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THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE-READINESS TESTING ON HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS' AND EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES ON EDUCATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE-READINESS TESTING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' AND EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES ON EDUCATION

Bradley Krauz

College-readiness testing has increased drastically over the last thirty years, with increases in the number of Scholastic Achievement Tests and American College Tests taken by students. The number of Advanced Placement tests has also reached an all-time high. With states using these college-readiness assessments as high-stakes exit tests and the socioeconomic benefits connected to college attendance and graduation, the focus on college-readiness assessment has impacted the classroom environment. With more time spent preparing for college-readiness assessments, the environment in which students interact and grow has evolved. This qualitative case study, informed by Freire's (2000) "banking concept" of education and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), involved data collection from two major stakeholder groups in the classroom, students and educators. Eight students, eight teachers, and two administrators were individually interviewed to gather data on the influence of college-readiness testing on attitudes about education. Participant interviews were conducted through videoconference and recorded. Data was transcribed and analyzed, through inductive coding analysis, and recurring themes were identified. Students' and educators' perceptions indicated that SAT and ACT preparation in school is insufficient, the SAT and ACT assessments do not align with the standard learning environment, and these assessments are often not an accurate reflection of a student's academic potential. In

addition, AP courses and assessments were perceived to be more valuable and promoted positive perceptions of educators through their dedication to student preparation and success. These themes will help guide educators and curriculum design to foster learning environments that best prepare students for their role beyond the classroom.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wife, Natasha, and to my two sons Kyle and KJ. Thank you for your unwavering support through the various challenges presented throughout this journey. Though it is my name on the paper, this work is truly a reflection of our family.

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I would also like to thank my parents for instilling in me an appreciation for education. Thank you both for being incredible role models and showing me that success comes from hard work and dedication. My accomplishments are only possible because of the lessons and life skills that you provided.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Theoretical Framework	2
Significance of the Study	5
Research Questions	8
Design and Methods	9
Definition of Terms	10
CHAPTER 2: Review of Related Research	13
Theoretical Framework	14
Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”	14
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory	15
History of College-Readiness Testing	17
Description of College-Readiness Testing	19
ACT	19
SAT	22
Advanced Placement (AP)	24
Related Research	25
High Stakes Testing	25
Perceptions of Testing	29
Relationship between Prior Research and Present Study	32
CHAPTER 3: Method	35
Research Questions	36
Setting	36
Participants	37
Data Collection Methods	41

Data Collection Procedures.....	44
Trustworthiness of the Design	45
Research Ethics.....	48
Data Analysis Approach	49
Researcher Role	50
Limitations	51
Conclusion	52
CHAPTER 4: Results	53
Discussion of Overall Findings.....	53
Theme 1: Preparation for SATs/ACTs in School is Unsatisfactory as Opposed to AP Exam Preparation.....	57
Theme 2: Academic Potential is Inaccurately Represented by College-Readiness Assessments	65
Theme 3: College-Readiness Testing Does Not Align with Classroom Learning Experiences.....	73
Theme 4: Misunderstanding the Context of College-Readiness Testing.....	81
Theme 5: Educators Assistance is Invaluable.....	84
Conclusion	87
CHAPTER 5: Discussion.....	89
Discussion of Findings.....	89
Educator and student experiences with college-readiness assessment programs	90
Feelings, thoughts and attitudes students and educators have about their experiences with college-readiness assessment programs	95
Ways educator and student experiences with college-readiness testing influence their attitudes toward education	98
Association to Theoretical Framework.....	103
Relation to Literature	105
Limitations of the Study.....	108
Recommendations for Future Practice.....	111
Recommendations for Future Research	115
Conclusion	117

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval	121
APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Guide - Student.....	122
APPENDIX C: Individual Interview Guide - Educator.....	124
APPENDIX D: Consent Form for Adults.....	126
APPENDIX E: Student Consent Form	129
APPENDIX F: Participant Invitation to Participate (Educator)	132
APPENDIX G: Participant Invitation to Participate (Student).....	134
REFERENCES	136

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Demographic of Secondary Schools of Participating District.....	37
Table 2	Description of Participants.....	40
Table 3	Interview Guide Questions Connection to Research Questions.....	43
Table 4	Significant Categories for Individual Interviews.....	53
Table 5	Overall Findings.....	55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Education Production Function.....	5
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Over the last thirty years the number of students that have taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) has increased by 50% and the number of students that have taken the American College Test (ACT) has increased by 300% (Adams, 2017). The number of SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement (AP) exams taken by students in high schools across the country has continued to grow, with an all-time high 2.1 million students in the class of 2018 taking the SAT (Genota, 2018, para. 3). In addition, between 2001 and 2017, the total number of students taking an AP exam grew from about 820,000 to more than 2.6 million (Zhou, 2018). With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (2001), Race to the Top (2009), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), states have been encouraged to introduce assessments that measure student performance (Park, Lane, & Stone, 2006; Hursh, 2005; Gentry, 2006). The focus has turned to raising test scores for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The increased prevalence of and focus on high-stakes testing, specifically college-readiness testing, has created high-anxiety learning environments. Today's students are, "the most tested generation in history" (Abeles, 2015, p. 101).

Increased amounts of classroom time spent on testing and test preparation activities have been shown to have a negative effect within the classroom and upon student learning (Gentry, 2006). According to Gentry, the joy of learning is being systematically removed from education, and students are less attentive. Hornof (2008) added that spending too much time on test preparation may have an inverse impact on student performance, as it can result in students feeling bored and frustrated. While data is valuable in accurately assessing student understanding, if teachers and students are not

enjoying their learning experience, student desire to continue their educational growth may be impeded.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how, if at all, high stakes college-readiness testing is influencing students' and educators' attitudes about education. As aforementioned, the number of students taking college-readiness assessments has shown a significant increase over the last thirty years. With more students taking these exams, more teachers are leading classes and coursework connected to college-readiness assessments. Data was collected from a suburban secondary school in the Northeast through in-depth interviews with students that have taken multiple college-readiness courses and assessments, in-depth interviews with teachers that have a minimum five years of experience teaching Advanced Placement (AP) courses that culminate in a college-readiness assessment, and building administrators that oversee these programs.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by theories embedded in Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. Freire's (2000) work focused on the education system in Brazil in the 1960's. He contended that there were inherent flaws with that educational system. Freire explained that the flawed conception is the oppressive "depositing" or "banking" of information by teachers into their students. The banking concept of education describes how the teachers directly fill the minds of students with information and the students accept it. While Freire conceded there is a time in which "banking" methods are necessary, such as the acts of recording,

memorizing, and repeating phrases, which is true when teaching in an elementary school, next level learning requires critical thinking and analysis. College-readiness falls under the category of next level learning, therefore, if Freire's "banking" concept is the sole technique being utilized when students are engaged in college-readiness test preparation and assessment, student and teacher experiences in the classroom may not reflect higher-level learning. This could lead to student and teacher attitudes toward education being impacted because of the "banking" learning experience that takes place in the classroom.

While Freire's theory focuses on the specific method of delivery of the content, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) is based on the belief that children find themselves in various levels of social interactions, or ecosystems. These ecosystems range from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system, and then to society and culture, which is the most expansive system. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is organized into five levels of influence: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These levels are categorized from the most intimate to the broadest. Each of these ecological systems interacts with and influences each other in all aspects of children's lives. Though the school environment is housed in the microsystem level, by studying the various ecological systems, the diversity of interrelated influences on children's development can be demonstrated and utilized in analysis of their growth. Constructing meaning through shared experiences will shape a person's attitude. The social learning necessary for students to make meaning from their experiences with college-readiness testing and test preparation programs begins with their shared experiences throughout the various ecological systems defined by Bronfenbrenner. Therefore, children's learning experience in the classroom lays the foundation for their

growth, or lack of growth, and attitude toward education when engaged in various environmental settings such as college-readiness testing and test preparation programs.

An education production function is often used to model the educational process that leads to improved student outcomes (Eide & Showalter, 2010). This model includes inputs, processes, and outputs. Common educational input measures include the student, the number of students in a class, the teacher, teacher education, teacher experience, as well as educational policy. The process refers to what goes on in a system, such pedagogical strategies, or methods of instruction. Anthony and Herzlinger (1991) describe education outputs as the direct effects on students in relation to their knowledge acquisition, skills, beliefs, and attitude. Upon entering classrooms, there is a greater likelihood that secondary students will need to complete at least one college-readiness assessment, which means the teacher must prepare the student for such an assessment. When this is combined with a focus on improving student test scores, as has been the case with recent governmental educational policy, the series of inputs to consider include students, teachers, college-readiness assessments, and educational policy. The process by which this content is disseminated and experienced by students is directly linked to the theoretical framework that is the basis for this study. With the focus on student results, teachers may utilize Friere's (2000) "banking" concept to deposit the information in students' minds, rather than build next level connections. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory is connected to how students experience and view their learning environment, and in turn may shape their attitudes toward education across various ecological system levels. Each of these theories influences the output in the educational production model of education as depicted in Figure 1, with Friere's theory

linked to the process of how the content is delivered and Bronfenbrenner's theory connected to both how the inputs and process are experienced by the students.

The researcher applied Friere's (2000) "banking" concept of education and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) in this study by engaging secondary educators and students, specifically twelfth-grade students, in conversations about their shared experiences with college-readiness test preparation and testing, in order to better understand their attitudes towards education.

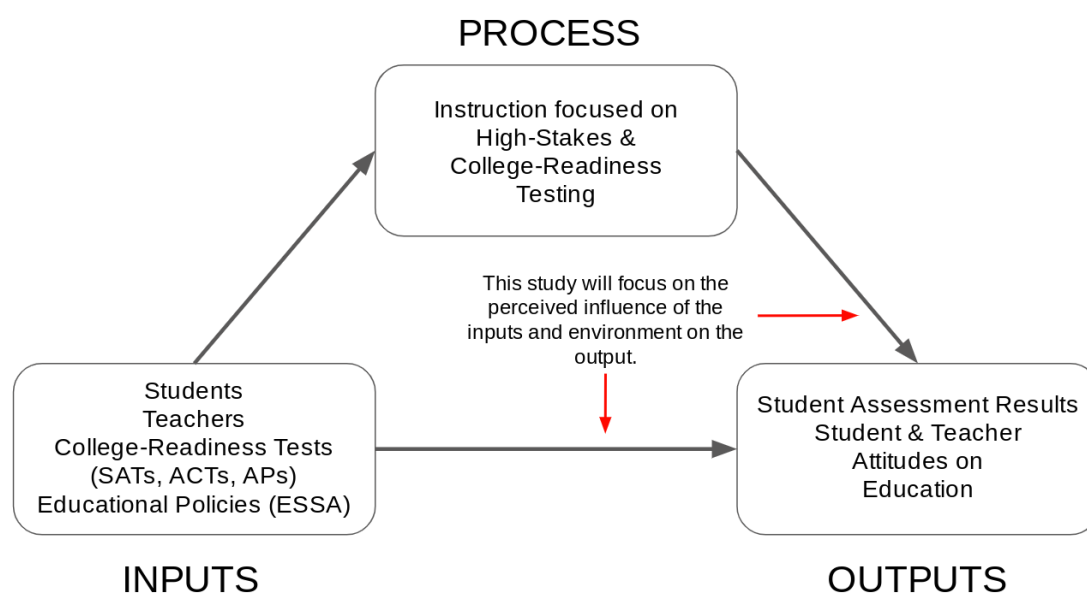


Figure 1 - Education Production Function

Significance of the Study

High stakes testing often influences curricular decisions in secondary institutions (McCloskey & McMunn, 2001). As a result, high school students are inundated with testing material and test preparation instruction (Santman, 2002). This study focused on a specific type of high stakes testing, college-readiness testing. As twenty-four states utilize college-readiness testing as a school exit exam (Gerwertz, 2017), it can be inferred that

college-readiness testing, whether an exit exam or college-entry requirement, falls into the category of high stakes testing. The goal of the study was to determine whether engaging students in a curriculum that emphasizes college-readiness testing and college-readiness test preparation programs influences educators' and students' attitudes towards education. The significance of the study is twofold: (a) fill a gap in the existing body of scholarly literature and (b) bring about social change through the implementation of curricular or program changes in college-readiness testing or college-readiness test preparation programs.

Presently, most research has focused on high stakes testing, not specifically on college-readiness testing. The concentration has been on the impact of high stakes testing on students. Paris, Lawton, Turner, and Roth (1991) examined student performance on high stakes tests based on students' views of the tests. Hughes and Bailey (2002) explored students' anxiety levels with regard to high stakes tests. While looking at an array of student interactions within the school, Nogueira (2007) also asked students to provide their thoughts on high stakes testing. Wong and Paris (2000) compared students' attitudes about high stakes testing and regular classroom tests. Henry, Mashburn, and Konold (2007) examined first graders and teachers to assess children's attitudes toward school and learning, with a particular focus in the area of high stakes testing. Mulvenon, Stegman, and Ritter (2005) explored students' attitudes and reactions to the testing process. Certo, Cauley, Moxley, and Chafin (2008) examined student perceptions of engagement in various aspects of high school activities that concentrated on high stakes testing. Moni, Van Kraayenoord, and Baker (2002) completed a yearlong case study involving two eighth grade classrooms to determine students' attitudes toward literacy

assessment. While these studies are valuable and informative, they do not specifically address college-readiness tests as the formative assessment being considered.

The exploration of college-readiness testing as a specific category within high stakes testing includes research done by Foote, Schulkind, and Shapiro (2015) in which they used regression discontinuity to determine if students' college enrollment decisions were affected by their own awareness of college-readiness as identified by their ACT scores. Other research that examines college-readiness and assessments showed that society judges people based on test performance and the lives of individuals are determined, in part, by test performance (Sarason, 1959). In other words, how individuals perform on these assessments impacts how they are treated by their peers, as well as influencing their socioeconomic status. In addition, tests are not just means of measuring academic aptitude. A meta-analysis of standardized tests showed that they are used by colleges and universities to forecast student success in a wide range of disciplines (Kuncel & Hezlett, 2007). This research analyzed the correlation between test scores and various measures of student success including: first-year grade point average (GPA), graduate GPA, degree attainment, qualifying or comprehensive examination scores, research productivity, research citation counts, licensing examination performance, and faculty evaluations of students. Across this long list of variables, Kunzel and Hezlett concluded that standardized tests consistently served as effective predictors of success within each variable. In addition, a separate meta-analysis looked at results from a test that was designed for admissions assessment but was also marketed as a tool for making hiring decisions (Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2004). Though originally intended as a measure of "book smarts," it also showed a correlation with successful outcomes at both

school and work (Kuncel & Sackett, 2018).

College-admissions testing, such as the SATs, ACTs, and APs have direct impacts on the lives of students, especially given the documented socioeconomic benefits of a college education. The more stock that is placed in college-readiness testing in college admissions, as well as in predicting a student's future success, the more students and teachers feel pressured to perform at levels commensurate with their desired outcomes which will influence the educational environment to which students are exposed. American teachers feel enormous pressure to raise their students' scores on high-stakes tests. Some teachers provide classroom instruction that incorporates, as practice activities, the actual items on high-stakes tests (Popham, 2001). Campbell's Law (1976) states that the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor. This means that an educational environment overly focused on college-readiness testing may devalue the information that college-readiness testing was designed to provide and in turn, influence teacher and student attitudes on college-readiness testing and preparation.

This study addresses research needs by focusing specifically on how college-readiness testing and college-readiness preparation programs have influenced educator and 12th-grade students' attitudes towards education.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding the study was:

1. How do college-readiness testing experiences influence educators' and students' attitudes about education?

Sub-questions included:

- What were educators' and students' experiences with college-readiness assessment programs?
- What feelings, thoughts, and attitudes do students and educators have about their experiences with college-readiness testing programs?
- In what ways, if at all, did educators' and students' experiences with college-readiness testing influence their attitudes toward education?

Design and Methods

This study required descriptions of various feelings, thoughts, attitudes, experienced and perceived, by those individuals that have been involved with college-readiness testing, educators and students. As such, the study utilized a case study methodology. Case study research investigates phenomenon within its real-life context. Case studies are based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group or event to explore the causes of underlying principles (Creswell, 2018).

Through interviews with administrators, teachers, and students that regularly have experienced college-readiness testing, their descriptions of their experiences provided common language for which operational definitions were constructed to inform the development of participant attitudes towards education.

For the purposes of this qualitative research study, the interviewer and interview questions are the main instruments utilized. The technique utilized followed Seidman's (2013) interviewing techniques for qualitative research, with an initial interview to ease the participant's connection with the researcher, followed by a second more intensive interview. This second, more intensive interview, was guided by an Individual Interview

Guide (Appendices A & B). The third interview was where the participant had the opportunity to review their responses, complete a member-check, and reflect upon their responses.

Definition of Terms

Attitude:

Attitude is defined as a tendency to react favorably, neutrally, or unfavorably toward a particular stimulus (Salkind, 2010). For the purposes of this study institutional practice as related to college-readiness testing and preparation is the stimuli, with the response focusing on education. As an individual's attitude toward an object cannot be observed directly it was inferred from observed behavior during a question and answer research interview.

College-readiness:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program (Conley, 2007).

College-readiness testing:

College-readiness testing is defined through the completion of assessments where grades are determined against established empirical benchmarks (Conley, 2007). This study focuses on three college-readiness tests, the SAT, the ACT, and AP exams. The ACT has defined college-readiness testing by establishing college-readiness Benchmarks representing the ACT test scores required for students to have a high probability of success in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses.

SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)

The SAT is intended to forecast a student's ability to perform in his or her freshman (first) year at college. The SAT test consists of two portions, one measuring students' mathematical skills and the other their verbal skills. The SAT does not measure all factors related to freshman student success, but its scores have a statistically significant relationship to that success (College Board, 2020).

ACT (American College Test)

The ACT is a standardized test to determine a high school graduate's preparation for college-level work. It covers four areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. The ACT is a test based on courses studied in high school (ACT, 2005). ACT scores that achieve certain benchmarks correlate students having a 75 percent or greater chance of obtaining a post-secondary course grade of C or better (ACT, 2005).

AP (Advanced Placement) Exams

Advanced Placement examinations are the culmination of yearlong Advanced Placement (AP) courses approved by the College Board. AP exams have a multiple-choice section and a free-response section. The exams themselves do not grade the students' mastery of the course material; rather, the students themselves set the grading rubrics and the scale of each exam. The decisions is based off the AP Grade over the previous three years, how students do on multiple-choice questions that are used on the test from year to year, the overall quality of the answers to the free response questions, how university students who took the exam as PART A experimental studies do, and how students perform on different parts of the exam. Policies vary but institutions may choose

to award credit based on a score of 3 or higher on any given exam. Some institutions choose to award an "A" grade for a 5 score (College Board, 2020).

CHAPTER 2: Review of Related Research

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the attitudes of high school educators and twelfth grade students that have experience with college-readiness testing in order to determine how college-readiness testing and preparation programs have influenced educator and students' attitudes toward education. As college-readiness testing is a specific category of tests within high stakes testing, research literature on high stakes testing, as well as college-readiness testing was included. In addition, the research literature on high stakes testing impact on United States schooling, students, and student perspectives towards testing is included in Chapter 2. Also included is an examination of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) educational banking theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

Online databases such as Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Education, ProQuest Psychology, and PsycArticles were researched to collect relevant articles for review. The following key words and phrases were combined in a variety of ways: *standardized tests, high stakes tests, college-readiness, college-readiness tests, student attitudes, teacher attitudes, student perspectives, teacher perspectives, influence of college-readiness testing, college-readiness test preparation, and college-readiness test preparation programs*. The terms were entered into the various database search engines and review of relevant literature was continued until saturation was achieved, which was identified when the same results were returned across databases and terms searched. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act occurring in 2001, Race to the Top in 2009, and Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015, this literature search included research from the last 10 years; however,

research older than 10 years was included because of its contribution to the research community's understanding of high stakes and college-readiness testing.

This literature review will gather from all sources containing relevant information about the significance and weaknesses of high stakes and college-readiness testing. Over the years, teachers have gauged student growth based on achievement of learning outcomes as measured by assessments. College-readiness is listed among the top priorities in education as there is believed to be deficiency in college-readiness on the part of students. In a national community education study, McCabe (2000), discovered that at least 29% of all students enrolling in college are inadequately prepared, with that number even higher, 41%, for students joining community colleges being identified as deficient in mathematics, reading, and writing skills. While there is rationale to focus on college-readiness in school, the effect that this focus on college-readiness and assessment has on student and teacher attitudes towards education is unclear. Reviewing research on high stakes testing provides context, as college-readiness testing is a specific form of high stakes testing.

Theoretical Framework

Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

Freire's (2000) begins his analysis by explaining to the reader that dehumanization and oppression go hand in hand. The author explains that those members that oppress another are actively dehumanizing the oppressed party (Freire, 2000, p. 44). In turn, this process makes the oppressor dehumanized for taking advantage of a group they do not consider their equal. Just as well, in allowing themselves to be treated so, the oppressed contribute to their dehumanization (Freire, 2000, p. 48)

The concepts of oppression pertain to the education system, more specifically to the teacher and student relationship. The student is regarded as the oppressed and the teacher as the oppressor. In Freire's (2000) discussion, the term banking is used to describe the depositing of information by teachers into the minds of the students (p. 72). In doing so, it prevents students from formulating their own thoughts. Instead, the students receive and memorize the information deposited to them without any critical thinking or true knowledge acquired. According to Freire (2000), "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (p. 72). To resolve this issue, teachers and students not merely teach or be taught, but that both parties equally teach and learn with each other. Dialogue between students and teachers must convey both reflection and action for there to be any true communication (Freire, 2000). Freire argues this communication is imperative to education; this study determined if Freire's contention is embedded within the college-readiness assessment system.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Ecological Systems Theory states that children develop within a complex system of relationships. These relationships are affected by multiple levels of environmental factors. Bronfenbrenner (1998) contends that child development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interactions between children and the different layers. The layers include the immediate environment, such as the family, the peer group, the child's characteristics, and the wider community. It is what happens within the child's settings such as the family, the playground, the peers, service

institutions and the larger community that influences his/her development and education (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's theory has five levels which all can affect development. These levels include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem, all of which can directly or indirectly influence the development of the child. The innermost level, the microsystem, is closest to the child. This system involves the children's most immediate environment such as the child, parents, siblings, friends, teachers, etc. The mesosystem layer is unique because it involves those systems that interact with people in the microsystem. For instance, what takes place in the microsystem such as the living conditions of a child at home influences what happens in the school and vice versa.

Bronfenbrenner states that there are certain layers that do not work directly but these have some impact on the child's development. This is what comprises the exosystem. The examples of this system include parents' workplace, or policies from the Department of Education. For instance, parents may be unable to take care of their children due to either long or late working hours (Berk, 2000). The macrosystem is comprised of values, law, customs and resources, lifestyles and opportunity structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For instance, there are certain cultural beliefs such as making young children not go for immunizations or vaccinations. The final ecological level Bronfenbrenner identified is the chronosystem. The chronosystem is made up of environmental events and transitions that occur throughout a child's life, including any socio-historical events. Bronfenbrenner highlights that the time in a child's life in which an event occurs can have a different impact on their social-emotional growth.

This study engaged educators and students in discussion about their experiences with college-readiness tests and preparatory programs. These experiences take place across multiple levels as outlined by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. This study was rooted in this theory, where student and educator attitudes toward education were analyzed based on the impact of college-readiness testing and preparatory experiences across the various ecological systems levels.

History of College-Readiness Testing

The history of standardized college-readiness tests has roots prior to 1900; however, the birth of the current iteration of college-readiness testing which has become commonplace coincides with the development of the IQ test in the early 20th century by Alfred Binet (Fletcher, 2009). The military adapted intelligence testing to assess incoming soldiers in an effort to choose officers. This laid the groundwork for applying testing in education. The first standardized college admission exam was administered in 1901. Students could take one exam for multiple universities. The exam was called the Achievement Test (AT). The test included questions on math, science, history, and English; however, there was concern that the assessment focused on memorization rather than student academic potential (Luo, 2009; Wang & Zhang, 2007).

The College Board first established the SAT in 1926, and in the late 1930's a group of elite northeastern colleges, agreed to use the test as a common admission metric (Lemann, 2004). There were two types of SATs, SAT I Reasoning Test and SAT II Subject Tests. Lemann described the goal of implementing the SAT was to use a test that identifies the most intellectually able students. That is why the test is explicitly designed not to be an achievement test that measures knowledge learned in high school. In 1947,

Educational Testing Service (ETS), a non-profit organization, was founded in Princeton to administer the SAT.

The ACT arose as a means to identify the top academic talent in the state of Iowa (ACT, 2009). Everett Lindquist, a professor of education at the University of Iowa, and Ted McCarrel, the director of admissions at the University of Iowa, developed various iterations of tests designed to identify top academic performers in primary and secondary school. In 1959, as a result of their work, the ACT emerged. The final product was an assessment tool that served two purposes; the first was to serve as a college-readiness assessment as it measured knowledge of content learned during a student's course of study in high school, the second was to help students determine appropriate topics of study and post-secondary institutions that met their needs.

The AP program began in the 1950s (College Board, 2020). In the midst of the Cold War, students with advanced training were viewed as essential. In response, the Ford Foundation created the Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE) in 1951. An initial investigation of elite prep school students attending Ivy League colleges found that most students were repeating things already learned in high school. The FAE suggested that more advanced high school students be allowed "advanced placement" in college coursework based on exam results. A second FAE project worked on college-level curricula to be implemented in high school. The combination of studies led to a pilot program where the first AP tests were administered in 1954. The results led to ten AP exams being rolled out nationally in 1956 and management of the AP Program was handed over to the College Board.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, these exams became firmly established as a critical element of the admission process across all four-year institutions of higher education. These exams expanded due to an increased demand for higher education which resulted in greater numbers of students seeking college enrollment. For the graduating high school class of 2011, about 1.65 million students nationwide took the SAT (Adams, 2011) and 1.62 million took the ACT (ACT, 2011). Similarly, in 2017, 2.6 million secondary students took an AP exam (Zhou, 2018).

Description of College-Readiness Testing

ACT

The ACT contains four tests - English, mathematics, reading, and science - and an optional writing test (ACT, 2019). These tests measure the most important content, skills, and concepts taught in high school and are needed for success in college and career. The content specifications describing the knowledge and skills to be measured by the ACT were determined through a detailed analysis of relevant information. ACT uses feedback directly from current high school and postsecondary teachers as well as student data from the ACT and from actual postsecondary performance in courses. These empirical data are used to continually verify the knowledge and skills required for postsecondary and career success and are being measured by the ACT.

The ACT English test is a 75-item, 45-minute test asks students to assume the role of a writer who analyzes texts and makes decisions to revise and edit the writing. The test measures understanding of the conventions of standard written English, production of writing, and knowledge of language. The test consists of five essays, or passages, each accompanied by a sequence of multiple-choice test items. Different passage types are

employed to provide a variety of rhetorical situations. Students must use the rich context of the passage to make editorial choices, demonstrating their understanding of writing strategies and conventions. Spelling, vocabulary, and rote recall of rules of grammar are not tested. The ACT English test assesses skills across a range of cognitive complexity using items at Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels 1, 2, and 3 (Webb, 2005).

The ACT mathematics test considers the whole of a student's mathematical development up through topics typically taught at the beginning of Grade 12, focusing on prerequisite knowledge and skills important for success in college mathematics courses and career training programs. Students have 60 minutes to complete 60 multiple-choice items. Each item has five response options. The test contains problems ranging from easy to very challenging in order to reliably report on readiness levels for students with different preparation. The test emphasizes quantitative reasoning and application over extensive computation or memorization of complex formulas. Items focus on what students can do with the mathematics they have learned, which encompasses not only mathematical content but also mathematical practices.

The ACT reading test is a 40-item, 35-minute test that measures a student's ability to read closely, reason about texts using evidence, and integrate information from multiple sources. The test comprises four passage units, three of which contain one long prose passage and one of which contains two shorter prose passes. The passages in the reading test include both literary narratives and informational texts from the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. Passages are representative of the kinds of text commonly encountered in first-year college curricula. Items ask students to determine main ideas, locate and interpret significant details, understand sequences of events, make

comparisons, comprehend cause-effect relationships, determine the meaning of context-dependent words, phrases and statements, and integrate information from multiple related texts. The ACT reading test assesses skills across a range of cognitive complexity using items at DOK Levels 1, 2, and 3.

The content of the science test is drawn from the following Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Earth Science/Space Science. The test is a 40-item, 35-minute test that measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences. It is expected that students have acquired the introductory content of Biology, Physical Science, and Earth Science, and are familiar with the nature of scientific inquiry, along with having been exposed to laboratory investigation. The test presents several sets of scientific information, each followed by a number of multiple-choice items. The scientific information is conveyed in one of three different formats: data representation, research summaries, or conflicting viewpoints. The science test assesses DOK Levels 1, 2, and 3, with almost all the items being at DOK Levels 2 and 3.

The writing test, which was revised as of 2015, consists of one writing prompt that describes a complex issue and provides three different perspectives of the issue. Students are asked to read the prompt and write an essay in which they develop their own perspective on the issue. The essay must analyze the relationship between their own perspective and one or more other perspectives. The writing test is allotted 40-minutes and measures writing skills; specifically, those skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses. The writing test tells postsecondary institutions about students' ability to think critically about an issue,

consider different perspectives on it, and compose an effective argumentative essay in a timed condition.

SAT

The SAT consists of a Reading and Writing section, a Math section, and an optional essay section (College Board, 2015). The basic aim of the SAT's Reading Test, a 65-minute section consisting of 52 questions, is to determine whether students can demonstrate college and career readiness proficiency in comprehending a broad range of high-quality, appropriately challenging literary and informational texts in the content areas of U.S. and world literature, history, and science. The Reading Test is a rigorous, carefully constructed assessment of comprehension and reasoning skill with a focus on close reading of appropriately challenging passages and graphics in a wide array of subject areas.

The aim of the SAT's Writing and Language test, a 35-minute section comprised of 44 questions, is to determine whether students can demonstrate college and career readiness proficiency in revising and editing a range of texts in a variety of content areas, both academic and career related, for development, organization, and effective language use and for conformity to the conventions of Standard Written English grammar, usage, and punctuation. The test comprises a series of high-quality multi-paragraph passages and associated multiple-choice questions. Some passages and questions are accompanied by one or more graphical representations of data and certain questions require students to make revising and editing decisions about passages in light of information and ideas conveyed. The SAT Writing and Language Test presents students with a rigorous,

carefully designed assessment of key literacy competencies needed for college and careers.

The optional essay portion, a 50-minute one prompt section, of the SAT is to determine whether students can demonstrate college and career readiness proficiency in reading, writing, and analysis by comprehending a high-quality source text and producing a cogent and clear written analysis of that text supported by critical reasoning and evidence drawn from the source. The essay task is not designed to elicit students' subjective opinions but rather to assess whether students are able to comprehend an appropriately challenging source text and to craft an effective written analysis of that text. Considered together with the multiple-choice SAT Reading and SAT Writing and Language tests, the essay response gives detailed insight into students' reading and writing achievement and their readiness for college and careers.

The math test has two portions; one is a 55-minute portion comprising 38 questions for which students are allowed to use calculators to solve the problems, the other is a 25-minute portion comprising 20 questions for which students are not allowed to use calculators to solve the problems. The test has four content areas: heart of algebra, problem solving and data analysis, passport to advanced math, and additional topics in math. The test covers all mathematical practices including problem solving, modeling, using appropriate tools, and looking for and making use of structure to do algebra. These practices are central to the demands of postsecondary work. The goal is a balance across fluency, conceptual understanding, and application to serve as a good reflection of college and career-ready standards.

Advanced Placement (AP)

At present, the College Board supports 36 distinct AP courses and exams in the Arts, English, History and Social Sciences, Math and Computer Science, Sciences, and World Language and Culture (College Board, 2020). The specifics for each course's culminating exam can vary, though there is generally a three-hour exam consisting of a combination of multiple choice and long answer questions. The scope of content for an AP course and exam is derived from an analysis of hundreds of syllabi and course offerings of colleges and universities. Using this research and data, a committee of college faculty and expert AP teachers work within the scope of the corresponding college course to articulate what students should know and be able to do upon the completion of the AP course. The resulting course framework is the heart of this course and exam description and serves as a blueprint of the content and skills that can appear on an AP Exam.

The AP Test Development Committees are responsible for developing each AP Exam, ensuring the exam questions are aligned to the course framework. The AP Exam development process is a multiyear endeavor; all AP Exams undergo extensive review, revision, piloting, and analysis to ensure that questions are accurate, fair, and valid, and that there is an appropriate spread of difficulty across the questions.

Committee members are selected to represent a variety of perspectives and institutions (public and private, small and large schools and colleges), and a range of gender, racial/ethnic, and regional groups.

Throughout AP course and exam development, the College Board gathers feedback from various stakeholders in both secondary schools and higher education

institutions. This feedback is carefully considered to ensure that AP courses and exams are able to provide students with a college-level learning experience and the opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications for advanced placement or college credit.

Related Research

High Stakes Testing

Tests consisting of predominantly multiple-choice questions and that are economically feasible, as well as reliable, are the major characteristics of high stakes tests (Parke et al., 2006). While the SAT, ACT, and AP exams are well known high stakes assessments, any standardized comprehensive assessment given to a large number of students in order to measure performance can be a high stakes test (Parke, et al., 2006). Administering tests to a large number of students is most easily accomplished through the use of multiple-choice tests (Roediger & Marsh, 2005). These tests are primarily designed to rank students, produce tangible, data-heavy results, and assess content knowledge (Sloane & Kelly, 2003; Azin & Resendez, 2008).

Traditional high stakes college-readiness assessments, such as the ACT and SAT, have been used for a long time in the assessment of students' college-readiness (Barnes & Slate, 2013). These assessments will continue to be utilized as a Harvard University (2018) study revealed that nearly 90% of employment slots in the United States would, at some point, require developmental postsecondary education (Fleming, 2013). These college-readiness tests are primarily designed to assess some of the skills and knowledge necessary for a student's successful transition to postsecondary education. Before admission, students are asked by the college or university to submit scores. While findings from various studies have shown that students meeting ACT and SAT

benchmarks see greater success in first year college grade point average, these standardized tests fail to unearth social and emotional learning skills, specialized knowledge, and interpersonal skills. As such, there is significant disagreement on the use of high stakes testing, specifically college-readiness testing, as an appropriate form of assessment.

No individual high stakes test can provide a clear profile of student learning; however, states continue to use standardized testing systems to gauge individual growth (Nelson & Eddy, 2008). According to Nelson and Eddy, high stakes tests currently utilized are insufficient to guide instruction, nor do they provide information that may be used to design interventions, or any information surrounding learning trends for students. In addition, high stakes tests often ignore real-world skills (Darling-Hammond, 2006). According to Smyth (2008), students undergo a more distorted learning experience due to the incorporation of high stakes tests into the school environment. The traditional school curriculum has been transformed with greater emphasis having been placed on test preparation and college-readiness (Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

In the current educational climate teachers feel obligated to implement test preparation programs and strategies in order to raise test scores, as opposed to previously identified best instructional practices (Hollingworth, 2007). Additionally, teachers feel pressured to abandon research-supported teaching practices when test results remain stagnant (Hollingworth, 2007). According to Higgins et al. (2006) teaching for learning has been replaced with teaching solely for high stakes testing. This has resulted in a variety of negative consequences including a narrowed curriculum that focuses on low-level skills, inappropriate assessment of English language learners and students with

special needs, and incentives to exclude low-scoring students from school (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Furthermore, while teaching to the test may raise scores, it does not consider best instructional practices, nor does it prepare students for future learning experiences (Gulek, 2003).

Schools are now focusing more on passing state tests as opposed to student achievement (McColskey & McMunn, 2000). To achieve this goal, administrators and teachers have engaged in illicit practices, such as illegal test preparation, cheating, manipulating statistics, and failing to report accurate dropout rates (Garcia, 2006; Faulkner & Cook, 2006; Gentry, 2006). Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008) performed a mixed-methods study in a large urban district in Texas. They found that the reward and consequence system created by high stakes testing policies incentivizes schools to “game the system” and implement practices that exclude students from testing or even school. In this longitudinal study, over 270,000 students during a 7-year period were included in the quantitative data set to track three cohorts of students from 1995-2002, specifically looking at test scores trends alongside characteristics of students that were excluded from taking the test. In addition, qualitative interviews collected data on student achievement, progression, and graduation. These interviews included focus groups and individual interviews of approximately 200 various stakeholders, comprising administrators, teachers, and students. The results of the study suggest the district purposefully did not code dropouts to represent achievement and passing rates to meet high stakes testing policies.

In a similar study, Figlio and Getzer (2002) researched schools in Florida and found that significantly higher rates of disabled students were from the lower-income and

lower-performing student pool, with this trend seeming to rise when new high stakes assessments were introduced. Another concern is that students may perform better on assessments because they practice for the test rather than actually learning the content. Strategies that familiarize students with the test may not represent real learning, because scores sometimes will be related to students being prepared for the specific assessment rather than being taught the relevant concept (McColskey & McMunn, 2000).

The perceived pressure on the part of administrators and teachers is understandable given that consequences are issued by the federal government when the results of schools are not meeting benchmarks for annual progress, with the goal being to motivate schools to develop strategies to address low-performance, typically in the form of raising test scores (Zaltman, Florio, & Sikorski, 1977). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 required states to develop assessments in basic skills. To receive federal school funding, states had to give these assessments to all students at select grade levels. In 2009, the Race to the Top Fund (RTTT), was created as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009). RTTT was a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that created conditions for education innovation and reform with a focus on achieving significant improvement in student outcomes. The most current federal policy on education is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed in 2015. While ESSA places more responsibility back on the states to govern their education systems, there still are strict assessment requirements as ESSA requires states to hold schools accountable for how students achieve.

Student performance is at the forefront of information provided to parents and they are more aware of student results on tests both within their school and how their

school compares to other schools. In addition, the pressures felt by educators are magnified because governmental policies have created conditions where student test scores are actively publicized within, and across, communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). Parents use test score information to gauge not only if their children are learning but also to assess if teachers are teaching effectively. This creates a potential issue as using results on high stakes tests as the sole gauge of student learning, while under the intense scrutiny of the public, could impact student attitudes about learning altogether (Nelson et al., 2007). This means that an educational environment overly focused on high stakes tests, such as college-readiness testing, may actually devalue the information that college-readiness testing was designed to provide and in turn, influence teacher and student attitudes on college-readiness testing, preparation, and education.

Perceptions of Testing

High stakes testing has been researched for its effect on schools, the curriculum, and the educational environment. Research has been done to determine how students and teachers perceive the high stakes testing world that now controls the educational landscape, as well. Current studies are limited, though, as the focus of most seem to align to the same trends. One of the consistent trends that has repeatedly been identified by research studies in this area is the perceived benefit, or lack thereof, of high stakes testing.

Paris, et al. (1991) researched students' attitudes about high stakes assessments and its impact on performance and student self-esteem in school. Students from second grade through eleventh grade were surveyed, with the results showing that as students move through school, their perception of high stakes tests evolved. Students in lower

grade levels put faith in their teachers and the system, believing that high stakes tests were valuable; however, high school students questioned the validity and need for the exams. Quantitative data collected from the same study (Paris et al., 1991) showed that secondary school students believe that test results and intelligence are distinct from each other, with one not necessarily connected to the other. A consistent sentiment on the part of high school students was that “intelligent students do not always get good test scores” (p. 15).

That may be the result of a lack of motivation to perform well on high stakes tests as students’ progress through school. Wong and Paris (2000) interviewed 52 fourth grade students and 39 tenth grade students, all of whom were identified as strong academically. Open-ended questions about student perceptions on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) were given to the participating students. Results indicated that tenth grade students regarded classroom tests as more important to perform well on as opposed to high stakes assessments. Wong and Paris (2000) postulated that older students require external motivators to promote effort on high stakes assessments. Repeated exposure to high stakes testing where students do not receive any useful information or extrinsic consequence can result in students becoming more focused on obtaining rewards rather than intrinsic interest in understanding and learning content. When results are the sole focus, students may be less motivated to continue in their efforts to learn (Wong & Paris, 2000).

In a similar study that had sophomore students rank their anxiety levels with regards to a specific state assessment, the results showed that students perceived the test to be unfair and because of that, they didn’t worry about the results or the test itself

(Hughes & Bailey, 2002). With state results suggesting that many students would fail the test, and the research study showing that nearly fifty percent of the students believed that their results could prevent meeting graduation requirements, the lack of concern on the part of students became magnified. Hughes and Bailey (2002) further investigated this phenomenon through intense interviews with participants. The results identified that students perceived the system to be unfair with one test so strongly impacting their high school career. Additionally, students raised concerns about the loss of instructional time because of testing and test preparation.

Further research by Noguera (2007) investigated the idea that high stakes testing can be perceived to limit instructional content when he surveyed 10th grade students in ten different high schools. Students were surveyed and asked a variety of questions regarding relationships with teachers, school security, student motivation, and opinions on high stakes testing. The results suggested that students are displeased with the amount of class time that is allocated to test preparation, specifically for the high stakes assessments required in the school. The results also indicated that students did not take issue with the test themselves, as they understood the potential in holding schools and teachers accountable to ensure students learn required content. In other words, students recognize the inherent benefit of high stakes testing, but take exception to the fact that the logistics of high stakes testing interferes with valuable instructional time in the classroom (Noguera, 2007).

Teachers' perceptions of college-readiness tests also question the value of such exams. Urdan and Paris (1994) surveyed 153 K-8 teachers to determine their attitudes about the Standardized Achievement Test (SAT), specifically, to gauge teacher

perception on the test's usefulness, how others view them, and how best to prepare students. The results suggested that teachers view the test as detrimental and that teachers engaged in practices, purposely or accidentally, that could invalidate students' scores. In addition, personal experience, such as the number of years in teaching, and professional environments, such as the demographic of students, seemed to influence teachers' attitudes and educational practices regarding the SAT.

Not all perceptions of high-stakes testing are negative. Fuchsman et al. (2020) found that removing high-stakes testing had no impact on the likelihood of quitting teaching, changing grade levels, or switching districts. Instead, it found potential positive outcomes of regular high-stakes testing. The researchers used a "difference-in-differences" approach, comparing changes in mobility over time in grades/subjects where testing is no longer given as compared to those grades/subjects where testing is always given. The results showed that the probability of teachers with less than four years of experience in grades one and two fell from one percentage, and three percentage points for those teachers in grades six and seven.

Relationship between Prior Research and Present Study

Post-secondary education is continuing to expand as a necessity to be a successful member of society. As such, college-readiness assessment is a valuable and necessary tool. Even more so when discoveries show that 40% of all students enrolling to pursue different courses at the post-secondary level require some form of remedial course upon admission (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). This suggests that college-readiness assessments that gauge content knowledge are necessary; however, the

dissent among educational professionals and students as to the importance placed on these tests alone is problematic.

To produce college-ready students from high school, school systems must align curriculum to the content necessary for post-high school environments of work and education (Camara, 2013). Higher learning institutions prioritize creative thinking, problem solving, effective judgement making in various situations (Bangser, 2008). Many high schools already infused this type of curriculum into their educational environments. A study involving almost 1,200 students, originating from 700 high schools, found that most schools emphasize independent learning, problem-solving, and self-paced curriculum (Bissell, 2017). The study concluded that higher scores of these parameters translated to a high likelihood of successful transition to college.

Johnson (2008) determined that students from rigorous learning set-ups are more likely to prove college ready as compared to those from the less stringent academic environment. The study also discovered that such students from a rigorous learning environment were more likely to stay in school until the completion of their degree (Johnson, 2008). This is because higher rigor promotes the development of learning skills, such as problem-solving skills and independent learning skills.

While there has been research to show the value of soft skills, the ability to think critically, problem solve, lead, be responsible, and communicate, and collaborate (Devedzic et al, 2018), and higher-level thinking for students to be college ready, there is a gap in the research as to how college-readiness assessment participation impacts the attitudes of students and educators toward education. This qualitative research explored, and adds to the literature, an understanding of the impacts of college-readiness

assessments on students' and educators' attitudes about education. College-readiness assessment has been effectively utilized to gauge student knowledge and academic aptitude. Similarly, these assessments have provided context by which educators can assess their own effectiveness in imparting knowledge and academic skills; however, participation by students and educators in these college-readiness assessments provide life experiences. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights that experiences in the various levels will influence the other levels that help shape an individual. When combined with Friere's "banking concept" of education, and the depositing of information to prepare students for these college-readiness assessments, the context of this research becomes apparent. The experiences from college-readiness assessment participation by students and educators will have an influence on attitudes towards education due to participation in college-readiness assessment, which provides the basis for this qualitative research study.

CHAPTER 3: Method

Curricular decisions have been made based on federal education policy and mandates contained within the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the Race to the Top Fund (2009) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Such decisions will have an impact on the classroom experience for students and teachers. Increased participation in college-readiness testing also impacts the classroom experience. Educators now spend more time preparing students for testing than they do on other content areas that were part of the traditional curriculum (Higgins et al., 2006). As a result, students are inundated with testing material and test preparation programs throughout their 4 years of high school (Santman, 2002). The purpose of this qualitative case-study was to understand the experiences of administrators, teachers, and 12th-grade students regarding college-readiness testing and test preparation programs with respect, in particular, to their attitudes toward education.

In Chapter 3, the research method, design, and an explanation of the appropriateness of a qualitative case-study approach are provided. Also included is a description of the population, data collection procedures, and instrumentation. Trustworthiness of results will be addressed, as well as data analysis procedures.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding the study was:

1. How do college-readiness testing experiences influence educators' and students' attitudes about education?

Sub-questions included:

- What were educators' and students' experiences with college-readiness assessment programs?
- What feelings, thoughts, and attitudes do students and educators have about their experiences with college-readiness testing programs?
- In what ways, if at all, did educators' and students' experiences with college-readiness testing influence their attitudes toward education?

Setting

This study focused on attitudes of high school administrators, teachers, and students in a Northeastern Suburban School District. To maintain confidentiality, all names of districts, schools, and participants are pseudonyms. The Wayne School District is a large suburban school district, which has approximately 6,700 students enrolled and employs more than 650 teachers throughout the district (National Center for Education Statistics). The community boasts a median household income of almost \$100,000 with nearly 16,000 households within the school boundaries as per the National Center for Education Statistics.

This study's objective focused on college-readiness testing that takes place in the latter grades. As such, relevant demographics for the secondary schools (grades 9 - 12) is detailed in the table.

Table 1 - Demographic of Secondary Schools of Participating District

School	Number of Teachers	Number of Students	Percent of Graduates Attending a 2- or 4-year college
East Wayne High School	101	1,115	97.8%
West Wayne High School	112	1,205	97.4%
Central Wayne High School	6	48	N/A

The researcher had familiarity with procedures and programs within the school district, which allowed the researcher to directly access certain resources and individuals to aid in the completion of the study. The principal of the school was contacted to obtain permission for entry and to identify prospective administrator and teacher participants. The teacher of the science research program within the school was also contacted to identify potential student participants.

Participants

Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that administrator, teacher, and student participants had experiences with college-readiness testing. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study (Palys, 2008). Guest et al. (2006) determined that saturation, the point at which there is enough data to ensure research questions can be answered (Bowen, 2008), typically occurs within twelve interviews, but recommend a minimum sample of fifteen participants for all types of qualitative study. As such, a sample of two administrators, eight teachers and eight students, for a total of eighteen participants, was

sought for this study. Participants were asked to provide relevant demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, level of education), while maintaining their confidentiality. Participants all have experienced college-readiness testing and college-readiness test preparation programs as an administrator, teacher, or student. Teachers were selected for participation based on their experience, with a minimum of five years teaching Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which culminate in a formal college-readiness written assessment or teaching courses that are connected to a SAT or SAT Subject Exam. Student participants were all seniors, at least 18 years of age, all having completed a minimum of two AP classes and corresponding AP Exam, along with having taken an SAT or ACT assessment a minimum of one time. The researcher also worked to ensure that all student participants were a representative sample of the school's demographic makeup.

Basic demographic information of the eighteen study participants is detailed in Table 2. The participants consisted of eight students of the same age (18) who have previously completed an SAT and/or an ACT preparation program and who participated in AP classes and coursework that culminated in an AP exam. Eight participants were educators with previous experience in college-readiness preparation and test-taking as well as having a minimum of five years' experience teaching an AP course. The study also included two school administrators. Participants were coded as S1–S11 for students; T1–T8 for teachers; and A1 and A2 for administrators during data collection, but for the purposes of this study and to maintain confidentiality, participants were identified by pseudonyms as listed in Table 2.

The S1–S11 group consisted of four females and four males, consisting of two Hispanics, one student of Bengali descent, four Asian students and one white American. Each of the participants had partaken in the SAT preparation program around 16 years of age, with some as young as 15. For the student participants, AP exams were taken over multiple years, when students were 15 - 18 years of age. The same age was recorded for ACT preparation programs for all eight students. Both administrators are of Caucasian background, the female is 55 years of age, the male younger at 47 years. A2 is the High School Principal with a doctoral degree in education administration, and A1 is the Assistant Principal with a background in social studies and technology. T1 – T8 consisted of seven men with and one female who was 41 years of age with a master's degree and currently teaching a range of human and psychology studies, as well as global and social issues. The male educators of group T range from 43 years to 61, five of whom have obtained a master's degree in various subjects, the other two have a PhD in their respective fields.

Table 2 - Description of Participants

Participant	Title	Gender	Age	Education	Background	Number of AP Exams Taken	Number of Years Teaching College-Readiness Connected Class
A1 - Dr. Selena	Administrator	Female	55	Doctorate	White / Jewish	N/A	N/A
A2 - Dr. Bruce	Administrator	Male	47	Doctorate	Caucasian	N/A	N/A
S1 - Gal	Student	Female	18	High School Graduate	White / Hispanic	9	N/A
S2 - Steve	Student	Male	18	High School Graduate	Asian	9	N/A
S3 - Scarlett	Student	Female	18	High School Graduate	Hispanic	10	N/A
S4 - Robert	Student	Male	18	High School Graduate	Latino	3	N/A
S6 - Tony	Student	Male	18	High School Graduate	Bengali	11	N/A
S7 - Chris	Student	Male	18	High School Graduate	White	5	N/A
S9 - Gwenyth	Student	Female	18	High School Graduate	Asian / Latino	10	N/A
S11 - Evan	Student	Male	18	High School Graduate	Asian	11	N/A
T1 - Mr. Reed	Teacher	Male	47	Master's	Jewish	N/A	18
T2 - Mr. Storm	Teacher	Male	48	Master's	Irish American	N/A	20
T3 - Mr. Grimm	Teacher	Male	45	Master's	White	N/A	10
T4 - Ms. Kyle	Teacher	Female	41	Master's	White / Caucasian	N/A	16
T5 - Dr. Freeze	Teacher	Male	43	Doctorate	Caucasian	N/A	14
T6 - Dr. Stark	Teacher	Male	61	Doctorate	White	N/A	20
T7 - Mr. Downey	Teacher	Male	52	Master's	White	N/A	27
T8 - Mr. Evans	Teacher	Male	47	Master's	White	N/A	8

Data Collection Methods

The method for data collection was individual interviews. Interviewing, when considered as a method for conducting qualitative research, is a technique used to understand the experiences of others. While the primary goal was to perform these interviews in-person, governmental policies and guidelines from the Department of Health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person contact. As such, a parallel design included the use of virtual interviews. Virtual interviews that took place used the video conference application Google Meet. Google Meet is a video conferencing platform similar to Zoom. Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing platform that can be used for video conferencing meetings, audio conferencing, meeting recordings, and live chat. Participants were able to join the meeting in real time, via webcam or video conferencing camera, or via phone. Archibald, et al. (2019) interviewed 16 practicing nurses and found that most described the interview experience on Zoom above alternative interviewing mediums, such as face-to-face and telephone. They concluded that Zoom is a viable tool for qualitative data collection because it is easy to use, cost-effective, and includes appropriate security. The selection of the design was dependent on in-person accessibility at the time of the study. In other words, in-person versus remote interviews were selected based on the Department of Health and IRB guidelines in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of each interview. Both designs utilized Seidman's (2013) interview technique as the overall structure for the process by which interviews were completed.

Seidman's interview protocols include fundamental practices that must be utilized in the interview process. Listening skills are required in an interview as more focus and

attention to detail is necessary than what is typical in normal conversation. In addition, while an interviewer generally enters each interview with a predetermined, standardized set of questions, it is important that they also ask follow-up questions throughout the process. Similarly, the research must ensure that while the participant is being interviewed, they are being encouraged to explore their experiences in a manner that is sensitive and respectful. Another practice is the use of open-ended questions, when possible, to avoid any type of leading questions that can influence a participant's response. Participants must also feel comfortable and respected throughout the entire interview, so interviewers should avoid interrupting participants whenever possible as well as being aware that interviewing creates an unusual dynamic that requires the participant to divulge personal information in the presence of a complete stranger.

Seidman's model of in-depth interviewing consists of a series of three separate interviews with each participant. Three interviews provide an opportunity to plumb an experience and place it in context as opposed to limiting the method to a single interview, which increases potential bias (Granot & Greene, 2015). The purpose of the first interview is to allow the participant to become familiar with the context of the study and develop a relationship with the interviewer. The purpose of the second interview is to focus on specific details of the participants' present experience. In the third and final interview, participants are asked to reflect on their experience and responses during the second interview session.

While the interviewer and interviewee were the main instruments utilized, an Individual Interview Guide for educator participants (Appendix B) and an Individual Interview Guide for student participants (Appendix A) was the basis for interview

questions during the interview of the participants. The interview guide approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information. The interview guide approach is useful as it ‘allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study’ (Wenden, 1982). Table 2 indicates how each question of the interview guides connects to the research question and sub-questions.

Table 3 - Interview Guide Questions Connection to Research Questions

Research Question	Individual Interview Guide - Student	Individual Interview Guide - Educator
Research Question 1	10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15a, 16
Sub-Question 1	4, 5, 5a, 6, 6a, 6b, 6c, 15	4, 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 7b, 7c, 16
Sub-Question 2	7, 8, 9, 15	8, 9, 10, 16
Sub-Question 3	10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15a, 16

These individual interview guides were developed for use in a study on the influence of high-stakes testing on 12th grade student attitudes toward education and lifelong learning (Rowland, 2011). Permission was obtained from the researcher to integrate these interview guides into this study.

Rowland (2011) completed a pilot study prior to utilizing the developed interview guides in her research study. Results from the pilot study showed that questions asked during the individual in-depth interviews yielded detailed and in-depth responses from both participants. Rowland did not have to clarify interview questions in order to gain

responses from participants. Rowland concluded that the pilot study supported that the data collection instrument was sufficient to answer the research question.

Data Collection Procedures

While the researcher prepared parallel designs, all interviews for this study took place remotely by videoconference. Participants had the opportunity to participate from a self-selected location. Familiarity with the setting for the interview is done to increase participants' level of comfort. The interview was limited to no more than one hour and was recorded using either the Voice Memo application on the researcher's iPhone 8 for in-person interviews or video recorded directly onto the researcher's hard drive for video conference interviews.

The researcher had direct access to certain resources and individuals to aid in the completion of the study. The principal of the school was contacted by phone to obtain permission for entry. Due to governmental policies and department of health guidelines, entry may not have been possible, though this did not prevent the collection of data through alternative means as described. Purposive sampling will be utilized to ensure that teacher and student participants have experiences with college-readiness testing. Collaboration with the principal will assist to identify prospective teacher participants. The teacher of the science research program within the school was also contacted by phone to identify potential student participants. While the researcher's primary goal was to collect data on-site, digital technology was utilized to gather the necessary data.

Each teacher identified was contacted by email (Appendix E) to invite them to participate in the study. A participant consent form (Appendix C) was included in the email. Through coordination with the Science Research teacher, potential student

participants were provided with a digital copy of the invitation through email (Appendix F) to participate in the study, as well as a copy of a student consent form (Appendices D).

Each participant completed an individual interview session. The primary goal was for these individual interviews to take place at the participant's school in order to maximize the comfort level for the participant; however, these interviews took place through a Google Meet video conference. Individual interviews that were to take place in person would have been voice recorded on the researcher's iPhone 8 in order for the researcher to fully engage with the participant. Individual interviews that were to take place through video conference were audio and video recorded with a copy saved directly onto the hard drive of the researcher's computer. Individual in-depth interviews probed participants' individual attitudes with college-readiness testing in order to reveal how those experiences have influenced participants' attitudes about education.

Trustworthiness of the Design

This study focused on the attitudes, experienced and perceived, by those individuals that have overseen instruction, provided instruction on or taken college-readiness assessment. An individual's beliefs stem from real-life experiences. Qualitative research methodology utilizing a case study research strategy allows for an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. As the researcher was interviewing participants from the same high school, they comprise a single group and case studies are based on in-depth investigations of a single individual or group (Creswell, 2018).

While it may be argued that quantitative research methods are seen as a more reliable method in research as they are considered to be objective and qualitative research

is believed to contain a subjective nature, establishment of credibility, dependability, reliability, and confirmability supports the trustworthiness of any qualitative study (Denscombe, 2010) .

Credibility asks the researcher to link the findings with reality in order to demonstrate the truth of the research study (Creswell, 2018). In other words, credibility requires that the findings are believable. Credibility was established through triangulation and the use of member-checks. Triangulation can be defined as “...the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Denzin, 1978, p. 291). Through the collection of different kinds of data on the same phenomenon, results can be interpreted with greater accuracy. In other words, when the collected data aligns it “...enhances our belief that the results are valid and not a methodological artifact” (Bouchard, 1976, p. 268). Triangulation was achieved through data collection involving student responses, teacher responses, and administrator responses. Member-checking is defined as sharing either a brief summary of the findings or sharing the entirety of findings with the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By reviewing different data sets on the same topic, student, teacher, and administrator responses on college-readiness assessment and attitudes on education, along with the data collected from the member check, the researcher was able to identify, with credibility, any repeating themes.

Dependability supports trustworthiness because it establishes the research study findings as consistent and repeatable (Creswell, 2018). This means that if another researcher were to review the data, they would draw similar interpretations and conclusions. Dependability was established through an inquiry audit. An inquiry audit involves having an outside researcher review the data collection process and analysis,

along with the results of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This allows for confirmation of accurate findings that are supported by the collected data, and therefore supports the trustworthiness of the design.

Reliability in qualitative research relies on consistency (Leung, 2015). Results may vary, so long as the methodology consistently yields data that are similar. Consistent methodology was promoted through the use of interview guides that ensured all participants received the same bank of questions. Saturation, the point at which responses begin to overlap (Bowen, 2008), was accomplished by exceeding the minimum number of required interviews to achieve saturation in qualitative research (Guest et al, 2006).

The last component in considering trustworthiness is confirmability.

Confirmability connects to the level of confidence that the findings are based on participants' words rather than researcher biases (Creswell, 2018). Confirmability was achieved through the use of reflexivity. Reflexivity pertains to the researcher being analytical of their role as they proceed through qualitative research (Dowling, 2006). Reflexivity is defined both conceptually and as a process (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017). Conceptually, it refers to a certain level of consciousness and entails self-awareness (Lambert, Jomeen, & McSherry, 2010). It is about the recognition that researchers are part of the social world that we study (Ackerly & True, 2010; Morse, 1991; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1990). Reflexivity as a process is introspection on the role of subjectivity in research. It is continuous reflection on personal values on the part of the researcher (Parahoo, 2006). It requires recognizing, examining, and understanding how their "social background, location and assumptions affect their research practice" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 17). The key to reflexivity is "to make the relationship between and the

influence of the researcher and the participants explicit” (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009, p. 45). To accomplish this level of reflexivity, the researcher maintained a reflective journal. Such a journal allows for the researcher to continually review progress but also the opportunity to actively reflect on the research experience and collection of data.

The implementation of an inquiry audit, the use of interview guides, and sampling to support saturation led to trustworthiness of the design for this research study. In addition, the use of reflexivity and triangulation on the part of the researcher led to reliable and valid research (Boodhoo & Purmessur, 2009).

Research Ethics

Study participants were selected from the high school’s administrators, teachers, and students in 12th grade. The principal assisted in identifying the teacher participants for the study and sharing their professional contact information. The science research teacher provided the contact information for the students. Each teacher identified was contacted by email (Appendix E) to invite them to participate in the study. A participant consent form (Appendix C) was included in the email. Through coordination with the Science Research teacher, potential student participants were provided with a hard copy of the invitation (Appendix F) to participate in the study, as well as a copy of a student consent form (Appendices D). No participant was under the age of 18; however, student participants are still in high school. Audio recording, or video recording dependent on the selected design, was used to capture the exact statements of the participants and allow the researcher to ask questions without writing down participants’ responses. The recordings were used to create accurate transcripts for data analysis. Confidentiality of participants

was maintained, as assigned identification numbers were used in place of participants' names.

Educator and student identities along with the information that was collected during interviews are kept confidential. All recorded interviews and all parts of the research process are maintained in the strictest confidence. While a transcription service was utilized, identifiable information was not included. In addition, the transcription service adheres to National Institute of Health policies and procedures for maintaining confidentiality. The researcher is the only one who has access to the raw data. The raw data will be stored for 5 years on the hard drive of the researcher's computer, with password protection. The raw data is not to be shared.

Data Analysis Approach

The researcher submitted audio recordings to a transcription service and the data was transcribed from the recordings. Transcriptions were reviewed and analyzed using inductive qualitative analysis. Merriam (2009) indicates data analysis of qualitative research involves identifying recurring patterns. According to Hatch (2002), inductive analysis starts with specific elements and finds connections to them, along with searching for patterns of meaning.

To find these connections and patterns, the data was coded. Coding is the process of labeling and organizing qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them (Creswell, 2018). Assigning codes to words and phrases helps capture what the response is about which, in turn, helps better analyze and summarize the results. The researcher utilized manual inductive coding where a small sample of the data was reviewed to create codes that cover that sample (Basit, 2003). A

new sample was reviewed, and the created codes applied, with new codes created for any aspects of responses that did not fit the existing codes. This process was repeated until all responses were coded. To best manage and organize the various codes, a codebook was maintained. The codebook was kept on an Excel Spreadsheet, to which only the researcher had access. As data was coded, new codes were added to the codebook and the resulting categories and themes were adjusted, as necessary. The codebook included the label for each code, a simple description to what the code refers to, the date it was coded, and any miscellaneous notes on the code.

Codes were continuously condensed and arranged into a hierarchical coding frame so that statements about the phenomenon could be developed (Hatch, 2002). Hierarchical frames help organize codes based on how they relate to one another. From those frames, recurring themes may emerge which will allow the researcher to begin to understand participants' experience, how they experienced it, and their resulting attitude with regard to education.

Researcher Role

The researcher's personal experience growing up in a homogeneous cultural and socio-economic community has influenced the researcher's attitudes and beliefs about the role of education and the potential implications of college-readiness testing and preparation programs. In addition, as an educator for the past 18 years, the researcher's professional experiences have informed the researcher's own beliefs of college-readiness testing and preparation programs. Through these professional experiences, the researcher was inspired to develop these research questions and engage in this study. As such, the researcher has a vested interest in the research study and will have a bias that will not be

allowed to influence the data collection or analysis process.

Through the use of reflexivity, the impact of these biases was minimized. Reflexivity as a process is introspection on the role of subjectivity in research. It is continuous reflection on personal values on the part of the researcher (Parahoo, 2006). By openly recognizing personal biases, the researcher was able to proactively address them, so they did not influence data collection or analysis. Through the methodical collection and analysis of the data, existing biases were resolved.

The study was also directed by a postpositivist paradigm. Postpositivists dissect statements of truth gathered through data collection in order to determine the reality of the phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002). Yet, postpositivists contend that reality cannot be known entirely. Researchers can only hope to gain a close resemblance to reality (Hatch, 2002). According to Creswell (2018), the absolute truth can never be found. Researchers let the data guide their findings, not their impressions (Hatch, 2002). Research attempts to advance significant true statements that explain the situation being studied.

Limitations

As with the majority of studies, the design of the current study was subject to limitations. Limitations include participants originating from a single district, participant response, the researcher effect, and the timespan of the study. Though the sample size was sufficient for saturation within the district, data collection was limited to responses from students and educators from a single district. Participant response was also a limiting factor, as some participants may not wish to answer specific questions during the interview that relate to their experiences, attitudes, and emotions with relation to college-

readiness testing and education. Individual interviews and the interview locations were strategies to address this limitation. The researcher effect (Payne & Payne, 2004) exists as the researcher is a former employee of the district. As a former colleague and teacher of the participants, it was possible that the researcher's personal experience could subconsciously influence the participants. Maintaining a detailed reflection journal and including the participants in a member-check assisted in minimizing the effect of this limitation. The short time span of the study, as opposed to a longitudinal study, only provides data from the current 12th grade cohort of students in the school.

Conclusion

This qualitative case-study focused on educators and 12th grade students who have experience with college-readiness testing and college-readiness test preparation. Specifically, this study sought to understand how high stakes testing and test preparation programs influence educators' and students' attitudes about education. Participants were administrators, teachers, and 12th-grade students that participated in in-depth interviews from a single high school district in a Northeastern suburb. Interviews took place either at the high school or via video conference, depending on the selected design, using consistent data collection procedures and instruments.

CHAPTER 4: Results

The conducted research study focused on investigating how college-readiness testing programs affect student and teacher attitudes toward education. Scholastic Achievement Tests (SATs), American College Tests (ACTs), and Advanced Placement (AP) exams commonly taken by students are an integral part of the college-readiness experience. The attitudes teachers and students have toward this practice is multifaceted and the foundation by which the researcher sought to conduct this study. Since the qualitative study consisted of raw subjective data an inductive coding approach was incorporated to derive codes from the collected information.

Discussion of Overall Findings

The major categories identified, along with excerpts of participants' responses that informed the development of those categories, are highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4 - Significant Categories for Individual Interviews

<u>Category</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Description of Attitude</u>
Content	CT	<p>The content has nothing to do with my program of interest.</p> <p>The SAT questions aren't the same as what we're learning in high school, like they're considered tricky questions.</p> <p>Standardized tests are really skills-based. The part SAT that hasn't changed has been the reading comp. That's a skill.</p> <p>Teachers provide all the content and resources to prepare for the AP exam.</p>
Performance	PRFM	<p>The exams aren't the best measure because results may not be representative of a student's ability or performance through the year.</p>

		Results can be situational because of different questions/content covered on exams taken on different dates.
Environment	ENV	It is daunting and you feel underprepared. The environment is not the same as how students are taught. The tests are too long. The tests create a challenging environment. The tests create unnecessary stress.
Structure	STR	The purpose of the exams is misunderstood. Preparation for the exams is repetitive.
Support	SPT	Teachers provide ample review and provide insight to be successful. Students often comment about the quality of the review sessions and how they were helpful.
Perception	PER	The tests don't matter and should not be used. It is tiresome and not beneficial. A more holistic approach should be used when considering college admission.

This bottom-up method allowed for themes to be identified through the study as opposed to predetermining one based on literature. Most importantly, inductive coding attributes a sense of credibility to the qualitative form of data that will be presented in a comprehensive structure to follow. As the data collection calls for insight into thematic analysis in order to organize, analyze and report on the qualitative findings of the 18 participants, this approach is included with the inductive reasoning across the epistemologies and rationale discussed.

Based on the number of responses received, numerous themes have been identified and the respective coding will be detailed in the following table. A summary of the participants' responses was created and reviewed to allow for these themes to be formulated and expanded on to align to the over-arching research question and sub-questions that align with the objectives of the research study.

Table 5 - Overall Findings

<u>Category</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Emerging Themes</u>
Content	CT	Unsatisfactory preparation of SAT program AP classes had positive impact on content knowledge AP coursework properly prepares students for tests over SAT and ACT
Performance	PRFM	Inaccurate reflection of academic performance and ability
Structure	STR	The purpose of college-readiness exams is misunderstood Preparation for these exams results in repetitive learning
Environment	ENV	Tests are too long, daunting and stressful
Support	SPT	Educators assistance is invaluable
Perception	PER	There is no need for SATs and standardized testing should be abandoned

The inductive approach identified major themes that were common once analysis of the data began. Inductive coding revealed a large number of participant responses related to content. Responses included recurring commentary that SAT content

preparation was insufficient, AP coursework provided valuable content knowledge, and that AP coursework was more effective in delivering content knowledge than SATs and ACTs. This connects to participant responses that suggest a belief that college-readiness assessments, specifically the SAT and ACT, are inaccurate reflections of student abilities, and as such, there is a perception among the participants that certain college-readiness assessments, specifically the SAT, should not be utilized as a gauge of student ability when making college-acceptance decisions. In addition, the environment created by these exams is stressful and dissimilar from the typical learning environment and assessment formats to which students are regularly exposed and participate.

Rather than abandon college-readiness assessments, participant responses suggested a lack of understanding of the role of college-readiness assessments when compared to the history and purpose of these exams. This lack of understanding connects to experiential learning that is reflective of Friere’s “banking concept” of education, where content assimilation is based on depositing of information and repetitive learning, rather than critical thinking and analysis. Even with this connection to Friere’s “banking concept”, there was consistency in participant responses that educators create dynamic learning environments to maximize student success on college-readiness exams, specifically the APs, and that these efforts are invaluable and appreciated.

These themes, as revealed by analysis of participant responses, will be explored, explained, and exemplified further in the following sections, with overarching themes connecting them to provide a clearer picture of repeating ideas and perceptions as shared by participants.

Theme 1: Preparation for SATs/ACTs in School is Unsatisfactory as Opposed to AP Exam Preparation

The SAT and ACT are considered the biggest standardized testing methods utilized for college-readiness assessment. It is vital to ensure that the procedure by which these tests are administered and performed is done in support of furthering students' education and chances for acceptance into higher educational institutions. The interviews show this is not the case for many of the participants. With respect to the SAT preparation program six out of eight student participants stated that the process of SAT classes were not conducted on a continuous basis, with some only occurring a few months out of the year, therefore sufficient preparation efforts or familiarity with the content could not take place. Similarly, both administrators and six out of eight teacher participants stated that SAT preparation is not part of the school or classroom curriculum. Seven out of the eight teacher participants stated that they did not do any ACT preparation and did not even bring up the ACT as a potential college-readiness assessment with their students.

This was further highlighted by student responses that suggested SAT and ACT preparation must take place outside of the standard school day and year. Student participants raised concerns over the time factor of taking college-readiness preparation classes in between their current curriculum and after school activities. As one mentioned, the programs are often scheduled during the summer which is at an awkward time in the year. It also means that this preparation is not being provided by the school or any classroom teacher. In addition, the preparation that is provided, whether by school or outside entities, is not focusing on content. For Steve (18-year-old male student) taking

part in SAT preparation only assisted from the point of making him familiar with the general testing environment and the formats of either the ACT or SAT. When discussing the ACT and SAT, Steve said, “Completely different. It’s just that they’re not cohesive, so you have to be prepared to take one or the other. It’s not like the same thing.” Not only are preparation programs not providing content knowledge, the exams themselves are such different formats that preparation can’t be streamlined, which furthers the perception that preparation for the SAT and ACT is unsatisfactory.

While six out of eight students reported a lack of in-school preparation, such as when Scarlett (18-year-old female student) said, “...the SAT is not an in-school thing...,” this didn’t necessarily undercut the perceived importance of college-readiness preparation and testing. Scarlett also said that, “I think the SAT helped me...well preparing for the SAT helped me realize I need to be proactive.” This shows that the SAT is preparing students for adult life in college as they can no longer rely on teachers and administrators to remind them of assignments or manage their workload. However, it is also highlighting that preparation is not occurring while students are in their classes. This perceived value of the college-readiness experience is further backed by Robert (18-year-old male student) who stated that the preparation program didn’t help him with any of the content on the tests, but that he wasn’t stressed about the outcome because the programs assist with the best way to go about taking a test and conducting oneself. For Scarlett it was said that she had sufficient resources provided by her teacher for the SAT even though there was not much support offered during class time:

I think I had enough resources to feel prepared for it. I think especially with the recommendations I had from my teacher. We weren’t doing stuff in class, but I

felt like I had enough stuff outside of the school to really prepare myself and I think that's what drove me to do good. (Scarlett, 18-year-old female student)

This quote reinforces the lack of preparation for the SATs and ACTs in class but removes the blame from the teacher. In fact, it suggests that teachers provide information, there just isn't sufficient in-class college-readiness assessment preparation.

While seven out of eight teachers interviewed stated a lack of SAT and ACT preparation in their class, that doesn't mean it is non-existent. Mr. Storm, a 20-year veteran teacher, has had SAT preparation skills since 1995 and articulated that he performed numerous activities throughout the year for the students, contrasting much of what had been said by other participants. Mr. Storm said, "I work quite a bit of that into my own course. So, I do quite a bit of practice". Specifically, for the SAT Mr. Storm expressed that the college-readiness preparation testing connected to the SAT and ACT must differ from the AP programs because they are testing basic skills needed for college:

All those standardized tests are really skills-based. So, the way we're teaching the reading comprehension skills, years ago, we used to do more structured vocabulary units to try to get them ready for that portion of the SAT. But the part of the SAT that hasn't changed has been the reading comp. That's a skill. So, really throughout the whole course we're doing that. (Mr. Storm)

Mr. Storm also mentioned that there are no special activities or resources provided for the ACT in his classes. So, while he provided a different viewpoint than the majority of his peers or students with regard to SAT preparation in the classroom, the lack of ACT preparation is consistent with the unsatisfactory college-readiness assessment preparation sentiment.

The above quote will be revisited as it correlates with another theme that SAT scores do not accurately represent the students' academic ability, and that perhaps the students do not understand the function of the standardized testing that is meant to encompass foundational language and mathematical skills among comprehension that is vital for college environments and even the working world. Before expanding on that idea, though, Mr. Storm's quote also serves as an example that highlights a perceived fundamental difference between AP exams and SAT/ACT exams and the preparation that is provided for these college-readiness assessments.

Regarding AP classes, seven out of the eight students and eight out of eight teachers responded that regular preparation and review took place during class time and the school year for these exams. Tony (18-year-old male student) said:

I think that it kind of made sense because it was kind of like...because it was really integrated into. Because all the teaching in those classes was mostly meant for the AP I would say. It was meant for your success there, so it was really correlated. It was really heavily intertwined. (Tony)

Dr. Selena, the Assistant Principal, agreed with this and that the AP coursework provides a comprehensive platform of content and review opportunities where students can "...enjoy many of the classes and they feel like they've learned something from them", finding them as important for the students' future entry into college and subsequent acceptance as it is to gain their high school diploma.

This was further supported by Gal, an 18-year-old old female student, who answered the SAT preparation program had no impact on her college-readiness performance, only that the process discouraged her from applying to certain institutions.

For Gal, the AP classes were challenging enough as a regular honors student, and even said, "...that's where I felt like everybody I was around is on the same level as me, we're going to get each other and I was learning more as far as I like about myself because I was being challenged." The process of preparing for the AP tests is what secured Gal's opinion of the education system, learning not just for the class and test but for her long term educational and professional career:

The AP testing like preparedness really is what solidified what I like and don't like. And I feel like it really enhanced my opinion on the education system like I have more faith in it now after taking APs than when I was taking the average class because it's so rigorous and I feel like I learned everything not just for the test but like in the long run. (Gal)

While Gal expressed confidence in the education system, she shared openly her lack of confidence in the college-readiness assessment system. She believed that the SAT didn't seem to have any significant impact, in fact she believes the test to be a bad indicator of college-readiness due to the fact the test is only administered once and based on two subjects, Mathematics and English. If a student scores low on the SAT for whatever reason, certain scholarships aren't accessible and even though Gal was able to get into her school of choice, she stated "...it definitely discouraged me from applying to higher levels schools." Particularly for Gal, she knew she wanted to further her education and only took the SAT due to university entrance requirements, and were this not compulsory, she would have only taken AP classes as "I wanted to be challenged in the class and I wanted to see if I can get some college credit for a reduced price because college is expensive and I don't want debt."

It is important to note however for Gal, that the test itself had no major impact on her, it was the AP coursework that affected the student's overall perspective and attitude towards college-readiness preparation and education. This highlights the importance of regular preparation that is constantly revisited and presented throughout the school year.

As AP classes integrate college-readiness exam preparation throughout the academic year, where some are even performed only for half of the period, the preparation methods are conducted on a continuous basis, cementing the knowledge, content, and environment in which testing takes place. Tony (18-year-old male student) added that the AP exams did have a positive impact because they were more "varied" and shorter as opposed to SATs and were not as "repetitive or monotonous".

It is understandable, given such responses, that AP college-readiness assessments and coursework would be preferred by students over the SAT and ACT as college-readiness assessments. Evan (18-year-old male student) stated that AP exams were easier to get through, but this was due to the teacher's involvement in reviewing the content and making the effort to prepare the students:

AP exams, they are more relaxing to me. I just – so um the teachers in my school, they do some very – they fulfill all the reviewing purposes so I don't have to do much work on my own. So preparing for the AP exams is relatively easier on me as I don't have to like find any of the other materials to do, to prepare for AP. My teachers will do it, like basically for. (Evan)

Since AP classes are conducted throughout the year, regular marks and scores are included and account toward students' total credit, furthering their chances of entering prestigious universities. The attitude towards this preparation program is far better

received than the SATs as evidenced by the majority of the participants. For Mr. Reed (18-year teacher) this point is shared as the curriculum is seen as a challenge that students aim to achieve:

I didn't really know what kids could do until I started teaching the AP classes, and it wasn't just the population. It was the relevance of the curriculum combined with the challenge. Kids rose to the occasion for the most part. I think we can make some better students. (Mr. Reed)

Student responses revealed that the AP classes for the subjects they are interested in are the most useful. Student responses also suggested that AP coursework was the most productive in preparation of their college-readiness testing and positively influenced their attitudes towards the educational system. For Scarlett (18-year-old female student) AP classes were helpful, "It was very thorough, and I feel like I got the most preparation for any college-readiness testing for the AP exam". Even though this was concurred by Steve (18-year-old male student), he suggested that the materials received by the College Board were not always the most relevant and up to date and it felt like "they could just change the format of the test and you could be completely unaware". The preparation of AP tests for Robert (18-year-old male student) was well received in that most of the year was focused on reviewing the content and refreshing student knowledge periodically, while performing group discussions to encourage other learning methods.

For Robert in AP Government class, the AP preparation platforms and resources assisted him the most. The same student expressed that with AP classes "...you are able to focus down more on a particular topic in that subject. And it relates to the same topic so it's a little bit easier in that regard". Whereas for SATs there are two subjects for

which to prepare, APs allow for students to focus on one subject at a time and prepare for a certain environment.

To ensure these classes are positively received and students feel well prepared, Mr. Storm explained that his method of preparation was to go through previous exams and prepare mockup tests for the students with timed essays. In addition, reviews of books and authors are assigned, and practice tests given to the students to prepare them for the AP tests. Mr. Storm went on to explain:

So, because I have access to all those old exams, and then the skills and practice that we do in that course, I work quite a bit of that into my own course. So, I do quite a bit of practice. Again, like I said, if I find passages that tie in – like reading comp passages that tie in with what I'm covering in class, I make photocopies and use those throughout the course. (Mr. Storm)

It is important to note that Mr. Storm conducts this method of college-readiness preparation during SAT seasons as well, and not just during the allocated AP class times.

This commitment to AP preparation by educators is further demonstrated by responses provided by Ms. Kyle. Ms. Kyle cited the AP test preparation as being “undoubtedly” important and is conducted on a regular basis. As a psychology major with 16 years of experience Ms. Kyle believes the AP program to be highly advanced forms of content that utilize advanced terminology and oftentimes educators engage in “practice question type learning” based on past AP test papers because the questions are not always posed in a very straightforward way. Ms. Kyle said, “So, if kids want to be successful on the AP exam, they need a rigorous regimen from the start of the year familiarizing themselves with the language and the style of the AP exam.” In other

words, there is exam preparation that must take place for student success, but this college-readiness assessment preparation in classrooms only exists for AP testing; therefore, this supports the perception that SAT and ACT preparation is unsatisfactory.

Theme 2: Academic Potential is Inaccurately Represented by College-Readiness Assessments

The purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes of students and educators in the context of preparing for college through various preparation programs and testing platforms. Another theme brought to light when analyzing participant responses is the shared consensus that the college-readiness preparation programs often do not accurately represent students' academic performance throughout the year as the tests taken are based on a small period of time in which they had to study and prepare. The results from the SAT scores only show one mark towards students' aptitude, whereas AP scores may show students' average performance from the beginning of the academic year, to gauge their progress and evaluate college-readiness on a broader scale. The attitudes from five out of the eight students interviewed in this regard is that many would choose not to partake in college-readiness preparation programs like the SAT or ACT for fear that the scores would lessen their chances of gaining acceptance into a prestigious university. For example, 18-year-old female student Gal stated:

I wanted to apply to Ivy Leagues, and I didn't because I knew my SAT wasn't going to get me in. And when I applied without the SAT to the University of Rochester, I got a good amount of money and it was a very selective school. But when I applied to another school of the same stature, I didn't get any money

because they required an SAT and it stopped me from going to my dream school basically. (Gal)

This suggests a perception among students that the SAT is not an accurate reflection of their academic potential. In addition, it demonstrates an impact on decisions made with regard to higher education based on student experiences and perceptions with regard to college-readiness assessments and their reflection of student ability.

Gwenyth, an 18-year-old female student, held views that all three preparation programs, ACT, SAT and APs were only important to “weed out what they want”, to maintain a certain level of quality of students a university will accept. Where most of the participants saw a noteworthy amount of value from AP classes as a college-readiness assessment that is accurately assessing one’s academic performance, Gwenyth believed that none of these programs showed the person as a whole, and allowed institutions to judge a student based on their score. Gwenyth said:

...I also think that testing and scores doesn’t show the whole person of like, what their value is. And it seems some colleges still hold a lot of weight on what your score is in order to accept the student or not.

This student also expressed that standardized tests like the SAT are possibly more important than the AP tests, but that they can still be valuable. This demonstrates an understanding of the need for tests, but the belief that too much value is placed in scores when judging a student’s academic potential.

With all eight students interviewed sharing their concern over a single test representing their academic potential, it becomes important to consider the other participants such as the administrators that participated in the study. Dr. Selena discussed

the caliber of a student and the person they are is not accurately reflected in the scores they receive from SAT testing and oftentimes a highly academic student does not perform well on a standardized test. She states:

They can be a terrible student and do very well on the test and there's everything in between. I don't really see it as the best measure of a student's ability to be successful in school or to achieve in school. (Dr. Selena)

The Assistant Principal went on to express her views on the topic of a good student “as somebody who does their schoolwork when it's supposed to be done, puts effort into it so that they can do it as well as they can, seeks assistance when they can't do it as well as they can, or they recognize that they are missing something”. This type of abstract definition of a good student isn't something that will be encapsulated in a single exam score.

This belief isn't just that of the Assistant Principal; when asked what constituted a good student Mr. Storm replied:

Participation, enthusiasm, ability to think, maybe, critically or to think kind of creatively to carry on a discussion in class. Maybe a back and forth debate. Ability to back up an interpretation with evidence from a text, let's say. The exams don't always cover all those skills that a student displays in the classroom. (Mr. Storm)

This further supports the students' claims that not all the college-readiness preparation and assessment programs show their true academic abilities.

Ms. Kyle, a veteran AP Psychology teacher, provided additional evidence of this perception when she shared that the students who receive 5's as their AP score are

generally not the same students that are getting A's in the class; therefore, in addition to SAT, the APs are not a true indication of students' academic ability and knowledge.

I will say that my 5's don't always line up with the kids who are getting A's in my class or 100's. No. If you're looking to do that fine-tune and can I predict, and look at who's getting a 3, 4, 5? No, absolutely not. That's kind of a crapshoot per se because and I also look at the idea that some kids are taking seven AP's. (Ms. Kyle)

Further in the interview when asked about relating student ability to AP test preparation programs Ms. Kyle elaborated:

So, when you hear about AP performance, you know, sometimes the scores are more indicative of motivation, future plans in colleges, whether their college even accepts the credit and all of that. So yeah, there are outliers sometimes that I have kids that are getting 98's. I get 1's and I'm like, "How did that happen?" I have kids that fail virtually every test all year that pull out 4's. And so, yeah, in terms of the predictive validity of the exam or the assessments I give in the classroom to be able to predictably judge AP performance, for the most part they're all a 3 and above confident in the subject area."

While Ms. Kyle supports the AP course and curriculum, she doesn't think that the method in which the students are tested is ideal. The AP tests tend to ask tricky questions, which even though it is useful to gauge the level of advanced thinking and problem-solving skills students possess, assessing them only once over their 10 month school period is not sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of what the student actually knows.

Ms. Kyle felt it was “haphazard” and that when there are “14 terms to assess knowledge and you use a term twice” it tells her that the assessment wasn’t made in a way that “they actually want to know what kids know.” She felt this was highlighted even more so this year, with COVID-19 forcing a sudden shift in the format of the test and it seeming like more this year that they [College Board] were kind of going through the motions and not really putting a lot of time into the construction of the exam.

The aforementioned quotes from educator interviews are several specific examples of teachers and administrators supporting student perception that college-readiness assessments are not accurate reflections of student potential. With six out of the ten educators interviewed supporting this perception, it should be noted that there were some educators that believe the assessments do portray an accurate snapshot of a student’s academic ability.

Mr. Reed shared that the state averages for his classes are always higher than others and it is a good representation of the students’ ability. He went on to say, “It does [have] a pretty solid positive correlation. I think kids of high ability tend to do very well on these tests.”

However, Mr. Reed’s perception was the minority opinion and students were clear in their belief. Scarlett said that the ACT didn’t reflect well on her academic performance, however this was largely due to her lack of initial preparation. For the SAT, she held a similar stance in that it occurred during the summer and only once in the year, whereas for the AP it was “more of a consistent thing”. The SAT was not a true reflection of how the student performed on a continual basis. Scarlett explained, “I don’t think it

reflects my ethic as a student, but I do feel like I worked hard for it and I think that goes to show that I do have some kind of drive in some sense.”

While students clearly expressed a dissatisfaction with single assessments representing their academic potential, student attitudes towards college-readiness preparation and assessment programs should be tempered as they may be dependent on the subject of choice, where a certain aspect may be required for college but the student battles with retaining the knowledge, subsequently performing worse on those AP tests. For Tony especially he says:

I am not good at history. So, even if I did try my best for it, like memory is not my strongest skill for that. So, my scores in like Math AP tests would always be higher anyways. But I still understand history. Like I can still understand it, I still comprehend it. I can do work relating to it. So, it depends on the subjects whether or not, if it reflects my ability as a student. (Tony)

In the context of academic skills and ability Steve, an 18-year-old male student, alludes to APs being a “better representation of my ability because it shows how I can be more analytical in my skills rather than the chance of choosing the right answer”, as opposed to the SATs and ACTs.

The ability to select a specific subject and resulting college-readiness assessment topic influences student perception of the value and validity of certain college-readiness assessments over others. While participant responses revealed that it is perceived that SATs that do not accurately depict a students’ true performance and single exams are not always accurate reflections of student abilities, some college preparation programs may

be a better indicator of academic ability, namely the AP, when compared to SATs and ACTs. As Steven points out:

I think the AP exams were a little better representation of my ability because, for example, in AP language, AP lang, I was able to do things that I prepared for. Because in the SAT and ACT, they're a lot more general, and they pull from all areas, but in specific courses. Like maybe if you even count and SAT subject test, it really hones in on what you like prepared for.

Student participants that felt the college-readiness preparation programs and assessments inadequately represented their academic potential based on a few test scores, their attitude towards education and testing is affected. One important aspect Robert, an 18-year-old male student, raised is that unlike with AP classes where the student has enrolled into a class that they chose and wanted in the first place, SAT or even the ACT are based on specific subjects and criteria to be met. It is seen as unfair to determine a students' worth based on the weight of one or two test results. Robert went on to say:

Also it's the topics that are on it. Not science but reading I'm actually okay with but the math is actually one of my least favorite subjects so I feel that if it was a little more well balanced on different topics just because those aren't the only two topics that you're going to be learning about in high school and also in college as well. I feel like it should be more of the core subjects should include all of them instead of just a particular side because some people like me prefer some topics over another.

For students like this, SAT results can be detrimental to their future post-secondary opportunities and may limit college credit regardless of a higher AP score. For Tony the

SAT preparation didn't seem to have much of an effect, further agreeing with Robert that the SAT is not related to what you know as a student, but how well you can prepare for the test. Tony noted that, "It's just you need to be able to know how to apply basic things and it's not directly related to what you know as a student, like the things you learn as a student."

Chris, an 18-year-old male student, mentioned that his attitude towards education was negatively impacted based on the scores received after taking the SAT. "I have had decreased scores on the tests. I don't think that the scores reflect my preparation. So, I think it decreases my attitude towards education."

This is exemplified by student responses that suggest that the questions from the SATs are often perceived as outdated and that the content students learn throughout the year in class is not valuable by the time they sit for the examination. This notion is reiterated a few times by students who felt that the test questions were repeated year after year and only measured a students' ability to remember questions and answers in a repetitive, parrot learning fashion. This attitude is shared by administrators and educators.

Interviews with students and educators revealed that thirteen of the eighteen participants commented on "memorization" and "constant question review" as opposed to critical analysis and deeper learning. Parrot learning, or the depositing of content into students brains, was taking place as the ability to answer college-readiness assessment questions is based on reviewing questions over and over to the point of memorization and connects with this primary motif that identifies SATs as an insubstantial measurement tool to evaluate how well a student is performing. A lot of where SAT and ACT preparation falls short is the content that is being taught and the manner in which

preparation classes are conducted. For Scarlett it felt as though as students they were just trying to memorize questions and answers in order to pass a standardized test. In one aspect, this method of learning is suitable to a certain degree, in that it cements knowledge and skills for a student by relearning the material on a continual basis, but this can become tiresome and oftentimes students lose motivation to study, and feel that they are wasting valuable time. Tony expressed that the content and learning platform is very monotonous:

Like I think testing is important to some extent but also at the same time I feel like a lot of the testing that we take is very repetitive and I feel like there are a lot of ways that we could be testing children's knowledge and their experience and their intelligence.

The general attitude in this regard is negative towards the college-readiness preparation and assessment program and while the AP exams are perceived as potentially being a more accurate reflection of student ability, the participant responses earmark an area of further research as to ways that standardized testing can be updated to better represent student academic potential and promote deeper learning.

Theme 3: College-Readiness Testing Does Not Align with Classroom Learning

Experiences

The perception that college-readiness assessment preparation and testing promote Friere's "banking concept" of education and fails to promote higher level learning and critical analysis does not extend to the daily learning environment to which students are exposed. An underlying theme that was evident was that the environment in which the

official tests take place are not aligned with the classroom experiences that students are having on a daily basis.

Mr. Storm's opinion was that the SAT test preparation did not positively affect his attitude towards education, since the process felt more of a performance indicator for the school than a benefit for the student.

I felt like that was burdensome to me and that I really – I understood why we were doing that. And for – to improve the student's scores, so the school could then say, our students performed on this level on these tests, to try to attract more students to those schools. (Mr. Storm)

Mr. Storm also went on to discuss how he felt college-readiness assessment preparation didn't "fit seamlessly" into his coursework and that from an early time in his career, time and energy could have been devoted to more meaningful pursuits in the classroom. In other words, college-readiness assessment preparation is forced to fit into the flow of class, suggesting it is not aligned with student learning experiences or the standard classroom environment.

The environment in which these tests are conducted was a common concern among student participants, with five of the eight students describing an awareness that the test and testing room are not the same as what they experience on a daily basis in their classroom. Steve (18-year-old male student) mentioned that when preparing for exams in school, the setting is very different to when you enter the official room. Steve said, "...it's a different situation when you're actually in the testing room because it has a very different feel, and you're being timed...". In addition to being under these conditions,

students feel a disconnect between the school as an institution and the process of testing as though they are not correlated with each other. Tony goes on to say:

...SAT subject tests, the room is full of people who have been preparing for that specific subject, and it's just a different feeling rather than someone trying to just get a score so they could go to college. It's like someone trying to perfect that specific subject so they can go and do what they want...where the SAT and ACT start to feel like a competition between the students as to who can score the highest and earn the biggest scholarships.

This suggests a major disconnect between the assessment experience that students have in their regular classrooms, and therefore these college-readiness assessment experiences are having profound impacts on student perception, with minimal appropriate preparation provided for these anxiety-filled, stressful experiences.

When it comes to the curriculum, the consensus among the participants is that it is easy for the students to become overwhelmed from the workload. Where AP is conducted throughout the year, the coursework is more difficult and demanding, and the SAT and ACT tests are either prepared for during a short period of time or students must source outside assistance. Both of these situations do not match up with the typical classroom experience for students or for teachers. A ten year veteran AP teacher Mr. Grimm when asked about students having to take these types of college-readiness tests he said that they provide everyone with an equal experience and gives structure and a goal, but even when the college-readiness assessment curriculum changes, it didn't have a major impact on what he was doing in his classroom. Not to suggest that students weren't learning, rather that the teacher wasn't using the test as the basis to plan lessons, rather the focus was on

deep learning; however, this fuels the perception by students that there is a disconnect between the classroom learning experience and the college-readiness assessment.

When asked to elaborate on whether these perceptions were based on past experiences Mr. Grimm somewhat agreed that it was mainly to do with the stress students experience themselves around AP test preparation and tests.

So, I don't know that the exam itself has a big of an issue as it does, just the pressure for all the kids to be taking all these exams. And them being overstretched and just a lack of interest in learning and more of an interest in completing the course. (Mr. Grimm)

This statement further supports the stress that college-readiness testing and preparation are perceived as causing. It clarified that students have so much on their plate with AP test preparation, on top of SAT and ACT exams to learn for, that they develop the mindset of "just getting things done" for an end result. In the experience of Mr. Grimm many students attend to these assessments at the 11th hour. Previously he observed students spending a lot of time preparing for exams beforehand, but now they are doing that studying the night before. Perhaps this has to do with changes in the responsibilities of students beyond the classroom, so while the logistics of college-readiness assessment has remained constant, the school experience and student demands have not.

While the logistics of testing has been constant over the years, for many, testing is an uncomfortable experience that causes a lot of stress during a young student's life. The environment that these college-readiness tests create is daunting and stressful. For 18-year-old female student Gal, the SATs were no exception where she said, "I personally hated the experience of taking the SAT because it wasn't up my alley, I felt very out of

my comfort zone”. By saying this, it suggests students are just going through the motions of preparing to take AP, ACT, and SAT exams, however the method by which they prepare is a completely different environment in which they physically conduct the test, and as such, students are not properly equipped when they enter a test room. This connects to student perception that they are under increased pressure to prepare and perform well on these tests in order to secure their future. Interestingly though, this did not affect Gal’s attitude toward the educational system, rather she interpreted that most applicants are seen as numbers to the universities and base their acceptances on those with the highest scores, that is to say those who perform well enough on the SAT and ACT so that it does not impact scholarship opportunities.

The students feel stressed and daunted because they are not quite sure what to expect during the exam and must prepare for all types of environments to be presented to them. For many students who are studying a more creative or innovative subject such as art history or social sciences, college-readiness assessment programs are not as effective in preparing those students for their chosen careers. The content prepared for in these classes throughout the year, does not mimic the college-readiness test environment. The perception is that the questions put forward in these tests are based on science, mathematics and other standardized university subjects, and do not properly cover new topics that relate to the variety of 21st century professions. Students also feel that if they want to gain access to a university they either need to pursue a career in which the same subjects are covered under these college-readiness assessment programs, to ensure the best possible chances of entry and higher academic marks, or the students must choose to stick to their field but lose scores on these exams and possibly not be accepted into a

desired higher educational institution. Alternatively, students can also choose not to submit SAT scores when applying to colleges and universities, however for those needing financial aid, this can be a major implication that brings about further tension.

While stressful situations can be valuable learning experiences, there is consensus among participants that college-readiness assessments stress causes anxiety that is not productive. This was highlighted when Ms. Kyle discussed her experiences and how perfectly performing students are not achieving the results one would expect, subsequently this lowers student motivation and increases anxiety. Ms. Kyle discussed an instance with a particular student who was incredibly anxious and gave up badminton and gave up everything to do these test prep courses, walked in and bombed the test the first time he took it because there was so much anxiety built around it, and then didn't come to school the next day. This reaction to stress and anxiety is unhealthy and isn't indicative of student responses to typical school experiences.

While there was consensus on this stress among students and educators, with six of the ten educators commenting on stress and anxiety with college-readiness testing, and five of eight students mentioning stress, it wasn't always perceived as a bad experience. In Scarlett's opinion the pre-work especially was boring, but it did not change her attitude towards education. Scarlett stated that "these tests had brought some stress on me" and took her focus away from the preparation time because taking and passing the test was the most important part. In the same essence though these preparation methods were assistive for the students in figuring out what they needed to achieve in order to be successful in life. As Scarlett said in her interview:

It helped me hone in what I need to work on as a student and how my attitude towards education should be. Like I might not want to do it but it's going to help me in the long run so maybe I should just put all the effort I have into it and then just get it done with.

At one point of the session Scarlett spoke about feeling negative about education due to the length of the test, where "...I always felt like I was losing steam by the end of it...", ultimately affecting her performance on a test that is four hours long. Considering this education became less fun for Scarlett but more real in terms of what is to come. For many, taking a test is stressful enough, and with the added necessity of preparing to sit for that length of time comes with its own concerns. As this student points out at one point, "I just got hungry or I had to use the bathroom or something and I just kind of wanted to get out of there. That kind of affected my performance."

This lack of alignment with classroom learning experience had an embedded belief expressed by seven out of the eight student participants, where there is a perception that college-readiness testing, specifically the SATs and ACTs, should not be continued. Chris, an 18-year-old male student, stated that standardized testing shouldn't be used at all, given that many institutions themselves have chosen to do away with these college-readiness programs, stating: "...I even saw in the news yesterday or today that eight Ivy Leagues abandoned and want to stop using standardized tests."

This notion was shared by Mr. Storm when asked about the SAT scores being an indicator of a good student.

My experience is the SAT scores are not the greatest indicator of how that student is as an overall student. I think the results are – it's tough to say. I'm not surprised

when good students do well on that test. At the same time, I'm somewhat surprised when someone who's not a great student in class, does exceptionally well on the test.

While Mr. Storm places responsibility on students, recognizing that not all of them put their full effort into achieving maximum performance, he questions the validity of the tests and the need to use them to gauge student potential. This aligns with the student perception that college-readiness tests, not necessarily coursework, should be discontinued.

This was not a universal belief among educators, though, as Mr. Reed was under the impression that the SATs were an accurate indication of students' academic ability stating, "From what I understand, there's also a very strong positive correlation there as well. Makes sense". This discrepancy could be due to the fact that Mr. Reed has little to no involvement in the SAT preparation process, and only knows that night classes are being run with private tutoring sessions. This could also be a consequence of only a few students who have found success in this program, having expressed their experience and performance to Mr. Reed, and as such is his only form of reference. Mr. Reed went on to stress:

I don't have a problem with the tests. I know there's a movement amongst teachers that the tests stress kids out, or they're not an accurate measure of ability, or a future predictor of success in college. But I see SATs as the great equalizer, even though there is this socioeconomic aspect of it. It's the same test run for everybody and it's a very good measure of reasoning skills, which are needed for college.

This discrepancy leads into the next theme in that there may be misunderstanding as to the context of college-readiness assessments, which could connect to the lack of alignment between college-readiness assessment experiences and daily classroom experiences for students and educators.

Theme 4: Misunderstanding the Context of College-Readiness Testing

Students and educators expressed a belief that there is an over-reliance on college-readiness assessments; specifically, in making decisions about student potential and providing future academic opportunities for growth and success. These discouraging and demanding factors intersect with the theme above in that students are focused on obtaining good grades for the subjects of their choice, but college acceptance is reliant on a standardized test taken once a year. For many of the participants the attitude towards education has focused mainly on the administration side in which students are evaluated and not the system itself. These college-readiness assessment programs are meant to show students what to expect when they enter higher educational institutions and start to teach them elements of adult responsibility. Steve, an 18-year-old male student, provided a detailed explanation of his opinion, though representative of majority of participants, on college-readiness testing:

I feel like the college-readiness tests, the preparing for it, is like it gives you kind of – at the same time it gives you a goal, but it also might deviate from what like is intended. So, you might be able to learn or get a 100 on the multiple choice and have a loose understanding, but you might not be able to exactly dissect a piece or perform mathematical equation, like all the work done specifically. Because there are strategies for taking a test, and you learn the strategies in school by preparing.

But you might overlook the actual information that you're learning if you're too focused on the strategies for preparing the test. So being prepared is a good thing because we're brought up to believe that these two tests are our ticket into a better future. But it might hinder our actual understanding or the deeper meaning of something that we might be learning because we're so focused on the score that we get. So, preparing for a test is a great motivation. Like it motivates us to know everything so we can have a better future, but it might cause you to gloss over some things that might like change your understanding of something.

These views point to why students identify with college-readiness testing as such a difficult and tense time of their educational career, because there is a lot to maintain. Rather than focus on their academic growth, these college-readiness tests have turned into a life-changing experience where the results are perceived as the only determining factor in future success. This is misconstruing the purpose of these assessments because they are not meant to be the sole gauge of student potential. As Dr. Selena spoke about, the elements that constitute a good student are not necessarily those that are academically adept, but ones who are able to keep up with the demanding requirements of college life. With responsibilities such as these imposed on high school students attempting to attend a college or university, this theme is a major implication of the SATs and ACTs specifically that is hindering student progress and decreasing motivation to continue their education.

Ms. Kyle also spoke about how students are sourcing outside help in the form of private tutoring, but when asked about specific thoughts towards the SAT test preparation process Ms. Kyle spoke out, in agreement with most of the participants. The SAT didn't

accurately reflect their true performance as a student stating, “I think that it’s misleading kids into thinking that a single test will dictate their success in the future.

This was a recurring event for Ms. Kyle’s students who were academically proficient yet received disappointing results on the SATs. As a result, students are putting aside other important extracurricular activities in support of studying for SAT tests, and Ms. Kyle believes that there is more value attributed to the SAT scores than is worth students’ efforts.

SAT tests are in general more manageable to prepare for than AP in terms of workload, though teachers' perception is that SAT preparation has replaced the other after school activities in which students used to partake. Where focus used to be on sports, after school jobs, socialization with peers, or other typical adolescent social behaviors, it has been replaced as of late with SAT and ACT preparation programs. This is possibly due to the necessity to enter certain “dream colleges” as Gal said she couldn’t get into based solely on her SAT results. This shift in behaviors and perceptions is indicative of the misunderstanding of the context of college-readiness testing, where it is being used solely as an academic potential gauge and opportunity creator rather than an informative educational experience for students and teachers.

Mr. Grimm, a ten-year veteran of the AP classroom, additionally guessed that the overall experience was negative on the students because of the stress they are put under just to get into college. In relation to their attitude they just want to get these tests done so they can get accepted into college and move on. During this time, the impact is negative, but short lived, as the students forget about the tests as soon as they are over. Mr. Grimm explained that he believes that students do the prep work, study, and do the coursework

because they have to in order to get into college, but they forget everything as soon as the process is completed. This defeats the value of the learning experience that took place through the college-readiness assessment process.

This perception that students are not entirely aware of why standardized testing is in place was further expounded upon by Dr. Selena. The Assistant Principal reported that she believes students feel that they are preparing for tests that will have no impact on their educational career. Dr. Selena openly admitted to not being a fan of standardized testing, but that these tests serve a purpose in that they are meant to challenge students beyond the minimum high school curriculum. Especially the "...AP program which offers students the opportunity to challenge themselves beyond the high school curriculum, which I believe is important for college and being considered college ready."

Educators see the value in college-readiness assessment and preparation as an overall learning experience to promote next level critical thinking; however, students perceive these assessments solely as a means to an end. With this difference in perception of the role of these assessments and learning experiences, student attitudes toward the value of these experiences toward their education as opposed to educator attitudes will not align.

Theme 5: Educators Assistance is Invaluable

While students and educators may perceive the purpose of college-readiness testing differently, a consistent belief is that the role that educators play is invaluable and that they are committed to student success. Though shorter than the other sections, the analysis of this theme was more straightforward. Teacher and student comments were direct in their support of educator assistance, which limited the necessary analysis in

identifying the common theme. The consistent mention of educator assistance allowed for a more focused description of these common responses centered around this theme.

Nine out of ten educators spoke about the additional support provided and student willingness to take advantage of this support. As proof of the teacher's commitment to providing the students with as much preparation as possible Mr. Reed expressed that he maintains the test date in the back of his mind and prepares curriculum based around it, "Along with numerous sessions of AP prep around...starting around April. So, I do about 10 to 12 hours of extra prep that starts in April for the test." Additionally, Mr. Reed feels strongly about the AP tests and even stated "I do consider myself someone who does probably take the test more seriously than some of my colleagues." The testimonies from students are further evidence of the educator's support in teaching and preparing them for college-readiness. Mr. Reed stated:

I get emails from college kids all the time thanking me for holding them up to high standards, and that when they did get to their college psychology class or when they got to their college government class, they felt confident. They felt more prepared than other people.

This connects back to the first theme discussed, where students felt better prepared for AP exams as opposed to a lack of preparation for the SATs. However, even with that perception, teachers are doing the most they can. Mr. Storm shared that he provides enough resources for the students to prepare and does so throughout the school year, not only during SAT season. In light of this contrast between themes Mr. Storm said: "...the feedback that I get from students is usually pretty positive that they're appreciative that I

do that type of work with them.” Mr. Storm believes it is an “obligation” and he would be doing them a “disservice” if he didn’t provide resources and support.

It doesn’t stop at providing resources. Ms. Kyle admitted to going outside of the curriculum when a topic called for deeper research or discussion to take place. Ms. Kyle believes that most educators will make every effort for their students when they are in need, whether it be going beyond the scope of the curriculum or providing support outside of class. Ms. Kyle spoke about how teachers provided AP review sessions, outside of the scope of the school day, even on Saturdays, and without additional compensation.

This commitment to student success was recognized by administrators and students. Dr. Bruce, the Principal, and Dr. Selena, the Assistant Principal, both spoke about the hours of “extra help” that the teachers provide and the number of students in attendance. Both administrators spoke about how students are genuinely appreciative of the support and additional time that teachers provide in response to college-readiness assessment and preparation.

All eight students interviewed commented on their teachers' commitment to their success. Gwenyth’s attitude towards the preparation activities was positive where she stated that “...in general, I think the resources helped me a lot”. Evan, an 18-year-old male student, commented that he “...believed that his success was a combination of his efforts and the hours of support provided by my teachers.”

Through all of the potential criticisms of the college-readiness assessment process, these experiences for students and teachers bring out an appreciation for the time and energy that one group provides to see students succeed.

Conclusion

The major themes identified in this chapter have shown that there are a lot of overlapping student and educator perspectives surrounding college-readiness testing and particularly their experiences with the practical component of preparing for college and higher educational careers. For students that work their entire high school career to build an academic transcript to a point that prestigious and Ivy league colleges will be interested, there appears a decrease in student motivation. This is partly due to the understanding that the SAT tests don't fully integrate into a student's educational life, in that schools do not incorporate enough time into classes as is done with APs and students have to find help from an external source. For teachers however, many believed the same as the students where the highest performers would receive lower scores than expected. From this theme, it was suggested that the AP scores, that have been conducted throughout the year, be used towards college entrance requirements, because those are better indicators of how the student realistically performs as an academic. Additionally, some students of this study posited that all standardized testing should be removed, and only forced upon those that feel a college-readiness program could better prepare them.

It was a common notion that AP preparation is superior and preferred by the students as well as the educators who feel that due to the context surrounding AP, students can be challenged in a way that is not always available. This also provides them the opportunity to build onto academic skills throughout the year and this is where the teacher's involvement is linked. Many of the educators seem to be aware of the unsatisfactory perceptions associated with SAT and ACT testing and also realize the difficulties students face when planning for their career. In this sense, it is seen that these

participants are dedicated to their students and willing to go above and beyond to get them to a point that they are prepared for college and the expectations that come with being in a higher educational institution.

The following chapter will discuss these themes in more detail as to their unique intercorrelation to each other and as standalone components that steer college-readiness testing and college-readiness test preparation in the future, as well as their connection to the research questions and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the results of the findings examined in Chapter 4 of the participant interviews and how those responses, through thematic analysis, revealed viewpoints that connect to the overarching research objective to understand how college-readiness preparation programs impact the attitude students and educators have on education. The purpose of the study was to focus on investigating the perceptions these various participants had when faced with multiple platforms of college-readiness preparation and testing, and the themes that were discussed will be further connected to the literature that was presented in Chapter 2 to explore the topic in deeper context. Coded themes revealed that most students and educators have a negative attitude towards ACT and SAT preparation programs, but that AP had a positive impact on their educational experience as well as motivational levels. The literature showed much of the same views as the participants held, even where some believed that standardized testing served a specific purpose and was useful to a certain extent.

The themes that were analyzed in Chapter 4 will be referred back to in relation to any implications the results may have on the theoretical framework of SAT, ACT, and AP programs and will be supported with the reviewed literature.

Discussion of Findings

The themes identified in Chapter 4 from the inductive coding analysis of the responses to interview questions provide answers to the overarching research question and sub-questions identified in Chapter 1. The central research question guiding the study was:

1. How do college-readiness testing experiences influence educators' and students'

attitudes about education?

Sub-questions included:

- What were educators' and students' experiences with college-readiness assessment programs?
- What feelings, thoughts, and attitudes do students and educators have about their experiences with college-readiness testing programs?
- In what ways, if at all, did educators' and students' experiences with college-readiness testing influence their attitudes toward education?

In answering this central research question, the three sub-questions will be addressed below followed by an overview of the complete dissertation project.

Educator and student experiences with college-readiness assessment programs

From the eighteen participant responses, there were mixed views in regard to all three college-readiness assessment programs. The consensus among most students was that the APs were helpful and reflective of their true academic knowledge of the course content, but that SAT and ACT held less value than they would have liked. Recall when Gal, an 18-year-old female student, discussed her discontent with the college-readiness assessment program in that the school she had been dreaming of her whole life would not accept her with the SAT score she received, even though she was a top achiever. The same student, when she applied without the SAT score to a similar level college, although she did not receive the same amount of financial aid, was offered acceptance. Already this student had a negative attitude towards college-readiness assessment programs and felt that her future was limited because she couldn't afford to go to her dream school

without a higher SAT score. This was one negative experience that seemed to have an effect on the student's outlook towards education.

Toward that end, Gwenyth related that there is no correlation between the content taught in high school and the SAT test they take, which indicates a gap in the design of the program. This perception could be the result of miscommunication between the parties designing the test and those disseminating the content, or it could just be student interpretation. However, the aim of this dissertation was to understand the perceptions of the students, the fact that these comments are coming to the surface are a cause for concern. Towards the latter half of the student interviews it was said that there is not much need for standardized testing and it was even suggested that the SATs should be removed entirely, with several participants suggesting to abandon standardized testing, not just SATs. This suggestion goes back to what Mr. Storm said in that the SAT structure hasn't changed much since its inception, and perhaps this is the issue. Where reading comprehension shouldn't change much in the way it is organized, the vocabulary units that are taught during class could take a different approach in which the students feel they are more prepared when it comes to that portion of the SAT. Particularly where Gwenyth felt that the questions were tricky on purpose, is just one way that students' skills are being tested and developed, but another way in which their attitudes towards education is being affected.

The majority of the viewpoints centered around this notion too, which is how the thematic analysis identified it as the first coded theme. The time spent on preparing students for SATs is far from enough and is evident by the final test results they receive being lower than their AP scores. Under the scope of AP testing though, it was

unanimously agreed that the classes adequately prepared one for the test at the end of the year. Students also felt that the scores they received were indicative of their true skill as they had been preparing all year, had sufficient material, and the curriculum was difficult enough to challenge them to study harder. Because the teachers had more time to cover the curriculum, they were able to plan classes according to the time schedule and review the modules. Additionally, teachers are aware that AP exams utilize tricky questions, so many of them focus on this aspect in the classroom and the students benefit.

From the educators point of view, there were mixed responses on the overall college-readiness assessment program experience, in that some teachers and administrators felt that the test perfectly met the students' needs and that the results of the SAT/ACT test were their own responsibility for which to work harder. Others felt that the students were already too busy with their normal academic and extracurricular activities and these tests just imposed unnecessary burdens. Ms. Kyle's story about a student that gave up extracurricular endeavors like badminton in order to focus on college-readiness assessment preparation was an example of this overly burdensome experience. This student had difficulty handling the result of his performance, a behavior observed by many teachers as they experienced students who would battle to cope with normal day-to-day life just attending high school and getting through the socio-economic diversities everyone faces in today's society.

For some teachers who were willing, their experience with college-readiness assessment programs involved going outside of school duties to assist students where the school would not provide the resources. Mr. Reed talked about the additional hours of review he provided for AP exam preparation, similar to Dr. Selena's mention of the hours

of extra help that teachers in the school provide and of which students take advantage. Teachers also spoke about how SAT testing has changed, as Mr. Storm discussed where it used to be covered in the curriculum to a much larger extent, even though university requirements haven't been amended.

AP tests and classes were perceived far more positively because the students felt the learning and classroom experiences aligned more with the content and tests when they entered the exam room, they knew they were properly prepared. Recall 18-year-old female student Gal said she, "...felt as though the rest of the class was on the same level as each other because they had been brought up to the same skill level during the year, by being challenged with the same classes and experiences."

The College Board in 2020 stated that the AP courses and exams are designed in such a way as to collate a combination of long answer questions and multiple-choice questions that relate to the most up-to-date content as defined by industry professionals. These tests are managed by the AP Test Development Committees who sit together each year to design exams that are valid, fair and appropriate to the current coursework being implemented in high schools and undergo continuous revisions during the development process to ensure that the tests encompass a variety of questions to test all aspects of the curriculum. In addition, these professionals work to make sure that the difficulty level across the questions are in line with college and career expectations so that all students who take and pass AP tests know that they are sufficiently prepared and qualified in the subject they have taken.

What differs in the AP and SAT is that AP committee members meet to go over feedback given from secondary and higher educational institutions to evaluate how AP

courses and exams are progressing and how the experience is being perceived by students. If there are gaps within the curriculum or structure, or if students are failing due to the difficulty level not being in line with the coursework, then the necessary changes are made. This is a factor in why AP preparation and tests are far better perceived than other college-readiness testing, and students seem to perform much better in the overall context. This is also partly due to the fact that AP is focused on throughout the year, as part of the full-time curriculum that is integrated into the students' regular schedule, whereas for SAT the students only start preparing during the summer and have to source outside preparation assistance through private tutoring.

Notions of oppression seem to still be evident among the high school environments students are a part of in today's society and have come to the surface through these interviews. The implication of this last point is that motivation for students to perform better and partake in college-readiness programs is diminishing, and even those who are forced to complete SATs or ACTs, do not enjoy the experience, and only do so for one purpose, to gain acceptance to a reputable university so that one day they may have a stable income and career. In reality, the students forget about standardized testing the moment the scores have been finalized and don't look back on the experience other than to be grateful that it is over. With the recognition placed on SAT and ACT scores by universities for successful entrance, it should be at the fore-front of the school's curriculum and incorporated as much as what AP classes are, but this is not the case.

In general, the experiences the students described were not ideal and would naturally change anyone's perspective towards learning and education.

Feelings, thoughts and attitudes students and educators have about their experiences with college-readiness assessment programs

In answering this sub-question, subjective analysis must occur, where students expressed feeling stressed about preparing for these standardized tests. There was another element where a few students alluded to the idea that these tests are forced onto students for the school's agenda and don't hold any actual value to their educational careers. These thoughts and ideas are critical to understand why the students expressed them. Based on the experiences shared and the information gathered from the open-ended questions, there is a recognition that SAT and ACT testing was designed for a purpose and implemented into the education system to assist universities in recruitment, however AP has now taken preference in the student perspective, but not the institution.

One of the themes that came to light during the thematic analysis procedure that related to student and educator feelings toward the college-readiness assessment process was the perception that standardized testing such as the SAT and ACT programs did not accurately reflect students' potential, and was mainly indicative of their ability to memorize questions and answers. This viewpoint is corroborated in Chapter 2 by Luo (2009) and Wang & Zhang (2007) who studied the history of college-readiness testing. Originally the test was called Achievement Test (AT) and focused on subjects including science, history, math and English. Lemann (2004) explained that the objective of the AT was not to test students' achievement, but rather their intellectual capability to adopt specific measurable knowledge. To narrow the objective of academic testing, the ACT was later designed to emphasize on assisting students in choosing post-secondary

subjects and universities, along with measuring how well a student learned the content they were taught in high school.

The implication to this theme, specifically in relation to the literature that was reviewed, is that students are now becoming less inclined to apply to universities if their SAT/ACT scores are lower than they expected. These results also reflect negatively on the institution that shows an unsatisfactory academic average for graduating students. Educators such as Dr. Selena, Ms. Kyle, and Mr. Storm, commented that students who would do well in AP classes would get a low score on their SAT test, and other times, lower-academically-inclined students would score exceptionally well on the SAT/ACT.

Even with this potential inaccurate reflection of student ability, educators believe that college-readiness assessment programs are beneficial and vital to the university entrance process, however they held similar views in that the SAT and ACT no longer hold the credit they once did, nor is it governed by the same quality standards. Teachers also expressed feeling cornered to push the administration side of standardized testing to improve district scores, in sacrifice of student benefit. The administrators were in support of the preparation programs, most likely due to the fact they do not implement the practical aspect of the curriculum, and believe that the up to date content isn't being covered on SAT and ACT preparation programs that are on the tests. The advantage for college-readiness testing is the AP classroom structure and the examination, which all three groups praised. From all aspects AP meets student expectations as well as providing them with high level skills in a chosen topic.

Another major theme was that students felt insufficiently prepared for the SAT exam environment in that there was not enough preparation time during school hours.

This is highlighted by responses like Gal's where she wanted a private tutor. This relates to the identified theme of there being unsatisfactory preparation methods on college-readiness testing. There are complex ways in which people learn and develop knowledge and everyone does so in a different method, under various conditions and time constraints. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory posits that young children develop by way of the relationships they progress in and grow with. For example, children rely on their immediate surroundings to understand the environment and build their knowledge based on this. Bronfenbrenner goes on to propose a layered system by which these environmental factors are inclusive of family, friends, and schools that share experiences and events that affect viewpoints and attitudes towards other aspects of life. This relates to the theme where students feel stressed from all the responsibilities of college-readiness preparation and testing. This experience is regarded as a highlight point in a student's educational growth. Since studies have shown that these and other illicit activities are taking place, as there is a drive to maintain high performance to reflect positively on the school, it would be logical to assume that the claims made by the students hold some merit. This suggests the tests are not being aligned to the content taught and subsequently not accurately measuring their academic performance. The same literature suggested that some students perform better over others based on their ability to learn a certain assessment structure and not necessarily their knowledge of the content taught. Again, the correlation to the one major theme is evident, but these issues are not easily mitigated when federal policies are involved.

The overall feelings towards college-readiness assessment programs have to be looked at between the SAT/ACT and the AP. Where the participants can see the reason

behind schools utilizing SAT/ACT for gauging college preparedness, not many students can find the benefit to using these scores for furthering their higher education, unless they are given more time to prepare and the subjects are made more relevant. In the context of the AP, for such a highly positive response, these scores should take preference, if not equal standing, to SAT/ACT results when applying to universities.

Ways educator and student experiences with college-readiness testing influence their attitudes toward education

Based on the results of Chapter 4 and the discussion thus far, it would be logical to assume that the student and educator attitudes towards education would have negatively changed substantially through their experiences described in the interviews. However, as the transcriptions show, this is not entirely the case. Educators felt that the experiences were teaching the students valuable life lessons they would need after college, skills they would gain for life. The attitude towards education didn't change much but the experience in teaching the students did. Nowadays teachers are seeing the pressure building up in the students' lives with all the different preparation requirements needed and some expressed that where APs were more beneficial, they were being put to the wayside for the SAT and ACT that weren't employed on a large enough scale.

Mr. Reed thought that most kids did rather well on college-readiness assessments but that the SATs were not close enough in relation to the content as the APs. In other words, where AP classes were taught throughout the year and students were afforded the opportunity to constantly review and prepare for the test, SATs were only focused on during a set period of the year. This is not a reflection on the school or the educational framework in that the students know these standardized tests are required for college-

entry and should effectively treat them the same as AP preparation classes by studying much earlier on as well as put in more effort. Unfortunately, as many participants pointed out, the stress levels associated with college-readiness preparation testing is already at an all-time high that any more workload would be unfavorable to students' performance, however, it is just during the final year of high school. With the weight that colleges and universities attribute to SAT scores and the context in which it was designed; to be a valuable learned skill, it is something that students should be able to place more focus on throughout their academic years in high school, at least until the point until they have been accepted into the institution of their choice.

Interestingly this is reflected in the student attitudes toward the APs that provided regular classes with complex content that would challenge them. There was no real noticeable influence on any students' perception towards education because most knew that it was merely a steppingstone to get to the next stage of their lives. Gal, an 18-year-old female student, expressed that once the tests were over, she wouldn't place any more thought into it and would only be focusing on college next. This phase of high school is evidently difficult for many students, but in the overall context of their attitude towards education, little impact can be seen. The most noticeable points of mention are in relation to the logistical framework and operations by which standardized testing takes place and not the educational system.

Additionally, the college-readiness assessment experience has showcased the dedication and commitment teachers demonstrate in supporting student success. Testimonials have already justified the efforts that some teachers have put into additionally preparing students for college-readiness and high stakes testing. Educators

go above and beyond for their students. Instead of sticking to traditional teaching methods that aren't producing satisfactory results, many are bringing outside materials or going outside of the provided material and coursework to deliver students resources that will better prepare them for these difficult tests. Recall how Ms. Kyle discussed the extra hours that teachers volunteered to provide for AP exam preparation and Gwenyth's comments that the additional resources provided by her teachers were appreciated and helpful.

This extra effort may be self-serving, as suggested in Chapter 2 where Nelson et al., (2007) studied the possible implications the government's strict rules had on teachers and parents. Parents are naturally protective of their children and will always defend them first so when student scores are published publicly, educators are also being judged on whether their teaching methods are producing competent students. As such, teachers will want their students to achieve college-readiness assessment scores that positively reflect on them as educators. These types of factors can change the perspective of both educator and student towards education, especially if students are treated unfairly due to their grades. It would be better to provide these results on a confidential platform.

Support for teachers' actions lie with the scholarship in Chapter 2 that questions the validity of college-readiness testing if educators feel the need to submit false reports and abandon government approved teaching strategies. Especially the perceptions teachers hold regarding college-readiness tests being where the value is held, as parents use this change in their perspective on the outside world, in this case education and the overarching purpose for this study. Consequences of these experiences are seen through the participant responses. Students are taught one set way of learning for tests through a

narrowed curriculum. Hollinworth (2007) studied incidences in which educators would go outside of preparation norms governed by the academic committee heads to try to better assist students.

The use of alternative educational practices are critical in supporting student academic growth, as Nelson and Eddy (2008) pointed out that no single high stakes test such as the ACT, SAT, or AP can be used to measure students' individual academic growth, nor can it be used to gauge their learning profile. These researchers have agreed with the student consensus on SAT inadequately measuring performance, however, have gone to the extreme stating this for all individual high stakes testing. This team went on to further state that using these standardized testing methods also does not allow for new learning trends and industry specific interventions to be designed as no real-world skills can be adopted, because no true assessment can be made.

In support of this notion, another study believed that standardized testing doesn't incorporate realistic practical problems that people face in the real world and often ignore essential skills by placing focus on more complex areas like algebra or advanced history. In other words, students are not being faced with situations that they could experience in a normal setting where they may need to manage something important, such as attending a high-pressured business meeting with financial investors and having to pitch a proposal, or planning a large renovation project on a very tight schedule.

The lack of these experiences connects to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, in that the absence of these microsystem learning experiences in the classroom will never allow the larger ecosystem levels to thrive, and students will be deficient in life skills. Industries in the 21st century are evolving to a point where mathematics, English

and critical reading skills aren't the same critical skills as they used to be. This connects to the importance of education maintaining an awareness of the "banking model" of education and its ineffectiveness in supporting next level academic growth and critical thinking skills in students, which are needed for future success.

Freire's theory fits into the context in that educators are taught to impart knowledge in a set structure that limits students from deciding on a topic with their own opinions and formulating their own ideals. The concept of the ACT and SAT correlate to this theory in that students felt they are given only a set amount of course material to study, which the test will be based on. There are set criteria and guidelines to follow on how to answer questions and calculate equations, even if the answer is still correct, but there is a disconnect in that the student must follow exactly as the textbook has dictated. Students are told to memorize the information that is taught to them in order to pass a test or they won't get any further in life. Students are not taught the necessary skills needed to think critically or acquire knowledge through their own comprehension.

This viewpoint also ties in with the fact that these college-readiness preparation programs don't accurately reflect how a student performs in real situations, only how well they can remember questions and answers. A true collaboration between educator and student consists of one where each is learning from the other simultaneously and where both can reflect knowledge and compare opinions to gain deeper understanding on a topic. This is the true framework of how college-readiness should be assessed on a standardized level as Freire believes this is the only true method to determine students' accurate readiness for the next phase of higher education.

Association to Theoretical Framework

As the literature discussed, the three sections of the SAT were designed to test specific skills that demonstrate whether a student possesses the necessary proficiency levels in college and career readiness. Both academic and career related subjects have to be incorporated to encompass a variety of content areas that will provide students with a broad array of skills. This includes aspects of language and grammar, organization of complex thoughts and sentences, world literature with history and past events. The SAT/ACT tests also include mathematical and science sections that analyze the student's capability to apply advanced practices and knowledge learned through their years in high school and these skills are necessary to gain entrance into prestigious universities. The main emphasis on these standardized tests is that they are meant to serve as a reflection on students' ability to perform certain functions that postsecondary workplaces look for from graduating students.

While the tests may be intended to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate next-level thinking and academic potential, the belief is that these exams are centered around repetitive learning and the ability to memorize test-taking strategies as opposed to college-readiness skills. Freire's theory fits into the context in that educators are taught to impart knowledge in a set structure that limits students from deciding on a topic with their own opinions and formulating their own ideals. This belief inhibits students' and educators' ability to expand their knowledge and skill set, as they focus their efforts on memorizing facts rather than expanding critical thinking and analytical skills.

The gap lies in that the students believe the content to be of old material and outdated information, whereas the tests are of the latest curriculum. It is the students' responsibility to source study material to learn the content, but many are not aware of this discrepancy in the first place. Traditional methods of testing for skills are changing and the attributes once sought after are no longer as popular in the sense that creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, and niche business ideas are envied and preferred. Many of the students that battle to perform well on the SAT and ACT tests, cannot afford private tutoring due to economical constraints and certain disadvantages. This is another reason why so many students become despondent when their scores are low, and they cannot earn enough financial aid to get support from colleges or universities. For many of these disadvantaged students, they only take the SAT and ACT tests for the chance to go to a prestigious college or university with a scholarship.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory proposes a layered system by which environmental factors affect our viewpoints and attitudes towards other aspects of life. The interactions students and educators have with each other, along with the interactions that students have with the college-readiness assessments in which they partake, will influence perceptions on the education system. Perceived experiences will impact attitudes toward college-readiness assessments, but as Bronfenbrenner's theory shows that these interactions impact other layers, these perceptions will impact overall attitudes toward education. As participant responses suggested displeasure with the SATs and ACTs as singular events that should not be used to gauge student potential, the educational system which absorbs these into the practice is negatively impacted and viewed.

Relation to Literature

Further implications dictate that since students are forced to stick to certain learning practices and are only exposed to a specific set of “research-supported teaching practices”, students are not being sufficiently prepared for other forms of learning that they will be required to know. Where McColskey & McMunn (2000) stated that schools would be placing more emphasis on higher average pass rates, student achievement would fall even further to the wayside. One student felt this too, that standardized testing was just about putting through as many students as possible. Consequently, as the literature discussed, teachers and administrators are now tempted to partake in illegal practices in order to maintain desired statistics to represent the school. One such study alluded to a district member admitting to falsifying dropout rates of the students as a measurement tool to gauge how their children are progressing in class.

Luo (2009) and Wang & Zhang (2007) who studied the history of college-readiness testing explained it was originally called Achievement Test (AT) and focused on core subjects. Lemann (2004) explained that the objective of the AT was not to test students’ achievement and ACT adjusted it to assist students in choosing post-secondary subjects along with assisting in matching up with appropriate colleges and universities. This historical context connects with the one of the themes that came to light during the thematic analysis procedure that related to student and educator feelings toward the college-readiness assessment process. This theme was the perception that standardized testing such as the SAT and ACT programs does not accurately reflect a students’ potential and was mainly only indicative of their ability to memorize questions and answers. Recall Gwenyth’s response, “I also think that testing and scores doesn’t show

the whole person...,” along with when the Assistant Principal, Dr. Selena, shared her opinion that, “...you can be a terrible student and do very well on the test.”

This sentiment expressed by students and educators is in line with previously collected data. Quantitative data collected from the Paris, et al. study (1991) showed that secondary students believe that test results and intelligence are distinct from each other. A consistent sentiment on the part of high school students was that “intelligent students do not always get good test scores” (p. 15). The similarity in the sentiment that was expressed between Dr. Selena in this research study and students in the Paris, et al. study provides credibility to the results, as well as further supporting this perception and the need for it to be addressed.

Nelson and Eddy (2008) pointed out that no single high stakes test such as the ACT, SAT, or AP can be used to measure students’ individual academic growth, nor can it be used to gauge their learning profile. These researchers have agreed with the student consensus on SAT inadequately measuring performance, however, have gone to the extreme stating this for all individual high stakes testing. This team went on to further state that using these standardized testing methods also does not allow for new learning trends and industry specific interventions to be designed as no real-world skills can be adopted, because no true assessment can be made. Furthermore, while teaching to the test may raise scores, it does not consider best instructional practices, nor does it prepare students for future learning experiences (Gulek, 2003). Such scholarship connects to the belief among students and educators that college-readiness assessment should be discontinued, or perhaps overhauled to be more reflective of the skills required for future success in college and careers beyond high school.

If standardized testing does not have the buy-in of the educators that implement the programs, how effective and credible can they be? Under perceptions of testing within the literature it was deliberated that if teachers had negative outlooks on college-readiness testing programs, that student scores could be disadvantaged and possibly nullified, should someone with the necessary experience and power deem the educational practices not up to standard. It is important to look at how our educators perceive these initiatives as they are the people who will be passing knowledge and skills onto future generations and creating the next set of working professionals. The educational practices that engage students on a practical and academic level are critical elements to motivate them to improve SAT, AP, and ACT scores in order to enter reputable universities. The issue the education system faces is that if those teachers communicating with students from a face-to-face setting do not value the system by which they are working, the students will sense it. The students are also quick to wise up to when teachers have to use outside resources to better prepare for a class because they haven't been given sufficient material or perhaps have to stick to a curriculum that doesn't sufficiently prepare students without some form of workplace experience.

Even with these circumstances and the different perceptions, not all opinions are negative, as research by Fuchsman et al. (2020) found that removing high-stakes testing had no impact on the likelihood of quitting teaching, changing grade levels, or switching districts. Instead, it found potential positive outcomes of regular high-stakes testing. This aligns with responses shared by educators and students. Recall that Dr. Selena noted the value of students being challenged by higher-level curriculum. In addition, Mr. Reed mentioned the importance of an equal experience for all students through the college-

readiness assessment process. Lastly, students like Gwenyth commented about how the college-readiness assessment process helped her be prepared for college and adult responsibilities.

From an institutional point of view, college-readiness testing is still seen as a highly valuable and essential tool within society that effectively prepares students for higher level and post-secondary education, and many have proven that these standardized testing programs are necessary to determine content knowledge and essential skills. The disagreement among stakeholders now is the importance placed on these tests as a standalone aspect and the perceptions from students and educators that facilitate these programs.

Limitations of the Study

Based on the dynamic nature of the participants, in addition to the qualitative research method conducted, the responses received were open-ended and could have been interpreted in a multitude of different ways. This is why trustworthiness strategies were implemented, as detailed in Chapter 3. In addition, participants expressed their opinions in a more casual manner in comparison to how most interviews are performed, as well as some questions having to be reworded, which could have been misconstrued by the moderator. Since the interviews had to be transcribed from audio recordings there is also a possibility of missing critical words or phrases, however this has been managed well during the data mining process. The transcribed notes will allow for comparisons to be made at a later date, or reviews to be made to verify precision. By doing this, qualitative data can be confirmed, utilizing a standardized methodology and strengthens reliability of the study. The extraction of data was done through cross reference of answers, then

repeated until themes emerged that were too common to ignore, ensuring adequate saturation. In addition, member checks were carried out. Human perspectives and emotions are naturally subjective which means biases will occur with most qualitative studies, nevertheless, these are valuable and rich components that will enhance the findings and provide necessary transparency to the research.

Since the findings of this study are reliant on the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers towards education in order to answer the research questions, personal viewpoints had to be spoken and discussed to the point that negative and even private information came to light. This was accounted for by designating anonymous numbers and names to each participant in the groups. In respect to the internal validity of the study, the themes identified can be connected to the literature review that other researchers have discussed. This shows that there is strength in what the interview responses entail and a history of reoccurrence to these themes in past practices. The notions the students held in regard to SATs particularly only testing their memorization skills and not true academic ability was concurred by other authors and related back to earlier in this chapter. This illustrates that triangulation has taken place in this qualitative study and produced an element of trustworthiness to the participant responses.

The interviewer was able to maintain neutrality with the participants with consistency in the questions and keeping to specific keywords and phrases related only to education, SAT, ACT, AP, and college-readiness testing to ensure measurable outcomes in line with the research methodology. This process provides reliability as it did not sway from the objective of the study, to understand the participants attitude towards these factors of the study. As the literature review demonstrated, other researchers have been

able to replicate most of these themes, indicating reliability in the general sense, however it is important to note that some research exists where a few authors believe standardized testing within the high stakes range to be beneficial under specific circumstances.

Externally the validity of this study cannot be determined, as some evidence points to positive outcomes when students are exposed to high stressed environments in preparation for higher education. This is perhaps experienced in other countries, however, it was not the case with the demographic of the sample chosen for this study. Where other evidence supported the claims made, the studies did not fit the same sample population size, time or settings. Instead this research methodology can be incorporated to other observations and comparisons made on the past claims against these participant opinions to evaluate why the consensus hasn't changed as much.

Participants included students and educators from the same high school, one single group was studied, limiting any external influences. The researcher was formerly connected to the high school which brings a sense of familiarity, however no personal connection exists, so no bias interfered in the data analysis procedure. If another moderator were to review the results of the findings, they would arrive at the same conclusion.

One large element affects the trustworthiness of a few of the educator's responses, in that the literature spoke of studies that suggested fraudulent activity involving SAT and AP scores to avoid federal punishment or disgruntled parents. Teachers of certain districts are forced to amend student test scores and submit false attendance sheets in order to increase their high stakes test results and meet expectations of governmental policies. For many this causes mental and emotional strain, which causes the educators to

take time out of their personal lives to prepare students for college-readiness tests or provide additional resources not supplied in the curriculum. These acts are done to assist the students to raise their test scores so they can enter colleges or universities, when they should already be incorporated into the learning activities. The interviews from the teachers showed that some display complete honesty in respect to standardized testing and their positive or negative viewpoints. There is little consistency that can be determined, without knowing if the participants were being honest in their responses, though engaging in sufficient interviews to achieve saturation helped minimize this issue.

As the research methodology has outlined, all ethical considerations have been met and the purposive research approach was appropriate to the designated study. Efficient participant coding was utilized to maintain anonymity, and participant responses transcribed and recorded. As the findings have been illustrated to be duplicated in the literature review, this study displays credibility and reliability of the results. Both external and internal validity have been discussed and triangulation evaluated in terms of cross-referencing authors and publications. The biggest limitation of this study is the sample size and controlled group of 12th grade students; however, this aspect is necessary as the objective is pre-college student test preparation program.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The necessity for students to gain college admission in order to lead more successful lives is becoming an expanding priority, therefore college-readiness testing is a viable method of achieving this outcome. The issue, as we have seen with this research lies predominantly with the implementation and structure of the content, environment, and performance elements that constitute a passing student by post-secondary standards.

As Bangser (2008) spoke about, higher institutions value certain skills above others such as logical judgement of situations, problem-solving, and creative thinking. It is evident successful transition to college will require a specific curriculum by which to follow.

While ACTs and SATs were viewed as the worst of the college-readiness testing programs, APs had the best responses, due to the fact the curriculum was incorporated into the yearly outline and review conducted on a continuous basis. Students reported feeling adequately challenged from AP classes in addition to being on the same level as their classmates. They could predict their test scores because the structure the classes took prepared them for a rigorous testing environment. Educators had sufficient time and resources to teach the content and prepare the students for higher-level thinking required for college. Future practice could take notes from the students' responses, particularly those who expressed that AP classes motivated them to perform better and taught them what the real world would require of them one day.

Since SAT tests are prepared for in the span of a few weeks, students are not sure what platform of testing to get ready for, nor does the test encompass the subjects they are enrolled for. Some students have selected areas that are pertinent to their chosen career and the SAT test covers very specific subjects that are generalized, yet common in our daily lives, but the students do not always have enough knowledge to perform at levels commensurate with their knowledge base within their selected subject matter of interest. Oftentimes students must resort to hiring a private tutor or finding an after-hours study group. Other times they will be fortunate enough that a teacher will offer their time to help them practice. These aspects are important to understand from the students' perspective. Where it was reported that students may benefit from a stricter environment,

the one in which these students have been subjected to is not balanced correctly. The value attributed to SATs is clear, and the benefit students receive from AP classes is evident, therefore one should be structured to be more similar to the other. In saying so, where SATs have such a high weight attached to university applications, why not afford students the opportunity to perform better in those tests?

AP scores are also based on a yearly average through multiple class essays, class discussion, and assessments that gauge comprehension and content, whereas SAT is just one score. Recommendations for future practice could see SAT subjects incorporated earlier in the year with smaller assessments conducted that can be marked towards a yearly average, as well as a final grade. From an alternative aspect, higher education institutions could implement practice that changes policy where SAT scores are optional entries to gain additional credit or funding, but that AP results could be placed forward. If the former suggestion is implemented, then both scores should be used to calculate students' academic standing when being evaluated for admission. Stringent learning environments have been successful in previous studies, and even though students reported being stressed and feeling "daunted", this stress can be redirected through simple curriculum changes. The attitude currently is that all the work being done towards passing the SAT tests is for nothing because academic ability is not being reflected honestly and university requirements are not being met. Students experience stress relating to the AP tests as well, but still feel positive and motivated towards the curriculum and know they have made an achievement towards their educational career.

In continuation of this theme, the identification of the tests being overly long could be mitigated by using these suggestions. With constant assessments on SAT criteria

conducted throughout the year, final tests wouldn't need to be so time consuming. Many students lose steam towards the end and battle to maintain focus on these tests. The method in which the AP is performed may be repetitive, but it cements the content into the students' learning structure so by the time exam season starts, preparation is easier, and revision is just a touch up. As said above, for many students subjects like reading, mathematics, or writing are not part of their chosen curriculum, and although necessary for generalized life experience, the tests are difficult for someone who is not exposed to the material on a daily basis and learning in the manner that the curriculum states. In respect to the ACT, it covers even more topics that many students are not willing to take such as science and history.

The framework of standardized testing should not be removed, but rather the practices by which it is guided need to be amended based on these participant responses as they provide significant insight into the attitudes that are changing our future world leaders. The original objective of the SAT and ACT was to determine a certain set of skills one needs to perform as an individual in society and these skills are to be valued. Even though at this current point in college-readiness testing, student performance is not being properly reported, the SATs are illuminating students that may not have realized they had these skills. In addition, some students put in a lot of effort to achieve quality scores on these tests and are rewarded as such, the structure just needs to be amended so that it can be applied to the masses. Students that are performing well on SATs are not necessarily the ones with good AP scores, which shows that amended structure to align both college-readiness programs could prove beneficial.

Recommendations for Future Research

When standardized testing was first implemented it was to source elite individuals for specific tasks, and since then it has been amended to meet educational standards that prepare students for college. A large emphasis has been placed on high stakes testing and using it as a measurement for students who are ready for higher educational learning. However, as this research study has shown through teacher and student interviews of open-ended questions, the process by which these tests are conducted is not always conducive for student learning. In many cases students lose out on opportunities to universities they have been working their entire educational career in which to gain acceptance, and SAT scores are hindering this goal. The skills the SAT/ACT aims to test are useful, however the world is evolving into the fourth industrial revolution, which is evident by the subjects in which students are now choosing to enroll. Where professions are looking into creative and innovative individuals, current standardized testing does not encompass these components and continue to stick to traditional methods. Future research should include updated industry requirements and current market trends, with an additional focus on community and social development.

Unfortunately, little can be done to affect change within federal and government law, however statistical research could motivate amended legislation that will lessen the need for illegal activity to occur, where teachers are jeopardizing their ethical behaviors to retain their jobs. Committee heads that have the power and responsibility to implement policy change should be made aware of these gaps identified in the literature, as well as the perceptions and attitudes examined in this research. The benefits of the answers given allow for an honest viewpoint to be experienced from an anonymous point of view and

should form part of annual review meetings in which curriculum is evaluated and justified based on industry needs. By utilizing student surveys and educator experience, institutional administrators will be able to gain a better understanding of the needs of businesses, so that colleges can be informed as to whether curriculum amendments are also necessary.

Further research should also include admission requirements for universities, to examine why SAT/ACT scores are valued above APs, and whether changes to these conditions would improve student enrollment. Would this change also influence the caliber of the students that are accepted into universities or would there be little difference experienced? From the interviews it was noted that the curriculum content has been known to be outdated to the point that teachers will bring in other more relevant coursework for students to learn. Standardized testing should still remain updated even if the subject title does not. If the structure towards these college-readiness preparation programs are not able to change, perhaps the policy by which they run can be. In other words, if SAT/ACT coursework cannot be implemented into the current curriculum, then the standards by which students are measured on standardized testing must change. Less emphasis should be placed on the final score, in addition to lessening the time of the exam to a more reasonable limit.

Currently there is a large focus placed on school districts to achieve high scores on SATs and ACTs, however the means by which this goal is achieved is detrimental to the students in the long run. Many become disgruntled because of a lost opportunity or feel demotivated because they didn't score as high as they normally do on other tests. The larger issue here is that the attitude towards education is slowly shifting to a negative one,

where some students don't even submit their SAT/ACT scores when applying to colleges and universities. Change needs to happen from within the educational system that governs the curriculum. A rigorous approach incorporating all three preparation programs throughout the year is the most suitable recommendation for the current needs of the students and the industry. If there is a necessity to maintain the SATs or ACTs as the standardized method for testing certain skills, then proper platforms should be put in place for more students to achieve success and perform at a level commensurate with their potential.

As shown in the literature, many students succeed under stringent conditions and even stay in college until they have completed their degrees, so the capability is there, the opportunity just needs to be more freely available.

Conclusion

College-readiness preparation is a necessary step in order to ensure students are sufficiently aware of the level of higher education that awaits them at college or a university. This dissertation sought to investigate how these programs affect those who have to go through these college-readiness testing procedures and identified that significant gaps exist within the structure, environment, and content by which SAT and ACT tests are conducted. Because scores attributed to SAT and ACT are considered vital for college admissions, this paper also discussed how having too many of these test preparation programs can have a negative effect on the student and the classroom learning environment. By following Freire and Bronfenbrenner's theories as described earlier, this study aimed to incorporate these frameworks into the research design to

create a baseline of how different teaching strategies can be used to inform one's understanding of how college-readiness preparation and assessment should be conducted.

The significance of the study is to determine if student attitudes towards education change when challenged with high stakes testing such as college-readiness tests or any type of university entrance requirement exam. The objective is to identify and fill a gap in any literature and recommend suitable changes based on the analysis of the findings.

The literature review outlined the history of college-readiness testing and the standards by which it was originally designed. A look into Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory has been incorporated into the discussion to base the findings on these two frameworks by which complex learning systems are based. The current research on college-readiness testing has been compared and contrasted to traditional methods and expanded on to incorporate the realistic approaches that educators are adopting to assist students in their preparation efforts. Chapter 3 focused on designing an appropriate method of research that would sufficiently answer the research question and address the gap in existing literature. Since the methodology called for purposive sampling in the form of subjective content, open-ended questions through interviews were commensurate with the researcher's objective of this study. The data collection models stipulated through Seidman's interview protocols, support the process and validate the information through triangulation of the data. The method by which the interview questions were interlinked across research questions and participant groups shows sufficient saturation of the gathered responses on attitudes about college-readiness testing from educators and students.

Chapter 4 discussed how through thematic analysis and inductive coding the researcher identified five major themes related to college-readiness testing. Each theme was analyzed in its own context with participant responses inserted verbatim from the transcribed data, and then cross referenced with each other to find any overlapping themes or sub-contexts that contradicted or supported the claims made. In maintaining alignment with the research question and sub-questions, each theme was related back to how the interview responses implicated the study or identified a new avenue of topic that warranted further discussion.

This chapter has reiterated the major themes and their importance to the research topic by discussing how the participant interviews refuted and, in most cases, supported the literature supplied in Chapter 2. The literature stated that college-readiness testing didn't show a true indication of students' academic knowledge or potential. This was one of the biggest concerns mentioned on multiple occasions from the transcribed data, due to the students SAT and ACT scores. The attitude towards education effectively has not been changed, however through the recommendations on future practices and research outlined, future standardized testing can have a much less negative experience on the final high school year for students.

There is a need for college-readiness preparation assessment to take place and for college-readiness curriculum to be administered. The way the curriculum is maintained could benefit from these minor amendments to logistical planning. As teachers have pointed out, the students are willing to make the effort, but battle to manage the time with the method in which AP classes are run all year and ACT and SAT only part of the year. Future research should incorporate aspects of industry professionals that collaborate with

both educators and current high school students to ascertain expectations and capabilities that will fit into governmental policy that school districts are required to follow. This research has shown through purposive sampling and using the two educational frameworks described in the literature that aspects of student and classroom learning are dynamic and complex fields that cannot be managed by one set method. As Chapter 2 discussed briefly, students learn in different ways and some perform better under self-study conditions where they manage their own schedules and curriculum, however the educational system for 12th grade students is not at this level yet. Students of this age still require some form of guidance to support life decisions and assist the transitional period into adulthood, and college-readiness testing is the building block to developing these skill sets.

Although opinions regarding all three college-readiness preparation programs cannot be corroborated 100% across all participants, there is strong evidence in support of severe gaps within the way the system is currently being run, that is negatively affecting student performance as well as psychological wellbeing. Student attitude towards education is that they realize they need a degree for a certain style of living and social acceptance; therefore, college or university attendance is mandatory and furthering their education the next natural step. Another question to ask is what are student and educator attitudes toward the educational system that govern college-readiness preparation assessments? This change in keyword would open up another area of discussion that is not sufficiently researched that would do well to adopt the same purposive methodology with thematic and inductive coding analysis.

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

IRB-FY2020-408 - Initial: Initial Submission - Expedited - St. John's

irbstjohns@stjohns.edu <irbstjohns@stjohns.edu>

Mon 4/27/2020 12:53 PM

To: Bradley Krauz <bradley.krauz17@my.stjohns.edu>; clemensr@stjohns.edu <clemensr@stjohns.edu>



**ST. JOHN'S
UNIVERSITY**

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Apr 27, 2020 12:53 PM EDT

PI: Bradley Krauz
CO-PI: randall clemens
Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2020-408** *THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE-READINESS TESTING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' AND EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES ON EDUCATION*

Dear Bradley Krauz:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE-READINESS TESTING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' AND EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES ON EDUCATION*. The approval is effective from April 27, 2020 through April 26, 2021

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Guide - Student

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. What is your gender and ethnic background?
4. How long have you been taking college-readiness tests; specifically, the SAT, ACT, or AP (Advanced Placement) Exams?
5. When did you take your first SAT test in high school? ACT? AP?
 - a. How old were you for your first SAT? ACT? AP?
6. What was the test preparation process in high school like for you?
 - a. What specific activities did you engage in?
 - b. Did you engage in SAT preparation in all of your classes or just one-- which ones? ACT? AP?
 - c. Did you practice SAT test preparation throughout the school year or only during testing times? ACT? AP?
7. How do you feel about the college-readiness test preparation process as it pertains to the SAT? ACT? AP?
8. How did the college-readiness test preparation activities you engaged in affect your achievement on the SAT? ACT? AP?
9. How is your achievement on the SAT related to your abilities as a student? ACT? AP?
10. How are your experiences with the SAT test preparation related to your attitudes towards education? ACT? AP?

11. How are your experiences with SAT testing related to your attitudes towards education? ACT? AP?
12. How have your views about education changed because of having experienced SAT test preparation programs in your years of high school? ACT? AP?
13. How have your views about education changed because of your experiences with SAT testing in your years of high school? ACT? AP?
14. How are you different as a person getting ready for life after high school because you have experienced SAT testing and preparation programs? ACT? AP?
15. I appreciate your help in providing information for this study. Is there anything else you would like to say about college-readiness (SAT, ACT, AP) test preparation programs or SAT, ACT, and AP testing and education?

APPENDIX C: Individual Interview Guide - Educator

1. How old are you?
2. What is your level of education?
3. What is your gender and ethnic background?
4. What subject(s) do you teach?
5. How long have you been teaching or supervising class(es) connected to college-readiness tests; specifically, the SAT, ACT, and AP (Advanced Placement) Exams?
6. When do you first remember SAT testing being a part of your classroom/instructional responsibilities? ACT? AP?
 - a. How old were you?
 - b. How many years had you been teaching?
7. What is the SAT test preparation process in this high school like? ACT? AP?
 - a. What specific activities do you provide for students?
 - b. Does SAT college-readiness test preparation occur in all classes (or just yours)? ACT? AP?
 - c. Did you provide SAT test preparation throughout the school year or only during testing times? ACT? AP?
8. How do you feel about the SAT test preparation process? ACT? AP?
9. How do the SAT test preparation activities you provide affect student achievement on college-readiness tests? ACT? AP?
10. How is student achievement on SAT testing related to student ability? ACT? AP?

11. How are your experiences with SAT test preparation related to your attitudes towards education? ACT? AP?
12. How are your experiences with SAT testing related to your attitudes towards education? ACT? AP?
13. How have your views about education changed because of your experience with SAT test preparation throughout your years as a teacher? ACT? AP?
14. How have your views about education changed because of your experiences with SAT testing throughout your years as a teacher? ACT? AP?
15. How are students different as a person getting ready for life after high school because they have experienced SAT test preparation? ACT? AP?
 - a. How are students different as a person getting ready for life after high school because they have experienced SAT testing? ACT? AP?
16. I appreciate your help in providing information for this study. Is there anything else you would like to say about college-readiness (SAT, ACT, AP) test preparation or college-readiness (SAT, ACT, AP) testing and education?

APPENDIX D: Consent Form for Adults



Consent Form for Adults

You are invited to take part in a research study to learn about how high school educators and students feel about taking college-readiness tests and the college-readiness test preparation activities many students engage in before taking college-readiness tests. You were selected for this project because you are an educator that is actively involved with courses connected to college-readiness testing or a student that has completed multiple college-readiness assessments. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Brad Krauz, a student at St. John’s University, who is working on a doctoral degree in educational administration and instructional leadership. His faculty sponsor’s name is Dr. Randall Clemens in the Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine educators’ and students’ attitudes towards college-readiness tests and the testing process as well as the college-readiness test preparation activities students and educators have experienced during their time in high school.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Be a part of an individual in-depth interview with the researcher.
- Meet with the researcher via video conference for a period of no more than 50 minutes.
- Answer interview questions concerning your opinions and thoughts about taking standardized tests and engaging in test preparation activities.
- Be recorded so that the researcher can later analyze your answers, however your responses, names, and audio will be kept private. No one will review it except the researcher and your name will never be used in the final report.
- Be available outside of school hours to participate in a Zoom video conference, in order to conduct the interview(s).
- Be responsible for accessing the technology necessary to participate in a Zoom video conference.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at your school will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participating in this project might help others by allowing school board members, community members, parents, teachers, other students, and legislators to gain a better understanding of students' perspectives on standardized testing in order to make better educational decisions so that students can not only be better prepared for such tests, but also develop a value for education.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. That means that in the final report no one will be able to determine which student said what in particular. No one will know your name or what answers you gave. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher will contact you to set up the exact date and time of the interview. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at bradley.krauz17@my.stjohns.edu or by phone at xxxxx. You may also direct questions to the faculty sponsor, Dr. Randall Clemens, via email at clemensr@stjohns.edu or by phone at 718-990-2554. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of Consent

Participant's Signature

APPENDIX E: Student Consent Form



Student Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study to learn about how high school educators and students feel about taking college-readiness tests and the college-readiness test preparation activities many students engage in before taking college-readiness tests. You were selected for this project because you are an educator that is actively involved with courses connected to college-readiness testing or a student that has completed multiple college-readiness assessments. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Brad Krauz, a student at St. John’s University, who is working on a doctoral degree in educational administration and instructional leadership. His faculty sponsor’s name is Dr. Randall Clemens in the Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine educators’ and students’ attitudes towards college-readiness tests and the testing process as well as the college-readiness test preparation activities students and educators have experienced during their time in high school.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Be a part of an individual in-depth interview with the researcher.
- Meet with the researcher via video conference for a period of no more than 50 minutes.
- Answer interview questions concerning your opinions and thoughts about taking standardized tests and engaging in test preparation activities.
- Be recorded so that the researcher can later analyze your answers, however your responses, names, and audio will be kept private. No one will review it except the researcher and your name will never be used in the final report.
- Be available outside of school hours to participate in a Zoom video conference, in order to conduct the interview(s).
- Be responsible for accessing the technology necessary to participate in a Zoom video conference.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at your school will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participating in this project might help others by allowing school board members, community members, parents, teachers, other students, and legislators to gain a better understanding of students' perspectives on standardized testing in order to make better educational decisions so that students can not only be better prepared for such tests, but also develop a value for education.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. That means that in the final report no one will be able to determine which student said what in particular. No one will know your name or what answers you gave. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher will contact you to set up the exact date and time of the interview. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at bradley.krauz17@my.stjohns.edu or by phone at xxxxx. You may also direct questions to the faculty sponsor, Dr. Randall Clemens, via email at clemensr@stjohns.edu or by phone at 718-990-2554. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of Consent

Participant's Signature

APPENDIX F: Participant Invitation to Participate (Educator)

Dear Educator,

My name is Brad Krauz, and I am a student at St. John's University, who is working on a doctoral degree in administration and supervision. Your principal XXXXX and I are personally inviting you to take part in a research study to learn about how high school educators feel about college-readiness tests and the test preparation activities many students engage in before taking college-readiness tests.

You were selected for this project because you are an experienced educator who has led or overseen instruction in classes that are connected to college-readiness tests. The purpose of this study is to determine educators' attitudes towards college-readiness tests and the testing processes as well as the test preparation activities students have engaged in during their years in high school. Your thoughts on this topic would be very valuable. It is important that educators and administrators understand how teachers feel about the testing process and test preparation practices and whether that has influenced educators' attitudes about education so that instructional practices and possibly changes in policy could be made.

Should you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to partake in an individual in-depth interview so that I can get a more specific view of your attitudes and opinions about the topic. These individual interview sessions will take place by Zoom video conference. I have contacted your principal and we have made all the arrangements. I will be contacting you soon by phone and/or email to verify your willingness to participate in the study. Please take some time to examine the consent

forms that are included in this packet. The appropriate consent form must be signed and brought with you on the day of the interview.

Thank you so much for your time and your willingness to participate. I know that you will have so much to add to the discussion. I cannot wait to meet you. I will be contacting you within the next week to provide you with the exact time and date of the interview session. If you have any questions before then please feel free to contact me at the number or email listed below.

Sincerely,

Bradley Krauz
bradley.krauz17@my.stjohns.edu

Consent provided by Principal XXXXXXXXXX

APPENDIX G: Participant Invitation to Participate (Student)

Dear Student,

My name is Brad Krauz, and I am a student at St. John's University, who is working on a doctoral degree in administration and supervision. Your principal XXXXX, science research teacher XXXXX, and I are personally inviting you to take part in a research study to learn about how high school students feel about college-readiness tests and the test preparation activities many students engage in before taking college-readiness tests.

You were selected for this project because you are a student who has taken classes that are connected to college-readiness tests, as well as having participated in college-readiness testing during your schooling. The purpose of this study is to determine students' attitudes towards college-readiness tests and the testing processes as well as the test preparation activities students have engaged in during their years in high school. Your thoughts on this topic would be very valuable. It is important that educators and administrators understand how students feel about the testing process and test preparation practices and whether that has influenced students' attitudes about education and so that instructional practices and possibly changes in policy could be made.

Should you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to partake in an individual in-depth interview so that I can get a more specific view of your attitudes and opinions about the topic. These individual interview sessions will take place by Zoom video conference. I have contacted your principal and science research teacher; we have made all the arrangements. I will be contacting you soon by phone and/or email to verify your willingness to participate in the study. Please take some time to examine the consent

forms that are included in this packet. The appropriate consent form must be signed and brought with you on the day of the interview.

Thank you so much for your time and your willingness to participate. I know that you will have so much to add to the discussion. I cannot wait to meet you. I will be contacting you within the next week to provide you with the exact time and date of the interview session. If you have any questions before then please feel free to contact me at the number or email listed below.

Sincerely,

Bradley Krauz
bradley.krauz17@my.stjohns.edu

Consent provided by Principal XXXXXXXXXXX and Research Teacher XXXXXXXXXXX

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