nurturing learning environment. A school culture values ceremonies and traditions. It strives to help students and teachers feel appreciated and recognize and value their unique strengths and abilities. Positive school cultures celebrate diversity, provide support, collaborate, and provide a feeling where educators, students, and parents enjoy coming to their school (Matthews & Crow, in press).

High-stakes testing under NCLB labels schools by looking at how well students perform on a cumulative multiple choice test. Teachers and students of schools that do not score high enough to make AYP may question their ability to effectively teach and learn. It may damage the morale of teachers and students. The fear of not performing well on the test can create a stressful rigid environment. NCLB does not recognize and celebrate the strengths and abilities of teachers and students. Moreover, NCLB fails to provide support for schools (Jones, 2003; Meisels et al., 2003).

#### *Impact of the NCLB Act*

Some experts, educators, and lay people feel that NCLB has helped teachers focus on important objectives, find new ways to ensure that every child can learn, understand and use data to improve teaching, use group scores to pinpoint problems, and provides

more educational help for homeless students (Jehlen, 2006; Madaus, Russell, & Higgins, 2009). Test scores also provide communities and parents' information about the quality of their schools which can help them make informed decisions when choosing a school for their children. High-stakes tests also hold schools and teachers accountable for student achievement and help them focus attention on students who were previously poorly served (Madaus et. al, 2009).

Others feel that NCLB has the ability to create high levels of anxiety among teachers and students, which can negatively affect teaching and learning (Jones, 2003). Educators have reported that the tests crowd out learning, NCLB's one-size-fits-all approach does not work, and the act blames educators for problems they cannot control. Other problems included more teaching to the test and less student understanding, less time spent teaching non-tested subjects, impossible mandates, incentives to push out low-scoring students, students dropping out of school, and teachers leaving the profession (Jehlen, 2006, Madaus et. al, 2009).

Teachers are more prepared now to meet the needs of all of their students than ever before. They establish professional learning communities, collaborate with their teams, and teach lessons that are geared to a variety of learning styles. They assess, enrich, remediate, and reassess to help ensure that all students learn to the best of their ability (Defour, 2004). They sacrifice enormous amounts of their own personal time to ensure that this rich academic learning occurs. Yet, many have been labeled and more will soon be labeled as "failing" because some of their students learn in different ways or at a slower rate than what the government has deemed acceptable (Loschert & Winans, 2004; Meisels et al., 2003).

Twenty-five organizations, including the National Education Association, released a joint statement on October 21, 2004 recommending sweeping changes in the No Child Left Behind Act. They voiced their concerns of over-emphasizing standardized testing; over-identifying schools in need of improvement; using sanctions that do not improve schools; narrowing curriculum to focus on test preparation rather than richer academic learning; and funding inadequately (Organizations throughout U.S., 2004).

Another problem Mayes (2004) points out with this type of utilitarian analysis is that standardized testing does not *promote* knowledge, skills and dispositions in students but, rather, *delimits* and *deflates* such things. Mayes stresses that standardized, high-stakes testing does not promote questioning and acquiring healthy forms of knowledge that lead to a growth across multiple domains (psychological, ethical, economic, and political), but instead results in psychosocial as well as economic ineffectiveness (Mayes, 2005).

According to Jones and Egley (2004), in order to meet the demands of NCLB, some teachers have shifted many of their instructional strategies to teacher-centered instruction where they disseminate facts to students rather than student-centered instruction that promotes student inquiry, discovery, problem-solving, and leadership. Teachers have also noticed an increase in student anxiety as they approach end-of-level testing time. After receiving their test scores, students who do not pass have shed tears of disappointment, fear, and frustration. Some states require students who are not proficient on their end-of-level test to participate in summer school and re-take the test in the fall. If the student still does not pass, he or she will be retained the following school year

(Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Such consequences linked to high-stakes testing deflate a person's spirit and attitude toward learning.

In the battle to demonstrate AYP, schools have also cut back on P.E., health, music, art, social studies, and foreign language classes. Some feel the insincerity of NCLB is that the very students it claims to want to help, such as low-income, minority, and academically vulnerable, are the students Loschert's (2004) research shows gain the most from regular arts instruction. Raymond Bartlett, president of the council on Basic Education fears, that in our effort to close the achievement gap in math and literacy, we are creating educational inequity by denying our most vulnerable students the kind of curriculum available to the wealthy (Loschert, 2004). The question that continues to arise is "How can we protect positive school cultures that enrich the classroom and support democracy from some of the negative results associated with high stake testing?"

#### Problem Statement

Many people over the past century have given attention to improving schools. Currently, policymakers complain that public schools refuse to make rapid changes and do not effectively respond to students' learning needs (Jones, 2003). Their favored response has been to tighten up educational organizations, increase accountability, increase curriculum standards, test students' performances, and enforce penalties on schools whose students do not meet their standards for AYP. According to Peterson and Deal (2002), in the beginning, the results of these pressures are sure to encourage schools to change their practices to "teach to the test" and raise test scores. In the long term, such unfair demands will never rival the power of cultural values, expectations, and motivation (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Jones et al., 2003). At a deeper level, all schools improve

performance by cultivating a shared system of values, norms, and traditions. “These infuse the enterprise with passion, purpose, and a sense of spirit. Without a strong, positive culture, schools flounder and die. The culture of a school or district serves a central role in exemplary performance” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 7).

Discovering how high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act has affected school culture at two Rocky Mountain area public schools is the objective of this research. Much research suggests that NCLB has had a negative influence on school culture (Alquist, 2004, Jehlen, 2006, Johnson & Johnson, 2006, Jones & Egley, 2004, Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003, Loschert, O’Neil, & Winans, 2004; Madaus et al., 2009). This study will explore whether this has been the case at two specific schools in Utah.

#### Research Question

The challenge is, again, to address the question: What are the perceived impacts on school culture of high-stakes testing under the No Child Left Behind Act among teachers and principal at their school? While other studies have suggested that NCLB has had a negative influence on school culture, this study will add to the growing number of qualitative studies to identify and categorize teachers and administrators perceptions regarding the effects high-stakes testing have on school culture (Jones & Egley, 2004). Understanding what the possible effects high-stake testing can have on a school culture should be important to educators, parents, students, community members, and legislators.

This dissertation’s research question can provide schools with a deeper understanding of how NCLB has impacted school culture. Only by understanding the negative and/or positive effects of high-stakes testing can educators and policymakers hope to make changes to the NCLB Act that support a positive school culture.



### Definition of Key Terms

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* is part of the NCLB Act. Each state sets increasing achievement goals on math and reading assessments, with all students meeting the state’s standard for “proficient” by 2014. AYP is based not only on student averages, but on the performance of low-income students, students with limited English proficiency (LEP), minority students, and students with disabilities. A school that fails to show improvement in any subgroup does not make AYP. In addition, to make AYP, schools are required to test 95 percent of all subgroups and 95 percent of the entire school population (Wiener & Hall, 2004).

*High-stakes testing* refers to tests that have serious consequences for teachers, schools, students, and /or school systems, such as school ratings, student retention, and monetary incentives (Jones & Egley, 2004).

*Learning* is the active, goal-directed construction of meaning. The goal of education is to emphasize in-depth learning, learning oriented to problem solving and decision making, learning embedded in real-life tasks and activities for thinking and communicating, and learning that builds on students' prior knowledge and experiences (“A New Definition,” 2006).

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* of 2001 became law on January 8, 2002, with President Bush’s signature. The act substantially revises the *Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965*. NCLB is the most current, most aggressive, and one of the largest federal mandates associated with high-stakes testing ever placed on schools. It is based on increasing accountability, expanding state and local flexibility, expanding choices for parents, and focusing resources on proven educational methods. NCLB expects all

students to reach high standards of proficiency in reading and math by 2014. AYP has been measured in each public school since 2003.

*School culture* is the historical and current artifacts and the basic assumptions that provide the underlying basis for values, beliefs and actions in schools (Matthews & Crow, 2003).

*Test* focuses on a particular domain, is a sample of behavior or performance from that domain, and is used to make an inference from performance on the test to probable performance on the larger domain of interest, and based on that inference; decisions about the test taker are made (Madaus et al, 2009).

#### Delimitations

This study will be limited to two elementary school principals and a small group of 1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who work in Nebo School District which is located in Utah. School A has 17.59% of its students qualified for free and reduced lunch. School B has 51.98% of its students qualified for free and reduced lunch. School B did not make Adequately Yearly Progress in 2005 and 2007. School A has made AYP every year since the implementation of the NCLB Act.

Three elementary principals from different socioeconomic areas and a group of their 1st through 6th grade teachers were selected to be the focus of this study. One of the principals was assigned to a different school on July 1, 2007. Preparing to open a new school and start new traditions and procedures may affect this principal's current feelings regarding the impact NCLB has had on her current school's culture. I also decided to include the new principal who was transferred to that school on July 1, 2007. His experiences at this school would be limited to the 2007-2008 school year. Likewise, the

teacher interviews and focus group questions at the school with a new principal regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on school culture could be affected if the new principal has already tried to implement cultural changes at school.

### Summary

The problem area for this research question is the potential impact high-stakes testing under the federal mandate of NCLB can have on school culture. The primary role of public education in the United States is to help students learn the skills needed to contribute to a democratic society. School culture can affect student learning and play an important role in whether or not students require the skills needed to play a part in a democratic society. If NCLB is having a negative effect on school culture by diminishing the opportunity to teach skills that support democracy, questioning teachers' professionalism, creating pressure "to teach to the test," and producing feelings of self-doubt among teachers and students (especially whose schools have not made AYP and have been or will soon be labeled "a failing school") research is important to identify the potential impacts NCLB may have so educators can combat these negative effects.

The purpose of this research is to identify the perceived impacts of NCLB among teachers and principals on school culture. Much research suggests that NCLB has had some negative impacts on education (Jones, 2003; Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004; Jones & Egley, 2004; Taylor, 2004). Other research proposes that NCLB has also had some positive effects on education (DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Jones & Egley, 2004; Madaus, et al., 2009). By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to see if NCLB has impacted the school culture at two specific schools in Utah. Does NCLB help or hinder schools in reating or maintaining a school culture that increases student motivation and

achievement and increases teacher productivity and morale? Does NCLB affect the opportunities for students to learn the skills schools are ultimately responsible to teach, skills that students need to have to participate and enhance a democratic society? If this research can identify if some of the impacts of NCLB has affected school culture then it will be able to provide educators with tools to minimize the negative effects and maximize possible positive effects, therefore allowing teachers to focus on meaningful learning.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public education is the key to the promise of American democracy (Goodlad & McMannon, 1997). Jefferson argued that "the people" could be prepared to govern responsibly through a system of public education that would build up an intelligent populace and support a popular intelligence. Public schools would prepare citizens to debate among competing ideas, to weigh the individual and the common good, and to make judgments that could sustain democratic institutions and ideas which would enable the people to make sound decisions and withstand the threat of tyranny. Under Jefferson's argument schools must cultivate in all students the knowledge, skills, and understanding that both arm them with an intelligence capable of free thought and lead them to embrace the values undergirding our pluralistic democracy so they can live productively together. Goodlad & McMannon (1997) contend that If we let schools sink further into poverty and privatization, we will put our children at risk, and we will likely imperil the very foundation of their liberties.

If public education is to be guided by its democratic mission, it not only needs to be supported financially but also reendowed with a sense of civic passion. That means that public schools must be understood as a place that serves the public. The mission of public schools is to forge a common public dialogue. According to Goodlad and McMannon (1997), in order to achieve this it should be recognized that the public in schools also stands for plurality and diversity. For example, by acknowledging diversity and honoring students' distinctiveness, students who do not speak English as their first language will learn it more quickly and effectively (Mayes, Maile Cutri, Rogers, and

Montero, 2007). When they feel safe in their own language and culture they will participate in the dominant culture. Schools need to be as democratic as the civic ideals they teach. This includes cooperative learning, experiential and cognitive learning, and service learning. In fact, according to Goodlad and McMannon (1997) serving others is not just a form of do-goodism; it is a road to social responsibility and citizenship, and must be the responsibility of everyone. Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) expressed the perspective effectively:

A democratic education should enable all people to find out and act on who they are, what their passions, gifts, and talents may be, what they care about, and how they want to make a contribution to each other and the world. (p. 45)

#### School Culture

School culture plays an important role in supporting democracy. The concept of school culture is not new. In 1932, Willard Waller wrote, “Schools have a culture that is definitely their own. There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 2). His ideas are still important and have been given a great deal of attention during the past 25 years.

The study of organized school culture became significant in the United States during the early 1980s mostly due to the assumptions that the U.S. corporations were not performing as well as their counterparts in Japan. The economic success they were reporting pointed researchers in the direction of studying the importance of “culture.” The Japanese corporate cultures of the 1980s consisted of a strictly “business” model, which is not necessarily in alignment with a positive school culture that recognizes

individual differences among students and values autonomy, diversity, student centered cooperative learning, and learning amongst teachers. Even so, the study of foreign business culture promoted the study of school culture. Educational and cooperate leaders now realize that the culture of an organization plays the dominant role in exemplary performance (Daft, 1999).

### *Definition*

Educational leaders, teachers, students, and parents have always sensed something unique, yet difficult to describe, about their schools, and that something is school culture. Deal and Peterson (1999) describe it as the stable, underlying social meanings that shape thinking and behavior over time. According to Daft (1999), culture can be defined “as the set of key values, assumptions, understandings, and ways of thinking that is shared by members of an organization and taught to new members as correct” (Daft, 1999, p. 183). In simple terms, Fullan (1996) refers to culture as “the way we do things and relate to each other around here” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p 37). School culture influences how people think, feel, and act (Peterson, 2007).

Mathews and Crow (2003) believe culture is best defined as historical and current artifacts, commonly held beliefs and values among internal and external people in the school, and basic assumptions that provide the underlying basis for values, beliefs and actions. Schein’s widely recognized definition states that culture is “a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems... that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 4).

*Components*

School culture includes visible artifacts, such as patterns of behavior, type of dress, physical symbols, and ceremonies. At a deeper level are the expressed beliefs and values that are discerned from how people justify what they do. Some values become so deeply embedded in the school culture that members may not be consciously aware of them. These complex ideas do not develop overnight. In schools, they are shaped by the ways teachers, principals, parents, students, and other key people reinforce, look after, or transform underlying beliefs, values, norms, and assumptions (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson, 2007).

School culture is passed along to newcomers in a variety of ways. Some examples of sharing culture in a formal setting would include faculty meetings, orientations, and staff development activities. Informal approaches would include faculty room conversations, hallway discussions, and storytelling (Matthews & Crow, 2003).

Many educators feel that ritual is more important in schools than businesses due to education's numerous challenges and complex goals. To some extent schools run on faith and hope; teachers and students keep their humanity in tact while at school. They need to take time in the daily grind to reflect on their purpose of what is really important, to connect with one another, and to feel the shared spirit that makes technical routine more like a spiritual unity (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Many experts agree that in the past two decades, in the name of educational reform, we have sterilized schools of the symbolic acts that help culture survive and succeed. According to Deal and Peterson (1999), ritual and ceremony are the spiritual fuel we need to energize our schools. "Rituals are the daily comings and goings that



create the mortar that binds people and activities; rituals hold a school together” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 33). Ceremonies are culturally sanctioned ways that a school communicates its values, celebrates success, and recognizes the hard work of teachers and students. Learning is fostered greatly by rituals, strong traditions, and ceremonies to reinvigorate cultural cohesions and focus. Traditions, rituals, and ceremonies symbolize what is valued in schools. They provide the principals, teachers, parents, and students a chance to enrich day to day activities, to reflect on what is important, and to connect as a community (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Peterson, 2007).

Likewise, teachers, principals, students, parents, and community members connect in powerful ways to the logos and symbols of a school which are an important part of school culture. They tend to identify with these everyday inexpressible logos and symbols with great emotion and sentiment. Signs, symbols, and signals link those associated with the school to the deeper purposes and meaning of what is taking place there (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Other concepts of culture include architecture and the physical environment of our schools which affects our ability to concentrate and our emotional well-being. Although subtle, the physical environment sends messages about what is important, reinforces a sense of community, communicates core values and school missions, and motivates pride and hard work (Peterson & Deal, 2002).

Culture is important because it gives employees a sense of organizational identity and creates a commitment to particular values and ways of doing things. Culture binds employees together, creating a community rather than just a collection of isolated individuals. Culture integrates members so that they know how to relate to one another,

and it helps the schools adapt to the external environment. Culture can imprint a set of unwritten rules which can be extremely powerful in establishing behavior, thus affecting the organizational performance (Daft, 1999).

Culture also determines how the organization meets goals and handles outsiders. Cultural strength deals with the level of agreement among employees about the importance of specific values and ways of doing things. When widespread consensus exists, the culture is cohesive and strong; if it does not exist, the culture is weak. A strong culture is capable of increasing employee cohesion and commitment to the goals, values, and strategies of the school (Daft, 1999). Every school has a culture; ranging on a continuum from positive and hospitable to negative and toxic. School cultures are incredibly resistant to change, and real change will not occur unless the change takes place in the culture.

Sometimes a cultural gap develops. A cultural gap is the difference between desired and actual values and behaviors. Leaders play an important role in helping shape school culture. Daft (1999) feels that leaders shape cultural values most effectively through their daily actions. Educational leaders can use stories, ceremonies, language, symbols, selection, and socialization to influence cultural values in their schools. Historical lore and present-day stories form the character and anchor of culture. Providing time in faculty meeting and assemblies for staff members who are identified as storytellers to tell their stories can reinforce history and support the school's mission (Peterson & Deal, 2002). Encouraging everyone to share creates bonds that connect with the actual meaning of education and last a lifetime (Deal, 1999).

There are several ways effective leaders can shape their school culture over time.

Mathews and Crow (2003) state:

Perhaps nothing is more important as you enter a school as a principal or assistant principal for the first time than to take the time to understand the school’s culture. All other efforts will be contingent on your understanding of what already exists.  
(p. 146)

### *Levels of School Culture*

School cultures consist of different levels. Simple levels can be observed by others such as the things people easily hear, see, and observe. Middle levels are expressed values and beliefs that do not have to be observable but are discerned more by how people explain and justify what they do. These values are held at a conscious level. Deeper levels can be so embedded that members may not be conscious of them. Successful school improvement depends greatly on how well leaders understand the values and beliefs of teachers, parents, students, and community members. Basic assumptions play an important role in the school’s beliefs and values. Assumptions can permeate the school and affect its culture. Daft (1999) explains that although most assumptions start as expressed values, over time they increasingly become embedded deeper and deeper and are rarely questioned. School members take these assumptions for granted and generally are not even aware that these assumptions guide how they act, think, teach, and interact socially (Mathews & Crow, 2003).

Teacher’s reflectivity also affects their classroom and school culture. Mayes’ (1999) research on archetypal reflectivity describes the importance of educators being aware of their own archetypes as educators and the archetypes of their students. He

believes that an important step in investing one's reflectivity and practice with emotional adroitness and spirituality is to be aware of appropriate archetypal dynamics in personally enriching ways. Doing this allows teachers to work through dilemmas at personal and archetypal levels so they can protect their own psychic spaces and help their students expand theirs by nurturing them with authentic sensitivity to their individual needs.

According to Barth's (2004) research at Harvard University, an important part of awareness of culture is attending to "non-discussables," which are subjects that are not openly discussed at faculty meeting but are rather discussed in places such as the parking lot. Faculty members often fear that openly discussing non-discussables will cause a meltdown. The health of the school is inversely proportional to the number of non-discussables: the fewer non-discussables, the healthier the school culture. In order to change the culture of the school, the educational leaders must enable his or her members to identify, acknowledge and address the non-discussables, particularly those that impede learning. More desirable qualities need to be identified and used to replace the unhealthy elements found in non-discussables (Barth, 2004).

Once values, beliefs, and assumptions are identified and understood, Deal (1999) emphasizes developing a student-centered mission that motivates teachers, students, and parents helps build a positive school culture. Leaders can strengthen the positive existing parts that support the core values of the school. They can build on the traditions and values, while adding additional effective traditions and values. Leaders should hire and socialize staff who have the same values and who would add additional positive values. Heroes and heroines exist in every school culture. They are an example of what the group

can become (Daft, 1999). Educational leaders should take the time to recognize and celebrate what such exemplars represent to the school culture (Peterson & Deal, 2002).

Although the individual parts of a school's culture may be unique, the basic characteristics of positive cultures are similar. Such elements include a mission focused on learning, teaching and modeling democracy, serving as moral stewards of schools, collegiality, belief that all students and staff can learn and grow by providing equal access to a nurturing pedagogy, and a professional learning community that uses experience, knowledge, and research to improve performance. Other elements include good communication, shared leadership, rituals and ceremonies that reinforce cultural values, and stories that celebrate successes and recognize heroes. Creating an environment that symbolizes happiness and pride in what they are accomplishing and a shared sense of respect and caring are also important (Deal, 1999). "For students and teachers to feel connected to their schools, indeed for learning to occur, educational administrators' behavior must be centered on caring. With that focus, they could *then* generate changes in policy, structures, and career paths that would go beyond quick fixes and could actually help achieve these ends" (Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996, p. 291).

Some school cultures, while helping the staff draw together, tend to shut out parents and community members. A cohesive school culture reaches out and touches students, staff, teachers, principals, parents, and community members. Symbolic bonds should connect across to parents and members of the community, which requires the active involvement of everyone. The same sensitivity required for shaping culture within

the school should be applied to connect the parents and community members to the school culture.

### *Previous Studies*

Numerous studies of school change have identified the schools' culture as crucial to successfully improving teaching and learning (Fullan, 1998) although the literature review for this study revealed no qualitative studies along these lines. Positive school culture correlates with increased student motivation and achievement and increased teacher productivity and morale (Matthews & Crow, 2003). "If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff" (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37).

According to Defour (2004), incorporating learning communities in our school's culture is an effective way to improve learning. He states, "The purpose of a learning community is to see that all kids learn" (Defour, 2004). Learning communities respond to questions by building shared knowledge. In addition, when teams work toward a common goal with a shared vision, they work interdependently and collaboratively. True collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together interdependently to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.

Nevertheless, collaboration does not work by invitation alone. It is the principal's responsibility to build a schedule that ensures collaboration (Defour, 2004).

Newmann and Associates (1996) conducted a five-year study and found that success in schools required new structures and professional culture. School success flourished in cultures that had high expectations, focused on student learning, and

supported innovation (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Deal and Peterson's (1999) research indicates that stronger positive school cultures had more motivated teachers. Culture also improves collegial and collaborative activities that foster improved communication and problem-solving skills (Peterson & Brietke, 1994). Other classic studies have found that culture helped teachers overcome the uncertainty of their work (Lortie, 1975).

Peterson's (2007) research has found that schools that have high academic success have a higher group sense of responsibility. The vast majority of successful schools reports up to 70 to 80 percent of shared responsibility amongst their staffs. In summary, culture fosters positive change and improvement efforts, builds commitment amongst staff members, amplifies the energy, vitality and motivation, and increases the focus of daily attention on what is valued and important (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Often the most difficult task is to create a culture that can adapt and effectively deal with external pressures. Daft (1996) identifies and defines several different cultures that do this. An "adaptability culture" has leadership that supports the school's ability to interpret signals from the environment into new behavior responses. In order to meet the external pressures of schools, Daft (1996) recommends a school culture that supports teacher autonomy to make decisions, has a clear vision of the school's goals, and has an internal focus to swiftly meet changing expectations from the external environment.

### High-Stakes Testing

The issue of high-stakes testing is a controversial issue around the United States. The logic behind high stakes testing is that it informs the public about school quality, focuses learning on the important state curriculum, provides a measure of accountability, and gives information about student achievement (Jones, 2003, Madaus et al., 2009).

Proponents believe that testing is an equitable and objective means of evaluating the progress of students who differ in terms of culture, race, native language, or gender since students can take tests under the same conditions and student answers are scored in identical ways. They believe high-stakes tests increase creativity, higher order thinking skills, problem solving abilities, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Scheunenan & Oakland, 1998).

Providing an impetus for educators to review how the state core curriculum aligns with what the students are learning is another positive outcome of testing. High-stakes testing has forced some teachers who might not have been teaching the state curriculum to re-assess what they are teaching. Teachers from Ohio reported that testing has helped between grade levels, has helped schools identify curricular weaknesses, and has made educators more aware of educational outcomes (DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Jones & Egley, 2004; Madaus, et al., 2009). Test results can be used by educators in mapping out their curriculum and teaching (Jones & Egley, 2004).

Heyneman and Ransom (1990) state that a well-designed examination can monitor and measure achievement and occasionally aptitude, provide performance information, inform educators and officials about the overall strengths and weaknesses of their educational systems, and suggest ideas for change and improvement. Supporters argue that many minority group members achieve high test scores that qualify them to attend gifted classes, to attend college and universities, and to graduate from professional and graduate schools. However, Scheuneman and Oakland's (1998) research indicates that test scores are lower for some minority group members than would be expected if their actual score were known, even though scores correlate with the same criterion



measures as for majority of students (p. 85). Some state departments of education, Louisiana being one, argue that poverty should not be considered a factor in high-stakes tests because academic expectations should be an overall consideration of students regardless of background. They believe that considering poverty lowers expectations and results in discrimination of low socio-economic students (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004; Jones et al., 2003).

Opponents of testing do not believe that the current high-stakes testing programs achieve these outcomes. While on the surface testing seems to be a simple solution to attain these outcomes, its practical realization has proven much more difficult. Like all tools, tests are often incorrectly thought of as value neutral. Using high-stakes test results as a reform tool conceals the political aims of a reform (Madaus et al., 2009). Also, many reject high-stakes testing on the basis of viewing the negative consequences of testing to be greater than the positive consequences (Jones et al., 2003).

### *History of Testing*

Some educators feel the problems surrounding high-stakes testing can be traced back to the first half of the 1800s. During this time the belief of White biological supremacy over other races was predominant. Following these beliefs, in the early 1900s Alfred Binet designed a test of intelligence that was used to identify intellectual differences in children. The 1908 version of this test still remains the basis of IQ testing even though Binet warned that the test should only be used to obtain individual differences if the students tested had approximately the same educational and environmental opportunities. During this same time, Edward Thorndike and his students used objective measurements of intelligence on human subjects. At the time the United

States entered World War I, Thorndike had developed methods for measuring a wide variety of abilities and achievements. During the 1920s he developed a test of intelligence known as the CAVD. This instrument was planned to measure intellectual level on an absolute scale. The logic underlying the test predicted elements of test design that eventually became the foundation of modern intelligence tests. Thorndike also developed psychological “connectionism.” He believed that through experience, connections or neural bonds were formed between perceived stimuli and emitted responses; therefore, intellect facilitated the formation of the connections or neural bonds. People of higher intellect could form more connections and form them more easily than people of lower ability. The ability to form connections was rooted in genetic potential through the genes' influence on the structure of the brain, but the content of intellect was a function of experience. Thorndike did reject the idea that a measure of intelligence independent of cultural background was possible.

In 1916, Lewis Terman, Thorndike’s student at Stanford University, revised Binet scales and used them in a manner not prescribed by Binet. Terman’s standardized the scale from a sample that included 1,000 children and 400 adults (none of them Black). He used his scale to recommend special education classes that only teach concrete and practical concepts, since his research found that some children cannot master abstraction (Gurthie, 1998, p.61; Taylor, 2004). Rick Stiggins (2006), founder and CEO of the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, Oregon communicates that our assessment practices historically have been designed to encourage accountability by separating the unsuccessful from the successful learners and by emphasizing their differences.

Public education grew considerably following the end of World War II. Not only did enrollment in American high school increase by 50 percent or more, but there was also an unprecedented growth of curriculum expectations for schools. Public schools were viewed as engines for economic growth and as centers for recreational activity and community pride. The 1960s was an era of cultural, social, and racial disruption that opened the path for new curricula, including student choice for classes and programs of study. In the 1970s, as the economy slowed, taxpayers were less willing to finance the expectations they saw for public schools. Because of the growth and access to public schools by students with special needs, schools were viewed as offering “soft subjects,” such as social adjustment, health, and recreation and were at the same time under pressure to provide meaningful experiences for minorities (Jones et al., 2003). Testing reforms during these times included multiple-choice tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test in the 1950s widely due to the invention of the scantron; the basic skills movement in the 1970s; the release of a “Nation at Risk” in the 1980s; and the Goals 2000, which evolved into the No Child Left Behind Act.

Likewise, the movement to monitor and control what public school teachers teach is not new. It has been ongoing for over a century (Tyack, 1974). This movement is escalating in terms of mandated standards and curriculum control and recently has advanced to higher teacher education (Ahlquist, 2004). The following statement by Gurthie (1998) describes the effect of the historical development of testing in the United States: “Many Americans, Black and [W]hite, understand that IQ tests are not valid but are helpless in the system that has constructed and perpetuated a myth of mental

measurement” (p. 236). Likewise, for some researchers one of the principal criticisms of high stakes testing is cultural bias.

According to Madaus, Russell, and Higgins (2009) since 1950 there has been a steady rise of testing as a policy tool due to the following perceptions: tests provide objective measures of student learning and verify deficiencies in the educational system; teachers and schools will respond positively to a testing policy; and without test-based reform our international competitiveness and economic well-being is in danger. Over the past 60 years, requests for increased testing have utilized strong storylines (*A Nation at Risk*, AMERICA 2000, etc.) publicized through pseudo-events and assisted by the media that relies heavily on pseudo-facts supplied by advocates of test-based reform. “But calls for test-based educational reform consistently ignore the technical nature of testing, the fallibility of tests, and the unintended negative consequences that inevitably emerge” (Madaus et al., 2009, p. 30).

Rick Stiggins (2006) also points out that another problem with our current educational system stems from having the amount of time available to learn as fixed; measuring one year per grade; and ranking students rather than ensuring the competence of all students over time. Under this system the amount learned by the end of the year is free to vary: some learn a great deal, some learn very little. According to Stiggins (2006) research, able learners build on past success and continue to progress rapidly. Those who score high on assessments believe themselves to be capable learners—they become increasingly confident in school. They have the emotional strength to risk striving for more success because, in their minds, success is within reach if they try. Students on the other hand who fail to master the early prerequisites within the allotted time fail to learn

that which follows. Scoring very low on tests right from the beginning causes them to doubt their own capabilities as learners. They begin to lose confidence, which deprives them of the emotional reserves to continue to risk trying. As a result, assessment practices such as these that permit and even encourage some students to give up on learning must be replaced by those that engender hope and sustained effort for all students (Stiggins, 2006).

Stiggins' (2006) approach to learning involves the student in understanding what success looks like and to use each assessment to decide how to do better next time. Assessments become part of the learning process by keeping students informed on their progress and confident enough to keep striving. Students become partners in the self-assessment process by collaborating with their teachers in creating and using assessments like they will be accountable for later, which shows them the secrets to their own learning success while they are still learning. They become partners in personal portfolios which show the changes in their achievement as it is happening. This instills confidence that ultimate success is within reach. Students become partners in student-led conferences where they communicate about their own learning success showing concrete evidence from their portfolios.

It is difficult, if not impossible, in many cases to implement Stiggins' (2006) approach with high-stakes tests. High-stakes test results are not accessible to the teacher or student in a timely manner and most states do not allow the student to re-test. Rather high-stakes tests particularly multiple-choice exams, hold rewards for passing the test and consequences for not passing the test. Some rewards for passing include earning high academic grades, being placed in gifted or advanced placement courses, and building a

positive self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn and achieve. Some consequences of failing include repeating a grade, requiring summer school, being placed on a vocational track, damaging self-esteem and destroying the confidence needed to learn and achieve.

In their 1998 research, Black and Wiliam examined whether formative assessments (classroom) assessments yielded higher student achievement than summative assessments as found under the NCLB Act. Black and Wiliam synthesized more than 250 articles that addressed testing. After pooling the information on the estimated effects of improved formative assessment on summative test scores, they found unprecedented positive effects on student achievement overall and with improved formative assessments helping low achievers the most.

Yates and Collins (2006) found similar results in Brewer Elementary School, located in Columbus, Georgia. Brewer has 96% of their 520 students receiving free lunch, 9 out of 10 children are black, and the average student mobility rate is 30%. Brewer Elementary did not make AYP in 2002-2003. By implementing professional learning communities which included teacher’s administrating and discussing formative common assessments, they were able to increase the number of student’s proficient in 2002-2003 in reading from 69% proficient to 85% in 2004-2005. They increased their 2002-2003 math scores from a low 45% proficient to 70.1% proficient in 2004-2005. Brewer Elementary made AYP in 2005 and in 2006. Carol Ann Wood, a Title I teacher at Brewer, said after working so hard during the past two years, “It was an ‘aha’ moment. Teachers were so involved in their classrooms, and the design team was so involved in making sure it was supporting teachers, we didn’t realize the changes that have happened.

We became a professional learning community and then realized what we had done. Our whole faculty has changed. This school is the coolest place to be! It’s cool for children, but it’s really cool for adults” (Yates & Collins, 2006, p. 35).

*No Child Left Behind Act*

The most current and aggressive high-stakes testing policy implemented in the United States is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB was sponsored by President Bush and became a federal law on January 8, 2002. The act significantly revises the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. According to Bush, it is based on accountability for results, expanded state and local flexibility, and expanded choices for parents and focused resources on proven educational methods. This includes all students reaching high standards of proficiency in reading and math by 2014. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) has been measured in each school since 2003. “NCLB touches virtually every school in the country. Each year the impact grows—and so does a new bipartisan consensus that the law is hurting more than helping efforts to close achievement gaps” (Jehlen, 2006).

The NCLB legislation represents a major shift in policy, taking accountability out of the hands of state governments and placing it in the charge of the federal government, at an approximate cost of two billion dollars. The policy includes rewards and sanctions and the costs of failing to meet these guidelines. The basic argument of this bill seems to rest on the idea that schools will either get better quickly, or they will go out of business for lack of “customers.” This economics-based model mirrors the business perspectives of this legislation (Jones et al., 2003). Jones et al. state the following: “Although the goal of providing a quality education to every child is desirable, the option to simply abandon

public schools fails to recognize the critical role a strong public education plays in a democratic society” (p. 18).

NCLB sets increasing pass rates for the percentage of students in each subgroup required to pass the Language Arts and math tests. For example, for the Language Art’s test in 2004-2006 each school was required to have at least 71 percent pass in each subgroup, in 2007-2008 at least 77 percent pass in each subgroup, and in 2009 this increases to 83 percent. In math, in 2004-2006 at least 64 percent in each subgroup was required to pass, in 2007-2008 at least 71 percent pass in each subgroup, in 2009 this raises to 78 percent and so forth, with all students required to meeting the standard for “proficient” by 2014. If a school’s students perform at or about the required goal in a given year, it is designated as making AYP. If not enough of the students in any subgroup meet the goal the school is labeled as “failing.” If achievement scores are below the goal for two consecutive years, the school is designated as “in need of improvement.”

As long as it is approved by the NCLB administration, states are allowed to select goals for an additional gauge that represents their specific priorities. While most states have selected attendance rates, others have used performance on additional assessments. According to the Bush Administration, the AYP formula has a number of built-in safeguards to guarantee its validity. For example, starting in 2003 schools were only accountable for the achievement of students who had been enrolled in the school for 135 days, and schools are accountable only for subgroups large enough to disclose “statistically valid and reliable” data; this minimum number is determined by each state (Wiener & Hall, 2004). In 2006 it was determined that schools would only be



accountable for the achievement of students who had been enrolled in the school for 160 days.

Unfortunately, Utah's Performance Assessment System for Students (UPASS), which is Utah's education plan to comply with the federal mandates of NCLB, currently requires Utah public schools to count subgroups as small as 10. These subgroups are the smallest subgroups in the nation to be counted, which many feel are too small to be statistically valid or reliable. All 49 other states only count subgroups consisting of 40 or more students. In 2006, Utah Office of Education's testing representative tried to change the minimum number required to constitute a subgroup to 40 or more students.

Unfortunately, the Utah State's government denied the request due to the pressure they say they are getting from minority advocates to keep subgroups at 10 or more students. (November 29, 2006). The vast majority of Utah public schools have 10 or more minority students, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities, unlike many charter schools that have subgroups below 10 students.

Again, under NCLB each individual subgroup must pass AYP to be a passing school. That means that one student in one subgroup who scored poorly in math or language arts could result in an entire school being labeled as "failing." If schools identified as "in need of improvement" fail to make progress, NCLB has provided provisions to further identify them for "corrective actions" and after six years of not making adequate progress, for "restructuring." Schools in their first year of being identified as "in need of improvement" must offer families the option to transfer their children to other schools within their district. Schools in their second year of needing

improvement must offer low-income students access to supplemental academic services such as after-school or Saturday tutoring. More than 3,500 schools across the country are in the restructuring phase of Program Improvement for the 2007-2008 school year. That's a 50 percent increase from last year, when about 2,300 schools had to restructure (Asimov, 2008).

Nevertheless, Weiner (2004) states, “Anyone who says that AYP will raise achievement or close gaps is overselling it” (p.15). AYP can bring urgent attention to achievement gaps; the challenge, however, is to use this awareness to improve achievement and provide a quality education for all students (Wiener & Hall, 2004). One of the greatest problems with NCLB, according to Elmore (2007), is that it is psychometrically impossible to have all students make AYP by the year 2014 because there are too many varying factors you cannot control such as the design, administration, and interpretation of the test as well as the variables of intelligence, aptitude and personality traits of the students.

### *Consequences*

Since 2004 the number of schools subject to punishment under NCLB has skyrocketed. Out of the 39 states that reported their results to *NEA Today* 6,794 or 12 percent of the schools in those states missed AYP for two or more years—nearly doubling the number from the prior year. As a result, Title I schools must allow parents to transfer their children to other schools at the district's expense even if those schools are full. In 2003, nearly one third of the nations' schools missed AYP (NEA, 2004). In 2004–2005, twenty-nine states sanctioned low-performing schools. Sanctions included school reconstitution, school closures, student transfers, and turning schools over to private

management. Seventeen states provided rewards to improved and high-performing schools. Five states (Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, and Tennessee) withheld funds from low-performing schools (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Several states predict that unless the NCLB Act is fixed eventually all schools will fail as the standards continue to increase (Test and Punish, 2004).

In *The Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing*, Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) look at testing through an examination of school-based research to determine whether the Bush agenda has produced or will likely produce its promised outcome. Their research concludes that the harm found by such testing—at least in its present form—clearly outweighs its potential advantages (Jones et al., 2003). They found that standardized tests limit the subjects being taught in the classroom with math, reading, and sciences replacing the arts, social studies, and humanities since these subjects do not appear on the exit tests and thus do not “merit” equal time. According to Mayes (2005) such “soft subjects” are marginalized because they do not forge students into the obedient tools required of transnational cooperate capitalism. In fact, social studies, arts, and humanities often threaten what Joel Spring (1976) refers to as turning students into “worker citizens” (cited in Mayes, 2005).

*Teaches to the test.* Another problem Mayes (2005) points out is that these tests encourage—indeed compel—teachers not to teach about issues, general ideas, or approaches in any given field but to teach contextually disjointed facts that will appear on the test. Students may learn a mixture of disconnected facts, which they will more than likely forget as soon as they walk out of the testing room. What they will not learn is: a) how facts fit together to create a disciplinary whole that is both engaging and evolving; b)

how to create innovative knowledge in subjects and creatively pose novel questions; c) how subjects can overlap and cross-fertilize; and d) how all of this serves democracy, not simply the bottom line.

In short, standardized, high-stakes testing does not lead to those robust forms of knowledge and interrogative practices that lead to many different types of growth (psychological, political *and* economic), but rather paralyzes teachers and students in outmoded ways of (not) thinking that ultimately spell both psychosocial as well as economic ineffectiveness. (Mayes, 2005, p. 6)

It is also important to note that modern technology advancements such as the Internet have changed the focus of education. As mentioned earlier, along with democracy, public schools are responsible to prepare students to be economically productive. Technology has allowed our world to be flooded with information that is available worldwide, almost as quickly as it is being discovered (Clawson, 1999). Information is now available worldwide to everyone via the Internet. As a result the goals for our students today and in the future should not be what they can remember, but rather how well they can locate information and use it in meaningful ways. Many high-stakes assessments measure facts of knowledge rather than the student's ability to apply knowledge, and they do not measure student's ability to use technology in this manner. In a study of six major standardized tests in math and science, researchers found that the published tests failed to measure higher-order thinking skills and other topics they felt were important (Madaus, et al., 1992).

Research on students' conceptual ecologies has shown students' knowledge is richly connected to related concepts and prior experiences. Many high-stakes tests ask

students to strip away the richness of their knowledge as they try to answer discrete questions that have a single correct answer. Although teachers emphasize life connections with their students while teaching comprehension and writing strategies, researchers have found that under the pressure of high-stakes testing teachers shift their instruction to increase emphasis on the tested areas (Jones et al., 2003).

Oscar Hernandez teaches language arts to at-risk students at Reedly High School near Fresno, California, in a rural, low SES area where many students speak Spanish at home. “Many of these kids come in with no dreams. They think, ‘This is my life.’ Some of them are into gang membership and drugs,” he says (Jehlen, 2006, p. 27). Hernandez and his fellow teachers focus on making the academics relevant. They work on critical thinking rather than test prep, because, “what they need to learn for life is different from what they need to pass the tests” (p. 27). Currently he’s teaching a unit about gangs and “the kids are eating it up. They can’t put down the books. They’re totally engaged” (p.27). Can these students achieve high levels of academic learning? “Yes, they can, Hernandez insists, but the state test won’t show it and the school will be labeled “failing”—because many of the questions are so divorced from their world” (Jehlen, 2006, p. 27).

Blake Ostler (2005) a partner in the Salt Lake City Law Firm of Mackey Price Thompson & Ostler, addressed Utah principals at a UAESP conference and pointed out that although many believe that not funding NCLB is the major problem with the law, he believes that if we were to receive additional funding we would be required to use the money to administer even more tests, which is not good for students. One Utah student said, “At my school it is like a fire hydrant has been opened and spewed all over. I feel

that the money used to give us all of the tests should be spent on up to date textbooks.” Another student stated, “Passing the test is all they care about” (Ostler, 2005).

The concept of NCLB even goes against the newest and most successful forms of business practices. For example, Deming’s-Total Quality Management Program that has been extremely successful in the business world, state that testing is NOT the answer. Rather, they have found the key to success is intrinsic motivation, problem-solving (listening to and encouraging each other), and eliminating performance ratings by stressing cooperation not competition (Owens, 1998). Berliner and Biddle (1995) stress methods that promote thoughtfulness among students and staff through cooperative learning, peer and cross-age tutoring, and the project method.

Advocates of the NCLB Act have also encouraged changing public schools to single-sex schools for boys and girls, which violates Title IX (the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education). There could be real danger in this proposal as some educators believe that single-sex schools are less effective with boys than girls. Others believe that such schools deepen gender stereotypes and homophobia. Nevertheless, NCLB continues to promote segregation of students by sex, yet ignoring other gender issues altogether (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005).

*Narrows curriculum.* As predicted by Jones et al. (2003), in the race to demonstrate AYP, schools have cut back on P.E., health, art, social studies, and foreign language classes. Nearly 30 percent of elementary schools surveyed by the Council for Basic Education (CBE) have reduced the amount of time spent on social studies classes. Only 8 percent of elementary schools, 6.4 percent of middle schools and 5.8 percent of high schools provide daily physical education to all students for the entire year. Some

schools have even abandoned recess. In Atlanta, since the late 1990's schools have stopped having recess to secure more time for test-related programs. In 80 percent of the Chicago schools, recess has been banished as well (Kozol, 2006). A CBE study also found that currently 23 percent of principals in high minority schools have reduced the time they spend in foreign languages, with 29 percent expecting future decreases. Jesus Garcia, president of the National Council for the Social Studies states, "We're very concerned our children are leaving our schools having a rather distorted and unbalanced curriculum presented to them that will result in kids who can perform well on tests, but who know very little about other subject areas" (Rosenfield, 2004, p. 27).

With mounting pressure to improve test scores and demonstrate AYP, schools nationwide have cut arts programs as well. Although NCLB includes the arts in its core academic subjects the arts are not tested. A compilation of studies on the impact of arts on learning indicates that students who participate in the arts outperform those who do not on almost every measure. Research shows that sustained learning in theater and music correlate to greater success in reading and math, and students with lower SES see the greatest gains (Loschert, 2004, p. 24).

According to Richard Deasey, director of the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), "All students benefit intellectually, personally, and socially from quality arts education. But students of special needs—English-language learners, special education, those who may be failing in school—those who are often the lowest performing on standard measures of achievement, are immensely benefited from the opportunity to engage in quality arts experiences and instruction" (Loschert, 2004, p. 24).

“Art is your soul,” says art teacher Mollie Theel in Rochester, Minnesota, where her middle school students used to get almost 50 minutes of art each day (Jehlen, 2006, p. 28). Since NCLB, sixth graders get half as much art as before, eighth graders get only one semester, and seventh graders get nothing. “I understand about math and reading,” says Theel. “I just want fair time and respect. Art is not fluff. We teach kids how to see in new ways. We touch the senses.” Theel has always helped students use their art to apply to other subjects. “A lot of what I do is applied math—proportion and ratio, scale and measuring” (Jehlen, 2006, p. 28).

Some feel the irony of cutting the arts is that studies indicate the very students NCLB claims to want to help (low-income, minority, and academically vulnerable students) gain the most from regular arts instruction. “In our effort to close the achievement gap in literacy and math,” notes Raymond Bartlett, president of the Council on Basic Education, “we risk substituting one form of educational inequity for another, denying our most vulnerable students the kind of curriculum available to the wealthy” (Loschert, 2004, p. 20).

Mayes (2005) takes the research of Jones et al. (2003) on the unintended consequences of high-stake testing a step further. He believes the psychosocial consequences of high-stakes testing are far from *unintended*. “Rather, the devastating effects of such testing on both teachers and students are, ... all too frequently the quite intended results of political greed and moral cowardice” (Mayes, 2005, p. 4). According to Madaus et al. (2009) the technology of testing can lead to a neglect of moral, esthetic, and artistic consciousness:



Chief Inspector Holmes’s words echo down the decades. Testing as a social technique raises a host of value issues about who benefits or is empowered and who and what is hurt or diminished. It’s essential that we confront the moral and ethical values inherent in the tests themselves and in their various uses. (p. 106)

Many educational experts are greatly concerned with the potential effects NCLB can have on teachers, students and school culture.

*Encourages voucher plans.* Another concern amongst educators is the increasing number of voucher plans and money that is being spent on charter schools since the NCLB Act was initiated. NCLB includes two measures that provide for the facility financing of charter schools. The first provides facility financing assistance to states that support charter schools by having the Secretary of Education award matching incentive grants to states that have charter schools with per-pupil expenditure funds. The second includes the Charter School Facility Financing Demonstration Project for an additional two years which leverages private capital for charter schools to use for infrastructure needs (*No Child Left Behind*, 2002).

Some claim that NCLB is the continuation of those who sponsored *A Nation at Risk*. Berliner and Biddle (1995) point out that those who sponsored *A Nation at Risk* are guilty of confirmatory bias. Their report only included the studies that supported their claims while suppressing contradictory evidence. The need for a powerful story line by those arguing for test-based reform partially explains the disregard of information that contradicts the “education in crisis” story line. Madaus et al, (2009) explain that *A Nation at Risk* omitted stronger factors that could explain a slower growth rate in productivity such as decreased national investment in research, poor management decision, transition

to a service economy and an increase in the use of drugs and alcohol. Berliner and Biddle (1995) take it one step further believing that *A Nation at Risk* was a way for the Far Right, the Religious Right, and the Neoconservatives to further political ideas and to support ideas for reform such as vouchers, private schools, intensification, and increased accountability in public school.

Similarly it appears that those who sponsored NCLB could also be guilty of the slippery slope argument, a powerful story line, the creation of pseudo-facts and pseudo-events, and perhaps, confirmatory bias. For example, a brochure titled *No Child Left Behind: A Toolkit for Teachers* cites a study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that although spending on education increased in the 1980s and 1990s, reading achievement did not increase. In fact, according to this brochure only 31 percent of fourth graders in 2002 were reading at a proficient level ("No Child Left Behind: A Toolkit for Teachers," 2004). However, the 2002 NAEP reading report actually states that in the 4th grade study relatively more students were at or above the proficiency level in 2002 than in 1992. Similarly in the 8th grade study there was an increase from 1992 to 2002 in the percentage of students who had reached basic and proficient levels of reading (Plisko, 2002).

Although the rhetoric of NCLB appears to express a worthy goal, a closer look provides a narrower view. The government "blame-game" seems to continue. Former Secretary of Education Rod Paige states in regards to NCLB "For the first time, the federal government will invest in successful public education instead of continuing to fund a failing system (*No Child Left Behind. What to Know & Where To Go. Parents' Guide to No Child Left Behind. A New Era in Education*, 2002, p. 1). The NCLB Act

allows parents to remove their students from schools which do not make AYP and use public funds to attend private schools.

Apple (2006) points out that the current emphasis in schools on high-stakes testing, accountability and tighter control is not totally reducible to the needs of neoliberals and neoconservatives. Rather, part of the pressure of these policies comes from the new middle class educational managers and bureaucratic offices who believe that such control is warranted and “good.” High-stakes testing provides more dynamic roles for managers and enhances the chances that their children will have less competition from other children. He believes the surfacing focus on centralized standards, content, and tighter control found in NCLB is providing an open path to marketization through voucher and choice plans.

With nearly \$400 billion spent on K–12 public schools annually, private firms are looking to grab a chunk of the pie. It is estimated that testing alone costs states an estimated one billion dollars each year and states and their schools spend another billion dollars or more on tutoring and test preparation materials (Madaus et al, 2009). Just two decades ago, for-profit firms selling to schools were limited to goods like textbooks, cleaning supplies and soda machines. Now food services and transportation, substitute teachers and supplemental instructional services—even the management of entire public schools—are up for grabs in the push to “privatize” public education. Education Management Organization (EMOs), companies that contract to run public schools did not even exist until a decade ago. The number of public schools operated by EMOs more than tripled between 1999 and 2004, with an enrollment of more than 200,000 students in 2004 according to an Arizona State study. For-profit providers of tutoring and other

instructional services are clambering to take advantage of a potential \$2 billion market in “supplemental educational services” (SES) made possible through the NCLB Act. Under the NCLB Act, private companies are able to offer tutoring to students who attend “failing” public schools, and businesses intend to cash in. “The stream of revenue makes our eyes pop out of our heads,” a lobbyist for a leading SES provider, HOSTS, Inc., told Stateline.org, an online news service (Loschert, O'Neil, & Winans, 2004, p. 22).

Voucher plans—the ultimate form of privatization—continue to grow. Many feel that the Bush Administration is the prominent leader of putting education dollars into private hands, yet some school boards hoping to save a few dollars, and free-market proponents convinced that private employees can do a better job than public teachers, and politicians with a history of bashing schools all play a part (Ahlquist, 2004; Loschert, et al., 2004).

Under NCLB schools failing to make AYP for three consecutive years must be offered tutoring or small-group instruction after school hours. After five years, schools could face an alternate school governance plan that could turn the school over to a private company. During the interim period schools pay for supplementary services. Private firms are hoping to take advantage of a potential \$2 billion allotted for “supplemental educational services” (SES) made possible through NCLB while being exempt from NCLB’s requirements to give their students the state test, to use certified teachers or to accept all students (Loschert et al., 2004).

As predicted, along with NCLB “the Bush Administration has gone to extraordinary lengths to promote the ultimate form of privatization—vouchers” (p. 26). In fact, according to a People for the American Way study, the Department of Education

has already given out more than \$75 million in grants to voucher advocates since Bush took office (Loschert et al., 2004). A recent study by the U.S. General Accounting Office found that public schools managed by EMO's did not make any difference in student achievement compared to traditional public schools. The same conclusion was found with students attending private schools with vouchers—no advantage with the private sector. Ironically, private schools and service are exempt from accountability. For example, students who attended public schools labeled as “failing” can use taxpayer funded vouchers to attend private schools that are not required to give the state test that caused the public school to be labeled as “failing” in the first place. In addition, private schools are not required to use certified teachers or accept all students. As Eskelson states, “We believe public dollars should be devoted to those institutions that have public accountability” (as qtd. in Loschert et al., 2004).

Other concerns include private contractors may not do proper background checks on their employees. The loss of ESP jobs may also mean less purchasing power, less district revenue, and potentially less funding for public education. Some private firms use charter status to offer “virtual” courses to home scholars requiring public education to pay for it. In 2004 such firms operated 17 virtual schools in 11 states and served more than 10,000 students (Loschert et al., 2004).

The Arizona State University researchers found that more than 60 public schools managed by EMO's have ended their agreements due to high costs and their failed attempts to make academic expectations. Laurie Mozlin, a teacher who worked for Edison (an EMO) states the following about her experience, “Profit firms like Edison cut

corners every chance they get because the bottom line for them is making money. They are not in it for the kids, they are in it for themselves” (Loschert et al., 2004, p. 21).

According to Shelley Vana, president of the Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association and a member of the Florida House of Representatives a great number of parents of children with special needs regret taking vouchers. “They say, ‘The people in the private school I’ve chosen just don’t have any experience in [this area]. I’ve made a bad choice.’ But their child has lost a year” (Loschert et al., 2004, p. 27).

Milwaukee started its voucher program in 1990 and has reported scandals involving subpar instruction and financial improprieties. Opening a ‘choice’ school is easier than buying a gun in Wisconsin. All that is required to open a ‘choice’ [voucher] school is an application from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and an occupancy permit from the city. Students that attend are not required to take the state assessments under NCLB (Loschert et al., 2004).

Districts will pay for the NCLB mandate, although the Title I budget for the 2004–2005 school year was \$6.2 billion short of the amount authorized by NCLB. To sum it up, soon more public schools will fail to meet AYP forcing them to provide extra services with less federal money—while private vendors, exempt from NCLB mandates, walk away with the profits (Loschert et al., 2004).

*Interferes with reform.* High-stakes testing has also interfered with reform efforts. Mitchell (1997) found from principals who were implementing reform models that high-stakes tests are a barrier to school restructuring. Preparation for high-stakes testing took away valuable time from innovative instruction and more meaningful learning. Researchers found this conflict to be even more severe in the advent of the New

American Schools (NAS) because these schools were generally low-performing schools that were on “probation” due to low test-scores. The pressure resulted in less authentic instruction and assessment and more teaching to the test. Research indicates that teachers and administrators spend a larger percentage of teaching time preparing for tests when their own evaluations depend on the results of their students’ scores. Advocates of innovative instructional design contend that familiarizing the students with the test format is sufficient and should not take away from teaching time (Bol & Nunnery, 2001).

Although the NCLB Act stands for “No Child Left Behind,” Mayes (2005) feels that “no child left untested and unsorted” by a battery of pseudo-scientific psychometric devices that benefit those students who will and can conform while punishing and later abandoning those who won’t or can’t is a better description of NCLB. One of Bush’s Undersecretaries of Education summed it up in a recent Brigham Young University address, ‘The President and the Secretary of Education understand that there will have to be some body bags’ (cited in Mayes, 2005, p. 7). And who will those body bags contain? Disabled children, poor children, children from ethnically and racially subordinate groups? “The Unintended Consequences of High Stakes Testing may prove a potent weapon in the arsenal of those who are engaged in the admittedly uphill but extremely important battle of protecting and promoting the emotional, intellectual, and moral needs and potentials of our teachers and students” (Mayes, 2005, p. 7).

### *Recommendations*

Tests are useful tools for learning about student learning, identifying areas that are challenging to some students, and providing a broad picture of performance across a group of students. Nonetheless, all of the stakeholders in testing—politicians, policy-

makers, the press, the community, students, teachers, and principals—need to realize the fallibility of testing and the numerous issues that affect the validity of inferences based on a test score. “Herein lies a major paradox of testing. A test provides useful, but fallible information” (Madaus et al., 2009, p. 91).

Many people agree that standardized formal assessments that include criterion-referenced tests can provide important data that can be used to assess and improve the quality of education where norm-referenced tests are too often used to sort students into winners and losers. When standardized tests become high-stakes, the following questions should be addressed: Are these tests equitable? Are these tests injurious to students who have had a history of being underserved? Are these tests being used to prevent students from contributing and participating in the mainstream of society? Or are they being used to improve instruction for all? (Taylor, 2004).

Many legislators communicate that NCLB is working effectively and that parents of school-age children agree with them. However, for over thirty-five years, the Gallup polling organization and Phi Delta Kappa, have conducted a survey of the public’s attitudes toward public education and found that most parents do not agree with what legislators are claiming. The thirty-sixth annual poll interviewed 1,003 adults over the telephone between May 28 and June 18, 2004. One question was, “In your opinion, is it possible or not possible to accurately judge a student’s proficiency in English and math on the basis of a single test?” Seventy-three percent answered, “No, not possible.” Another question posed was, “In your opinion, will a single test provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement?” Sixty-seven percent of the respondents said, “No.” Another question asked, “How much, if at all, are you concerned that relying



on testing for English and math only to judge a school's performance will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects?" Eighty-one percent answered they were concerned "A great deal" or "A fair amount" (Johnson, 2006; Rose & Gallup, 2004).

"Public education is not a failure. It's never been more successful," states, Frosty Troy, editor of the *Okalahoma Observer* newspaper. According to Troy, NCLB is a "monstrosity," and even if the act was adequately funded, it would still stink. In 2004, 16 states had forwarded resolutions to President George Bush and Secretary of Education Rod Paige requesting that NCLB Act be rewritten (Troy, 2004, p. 5).

On April 19, 2005 the Utah Legislature passed a bill that ordered state officials to ignore provisions of the federal NCLB law that conflict with Utah's education goals or that require state financing. According to Dillon (2005), the bill is the most unambiguous legislative challenge to the federal law by a state, and its passage marked the collapse of a 15-month lobbying effort against it by the Bush administration. Federal officials fear Utah's action could encourage other states to resist what many states consider intrusive or unfunded provisions of the federal law. The attorney general of Connecticut has announced that he will sue the Department of Education over the law's finances; Texas is against the federal ruling on testing disabled children and may protest different provisions of NCLB.

Several Utah lawmakers noted that although they admired President Bush, they described the 1,000-page federal education law that he signed in January 2002 as an unconstitutional expansion of the federal role in education. Representative Margaret Dayton, the Republican state representative who wrote the Utah bill, said she had worded

it to assert Utah's right to control local schools without jeopardizing the state's federal education financing. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings warned in a letter to Senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah, that depending on how the state were to apply the bill's provisions, the Department of Education might withhold \$76 million of the \$107 million that Utah receives in federal education money. Several lawmakers felt the secretary's letter seemed to be a threat. The Utah bill's rationale is based on a provision in the federal education law during the first years of the Clinton administration, which forbids federal officials from requiring states to spend their own money to enact the policies outlined in the law (Dillon, 2005).

Madaus et al. (2009) states, "Monitoring of high-stakes testing is long overdue" (p. 216). The benefits and risks to schools and students linked to high-stakes testing programs are real and serious. Instead of leaps of faith about test quality, validity, use and consequences we perhaps need to use independent test monitors to help improve testing, decrease testing error and minimize the paradoxical harm caused by high-stakes testing. It is also a how to ensure the quality and validity of tests used for accountability.

The National Education Association, along with 24 additional organizations released a joint statement on October 21, 2004 recommending radical changes in the "No Child Left Behind" Act. Their concerns included over-emphasizing standardized testing, over-identifying schools in need of improvement, using sanctions that do not improve schools, narrowing curriculum to focus on test preparation rather than rich academic learning, and failing to adequately fund the policy (Organizations throughout U.S., 2004).

As a result of the concerns generated by NCLB, the National Education Association has worked with several other educationally minded organizations and has made the following recommendations:

1. Replace the law’s arbitrary proficiency targets with rates found in the most effective public schools.
2. Allow states to measure progress by using students’ growth in achievement in addition to their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency.
3. Ensure that school districts and states regularly report to the government and the public their progress in implementing systematic changes to enhance student learning.
4. Make available a comprehensive picture of students’ and schools’ performance by moving from an overpowering reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators of student achievement in addition to tests.
5. Fund research and development of more effective accountability systems that more effectively meet the goal of high achievement for all children.
6. Help develop assessment systems that include district and school-based measures that provide better, more timely information about student learning.
7. Strengthen enforcement provisions requiring that assessments:
  - Be aligned with state content and achievement standards;
  - Be used for purposes that are valid and reliable;
  - Be consistent with nationally recognized technical and professional standards;

- Provide various, up-to-date measures of student performance which includes assessing higher order thinking skills and understanding; and
  - Providing useful diagnostic information to improve learning and teaching
8. Decrease the testing burden on schools, districts and states by allowing assessment of students annually in selected grades.
  9. Ensure changes in teacher and administrator preparation and continuing professional development which has been found to improve educational quality and student achievement.
  10. Enhance local and state capacity to effectively implement changes needed to increase the knowledge and skills of administrators, teachers, families and communities to support high student achievement.
  11. Ensure that improvement plans are allowed sufficient time to be implemented before applying sanctions; sanctions should not undermine existing reform efforts.
  12. Replace sanctions that have not been consistently successful with interventions that allow schools to make changes that result in improved student achievement.
  13. Raise authorized level of NCLB funding to cover a substantial percentage of the costs that districts and states will incur to carry out these recommendations, and fully fund the law at those levels without reducing expenditures for other education programs.
  14. Fully fund Title I to ensure that 100 percent of eligible children are served.
- (Organizations throughout U.S., 2004)

Jones and Egley (2004) provide some implications based on 708 comments regarding FCAT for changing high-stakes programs. They noted that although teacher perceptions might differ from parents, administrators, or students, “understanding teachers’ concerns is important...because they have the most direct effect on students’ learning and motivation” (p. 24). First of all, the use of test scores needs to be limited. Test scores were not viewed as being valid when used to make comparisons between teachers, students, or schools. Their findings suggest that policymakers should do away with school grading or change the criteria for grading to make it more equitable. “Teachers are justified in their complaints that it is unfair to compare teachers and schools based on students’ scores because scores reflect other influences on students besides those of the school and teacher”(Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 24). One suggestion is to test students’ cognitive abilities at the start of the school year and compare these scores with their end-of-year scores. This would be a more effective way to directly measure the effects of student learning. In addition, to help rectify the inequity of an uneven playing field, some of the school grade could be calculated using the gains students made during the year.

Some other alternatives to high-stakes tests include authentic assessments that assess tasks through active engagement, rather than multiple choice tests. Others would like to use pluralistic assessments that include divergent culture viewpoints and sectors in the society (Scheuneman & Oakland, 1998). In order to address the concern of using a one-time test to accurately measure students’ development and learning, another option could be to give tests more than once a year. Nevertheless, this option would take away from prized instructional time and would be more costly. Another alternative would be to

use other types of assessments such as portfolios. Some teachers believe that portfolios have positively impacted their teaching methods and are vital in holding teachers accountable. Unfortunately, portfolios are more costly to grade and the consistency of the scores (reliability) have been relatively poor.

Other suggestions include modifying the curriculum to cover fewer topics within each subject (become less “broad and shallow”). It is recommended that if a high-stakes test is going to be given, it should be administered at the end of the school year or it should only cover topics that can be reasonably taught before the test is given. Steps should also be taken to prevent teachers from teaching to the test. The system should encourage teachers to engage in curriculum teaching without promoting item teaching. Curriculum teaching focuses directly toward the specific domain of content skills or knowledge but is not limited to the specific items being tested. Jones and Egley (2004) believe that the testing program itself is not the reason some teachers teach to the test. Rather, reasons such as pressure from parents, other teachers, and/or administrators to achieve and the fear of sanctions such as less money or a low school grade can contribute to teachers’ internalized pressures to succeed.

Despite its shortcomings, many feel that high stakes testing will “remain a force for democratic access to higher education and to the advantages that accrue from education” (Pryce, 2004; Scheuneman & Oakland, 1998, p. 70). Ahlquist (2004) states,

Informing the public is critical. But it will take time, courage and commitment to act against this massive inequitable, dumbing down of our curriculum and practices. This corporate movement, against democracy, against people on the downside of power, immigrants, second language learners, against multicultural

education and social justice issues is occurring not only in education, but in other institutions in our society. (p. 53)

She urges teachers to take collaborative, collective, and well-informed action that reinforces the critical aspects, multicultural and social justice perspectives in the courses they teach.

*Preservation of Positive School Culture in Spite of NCLB*

During the nine years Larry I. Bell traveled throughout the United States teaching workshops, visiting model schools that promote positive school culture, and conducting research on best practices, he found some strategies that many successful schools have in common that do not include “teaching to the test.” His findings included emphasizing reading skills, teaching higher-order thinking skills to all students, routinely re-teaching, ensuring at-risk students participate in class discussions, requiring students to speak and write in complete sentences, getting students emotionally involved, and providing patience and caring. His results suggest that schools that applied these practices were more effective in closing the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students (Bell, 2003).

Although the federal government has not fully funded the NCLB Act, public schools have taken it upon themselves to do everything in their power to close the achievement gap and help all students succeed. For example, African American students in South Hampton Road in Virginia improved pass rates on 25 of 28 tests on Virginia’s Standards of Learning (VSL) exams and outstripped the gains of White classmates on 23 of the tests (Taylor, 2004). Tidewater Park Elementary School in Norfolk where 90 percent of their students are eligible for subsidized lunches has made remarkable

progress. In 1997, zero percent of their students passed fifth-grade science and history SOLs. In 1998, only 18 percent of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students passed the English SOL exam. In 2000, the school's lowest score was in history with a 64 percent passing rate. By the year 2000, 97 percent passed the fifth-grade writing test. They attribute their success to small school size (400 students), small teacher to student ratio (grades first through third had one teacher for every 10 students), Saturday classes, and positive reinforcement (Taylor 2004).

Roberts Park Elementary School had double-digit increases on its SOL scores. Some of their classes had more than a 50 percentage point increase over the previous year. Some of the reasons for their increases included student-teacher ratios in grades third and fifth were reduced to six to one by reassigning instructional specialists to the classrooms. Students were tested weekly and regrouped based on their proficiency level. Parents were involved through SOL family nights, and every grade was required to participate in daily hands-on activities (Taylor, 2004).

Too much testing can hinder learning, but good tests, well used, can be effective, powerful tools. The results they yield can guide teachers in boosting students' learning to a higher level. Data drives instruction in Deborah Gore's second-grade classroom in San Bernardino County, California. Her students take monthly reading and math assessments. Then the results drive Gore's instruction. When diagnostic reports shows weaknesses in vocabulary, "we talk about words, label them, use them," Gore says (Jehlen, 2006, p. 26). She also shares data with parents, showing ways they can help at home. In 2004 her school failed to make AYP, scoring last of 22 schools in its district. In 2005, the school



soared to sixth. “Isn’t that awesome!” Gore exclaims. “This really pays off” (Jehlen, 2006, p. 26).

Janet Allen (2007), an international consultant for literacy with at-risk students, agrees with the findings of Langer’s *Beating the Odds* study. The study showed that teachers who used skills instruction that focused on a transmission-integrated curriculum, test preparation as a natural part of everyday instruction that is tied to meaning in their students’ lives, connected learning such as cross-age tutoring, “how to” lessons and review, conceptions of learning (base, frame, standard learning goals), and classroom organization that emphasized cooperative learning substantially increased their students’ reading scores.

Education cannot be measured by only assessing student outcomes. The effectiveness of education and student learning also includes difficult-to-measure indicators of social well being, teacher-student rapport, ability to share ideas, and working cooperatively (Schmuck & Runkel, 1994). An elementary school teacher says the following:

Most of all I am trying to get the children to really enjoy being in school--to enjoy learning and thinking and investigating on their own and growing to become really decent people. However, the school system probably disagrees and thinks that I should be imparting ten thousand little objectives. I do those anyway, but whether the kids remember them is questionable. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 69)

Teaching and learning for understanding is the key for success in schools. Policies that require passive learning of facts, prescribe time blocks for teaching irrespective of

teaching method or subject matter, require standardized teaching for students who learn and test differently, and prevent teachers from learning about students as individuals are not promoting effective learning. Darling-Hammond (1997) also believes that assessing students with norm-referenced tests and teachers by their students' scores on these tests, using top-down management, allowing obtrusive inequities in resources for education, and failing to invest in teacher learning make it impossible to achieve teaching and learning for understanding (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Taylor (2004) emphasizes the importance of informing teachers, administrators, parents, and the community about their children's academic achievement. According to Defour (2004), high-stakes testing is only one way to measure some of the learning that takes place; it is definitely not the most effective or most equitable way to measure learning. Educators agree. One of their arguments against high-stakes summative testing is that it does not provide adequate information to make on-going critical instructional decisions. Educators are much more in favor of doing formative assessments. Formative assessment is like a physical examination versus an autopsy which is summative (Defour, 2004). Formative assessment is an early warning system that includes frequent summative assessments given at regular intervals to determine which students have not yet met the proficiency standard set by the teacher or school (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006).

Rick Stiggins (2007) communicated that given the new mission of ensuring universal competence, assessments must now support the learning of all students so they can successfully meet state and federal standards. Both Stiggins (2007) and Defour (2004) recommend implementing new assessment systems that balance summative and

formative assessments and large-scale assessments with classroom assessments. Stiggins (2007) cautioned, however, the importance of remembering that the most dependable assessment in the world cannot be thought of as high quality if it has counterproductive effects on students or learning. “For instance, an accurate score that causes a student to give up in hopelessness cannot be regarded as a quality assessment because it does more harm than good . . . If assessments are to support improvements in student learning, their results must inform students how to do better next time” (Stiggins, 2007, p. 4). By communicating results that help guide the learner’s future actions and by discussing the student’s current level of achievement as well as how much the student’s capabilities have improved is a powerful booster for student confidence and motivation.

According to Stiggins (2007) data gathered around the world reliably show that when formative classroom assessment practices are found in classrooms, effect sizes (test score gains) of as much as a full standard deviation can be realized. Meisels and colleagues (2003) conducted a longitudinal study that looked at the course of change in scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) found in 96 third and fourth grade low-income, urban students who had been enrolled in classrooms where the Work Sampling System (WSS), a curriculum-embedded performance assessment, was used for at least three years. With curriculum-embedded performance assessments students' actual classroom performance is evaluated in terms of standards-infused criteria. These criteria then propose next steps in curriculum development which are in alignment with advancing progress toward attainment of the defined standard, as outlined by Stiggins (2007). The ITBS scores of children exposed to WSS were compared with 116 students in a group of non-WSS contrast schools that were matched by race, income, mobility,

school size, and number of parents in the home and to a comparison group of 2922 other students in the school district.

Results revealed that students who were in WSS classrooms exhibited growth in reading from one year to the next that far exceeded (gains of over 1.5 standard deviation) the demographically matched contrast group as well as the average change shown by all other students in the district. Students in WSS classrooms made greater gains in math than students in the other two groups, although the results were only slightly significant when compared with gains by the matched contrast group (Meisels, et. al., 2003).

Black and William (1998a) found gains of a half to a full standard deviation in their research review of more than 250 studies on the effect of formative classroom assessments. Firm evidence illustrates that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement especially with low achievers (Black & William, 1998b).

#### *Impact of High-Stakes Testing*

Research indicates that high-stakes tests can interfere with good teaching and learning by pressuring teachers to narrow their curriculum by focusing on teaching test materials while excluding other valid material (Jones, 2003). Also, the subjects being tested generally focus on lower order thinking skills and do not take into consideration different learning styles and multiple intelligences (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004; Jones, 2003; Taylor, 2004).

#### *Impact on Assessment*

Madaus (1988) predicts negative results of high-stakes testing, especially if examinations are used as the primary means to motivate in education. He states that

measurement-driven instruction perpetually leads to cramming; constrains the spontaneity and creativity of the teacher, narrows the curriculum, and degrades the professional judgment of teachers. In her case study of 64 Language Arts teachers, Wall (2005) found that these teachers narrowed their curriculum by placing a great deal of importance on the activities and skills that were found in their high-stakes examination.

In addition, high-stakes opponents point out that teachers' assessments generally do a more effective job measuring student learning than standardized tests, and standardized tests are poor predictors of students' creativity and success in college. A range of human, ideological, cultural, and political aspects influence the content of a test, the name of a test, how the person taking the test interacts with the test, and how scores are interpreted. These cultural and human factors account for why in part it is difficult to make a single test that works across a diverse group of students and schools (Madaus et al., 2009). This could explain in part the argument that high-stakes tests hinder minorities and low SES students because many of these individuals lack the familiarity with questions that are biased against them due to their environmental awareness and experience (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004).

### *Impact on Teaching*

The effect of high-stakes testing on teaching practices has been mixed. There appears to be a growing consensus that high-stakes testing can have a positive effect on some teaching practices, a negative effect on some teaching practices, and little if any effect on other teaching practices (Jones & Egle, 2004; Jones et al., 2003). Jones and Egle's (2004) current research indicates that the pressures of high-stakes testing has more of an effect on what is being taught than the way it is being taught.

Often teachers are the most opposed to high stakes testing, because they experience the consequences of testing firsthand. In Florida, over 708 teachers were surveyed with 80 percent reporting that Florida's testing program was not taking their public schools "in the right direction." Likewise, in Virginia, only 22 percent of the teachers reported that their high-stakes program was taking schools in the right direction, 38 percent were uncertain, and 39 percent reported that the program was not taking schools in the right direction (Jones, 2003). According to Principal Jim McCoy, it is sad that the state of Utah labels his entire school based on tests. He sees his school as a complete story, and test results are just a small part of the tale. "We have a great story here at Lakeridge," he said. "But if you take one picture of it out of context, it just might not make sense. It takes school achievement, programs, activities and many other things that work together to paint a true picture of the school" (Fellow, 2004, p.A7).

As a result of NCLB, many teachers feel intense pressure to change the teaching strategies they have found most successful for student learning. Teachers have found that some accountability schemes reinforce ineffective practice because they misunderstand the experiential nature of learning and the reciprocal nature of teaching. Frequently the curriculum is so overwhelming and the press coverage so severe that teachers feel they cannot pursue ideas that derive from students' interests or to deal with anything in depth. Darling-Hammond's (1997) research found that the importance of flexibility to teach adaptively, the importance of relationships with students and motivating them, and the critical need to focus on learning rather than on the implementation of procedures is what mattered to teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers often describe how teaching to the test results in the loss of teachable moments when students are interested in an idea

and want to pursue it. It can cause them to lose the chance to take more comprehensive views of their students' abilities. Despite policymakers' presumption that teachers should use standardized tests to improve teaching, only 12 percent found the results useful. Over two-thirds said instead they gauged their teaching effectiveness from what they observed from the students and from direct student feedback. Twenty-six percent used their own classroom measures of achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Research on the effects of high-stakes testing on teachers in Arizona (Smith, 1999) and North Carolina (Jones et al., 1999) showed that teachers had several concerns about high stakes testing. In North Carolina, 76% of the teachers studied reported that the testing program would not improve the quality of education (Jones et al., 1999; Jones & Egley, 2004). One of the teacher's major concerns was that high-stakes testing narrows the curriculum by forcing teachers to only teach the subjects being tested and excluded subjects such as social science, science, and health (Jones & Egley, 2004, Kozol, 2006; Smith, 1991). Other fears were that some teachers were feeling so much pressure to teach to the test they were organizing their instruction around illustrative items that were similar to, looked like, or were actual test items. This type of teaching can pollute the test scores by giving some students an unfair advantage over students who had not been privy to specific item teaching (Haladyna, Nolen, & Haas, 1991; Jones & Egley, 2004).

Test preparation and administration have been cited as reasons for reducing instruction time (Jones et al., 2003, Kozol, 2006). Some teachers have reported preparing students for high-stakes tests throughout the entire school year. In Texas, one researcher found that teachers spent on the average 8 to 10 hours weekly on test preparation. This takes away from engaging learning (Jones & Egley, 2004). John Kozol (2006) states, "In

some schools, the principals and teachers tell me that the tests themselves and preparation for the tests control more than a quarter of the year” (p. 20).

Teachers continually report that they feel pressure to improve their students test scores. They state they have felt embarrassment, shame, anger, and guilt from the publication of student test scores. Some of these feelings stem from teachers not believing that the tests sufficiently measure students’ learning and that the tests are not being used in valid ways (Jones & Egley, 2004; Smith, 1991). Many are afraid that such pressure might cause teachers to leave the profession. High-stakes testing has also had negative effects on children. Some teachers have reported that high-stakes testing has increased stress and anxiety amongst their students. The pressure can be especially hard for lower-performing students who may already have low self-esteems and self-concepts (Jones & Egley, 2004).

Cheryl Chapman, a second grade teacher in DuPage County, Illinois, believes that testing is crowding out learning. “I give them a week’s worth of tests every six weeks in language arts,” Chapman wrote in an e-mail. “Our lit program is so highly scripted, a second-grader could teach it. I’ve let them at times. I use it because I have to, but I supplement like crazy” (as qtd. in Jehlen, 2006, p. 26). Chapman gives another language arts test three times per year, in addition to several types of math tests. “All kids are supposed to graph their progress on the computer, even first-graders,” says Chapman. “Our administrators think the graphing will make the kids more motivated, but I haven’t seen the research to support this. It’s just a big stress-out” (as qtd. in Jehlen, 2006, p. 26). Recently, Chapman’s husband asked her why she decided to retire early, at age 60—especially after how much she loves teaching. She explained that she no longer sees what



she does as teaching. “My job is to protect my students from the local repercussions of this Administration’s educational policies....I wish Americans would wake up and see that these policies create little stressed-out robots, not thinking creative, smart kids” (as qtd. in Jehlen, 2006, p. 26).

At Public School 65 in New York City, during the three months prior to their high-stakes tests, fifth-grade teachers had to set aside all other curriculum from 8:40-11 a.m. and from 1:45 to 3 p.m., to prepare their students for their tests. In addition, two afternoons a week children in the fourth and fifth grades had to stay from 3 to 5 p.m. for another test preparation session. According to one teacher, the children were told, “it’s not just ‘important’ that they pass, but that passing this—the test—is actually the only thing that is important” (Kozol, 2006, p. 20).

#### *Impact on Minority Students*

NCLB applies blanket rules to all students—a one-size-fits-all approach. Educators know that does not work. One glaring example is the requirement that special education students meet the same standards as children with no disabilities. More schools do not make AYP because of low scores for special education students than any other group (Jehlen, 2006). When Federal officials first recognized this problem in the law they began by arbitrarily deciding that one percent of students would be allowed to meet more appropriate standards. Later, they added another two percent, which is not nearly enough, according to special educators like middle school teacher Tracy Keuler of Salem, Oregon:

In our special education classes, we have slow learners with low IQ’s and other learning disabilities. Special education gives them their best chance to achieve

even the smallest academic gains. It's a slow, often frustrating process. How can they be expected to pass the same test as other students? I am so tired of hearing the entire building's scores were brought down because my kids didn't pass!

What if the government decided physical disabilities could be eliminated through standards? What if there were a mandate that doctors must bring their patients to 'normal standards' and all patients must be able to walk? The government does not seem to believe that our students' disabilities are real. (Jehlen, 2006, p. 27)

She adds, "NCLB tells kids that there is something wrong with them if they don't meet the 'standards.' Kids who have true disabilities should be applauded for what they do, not made to feel worse" (Jehlen, 2006, p.27).

In Virginia, the Standard of Learning (SOL) examinations must be taken by public school students. In order to receive accreditation, Virginia schools must make improvement on the SOL exam by the year 2007. The impact of high-stakes testing is especially serious for students who are low income; linguistically or culturally diverse; physically, cognitively, or emotionally challenged; or not proficient in English (Popham, 2001; Taylor, 2004; Thompson, 2001; Zirkel, 2000). One of the distorting consequences that are taking a high toll on minority students is the increasing practice of compelling children to repeat a grade or several grades based solely on their test results (Kozol, 2006). According to Taylor (2004), high-stakes tests that are tied to grade promotion and graduation can result in roadblocks to minority academic success and ultimate membership in the dominant society (Taylor, 2004).

Research using the National Educational Longitudinal Study database indicates that minority and low socioeconomic subgroups are more likely than others to undergo

promotion tests in the eighth grade. For example, 35 percent of African American students and 27 percent of Hispanic American students are required to pass at least one high-stakes test in order to move up to the ninth grade where only 15 percent of White students are. Likewise, 25 percent of students in the lowest SES quartile and only 14 percent of students in the top SES quartile are subject to these same high-stakes requirements (Taylor, 2004).

Using scores from large-scale tests could be related to increased retention rates (Kaplan & Owings, 2001; Taylor, 2004). Repeating a grade does not usually improve achievement (Kohn, 2002; Taylor, 2004). More importantly, retention increases the student dropout rate (Burley, 2001; Morris, 2001; Taylor, 2004). Students who repeat a grade are 70 percent more likely drop out of high school than students who were not retained in the same grade (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 1997; Taylor, 2004).

Furthermore, the study found that the presence of high-stakes testing in the eighth grades is associated with pointedly higher dropout rates, particularly for students attending schools with a high concentration of low-SES students (Howe, 2000; Taylor, 2004).

Teachers are aware that the achievement gap amongst some of their students (especially minorities, students with disabilities, students from low status socioeconomic communities, and students with limited English proficiency) is already quite large by the time students enter kindergarten and that the gap tends to increase as students continue through school, with summer learning contributing a great deal to the increasing gap. According to the Applied Research Center, there are significant disparities in dropout rates, disciplinary rates, graduation rates and college entrance rates across race in our schools (Jones et al., 2003). Test data from the 1999 Massachusetts Comprehensive

Assessment System found that minority students scored significantly lower than their White counterparts. In Boston, 85 percent of Hispanic tenth graders failed the test compared to only 43 percent of White students (Education World, 2000). Data from the 2001 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) show a continued gap in achievement between minority students and White students. Average verbal scores for Whites rose from 518 to 529 over the ten-year period. Improvements for African Americans rose from 427 to 433, still leaving a ninety-six point gap between the two groups (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2001; Jones et al., 2003).

Disparities amongst groups do exist and it is important to recognize how this might impact different groups' opportunity to pass high-stake exams. *Education Watch: The 1996 Education Trust State and National Data Book* describes the following differences among groups:

1. Minority and low-income students are more likely to be taught a lower-level curriculum (where NCLB actually cites this as a justification).
2. Around 55 out of every 100 Asian Americans and White students complete Algebra 2 and geometry, where only 35 percent of African Americans and Native American seniors take these courses.
3. African American and Latino students who graduate from high school are much less likely than Whites to continue their education.
4. In schools where more than 30 percent of students are considered poor, 59 percent of teachers report that they do not have sufficient books and other reading resources where only 16 percent of teachers report insufficient books at more affluent schools.

5. Minority and low-income students are less likely than their more advantaged peers to be in classes taught by teachers who majored in their fields of study (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004).

Experts state the way to close the gap is not through high-stakes testing, but rather by starting at-risk students early with high-quality preschool and full-day kindergarten (Borman, 2002). In addition, data from a long-term study of students in Baltimore suggest that the widening of the gap between middle-class and poor students is explained by marked summer learning differences rather than differences in school-year learning rates (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). These are often the students who lack access to libraries filled with books, live in areas where without access to museums, aquaria, and symphonies, and come from homes where parents work two or more jobs. High-stakes testing policies often strip away the “fluff” of education (art, foreign languages, music and even science) to help children work on the “basics of reading, writing, and mathematics. These students who are losing access to a richer curriculum (art, foreign languages, music and science) are often the ones who need it the most (Jones et al., 2003). Therefore, it is critical to provide opportunities for all students to participate in programs during the summer and throughout the school year that involve the arts and sciences (Borman, 2002; Jones et al., 2003). According to Kozol (2006), “The political system has permitted millions of poor children to be sent into the streets without diplomas now for many generations—numbers that are almost certain to increase under the do-or-die agenda that has been enforced by nonpromotion policies” (p. 22).

*Use in Various States*

In order to meet the guidelines of NCLB, high-stakes tests are being administered throughout the country. High-stakes testing research has been conducted in several states. Although the results vary slightly from state-to-state, the majority of studies have shown negative results. High-lights from some of these studies are included, as well as the opinions of some educational experts from different states.

*California.* “Competency testing does not work. It is a quantitative means to try to answer a qualitative question” (Gale, 2004). Roberta Ahlquist, secondary education professor at San Jose State University speaks out against the effects NCLB is having in the schools in California. She describes NCLB as a guise that is dismantling the curriculum which attempted to address the needs of all children, particularly those on the down side of power, as well as those succeeding, to a system of dumbed-down curriculum that is aligned around state-mandated standards that will serve the needs of semi-skilled workers at best. Public schools are now becoming even more inequitable, more stratified by race and class as they continue to be grossly underfunded. Ahlquist (2004) states:

With all the talk about raising the quality of thinking and writing skills, it is amazing how the ‘powers that be’ are able to dupe people into thinking that the current accountability movement is a step in the direction of more critical, more questioning, more democratic and more active citizens. The opposite is the case. What is it we want from public schooling for our children, regardless of their skin color, language, and their social class? This is the question that the citizenry needs to address if we are to educate rather than train our population. (p. 47)

*Louisiana.* The state of Louisiana implemented the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (LEAP). The ratings included advanced, proficient, basic, approaching basic or unsatisfactory ratings. Any fourth or eighth grade student with an unsatisfactory level on the LEAP Language Arts and/or Mathematics test could not be promoted. Intensive summer school was offered, and at the end of the summer, the students were re-tested. In spring 2001, LEAP scores showed that more than a third of Louisiana's 10<sup>th</sup> graders did not pass the GEE, which means that 17,700 students will have to pass a retest in order to receive a high school diploma. Ironically one of the reasons for the high-stakes testing was low national test scores, high dropout rates, college remediation rates and employability. In 1998-1999, 20,923 Louisiana's 9<sup>th</sup>12<sup>th</sup> graders dropped out of school. Research found that students who are retained in their current grade once are 20 to 30 percent more likely to drop out of school than their peers with equally poor achievement who are not retained, and students who are retained twice have almost a 100 percent probability of dropping out (Shepherd & Smith, 1989 cited in Jones et al., 2003). It seems ironic that Louisiana would require their students to repeat 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade if their LEAP score was not high enough, when research showed that retaining students increased the dropout rate (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004).

In 2000, Johnson and Johnson (2006), education professors, took one year unpaid leaves of absence at their university to teach 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades in Redbud, Louisiana. Redbud Elementary School had 611 pre-kindergarten through fourth-grade students. Approximately 95 percent of the students qualified for free lunch. Around 80 percent were African American children. During the 1999–2000 school year one of the fourth-grade classes had fourteen different teachers who taught from a few days to a few

months. A second fourth grade class had five more teachers after the regular teacher resigned in January. The school had a performance score of 44.1 and was one of the 497 schools that were labeled below average academically in the fall of 1999. In the spring of 2000 students who failed the LEAP test (administered to all fourth and eighth graders) would have to repeat the grade unless they could pass a retake of the test following summer school.

The purpose of the Johnsons' (2006) study was to find out firsthand the effects of the accountability movement on public schools in Louisiana. They discovered that high-stakes testing had some serious consequences for the school culture of Redbud Elementary School. Several teachers reported doing little except preparing their students for the test during the months prior to the administration of the test. Some teachers reported that their students suffered nausea, insomnia, and other symptoms of test anxiety as did some of the teachers. Many students gave their best effort. They worked hard to learn and still the result of their work was "we are failures." The unreasonable demands placed on teachers stifled their creativity and enthusiasm which resulted in them leaving the teaching profession.

In 2000, 57 schools in Louisiana were labeled academically unacceptable based on the LEAP and Iowa test scores. Leslie R. Jacobs, who served on the state school board, designed initiatives to improve Louisiana's worst schools by only promoting students who meet standards on these tests. Both Jacobs and Alphonse G. Davis the chief executive of the New Orleans schools send their own children to private schools. Johnson and Johnson (2006) state:



We find it incomprehensible that a superintendent of public schools and a member of a state board of elementary and secondary education would not send their children to the public school that they steer. The Davis and Jacobs families can avoid the dictates of Louisiana's accountability system. (p. 164)

Johnson (2006) described his experiences in his fourth grade classroom after he received his student's test results. The fourth grade team of teachers learned that 54 of their 118 fourth graders failed the LEAP and would have to go to summer school. If they failed to pass a retake of the test they would have to repeat fourth grade. Fourteen of the 54 children were special education students. The team of fourth grade teachers discussed how after working so hard many of their students' test scores made them feel like they failed these students.

Dale Johnson discovered that six of his homeroom students failed the English Language Arts test. Four of the six are in special education, and one student named Yolande, had been truant more than 100 days during the year. In addition, three others failed the math test. Derek's math score was 280, and 282 would have been a passing score. Johnson described how Derek's self-concept is now damaged, and the summer he planned on fishing with his father had been ruined by two points. Eight additional students in his other class failed the language arts test; three were special education students. Five additional students failed the math test as well. Andrenna also scored a 280 and Danielle scored 279, three points from passing.

Johnson described his anger at the state bureaucrats and politicians who implemented this uncompromising accountability system. He pointed out the many strikes his students have against them, such as often being ill, having rotting teeth and

crying due to severe toothaches. Many live in dysfunctional homes, are ill clad, wear shoes that are not the correct size, and do not get enough food to eat or rest at night. He communicated that the harsh accountability system imposed by NCLB kicks them further. “I’m not opposed to testing. Well-designed tests can give educators useful information. Ideally, the results would inform districts about needs for remediation. Tests should be used to enlighten, not to torment” (Johnson, 2006, p. 166).

The fourth grade teachers decided to tell the students about their results in whatever way they felt would seem least hurtful. Johnson decided to call each of his students out to the hall in alphabetical order. His first student was Dario. He told him that he passed the English Language Arts part of the test but he would have to attend summer school because he did not pass the math portion. Dario cried quietly. “My papa [grandfather] gonna be mad at me. He will beat me” (p.167). Johnson told him to not be discouraged and that he was sure he would pass if he tried his best and worked very hard from June 4 to July 12. Johnson wondered how Dario cannot be discouraged when he (the teacher) is discouraged.

His next student was Jamal, a special education student. He had severe learning disabilities and speech problems. He failed both portions of the test. Johnson pleaded with him to go to summer school. All special education students must take the LEAP test. If they fail, they must attend summer school and retake the test. They are promoted to fifth grade whether or not they pass. The majority of these students do not have a chance to pass a test that is written several grade levels above where they are reading. Next Johnson told Jaylene who passed both parts of the test. She screamed and jumped around.

Johnson told her to try not to show her excitement when she went back to the classroom because it might make those who did not pass feel bad.

Johnson (2006) continued the process until he has informed all of his students of their results. When he reentered the classroom, most of the children were crying. Those who passed were hugging those who failed and are trying to console and comfort them. One little girl in the next classroom told her friend, ‘I’m going to kill myself’ (p. 167). Johnson witnessed the teachers choked up with as much emotion as their students.

Johnson and Johnson (2006) are concerned that the decision of teachers who work with children 176 days during the year are not considered. They emphasize that a certified, experienced teacher who sees all aspects of a child’s academic work is the best person to evaluate a student’s progress. Teachers know their students’ abilities better than any standardized test score can show. Teachers are experts, yet their expertise is brushed aside by this current accountability policy. Some politicians state that these tests are an effort to break the cycle of poverty. This argument does not make sense to most classroom teachers. “Memorizing and cramming for tests do not constitute an education. They help no one. They are not measures of critical comprehension or extrapolation, two qualities of an education that will serve students in their adult years” (p. 168).

Since 2000, many changes regarding testing have been witnessed. For example, in 2000, Louisiana became the first state to require fourth grade and eighth grade students to pass a standardized test for promotion to the next grade. Since that time, seven more states (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin) have implemented retention policies based on a single state test score. In 2004–2005, twenty-one states required statewide exit or end-of course exams to determine high

school graduation, with an additional three states scheduled to do the same in 2006 and two more in 2008 (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

The response of the Louisiana people is varied. A New Orleans-based group called Parents for Educational Justice tried to block the state from using the LEAP to determine whether students would be promoted to the next grade. The group's legal dispute has been rejected despite their attempts to resist what they claim are unfair consequences for students (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004).

Several civil right organizations stalwartly oppose high-stakes testing, especially when test scores are the sole factor used in making decisions for students or when students do not have equal access to high-quality teaching. For over 20 years, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) state, that the use of high-stakes testing for grade promotion and graduation is "another way of blaming the student victim." The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund have filed a legal suit against the state of Texas for its use of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills as an exit test for high school graduation. It states that the test denies diplomas to students without adequate proof that the policy will improve students' education or life opportunities, as well as the test not corresponding to what is actually taught in schools in several minority communities (NRC, 1999).

Other groups such as the nonprofit Council for a Better Louisiana felt that the program was fair since there were programs in place like free summer school and other assistance. The state has also currently funded a \$20 million K-3 reading and math initiative to help. The state has made a recent adjustment to their accountability system that states that students cannot be held back twice for failing the exam. Also, as the result

of an appeal , students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade who fail the LEAP are now given the opportunity to advance to high school and take remedial 8<sup>th</sup> grade courses while also taking 9<sup>th</sup> grade courses rather than repeating the 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004). Colonel Alphons Davis CEO of one of Louisiana’s most highly impacted school districts communicates that business people believe high-stakes testing is good because they need highly knowledgeable and skilled workers. Traditionally higher socio-economic groups favor high-stakes testing where lower socio-economic groups do not. There are mixed feelings amongst teachers and administrators. Davis states, “My personal opinions are that high-stakes testing is a part of life. Unfortunately, we, as African Americans have for too long fabricated excuses for not doing and we need to raise expectations among our own people and others.” Davis continues, “We need to also encourage African Americans that teaching is a noble profession. If we don’t help the village raise our children, who will?”(Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004, p. 93–94)

*Florida.* Jones and Egley (2004) conducted a study to determine whether Florida teachers perceived that their state’s high stakes testing program was taking public schools in the right direction, and why they felt the way they did. They based their study on the survey results of 708 teachers who provided a good cross-section of schools ranging from an “A” to an “F” school. Studies conducted shortly after the implementation of high-stakes testing programs showed that most teachers did not support the use of high-stakes tests. Teachers cited negative effects such as increased teaching to the test, narrowed of the curriculum, increased student and teacher stress, and lowered teacher morale (Jones et al, 1999). The purpose of Jones and Egley’s (2004) current study was to determine if teachers had begun to adapt to this new era of testing and come to understand how testing

can or has improved education after the end of the fourth year of high-stakes testing in Florida.

Florida's testing program, titled the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), was implemented under the direction of Governor Jeb Bush and seems to be in line with the type of testing outlined in his brother President Bush's NCLB Act of 2002. The FCAT was administered in the spring of 1999. Schools were given a letter grade ranging from "A" (making excellent progress) to "F" (failing to make adequate progress) based on the percentage of students scoring above certain reading, writing, and math levels, the percentage of students making learning gains in math and reading compared to the year before, the percentage of the lowest 25% of student who made adequate progress, and the percentage of students finishing the test. Schools that received an "A" or had improved at least one grade level were eligible for monetary incentives. Students who went to a school who received an "F" grade for two years in a four year period qualified for scholarships to attend a different public or private school. Decisions regarding student retention were made by the local school boards; nevertheless, starting in 2002 all students were required to pass the FCAT reading and math test in the tenth grade in order to graduate from high school.

After a number of years of high-stakes testing in Florida, teachers' opinions about the effects of testing remain more negative than positive. Most teachers (79.9%) reported that the FCAT program was not taking Florida's public schools in the right direction. In addition, the prevalence of open-ended responses described the negative rather than positive effects that testing had on education in Florida. It was also noticed that 47.3% of the teachers who reported that the FCAT was taking schools in the right direction also

gave at least one negative comment about FCAT. In addition, the large majority (93.7%) of the teachers surveyed reported that it was not fair to assign grades to schools based on the FCAT scores.

Over half (52.6%) of the teachers made a negative comment concerning the use and accuracy of the test. The second largest theme was a concern related to the negative effects of testing on teacher or student motivation (46.4%). Approximately one third of the teachers (35.2%) reported negative effects of testing on teaching and learning, and over a quarter (27.2%) reported other negative effects on education. Other (18.9%) teachers made a comment regarding the negative effects of testing on the curriculum. Fewer teachers made positive comments about the testing: 9.3% made positive comments regarding the use and accuracy of the test, 6.6% made positive comments regarding the effects on the curriculum, 6.1% made positive comments concerning teaching and learning, and 2.1% made positive comments in regards to teacher and student motivation (Jones & Egley, 2004).

Teachers reported that the high-stakes tests were improperly being used. Teachers reported the following comments. A teacher from a Grade B school stated:

Grading teachers and schools can never, and I mean never, be done fairly. Every teacher has a different group of students. Some students will score high no matter what. Other students will show growth and some may never show growth on the areas tested on the FCAT. The scores of FCAT depend on many factors and it should not reflect the ability of the student or the teacher. (Jones & Egley, 2004, p.11)

A teacher from a Grade C school reported:

What this test is doing to our already hard to reach students is an atrocity... It is absurd to think that they should be given the same test on the same day and be expected to produce the same quality of knowledge. All people talk at different ages, they walk at various ages, and they are going to learn at different times.

(Jones & Egley, 2004, p.11)

Other teachers (15.7%) reported that the test did not accurately measure student learning and development. A Grade B teacher states, “The format of various questions in reading and math seem to trick students rather than accurately test their knowledge”

(Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 13). Several teachers expressed concern that student learning cannot be measured by a one-time test. A Grade A school says, “FCAT is a small picture of a child. The whole picture is what I see that child do each and every day in class: his portfolio; my narrative; and his self-reflection of his work” (p. 13). Some teachers said that the tests were not developmentally appropriate. Another teacher from a Grade A school states, “The focus in teaching, in my opinion, has shifted, from teaching to meet the individual needs of each child, to forcing each child, regardless of his/her individual differences/needs, to perform for FCAT” (p.13).

Teachers communicated concern with how the test had affected the curriculum in which the test did not take into account the whole child or give the students the skills and knowledge needed to survive in today’s society. It was expressed that the test did not cover everything that is important for a well-rounded education. Other states have reported similar findings (Jones, et al., 1999; Jones & Egley, 2004). One teacher stated:



Before FCAT I was a better teacher. I was exposing my children to a wide range of science and social studies experiences. I taught using themes that really immersed the children into learning about a topic using their reading, writing, math and technology skills. Now I'm basically afraid to NOT teach to the test. I know the way I was teaching was building a better foundation for my kids as well as a love of learning.” (p.15)

In comparison to the often-cited analysis that testing forces lower-level learning, 13 of the teachers (2.1%) found that the test encouraged the learning of high-order thinking skills which suggests that the FCAT might focus on evaluation, analysis, and synthesis rather than the comprehension and knowledge that other high stakes tests focus on. Because the FCAT tests are not available for the public to see, Jones and Egley (2004) could not verify whether the tests indeed focused on lower or higher-level thinking. These views are nevertheless encouraging and suggest that it could be possible to produce high-stakes tests that focus on higher-order thinking, which most agree is an important goal of education.

Other negative concerns (15.6%) included teachers expressing that there was too much emphasis on the tests in general. Teachers expressed that their voices were not being heard by policymakers and that they were not included in the process of creating the accountability program. As Jones and Egley (2004) explain, “To ignore teachers’ voices is to ignore their ideologies. Moreover, this lack of a voice appears to have created a resistance and silent controversy to the testing program” (p. 21). Mathews and Crow (2003) concur, “Although not all problems you face can be solved by giving people a

listening ear, refusing to hear or ignoring individuals and groups that want to be heard is likely to aggravate the situation and intensify the negative aspects of the conflict” (p. 206).

In addition, 24 of teachers (3.9%) perceived that the FCAT testing was a political tool to serve the interests of the policymakers. A teacher teaching at a Grade A school explained:

Florida’s public schools have long been the target of ambitious, power-hungry politicians. This is just another political move to discredit the public schools and repay political contributors with vouchers for expensive private schools that their children already attend. Between the FCAT tests, vague Sunshine State Standards, school grades, and mathematically impossible required gains in test scores, it seems that the politicians’ goal is to eliminate public education from the state of Florida. (Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 22)

A teacher from a Grade B school stated:

I believe that the legislature is doing a great deal of harm to our students...I feel that the money we need is not being given to the schools for two reasons. The first is to somehow dismantle the public school system (through vouchers), and secondly, to create an elite system run by private interests. I have worked in both business (law, engineering, and banking) and say without reservation, education is the most efficient in the use of both man power and dollars. The FACT is nothing more than the politicians ploy to say either ‘See, we’ve fixed the system’ or ‘See, they’re not doing the job and we need to step in.’ All for the next election! (Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 22)

The last theme reported by teachers (10.3%) communicated that accountability was necessary, good, or that they were in favor of accountability. These teachers expressed that although FCAT was not taking schools in the right direction, they believed in accountability. Their responses were in favor of accountability but described why the FCAT was not effective in holding people accountable.

Jones and Egley's (2004) research found that several years of high-stakes testing have not lessened teachers' concerns about testing. Such concerns include the negative effects of increased teaching to the test, the great amount of pressure felt by students and teachers, the unfairness of comparing, teachers, students, and schools based on test scores, and the unreliability of a one-time test. Jones and Egley (2004) stated the following about the results of their study:

Perhaps most importantly, teachers indicted that they are not against being held accountable, only that they are not in favor of the current means by which they are being held accountable. The results of other studies might lead one to believe that teachers can be characterized as complainers who do not like testing because it holds them accountable for doing a job that they are not doing. On the contrary, the results presented here show that teachers are in favor of accountability or believe that accountability is necessary. (p. 23)

This finding is important because it transfers the discussion from whether or not teachers should be held accountable to a discussion of *how* teachers should be held accountable.

*Arizona.* An extensive qualitative study of the role of external testing in two schools in a Phoenix metropolitan district that collected data for over 15 months found that teachers experienced negative emotions as a result of the publications of test scores

and were determined to do what is necessary to avoid low scores (Smith, 1991).

Researchers interviewed teachers, students, administrators and others; employed direct observation of classrooms, meetings, and school life generally; and analyzed documents. Strauss' constant comparative and Erickson's analytic induction methods were used to generate and test assertions. In the study, classroom observations revealed that testing programs that included state-mandated Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and criterion-referenced tests given to their students substantially reduced the time available for instruction, narrowed modes of instruction and curricular offerings, reduced the capacity of teachers to teach content and to use materials and methods that are incompatible with high-stakes testing (Smith, 1991).

Smith found that the publication of test scores produced feelings of embarrassment, shame, guilt, and anger in teachers and the determination to do what was necessary to avoid these feelings in the future. Teachers expressed concern that the districts' drive to keep high scores high and eliminate low scores will prevent them from using promising programs that are not closely aligned to test contents. Even teachers whose students scored above grade level reported feeling anxiety and pressure. Smith (1991) found that administrators in high scoring districts used their test scores to ward off outside interference from parents and community members and used their test scores as symbols of status. Thus some applied pressure to teachers to continue to raise test scores and/or exceed the previous year's achievement growth. Teachers in such schools reported anxiety because they felt they could not directly control how their students would do on the tests or what the characteristics of the students assigned to them would be. Many felt that the test scores are not automatically related to good or bad teaching, but reflect the

socioeconomic status of the student or their natural intellectual abilities. Although several teachers approve of the state's achievement growth standard, several are becoming aware that ceiling effects and other technical aspects of tests make it impossible to exceed the growth standard at every grade every year. Therefore, many felt frustrated, felt out of control, felt off balance, and felt that the standards set were impossible to meet.

Teachers also reported that it was their belief that principals were evaluated on the test scores of their students. Teachers believed that the pressures on principals get "passed down the line" onto themselves. Teachers reacted to these pressures and expressed fear of losing autonomy of their classrooms. One teacher stated, "I wanted to keep my literature program, and I knew if my scores were low, they would make us go back to basal, so I drilled them with Scoring High worksheets [that match the objectives and formats of the ITBS]" (Smith, 1991, p. 9).

Smith (1991) found the beliefs about the invalidity of the test and the necessity to raise scores caused feeling of dissonance and alienation. The core category of teachers' beliefs was that educational attainment was not adequately measured by the achievement tests mandated by the state. This was caused by the psychometric inadequacies of the test, the difference between what was being taught and what was tested, and vagaries of student effort and emotional status at the time of the test. The researchers found that teachers must juxtapose the demands from district administrators and the public that they raise test scores against their professional teaching views that the tests are not adequately measuring student learning.

Smith's (1991) research also found beliefs about the emotional impact of testing on young children caused feelings of anxiety and guilt among the teachers in the study.

They reported feeling worried and anxious about whether they had adequately prepared their student for the test, whether their students would be able to perform their best, and whether there would be incidents of emotional distress (crying, vomiting, fighting, giving up, or random marking of answer sheets). As a result teachers try to appear calm, enlist the assistance of parents to make certain that the students receive a good night's rest and breakfast before the tests, repeatedly reading written test instructions, promising rewards and breaks, and offering frequent messages of encouragement. Decreased workloads during and after the test week are felt to be a way to alleviate the stress of testing. Secondary education teachers are more likely to not worry about negative effects of tests on students, but rather complain of students "blowing off" the test and having no incentive to put in the effort needed. Not every teacher in the study shared these beliefs, but the beliefs mentioned were significant and may account for the extensive investment of time and energy teachers spend in test preparation. It was discovered that testing programs reduce the time available for instruction. Time required to take the ITBS and state criterion-referenced tests, the time teachers prepared students for the tests, and the time spent in recovering from the tests resulted in a 100-hour bite out of instructional time in the schools studied. This equates to a loss of three to four weeks of the school year. (Smith, 1991).

According to Smith (1991) the focus on test material resulted in a narrowing of possible curriculum and a reduction of teachers' ability to create, adapt, or diverge. What the researchers saw in one school's sixth grade was a transition, as the school year progressed toward testing in April, from laboratory, hands-on instruction in science several days a week, to less frequent science out of the textbooks, to no science

instruction at all in the weeks prior to the test, to either no science or science for entertainment value during the testing recover phase, to science instruction precisely tailored to the questions in the state criterion-referenced tests, to no science at all. The same group spent about 40 minutes per day to writing projects in the fall, but wrote no more after January, in which they then spent time on worksheets on grammar, punctuation, usage, and capitalization. Writing instruction started up again in late May, when the students began writing poetry, stories, projects and reports during the small amount of school time left.

Social studies and health disappeared completely. Starting in January, teachers spent some of their day on the district's Study Skills Manual, which focused on test-taking techniques and reference, mapping and graphing skills found on the ITBS. This same group drilled repeatedly on operations with mixed fractions and decimals but skipped over pre-algebra and metrics to stress geometry skills on the basis of teachers' memory of what was on the math test. Narrowing of the curriculum was unfortunately not just seasonal. Primary grade teachers in one school replaced the hands-on science program they used to use in favor of a text. They communicated that setting up the experiments took too much time and they had more pressing demands on their time. Some dropped science completely (Smith, 1999).

Narrowing the curriculum resulted in two contrary trends with teachers. Because of the of requirements—tests, scope and sequence, program manuals, extra programs such as drug resistance programs—that exceeds the ability and time of any teacher to cover them all well and the set number of instructional hours available, some teachers aligned their teaching with expectations. They discarded what was not being tested.

Researchers fear that this may cause teachers to forget subject matter knowledge and teaching methods, and they will gradually lose their ability to define themselves.

The contrary trend was one of resistance. “My contract doesn’t say that I’m here to raise test scores, and if it ever does, I’m out of teaching. So we’re going to keep doing what we’re doing. They’re going to keep writing in their journals and doing math manipulatives and we’re going to keep reading stories every day,” a primary grade teacher declared (Smith, 1991, p. 10). Resistance also became political. Teachers lobbied the state legislature in its deliberation over the form of testing. They were able to convince legislation to remove the mandated testing of first graders.

According to Smith (1991) because multiple-choice testing leads to multiple-choice teaching, teaching methods become reduced and teaching work is deskilled. Over time and with increased high-stakes testing, teaching becomes more testlike.

#### *Impact on School Improvement*

Studies have also shown that high-stakes testing has endangered the success of school restructuring designs. For example, in 1991 the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRDP) provided sizeable funding for high-poverty schools to adopt whole-school restructuring designs such as the New American Schools (NAS) design. Part of NAS’s restructuring designs call for changes in the ways students are assessed, moving from more traditional tests, such as multiple choice exams, to more authentic assessments, such as performance-based projects. Teachers who taught in schools that were part of the NAS program used more observations of group and individual work, project-based or performance type assessments, student self-assessment, portfolios, frequent use of scoring rubrics, and computer-based assessments. These



changes were positive for students because they provided more valid evaluations of students across tasks and learning styles. These teachers also reported using assessments that called for higher levels of cognitive processing such as problem-solving and application.

While teachers were using alternative assessments more than traditional types of assessments, they communicated their concern about the incompatibility between the authentic assessment strategies advocated by NAS design teams and the multiple-choice standardized tests mandated by the state. These conflicting demands created situations teachers described as tense, uncomfortable, and sometimes overwhelming. Other studies have described the pressure felt by teachers as they labor to reconcile the demands for successful student-centered learning and high-stakes testing (Bol & Nunnery, 2001). This conflict has resulted in some teachers transferring to schools with higher SES students and others leaving the teaching profession altogether. As a result, schools teaching a greater number of at-risk students have less experienced and according to some, less effective teachers (Bol & Nunnery, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Many issues and concerns regarding the impact of NCLB have been raised. As Mayes (2005) points out, perhaps one of the most valid arguments is that the norm-referenced and standardized criterion referenced tests under the NCLB Act are simply unfair. Children who cannot fit into that “norm” for whatever socio-economic, psychological, cultural, or spiritual reasons will simply by definition not perform well on such tests. “As has been clear in educational research for at least the last four decades, such tests do not measure “ability” and “intelligence” in all of their infinite richness but rather are largely just indicators of the “cultural capital” that one brings to the testing

table” (Mayes, 2005, p. 7). Studies indicate that socioeconomic status is still the most powerful predictor of students’ SAT scores (Mayes, 2005).

### Summary

In summary, the question of how high-stakes testing in the United States public schools impact school culture continues to be raised. Studies regarding learning have identified school culture as key to successfully improving teaching and learning (Fullan, 1998). School culture correlates with increased student motivation and achievement and increased teacher productivity and morale.

The NCLB Act was made a law in 2003. Since its implementation high-stakes testing has been part of public schools’ culture. Research indicates that high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act can interfere with good teaching and learning by pressuring teachers to narrow their curriculum, constraining their spontaneity and creativity, lowering teacher morale, increasing teacher and student stress, increasing teaching to the test, and degrading the professional judgment of teachers (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004; Jones, 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Smith, 1991; Taylor, 2004; Wall 2005). In addition, the subjects being tested generally focus on lower order thinking skills and often do not take in consideration different learning styles which can hinder minorities and low SES students with biased questions (Clawson, 1999; Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Jones, 2003; Madaus, 1998; Madaus et al., 1992; Smith, 1991; Taylor, 2004). The time spent teaching the arts, sciences, social sciences, physical education, and foreign language have dramatically decreased and test preparation is greatly reducing instruction time (Jehlen 2006; Jones, 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Jones et al. 2003; Kozol, 2006; Loschert, 2004; Smith, 1991).

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Identifying the perceived impacts of the high-stakes testing found in the *NCLB Act* on school culture was the purpose of this study. As we have seen, the literature review in Chapter 2 points to some positive strengths as well as to a variety of problematic consequences of the implementation of NCLB at a wide range of school sites in the United States. Studies conducted in states after the implementation of high-stakes testing indicated a narrowing of curriculum, lower teacher morale, increased teacher and student stress, and increased teaching to the test (Smith, 1991; Jones & Egely, 2004; Jones et al, 1999;). In this study, I wanted to see if teachers and administrators at two schools in Utah have similar evaluations of NCLB. This study examined what teachers and principals perceived the impacts of high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act were at their school.

## Research Methodology

The specific purpose of this study was to address this question by asking teachers and administrators about their perceptions of testing near the end of the fourth year of the NCLB Act. Teachers and administrators employed at two schools in Nebo School District (located in Utah) were the sample. This study will add two case studies to the research regarding the consequences of the high-stakes testing requirements on the culture of a school—with particular focus, of course, on the effects of NCLB.

Because of the complexities and the roles people play in school cultures it would be difficult for research to measure the impact NCLB had on school cultures in quantifiable terms. Instead, I chose to use qualitative methodology through case study to

explore the role high-stakes testing plays in school culture. Qualitative research is fitting for this study because of the nature of the research problem (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach looks beyond the numbers to describe how NCLB has affected individual administrators and teachers. Qualitative methods allow subjects to describe their own behaviors and experiences in the language native to their experience. It also provides the opportunity for high credibility and face validity, which indicates that the measure appears relevant to the construct of the participants as well as an innocent bystander--that it can "ring true" to participants and make intuitive sense to lay audiences (Sewell, 2007; Slife & Williams, 1995). The participant's descriptions tell what is happening to his or her school culture and how this affects his or her classroom and/or school since the implementation of NCLB. While other studies have described teachers' feelings regarding testing, none found in the literature have used qualitative data to systematically identify and categorize these perceptions as they pertain to school culture.

#### *Case Study Research*

This study was a case study analysis of the experiences of two Nebo School District elementary principals and their teachers regarding high-stakes testing and their school cultures. The purpose of the case study analysis was to isolate effects that NCLB has had from the point of view of teachers and administrators on their schools. "In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p.1). The case study as a research strategy is an encompassing method—covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and precise approaches to data

analysis. In addition, the development of the case study designs maximized the following three conditions related to design quality: construct validity, external validity, and reliability. For case studies, the five elements (a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings) of a research design are important. For example in this study, it was proposed that high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act has had an effect on school culture. After looking at the research found in Chapter 2, it has been suggested that there will more likely be more negative effects than positive effects on school culture. Again, most multiple-case designs such as found in this study of two elementary schools are stronger than single-case designs (Yin, 2003). By gathering information from each school, this study analyzed the data and determined the similarities and differences between the two schools in various respects regarding NCLB.

### *Interview Guide*

To encourage the administrators and teachers in my study to provide narratives and tell about how high-stakes testing has affected their lives as principals or teachers I used an interview guide and the interview skills I developed during the past 13 years through the interview experiences I have had as a licensed school counselor. I asked the following questions that are based on Jones and Egley's (2004) research that has been modified for my own purposes. The broad questions were supplemented by probe questions when the respondent had trouble getting started and needed help to elaborate on his/her basic answers. The administrator questions were as follows:

1. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your teachers?

2. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your students?
3. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your school’s culture?
4. In addition to the changes you have already discussed, do you see any other changes that you would be willing to discuss?

The teacher questions are as follows:

1. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected you?
2. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your students?
3. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your school’s culture?
4. In addition to the changes you have already discussed, do you see any other changes that you would be willing to discuss?

I reminded the interviewees that by school culture I meant the historical and current artifacts, commonly held beliefs and values among the people in the school (Mathews & Crow, 2003). Another way to define culture is simply the “way we do things and relate to each other around here” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p 37). I also explained that school culture includes teacher student interaction, teacher parent interaction, teacher-teacher interaction, and teacher principal interaction. Both school and classroom policies, procedures, teaching strategies, extra-curricular activities and atmosphere are

part of school culture. Probe questions such as “Can you tell me more about that?” “What was the experience like for you and your school?” were used as needed.

Qualitative interviewing allowed me to probe for more details if needed so I could ensure that the principals and teachers involved in the study were interpreting questions the way they were intended. It also allowed me the flexibility to use my knowledge, expertise, and interpersonal skills to explore unexpected or interesting themes raised by the participants (Sewell, 2007). According to Riessman (1993), “Interviews are conversations in which both participants—teller and listener/questioner—develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both. Listeners can clarify uncertainties with follow-up questions and the answers given continually inform the evolving conversations” (p. 55).

#### *Focus Group Guide*

Four teachers from each school participated in a separate focus group that took approximately 45 minutes to complete. I determined that a focus group would provide the teachers in my study the opportunity to interact and voice their thoughts and feelings on how NCLB had affected their school culture. This helped me gain greater insight into why certain opinions and beliefs are held in that school. Focus groups also takes advantage of the fact that people naturally interact and are influenced by others, which resulted in high face validity (this method proved to be effective in helping me clearly see how the respondents viewed NCLB). This interview setting also allows me to interact directly with the teachers in my study. I was able to ask for clarification, ask follow-up questions, and probe for more information. In addition, the focus groups provided me

with a setting where I was able to gain information from non-verbal responses (Marczak & Sewell, 2007).

I acted as the moderator by directing the discussion, keeping it flowing and on track, guiding discussions back from irrelevant subjects, making transitions into the following question and being sensitive to the mood of the group. I also took notes, operated the tape recorder, responded to unexpected interruptions, and handled environmental conditions . . . My pre-session strategies included greeting the teachers and making small talk while avoiding the subject of NCLB and school culture. This allowed me the opportunity to observe interactions and learn the names of the participants (Marczak & Sewell, 2007).

The discussion was tape recorded and I wrote notes. I welcomed the participants, provided an overview and topic of study, discussed ground rules and asked the first question. The overview was a discussion of the purpose of my study, which was to determine how NCLB had impacted their school cultures and the importance of their group discussion on my study. Ground rules included having one person speaking at a time, no criticisms of what others have to say, treating everyone's ideas and opinions with respect, and minimizing side conversations.

The focus group was asked about their attitudes and beliefs about high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act.

1. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected you?
2. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your students?



3. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the No Child Left Behind Act affected your school’s culture?
4. In addition to the changes you have already discussed, do you see any other changes that you would be willing to discuss?

Following Marczak and Sewell’s (2007) direction, I made an effort to pause for five seconds after the participant talked before I started to talk. This allowed other participants the opportunity to jump in and join the conversation. I also tried to follow their recommendation that the moderator avoid head nodding, and giving responses such as “yes”, “okay”, “uh huh”, “that’s right”. I used probes such as, “Would you explain that in more detail?” or “Would you give an example?” when I needed additional information or clarification. I was attentive to group dynamics, watching for the expert, the shy participant, the dominant talker, the rambler, etc. At the conclusion of the discussion, I summarized what was said, asked if anything was missed, and thanked the group for participating (Marczak & Sewell, 2007).

#### *Study Sample*

The participants in this study were first through sixth grade teachers and administrators employed at two elementary schools in Nebo School District. These two schools were selected by taking into account both their socio-economic status and the results of their high-stakes tests. School A has one of the lowest percent of free and reduced lunch students in Nebo School District, with only 17.59% of children qualifying. They have made AYP every year since 2003 when the AYP was first measured under the NCLB Act. School B has the second highest number (51.98%) of free and reduced lunch students in Nebo School District. As a result, they are one of the ten Title I schools in

Nebo School District. They have also experienced two years of not making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) under the NCLB Act.

These two schools provide a fairly accurate representation of Nebo School District schools. There are 26 elementary schools in Nebo School District. School A's free and reduced lunch rate is within 13 percentage points of 12 of the elementary schools located in Nebo School District. In these 12 schools, the number of Caucasian students, limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities are similar to School A's. In addition, nine of these 12 schools have also made AYP every year since NCLB was implemented. Similarly, School B's free and reduced lunch rate is within 15.5 percentage points of the other 12 schools located in Nebo School District. In these 12 schools, the number of Caucasian students, limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities are similar to School B's. The majority of these schools have not made AYP at least once, some twice and one has not made AYP three times.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

Using the administrators and teachers at these two schools, I used qualitative methods to collect data through detailed, open-ended interview transcripts and focus group transcripts.

#### *Informed Consent*

I informed each participant about the general purpose of the study and explained the Informed Interview Research Form (see Appendix A) to the principals and the teachers participating in the study. The reason of the form was to make certain that participation was voluntary and provide a signed consent form from the participants. The

form explained the confidentiality of the participants in the study and provided instructions for them to follow if they have any concerns regarding the study.

### *Interviews*

After the participant agreed to the details given and signed the consent form, I recorded the interview and asked the questions from the Interview Guide Form (see Appendix B). In School A, interviews were conducted with the principal and five teachers ranging from first through sixth grade. In School B, interviews were conducted with the principal employed during the 2006–2007 year, the principal employed during the 2007–2008 year, and four teachers ranging from first through sixth grade. I followed Mishler’s (1986) assumptions regarding the role of research interviewing. The first assumption is that an interview is a behavioral rather than a linguistic event. This means that interviewing is not referring to the speech, talk, or communication taking place, but rather is a “verbal exchange,” or a “pattern or verbal interaction.” The second assumption is the reliance on the stimulus response paradigm of interviewing. Research shows that the interviewer and question variables have an effect on some, and perhaps all, types of responses under some conditions. In other words “each stimulus variable studied may influence some feature(s) of a response, the magnitude and seriousness of the effect being a function of various contextual factors” (Mishler, 1986, p.15).

I set up the interviews to welcome conversation which yielded stories as part of the data. According to Susan Florio-Ruane (1991) ethnographer and sociolinguistic researcher stories have a number of advantages such as adding richness and validity to their work by uncovering and sharing their own “implicit theories”; stories are

representations of knowledge that do not dodge moral consequences, and they are often untapped sources of information. Riesman (1993) describes:

Narrative analysis takes as its focus of investigation the story itself. The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant's story and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity. Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask, why was the story told that way? (p. 2)

Research interviews were not interrupted excessively with standardized questions, which allowed respondents the opportunity to hold the floor for lengthy turns and sometimes organize answers into long stories. This is unlike traditional approaches to qualitative analysis that can fracture these texts in the service of interpretations and generalization by taking snippets of a response edited out of context. They can eliminate the sequential and structural features that differentiate narrative accounts. A key way individuals make sense of experience is by directing it in narrative form. Aristotle said that a narrative has a beginning, middle, and end. Ever since his time, scholars agree that sequence is necessary for narrative. A narrative, according to this stance, is responding to the question "and then what happened?" (Riessman, 1993). According to Riessman "precisely because they are essential meaning making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished" (p.4).

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

In order to get at the meaning of experiences, I carefully analyzed the interviews and focus group discussions to understand not only the individual, private meaning of the experiences regarding NCLB and school culture, but also what is general and illuminating in understanding the meaning of human experience in a wider context of people and situations regarding NCLB and school culture (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 200).

### *Coding Strategies*

A concept-indicator model was used to direct the conceptual coding of the words described in the questionnaires and interviews.

In order to ensure that the coding not only discovered and named categories, I also coded data for relevance to the study, interactions among myself and the interviewee, strategies and tactics, and consequences (Strauss, 1993).

The initial type of coding I used was open-coding. This type of unrestricted coding is completed by scrutinizing the interview and questionnaire closely, line by line or word by word. The aim was to open up the inquiry—to produce concepts that seem to fit the data. I followed Strauss' (1993) guidelines: To ask, “What study are these data pertinent to?” “What category does this incident indicate?” and “What is actually happening in the data?” The second guideline was to analyze the data minutely. Third, frequently interrupt the coding in order to write a theoretical memo. Fourth, “The analyst should not assume the analytic relevance of any ‘face sheet’ or traditional variable such as age, sex, social class, race, until it emerges as relevant” (p.30–32).

Axial coding was an important part of open coding. It is referred to as axial coding because this intense analyzing revolves around the “axis” of one category at a time (conditions, consequences, and so forth). This produced cumulative knowledge about relationships between categories and subcategories.

Selective coding refers to coding systematically and concerted for core categories. In order to accomplish this, I delimited coding to only those codes that related to the core codes in significant ways. During selective coding, the analytic memos became more focused and helped to achieve the theory’s integration (Strauss, 1993).

*In vivo* and sociologically constructed codes were also used. *In vivo* codes are the behaviors or processes which explain how the basic problems of the teachers and principals are resolved or processed. They have analytic usefulness which relates the given category to others with specific meaning and helps formulate the theory and imagery. This also helped prevent cluttering my writing with too many illustrations. *In vivo* terms have vivid imagery, inclusive of much local interpretative meaning. Sociologically constructed codes were based on my scholarly knowledge and knowledge of the substantive field under study. They added scope by going past local meaning to broader social science concerns (Strauss, 1993).

Core categories generated the theory of the effect NCLB had on school culture. Strauss (1993) states, “The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved” (p. 34). Through the relations among categories and their properties, core coding integrates the theory and renders it dense and saturated as the relationships are discovered. This leads to theoretical completeness while accounting for as much variation in a pattern of behavior

with as few concepts as possible, thereby maximizing parsimony and scope (p. 34).

Analyzing data generated many codes. In order to identify the core codes I looked for core variables that appeared to be the main concern of the principals and teachers being studied that summed up in a pattern of behavior the substance of what was happening with the data.

### *Computer Software*

I used NVivo8 (QSR, 2008) computer software to help manage, organize and analyze the data. The following criteria were used to judge which categories should serve as the core category:

1. It was central, or in other words related to as many other categories and their properties as possible.
2. It appeared frequently in the data.
3. It related easily to other categories.
4. If it is in a substantive study it had clear implications for a more general theory.
5. As details are worked out analytically, the theory moved forward appreciably.
6. The core category also allowed for building in the maximum variation to the analysis, since the researcher was coding in connection of its dimensions, conditions, properties, consequences, and strategies (Strauss, 1993).

Theoretical sampling is a way to decide on analytic grounds what data to collect next. As emerging theories evolve, gaps in the data may become obvious. If this occurs, I will go back to the research participants to help fill in conceptual gaps and holes.

According to Strauss (1993), “When done well, this analytic operation pays very high dividends because it moves the theory along quickly and efficiently” (p. 39).

I also used memo writing to help keep track of theoretical ideas, make connections, and sort, which resulted in new ideas. Over the years, Strauss (1993) developed some rules of thumb for memoing. He recommends keeping memos and data separate, interrupting coding or data recording for writing a memo when an idea comes, and being unafraid to modify memos as the research develops, keeping a list of emergent codes handy, and recognizing that the analyst can bring a memo, literally force it, by starting to write a code. I followed Strauss' (1993) suggestion and watched for memos on different codes that seem the same, compared for differences and collapsed them into one category when appropriate. I was also flexible with memoing techniques (p. 127–128).

#### Validity Plan

Yin (2003) describes trustworthiness as the criterion to test the quality of research design. The criteria used to judge "trustworthiness" (i.e. credibility and validity of qualitative research) is credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Yin, 2003). In order to maximize this trustworthiness, or credibility, I used the three tests recommended by Yin (2003). The first test is construct validity which included using multiple sources of evidence. This was satisfied by interviewing three different principals and several elementary teachers employed at two different schools; and conducting focus groups in each school; establishing a chain of evidence; and involving member checks, which allows the interview participants to review my interpretations of their data in a draft case study report.

Transferability, or external validity, is the second criteria, which deals with the problem of knowing whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate study. Although each case study will be unique, and replication logic will not be used in



other multiple-case studies, I used this theory by searching for common themes through data analysis that show transferability.

Dependability or reliability is the third test in which the objective is to ensure that if a later investigator followed the same procedures as I described and conducted the same study all over again, the later investigator should come up with the same findings and conclusions. This was accomplished by minimizing errors, thoroughly documenting procedures and data, and minimizing biases. Philips and Burbules (2000) adds, “What serves as more genuine support is that no evidence can be found to disprove the account that is being given; it is up to the person giving the interpretation to convince the rest of us that such negative evidence has been sought vigorously” (p. 80).

Confirmability, or objectivity, is the fourth test which ensures that the evidence used is the best evidence available at the time, and it meets the criteria of excellence. If needed, this will allow data to be easily traced back to their sources and confirm the qualitative data analysis, and the codes and categories that were produced.

#### Limitations

Three elementary principals from different socioeconomic areas and their teachers were selected to be the focus of this study. One of the principals was assigned to a new school starting in the fall 2007. Because of this fact, I decided to interview the principal who had been at the school from 2002–2007 as well as the new principal that was there from 2007 until present. Preparing to open a new school and start new traditions and procedures may affect the first principal’s current feelings regarding the impact NCLB has had on her past school’s culture. Being new to the school may affect the new principal’s perspective of NCLB on the school’s culture. Likewise, because the teachers

interviews were conducted in the spring of 2008 (nine months after they were assigned a new principal), the questions regarding how NCLB has affected their school culture may be affected or confused by the changes implemented by the new principal.

#### Delimitations

This study will be limited to two elementary school principals and teachers who work in Nebo School District which is located in Utah County. The schools' socioeconomic status' range from 17.59% of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch students to 51.98%. One of the two schools has experienced two years of not making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) under the NCLB Act.

## CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

High-stakes testing under the *NCLB Act* has engendered a narrowing of curriculum, lower teacher morale, increased teacher and student stress, and increased teaching to the test (Smith, 1991; Jones et al, 1999; Jones & Egely, 2004). Although research has pointed out many factors associated with high-stakes testing, there has been little written about how high-stakes testing has impacted school culture.

Using qualitative research methodology, I completed a collective case study of nine teacher interviews, two focus groups consisting of four teachers each and three administrators from two schools. The teachers from two schools were selected using a stratified random sampling. The administrators were employed at the two schools during the course of the study. The data collected through interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo8 (QSR, 2008) software to help identify core categories from reoccurring themes and patterns (Strauss, 1993).

The following research question structured this study of teachers and principals at two elementary schools in Nebo School District: What are the perceived impacts on school culture of high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act among teachers and principal at their school? A list of reoccurring themes emerged from the analysis of the interview and focus group data. After transcribing the interviews and focus group data, 98 coding categories developed. I then grouped these categories into 10 themes. After coding the responses, I re-analyzed the coding categories and re-read the interview replies within each category to make certain that none of them were redundant. As the result of this re-analysis I either re-categorized or eliminated 34 of the 98 original coding categories that

overlapped or were found in other major codes which left a total of 64 coding categories. Five of the original coding categories were eliminated completely because only one teacher or principal provided a reply in that category or the response did not apply to the context of the study.

My study confirmed 55 themes found in previous research presented in Chapter 2 (Smith, 1991; Jones et al., 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Loschert et al., 2004; Taylor, 2004; Jehlen, 2006; Madaus, 2009). In addition, my research indicated some new findings. On the broadest level, I placed the 60 coding categories into four groups: one that described negative changes or effects of high-stakes testing under NCLB (43 categories, 72% of all categories), another that described zero effect of high stakes testing under NCLB (9 categories, 15% of all categories), another that described the positive changes or effects of high-stakes testing under NCLB (5 categories, 10% of all categories), and a last theme that unexpectedly appeared that described in positive terms the emergence of professional learning communities that arose within the schools as a way of dealing with the demands of NCLB (3 categories, 5% of all categories).

To help summarize my findings, Table 1 presents the negative teacher/principal responses regarding the impact of NCLB on their schools. It is organized as follows: There are five themes broken down into various topics under each theme. The total number of people at each school who voiced opinions about each of the themes is given as well as the total number of comments. Table 1 divides the responses into those from School A and School B. Table 2 presents the neutral teacher/principal responses regarding the impact of NCLB on their schools. It has three themes but is divided in the same way as Table 1. Table 3 presents the positive teacher/principal responses regarding

the impact of NCLB on their schools. It has three themes also and is also divided in the same way as the preceding tables. Table 4 presents the unexpected theme that emerged regarding the appearance of professional learning communities as a positive means within school culture of dealing with the requirements of NCLB.

Table 1

*Number of Teacher/Principal Responses per Category that Describe Negative Impacts of High-Stakes Testing Under the NCLB Act on School Culture*

Type of Response	Total		School A		School B	
	n	# of comments	n	# of comments	n	# of comments
Theme 1: Negative comments regarding the application and accuracy of testing under the NCLB Act	20	148	10	65	10	83
Labeling system is unfair (impossible to continue to make AYP)	18	64	8	16	7	48
NCLB is flawed (impossible to continue to meet AYP goals)	11	22	4	7	7	15
Unfair that a school fails because of the scores of one sub-group (attendance, low SES, disabilities, ELL etc.)	8	19	2	2	6	17
Unfair that Title I schools are held more accountable than other schools	9	19	0	0	9	19
Unfair to publish that schools are failing under NCLB	4	3	3	1	1	2
Unfair to tie money to test scores (taking away money from Title I schools, stipends, etc.)	5	5	1	1	3	3
Test does not accurately measure learning	13	36	8	23	5	13
Some students will not perform well on the test (because they are not good test takers, sickness, home, issues etc.)	4	4	3	3	1	1
Some test questions are not part the state core curriculum (written to trick)	7	17	5	13	2	4
Student learning cannot be measured by a one-time test	5	8	2	3	3	5
Test results are not an accurate reflection of teachers' ability	10	17	4	15	6	12
Parents and students are not held accountable (attendance, attitude, and home life play an important role in learning)	10	10	5	5	5	5
Students with disabilities (started out lower, makes slower progress, not tested on cognitive level, etc.)	10	16	4	6	6	10
Theme 2: Negative effects on curriculum	16	44	6	16	10	28
Narrows curriculum (teachers reduce or stop teaching some subjects that are not tested)	16	30	6	14	10	16
Negatively effects the arts	9	14	4	5	5	10
Interferes with educating the whole child (needed to teach democracy)	3	4	2	3	1	1
Negative effects on student understanding	4	5	3	4	1	1

Type of Response	Total		School A		School B	
	n	# of comments	n	# of comments	n	# of comments
Theme 3: Negative effects on teaching and learning	19	82	10	43	9	39
Takes time and or focus away from learning by increasing teaching to test and test preparation	18	63	9	33	9	30
Does not provide results in a timely manner	2	2	1	1	1	1
Does not allow teachers to meet the individual academic needs of students	8	11	7	10	1	1
Theme 4: Negative effects on teacher, student, and principal motivation	20	204	10	82	10	122
Student motivation: Stress and pressure on students	17	49	9	23	8	21
Unfair to students in subgroups (learning disabilities, ELL, etc.)	13	22	5	6	8	16
Learning is not as much fun	13	23	8	16	5	15
Has negatively affected relationships with students	3	8	10	5	7	3
Teacher/principal motivation: Stress and pressure on teachers	19	86	10	35	9	51
Lowers teacher morale	16	41	7	21	9	20
Teaching is not as much fun or as creative	16	43	7	17	4	7
Teachers are more likely to leave teaching or transfer from low SES schools to high SES schools	11	22	4	9	7	13
Has negatively affected relationships with other teachers	11	12	6	7	5	5
Teachers not wanting students with disabilities, ELL, etc. placed in their class	2	3	1	2	1	1
Negatively affects the school and or classroom culture	7	9	4	5	3	4
Stress and pressure on principals	6	7	2	2	4	5
NCLB does not cause teachers to work harder	5	5	4	4	1	1
Theme 5: Other negative effects on education	18	51	8	18	10	33
NCLB needs to be changed (recommendations)	12	25	3	5	9	20
Alternate Assessments	7	10	4	4	3	6
NCLB was created by non-educators	5	7	3	5	2	2
NCLB creates a negative perception of public education (stigma on Title 1 and low performing schools)	5	7	1	1	4	6
Promotes charter and private schools which takes students and funding away from regular public schools	4	4	3	5	1	1
Test encourages competition amongst teachers (discourages rotations)	4	4	3	3	1	1
Too much emphasis on teachers being highly qualified (passing two Praxis tests, portfolios etc.)	4	8	0	0	4	8

Table 2

*Number of Teacher/Principal Responses per Category per School that Describe Neutral (Neither Positive or Negative) Impacts of High-Stakes Testing Under the NCLB Act on their School Culture*

Type of Response	Total		School A		School B	
	n	# of comments	n	# of comments	n	# of comments
Theme 6: Neutral comments on the accuracy and application of testing under the NCLB Act	3	3	2	2	1	1
Theme 7: Neutral comments regarding the effect of NCLB on teaching and learning	3	4	1	1	2	3
Theme 8: Neutral comments on the effect of NCLB on teacher, student and principal motivation	15	20	5	10	5	10
Neutral comments regarding motivation with students	4	4	2	2	2	2
Neutral comments regarding relationships with students	5	5	4	4	1	1
Neutral comments regarding relationships with principals	7	9	3	4	4	5
Neutral comments regarding motivation with teachers	6	10	3	5	3	5
Neutral comments regarding relationships with teachers	5	6	3	4	2	2
Neutral comments on the effect of school culture	5	6	2	2	3	4



Table 3

*Number of Teacher/Principal Responses per Category per School that Describe Positive Impacts of High-Stakes Testing Under the NCLB Act on their School*

Type of Response	Total		School A		School B	
	n	# of comments	n	# of comments	n	# of comments
Theme 9: Positive comments regarding the application and accuracy of the testing under the NCLB Act	14	22	6	12	8	10
Test data provides useful information about students	9	11	6	8	3	3
Test holds educators accountable	5	10	3	6	2	4
Theme 10: Positive effects on curriculum	4	7	1	2	3	5
Theme 11: Positive effects on teaching and learning	5	9	1	2	4	7

Table 4

*Number of Teacher/Principal Responses per Category per School that Describe Positive Impacts of PLC's on Their School Culture*

Type of Response	Total		School A		School B	
	n	# of comments	n	# of comments	n	# of comments
Theme 12: Positive changes because of PLC's	14	27	8	14	6	13
Relationships with other teachers are positive	3	5	1	1	2	4
Relationships with principal is positive	6	8	5	6	1	2

### Overview of Findings

Theme 4 had the most responses. A total of 204 comments were made by 100 percent (20) of the teachers and principals regarding the negative effects on teacher, student, and principal motivation. Theme 1 was the second largest theme with 100 percent (20) teachers and principals reporting (148) negative comments regarding the application and accuracy of testing under the NCLB Act. Ninety-five percent (19) teachers and principals made 82 comments concerning the negative effects of teaching and learning (Theme 3), 80 percent (16) made 44 comments regarding the negative effective on curriculum (Theme 2), and 90 percent (18) made 51 comments concerning other negative effects on education (Theme 5).

Some teachers and principals did not notice a positive or negative change in education since the implementation of high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act. Fifteen percent (3) of teachers and principals made three neutral comments regarding the application and accuracy of high-stakes testing (Theme 6). Three teachers and principals made four comments indicating there had been no effect on teaching and learning (Theme 7). Fifty percent (10) made 23 additional remarks that NCLB did not affect teacher, principal, or student motivation (Theme 8). Twenty-five percent (5) of teachers and principals made six comments that indicated there had not been an effect on the traditions found in their school culture (Theme 8).

Although fewer than the negative comments, some teachers and principals made positive comments regarding high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act. Fifty percent (10) of teachers and principals made 11 positive comments regarding the application and accuracy of the testing under the NCLB Act (Theme 9). Twenty percent (four) made

seven positive statements about curriculum (Theme 10) and 25 percent (five) made 9 positive comments about the positive effects of testing on teaching and learning (Theme 11) Seventy percent of the participants (14) made 27 positive comments regarding positive changes and effects of the implementation of professional learning communities and collaboration in their schools.

The following section contains the coding categories within each of the 13 themes. The negative themes from Table 1 will be compared to the neutral themes from Table 2 and the positive themes from Table 3. For example, the results of Theme 2 (Negative effects on teaching and learning) will be discussed with the results of Theme 7 (No effect on teaching and learning) and the results of Theme 11 (Positive effects on teaching and learning). Table 4 contains positive themes regarding PLCs. Comparisons between the two schools are also made in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4. In order to hear the teachers' and principals' voices in their own words, several quotations are included. These quotations are typical in nature of the comments that teachers and principals made within each of the themes.

*Themes 1, 6, and 9: Comments Regarding the Application and Accuracy of  
Testing Under the NCLB Act*

The points expressed by teachers and principals in Theme 1 were that the labeling system under NCLB was unfair (criteria for making AYP), that the CRT tests do not accurately measure learning, and that the test results are not an accurate reflection of teachers' ability. These concerns confirmed previous research described in Chapter 2 (Smith, 1991; Jones 2003, Jones & Egle, 2004; Taylor 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Ninety percent (18) of the teachers and principals made 64 comments about the

unfairness of the NCLB Act's labeling system. Three times more comments (48/ 64) were made from the teachers and principals from School B. Teachers and principals expressed concern about the NCLB Act raising the proficiency score every two years (the bar is raised so the percent of students required to be proficient in each subgroup increases). They expressed concern that as the bar continues to raise, the number of schools labeled as "failing" increases. Teacher B3 said, "So the accountability factor doesn't really concern me or bother me, it's just . . . hitting a moving target every year." By 2014 100 percent of the students will be required to make adequate yearly progress or the school will be labeled as a "failing" school.

Principals presented the idea of policy makers wanting our public schools to fail, which was similar to the ideas shared by Jones et al. (2003) and Mayes (2005). Principal A1 explained, "I have a concern too with it, with this idea that we are all going to fail eventually. It seems to me like we are seeing more and more legislation, they want our public schools to fail and instead of the support and how can we make them better. It seems to be set up for how we can fail."

Another principal provided a similar message. She communicated, "We can't get to 2014 and have every single kid, no matter what their circumstance and disability or how long they have been in the country. . . pass the test." NCLB is "a whole system with its structure that sets us up for failure and we are seeing that happen" (Principal B2).

Fifty-five percent of the teachers and principals reported that the NCLB policy was flawed. Teacher B5 explained:

Well this is how I look at that. An analogy you could use is, 'Pull out a gun, spin it, Russian Roulette, and you fire. Next year, pull it back and fire it again. Good I

made it two years in a row, I'm done. No. Guess what? I am raising the bar, and this year I'm putting two bullets in. Spin it and try it.' And if you keep passing, you are going to keep trying until you fail. There is no pass. Unless you revamp it, everybody will eventually be a failing school.

Specific concerns were about the act setting public schools up to fail because the law requires each subgroup to pass with the same high proficiency score. Forty percent (8) of the teachers and principals stated that it was unfair to label their school as "failing" because of the scores of their special populations. Seventeen out of the 19 comments made were from School B respondents. They reported that it was unfair that their low SES subgroups, their students with disabilities' subgroups, and their limited English learners were required to have the same percentage of students' proficient as their regular education students. They cited factors out of their control, such as students' attendance. Principal B1 explained how this worked in his school: "One of the years we did not make it [AYP] and we had to appeal." He continued, "We had a gal in one of our UEI units who could not speak. . . a beautiful little girl, but she was sick. She was at school one third of the time. And so because of attendance we didn't make AYP."

Other factors mentioned were students' parents and home life as contributing to students' problematic performance on standardized tests. Principal B2 described her school population as a "very low income area, a lot of transient kids, a lot of kids with families in trauma, we had a lot." She explained, "We had parents in jail, we had all kinds of issues going on with parent problems and therefore students had problems and issues and stresses." She continued to describe her faculty: "I had a great staff . . . really hard working teachers and they would take these kids that had all kinds of troubles and they

would take them from where they were at the first of the year and they would help them progress and learn so much throughout the year and they would give that end of level test and be so proud of how much that child had learned. And then she discussed getting the school's CRT scores. "Then we get the results back . . . We did not pass AYP because of our students with disabilities subgroup. And it was totally devastating." This reinforces a theme that occurred in the literature review regarding how NCLB can confirm schools in negative images of themselves and thus, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, propel them down the sad road of ever worse performance

The practice of counting many of the same students in several different subgroups was seen as unfair, especially by the teachers and principals from School B. Teacher B2 explained in her interview that she believed this was a problem: "I know that in our school that has been a problem" because "the kids who are getting counted in several subgroups are bringing the whole AYP thing down." She said that, "It is not reflective of the progress of the school as a whole . . . [There are] problems with the system" since it "doesn't really reflect the progress of the school as a whole." Teacher B4 described it as one of the reasons her school failed: "And I think where we fail is when we take that small subgroup and then we subdivide it [into] 10 million. I mean some of those kids get divided out like 3 or 4 times." She emphasized, "I really don't think our school fails, even though they say [we fail] because of NCLB, because you are only looking at that small subgroup. . . I think as a school we do an excellent job and I think we have really good students." Again, this reflected a theme in the literature regarding NCLB's tendency grossly to overlook individual, intra-group, and intergroup variability in performance on standardized tests.

Teacher B1 also discussed the injustice of labeling an entire school as failing due to the scores of one special population: “I just understand that it puts a lot of pressure on the schools. Teachers especially” because “if just one little subgroup fails the whole school fails. . . Teachers talk about it, and they talk about other schools that didn’t make it. . . there is a big label for not making it.”

Teachers and principals reported that it was unfair that Title I schools were held more accountable than Non-Title I schools under the NCLB Act. Nine teachers and principals from School B made 19 comments regarding this. Teacher B7 said, “Schools that are Title I are held up to that standard for AYP and the Non-Title I schools don’t have to live up to that.” She continued, “They take their CRT’s but they are not held accountable for being a failing school and I think it needs to be fair across the board.” She also pointed out that Non-Title I schools have some advantages over Title I schools: “We are obviously a low socio-economic school here. They don’t get the experiences in life to have that schema to help them on their end of level testing.” But, “the ones who aren’t Title I schools, they have the higher economic and they get to do more things. . . Their schema’s broader; they are going to do well. I feel like they should be held to that same standard as Title I schools are.” Principal B1 conversation about his teachers perceptions regarding Title I versus Non-Title I schools paralleled the views of his teachers. Principal B1 said, “We have people here that think that being in a Title I school is death. And they really feel that it is different in other schools. . . We have to keep telling them that there is just as much pressure to make AYP in other schools as here, but we just get the sanctions.” This injustice inherent in NCLB regarding the differential performance of different SES schools was, of course, also salient in the literature.

Another fact that closely binds Title I schools to the NCLB Act is federal funding. Principal B2 brought up the following point regarding funding: “The whole interesting thing about NCLB and one of its many flaws is . . . the only money that it is tied to is Title I [money], and so it really was a law that was passed with no extra money.” She explained, “It was like here are all these gigantic expectations . . . everyone is going to pass the test by 2014 . . . and yet, we are not going to give you any more money.” In fact, “we are going to take the Title I money we already give the schools” but “if you don’t pass as a Title I school then you’ll have sanctions . . . and your school may be closed eventually if you can’t get your test scores up.”

Teachers and principals at Title I schools were also concerned about keeping good teachers. Teacher B4 expressed her concern regarding this, “if they keep going this way, . . . Title I schools are not going to be where your best and brightest are going to be, because they are going to be labeled as a failing school.” This is especially problematic because “that is actually where you need your best teachers . . . because these kids really do need all of the help you can give them.” The flight of the best teachers from the lowest-performing schools, especially when the performance of those schools is being held up to public scrutiny (and often scorn), is another theme in the interviews that mirrored themes that were noted in the literature review Echols and Echols-Williams (2004), Taylor (2004).

Smith (1991) found that the publication of test scores produced feelings of embarrassment, shame, guilt and anger in teachers. Likewise, the focus group teachers from School A were also upset about their test scores being published in the paper. Here is an example of their conversation: “You know they are published in the newspaper.



And compared” (Teacher A7). “Uh huh, people compare them” (Teacher A8). “People from school to school, from community to community, state to state, teacher to teacher” (Teacher A9). “We feel critiqued big time” (Teacher A8). “Yeah” (Teacher A6). “Yeah, like I want to run in the opposite direction” (Teacher A9).

Similar to the results of Jones and Egley’s (2004) study, 25% of the teachers and principals in this study communicated that it seemed unfair to tie money to test scores. Teacher A9 explained, “Even stipends are attached to it. You go to that math training. Okay you can have the bonus if your kids stay on grade level” but “if they drop you can’t have the bonus.” She continued, “Okay then why go to the math training? Why threaten me with that? Why make me feel like, ‘Ah oh, here we go again.’ It seems like everything is attached to that [test scores].” On the opposite spectrum, rather than receiving a monetary bonus for high test scores, other teachers were concerned about losing money for low test scores. Teacher B4 emphasized that there was a problem with “taking away money and funding . . . from children that . . . really need it.” She continued, “If anything . . . [the students] need more help. . . so maybe we should address the concern and see what we can do to help [them]. . . instead of punishing [them].”

Another major concern was that the test does not accurately measure learning. These findings were consistent with the findings from Smith (1991), Jones (2003), Jones and Egley (2004), Echols and Echols-Williams (2004), Taylor (2004), Johnson and Johnson (2006), and Madaus et al. (2009). Several teachers and principals (65%) reported that the test did not accurately measure student learning and development. School A made 1.8% more comments (23/36) in this category than School B. Principal A1 explained her philosophy: “We always want to encourage our teachers to use the core,

but there is methodology that you use when you are teaching kids and yet, typically we can't test that way." As a result, "it really narrows how they teach things. Some of these kids will be more successful by having a very direct instruction lesson and *teaching to the test* so to speak." She clarified that "they will probably test better than a classroom that is rich with science experiments and . . . the whole scientific process." Unfortunately, "I just saw the data . . . reflect that. We had great instruction going on, students were learning, and yet students really didn't test as well.

Ten teachers in Jones and Egley's (2004) research reported concerns that test results do not match levels on national tests or the test ignores tests given elsewhere in the nation. Principal B2 had similar concerns:

When we talk NCLB let's not forget that every state is different. The standards that their state has set are different. The curriculum they are teaching is different. The test they are giving is different. So the fact that my students maybe didn't pass my state 3<sup>rd</sup> grade core test [does not mean] that student may [not] have passed the core test in Colorado. We still don't have much standardization going on. . . And you have to question the validity of these tests. We have these very tests that are determining whether schools are passing or failing and I'm not even convinced that our state tests . . . are true, valid . . . beta tested tests; that we really should judge a school or judge a child passing or failing by looking at the data on [this] test. And it is a multiple choice test. So we can only get as much data as you can get from a multiple choice test. So there are flaws in the testing system.

A similar point was made by Teacher A: "Oh, I don't know if any test is going to be totally accurate because, you can't predict a kid's day." She reported, "I did notice some of the questions on the math . . . the kids knew [how to solve them] . . . and they got

them wrong.” There were other questions that were not even part of the state core curriculum. ”I was thinking, ‘Where did that question come from?’”

Another point consistent with Jones and Egley’s (2004) research regarding the test not accurately measuring learning was the idea that some students will not perform well on the test (because they are not good test takers, sickness, home issues, etc.). Twenty percent of teachers and principals voiced like concerns. Teacher B8 described an experience she had in her faculty room while discussing the Praxis test. “One of her colleagues said, ‘I would fail it because I am not a good test taker. I panic and I do not do well on the test.’” She explained that got her thinking about her own students. She explained, “You know there are just some kids that very well know the knowledge . . . but it’s a TEST. . . [It is] so big, we spend so much time on it, we spend so much time reviewing and so much time taking the test and there are so many rules, and we have to read the instructions and it is so formal.” The pressure students feel can affect how they perform on the test. Teacher B4 described that she personally feels pressure while taking tests as do many of her students: “I don’t test well. It’s a panic. It’s like okay, I know this is the answer . . . or are they trying to trick me?” She communicated that the importance placed on high-stakes was probably one of the primary reasons her students felt pressure about testing, which was similar to the findings by Johnson and Johnson (2004). She stated, “I think that it puts a pressure on the kids that is unduly warranted because they know of the importance of it and so I think it is scaring a lot of them.” She emphasized “I’ve had kids in the past who have not been on a level and to me it is just pure child abuse to make that kid take a test on a level that they’re not competent enough to do because they spent the whole year in resource.” And “we are trying to build them up,

trying to help them, trying to give them basic skills and then you throw this test at them that they can't even read or understand . . . . I think it is hurting the kids' self-worth because so much emphasis is put on it."

In addition, 35% of teachers and principals said that some of the test questions were not part of the state core curriculum and/or were written to trick students. Three times more of comments (13/17) were made from School A. The focus group from School A discussed the problem of poorly written test questions: "I feel like a lot of questions . . . are tricky, like we didn't teach them in the core" (Teacher A7). "Or even misleading" (Teacher A8). "Yeah, misleading. . . It was set up to trick them" (Teacher A6). Teacher A1 emphasizes that division is not part of the state core curriculum, however, she explained, "So what did they [state] do? They put a division sign [on the CRT test]. And that makes me a little upset. Just because of NCLB, I'm pushing."

Of specific concern was the use of scores from end-of-level tests to make inferences about teachers, students, and schools. In fact, 25% of the teachers and principals said that student learning cannot be measured by a one-time test. Principal B1 explained why this was a concern, "Some even call it [high-stakes tests] the post mortem. . . there are so many variables." He continues, "The kids can have a bad day, they could not have slept that night, they could have not eaten that day . . . the one shot thing does not make sense." Teacher A4 was concerned about the impact testing had on learning: "Sometimes I think there is too much, too much emphasis placed on testing rather than the learning process. Everything can't be measured by a test no matter how good the test is. You just can't measure everything on a test."

Under Theme 6 some teachers and principals (15%) did not distinguish whether the application and accuracy of testing under the NCLB Act was positive or negative. For example, Teacher A4 explained, “It [NCLB] really hasn’t changed the way I feel about testing.”

Despite the concerns listed above, 50% (10) of the teachers and principals reported 11 positive comments that testing under the NCLB provided useful information and that testing holds educators accountable. Forty-five percent of the teachers and principals reported that the test provided useful information about student. The majority (8/11) of the comments were made by School A. Fifty percent of the teachers and principals reported that the test provided useful information about student. Principal B2 explained, “There is a greater emphasis on testing data and really analyzing that it seems like . . . we are continuously reminded of it throughout the year and meeting with teachers on it and looking at data, continuing to set goals and try to make sure the teachers are teaching the core.” Teacher B said, “It gives me information on what areas I’m maybe weak at, I really take that seriously. To go back and look at what I could do better.” Teacher A3 stated, “You don’t ever want to teach to the test, but it is a concern of whether you’re going to make the standard . . . but I like it [CRT data] because you can see the areas you need to work on.” Here we see a theme that also emerged in the literature on NCLB, namely, some of the positive effects that it can have on curriculum and instruction, which, although much fewer than the negative effects, also need to be considered in responding as intelligently as possible to the presence of NCLB at a school site (DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Jones & Egley, 2004; Madaus, et al., 2009).

Twenty-five percent of the teachers and principals reported that the test holds educators accountable. Teacher A3 noted that teachers are now more aware of what they should be teaching: “I think most teachers really do try to do their job, you know, but I think, we feel more accountable, and that is probably a good thing.” Teacher B6 explained that there are a lot of necessary things about standardized testing, but she was concerned about the length of the test and about “making different allowances for understanding the individuals behind the test. She suggested providing “individualized assessments . . . that’s what I was used to in high school.” Teacher B6 described the importance of having a system that “test(s) children. She continued, “There needs to be a way to . . . prove our abilities, that we are capable, because there are bad teachers or lazy teachers. . . There is going to be fault in about anything you come up with I think.”

Although many teachers and principals mentioned some positive attributes of end-of-level tests, they often followed the positive comment with a negative comment. For example, Principal B1 stated that NCLB “has been a great tool for us and motivator for us to focus on the kids individually and the different groups not just our school as a whole. . . . But it needs to be updated because the rest of it is awful.” He explained that the NCLB Act has created impossible expectations and “that the public perception of the school is being really tarnished with public schools because they see, ‘oh you didn’t make AYP.’ and how literally impossible this is to meet the requirements.”

Principal B2 clarified, “We have made changes in how we teach and how . . . we look at subgroups.” Nevertheless . . . we are asking students sometimes to take tests and do things that really are too difficult for them and that is wrong. And when we have that handful of kids that should not take that test, there should be a way that they are not

counted.” Teacher B1 communicated that CRT testing was a good method to measure student progress: “Well I can’t imagine a better way to do it if they want to measure progress you need to have a CRT. . . But to identify the success or failure of a school based on every little subgroup test doesn’t seem right.”

Another theme that emerged was that the test results did not accurately reflect teachers’ ability (Mayes, 2007). Fifty percent (10) of the teachers and principals reported that test results were not an accurate reflection of teachers’ ability. Focus Group B stated: “But then for AYP, it showed we weren’t the best teachers” (Teacher B5).

“Which isn’t accurate” (Teacher B6). “I don’t mind the No Child Left Behind. I would be totally fine with it if I got to choose what students I got. If I get them on grade level, I will make sure they reach grade level.” She continued, “But I don’t have control if I get a student that is a second grade level and I’ve been teaching fourth. That doesn’t make sense. . . I can pull them up one, but to pull them up two grade levels in one year, that is part I think that is frustrating.” (Teacher B5)

Student attendance plays an important role in learning: “The reason I feel frustrated with it this year is because I have a little girl who doesn’t ever come to school until like 10:00 o’clock.” Teacher A4 continued . . . “She hasn’t had science all year long so she failed . . . That tells me that under the No Child Left Behind that I’m a bad teacher, and I know that I’m not. It just reinforces that it is unfair to all of us.”

This topic started a conversation about the role parents and students should play in the accountability process. Fifty percent of teachers and principals were concerned with the lack of parent accountability found under the NCLB Act. Teacher A4 reports, “I think that it is faulty, faulty. . . It is a good goal and that is what we all want. However,

they [educational policymakers] are going about it in the wrong way. They are putting all of the responsibility on teachers, where parents have to have some of that responsibility.” Teacher B3 described similar feelings, “I’m not afraid of being held accountable but I don’t want to be the only one held accountable. Where’s the accountability for children being ready to come to school to learn? Where’s the accountability to see that the child’s homework is done and that they are reading each night?”

Teachers and principals were also concerned about some of their student’s home life. Many of the comments were similar to the comments found in Johnson & Johnson’s (2006) research. For example Teacher B1 explained, “The subgroups, so many at our school have so many major issues... It is just horrific what [some of my students] they have been through in their short lives. And neither of them are . . .Special Ed kids, but I think several of the Special Ed kids have a lot of factors, making it hard for them to [pass the test] and it can’t be totally attributed to the teaching they receive at school. . . It just seems like a really strict way to do it. The No Child Left Behind.”

Fifty percent of the teachers and principals also showed distress in regard the NCLB Act not assessing individual student growth which was also found in Jones & Egley (2004)’s study. The act does not address problems associated with students with learning disabilities. For example, students’ academic levels at the beginning of the school year not measured under the NCLB Act. The vast majority of students with learning disabilities start out below grade level and they generally make slower academic progress. Teacher B3 notes:

I can show a year’s growth but it may not be the end of the fifth grade level they are looking for. And I think that puts a lot of pressure not only on teachers, but I



think it is almost cruel to have some of these kids . . . to take these tests and to feel totally frustrated. Totally the opposite from what we are trying to teach. . . I have taught for 32 years and I want to see them to do their best with what they are able to do. And that might be a C and that is terrific growth.

Teacher A6 discussed how the Act sets students up to fail: “I think they are . . . setting them up to fail too. The really, really, low kids . . . they are progressing, but in small, small [increments] . . . which is not enough . . . to meet the expectation. . . [that] is impossible for them.” Teacher B3 provided another good example of how difficult this can be: “ I worry about my Title One and my Special Ed kids that have to take the fifth grade end of level test and they are on a third grade level, and they came to me on a first grade level.” This effect of NCLB, known in the pedagogical literature as “The Pygmalion Effect,” thus emerged as a salient one in this study (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992).

#### *Themes 2 and 10: Effects on Curriculum*

Several researchers have found that the implementation of high stakes testing can pressure teachers to narrow their curriculum. As a result, the time spent teaching subjects (arts, sciences, social sciences, and physical education) that are not tested under the NCLB Act have dramatically decreased (Smith, 1991; Jones, 2003; Jones et al, 2003; Jones & Egey, 2004; Loschert, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Jehlen, 2006) Likewise, teachers and principals in this study expressed concern with how high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act had affected their curriculum. Particularly, 16 (80%) of the teachers and principals indicated, through 30 comments, that testing narrows the curriculum by encouraging them to spend more time on subjects tested. For example, Teacher A4 stated, “There is

more emphasis put on the things that are tested and less on the things that are not tested.” Other teachers discussed the subjects they were having difficulty finding time to teach subjects other than math and English. Teacher B2 declared, “Oh, no, how do I put it, science left behind, music left behind, dancing left behind. A lot of teachers are disappointed because there is not as much time left for extra activities. I, you know, I feel that too.” Principal B1 reiterated: “Oh, I think we are letting go of a lot of things. We are letting go the arts . . . and sometimes social studies. . . We don’t have . . . as much fun with the kids and so their education . . .their educational experience is not as rich. . . and as well rounded as it was before.”

Writing was a subject that was mentioned more than once. Teacher B7 confessed, “I shouldn’t admit this, but what I give up is writer’s workshop. I give that up because I’m cramming math and reading down their throats.” She continued to explain the benefits of spending more time on writing, “When I did writers workshop, and I did a really good job with it. I shared personal experiences with my children. And I have [previous] students who will come back . . . and they will say, ‘Remember those things?’” Unfortunately, “I don’t do that anymore and I feel really bad, but that’s what I’ve given up to try and help pass AYP.” Principal B2 also talked about a decrease in writing. “There are flaws in the testing system and one thing that really concerns me is the writing aspect.” “We were really making strides and now as we have become more and more . . . determined to make sure we can pass these multiple choice tests I don’t think we are writing as much as we were even three or four years ago in the classroom.” She continued, “[Writing] is one thing that is being pushed to the side at the expense of test prep and practice.” (Principal B2)

Nearly half (9) of the teachers and principals reported specific concerns about the negative effect NCLB has had on the arts in school. Teacher A7 passionately stated, “The arts, they expect us to drop all those and say that it is not as important. . . Yet if they want high test scores and they bring the arts back in it is proven that it will take them back up.” Other teachers who had taught less than 5 years explained how they were disappointed in the lack of time to integrate the arts, Teacher B6 said as a dancer she thought she was going to do “movement, visual arts, and all of these fabulous things and you really don’t have time.” Teacher B6 stated that, “You feel like have to hit the hard core content and there’s not time for the creative arts.” She continued to explain her philosophy: “If I love my job ... the children will know. . . But you are too stressed about the test, the test, the test. The test drives you. The test drives you. It’s not the children it’s not always the children who need it. It’s the test. The test drives you.” Principal A1 described her concern: “I think the kids are affected by the type of instruction that we are giving. . . They are not seeing the depth that they used to.” In addition, “I feel like . . . some of our arts programs have suffered and some of the extracurricular type things that we are not testing are not an emphasis like they were. So now our emphasis truly is math, reading, and science.”

This led to a concern that NCLB did not take into account other important concepts needed to participate in a democratic society. This could indicate that NCLB does not include everything that is needed for a well-rounded education. Teachers from other states have reported similar findings (Jones, et al., 1999). Fifteen percent of the teachers and principals were concerned that the test does not cover many of the things needed for a well-rounded education. Principal A1 stated:

It is unfortunate to me that because that is one of the benefits of public education is for every child to be taught and for every child to have access to knowledge to learn, and to learn democracy. I mean it is one of our three great constitutional rights here in our country.

Teacher B4 explained, “To me it seems like the end to all is passing the test. It’s not enriching the children’s lives with learning. There is a difference between . . . being in the learning communities . . . enriching each other’s lives that way and passing the test. . . a lot of [that] stuff . . . cannot be tested. Principal B1 agreed, “They’re kids, they have to have fun and they need to know about their country and what it means to be a good citizen. We need to spend time on that but there is so much pressure with this other that you know that it is oftentimes neglected.”

Others (20%) voiced a similar concern with Jones and Egley’s (2004) and Loschert et al.’s (2004) results that narrowing curriculum interfered with student understanding. Teacher A7 described her experience: “Well, just last year we sat down as a team and every day we had a math concept we had to teach and I finally said, ‘My class can’t keep up.’” She continued, “I finally had to come to the realization that I was teaching a program not kids. And that’s not how it should be, but NCLB teaches programs not kids. And that is really hard.” Teacher A9 made a similar comment, “It just seems like a lot of times we just have to worry about filling time, instead of filling the individual student with what they need in their own way, just to make sure that they pass the CRT’s.” Teacher B6 explained why she felt her school was not getting the results they wanted:

They [students] are exhausted. And you can see it on their faces and you’re tired

and after a while I just think that all of this pushing is not getting results. They're children. They need the movement they need a lot of different variety.

Teacher A5 described losing valuable teaching moments: "You are so worried about passing those tests instead of . . . going with the kids and learning things that they are interested in." She continued, "You can't . . . extend . . . and enrich . . . enrichment . . . opens up learning to me, and the thirstiness, the real learning, the true love of learning."

Under Theme 10, similar to the findings of Jones & Egley who had 6.6% of the teachers in their study, four teachers and principals in this study made seven positive comments regarding the curriculum being taught under the NCLB Act. Principal B2 explained:

One of the good things that have come from the law is a focus on the curriculum. As a principal, it has given me the chance to really say. . . 'our stewardship is to make sure that students learn the core curriculum'. . . I don't know if NCLB is really the catalyst that made us really stop and focus more on curriculum, but I think it has been the . . . curriculum maps [that communicate to teachers], 'I need to make sure you are staying on course . . . you are teaching, and your students are learning the core curriculum.'

Principal A1 agreed, "It [NCLB] has probably made it us look a little more closely to the curriculum and exactly what we teach and what is the most important. And what is the fluff . . . we [can] get rid of." Teacher A3 described that her team had "narrowed it [the curriculum] down . . . because over the years we know what is important and what is . . . fluff . . . you definitely want to get to the meat. . .

Our awareness is heightened, so in turn we serve our students better because of it.”

However, she then added, “Although, I don’t love NCLB.”

*Themes 3, 7, and 11: Effects on Teaching and Learning*

Another theme that paralleled other studies on NCLB regarding teaching and learning emerged (Jones et al, 2003; Ahlquist (2004); Jones & Egley (2004); Mayes (2005); Madaus et al, 2009). Ninety-five percent of the teachers and principals reported 82 examples of how high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act had negatively affected teaching and learning. The most repeated objection of the effects on teaching (90% of teachers and principals) was that they had to spend a great deal of time preparing for the tests and “teaching to the test.” Teachers and principals reported that test preparation was taking time and focus away from other important learning. Teacher B4 responded, “I think that we have gone to where the learning has ceased and it is all about passing the test at the end of the year. . . sometimes it’s all just go in the labs and practice the test, practice the test, practice the test, practice the test.” Principal A1 explained part of the problem: “I think sometimes we are focused on the results of just the CRT’s instead of education in general. . . I feel like we are spending too much time on just how questions are worded.” Principal B2 had the same concerns. She asked, “Are we teaching to a test? . . . I hope we’re not. . . Are we spending too much time preparing for the test? . . . Maybe.” She warned, “I think we need to really watch that pendulum and make sure it doesn’t swing too far. I felt like since the last raise in the cut scores that people have felt more pressure to really hone in and maybe teach to the test more [and] that is unhealthy.” Teacher A5 responded, “I think it [NCLB] is always on your mind. It controls what I teach all the time. . . Even when Christmas comes around” She added, “I don’t want to

look bad.” Teacher B3 described feeling guilty if she was not “hammering in those core. . . subjects.” She explained, “I think that it has [affected teaching and learning]. You don’t feel as free to do that [expand on subjects students show an interest in] like I used to years ago.”

Another problem is that the tests do not provide results in a timely manner. This is a problem that was also communicated by the teachers in Jones and Egle’s (2004) research: “Getting that information [test results], which ironically we got the day before school starts. . . [is] another big flaw in our system here in Utah”. Teacher A3 described similar feelings, “First of all I wish the feedback was sooner. . . So you didn’t have all summer to go and kind of forget.”

Forty percent of teachers and principals also reported that high-stakes testing takes time and focus away from meeting the individual academic needs of students. Alquist (2004) and Echols and Echols-Williams (2004) found similar findings. Principal A1 explained that when:

We are working with students with any level of disability or disadvantaged we’re trying to accommodate and literally have tiers of [accommodations] for them. . . And yet when we test, they are given a test that is way above their level to read. So I just think it is a constant stress for them and a reminder that they are not there yet. . . Of course we are always working to get them to grade level . . . But if they are not at that level and they are expected to take that test. . . I think that is very detrimental to a student. And I don’t think it is fair for a teacher to have to give a child a test that they know they are not prepared for. So I think it is hard on both.

Teacher A6 described the one of the problems of testing all students in the same way: “Individual children have different needs and they learn different ways but we have to test them all the same way.” Teacher A5 communicated a similar message: “I see all kinds of students at one school and they are making every kid fit this one mold. And I think it has caused more trouble than what they wanted. . . . Everyone is not the same [yet] . . . they want us to teach the same. Teacher A3 gave a similar example about how NCLB impacted a student in her class: “I have a girl in my class who came into second grade not reading, but she has moved up probably seven levels. She’s not on grade level . . . but nobody tried harder and she made huge progress.” She continued to explain the problem, “She probably won’t be reading on level by the time she leaves third grade, but the improvement she made was huge.”

Fewer, (15%) of the teachers and principals expressed that NCLB had not affected their teaching and learning. For example, after being asked about the time spent preparing students for testing Teacher A2 responded in the following way: “Maybe I’m terrible. I don’t really think about that a lot. I think as the years go by and I get more experience. I have done more to study with them and help them but I don’t even think of the NCLB. I just do it.” Teacher B3 had similar thoughts on the subject, “I . . . think that all the years I’ve been teaching . . . I pretty much . . . have the same blocks on math and Language Arts. I don’t think that I’m . . . teaching longer periods than I would before.”

In comparison to the comments above, twenty-five percent of the teachers and principals made at least one positive comment regarding teaching and learning and the NCLB Act. Similarly, 37 (6.1%) of teachers in Jones and Egley’s (2004) study made at least one positive comment regarding teaching and learning. Seven of the 9 comments in



the present study were made by school B. Principal B2 shared the following thoughts: “I have seen great positive things that have been filled by really drilling down that data, and not just taking the averages and going, ‘Whoopee were doing great!’” She explained, “We have really made changes in how we teach and [in the] inservice that we conduct and the way we conduct business here, because we look at subgroups.” Teacher B1 talked about school traditions that got in the way of learning, “And some of those traditions maybe should have been dropped anyway so we could focus more on academics.” Teacher B2 described NCLB as a catalyst of change. “I’m hoping that it [NCLB] will be the impetus for a much needed change. I hate to say it. But I think that it is helping us make some changes that we probably needed in our public education system.” She admitted, “I would never say it in faculty meeting, or anything like that, but I see some good things happening because of it [NCLB].”

*Themes 4 and 8: Effects on Teacher, Student, and Principal Motivation*

The themes concerning student, teacher and principal motivation, had the highest number of responses. One hundred percent of the teachers and principals made 204 responses in this theme. While lawmakers, politicians and the public often focus on the achievement of students in public school, teachers and principals seem to be equally as concerned about the impact of high-stakes testing on student and teacher motivation (Field, Cohler, & Wool, 1989).

*Student Motivation*

Eighty-five percent of the teachers and principals (17) commented that the testing had caused students to feel too much pressure and stress. Because researchers have found that high student anxiety or stress can have negative effects on student performance, these

concerns should be taken seriously and not merely pushed aside as support that teachers and students need to “work harder” or “toughen up” (Jones et al. 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Johnson & Johnson; 2006; Madaus, 2009; Mayes, 2007). Focus group from School B said the following about their students: “‘I’m so nervous to take the test.’ And I will say, ‘You’re going to do fine’” (Teacher B6). “‘I’m scared’” (Teacher B7). “‘Crying. I have criers’” (Teacher B). “‘Sick to my stomach. . . I didn’t sleep well last night. I cried all last night’” (Teacher B4). See I give one test per day and I always make sure that it’s in the morning. I did that with the ITBS and I still had kids who just felt bad” (Teacher B7). Teacher A1 described her classroom, “‘Oh yeah. I think they [students] are feeling my stress. I’m feeling my principal’s stress. Oh they are very in tune. They definitely know when their teacher is having a bad day.’” She continued, “‘I’m sure all of the children in this building have felt it is end-of-year testing. It radiates through the faculty. . . we are telling them. . . ‘This is really important, please be focused.. .do your best work’. . . Sure they feel it [stress].’”

Teacher B7 stated, “‘Well this year they [students] have felt way more stressed. . . . and some of my really high kids had anxiety.’” Johnson and Johnson (2004) described how difficult high-stakes testing was on their students. Principal B2 shared similar examples:

I think it is almost criminal that we take these little kids who have learning disabilities and . . . [who are] obviously . . . reading and performing way below grade level (that’s why they have an IEP) and then I put that test in front of them and make them endure 100 reading questions that are way over their ability. And I

think those kinds of horrible things that are part of the law . . . are the things that need to be taken out.

Teacher A1 described similar instances of how high-stakes testing had affected some of her students: “It is so unfair to put a pencil and paper in their hand and say this is the only way you will be evaluated”. She explained, “It is just not right because they are intelligent, creative, [and] they have such talents. . . it just breaks their little self esteems.” There has got to be a multitude of different ways to evaluate someone.” For example, “This year . . . I have a little eight-year-old who cannot take tests. Bless her heart. . . I do it orally. Oh my goodness, she is amazing! . . . We need to make accommodations for that.” This deleterious effect of NCLB on student creativity was also noted in the literature review (Kozol, 1996; Mayes, 1996; Mayes, 2007).

On the other hand, twenty percent of the teachers/principal portrayed in at least one comment that high-stakes testing had not affected their students’ motivation. Teacher A2 said, “I think they are oblivious to it [NCLB]. . . .I don’t think that has changed because the same kids before who stressed on tests, stress now. You try and help them with that but I don’t think there’s been that big of a difference.” Teacher B2 made a similar comment: “I don’t think they are aware of it that much, other than how it affects my teaching, my emphasis.” Such comments were rare, however.

Over half (65%) of the teachers and principals also talked specifically about NCLB being inappropriate for students with learning disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, etc. These findings are comparable to the findings by Jones et al. (2003), Price (2004), and Taylor (2004). Teacher B6 explained, “My self-contained student is on a first grade level in all subjects and he had to take the third grade math test

and he hasn't even seen multiplication, he hasn't seen subtraction with regrouping." She continued, "And then he gets to the computer and there it is and he panicked and I don't think that it was a success." Teacher B6 added, "It just becomes a negative thing instead and then all test-taking carries on that same kind of resentment."

Principal B1 questioned the reason for subjecting students to failure: "Yeah, that doesn't make any sense. . . We just set them up to fail and that is all." He then described discussing test results with parents, at parent teacher conferences, "'Here's your student's test and they failed it' and oftentimes those kids are sitting there. . . What good does that do?" Principal B2 described the problems associated with testing students who are in the process of learning English: "You put that test in front of a student who [is] just learning the English language and it's overwhelming. . . I just truly believe that we are asking students sometimes to take tests and do things that really are too difficult for them and, and that is wrong." For instance, "When we have that handful of kids that should not take that test, there should be a way that they are not counted." She suggested, "We are looking at their IEP data . . . at their data from their ESL teacher, we are still making decisions based on that data, but we don't make them endure that test that is too difficult for them." As a result, "I do have problems of whether it is ethical to put students through that."

Seventy-three (12%) of the teachers in Jones and Egley's (2004) study found that high-stakes testing negatively affected students' interest, pleasure, and creativity in school. Likewise 65% of the teachers and principals in this study noted that school was not as much fun. Teacher A7 said, "Well and it has taken the fun out of a lot of things. We have so many programs that have been cut because of time commitments and they

say this is what we are mandated to do.” Principal B1 described the students educational experience: “Oh, I think we are letting go a lot of things. . . We don’t have fun . . . with the kids and so their . . . educational experience is not as rich.” Teacher A1 shared her fears regarding losing student creativity:

I’m afraid that with our atmosphere . . . we will all have everyone thinking . . . [and] structured the same . . . We are going to be losing some real great creative minds that can do amazing things. . . That is one of my fears. That we are . . . losing some creativity in teaching kids how to reach out and explore when they find a passion, because we can’t in [how] . . . my [current classroom is] structured.

In addition, 40 percent of the teachers and principals reported that the testing negatively affected the relationships they had with students. This was a new finding that was not mentioned in the research discussed in Chapter 2. Teacher B6 explained: “Somehow your students have to know that you love them, to earn that respect. They have to feel safe. And they have to have all these things.” Things have changed. ”We are very academic driven [now] and a lot of the personal can’t be there as much, your personality and those extra things can’t be there as much.” Principal B1 stated, “I think that if you let the law take over and govern everything you do I think you could affect the relationships especially with the teachers and kids.” He explained, “If they are so focused on instruction . . . [and] curriculum and they are not focused on the kids I think it could definitely affect their interaction.” Teacher B5 asserted, “I’m so worried about the test. It is straight to the point. ‘Come in, sit down, be quiet, listen, [and] get busy.’” Teacher A5 provided a similar description: “As a school teacher you do not have as much free time to

involve yourself with kids where they get to know you. . . . I used to know my students a lot better than I do now.” She explained, “you are so into preparation, testing them, scoring, and things. . . .The demands are huge.”

#### *Teacher/Principal Motivation*

A common finding in other research (Jones et al. 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Loschert et al. 2004; Madaus et al. 2009) regarding high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act found that teachers were feeling stress from the pressure of the tests. Likewise, several teachers and principals (95%) reported (in 87 comments) that they were feeling stress from the pressure of the tests. Fifty-one out of the 87 comments were made by School B. A focus group conversation from School A had the following conversation about stress: “I think maybe that it is causes some kids to fail, but I think it sets teachers up to fail too. And you take the fun out of it” (Teacher A7). “And it takes the fun out of it for us too” (Teacher A6). “You start getting more and more stressed. I mean anxiety over end of year testing. You’re thinking, ‘Did I teach enough of this. . .? And all of sudden, ‘I don’t know’ . . . You become so focused on the wrong things” (Teacher A7).

Teacher B7 said, “It is more stressful. If you are a failing school years in a row, we know that it is not good. The results are sent home.” Teacher B5 talked about when the stress starts. “The worst thing is the stress doesn’t start right now. It started clear back in August for us when we found out we didn’t pass. I don’t know about you guys but I felt the weight of it.” Teacher A1 explained some of the reasons she was feeling stress: “Oh my goodness, I’ve got to perform or I’m going to be in such trouble and from the superintendent down to the child are all feeling the same thing.” She continued, “The

teacher is more stressed, 'I've always got to do more, there is always something more now', and it is a job that never ends as it is. And then with the NCLB it has just been magnified."

In conjunction with research by Jones & Egley (2004) and Johnson and Johnson (2004), 80 percent of the teachers and principals said that teacher morale at their school was lower. Teacher A7 described how the stress of testing has caused her to question whether or not she wanted to continue teaching:

I love teaching but I have found over the years, especially this time of the year with the testing, I start thinking, 'well maybe I should do something else.' I mean the nightmares, just the worry. You start to think, 'Okay what if they don't pass that? I didn't do a good job'. You start to second guessing yourself. . . I start battling it and thinking I just want to be a Wal-Mart greeter and stay home and not worry about every little thing. Then I think, 'No I love my job'. But it is the kids that you love and want to work with. But all of this other stuff, I think that it takes its toll.

Teacher B6 explained her feelings: "Yeah, it's unfair. And you get down on yourself and think, 'why do I even do this? Am I really making a difference?'" Principal A1 described her teachers' morale since NCLB: "I've seen a change in . . . teacher morale with . . . the testing . . . and the emphasis on it."

Along with lowering teacher morale was the idea that NCBL had caused some teachers to not want students who are behind academically placed in their class. Ten percent of the teachers and principals made comments about this. Principal A1 stated, "I think teachers are a little bit more hesitant to have an ESL . . . [or] a self-contained

student in their class.” She explained, “I hate to see teachers expressing that much frustration to me because I worry about the carry over it will have in their class.” Unfortunately, “There are concerns [among some teachers] with having those kids in their class because they know it will lower their test scores.” (Principal A1)

Principal B2 explained that it can be difficult in collaboration meetings for teachers whose students are continually not scoring where some of the other teachers on her team are. She explained that no matter how hard a principal tries to balance classes, “sometime[s] one teacher . . . has more kids that struggle in her class [than other teachers]. Therefore she is going to have a harder time testing.”

Similar to the studies (Jones et al. 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004) finding students not having as much fun in school, 55% of the teachers and principals in this reported that teaching was not as much fun or as creative since the implementation NCLB. School A made 2.4 (17/24) more comments in this category than School B. Teacher A7 responded, “Well and it has taken the fun out of a lot of things. We have so many programs that have been cut because of time commitments and they say this is what we are mandated to do.” Teacher A8 explained, “I don’t have the fun with my students that I’m teaching. . . I think what part of it is you can only be outside for this many minutes, you don’t get to do this, you don’t get to do that, and they are going ‘argh.’” Teacher B5 said, “That’s my bias, what I hate about it. It takes the fun out of teaching and no matter whatever happens it has too many flaws.” Teacher B8 described how NCLB affected her teaching experience:

I didn’t really understand NCLB. . . I hadn’t seen the test, nobody told me how important it was to make sure I taught everything on the core, or how in depth I needed to go, and how hard to hit it. And so I actually came in and was excited about all of the



things I learned in school... I went full force in that direction and did a lot of writing, I love creative writing. . . I felt through creative writing . . . I had a very close relationship with my kids last year. And this year, I have not done half of what I did last year, \because I . . . saw the test. I saw that we didn't pass. I started to see implications of it and thought, 'Oh wow, I didn't realize this is what this is all about.' So this year has been very different for me. And I still feel like I have a good relationship with my kids, but it hasn't been as fun for me.

Research has shown that with high-stakes testing, teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession or transfer from a low SES school to a higher SES school (Smith, 1991; Jones et al., 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Jones & Egley, 2004; Madaus, 2009). Similarly, 55% of the teachers and principals in this study voiced a concern that since NCLB, teachers were leaving the teaching profession of transferring to higher SES schools. Teacher A8 described a young teacher leaving the profession for these reasons:

I've got a family member who has taught for 9 years and is leaving education for that very reason. It has taken away all of the fun. You can't have individual teacher personalities anymore. A dynamic teacher is leaving, walking away and saying, 'I will never come back to it because I cannot be my personality.' And that is a loss in the education system. And it is not just one person I've heard others say, 'I would rather go out and flip hamburgers than have my personality taken away from me, in an educational setting' . . . Personally I'm seeing more and more of it. The longer I teach the more I see it. That's sad.

The focus group from School B described their experience when their school did

not make AYP. “It was horrid. Just horrid. And it was not like my class did poorly. But . . . it’s still that stress. [As a result] we have a lot of teachers leaving to Non- Title One schools” (Teacher B8). “Really, I didn’t know that” (Teacher B6)? “And I’ve heard many of them say when they have left, ‘how much more they are enjoying their job. They’re not stressed. They are able to teach a little bit more how they want to’” (Teacher B8). Principal B2 described the situation of one of her teachers transferring to a higher SES due to their school not making AYP: “I actually had a teacher, a first grade teacher who choose to change schools.” Principal B2 explained that she was positive and let her teachers know much they were appreciated and her teacher still said, “You know I work my tail off for my first graders and for this school and have for many years and then I have to see my school in the newspaper saying, ‘school failed AYP.’” As a result she transferred to one of the highest SES schools in the district. “When you label a school passing or failing. . . you are encouraging our best and brightest, and most experienced teachers to go elsewhere where it is easier to pass those tests. . .and where parent support is higher” (Principal B2).

Teacher A5 expressed her thoughts about leaving the teaching profession: “Me personally, if I was on the other end, and starting over, I would think twice about going into teaching with the demands they have on us and the pay they give us.” She continued, “It used to be more of a rewarding self thing, it was fun. But now there is so much pressure.”

Another new finding with teachers and principals was in regards to high-stakes testing negatively affecting their relationships with other teachers. Fifty-five percent of the teachers and principals talked about this. Teacher A3 explained: “I’ve seen it [NCLB]

raise the stress level in some and I think that affects how people work with each other.” Focus Group B described a situation that occurred in their school: “Well one year we were handed out the scores, and we all saw the third grade. I saw the other two third grade scores and mine, and I was wondering, ‘what are they thinking about my scores?’” (Teacher B7)? “Uh, huh, the competition” (Teacher B8). “The comparison and competition” (Teacher B7).

Other new findings were that some teachers and principals (45%) reported that high-stakes testing negatively affected their school and/or classroom environment/culture. Principal B2 said the following: “I do think that it does affect your culture to have such an emphasis on testing.” She explained that it would be helpful to have the same emphasis on student learning as they do with collaboration, “because it’s on-going testing and it is really . . . guiding how we teach and we are working together in that format and supporting each other.” However, “With CRT’s it’s not like that. It’s looking at that just one time testing and then we are continually beating it to death all year.” Principal B1 said, “I think it has made it [the school culture] a little more tense. We have to be very careful. I can’t count how many times I have said to the staff, ‘the kids are the most important thing. It is not this test. . . The kids are the most important thing.’” Teacher B3 described the same tense feeling: “It is a real tense feeling while we are testing. Not only for the kids, but just the whole environment in the school, the teachers are much more tense. . . You can almost see and feel the tension in the building during the test.”

Teacher B4 said the following regarding her classroom environment: “And it is that environment that you create that is a good nurturing one in your classroom I think

has suffered, because . . .if you don't pass the test? . . I think that is what is suffering.”

Teacher A5 made a similar comment: “I think it has kind of liked stifled teaching . . .and I think we are more structured and it is not a natural environment, it is more boring, you know.” Teacher A1 also talked about the classroom environment: “My concern is in our environment. . . we are not making the children creative. I think our great scientists our great researcher is because their minds can explore. . . I'm afraid that with our atmosphere we are not developing that.”

As noted earlier in this study, an important part of school culture is traditions. Twenty-five percent of the teachers and principals reported that high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act had not particularly affected their traditions, which is an important part of school culture. Principal B2 reported, “I think we work really hard to keep [school traditions] . . . like carnivals. . . We do in the evenings so we don't take up school time.” She continued, “We are trying to keep the really great traditions and . . . still be able to spend enough time on the curriculum so the kids can learn.” Principal B1 made similar comments: “We've kept those in place . . . It is very important to keep those traditions going with the kid and with the staff. So yeah, we've kept those things going.” Teacher B3 reported, “We still have the school carnival. I don't think it has really changed traditions.” However, “I think it has changed teachers where they don't have much time to get to their personal . . . enjoyable goals, because you just have to drill the core.”

Along with students and teachers feeling the stress over high-stakes testing, 30% of the teachers and principals reported that principals are feeling the stress of NCLB. Teacher B5 stated: “You can just feel more of a stress, more of a tension from . . . the school district, to the principal, to passing. And it is . . . passing right down to the teacher

and I feel right to the student.” Teacher B7 said, “A lot of his (principal’s) focus. . . our faculty meetings . . . everything we do, everything that we are, seems to be focused on how can we better help our children . . . pass this test.” Teacher A1 also mentioned what her principal focused on in faculty meetings: “In faculty meetings (the principal) will say, ‘Now remember to be using your Utips, do everything [to prepare the students for the test].’ I can feel her stress. You know, you can feel it.” Teacher A3 described principals were under more pressure than teachers: “I think principals feel more pressure than teachers do because they want their school to reach adequate yearly progress. . . I think it is more of a frustration to a principal than it is for a teacher.”

Sixty percent of the teachers stated that NCLB had not affected their relationship with their principal. Teacher B1 explained that principals, “talk about the testing and how important it is.” But “they make a real effort to let us know that we are appreciated and to do the best you can, you can’t do more than that. So I don’t think it has affected my relationship with them.” Teacher B2 described a similar relationship with her principal, “I never felt threatened. (She) had a really good way of explaining so everyone could understand. And I think she was worried, but she never made anyone feel like we were under the gun.” She continued, “She made us feel like we were an important part and that everyone was needed to accomplish the task. She understood it well enough, so she knew exactly what needed to be done.” This finding suggests that teacher-principal relationships, when strong, are perhaps able to withstand the presence of NCLB at a school site—another reason for promoting professional learning communities at schools sites since such communities can both build upon and reinforce the ties that already exist, even under the pressure of NCLB, as evidenced in this study (Matthews & Crow, 2003).

Similar to the Smith & Egley's (2004) findings, 25% of the teachers and principals in this study said that the tests did not cause them to work harder. Teacher A4 stated that she was frustrated with NCLB but "I don't think my teaching has changed because of it, and I don't think the way . . . that I test has changed." If offended her that policymakers send a message that "now that we passed this law, you will stop leaving those kids behind that you did before." She explained, "That is really offensive to most teachers."

Some teachers and principals (30%) reported that they try to not let NCLB impact their motivation. Teacher B2 explained that although a lot of people do not like the NCLB Act, she said, "I don't let anything like that affect me. I've been through enough. I've been through lots of lots of lots of fads and I don't think is a fad, but I've been through lots of changes and lots of principals, I have had eight" she explained and she does not let it policies affect her. Teacher A2 described her coping skills: "I guess I try not to think about it too much because it can be overwhelming . . . There's not an awful lot you can do about it. You just try to stay positive about it. . . You hear all of the negatives [about NCLB] but whatever." Teacher A3 explained her personal teaching philosophy: "I have seen some teachers who let it worry them. Maybe it is my personality, I try to do the best I can and I want the kids to achieve, but I don't let it overrule who I am and how I'm going to teach." She continued, "I'm trying to teach it all anyway, but I have seen some teachers . . .stressed so much that they almost become ineffective in some ways because they are so worried about it."

Twenty-five percent of the teachers and principals said that NCLB had not affected their relationship with their students. Teacher A1 stated, "I don't, I hope not. No,

you know you do care for them and they care for you. You are bonded and I hope it has not negatively impacted them. I would hate to think that.” Likewise, 25% of the teachers and principals said that NCLB had not affected their relationship with teachers. Teacher A5 answered, “I don’t see anything that is pulling the teachers apart.”

There were no positive comments regarding teacher and student motivation.

*Theme 5: Other Negative Effects on Education*

The last negative theme consisted of several singular categories that did not fit into any of the other themes. I felt that it was important to include these categories because these subjects were important to many of the teachers and principals. Similar to other studies cited in the literature review, sixty percent of the teachers and principals stated that NCLB needed to be changed, which was similar to other research results (Jones & Egley; 2004; Loschert; 2004; Madaus et al. 2009). Four times more comments in this category (20/25) were made by School B. Teacher A6 said, “I just think if they are going to have something like that [change NCLB]; they need to give more support.” Teacher B8 discussed changes for special need students; “I believe that they should be tested on the level they are at. My resource students who are in fourth grade that are going to resource or self-contained should not have to take the fourth grade CRT.”

Principal B1 remarked:

Get some new people in Washington that will change the laws so that it would make sense. . . Keep the good things and get rid of the impossible expectations that we can’t meet. . . They’re kids. They have to have fun and they need to know about their country and what it means to be a good citizen. We need to spend time

on that but there is so much pressure with this other that you know that it is oftentimes neglected.

Along with changing NCLB, thirty-five percent of the teachers and principals recommended that alternate assessments be used in place of/or in conjunction with the end of year tests found under NCLB. Teacher B6 explained, “I think a teacher is constantly assessing. There are so many things that you are aware of just watching them interacting.” She continued, “There [are] all of these different ways to show your learning.” Like Defour (2004) shows in his research, teachers have more faith in formative assessments. Teacher B7 stated, “For me the (district) benchmark is a better assessment for reading.” Teacher A1 described effective informal assessments:

I think there are a lot of different ways. . . Maybe because there is a lot of different people. . . We do need to make those accommodations and I think that observation is an excellent way to evaluate. Just walking through your room with a clipboard, just a check mark, ‘Do they get it? Do they not get it?’ . . . As long as you can help them improve and . . . you are always working to bring up even those who are already high and see how you can stretch them.

Teacher A5 explained assessing learning: “You want to individualize it [learning]. So, especially the children [who are] behind [receive more] individualized [instruction]. Maybe they are on a slower route than the rest” but you ensure that they are making progress, “from point A to point B, individually.”

Teachers and principals (25%) expressed that their expertise and voices were not being heard by lawmakers and policymakers and reported that they had not been included in the process of creating the NCLB Act. Teachers and principals’ perception of not



being heard could have created some of the resistance being reported. As Matthews and Crow (2003) describe, “Although not all problems you face can be solved by giving people a listening ear, refusing to hear or ignoring individuals and groups that want to be heard is likely to aggravate the situation and intensify the negative aspects of the conflict” (p. 206; Jones & Egley, 2004). This belief is consistent with the teacher/principal voices reported in this study as well as other studies on high-stakes testing (Bol & Nunnery; 2001; Ahlquist, 2004; Jones & Egley, 2004; Taylor 2004; Madaus, 2009). Principal B2 communicated:

I do have problems of whether it is ethical to put students through that. I want to know if the legislators that put this on the table would love to be handed a final exam from medical school and have it set in front of you and say, ‘You endure this you know these 100 questions and your job depends on it or your school will pass or fail because of it.’ . . . Adults would never be comfortable with doing that. And we do that to children. And so you know, I have a lot of problems with it that way.

Teacher A3 stated: “I really honestly to bottom line it, I feel like No Child Left Behind was . . . a political move by a President who wanted to say, ‘Hey look at me. I’m involved in education.’ She continued, “He was totally out of line doing it. He didn’t know what he was doing. . . . We need accountability, and that is fine, but as far as No Child Left Behind, it was just a blanket political move.” Teacher A4 communicated: “They get away with it. We know that it is not a good idea. I used to be a lot angrier about it than I am now because I think a lot of people and politicians are starting to see that it is ridiculous and just kind of laugh.” She explained, “And I think maybe teachers

are starting to see that there is nothing we can do about it, so let's just laugh about how stupid it is." Nevertheless, "Maybe administrators don't feel that way because they are feeling more pressure about making adequate yearly progress for the whole school, but I think teachers have been really angry but they are just starting to think" that "it is stupid, why be angry about something that is stupid and that you can't do anything about?"

Teacher A5 suggested that policymakers spend some time in the classroom: "I think that whoever made the NCLB should spend a year, a few days, a month and just see, what . . . a struggling child is faced with." She explained, "It's not fair to that child, or taking away from other children, or the pressures on the teachers. . . I think that their intentions were well meant, but it hasn't been effective."

Further, similar to the findings from Berliner and Biddle (1995), Kozol (2006), and Jones and Egley (2004), 25% of the teachers and principals believed that NCLB was creating a negative perception of public education (stigma on Title 1 and low performing schools and many parents do not understand NCLB). Six of the seven comments were made by School B. Principal B1 said, "I think that the public perception of the school has been really tarnished with public schools because they see 'Oh you didn't make AYP.'" He continued, "I think that one of our jobs as principals is to get the word out to the community the good things that are going on in the schools and how literally impossible this is to meet the requirements."

Twenty percent of the teachers and principals also stated that NCLB promoted charter and private schools which takes students and funding away from regular public schools. Five times as many comments in this category were made by School A. Teacher B6 explained: "I had a couple of parents who were concerned about having their children

at this school. They actually pulled them out and had them go to a charter school.” But, “they ended up leaving the charter school, which was not providing the education that they were pleased with, and brought them back [because they] found that they were happier here.” She continued, “There are a lot of implications back to the public schools when that happens, all the money that is lost, all the catching up, and re-teaching...that is frustrating.” Teacher A4 discussed another problem with charter schools: “Our legislators in Utah are way out of line in how much money they are giving to charter schools. They are not a true charter. [They make] exceptions from the law and I think that it is really unfair.”

Principal B1 felt that NCLB was a political game or tool—a theme also voiced by teachers in Jones and Egleys’s (2004) study. Principal B1 communicated that the NCLB Act is the product of our legislators wanting our public schools to fail rather than providing support and helping our schools get better. He continued, “I feel like a lot of it is leaning toward a business model. I don’t know if they are hoping to be able to have more people want to go private or what they are trying to do with some of that, I’m assuming it’s just to use funding elsewhere.” He responded, “It is unfortunate to me because . . . one of the benefits of public education is for every child to be taught and for every child to have access to knowledge to learn, and to learn democracy.” He explained, “I mean it is one of our three great constitutional rights here in our country and to feel like the legislation doesn’t fully understand that anymore is frustrating to me.”

Another concern shared by 20% of the teachers and principals was that high-stakes tests encouraged competition among teachers. Twenty-three teachers (3.8%) in Jones and Egleys’s (2004) research reported this as well. Principal B2 explained: “I also

see it with teacher to teacher. Teachers will discuss how many resource kids they have in their class or you know ‘my kids are lower this year.’ And they are bugged by that.” She continued, “You can kind of hear it in their tone with when looking at data and how they are testing. . . They seem to be a little more ornery with each other sometimes because of the way we have that set up.” As a result, “I do think that does affect your culture to have such an emphasis on testing.”

Twenty percent of the teachers and principals reported that the NCLB puts too much emphasis on teachers being highly qualified (passing two Praxis tests, portfolios, etc.). This was a finding that was not discovered in the other research reviewed. All of the comments in this category were made by School B. The teachers described how the stress of getting highly qualified negatively affected their teaching ability. Teacher B5 stated, “Those two things alone, passing the praxis and doing the district or state portfolio has totally wiped me out. Last summer I took the essay praxis and missed it by a couple of points.” He continued to explain, “And I’ve spent a year not sleeping at night . . . Just because of all of the stress of some stupid test that I missed by a couple of points, because somebody didn’t like how I worded something.” Teacher B8 explained that during her first few years of teaching she was working on “trying to get your basics put together in your lesson plans, in your thought, your organizing, your management.” Then, “You [have] to create a portfolio, and study and stress over the [Praxis] test. . . It’s really a distraction . . . I taught two years back in the early ninety’s and just came back last year.” But, “because of the No Child Left Behind . . . I had . . . to take two Praxis’ tests and do a portfolio to become a Level 2 or highly qualified teacher. So that has just added to the chaos of it all.”

Ten percent of teachers and principals stated that NCLB takes money away from students with more critical needs. Alquist (2004) and Taylor (2004) discussed the problems associated with lack of funding in their findings. Teacher B5 described the lack of funding by NCLB:

The idea of a NCLB basically says that no child is supposed to be left behind, but a child that is left behind, or is behind [is not given funding] to give that student extra help. They just don't do it. And if we don't . . . make NCLB . . . they actually take it [funding] away so we have less to work with the following year and if we fail it two years in a row not only do they give us less funding, but our school will have to pay to bus our students to elsewhere to a school [that] is making NCLB, which makes no sense.

*Theme 12: Professional Learning Communities and Collaboration have had a Positive Effect on School Culture*

Seventy percent of the teachers and principals reported that they have witnessed positive cultural changes since the implementation of professional learning communities and collaboration. Although they had noticed this positive cultural change during the same or similar time period of the enactment of NCLB, they did not refer to NCLB as being part of/or instrumental in application of starting PLC's and collaboration in their schools. One of the benefits of collaboration was that it helped eliminate competition among teachers and that it helped them focus on helping all students learn not just the students in their own class. Focus Group A explained: "I don't know if this has to do with the NCLB, but you've talked about the principal and change. I have felt just even the last little bit as [our principal] has brought on the PLC's." She continued, "I hate it when

there is competition on teachers. It's like..." (Teacher A7). "I'm so much better "(Teacher A6). "Yeah. So she [principal] said, 'You know what? We have to be there as a team, just because this little boy is in this class, it doesn't mean that it isn't your responsibility. You have to help that teacher.'" And "I thought that is really the kind of thing we need, to get to have this work . . . we all take that on as a group and [share] great ideas" and not have the mindset that "I don't want to share because I want the kids to like me more. . . I think you see that sometimes . . . She was talking about a . . . more collaborative type effort. I like that." Teacher B3 explained similar benefits of collaboration: "We are in the beginning stages of collaboration. We are mainly focusing on math but we are adding language arts and we are just taking this a little at a time." She explained that they have been "re-teaching, re-enhancing, and enriching. And by . . . collaborating, we feel a little bit more [responsibility for] the [entire] fifth grade. You get to know the other kids in the classroom . . . that is a big benefit."

Teachers/principals described the positive effects of collaboration on curriculum and relationships with other teachers: "For the last couple of years our relationships have changed. There's not the competition. . .now I feel like everyone[s] on the same page . . . and the team can decide whether to go with it" (Teacher A6). Teacher A2 stated, "More collaboration, teachers on the same page, communicating with each other in those collaborations to help us better, you know what are you doing in math, finding the best ways to teach, getting new ideas. . . The collaboration has been big." Principal B1 shared similar experiences: "We have the collaboration thing going that we didn't have going before, you focus on the assessments and how to help the kids more individually, but I think that it a change." But "I think there is more talk among the teachers too about the

dreaded NCLB and trying to find answers (during collaboration).” Principal B2 explained that collaboration helped teachers identify students who would benefit from extra programs: “We are doing more with Reading Recovery. . . Star Tutoring and Waterford.” She continued, “I think there is more dialogue about [the] interventions we can [provide] to help kids.”

Thirty percent of the principals/teachers reported that their relationships with other teachers have improved since the implementation of collaboration. Teacher A7 simply said, “We all work together.” Teacher A6 added, “Our relationships have changed, we are more cooperative.” Teacher A3 noticed, “Maybe it has [made] us more unified because we are collaborating more.” Teacher B3 stated, “I haven’t heard anything but positive things . . . as a faculty you support one another [and] we have the rapport that we [can] go into any teacher’s classroom and ask for help and we will get it.” She explained, “That hasn’t always been the case in my career. There has been a few with a sort of closed file syndrome and they don’t want to share. But that’s something our school has [we share and help one another].”

Fifteen percent of the teachers also reported positive relationships with their principals since the implementation of collaboration. Teacher A1 explained that since NCLB, “There has been a lot more responsibility put on us with [our principal], not that that’s a bad thing. . . The communication has worked a lot better, since she came in.” In addition, “She makes things run smooth, and we have to talk, so . . . since [our principal] came in I think probably, even with NCLB, all the great things have gone up.” Teacher B2 communicated that her principal “was a very supportive principal [and] always made me feel good about myself. Even, if I made a mistake . . . she would just try to point out

my good qualities, and try to help me overlook the others.” She emphasized, “I wish every principal could be like that.” Teacher B4 explained that her principal’s “really have not put [pressure or] made us feel like it was our fault if the kids failed . . . In fact, [our principal] really made you feel at ease about it [testing under the NCLB Act].”

### Summary

The negative statements given by teachers and principals about the effects high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act seem to outweigh the positive comments. These findings are consistent with the research presented in Chapter 2 (Peterson & Deal, 2002; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; Ahlquist, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Jehlen, 2006; Madaus, 2009). Teachers and principals reported that NCLB negatively affected school culture by: the unfairness of using test scores to label schools as “failing”; narrowing curriculum; taking time away from learning by increasing teaching to the test; the significant amount of pressure felt by students and teachers; and the belief that the NCLB Act needed to be changed. The study also ascertained that many of the teachers and principals believed that the test data they received provided some useful information about their students and that they are not against being held accountable. Rather, they simply do not support the current method they are being held accountable under the NCLB Act.



## CHAPTER 5

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This research study examined the effects high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act had on school culture. In summary, this final chapter of the dissertation reviews the research problem and outlines the main methods used in the study. The major sections of this chapter summarize the most important results, and discuss their implications.

## Summary of Results

School improvement has been a popular topic in the United States over the past 180 years. As early as 1830, Horace Mann started implementing the revolutionary bills supporting his argument that all citizens, regardless of race or economic status, should have equal access to a tuition-free, tax-supported public school system (Cremin, 1988). Some recent policymakers complain that public schools refuse to make rapid changes and do not effectively respond to students' learning needs (Jones, 2003). A popular answer to school improvement during the past eight years has been to tighten up educational organizations, increase accountability, increase curriculum standards, test students' performances, and enforce penalties for schools whose students do not make adequate yearly progress under the NCLB Act. According to Peterson and Deal (2002), in the beginning, the results of these pressures are sure to encourage schools to change their practices to "teach to the test" to raise test scores. In the long run, such unfair, uneducated demands will never rival the power of cultural values, expectations, and motivation (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Jones & Jones, 2003). At a deeper level, all schools improve performance by cultivating a shared system of values, norms, and traditions. Without a strong, positive culture, schools are ineffective (Peterson & Deal, 2002). This study

researched how high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act has affected the school culture at two Nebo School District public schools located in the Rocky Mountain area.

I used qualitative research methodology to conduct two case studies of 17 teachers and three principals who were employed at two schools in the Nebo School District. Using NVivo8 (QSR, 2008) computer software, I analyzed the qualitative data gathered through interview and focus group transcripts, ensuring development and density through theoretical sampling, making constant comparisons, and using coding paradigms. I obtained formal individual interview data as well as focus group data. In order to isolate the effects of NCLB from the point of view of teachers and administrators, I used a case study analysis. According to Yin (2003), case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed within some real-life context (Yin, 2003). The following research question structured this study: What are the perceived impacts on school culture of high-stakes testing the NCLB Act among teachers and principal at their school?

An interesting finding that emerged was that the NCLB Act tends to excite strong emotions and opinions about the policy and they are overwhelmingly negative. Only four percent of the comments made by teachers and principals were neutral in nature. Traditionally teachers are negative about top down federal reform in their classrooms. Larry Cuban found that for every one positive feeling reported 6 to 7 negative feelings and opinions were reported and this has been the case for the past century for federal reform agendas in public schools. In this study, teachers and principals were not only negative but for every one positive feeling reported about NCLB, 100 negative feelings were reported! The NCLB Act is a particularly difficult and unpopular reform for

teachers and principals and we have seen why this reform is especially problematic as has been indicated by several historians of educational reform (Gelberg, 1997; Whatras, 2002; Urban & Waggoner, 2009).

Other significant themes mentioned in Chapter 4 are worthy of note. Among the most important were the negative consequences of labeling schools as “failing” under the NCLB Act. Devine (1995) described Labeling Theory in his research. He found that when you label someone as something they begin to believe that and become that. The way NCLB’s high-stakes tests are designed, certain schools are almost guaranteed to fail. They fail, they fail again and it becomes a self- sustaining prophecy that they do not make AYP under the NCLB Act. Forty-eight out of the 64 comments regarding labeling schools as “failing” were made by School B. This makes sense because these are the teachers and principals who have twice experienced their school being labeled as “failing” under the NCLB.

Included in this theme was the unfairness of labeling schools as “failing” based on the test scores of individual sub-groups. Ninety percent of these comments were made by School B. All of the 19 comments regarding the unfairness of holding Title I schools more accountable than other schools were made by School B which is a Title I school. The majority of teachers and principals mentioned that it was not fair to label schools as “failing” based on the test scores of individual sub-groups of students.

Other essential findings were that the high-stakes test results do not accurately reflect teachers’ ability and that the high-stakes tests do not accurately measure learning. Interestingly, three times more comments were made by School A in this category. School A has currently made AYP since the beginning of NCLB.

Participants' comments regarding negative effects on curriculum and negative effects on teaching and learning were also substantial. It was found that the curriculum was narrowed where teachers reduced or altogether stopped teaching subjects that were not tested. The arts and writing were largely impacted. Teachers and principals seemed to be especially upset about reducing the time to teach these subjects because it is through the arts and writing that many of their students make connections, communicate and learn. The arts and writing promote creativity, encourage higher-level thinking and help build positive relationships between students and teachers. Teachers and principals were also troubled about how much time and focus that had been taken away from learning due to increased teaching to the test and test preparation. Many communicated that more effective or meaningful teaching/learning activities were replaced by drill and practice activities due to their concern of their class and school passing the tests and making adequate yearly progress.

The most significant negative effects on teacher, student, and principal motivation were stress and pressure on students, teachers and principals. School B made 1.7 times more comments in this theme than School A. As the Labeling Theory suggests, not making AYP could negatively affect their motivation. They were frustrated about the great amounts of time and energy put they into the teaching/learning progress, students were making great progress, yet their school was still labeled as a failing twice. The teachers and principals at both schools made several strong comments regarding the inappropriateness of the tests for at-risk student subgroups. They described giving these students the tests provided under NCLB as criminal, pure child-abuse, unfair, horrible, and damaging to the student's self-worth.

Another interesting finding was that both teaching and learning were viewed as not being as much fun or as creative since the NCLB Act was implemented. School A made 2.4 more comments in this theme, so even though School A has made AYP during the past six years NCLB has still had a huge impact on their view of teaching and learning. A classroom culture that is fun, energetic, and stimulating plays a significant role in creating a positive teaching/learning experience. Taking fun away from teaching and learning probably plays an important role in the fact that teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession or transfer from a low SES school to a higher SES school. The fact that several of the teachers at School B had transferred to higher socio-economic schools upset many of the teachers and principals. An important part of their school culture was their commitment of “sticking together” and “working through the problems associated with NCLB” to ensure that their students had every possible chance to succeed in life.

The topic of the NCLB Act excites strong opinions. Very few neutral comments (4%) were made about NCLB. The theme in this category that is worth mentioning falls under the motivation category. Ten teachers and principals actually made at least one neutral statement that indicating that NCLB did not have a positive or negative effect on teacher, student, or principal motivation. I believe these comments were the result of educator’s positive attitudes toward education and students. Many communicated that since they did not have control over the parts of NCLB they viewed as inappropriate, they would instead focus on what they did have control over which was helping all students learn, progress, and feel competent in contributing to a democratic society.

Teachers and principals also made some positive comments regarding the NCLB Act. Forty-five percent of the teachers and principals made at least one positive comment indicating that the test data provided some useful information. The data allowed teachers to see what areas of their students were proficient in and what areas their students still needed help in. It also gave them feedback on the curriculum areas they were teaching well and the areas they may need to teach better if for example, their entire class scored high or low on a specific learning objective. Twenty-five percent of the teachers and principals also shared their belief in accountability. They want to be held accountable for student learning however they would like to be accountable for the progress their student's made rather than a system like NCLB that does not take into account students' beginning academic levels and individual differences. Due to these problems, among others, the majority of teachers and principals recommended wide-sweeping changes in the NCLB Act.

#### Discussion of Results

The discussion section includes my insights and implications of the findings. This study provides policymakers with information that documents teachers and principals' concerns and frustrations with high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act and how these concerns can affect their school culture. Hopefully policymakers will use this information to improve upon the current NCLB Act. I agree with Jones and Egley (2004) that in order for educators to support a testing program, they need to be heard by policymakers and be included in the development of the program. This idea is evident with some of the teachers in this study. For instance, one teacher stated, "And it was not decided or proposed on by a panel of teachers. It was by lawmakers, and people who have never

stepped in a classroom.” Comments such as these suggest that teachers and principals disagree with how high-stakes testing has been put upon them without their input, opinion, or approval.

### *Concerns of NCLB*

Included are the following topics that affect school culture: application of testing, curriculum, teaching and learning, teacher and student motivation, other negative effects on education, and professional learning communities. I have also provided some implications for changing the NCLB Act based on teachers and principals’ statements. Although teachers and principals might be different from those of students, parents, or the general public, I agree with the statement made by Jones and Egley (2004), “Understanding teachers’ concerns is important, however, because they have the most direct effect on students’ learning and motivation” (p. 24).

### *Application of Testing*

One of the main implications in Theme 1 was the application and use of test scores needs to be changed or limited. Some of the teachers and principals reported that the test data provided them with useful information about students. It appears that these teachers and principals are saying, “We don’t like NCLB taken as a whole but it has some good elements that could be salvaged from it—especially regarding the tests as *diagnostic tools* to help kids, not as *assessment tools* to punish them.” The test scores were not recognized as being valid when used to label or compare teachers, students, or schools. The majority of teachers and principals mentioned that it was inappropriate to label schools as “failing” based on the test scores of individual sub-groups of students. These remarks imply that the policy of making adequate yearly progress under the NCLB

Act should be eliminated or revised. Schools that have more students who have academic learning disabilities, who speak English as a second language, and who are not given as much academic support at home have an unfair disadvantage. “Teachers are justified in their complaints that it is unfair to compare teachers and schools based on students’ scores because the scores reflect other influences on students besides those of the school and teacher” (Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 24).

One way to help make the NCLB Act more appropriate would be to test ELL and Special Education students on the academic level they are on at the end of the year rather than the grade level they are in. For instance, if a fourth grader is reading on a second grade reading level he/she could be tested on a second grade end-of level reading test. Another similar recommendation in Theme 1 would be to test students’ academic abilities at the beginning of the year and compare these scores with their scores at the end of the year. Utah has attempted to do that with their UPASS plan. Unfortunately, the NCLB Act disregards Utah’s UPASS scores when calculating adequate yearly progress. The main problem with this plan is there are still some students who will make progress, but they may not make an entire year’s progress due to the severity of their learning disabilities (low cognitive abilities, the ability to store and retrieve information, etc), language deficiencies (difficulty in understanding idioms, etc.), lack of support at home, etc.

Another important concern of teachers and principals in Theme 1 had to do with the use of a one-time test to accurately measure student learning. One option would be to test more often. This would not be recommended because of the extra cost and it would take even more instructional time away. Another option would be to use alternate assessments. The teachers and principals in this study suggested portfolio assessments,



research based reading benchmark assessments, informal classroom assessments, individual assessments, and/or oral assessments. Additional research into the use of these and possibly other types of alternate assessments would be useful.

### *Teaching all Curriculum*

Based on the findings in Theme 2, steps should be taken to ensure that the entire state core curriculum is being taught and not only the subjects being tested. Several teachers and principals reported letting go important subjects such as writing, the arts, social studies, and PE. Research shows that sustained learning in theater and music correlate to greater success in reading and math, and students of special needs—special education, English-language learners, and low SES students greatly benefit from the chance to engage in art instruction (Loschert, 2004).

In addition, teachers should not feel like they do not have time to take those teachable moments and expand on a subject their students show an interest in. Teachers and principals have reported that their teaching is not as well-rounded or as rich as it was before NCLB; that the narrowed curriculum does not allow them to teach the whole child as thoroughly as before. Teaching the whole child is an important part of preparing students to contribute to a democratic society.

### *Elimination of Teaching to the Test*

To address the concerns raised by teachers in Theme 3, something should be done to stop taking time and focus away from learning and to stop teachers from teaching to the test. The challenge is to create a program that encourages teachers to teach the core curriculum without encouraging item teaching or drill and practice activities that are similar to test questions. It is probably true to say that the NCLB Act itself does not cause

teachers to teach to the test, but rather a variety of other reasons such as pressure from (self, other teachers, parents, principals) to score well on the tests and the fear of being labeled as a “failing school.” Other studies have indicated that when teachers feel pressured and responsible for making sure that their students perform up to unrealistic standards, they become more controlling (Jones & Egley, 2004). This leads into the next section covering teacher and student motivation.

### *Motivation of Teacher and Student*

The most significant finding in this research is the effect high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act had on teacher and student motivation. Attending school and learning should be a positive, fun experience. Students should leave school feeling cared for, motivated, and capable. They should not be required to suffer the stress of taking a test that they cannot read or understand or that makes them feel stupid or incapable. Teachers should have the autonomy to meet their student’s unique and individual needs. They should not feel that they do not have the time to develop the relationships they once had with their students. Steps need to be taken to lessen or eliminate the stress and pressure the students and teachers are feeling. Teachers should be able to enjoy teaching and feel good about making it fun, exciting, and creative for their students.

The negative effects teachers, principals and students are feeling from the pressures of NCLB also negatively affect their school and classroom cultures. These beliefs are expressed by the teachers and principals in this study. One of the principals said, “We have to be very careful. I can’t count how many times I have said to the staff, the kids are the most important thing. It is not this test. We don’t have fun, as much fun with the kids and so . . . their educational experience is not as rich.”

I also noticed that the teachers at School B especially those with a lot of years at that school felt communicated that part of their school culture was the moral mission they felt toward the students at their school. They were upset and frustrated over losing teachers to higher socio-economic schools.

#### *Other Negative Effects*

Among the greatest concerns cited in Theme 5 was that NCLB needs to be changed. Some of the concerns given by teachers and principals in Theme 4 and 5 would likely be lessened if as noted above, NCLB could be revised so that schools were not labeled as “failing.” Other teachers and principals believed that federal mandates such as NCLB are politically motivated and are purposefully set up to give the perception that public schools are failing. Attacking public education opens the doors for drastic inequities. A major role of public schools is to provide as much equity as possible amongst its citizens by educating and preparing all students to contribute to a democracy, regardless of their socio-economic status or ethnic background. Taking money away from public education to fund charter and private schools, threatens our nation’s democracy. Charter and private schools are not held to the same standards as traditional public schools. For example, they can select who they accept in their schools and they are not subject to high stakes testing under the NCLB Act. Many students are not accepted into charter or private schools for socio-economic and/or intellectual reasons. Students with such hardships are not given the same opportunities to be educated in these schools, unlike public schools that accept and educate everyone.

*Unanticipated Findings Regarding Professional Learning Communities*

An unanticipated finding occurred regarding the positive effects of professional learning communities during this turbulent time for educators. Teachers and principals noted among the stress and pressure of preparing their students to pass high-stakes tests, after their principals introduced and facilitated professional learning communities and collaboration in their schools, positive things occurred. They viewed PLC's as a way to facilitate and humanize the NCLB Act. As noted in the literature review by Yates & Collins (2006) they communicated that through collaboration their relationships with other teachers had improved. They noted that they were more cooperative. By working together to write curriculum maps, teachers were teaching common core concepts. Along with this, teachers were more readily sharing student data and curriculum ideas with each other. Teachers felt joint responsibility and were working together to help struggling students. They used a variety of ways to measure learning through common assessments and then worked together to re-teach the students who were not competent in a curriculum area and enrich the learning of the students who were competent. It has also helped teachers and principals identify which students would benefit from special programs such as Reading Recovery, Special Education, Star Reading Tutoring, computer-based Waterford Reading Tutoring and computer-based Waterford Math Tutoring. One principal stated, "We really encourage great teams, we know that better teaching and learning goes on when teachers work in teams."

I believe that the implantation of PLCs in schools were not due to the NCLB Act. Rather, higher-education programs and educational research have taught the importance of teaming and collaborating. In addition, Brigham Young University's Principal's

Academy has been instrumental in training principals in Nebo School District on how to implement PLCs in their schools. Nevertheless, after considering all of the negative comments reported in my study in regards to the NCLB Act, I do believe that PLCs have helped teachers and principals mediate and adapt to NCLB. PLC's have helped humanize the pressures of NCLB by promoting a positive school culture by helping teachers and principals renew their love and belief in education during the stress and pressure they are feeling under the NCLB Act. Therefore, it seems advisable that schools dealing with the demands of NCLB implement PLCs in their schools to help to facilitate and mediate the challenges surrounding NCLB.

### Conclusion

Teachers and principals offered a lot of powerful insights about the effect high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act has on school culture. Even though teachers and principals do not agree with many of the policies under the NCLB Act they are not opposed to being held accountable. The structure I outlined based on teacher/principals' remarks can be used to evaluate the positives and negatives of high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act as observed by educators. In addition, these remarks can be used to help improve the current NCLB policy. Until lawmakers and policymakers take educators' points of view seriously and address their concerns, educators will most likely not fully support the NCLB Act. With the input of educators, who have the knowledge and experience needed to make some critical changes, testing programs under the NCLB Act are more likely to have a positive effect on the teaching and learning processes which affect school culture.

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APPENDIX A  
Consent to Participate Form  
Research study Project: A Doctoral Dissertation Research

*Consent to be a Research Participant*

This research project is part of the requirements of a doctoral program in the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations in the College of Education at Brigham Young University. The research study is being conducted by Mrs. RaShel Tingey, an Ed.D. candidate in this Department. The purpose of this research is to identify if and how the No Child Left Behind Act has impacted school culture.

As a research study participant, you will be expected to participate in a personal interview and in a small focus group. You will be asked if and how NCLB has affected your school culture and if you think it is taking Utah schools in the right direction. You will be expected to be honest and forthright with your contributions.

Your identity as a subject of this study will be kept anonymous to all outside of this study, but the researcher, RaShel Tingey. You will not be personally identified in any publications, text, presentations, or conversations dealing with this study. Confidentiality will be maintained by the researcher concerning personal information given out, by you, in this study.

If you have any questions about this research study, you may contact: RaShel Tingey, Principal Spanish Oaks Elementary, 2701 E Canyon Crest Drive, Spanish Fork, Utah 84660, telephone number: (801) 798-7411, 423-2040, or 310-4166.

If you wish to speak to someone regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

“I hereby affirm that I will not disclose information discussed during the Program or this research study to anyone other than other members of the Program and the researcher of this research study. My signature below indicates that I have read, understood, and willingly comply with this consent form and have also received my personal copy of it. I desire of my own free will to participate in this research study.”

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print your full name)

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print your full name)

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_





## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide for Administrators

The following broad questions, supplemented by probe questions in case the respondent has trouble getting started:

1. How would you describe the NCLB Act?
2. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected you?
3. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your students?
4. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your teachers?
5. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your curriculum?
6. Have you seen any changes in relationships, teacher-teacher, principal-teacher, teacher - student, since NCLB?
7. In addition to the changes you have already discussed, do you see any other changes that you would be willing to discuss?

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Guide for Teachers

The following broad questions, supplemented by probe questions in case the respondent has trouble getting started:

1. How would you describe the NCLB Act?
2. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected you?
3. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your students?
4. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your colleagues?
5. Have you seen any changes in relationships, teacher-teacher, principal-teacher, teacher - student, since NCLB?
6. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your curriculum?
7. Do you spend more time preparing your students for the CRTs since NCLB? If so, approximately how much time is spent preparing your students? Do you feel this is a good use of time?
8. Do you assess your students differently since NCLB? If so, in what ways?
9. In addition to the changes you have already discussed, do you see any other changes that you would be willing to discuss?

APPENDIX D  
Focus Group Guide

The focus group will be asked about their attitudes and beliefs about high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act. The following broad topics will be given to be discussed by focus group members:

1. How would you describe the NCLB Act?
2. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected you?
3. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your students?
4. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the NCLB Act affected your colleagues?
5. Have you seen any changes in relationships, teacher-teacher, principal-teacher, teacher - student, since NCLB?
6. In what ways has the high-stakes testing found under the No Child Left Behind Act affected your curriculum?
7. Do you spend more time preparing your students for the CRTs since NCLB? If so, approximately how much time is spent preparing your students? Do you feel this is a good use of time?
8. Do you assess your students differently since NCLB? If so, in what ways?
9. In addition to the changes you have already discussed, do you see any other changes that you would be willing to discuss?