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THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

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State Standardized Testing Programs: Their Effects on Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

A driving force in standards-based educational reform was the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission of Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). The report called for "an end to the minimum competency testing movement and the beginning of a high-stakes testing movement that would raise the nation's standards of achievement drastically" (Amrein & Berliner, 2003, p. 6). This report was predicated on the assumption that the public school system was in dire need of comprehensive reform to increase student and school performance, as it was currently failing to effectively prepare the nation's youth for the workplace and preventing Americans from competing on an international stage (Marcoulides & Heck, 1994; Smith & Fey, 2000). The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of state testing programs on schools, teachers, and students, focusing on selected issues that have arisen separately from previous studies. The trigulated mixed method study was conducted in two phases. The theoretical, conceptual framework that was used for both phases of the study was that of an interpretist theory (Erickson, 1986). Blumer's (1972) framework of symbolic interactionism guided the phase focusing on student perceptions of state testing. For Phase I, survey methodology was used to ascertain the beliefs and self-reported practices of a national sample of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers. Phase II employed a qualitative research methodology to ascertain students' and teachers' perceptions of the influences that state testing mandates have on the curricula and the instructional process. Results from both studies indicated four prominent findings: (a) teachers and students feel a tremendous amount of pressure associated with high-stakes testing; (b) the pressure felt by teachers results in drill and practice type of curriculum and instruction; (c) the pressure felt by high-stakes testing is greater in disadvantaged schools and results in more drill and practice instruction; and (d) gifted and talented students feel pressure to perform well to bring up all scores oftentimes resulting in disengagement from the learning process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior to the educational reform movements of the 1970s and 1980s, standardized tests were primarily employed as measures of student achievement that could be reported to parents, and as a means of noting state and district trends. Teachers paid little attention to these tests, which in turn had little impact on curriculum (Goslin, 1967). However, in the continuing quest for better schools and high achieving students, testing has become a central focus of policy and practice.

A driving force in standards-based educational reform was the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission of Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). The report called for "an end to the minimum competency testing movement and the beginning of a high-stakes testing movement that would raise the nation's standards of achievement drastically" (Amrein & Berliner, 2003, p. 6). A *Nation at Risk* was predicated on the assumption that the public school system was in dire need of comprehensive reform to increase student and school performance, as it was currently failing to effectively prepare the nation's youth for the workplace and preventing Americans from competing on an international stage (Marcoulides & Heck, 1994; Smith & Fey, 2000). The philosophy articulated in *A Nation at Risk* accorded with a mounting belief that teachers were unqualified to educate students to the desired level, and these forces combined to spur the development of educational standards, tests, and assessment policies by state educational bodies (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Perreault, 2000).

As the high-stakes testing movement gathered momentum, standardized tests became a tool for reform through their use as a measure of the quality of the education system, and as the foundation for curriculum and instructional practices (Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005). In the current era of *No Child Left Behind*, standards and assessments rest firmly at the core of national education policy, and remain the strongest force on policy and practice. However, despite the pivotal role of high-stakes testing in the effort to improve America's public education system, there has been little research into many aspects of its effects on schools, teachers, and students. In particular, there is a dearth of research into the effects of high-stakes testing on the achievement, motivation and learning of special populations of students (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Lattimore, 2001),

including those from minority groups, those from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, and those who can be classified as gifted and talented (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Moon, 2001). While there has been some investigation of the impact of testing programs on teachers' curricular and instructional practices (Abrams, Pedula & Madaus, 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003; Vogler, 2005), recent research has not considered these effects in light of their potential impact on special populations of learners.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of state testing programs on schools, teachers, and students, focusing on selected issues that have arisen separately from previous studies. These issues included the effects of state testing mandates on teachers' curricula and instructional practices; the impact of high-stakes testing on minority students; and the impact of curricula driven by high-stakes testing on the achievement, attitudes, and motivation of gifted students. Specific research questions included:

1. How do state testing programs affect schools and teachers in terms of (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) perceived pressure to improve test scores, and (c) test preparation practices?
2. Are schools and teachers affected differently by state testing programs based on the socioeconomic backgrounds of their students?
3. How do state testing programs affect students labeled as gifted and talented, in terms of their (a) attitudes towards school, (b) motivation to learn, and (c) perceptions of the classroom environment?

Methodology

Research Study Design

The research study was conducted in two phases. The theoretical, conceptual framework that was used for both phases of the study was that of an interpretist theory (Erickson, 1986). That is, to understand the actions of others, one must consider insider perspectives (Eisenhart & Howe, 1990). Erickson stated, "The task of interpretive research is to discover the specific ways in which local and non-local forms of social organization and culture relate to the activities of specific persons in making choices . . . (p. 129)." As teachers are pressured to produce better test scores, they make specific choices to accomplish this goal, for the betterment or detriment of sound instructional practices for gifted and talented students (or for nurturing at-risk students with potential).

In turn, Blumer's (1972) framework of symbolic interactionism guided the phase focusing on student perceptions of state testing. Blumer's theory is based on the premise that humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings that they have for the individual. These meanings are derived from social interaction and they help people

interpret situations. The study examined the meanings students assigned to state-mandated tests and the resulting effects on their attitudes and motivations to learn.

Phase I: State-testing Survey

Survey methodology was used to ascertain the beliefs and self-reported practices of a national sample of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers. A 99-item teacher questionnaire was specifically developed and piloted for the study. Each questionnaire (elementary school, middle school, high school) asked about the perceived influence of state testing on curriculum and instruction, the pressure the teacher felt to improve test scores, the amount of time and attention given to test preparation, the perceived positive and negative effects of standardized testing, the teacher's perceptions of the consequences of testing, and teacher background data, including geographic and poverty indicators.

Principal component analysis was conducted to confirm the intended scales of the survey. Based on this analysis, 69-items were retained, accounting for 64% of the variance. Three factors emerged from the 69-items: Standardized Tests Influence on Class Time, Pressure Felt to Improve Test Results, and Teacher Attitudes about State Testing.

Sampling Framework

Elementary School

Based on the information provided by Market Data Retrieval (MDR) approximately 928,170 elementary teachers (defined as grades K-8) were employed in schools across the nation at the time of sampling. It is important to note that approximately 15,000 elementary schools house grades K-8; however, the upper grade teachers were only in the elementary teacher database and not in both the elementary and middle school teacher databases. In other words, each database was mutually exclusive. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn (n=8,044; return rate=16% (1, 289 surveys)).

Middle School

Based on the information provided by MDR approximately 230,000 middle school teachers (defined as grades 6-8) were employed in schools across the nation at the time of sampling. It is important to note that approximately 15,000 elementary schools house grades K-8; however, the upper grade teachers were only in the elementary teacher database and not in both the elementary and middle school teacher databases. In other words, each database was mutually exclusive. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn (n=2, 259; return rate=18.4% (415 surveys)).

High School

Based on the information provided by MDR approximately 250,000 high school teachers (defined as grades 9-12) were employed in schools across the nation at the time of sampling. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn (*n*=2,566; return rate=15.5% (393 surveys)).

Mailing of Questionnaire

Questionnaire packets, including a brief study rationale and directions for completing the survey, were mailed to teachers. Teachers were provided postage-paid return envelopes for mailing the questionnaire back to the researchers. There was no follow-up with teachers after the initial questionnaire mailing.

Data Analysis

Data were coded by metropolitan status and poverty level of the school. Data were then aggregated based on the aforementioned variables for analysis; that is, the responses of individual teachers were average with those of other teachers across common-grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school), metropolitan status, and poverty status indicators.

Phase II: Qualitative Study of Teachers and Students

This phase of the study employed a qualitative research methodology to ascertain students' and teachers' perceptions of the influences that state testing mandates have on the curricula and the instructional process. In addition, students' attitudes toward school were investigated. Seeking diversity of culture groups, SES, and metropolitan status, districts in California, Texas, and Virginia were selected for participation in Phase II of the study.

Sampling Framework and Data Collection

Using a stratified purposeful sampling design, a series of focus groups were conducted to illustrate characteristics of particular subgroups of interest to the study, such as teachers of gifted students, teachers of mixed-ability classrooms, gifted and talented students, economically disadvantaged students, and limited English proficient students.

Each focus group (*n*=21) for both teachers and students ranged in size from 3 to 5 participants. Individual interviews were conducted with some teachers and students because of schedule conflicts.

Observations of each participating teacher's classroom were conducted at various intervals of the school year using a semi-structured observational protocol. These observations served as a point of reference for researchers and teachers during focus

group interviews. Further observational data were triangulated with teacher and student interview data for a more complete picture of the effects of state testing on classroom practices.

Data Analysis

The principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were adhered to throughout the analysis phase. Transcript-based analysis, the more rigorous analysis strategy, was used to analyze focus group interviews. That is, focus group discussions were tape-recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Classroom observations were script-taped by researchers to attempt to record as many teacher and student actions and interactions as possible. Script-tapes are verbatim transcriptions of classroom events including teachers' directions and behaviors, students' responses, and other interactions among the individuals involved in the classroom. Additionally, researchers included descriptive information about the classroom context, climate, and procedures that might not be evident from script-tapes. Researchers' comments and insights into classroom activities and interactions were also included in the field notes. The transcriptions, observations, and researchers' field notes were analyzed inductively to develop coding categories (by question and then overall) from responding teachers and students. Data were then coded and sorted into the categories with typologies and diagrams being developed that reflected key findings (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Categories were collapsed and reconfigured within each setting and across districts to determine patterns across data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Double coding of each transcription, observation, and field report (two researchers coding the same data) occurred to aid in definitional clarity as well as to serve as a reliability check (Miles & Huberman, 1984). References following direct quotations include the school's pseudonym, source of data, number of document in chronological sequence, and the page number of the document where the citation can be located.

Results and Discussion

Recent research has indicated that the centrality of high-stakes testing has significantly influenced the educational system at the levels of curriculum and instruction (e.g., Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005). Consistent with such research, data from both the national survey and the subsequent qualitative component of this study indicate that teachers' curricular and instructional practices are substantially shaped by the high-stakes associated with testing. Teachers in high-stakes testing environments testify to a significant school-based emphasis on the outcomes of state tests, and an intensifying focus on test outcomes over the past 3 to 5 years. The impact of this focus on test outcomes is apparent in teachers' decisions about curriculum and instruction, in the pressure they feel to raise student test scores, and in the stress they observe in their students. These effects are most pronounced in schools serving students from the lowest SES groups, where teachers are most likely to alter curriculum and "teach to the test" under administrative pressure to raise test scores. The findings of this study paint a picture of an education system in which school-based (and classroom-based) decision making is driven by the desire to produce high student test scores, and in which some

groups feel the pressure of the high stakes more keenly than others. The following themes were prevalent both in the national survey as well as observations and interviews of classrooms throughout the country.

Theme 1: Pressure Associated With High-stakes Testing

A consistent theme of teachers' discourse around state testing mandates is the pressure arising from the perceived need to produce high student test scores. Although there is variation in the extent to which teachers experience this pressure, it is present across elementary, middle, and high school settings in which high-stakes testing is salient. To some extent, the pressure experienced by teachers varied by length of tenure, the previous success of students at their school, and the perceived stakes (or expected consequences) associated with testing. In many cases, teachers acknowledge that they place pressure on themselves, as they strive to demonstrate their own effectiveness and hold themselves accountable for student performance.

Data from both the national survey and the school visits point to the perceived top-down filtering of test-related pressure. That is, many teachers believe that the pressure to produce high student test scores originates from central office administrators, from whom it is transferred to school principals, who in turn exert pressure on teachers and students.

Theme 2: Impact of High-stakes Testing on Curriculum and Instruction

Data from both phases of this study indicate a strong relationship between the perceived pressure associated with high-stakes testing and the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction in the classroom. Much of the pressure and frustration experienced by teachers seems to arise directly from the perceived mandate to implement a heavily prescribed curriculum that allows for little flexibility in response to student need. Teachers commonly express frustration that the time pressure imposed by a standardized curriculum leaves them unable to explore topics in the depth required to maximize student learning, or to allow students to pursue areas of scholarly interest. Many indicate that the strict pacing and sequencing guidelines of the mandated curriculum force them to skim over material and move on whether or not students have achieved deep levels of understanding.

Although many teachers appear to focus on test preparation throughout the school year, there appears to be a consistent increase in this kind of classroom activity in the period immediately preceding the administration of the test. In some schools, the time leading up to the state test is characterized by a focus on drill and practice for students who are expected to struggle. Teachers report being directly instructed by administrators to spend the weeks prior to the test purely on preparation, at the expense of introducing new material or engaging students in project work.

The results of this study suggest that the intense focus on test preparation ends abruptly following the administration of the test, at which time teachers feel freer to

explore non-tested subjects, to pursue areas of student interest, and to go into depth in areas that were glossed over prior to the test. One teacher refers to this as "post-test curriculum." Many elementary teachers indicate that non-tested subjects, such as science and social studies, are taught almost exclusively during this post-test period. In middle and high schools, teachers in non-tested subjects feel greater flexibility and freedom to explore topics in depth and to allow students opportunities to study areas of interest.

Theme 3: Impact of High-stakes Testing on Disadvantaged Schools and Students

Data from the national survey suggest that the perceived pressure to increase test scores is experienced most acutely by teachers serving the most impoverished students. This pressure translates into a differential impact of state testing on curriculum and instruction across poverty levels. There is an enhanced use of "skill and drill" instruction in impoverished schools, with teachers spending more time on test preparation activities involving multiple-choice and constructed response items that mirror the format of state tests. The trade-off takes the form of a diminished focus on long-term projects, and performance-based activities such as hands-on experiments and enrichment activities. Within this study, teachers in high SES suburban middle schools represent the group least likely to spend class time on test preparation activities, and most likely to engage students in projects and hands-on learning activities. In the face of pressure to raise scores, the practice of teaching to the test persists in the most disadvantaged settings despite the lack of research indicating its effectiveness in engaging students in learning and raising achievement scores on any measure. These students, who are often among the most disengaged in the school system, face repetition of minimum level, test-like information, at the expense of diverse and interesting learning opportunities and subject matter not covered in state tests (such as science and social studies at the elementary level, and fine or performing arts).

This study also suggests a link between high-stakes testing and student disengagement that should be explored by future researchers. For some high school students in particular, the belief that poor test performance could lead to retention in school for another year, or prevention from graduating, appears to create significant anxiety. It seems that for some students, disengagement from or non-attendance at school follows repeated poor performances on tests and an associated feeling that there is no point in persisting with school.

Theme 4: Impact of High-stakes Testing on Gifted and Talented Students

The results of this study indicate that while some gifted students appear to enjoy and feel challenged by school, others are left feeling bored and under-extended. Gifted students' perceptions of school are shaped by classroom experiences that are heavily focused on test-preparation, skill practice, and repetition. Many of these students report frustration and resentment at the slow pace of learning, the disproportionate amount of class time spent in practice for standardized tests, and the focus on repetition of basic concepts. Teachers note that although many gifted students do not feel pressure associated with state tests, others can become highly anxious in response to the pressure

they feel to perform at a perfect level, to maintain their access to advanced programs, and to compensate for lower-performing classmates.

The perception of many gifted students is that the focus on standardized curriculum and test preparation often leaves them waiting for other students to catch up, even when they are ready to move on. Students express frustration that all students are expected to work at the same pace and study the same material in the same ways.

Teachers vary in their perceptions of whether or not the needs of gifted students are being met by the school. Some teachers acknowledge that the needs of gifted students are not adequately addressed in their classrooms, but feel unable to provide appropriately challenging learning experiences and still meet their curricular requirements. In the context of inadequate challenge, some gifted students report "tuning out" or engaging in non-academic activities such as independent reading, resting or chatting to friends while they wait for their teachers to further explain concepts to other students.

Overall, it appears that the current high-stakes testing movement affects gifted students by providing a curricular "ceiling" that is well below their own academic potential, by decreasing opportunities for students' abilities to emerge through engagement with quality curriculum, and by shifting the goal of education away from helping each student to meet his or her academic potential, and towards helping each student contribute an adequate test score to the class or school average.

Implications for Research and Practice

There is every indication that high-stakes testing is here to stay, particularly in the current political climate. Given this assumption, it is recommended that teachers' and students' experiences of high-stakes testing at the school, classroom, and individual levels be examined and taken into account by policymakers. That is, while high-stakes testing might result in some of the policy's intended outcomes (e.g., focused curriculum), its current implementation is perceived by many teachers to be ineffective, unfair, and detrimental to both student and teacher performance. This discord between the increased policy focus on testing outcomes, and the increased perception among teachers that their professionalism and pedagogical effectiveness is being compromised by the pressure to increase test scores, must be addressed if the public education system is to flourish. Similarly, the disconnect between the political objective of making the system more equitable for students from low income and minority backgrounds through test-based accountability, and the finding that students within the most impoverished schools experience the most narrow, test-driven curriculum arising from the greatest performance-based pressure on teachers should be acknowledged and addressed. The provision of adequate resources and professional development for teachers in impoverished settings to create engaging curriculum that connects to students' strengths and interests should be a prominent priority. Although high-stakes testing has clearly resulted in widespread reform at the level of curriculum and instruction, this reform has not developed in the direction of best practice within many settings.

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State Standardized Testing Programs: Their Effects on Teachers and Students

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Prior to the educational reform movements of the 1970s and 1980s, standardized tests were primarily employed as measures of student achievement that could be reported to parents, and as a means of noting state and district trends. Teachers paid little attention to these tests, which in turn had little impact on curriculum (Goslin, 1967). However, in the continuing quest for better schools and high achieving students, testing has become a central focus of policy and practice. By the year 2000, the importance of standardized testing had increased to the extent that good test scores were widely considered a major goal of schooling. Forty-nine states had appropriated funds to establish instruments for evaluating educational effectiveness before the 2001 *No Child Left Behind* legislation mandated that they develop system-wide assessments and standards in grades 3 through 8 (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2000).

A driving force in standards-based educational reform was the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission of Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). The report called for "an end to the minimum competency testing movement and the beginning of a high-stakes testing movement that would raise the nation's standards of achievement drastically" (Amrein & Berliner, 2003, p. 6). A *Nation at Risk* was predicated on the assumption that the public school system was in dire need of comprehensive reform to increase student and school performance, as it was currently failing to effectively prepare the nation's youth for the workplace and preventing Americans from competing on an international stage (Marcoulides & Heck, 1994; Smith & Fey, 2000). It was thus argued that the position of the United States as an economic world power was under threat because of the low standards and inferior graduation requirements to which schools held their students, and schools were challenged to raise their expectations, increase the amount of time devoted to learning, and improve teaching by holding teachers accountable to higher standards (NCEE, 1983). High-stakes testing based on high standards was promoted as the tool that could effectively propel this reform effort. The philosophy articulated in *A Nation at Risk* accorded with a mounting belief that teachers were unqualified to educate students to the desired level, and these forces combined to spur the development of educational standards, tests, and assessment policies by state educational bodies (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Perreault, 2000).

As the high-stakes testing movement gathered momentum, standardized tests became a tool for reform through their use as a measure of the quality of the education system, and as the foundation for curriculum and instructional practices (Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005). States became responsible for designing and implementing standards and assessments to meet the dual goals of measuring student achievement and ensuring school accountability. While standards and testing formats varied between states, these were established as state education policies, such that testing and policy became essentially synonymous (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2004). In this way, the purpose of standardized tests shifted from providing information to parents and mapping overall trends to measuring educational merit, framing curriculum, and ensuring accountability for adhering to education policy. In the current era of *No Child Left Behind*, standards and assessments rest firmly at the core of national education policy, and remain the strongest force on policy and practice. However, despite the pivotal role of high-stakes testing in the effort to improve America's public education system, there has been little research into many aspects of its effects on schools, teachers, and students. In particular, there is a dearth of research into the effects of high-stakes testing on the achievement, motivation, and learning of special populations of students (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Lattimore, 2001), including those from minority groups, those from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, and those who can be classified as gifted and talented (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Moon, 2001). While there has been some investigation of the impact of testing programs on teachers' curricular and instructional practices (Abrams, Pedula & Madaus, 2003; Pedulla et al., 2003; Vogler, 2005), recent research has not considered these effects in light of their potential impact on special populations of learners. The purpose of this study is (a) to investigate the effects of state testing mandates on teachers' curriculum, instruction, and perceived pressure to raise test scores, and (b) to explore the impact of an educational system distinguished by high-stakes testing on the education of gifted and talented students, and on teachers and students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Review of the Literature

Defining "High-stakes" Testing

The term "high-stakes" refers to the potential consequences associated with mandated tests. These tests have been introduced via policy as a means of increasing students' achievement by holding teachers, schools, and students themselves accountable for meeting state standards. For students, consequences of failing to perform to an acceptable level might include denial of student diplomas, and grade retention. For schools, consequences might include loss of school accreditation and public censure. Under the conditions of high-stakes testing, results are used as the basis for comparisons between schools and districts. Schools are ranked and labeled within districts based on student pass rates on the tests (Fuller & Johnson, 2001; Perreault, 2000), and test results are made public through newspapers and magazines, creating an environment of high pressure on teachers, administrators, and school boards to increase test scores (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000).

Support for High-stakes Testing

According to proponents of high-stakes testing, educational standards that are determined and mandated by the government are essential to the system-wide improvement of student learning. Supporters argue that standards-based tests provide a framework of high-quality content and skills upon which schools can build rich, focused curricula, and ensure national homogeneity in education by exposing all students to the same content while holding them to equivalent standards (Carr & Harris, 2001; Porter, 2000). In addition, it is contended that teachers and schools take student achievement more seriously when high-stakes tests are in place, since they are held accountable for student test scores (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Roderick & Engel, 2001; Wright, 2002).

Advocates of high-stakes testing programs further point to benefits beyond effects on curriculum. It is thought that standardized tests act as efficient agents of educational reform, since they are relatively inexpensive compared with measures such as reducing class size or hiring teacher aides; they can be externally mandated, making them more efficient than effecting change in individual classrooms; they can be rapidly implemented; and they have visible results, since they can be easily reported to the press (Lin, 2002; Smith & Fey, 2000). Policy-makers and the public generally perceive test scores to be valid and objective measures of student achievement (Haladyna, Haas, & Allison, 1998), which remove the effects of politics and favoritism associated with grading (Airasian, 1993; Hannaway, 2003). For example, the results of a survey of more than 1,000 parents of school-aged children commissioned by the Association of American Publishers (AAP, 2000) indicated that the majority of American parents supported standardized testing. The study also reported that 83% of parents believed standardized tests to provide very important information, while 90% wanted access to comparative data about their children and the schools they attended.

Cizek's (2001) article, "More Unintended Consequences of High-stakes Testing" suggests that the focus on high-stakes testing has produced many positive, unanticipated outcomes in schools. These include more focused professional development efforts, resulting in improved instructional skills and content-area expertise among teachers, greater attention paid to students with special needs, and the increased availability of information regarding student performance. The situation in Texas appears to support Cizek's claims. The long entrenched system of high-stakes testing in that state has been linked to such dramatic increases in the performance of minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (two populations noted for their low achievement), that the change has been touted as "The Texas Miracle" (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000). However, while rising scores seem to indicate positive changes in the Texas educational system, critics question whether the higher scores stem from an increased classroom focus on teaching to and preparing for state tests, or whether they indeed reflect a qualitative improvement among students and schools.

Criticism of High-stakes Testing

Critics of high-stakes testing remain skeptical about the validity of standardized test scores as indicators of school and student achievement. They question whether cases such as "The Texas Miracle" can be explained in terms of teaching to the test, in which case students become better test-takers without necessarily becoming better learners (Gordon & Reese, 1997; Haney, 2000; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Klein, et al., 2000). According to these researchers, closer inspection of the situation in Texas revealed that the "miracle" could better be described in terms of creative accounting and instructional adaptation. That is, as the test scores in Texas rose, so did the pressure to remove low achievers from the testing pool. Attempts to raise the scores concurred with a rise in suspensions, failures, and drop out rates (Haney, 2000), along with an increase in the frequency with which low achievers did not take the tests (McNeil, 2000).

In addition to creative accounting practices, researchers noted that students in classrooms across Texas spent increasing amounts of time preparing for the state tests (Gordon & Reese, 1997; Haney, 2000; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Klein et al., 2000). Based on their analysis of an open-ended survey completed by 100 public school teachers, Gordon and Reese (1997) found that teachers in Texas spent a significant amount of class time preparing students for the tests, that daily lessons were expected to relate to the objectives of the tests, and that special practice lessons were incorporated into the curriculum. When instruction is wholly geared towards teaching to the test, critics argue, scores are unlikely to provide an accurate measure of student learning, problem solving skills or critical and higher-order thinking skills.

Ideally, a good assessment motivates students and teachers to work harder, creating a richer learning experience. But in itself, working harder does not always result in higher test scores (Lin, 2002), and higher test scores do not always reflect richer learning. Research has indicated that students tend only to do well on the test they have prepared for, with gains failing to transfer to other forms of assessment (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Roderick & Engel, 2001). Increases in test scores appear to be temporary and artificial, suggesting that students on the receiving end of teaching to the test do not acquire general knowledge about a discipline, but rather knowledge that is specific to a particular test (Klein et al., 2000). Findings such as these call into question the validity of state test scores as a measure of student achievement.

In addition to issues of measurement and validity, researchers have criticized the systematic practice of high-stakes testing for its tendency to reproduce societal inequalities (Diamond & Spillane, 2004), its influence on the nature of school curricula, and for the resultant impact of test-driven curriculum and instruction on the educational experience of the nation's gifted youth (Moon, 2001; Moon, Callaghan & Brighton, 2002). Critics are concerned that curriculum based on high-stakes testing programs becomes narrow, driven primarily by the content that is likely to appear on the test, rather than developing around natural enquiry and authentic learning.

Impact of High-stakes Testing on Curriculum and Instruction

With increased accountability, successful school reform has come to be synonymous with increased test scores. Bryk states, "Don't show me the standards documents. Show me what you test, because the load-bearing wall in all of this is not the standards document, it's the assessment" (Olson, 2001, p. 14). While the development of standards has received some attention by the states, little systematic attention has been paid in recent years to curriculum content and design, school structures, pedagogical approaches, or necessary resources; these considerations have become secondary to the focus on improving test scores (Cambron-McCabe, 2002).

While much of the research in the area has been based on data from single states, the picture across multiple studies suggests that the increased salience of test scores has resulted in an increased emphasis on practices such as repetitive basic skills instruction and drill and recitation (e.g., Brown, 1992; Cambron-McCabe, 2002; Herman & Golan, 1993; Shepard & Dougherty, 1991). Herman and Golan (1990) sought to determine whether accountability pressures drove schools to narrow their curriculum at the cost of broader student learning. In addition, the researchers were interested in determining whether testing differentially affected instruction in districts that served predominantly economically disadvantaged students compared with those districts that served predominantly advantaged students. Using questionnaire methodology, the authors concluded that testing substantially influenced teachers' instructional planning. Specifically, teachers reported devising instructional plans that included all or most of the test content and test objectives. In addition, teachers reported adjustment of the curriculum sequence based on the tests. It was reported that the curriculum and instructional practices of teachers in low SES schools were more influenced by testing than teachers in high SES schools.

Shepard and Dougherty (1991) developed a study around the findings of the Herman and Golan (1990) study. Third- through sixth-grade teachers were surveyed in two high-stakes districts, using a questionnaire that focused on perceptions of the influences of testing on teaching. The authors reported that 75% of the teachers gave greater emphasis to basic skills instruction, vocabulary lists, word recognition skills, and paper-and-pencil computation than they would if there were no mandated tests. Further, content that was not a predominant focus of the tests was overlooked. Fifty percent of the teachers reported giving less time and emphasis to subjects that are not tested by the state (e.g., science or social studies).

Wilson and Corbett (1991) found that the stakes associated with state tests substantially influenced both curriculum and instruction. In a comparison study of a high-stakes testing state to a low-stakes state, the researchers noted that higher stakes were associated with the tendency of teachers to narrow what they taught to reflect test content.

In 1992, Brown examined the meanings that teachers assigned to state-mandated tests and the actions that they initiated following their interpretation of the test results.

Using a qualitative research design with 30 fifth- and sixth-grade teachers and 12 principals, the author reported that teachers altered the scope and sequence of curriculum and eliminated concepts that were not covered on the state tests, thereby narrowing the curriculum. Teachers also reported reluctance to use innovative instructional strategies and mentioned the use of more traditional instructional methods, citing a belief that such strategies would better prepare students for state tests.

According to Pedulla et al. (2003), in high stakes testing environments, past tests or released items become de facto curriculum. Teachers also adjust assessment to look like the state tests, reproducing the state test format on their own assessments (Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Roderick & Engel, 2001). The result is often an emphasis on multiple-choice type classroom tests over other forms of assessments (Lattimore, 2001).

Among a random sample of 1,000 teachers in Colorado, Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, and Rosenthal (2003) surveyed the effects of the state's assessment program on instruction and test-related practices. Results from the survey suggested that instruction was less focused on social studies and science, subjects not assessed, and focused more strongly on test format practice.

Researchers have employed a variety of data in examining the consequential validity of state assessment programs. For example, based on teacher interviews and classroom documents, McDonnell and Choisser (1997) reported that assessment programs in Kentucky and North Carolina led to new instructional strategies being used by teachers, but the complexity and depth of the content was lessened. A similar narrowing of the curriculum has been noted in other states (e.g., Chudowsky & Behuniak, 1997; Koretz, Barron, Mitchell, & Stecher, 1996).

Louis et al. (2005) examined teachers' responses to accountability practices in high schools across three states. Using a sense making approach to analyzing responses, the authors found that teachers' curriculum and instruction were likely to be affected by state testing when administrators emphasized and expressed support for state policy, and helped teachers understand how to translate policies into their own classroom practices.

Taken together, the findings of these studies suggest that in environments of high-stakes testing, where accountability is salient, teachers are likely to alter their curriculum and instructional practices in an attempt to raise test scores. These practices may include teaching to the test by narrowing curriculum content, and reliance on strategies such as drill and recitation.

Although there has been some study of the extent to which state-testing mandates impact the instructional practices of teachers who are under pressure to raise student scores, research has not investigated teacher and student perceptions of the impact of these practices on various subgroups such as gifted students, students from economically disadvantaged environments, students with limited-English proficiencies, and students with learning disabilities. Further, there has been no exploration of whether this change in teachers' instructional emphasis may in turn contribute to the under-representation of

minority groups in gifted programs. That is, minority students, or other traditionally underserved populations of students, may respond negatively to the instructional delivery of teachers geared toward preparation of students for state tests (Callahan, Tomlinson, Hunsaker, Bland, & Moon, 1995). The consequence of this negative response may be a lower representation of these types of students in gifted and talented programs.

Effects on Testing in Impoverished Schools

The current high-stakes testing movement is designed in part to ensure greater equity for students from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. However, some researchers suggest that testing practices raise concerns over equity.

As noted in the previous section, high-stakes tests have become the driver of curriculum across a range of settings, leading to a narrower curriculum, and an increased reliance on drill and skill instruction at the expense of higher-order thinking opportunities. Some research suggests that the influence of testing on instruction is more pronounced in schools of lower socioeconomic status (Ascher, 1990; Cimbricz, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001). Studies indicate a greater emphasis on drill and practice and the use of worksheets in high poverty schools (Ascher, 1990), and a higher focus on test-taking strategies (Monsaas & Englehard, 1994). These practices stem from the belief that greater emphasis on test-related content and instruction will help students perform better on tests.

The pressure to raise test scores is extreme in impoverished schools, where students often under-perform on tests relative to their more economically advantaged counterparts (Beck & Shoffstall, 2005; Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002; Wright, 2002). However, the results of efforts to prepare for state tests and "cover" the curriculum may be confounded in impoverished schools by their access to fewer resources, with fewer resources often translating into lower test scores (Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002). For example, Toutkoushian and Curtis (2005) used data on public high schools in New Hampshire to illustrate how socioeconomic status could help to explain variations in state test scores, school rankings within districts, and college attendance. The authors contend that controlling for socioeconomic status dramatically alters school rankings. Based on interviews and observations of two high performing and two probation schools in Chicago, Diamond and Spillane (2004) found that the implementation of accountability policies worked very differently according to the poverty level of the school. In the high poverty schools, accountability based on test scores was perceived as a threat, and functioned to marginalize low-performing students. Being held accountable for low scores did nothing to increase the resources or improve the instructional practices of the probation schools. In the high-performing schools administrators could build on previous successes and use accountability policies as the basis for a system of rewards and incentives. The authors argue that without addressing resources and other core problems, accountability policies function to exacerbate many of the inequalities they are designed to overcome.

Test performance in impoverished schools might also be confounded by the more transient populations of teachers, administrators, and students that are characteristic of these settings (The College Board, 1999). In addition, these schools tend to have larger populations of students with English as a second language, a distinct disadvantage when direct comparisons are made with schools serving populations of native English speakers. Teachers also tend to have lower expectations of poor and minority students (Ascher, 1990; Herman, Abedi, & Golan, 1994), which in turn negatively affects student performance on tests (Ascher, 1990; Wright, 2002). Roderick and Engel (2001) found that the goal of scoring well on state tests is often believed to be unattainable by students from low-SES and minority backgrounds, causing students to believe that the effort of preparing for the tests is not worth it. These factors combine to influence test scores in impoverished schools, leading many to question the effectiveness of directly comparing schools with different populations of students, different curricula, and different access to resources (Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002; Wright, 2002).

Although teachers in high-stakes testing environments tend to resort to skill and drill instruction, believing that this approach will ensure student acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge, this type of instruction may actually lower test scores. In several studies, students with conceptual understanding of tested material were found to do better on skills-type tests (Ascher, 1990; Carpenter, Fennema, Peterson, Chiang, & Loef, 1989). Knapp (1995) likewise found that elementary students from low-SES backgrounds progress more rapidly when learning basic skills within the context of meaningful instruction than they do when offered skill-and-drill instruction. These findings also support the National Council on Educational Standards and Testing (NCEST, 1992) claim that teaching for meaning and understanding is better for low-SES elementary school students than skill-and-drill instruction. Nonetheless, teachers in low-SES schools tend to rely heavily upon this type of approach to raising student test scores.

This instructional focus in lower SES schools threatens to affect not only at-risk students, but also gifted and talented students. The ceiling prompted by state mandates may be too low to challenge these students in the context of their academic potential. Studies indicate that students with higher test scores are making smaller gains than those with lower scores (Klein et al., 2000; The College Board, 1999). As a result of high-stakes testing, low-SES schools are unlikely to develop programs or curricula that focus on conceptual depth, interdisciplinary understanding, or higher-order thinking skills. Adaptation of the scope and sequence of curriculum to meet a wide range of students' needs is evidently being sacrificed in favor of a one-size-fits-all education with a strong focus on test-directed instruction.

Teachers' Perceptions of High-stakes Testing

Mehrens (1998) suggested that the greatest impact of testing is on teachers' instructional practices. Teachers can identify the various beneficial uses of high-stakes tests, such as clearly-defined instructional goals, formative information on students' strengths and weaknesses, and identified gaps in instruction, but they feel that these

benefits are overshadowed by the negative effects, such as the amount of time lost to test preparation (Costigan, 2002; Herman, Abedi, & Golan, 1994; Mehrens, 1998).

Research indicates that teachers have responded to the increasing pressure to improve test scores on state tests by spending more classroom time on test preparation activities (e.g., Costigan, 2002; Hoffman et al., 2001; Koretz et al., 1996; Popham, 2001). One concern stemming from this reported focus on test preparation centers on the validity of the test scores as a measure of student achievement. Specific preparation activities and instruction geared toward the test can yield scores that are invalid (Lin, 2002). One would expect that if student scores are improving on the state test from year to year, scores on other tests that measure the same content and/or skills should show similar improvement. However, several studies have compared student performance on state tests with performance on other standardized tests that assess similar content knowledge and/or skills and have found that improvement on state tests did not necessarily reflect broader gains in student knowledge on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (e.g., Klein et al., 2000; Koretz & Barron, 1998).

Other negative consequences of high-stakes testing reported by teachers include an increase in both their own stress and that of their students as a result of the tests (Mehrens, 1998; Popham, 2001; Wright, 2002), and the demoralizing effects of the tests on both teachers and students (Shepard & Dougherty, 1991). Teachers report feeling less autonomous and believe that their sense of professionalism is negatively affected by the obligation to implement a one-size-fits-all curriculum (Perreault, 2000; Wright, 2002).

Students' Perceptions of High-stakes Testing

Very little research has documented students' perceptions of current educational reform efforts. One study that explored students' perceptions of reform focused on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Through individual and focus group interviews, students proved to be knowledgeable and articulate about the aspects of the reform movement that had direct implications for them. While most students recognized that reform might help them become more competitive with other students for college places, they also reported increased stress on themselves and their teachers as a result of the increased pressure to perform (Kannapel, Aagard, Coe, & Reeves, 2000). The study did not investigate students' perceptions of their classroom experiences or the way instructional practices had or could influence their motivation and learning.

A small number of studies have focused on minority students' experience of the high-stakes testing environment. Horn (2003), and Roderick and Engel (2001) found that tests used to determine graduation and grade advancement are associated with higher drop-out rates among minority students. Many at-risk students express feeling rejected by school and failing to connect with their teachers (Baker, 1999). Feeling accepted and successful in a school environment is critical to students' desire to stay in school and motivation to succeed (Baker et al., 2001). Positive early school experiences tend to result in higher achievement in high school (Ascher, 1990; Coleman, Collinge, & Seifert,

1993; The College Board, 1999), but high-stakes testing has a negative social and educational impact on minority and low-SES students from a very early age.

Lattimore (2001) conducted a series of interviews with African American students, in which they expressed feeling as though the test was dominating their lives. In Texas and North Carolina, test data indicated that both minority and majority students had shown an increase in test scores, but only a small percentage of minority students were achieving at high levels (The College Board, 1999). The experience of minority students suggests that although high-stakes testing was designed in part to raise the achievement levels of these students, it has instead resulted in higher drop-out rates, decreased engagement in education, and diminishing opportunities for these students to engage in challenging, meaningful learning.

Effects of Testing on Gifted and Talented Students

A number of studies have examined gifted students' perceptions of their schools and classrooms since the initiation of widespread educational reform. In a study by Clementson and Wenger (1998), high school students reported overall satisfaction with their school experience, but called for more challenging and stimulating curriculum and instruction. Students' perception of a lack of engaging, challenging curriculum was expressed in quotes such as, "Too many students coast through high school without being challenged. Mediocrity is becoming the norm", and "The difficulty of most of the classes is far below the level of the majority of the students. Raising the difficulty of these classes would challenge a student's intellect", and "I would urge my teachers to make learning more exciting" (p. 208, 209).

Gallagher, Harradine, and Coleman (1997) found that according to the results of a K-12 survey of students' perceptions of school, many students were bored and in need of more complex and diverse materials and opportunities. While individual students identified instances of challenging instruction, the majority of students reported that instruction was paced too slowly and based on too much repetition.

As noted previously, high-stakes testing programs do not encourage the kind of complex, authentic curricular or instructional practices that are necessary to challenge gifted students. Although there are numerous recommended strategies for increasing challenge and personal satisfaction in learning for students (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), research suggests that state-level initiatives do not encourage implementation of these strategies.

Moon, Callahan, and Brighton (2002) suggest that the emphasis on narrow curricular and instructional practices associated with high-stakes testing may lead to students with high potential being overlooked for gifted programs. That is, the academic potential of students who do not respond positively to traditional, test-driven instruction, particularly those from minority and underserved groups, may be masked by these students' lack of engagement in learning. Research documents the under-representation of minority students in gifted programs, suggesting that these students are particularly

unlikely to be selected when achievement tests are used as the basis for identification (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Once given access to programs though, minority students have been shown to perform successfully in academic enrichment settings (Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, & Ngoi, 2004), suggesting that they perform better with the opportunity to learn through engaging, challenging curriculum.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of state testing programs on schools, teachers, and students, focusing on selected issues that have arisen separately from previous studies. These issues included the effects of state testing mandates on teachers' curricula and instructional practices; the impact of high-stakes testing on minority students; and the impact of curricula driven by high-stakes testing on the achievement, attitudes, and motivation of gifted students. Specific research questions included:

1. How do state testing programs affect schools and teachers in terms of (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) perceived pressure to improve test scores, and (c) test preparation practices?
2. Are schools and teachers affected differently by state testing programs based on the socioeconomic backgrounds of their students?
3. How do state testing programs affect students labeled as gifted and talented, in terms of their (a) attitudes towards school, (b) motivation to learn, and (c) perceptions of the classroom environment?

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

Research Study Design

The research study was conducted in two phases. The theoretical, conceptual framework that was used for both phases of the study was that of an interpretist theory (Erickson, 1986). That is, to understand the actions of others, one must consider insider perspectives (Eisenhart & Howe, 1990). Erickson stated, "The task of interpretive research is to discover the specific ways in which local and non-local forms of social organization and culture relate to the activities of specific persons in making choices . . ." (p. 129). As teachers are pressured to produce better test scores, they make specific choices to accomplish this goal, for the betterment or detriment of sound instructional practices for gifted and talented students (or for nurturing at-risk students with potential).

In turn, Blumer's (1972) framework of symbolic interactionism guided the phase focusing on student perceptions of state testing. Blumer's theory is based on the premise that humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings that they have for the individual. These meanings are derived from social interaction and they help people interpret situations. The study examined the meanings students assigned to state-mandated tests and the resulting effects on their attitudes and motivations to learn.

Phase I: State-testing Survey

Survey methodology was used to ascertain the beliefs and self-reported practices of a national sample of elementary school, middle school, and high school teachers. A 99-item teacher questionnaire was specifically developed and piloted for the study. Each questionnaire (elementary school, middle school, high school) asked about the perceived influence of state testing on curriculum and instruction, the pressure the teacher felt to improve test scores, the amount of time and attention given to test preparation, the perceived positive and negative effects of standardized testing, the teacher's perceptions of the consequences of testing, and teacher background data, including geographic and poverty indicators.

Principal component analysis was conducted to confirm the intended scales of the survey. Based on this analysis, 69-items were retained, accounting for 64% of the variance. Three factors emerged from the 69-items: Standardized Tests Influence on Class Time, Pressure Felt to Improve Test Results, and Teacher Attitudes about State Testing. Table 1 displays the number of items and internal consistency coefficients for the final questionnaire and Table 2 displays the final state testing questionnaire.

Table 1

Item Structure Coefficients

Item	Structure Coefficient
Review/practice using state-released items during the 2nd third of the year	.811
Review/practice using state-released items during the month prior to state testing	.794
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on the state test(s) during the 2nd third of the year	.783
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on the state test(s) during the month prior to state testing	.778
Instruction for students on test-taking strategies one month prior to state testing	.752
Review/practice using state-released items during the 1st third of the year	.746
Instruction for students on test-taking strategies during the 2nd third of the year	.721
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on the state test(s) during the 1st third of the year	.716
Instruction for students on test-taking strategies during the 1st third of the year	.639
Administration discusses ways to improve test scores	.806
Administration checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness for past test results	.769
Administration introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas	.750
Administration provides materials to improve test scores	.731
Administration reviews test scores at staff meetings	.696
Pressure to improve standardized test scores from parents	.783
Pressure to improve standardized test scores from professional organizations	.769
Pressure to improve standardized test scores from the media	.718
Pressure to improve standardized test scores from the school board	.712
Pressure to improve standardized test scores from other teachers	.634
Use of worksheets during the 2nd third of the year	.868
Use of worksheets during the 1st third of the year	.850
Use of worksheets after the state tests	.820
Use of worksheets one month prior to state tests	.788
I do not do anything differently because of state tests	.728
I omit certain information because thee is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)	.650
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would	.593
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students because of state tests	.565
Test scores have changed due to changes in instructional strategies	.819
Test scores have changed due to attention to test-taking strategies	.744
Test scores have changed due to changes in assessment strategies	.733
Test scores have changed due to alignment of instruction with state test content	.702
Test scores have changed due to changes in teacher effectiveness	.616

Table 1 (continued)

Item Structure Coefficients

Item	Structure Coefficient
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores	.792
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests	.777
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores	.687
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners	.661
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores	.603
Learning outcomes measured by state tests are important ones to measure	.712
State tests help to clarify and specify learning goals	.707
State testing in helping schools improve	.707
State tests give me important feedback how well I am teaching the curricular area(s)	.691
Test results are an accurate picture of student learning	.673
Potential consequence to poor test scores is private reprimand	.711
Potential consequence to poor test scores is reassignment of grade level or type of student taught	.706
Potential consequence to poor test scores is pressure to change teaching strategies	.700
No consequences to poor test scores	.693
Potential consequence to poor test scores is loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district	.594
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcomes of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	.690
How has the emphasis on outcomes on state-level tests changed over the past 3 years	.623
Pressure to improve standardized test scores the principal	.616
Pressure to improve standardized test scores from the central office administration	.548
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on the state test(s) after state testing	.794
Instruction for students on test-taking strategies one month prior to state testing	.724
Review/practice using state-released items after state tests	0.620
Frequency of long term projects (e.g., research or other projects requiring a week or more)	.793
Frequency of performance type items (e.g., presentations, science experiments)	.740
Frequency of constructed response items (essays)	.622

Table 2

Final State Testing Questionnaire

Subscale	No. of Items	Range	Alpha
STANDARDIZED TESTS INFLUENCE ON CLASS TIME			
How much time do you spend in your classroom on various test preparation activities?	9	5=Regularly → 0=None	0.93
How much time do you spend in your classroom on worksheets for test preparation?	3	5=Regularly → 0=None	.92
How much time do you spend in your classroom on various test preparation activities AFTER state testing?	4	5=Regularly → 0=None	.84
Teacher attention to tests during instruction *To what extent do various factors influence instructional planning?*	3	3=Strongly → 1=Not At All	.72
How have state test results affected your instruction?	4	1=Yes → 0=No	.73
How frequently are various nontraditional item formats used in your classroom?	3	3=Often → 1=Rarely	.61
How frequently are various traditional item formats used in your classroom?	2	3=Often → 1=Rarely	.45
Basic Skills/Knowledge Focus	2	3=Often → 1=Rarely	.46
Higher-Order Thinking Focus	2	3=Often → 1=Rarely	.67
PRESSURE TO IMPROVE TEST SCORES			
Do what extent do you feel pressure to improve test scores from various groups?	5	5=Extremely High → 0=No Pressure	.82
How often during the year does your administration engage in various activities for improving test results?	5	3=Many Times → 0=Not At All	.85
What is the potential for various consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state tests?	5	1=Yes → 0=No	.76
If test scores have changed, how important are various classroom factors?	5	3=Major Factor → 0=No Factor	.81
Pressure perceived by students and teachers	5	3=Strongly Agree → 1=Strongly Disagree	.82
Emphasis on state test outcomes	4	5=Extremely High→ 0=No Pressure	.70
If test scores have changed, how important are various school factors?	3	3=Major Factor → 0=No Factor	.76
TEACHER ATTITUDES ABOUT STATE TESTING			
Helpfulness of State Testing Program	4	3=Strongly Agree → 1=Strongly Disagree	.76
Student Ableness to Learn Test Material	1	3=Strongly Agree → 1=Strongly Disagree	*

* Alpha not computed due to 1-item scale

Sampling Framework

Market Data Retrieval1 (MDR) provided teacher level information for all public schools in the U.S. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn from each of the elementary school, middle school, and high school databases.

Elementary School

Based on the information provided by MDR approximately 928,170 elementary teachers (defined as grades K-8) were employed in schools across the nation at the time of sampling. It is important to note that approximately 15,000 elementary schools house grades K-8; however, the upper grade teachers were only in the elementary teacher database and not in both the elementary and middle school teacher databases. In other words, each database was mutually exclusive. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn (*n*=8,044; return rate=16% (1, 289 surveys)2). Table 3 provides teacher demographics for the total sample and for the poverty level stratification variable; Table 4 provides demographics for the urban status.

Table 3

Elementary Teachers Demographics for Total Sample and Poverty Level

	Total Sample	Poverty Level			
		A	B	C	D
TYPES OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM					
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	41.8	12.3	30.7	53.6	28.9
Limited English Proficient	6.9	3.9	4.8	8.1	27.8
Special Education	10.3	10.0	10.1	10.7	14.5
Gifted Education	7.8	9.6	7.5	7.3	13.6
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL					
Much above grade level	3.0	3.3	2.0	2.4	5.2
Somewhat above grade level	25.7	42.4	28.9	18.4	17.3
At grade level	46.5	42.9	48.8	49.3	39.9
Somewhat below grade level	20.9	10.9	16.7	25.7	30.1
Much below grade level	3.9	0.5	3.6	4.1	7.5

Note: Numbers are reported as percentages

[1] Market Data Retrieval (MDR) is the leading U.S. supplier of educational information. MDR collects the most comprehensive and accurate database of educational institutions and personnel available from preschool through college (www.schooldata.com).

[2] According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), based on a population over 75,000 teachers, 382 returned surveys were needed for a representative sample.

Table 4

Elementary Teachers Demographics for Urbancity

	Urbancity		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
TYPES OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM			
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	54.8	29.9	42.8
Limited English Proficient	12.2	4.9	4.3
Special Education	9.7	9.6	11.4
Gifted Education	9.5	7.6	6.5
SUBJECTS RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING*			
English/Language Arts	88.7	88.8	84.7
History/Social Studies	86.7	85.9	84.9
Mathematics	84.1	91.1	80.6
Science	81.6	82.0	80.2
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL			
Much above grade level	7.0	1.6	3.2
Somewhat above grade level	25.1	31.9	22.9
At grade level	41.6	45.3	51.7
Somewhat below grade level	22.6	17.8	20.4
Much below grade level	3.6	3.3	1.8

* In some cases, teachers reported teaching more than one grade level. Therefore, the percent is larger than 100.

Middle School

Based on the information provided by MDR approximately 230,000 middle school teachers (defined as grades 6-8) were employed in schools across the nation at the time of sampling. It is important to note that approximately 15,000 elementary schools house grades K-8; however, the upper grade teachers were only in the elementary teacher database and not in both the elementary and middle school teacher databases. In other words, each database was mutually exclusive. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn (n=2, 259; return rate=18.4% (415 surveys)[3]). Table 5 provides teacher demographics for the total sample and for the poverty level stratification variable; Table 6 provides demographics for the urban status; Table 7 provides teachers' reported class ability levels by poverty level; Table 8 provides teachers' reported class ability levels by urban status.

[3] According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), based on a population over 75,000 teachers, 382 returned surveys were needed for a representative sample.

Table 5

Middle School Teacher Demographics by Total Sample and Poverty Level Status

	Total Sample	Poverty Level			
		A	B	C	D
TYPES OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM					
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	40.7	6.2	25.0	47.1	74.1
Limited English Proficient	5.1	1.9	4.5	4.4	10.3
Special Education	11.0	10.1	11.7	9.6	12.3
Gifted Education	14.5	12.3	12.9	16.8	14.0
SUBJECTS RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING*					
English/Language Arts	41.2	53.8	36.7	41.4	41.7
History/Social Studies	19.0	15.4	26.6	14.6	18.1
Mathematics	31.8	23.1	29.5	36.3	30.6
Science	23.1	20.5	26.6	22.9	16.7

* In some cases, teachers reported teaching more than one grade level or subject area. Therefore, the percent is greater than 100.

Table 6

Middle School Teacher Demographics by Urban Status

	Urbancity		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
TYPES OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM			
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	47.6	25.4	25.9
Limited English Proficient	8.9	5.1	6.3
Special Education	10.4	12.8	8.2
Gifted Education	19.5	14.6	9.6

* In some cases, teachers reported teaching more than one grade level or subject area. Therefore, the percent is greater than 100.

Table 7

Achievement/Ability Level of Middle School Classes by Poverty Level

	Total Sample	Poverty Level			
		A	B	C	D
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 1					
Much above grade level	10.7	18.4	10.1	12.9	4.2
Somewhat above grade level	23.2	23.7	23.9	21.9	23.9
At grade level	36.1	44.7	41.3	31.6	31.0
Somewhat below grade level	22.9	10.5	21.7	23.9	29.6
Much below grade level	7.1	2.6	2.9	9.7	11.3
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 2					
Much above grade level	9.8	23.7	12.3	5.8	5.8
Somewhat above grade level	26.2	28.9	26.1	26.3	23.2
At grade level	33.7	36.8	38.4	31.4	30.4
Somewhat below grade level	26.2	10.5	18.8	26.9	31.9
Much below grade level	7.1	0	4.3	9.6	8.7
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 3					
Much above grade level	9.2	18.9	9.5	8.0	7.1
Somewhat above grade level	20.4	29.7	21.2	18.0	18.6
At grade level	42.0	48.6	45.3	39.3	40.0
Somewhat below grade level	20.4	0	20.4	24.0	24.3
Much below grade level	7.7	2.7	3.6	10.7	10.0
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 4					
Much above grade level	8.8	11.8	7.2	10.1	6.7
Somewhat above grade level	21.9	29.4	24.8	18.8	20.0
At grade level	37.8	44.1	40.0	35.5	33.3
Somewhat below grade level	23.8	14.7	23.2	26.1	28.3
Much below grade level	7.7	0	4.8	9.4	11.7
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 5					
Much above grade level	9.9	20.7	9.8	11.3	1.9
Somewhat above grade level	16.2	24.1	21.6	8.9	17.3
At grade level	46.2	34.5	46.1	50.0	46.2
Somewhat below grade level	16.6	6.9	13.7	16.9	26.9
Much below grade level	11.1	13.8	8.8	12.9	7.7

Note: Numbers are reported as percentages

Table 8

Achievement/Ability Level of Middle School Classes by Urban Status

	Urbancity		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 1			
Much above grade level	14.6	21.7	9.2
Somewhat above grade level	14.6	19.3	29.0
At grade level	27.	32.9	27.5
Somewhat below grade level	32.6	16.8	23.7
Much below grade level	11.2	9.3	10.7
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 2			
Much above grade level	10.2	20.8	14.7
Somewhat above grade level	19.3	17.0	22.5
At grade level	28.4	37.7	34.9
Somewhat below grade level	26.1	15.1	17.8
Much below grade level	15.9	9.4	10.1
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 3			
Much above grade level	6.3	19.2	12.1
Somewhat above grade level	19.0	17.9	23.4
At grade level	35.7	37.2	29.0
Somewhat below grade level	23.8	15.4	24.2
Much below grade level	13.1	10.3	11.3
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 4			
Much above grade level	18.9	6.7	10.8
Somewhat above grade level	25.7	27.4	26.9
At grade level	28.4	34.1	37.6
Somewhat below grade level	18.9	16.3	18.3
Much below grade level	8.1	6.7	6.5
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 5			
Much above grade level	9.4	17.9	7.9
Somewhat above grade level	37.5	22.2	18.4
At grade level	29.7	34.2	40.8
Somewhat below grade level	17.2	17.1	25.0
Much below grade level	6.3	8.5	7.9

Note: Numbers are reported as percentages

High School

Based on the information provided by MDR approximately 250,000 high school teachers (defined as grades 9-12) were employed in schools across the nation at the time of sampling. Because of the large number of teachers, a 1% stratified random sample based on metropolitan status and poverty state (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990) was drawn (*n*=2,566; return rate=15.5% (393 surveys)4). Table 9 provides teacher demographics for the total sample and for the poverty level stratification variable; Table 10 provides demographics for the urban status; Table 11 provides teachers' reported class ability levels by poverty level; Table 12 provides teachers' reported class ability levels by urban status.

Table 9

Demographics of High School Teachers for Total Sample and Poverty Status

	Total Sample	Poverty Level			
		A	B	C	D
TYPES OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM					
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	30.0	9.2	21.2	41.3	29.6
Limited English Proficient	5.5	2.7	4.6	7.7	7.1
Special Education	10.0	8.5	10.8	10.3	10.1
Gifted Education	16.0	22.2	16.2	13.7	7.1
SUBJECTS RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING*					
English/Language Arts	43.1	33.8	43.0	50.0	40.0
History/Social Studies	17.1	16.2	14.8	20.1	13.3
Mathematics	26.5	32.4	26.1	21.6	36.7
Science	14.5	17.6	15.5	11.9	13.3

* In some cases, teachers reported teaching more than one grade level and/or subject area. Therefore, the percent may be greater than 100.

[4] According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), based on a population over 75,000 teachers, 382 returned surveys were needed for a representative sample.

Table 10

High School Teacher Demographics by Urban Status

	Urbancity		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
TYPES OF STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM			
Free and/or Reduced Lunch	45.1	17.3	34.2
Limited English Proficient	10.3	5.4	2.4
Special Education	10.1	9.2	10.9
Gifted Education	13.4	20.7	11.5
SUBJECTS RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING*			
English/Language Arts	10.5	14.3	17.6
History/Social Studies	3.6	6.1	6.9
Mathematics	6.1	12.8	7.4
Science	3.1	7.9	3.0

* In some cases, teachers reported teaching more than one grade level and/or subject area. Therefore, the percent may be greater than 100.

Table 11

Achievement/Ability Level of High School Classes by Poverty Status

	Total Sample	Poverty Level			
		A	B	C	D
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 1					
Much above grade level	15.4	25.7	15.6	9.8	16.7
Somewhat above grade level	21.9	23.0	22.0	22.0	10.0
At grade level	29.8	32.4	28.4	31.1	26.7
Somewhat below grade level	22.9	8.1	25.5	26.5	30.0
Much below grade level	10.0	10.8	8.5	10.6	16.7
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 2					
Much above grade level	15.9	32.4	17.3	7.8	3.7
Somewhat above grade level	19.8	14.9	19.4	23.3	16.7
At grade level	34.6	35.1	35.3	32.6	40.0
Somewhat below grade level	18.8	9.5	16.5	24.0	23.3
Much below grade level	10.9	8.1	11.5	12.4	13.3
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 3					
Much above grade level	14.0	30.6	11.0	9.4	7.7
Somewhat above grade level	20.2	15.3	20.6	21.3	23.1
At grade level	34.2	31.9	39.7	31.5	26.9
Somewhat below grade level	20.2	15.3	19.1	22.8	26.9
Much below grade level	11.3	6.9	9.6	15.0	15.4
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 4					
Much above grade level	12.6	19.0	11.3	9.9	10.0
Somewhat above grade level	25.2	25.4	30.2	22.5	5.0
At grade level	33.7	42.9	31.1	27.9	55.0
Somewhat below grade level	19.1	9.5	19.7	27.0	15.0
Much below grade level	9.4	3.2	9.4	12.6	15.0
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 5					
Much above grade level	12.1	21.2	16.8	4.3	0
Somewhat above grade level	19.7	19.2	22.1	18.3	18.8
At grade level	34.8	40.4	31.6	33.3	43.8
Somewhat below grade level	24.6	13.5	23.2	30.1	37.5
Much below grade level	8.7	5.8	6.3	14.0	0

Note: Numbers are reported as percentages

Table 12

Achievement/Ability Level of High School Classes by Urban Status

	Urbancity		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 1			
Much above grade level	14.6	21.7	9.2
Somewhat above grade level	14.6	19.3	29.0
At grade level	27.0	32.9	27.5
Somewhat below grade level	32.6	16.8	23.7
Much below grade level	11.2	9.3	10.7
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 2			
Much above grade level	10.2	20.8	14.7
Somewhat above grade level	19.3	17.0	22.5
At grade level	28.4	37.7	34.9
Somewhat below grade level	26.1	15.1	17.8
Much below grade level	15.9	9.4	10.1
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 3			
Much above grade level	6.3	19.2	12.1
Somewhat above grade level	19.0	17.9	23.4
At grade level	35.7	37.2	29.0
Somewhat below grade level	23.8	15.4	24.2
Much below grade level	13.1	10.3	11.3
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 4			
Much above grade level	18.9	6.7	10.8
Somewhat above grade level	25.7	27.4	29.9
At grade level	28.4	34.1	37.6
Somewhat below grade level	18.9	16.3	18.3
Much below grade level	8.1	6.7	6.5
ESTIMATE OF CLASS'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/ABILITY LEVEL – CLASS 5			
Much above grade level	9.4	17.9	7.9
Somewhat above grade level	37.5	22.2	18.4
At grade level	29.7	34.2	40.8
Somewhat below grade level	17.2	17.1	25.0

Note: Numbers are reported as percentages

Mailing of Questionnaire

Questionnaire packets, including a brief study rationale and directions for completing the survey, were mailed to teachers. Teachers were provided postage-paid return envelopes for mailing the questionnaire back to the researchers. There was no follow-up with teachers after the initial questionnaire mailing.

Data Analysis

Data were coded by metropolitan status and poverty level of the school. Data were then aggregated based on the aforementioned variables for analysis; that is, the responses of individual teachers were average with those of other teachers across common-grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school), metropolitan status, and poverty status indicators. To simplify the reporting of the questionnaire results, similar items were grouped together in categories: curriculum and instructional effects; pressure to improve test scores, test preparation; positive and negative effects of standardizing testing; perceptions of the consequences of testing; and teacher background data, including geographic and poverty indicators.

Phase II: Qualitative Study of Teachers and Students

This phase of the study employed a qualitative research methodology to ascertain students' and teachers' perceptions of the influences that state testing mandates have on the curricula and the instructional process. In addition, students' attitudes toward school were investigated. Seeking diversity of culture groups, SES, and metropolitan status, districts in California, Texas, and Virginia were selected for participation in Phase II of the study.

Sampling Framework and Data Collection

Using a stratified purposeful sampling design, a series of focus groups were conducted to illustrate characteristics of particular subgroups of interest to the study, such as teachers of gifted students, teachers of mixed-ability classrooms, gifted and talented students, economically disadvantaged students, and limited English proficient students.

Each focus group (n=21) for both teachers and students ranged in size from 3 to 5 participants. Individual interviews were conducted with some teachers and students because of schedule conflicts. Although it is inappropriate in qualitative studies to make generalizations beyond the specific context studied, the stratified design allowed the development of assertions about the effects of state-mandated testing on teachers and students, which could be triangulated with the more generalizable quantitative findings.

Observations of each participating teacher's classroom were conducted at various intervals of the school year using a semi-structured observational protocol. These observations served as a point of reference for researchers and teachers during focus group interviews. Further observational data were triangulated with teacher and student

interview data for a more complete picture of the effects of state testing on classroom practices.

Data Analysis

The principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were adhered to throughout the analysis phase. Transcript-based analysis, the more rigorous analysis strategy, was used to analyze focus group interviews. That is, focus group discussions were tape-recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Classroom observations were script-taped by researchers to attempt to record as many teacher and student actions and interactions as possible. Script-tapes are verbatim transcriptions of classroom events including teachers' directions and behaviors, students' responses, and other interactions among the individuals involved in the classroom. Additionally, researchers included descriptive information about the classroom context, climate, and procedures that might not be evident from script-tapes. Researchers' comments and insights into classroom activities and interactions were also included in the field notes. The transcriptions, observations, and researchers' field notes were analyzed inductively to develop coding categories (by question and then overall) from responding teachers and students. Data were then coded and sorted into the categories with typologies and diagrams being developed that reflected key findings (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Categories were collapsed and reconfigured within each setting and across districts to determine patterns across data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Double coding of each transcription, observation, and field report (two researchers coding the same data) occurred to aid in definitional clarity as well as to serve as a reliability check (Miles & Huberman, 1984). References following direct quotations include the school's pseudonym, source of data, number of document in chronological sequence, and the page number of the document where the citation can be located.

CHAPTER 3: Results

Phase I: National Survey Data

Elementary Schools

Table 13 below presents the means and standard deviations for elementary school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points of the year in relation to state testing. For each of the four activities, the reported time spent on test preparation increased from the first third of the year to the second third, and increased again for the month prior to state testing. In the case of all four activities, the mean reported time spent on test preparation decreased for the period following state testing.

Based on the means shown in Table 14, elementary school teachers reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators (*M*=4.2, *SD*=.96), followed by school principals (*M*=3.9, *SD*=1.0) and the media (*M*=3.9, *SD*=1.2). Discussing ways to improve test scores was reported as the test-related administrative activity most frequently engaged in with teachers (*M*=2.1, *SD*=.89), while pressure to change teaching strategies was identified as the most likely school-based consequence for teachers whose students perform poorly on state tests (64%).

Table 13

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.4	1.9
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.0	1.9
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.3	2.0
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.0	1.9
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.6	1.8
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.3	1.8
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.7	2.0
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.3	1.9
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.8	1.8
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.7	1.8
Review/practice using state-released test items		3.4	2.0
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.8	1.8
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.0	2.1
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.8	1.9
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.4	1.8
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.9	2.0

Table 14

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high		
Pressure from other teachers		2.9	1.1
Pressure from school board		3.6	1.2
Pressure from parents		2.9	1.1
Pressure from media		3.9	1.2
Pressure from professional organizations		2.9	1.1
Pressure from principal		3.9	1.0
Pressure from central office administrators		4.2	.96
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times		
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.8	.80
Discusses ways to improve test scores		2.1	.89
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.9	1.0
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.6	1.1
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.8	1.0
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked		
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		20%	
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		32%	
Private reprimand		31%	
Pressure to change teaching strategies		64%	
No consequences		24%	

The data in Table 15 indicate that elementary school teachers' instructional responses to state test results most frequently involved teaching to the state tests more often than they normally would (61%) and omitting information that state testing did not leave time to cover (58.8%). Only 21.3% of respondents indicated that their instructional practices had not changed at all as a consequence of the test results. Teachers reported most frequently engaging in test preparation (*M*=2.6, *SD*=.59) and covering state test topics (*M*=2.6, *SD*=.69) in classroom activities, while engagement in long term projects was identified as the least frequently used of the available activities (*M*=1.9, *SD*=.73).

The means in Table 16 indicate that elementary school teachers most strongly disagreed that tests provide an accurate picture of student learning (*M*=1.3, *SD*=.55) and that test scores are important outcomes to measure (*M*=1.4, *SD*=.56). The highest level of agreement was with the statements that both teachers (*M*=2.8, *SD*=.52) and students (*M*=2.6, *SD*=.66) are under too much pressure to increase test scores, and that students are treated as test takers rather than learners (*M*=2.6, *SD*=.70). Elementary school teachers reported a significant increase in the extent to which the outcomes of state tests have been emphasized over the past 3 years (*M*=4.6, *SD*=.73), and identified a high level of emphasis on testing outcomes in their own schools within the past year (*M*=4.2, *SD*=.85).

Table 15

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not al all to Strongly		
Influence of recent state tests results		1.9	.71
Influence of overall school results		2.1	.69
Influence of last year performance		1.9	.68
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked		
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		61.0%	
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		58.8%	
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		29.6%	
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		21.3%	
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often		
Frequency of constructed response items		2.2	.77
Frequency of long term projects		1.9	.73
Frequency of performance items		2.1	.68
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.3	.71
Frequency of test preparation		2.6	.59
Frequency of covering state test topics		2.6	.68
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often		
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6	.56
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.8	.45
Attention given to basic skills		2.8	.44
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.6	5.2
Attention given to teaching items not on state tests		2.1	.68
Attention given to fine and performing arts		1.7	.69
Attention given to enrichment		2.1	.71

Table 16

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree		
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.9	.81
State tests help clarify learning goals		2.0	.74
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.4	.56
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.3	.55
State testing is helping school improve		1.7	.71
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree		
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.6	.70
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.6	.66
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.4	.74
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.5	.70
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.8	.52
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.2	.85
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.6	.73

Middle Schools

Table 17 below presents the means and standard deviations for middle school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points of the year in relation to state testing. Across three of the four activities, the reported time spent on test preparation remained constant from the first third of the year to the second third. The reported times increased for the month prior to state testing for three of the four activities. In the case of all four activities, the mean reported time spent on test preparation was lowest for the period following state testing.

Table 17

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.3	1.8
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.1	1.7
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.6	1.9
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.3	1.8
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.3	1.8
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.0	1.8
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.6	1.9
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.3	1.8
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.3	1.9
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.5	1.7
Review/practice using state-released test items		3.2	1.9
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.6	1.7
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		2.8	2.0
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.0	1.9
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.5	1.9
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.2	2.0

Based on the means shown in Table 18, middle school teachers reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators (*M*=4.1, *SD*=1.0), followed by school principals (*M*=3.8, *SD*=.98). Discussing ways to improve test scores was reported as the test-related administrative activity most frequently engaged in with teachers (*M*=2.0, *SD*=.90), followed by reviewing test scores at faculty meetings (*M*=1.8, *SD*=.79). Middle school teachers identified pressure to

change teaching strategies as the most likely school-based consequence for those whose students perform poorly on state tests (64.6%).

Table 18

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high		
Pressure from other teachers		2.8	.99
Pressure from school board		3.3	1.3
Pressure from parents		2.8	1.2
Pressure from media		3.5	1.3
Pressure from professional organizations		2.9	1.2
Pressure from principal		3.8	.98
Pressure from central office administrators		4.1	1.0
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times		
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.8	.79
Discusses ways to improve test scores		2.0	.90
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.7	1.1
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.5	1.1
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.5	1.0
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked		
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		20.0%	
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		25.2%	
Private reprimand		31.5%	
Pressure to change teaching strategies		64.6%	
No consequences		22.8%	

The data in Table 19 indicate that middle school teachers' instructional responses to state test results most frequently involved omitting information that state testing did not leave time to cover (59.0%) and teaching to the state tests more often than they normally would (54.6%). Only 21.7% of respondents indicated that their instructional practices had not changed at all as a consequence of test results. Of the available options, teachers reported most frequently engaging in test preparation during classroom activities (*M*=2.7, *SD*=.50), while engaging least frequently in long term projects (*M*=2.0, *SD*=.75).

The means in Table 20 indicate that middle school teachers most strongly disagreed that tests provide an accurate picture of student learning (*M*=1.3, *SD*=.59), while the highest level of agreement was with the statements that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores (*M*=2.6, *SD*=.61), and that students are treated as test takers rather than learners (*M*=2.5, *SD*=.73). Middle school teachers reported a significant increase in the extent to which the outcomes of state tests have been emphasized over the past 3 years (*M*=4.4, *SD*=.78), and identified a high level of emphasis on testing outcomes in their own schools within the past year (*M*=4.0, *SD*=.95).

Table 19

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not at all to Strongly		
Influence of recent state tests results		1.9	.68
Influence of overall school results		2.0	.69
Influence of last year performance		1.8	.67
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked		
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		54.6%	
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		59.0%	
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		29.0%	
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		21.7%	
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often		
Frequency of constructed response items		2.4	.68
Frequency of long term projects		2.0	.75
Frequency of performance items		2.1	.70
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.2	.76
Frequency of test preparation		2.7	.50
Frequency of covering state test topics		2.4	.73
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often		
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6	.59
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.6	.53
Attention given to basic skills		2.6	.57
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.6	.59
Attention given to topics not on state test		2.1	.67
Attention given to fine and performing arts		1.5	.65
Attention given to enrichment		2.1	.73

Table 20

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree		
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.8	.76
State tests help clarify learning goals		2.0	.75
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.4	.61
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.3	.59
State testing is helping school improve		1.8	.72
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree		
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.5	.73
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.4	.74
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.3	.75
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.3	.78
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.6	.61
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.0	.95
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.4	.78

High Schools

Table 21 below shows the means and standard deviations for high school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points of the year in relation to state testing. For all but one activity, the reported time spent on test preparation was greatest during the month prior to testing. In the case of all four activities, the mean preparation time decreased for the period following state testing.

Table 21

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Means	Std Dev
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.0	1.9
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.5	1.7
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.9	1.9
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.5	1.9
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.0	1.9
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.3	1.8
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.0	1.8
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.5	1.9
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		3.0	1.9
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.7	1.9
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.6	2.0
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.9	1.9
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly		
Worksheets for test preparation		2.3	2.1
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.4	1.8
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.1	1.6
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.5	1.9

Based on the means shown in Table 22, high school teachers reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators (M=3.9, SD=1.2), followed by school principals (M=3.6, SD=1.1). Discussing ways to improve

test scores was reported as the test-related administrative activity most frequently engaged in with teachers (*M*=1.7, *SD*=.96), followed by reviewing test scores at faculty meetings (*M*=1.6, *SD*=.80). High school teachers identified pressure to change teaching strategies as the most likely school-based consequence for those whose students perform poorly on state tests (61.0%).

Table 22

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high		
Pressure from other teachers		2.6	1.0
Pressure from school board		3.3	1.3
Pressure from parents		2.7	1.1
Pressure from media		3.4	1.3
Pressure from professional organizations		2.6	1.1
Pressure from principal		3.6	1.1
Pressure from central office administrators		3.9	1.2
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times		
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.6	.80
Discusses ways to improve test scores		1.7	.96
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.4	1.1
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.2	1.1
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.4	1.1
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked		
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		20.3%	
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		26.5%	
Private reprimand		29.1%	
Pressure to change teaching strategies		61.0%	
No consequences		12.2%	

The data in Table 23 indicate that high school teachers' instructional responses to state test results most frequently involved omitting information that state testing did not leave time to cover (51.3%). Of the available instructional practices, teachers reported most frequently engaging in test preparation (*M*=2.7, *SD*=.53), while long-term projects (*M*=2.0, *SD*=.70) and performance items (*M*=2.0, *SD*=.70) were identified as the least frequent of the classroom activities.

The means in Table 24 indicate that high school teachers most strongly disagreed that tests provide an accurate picture of student learning (*M*=1.4, *SD*=.61), that test scores are important outcomes to measure (*M*=1.4, *SD*=.56), and that state tests help clarify learning goals (*M*=1.4, *SD*=.56). The highest level of agreement was with the statements that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores (*M*=2.5, *SD*=.70), and that students are treated as test takers rather than learners (*M*=2.4, *SD*=.73). High school teachers reported a significant increase in the extent to which the outcomes of state tests have been emphasized over the past 3 years (*M*=4.4, *SD*=.82), and identified a high level of emphasis on testing outcomes in their own schools within the past year (*M*=4.0, *SD*=.88).

Table 23

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not al all to Strongly		
Influence of recent state tests results		1.7	.67
Influence of overall school results		1.8	.66
Influence of last year performance		1.7	.65
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked		
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		46.9%	
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		51.3%	
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		20.6%	
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		30.5%	
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often		
Frequency of constructed response items		2.3	.74
Frequency of long term projects		2.0	.70
Frequency of performance items		2.0	.70
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.2	.76
Frequency of test preparation		2.7	.53
Frequency of covering state test topics		2.2	.78
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often		
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6	.56
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.6	.52
Attention given to basic skills		2.5	.63
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.6	.58
Attention given to fine and performing arts		1.6	.71
Attention given to enrichment		2.4	.19
Attention given to topics not on state tests		2.3	.65

Table 24

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Mean	Std Dev
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree		
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.8	.82
State tests help clarify learning goals		1.4	.56
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.4	.56
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.4	.61
State testing is helping school improve		1.7	.68
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree		
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.4	.73
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.3	.74
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.3	.75
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.3	.73
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.5	.70
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.0	.88
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.4	.82

School Poverty Results

Elementary Schools

Table 25 below shows the means and standard deviations for elementary school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points relative to state testing, classified by school poverty level. Across the survey results, a pattern of increasing means by poverty level is evident, such that those grouped into poverty level A reported the least time spent on test preparation, while those in poverty level D spent the most. This pattern is consistent across the four time periods about which teachers were surveyed, with poverty level A showing the lowest or equal lowest mean on all 16 response items, and poverty level D showing the highest or equal highest mean on 14 out of the 16 items.

Table 25

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		3.3 (2.05)	3.3 (1.91)	3.6 (1.83)	3.5 (1.80)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.8 (1.91)	2.8 (1.88)	3.0 (1.87)	3.4 (1.82)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.1 (2.06)	2.1 (1.99)	2.3 (2.05)	2.8 (2.01)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.8 (2.04)	2.9 (1.93)	3.0 (2.00)	3.6 (1.81)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		3.3 (1.98)	3.5 (1.83)	3.8 (1.69)	3.8 (1.68)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.0 (1.82)	3.2 (1.81)	3.3 (1.82)	3.9 (1.69)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.3 (2.05)	2.6 (2.00)	2.7 (2.05)	3.4 (1.90)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.9 (1.93)	3.2 (1.85)	3.3 (1.86)	4.0 (1.63)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		3.5 (1.98)	3.6 (1.84)	3.9 (1.72)	4.0 (1.60)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.3 (1.87)	3.6 (1.77)	3.8 (1.75)	4.3 (1.48)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.8 (2.12)	3.3 (2.00)	3.5 (1.99)	3.9 (1.78)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.4 (1.94)	3.7 (1.81)	3.9 (1.77)	4.3 (1.48)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.7 (2.2)	2.8 (2.05)	3.2 (2.01)	3.0 (2.03)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.6 (1.9)	1.6 (1.90)	1.9 (1.98)	2.2 (2.15)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.1 (1.7)	1.2 (1.77)	1.4 (1.88)	1.8 (2.04)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.7 (1.99)	1.8 (1.99)	2.0 (2.06)	2.4 (2.13)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

The means in Table 26 suggest a varying pattern across poverty levels, depending on individual response items. The extent to which elementary school teachers reported feeling pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators, the school principal, and other teachers tended to increase across poverty levels, such that teachers in poverty level D reported the greatest or equal greatest pressure from these sources, while those in poverty level A reported the least. By contrast, teachers in poverty level D reported feeling the least pressure of the four groups from parents, the school board, and the media. Teachers in poverty level A reported the feeling the highest level of pressure out of the four groups from parents. Across all four poverty levels, elementary school teachers identified pressure to change teaching strategies as the most likely outcome of students' poor test performance.

Based on the data in Table 27, the instructional responses to state test results of elementary school teachers across all four poverty levels were characterized by teaching to the state test more than they normally would, and omitting certain information because of the time constraints imposed by state testing. Practices involving constructed response items, long term projects and performance items were reported to be most frequently used by teachers in poverty level A, and least frequently by those in poverty level D. By contrast, the means for use of multiple choice items and test preparation showed the opposite pattern across the groups, such that these practices were most frequently used by teachers in poverty level D, and least frequently by those in poverty level A.

Table 26

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high				
Pressure from other teachers		2.8 (1.0)	2.9 (1.1)	3.0 (1.1)	3.0 (1.1)
Pressure from school board		3.5 (1.3)	3.6 (1.1)	3.6 (1.2)	3.4 (1.3)
Pressure from parents		3.2 (1.1)	2.9 (1.1)	2.9 (1.1)	2.8 (1.3)
Pressure from media		3.9 (1.2)	3.9 (1.1)	3.9 (2.2)	3.7 (1.2)
Pressure from professional organizations		2.8 (1.2)	2.9 (1.1)	3.1 (1.2)	2.8 (1.2)
Pressure from principal		3.7 (1.0)	3.8 (1.0)	4.0 (.98)	4.1 (.97)
Pressure from central office administrators		4.1 (1.0)	4.2 (.94)	4.3 (.93)	4.3 (.94)
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times				
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.7 (.81)	1.8 (.75)	1.8 (.82)	2.0 (.78)
Discusses ways to improve test scores		2.0 (.90)	2.1 (.86)	2.1 (.96)	2.4 (.79)
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.8 (1.0)	1.8 (1.0)	1.8 (1.1)	2.2 (.83)
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.4 (1.2)	1.6 (1.1)	1.6 (1.1)	2.0 (1.1)
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.8 (1.1)	1.8 (1.0)	1.8 (1.1)	2.1 (.93)
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked				
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		12.5%	18.0%	19.8%	26.1%
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		19.5%	29.9%	35.4%	42.8%
Private reprimand		24.0%	30.3%	32.4%	37.8%
Pressure to change teaching strategies		51.0%	65.8%	65.5%	71.7%
No consequences		39.5%	23.6%	23.4%	13.9%

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 27

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not al all to Strongly				
Influence of recent state tests results		1.8 (.66)	1.9 (.72)	1.9 (.71)	2.1 (.72)
Influence of overall school results		2.0 (.67)	2.1 (.71)	2.1 (.67)	2.1 (.67)
Influence of last year performance		1.7 (.59)	1.9 (.70)	1.9 (.68)	1.9 (.72)
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked				
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		59.3%	59.7%	62.8%	62.8%
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		55.8%	61.4%	61.5%	48.6%
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		23.1%	31.4%	33.1%	22.7%
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		25.1%	18.7%	20.5%	23.9%
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often				
Frequency of constructed response items		2.3 (.75)	2.2 (.77)	2.2 (.79)	2.1 (.77)
Frequency of long term projects		2.0 (.70)	1.9 (.72)	1.8 (.75)	1.8 (.77)
Frequency of performance items		2.2 (.65)	2.1 (.68)	2.1 (.69)	2.0 (.71)
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.2 (.69)	2.2 (.72)	2.3 (.69)	2.3 (.73)
Frequency of test preparation		2.5 (.66)	2.6 (.61)	2.7 (.54)	2.8 (.46)
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often				
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6 (.50)	2.5 (.57)	2.6 (.55)	2.6 (.57)
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.8 (.43)	2.8 (.46)	2.8 (.43)	2.8 (.45)
Attention given to basic skills		2.8 (.45)	2.8 (.42)	2.8 (.44)	2.8 (.45)
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.6 (.53)	2.6 (.50)	2.6 (.53)	2.7 (.47)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 28 shows that across all four poverty levels, elementary school teachers most strongly disagreed that test outcomes are important ones to measure, and that state tests help clarify learning goals. Across all four poverty levels, teachers most strongly agreed with the statement that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores.

Middle Schools

Table 29 below shows the means and standard deviations for middle school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points relative to state testing, classified by school poverty level. Across the survey results, a pattern of increasing means by poverty level is suggested, such that those grouped into poverty levels A and B reported the least time spent on test preparation, while those in poverty level D spent the most. This pattern is consistent across the four time periods about which teachers were surveyed, with poverty level D showing the highest mean on all 16 response items, and poverty level A or B showing the lowest mean on 15 out of the 16 items.

Table 28

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.9 (.73)	2.0 (.75)	2.0 (.73)	2.0 (.76)
State tests help clarify learning goals		1.3 (.51)	1.4 (.57)	1.4 (.57)	1.4 (.59)
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.3 (.53)	1.3 (.52)	1.3 (.53)	1.4 (.64)
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.7 (.68)	1.7 (.71)	1.7 (.71)	1.7 (.72)
State testing is helping school improve		2.0 (.84)	2.1 (.84)	2.1 (.83)	2.1 (.84)
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.5 (.75)	2.6 (.68)	2.6 (.70)	2.5 (.71)
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.6 (.70)	2.6 (.69)	2.6 (.65)	2.6 (.64)
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.3 (.74)	2.4 (.75)	2.5 (.72)	2.5 (.73)
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.5 (.71)	2.5 (.69)	2.5 (.70)	2.5 (.74)
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.8 (.54)	2.8 (.53(	2.8 (.50)	2.8 (.54)
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.2 (.81)	4.1 (.85)	4.2 (.88)	4.2 (.82)
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.5 (.71)	4.6 (.74)	4.6 (.73)	4.5 (.72)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 29

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.8 (2.00)	3.2 (1.88)	3.4 (1.67)	3.6 (1.69)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.1 (1.72)	2.9 (1.71)	3.1 (1.68)	3.7 (1.52)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.1 (1.86)	2.2 (1.91)	2.7 (1.90)	3.2 (1.80)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.2 (1.61)	3.1 (1.93)	3.3 (1.76)	3.9 (1.56)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		3.2 (1.92)	3.2 (1.90)	3.3 (1.72)	3.4 (1.71)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.1 (1.70)	2.8 (1.82)	2.9 (1.68)	3.5 (1.78)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.5 (1.74)	2.2 (1.95)	2.7 (1.91)	3.2 (1.88)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.2 (1.59)	3.0 (1.88)	3.3 (1.74)	3.6 (1.75)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month* prior to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.9 (2.15)	3.3 (1.94)	3.2 (1.84)	3.4 (1.78)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.2 (1.80)	3.3 (1.78)	3.5 (1.69)	4.0 (1.53)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.6 (1.83)	2.8 (2.01)	3.3 (1.90)	3.9 (1.56)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.2 (1.77)	3.4 (1.87)	3.7 (1.70)	4.1 (1.46)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.5 (2.10)	2.7 (2.04)	2.7 (2.07)	3.1 (1.95)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.0 (1.84)	1.9 (1.98)	1.8 (1.92)	2.7 (2.14)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.2 (1.59)	1.2 (1.79)	1.4 (1.74)	2.2 (2.13)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.0 (1.93)	2.1 (2.05)	2.1 (2.04)	2.6 (2.11)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

The means in Table 30 show that across all four poverty levels, middle school teachers reported feeling most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators. Teachers across all four poverty levels identified discussing ways to improve test scores as the administrative response to test scores most frequently engaged in with teachers. Teachers across all groups also identified pressure to change teaching strategies as the most likely outcome of poor student test scores.

Based on the data in Table 31, middle school teachers in higher poverty level schools reported teaching to the state tests and omitting certain information because of time restraints imposed by state tests more often than did teachers from poverty level A. Teachers from poverty level A most frequently reported doing nothing differently as a result of the state tests, compared with teachers in the other three groups. Across the four poverty levels, middle school teachers reported most frequently using practices involving test preparation and constructed response items. Of the four groups, teachers from schools in poverty level A reported spending the least classroom time on multiple-choice items, while teachers from poverty level D reported spending the least time on long-term projects. Teachers from schools in poverty level A reported paying the most classroom attention to higher order thinking skills, and the least attention to factual knowledge. Teachers from schools in poverty level D reported paying just as much attention to factual knowledge as they did to basic skills, problem solving and higher order thinking skills.

Table 30

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high				
Pressure from other teachers		2.7 (1.06)	2.8 (.96)	2.7 (.91)	2.8 (1.16)
Pressure from school board		3.5 (1.39)	3.3 (1.19)	3.3 (1.22)	3.3 (1.45)
Pressure from parents		2.9 (1.25)	2.9 (1.12)	2.8 (1.13)	2.5 (1.34)
Pressure from media		3.7 (1.38)	3.6 (1.15)	3.4 (1.30)	3.2 (1.39)
Pressure from professional organizations		2.9 (1.24)	3.0 (1.17)	2.9 (1.18)	2.5 (1.30)
Pressure from principal		3.6 (1.21)	3.9 (.94)	3.7 (.90)	3.9 (1.08)
Pressure from central office administrators		3.9 (1.20)	4.0 (1.00)	4.2 (.93)	4.2 (1.07)
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times				
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.7 (.86)	1.7 (.75)	1.8 (.79)	1.9 (.77)
Discusses ways to improve test scores		2.0 (.76)	1.9 (.94)	1.9 (.91)	2.1 (.85)
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.7 (1.02)	1.6 (1.17)	1.6 (1.00)	1.8 (.93)
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.4 (1.21)	1.4 (1.09)	1.4 (1.08)	1.7 (1.13)
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.6 (1.07)	1.5 (1.01)	1.6 (1.05)	1.5 (1.11)
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked				
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		26.0%	13.8%	25.6%	33.3%
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		15.4%	21.0%	25.6%	37.5%
Private reprimand		20.5%	29.7%	32.1%	37.5%
Pressure to change teaching strategies		56.4%	68.8%	63.5%	62.5%
No consequences		33.3%	22.5%	19.9%	23.6%

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 31

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not at all to Strongly				
Influence of recent state tests results		1.7 (.69)	1.8 (.71)	1.9 (.61)	2.1 (.76)
Influence of overall school results		2.0 (.64)	2.0 (.70)	2.0 (.65)	2.1 (.77)
Influence of last year performance		1.9 (.67)	1.8 (.70)	1.9 (.64)	1.9 (.69)
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked				
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		35.9%	52.9%	57.1%	63.9%
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		46.2%	58.8%	59.0%	68.3%
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		17.9%	26.5%	32.8%	31.9%
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		30.8%	24.3%	21.8%	12.5%
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often				
Frequency of constructed response items		2.5 (.65)	2.4 (.72)	2.4 (.64)	2.4 (.67)
Frequency of long term projects		2.2 (.59)	2.1 (.73)	2.0 (.79)	1.9 (.74)
Frequency of performance items		2.2 (.72)	2.1 (.67)	2.1 (.69)	2.0 (.74)
Frequency of multiple choice items		1.9 (.87)	2.2 (.74)	2.2 (.74)	2.3 (.78)
Frequency of test preparation		2.6 (.55)	2.7 (.49)	2.8 (.46)	2.7 (.58)
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often				
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.8 (.43)	2.5 (.60)	2.5 (.61)	2.6 (.54)
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.6 (.55)	2.6 (.50)	2.6 (.59)	2.6 (.48)
Attention given to basic skills		2.7 (.47)	2.5 (.58)	2.5 (.59)	2.6 (.51)
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.5 (.61)	2.5 (.55)	2.5 (.60)	2.6 (.62)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 32 shows that across all four poverty levels, elementary school teachers most strongly disagreed that test outcomes are important ones to measure, and that test scores provide an accurate picture of learning. Across all four poverty levels, teachers most strongly agreed with the statement that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores. Teachers in all groups reported a significant increase in the emphasis on outcomes of state level tests over the past three years, and all groups reported a high emphasis on the outcomes of state tests in their schools over the past year. Teachers from schools in poverty level A reported the highest level of emphasis on test outcomes over the past year, and this reported emphasis decreased across the poverty groups such that teachers in poverty level D reported the least (although still high) emphasis.

High Schools

Table 33 below shows the means and standard deviations for high school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points relative to state testing, classified by school poverty level. Across the survey results, a pattern of increasing means by poverty level is evident, such that those grouped into poverty level A reported the least time spent on test preparation, followed by those in poverty levels B and C, while those in poverty level D spent the most. This pattern is consistent across the four time periods about which teachers were surveyed, with means increasing across poverty levels on all 16 response items.

Table 32

Teacher Attitudes about State Testing

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.6 (.76)	1.9 (.74)	1.9 (.77)	1.8 (.75)
State tests help clarify learning goals		1.9 (.59)	2.1 (.74)	2.0 (.74)	2.0 (.85)
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.4 (.55)	1.4 (.55)	1.4 (.60)	1.5 (.73)
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.4 (.59)	1.3 (.52)	1.3 (.62)	1.3 (.62)
State testing is helping school improve		1.7 (.70)	1.8 (.69)	1.7 (.72)	1.7 (.79)
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.3 (.74)	2.4 (.78)	2.5 (.70)	2.6 (.69)
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.5 (.68)	2.4 (.74)	2.4 (.73)	2.4 (.79)
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.4 (.68)	2.3 (.75)	2.3 (.74)	2.4 (.78)
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.2 (.79)	2.4 (.70)	2.2 (.81)	2.2 (.85)
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.7 (.52)	2.6 (.60)	2.6 (.64)	2.6 (.66)
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.2 (.69)	4.1 (.96)	4.0 (.97)	3.9 (1.0)
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.3 (.67)	4.4 (.81)	4.5 (.71)	4.2 (.87)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 33

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.6 (1.98)	2.8 (1.88)	3.1 (1.94)	3.7 (1.72)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.9 (1.51)	2.2 (1.73)	2.8 (1.74)	3.6 (1.50)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.2 (1.57)	1.7 (1.78)	2.2 (1.88)	3.2 (2.07)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.7 (1.85)	2.3 (1.79)	3.0 (1.95)	3.4 (1.75)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.6 (2.02)	2.8 (1.92)	3.1 (1.92)	3.8 (1.63)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.8 (1.65)	2.1 (1.77)	2.6 (1.78)	3.5 (1.48)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.3 (1.65)	1.8 (1.81)	2.2 (1.88)	3.2 (2.04)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.8 (1.86)	2.3 (1.82)	2.8 (1.90)	3.3 (1.79)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month* prior to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.5 (2.05)	2.8 (1.91)	3.1 (1.90)	3.9 (1.62)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.1 (1.92)	2.5 (1.84)	2.9 (1.91)	3.9 (1.49)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.9 (1.94)	2.4 (1.93)	2.9 (1.97)	3.5 (1.98)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.4 (2.06)	2.6 (1.84)	3.2 (1.96)	3.8 (1.70)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly				
Worksheets for test preparation		2.0 (2.13)	2.1 (2.11)	2.5 (2.07)	3.2 (2.08)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.0 (1.58)	1.1 (1.65)	1.6 (1.87)	2.3 (2.17)
Review/practice using state-released test items		.6 (1.24)	.9 (1.61)	1.3 (1.69)	2.0 (2.12)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.1 (1.76)	1.1 (1.62)	1.8 (1.98)	2.2 (2.11)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Based on the means in Table 34, high school teachers across all four poverty levels reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators. Also across poverty levels, teachers identified discussing ways to improve test scores as the test-related administrative activity most frequently engaged in with teachers. Pressure to change teaching strategies was identified by high school teachers in all groups as the most likely school-based outcome of poor student test scores.

Table 35 shows that high school teachers in higher poverty level schools reported teaching to the state tests more often than did teachers from poverty level A. Teachers from poverty level A most frequently reported doing nothing differently as a result of the state tests, compared with teachers in the other three groups. The reported influences of state test results, overall school results and last year's test performance were lowest for teachers in poverty level A, and showed a pattern of increasing means across the groups such that they were highest for poverty level D. Across all four poverty groups, high school teachers reported test preparation practices to be the most frequently used of the available instructional items. Teachers from poverty level D reported paying more attention to factual knowledge than to other areas, and this group also reported paying the most attention to factual knowledge of the four groups.

Table 34

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high				
Pressure from other teachers		2.5 (1.17)	2.6 (1.05)	2.6 (.93)	2.5 (1.15)
Pressure from school board		3.1 (1.38)	3.3 (1.29)	3.3 (1.28)	3.0 (1.45)
Pressure from parents		2.8 (1.22)	2.8 (1.11)	2.5 (1.06)	2.5 (1.20)
Pressure from media		3.4 (1.29)	3.5 (1.21)	3.2 (1.25)	3.5 (1.31)
Pressure from professional organizations		2.4 (1.08)	2.6 (1.19)	2.6 (1.07)	2.7 (1.29)
Pressure from principal		3.4 (1.26)	3.7 (1.01)	3.6 (1.05)	3.6 (1.22)
Pressure from central office administrators		3.7 (1.34)	3.9 (1.11)	3.7 (1.18)	4.1 (1.17)
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times				
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.4 (.82)	1.5 (.76)	1.7 (.84)	1.6 (.77)
Discusses ways to improve test scores		1.5 (.94)	1.6 (.99)	1.9 (.93)	2.0 (.81)
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.0 (.98)	1.3 (1.05)	1.7 (1.07)	1.7 (1.09)
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		.9 (1.02)	1.1 (1.13)	1.4 (1.07)	1.2 (1.07)
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.4 (1.08)	1.3 (1.04)	1.4 (1.06)	1.5 (0.97)
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked				
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		18.1%	21.4%	19.7%	26.7%
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		20.8%	28.6%	25.8%	36.7%
Private reprimand		29.2%	31.4%	28.0%	23.3%
Pressure to change teaching strategies		55.6%	66.4%	59.1%	46.7%
No consequences		31.9%	26.4%	30.3%	30.0%

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 35

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not al all to Strongly				
Influence of recent state tests results		1.5 (.50)	1.7 (.67)	1.9 (.64)	1.9 (.83)
Influence of overall school results		1.6 (.58)	1.8 (.70)	1.9 (.61)	1.9 (.74)
Influence of last year performance		1.6 (.55)	1.8 (.70)	1.7 (.62)	1.8 (.74)
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked				
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		31.1%	48.6%	49.2%	66.7%
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		45.9%	52.9%	50.0%	56.7%
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		14.9%	20.0%	21.2%	23.3%
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		40.5%	26.6%	30.3%	23.3%
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often				
Frequency of constructed response items		2.3 (.71)	2.3 (.75)	2.4 (.74)	2.2 (.74)
Frequency of long term projects		2.1 (.68)	2.0 (.71)	2.1 (.68)	1.7 (.70)
Frequency of performance items		2.0 (.75)	2.0 (.68)	2.1 (.71)	1.9 (.65)
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.2 (.72)	2.1 (.78)	2.3 (.74)	2.5 (.74)
Frequency of test preparation		2.7 (.56)	2.7 (.54)	2.7 (.53)	2.9 (.35)
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often				
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6 (.53)	2.6 (.58)	2.6 (.56)	2.5 (.63)
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.6 (.52)	2.6 (.54)	2.7 (.52)	2.5 (.51)
Attention given to basic skills		2.4 (.64)	2.4 (.63)	2.5 (.62)	2.7 (.67)
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.6 (.57)	2.5 (.57)	2.5 (.61)	2.8 (.43)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Based on the data in Table 36, high school teachers across all four poverty levels most strongly disagreed with the statements that test outcomes are important to measure, and that test scores provide an accurate picture of learning. Across all four groups, high school teachers reported a high level of emphasis on state test outcomes over the past year, and a significant increase in the emphasis on state testing over the past 3 years.

Metropolitan Status Results

Elementary School

Table 37 below shows the means and standard deviations for elementary school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points relative to state testing, classified by school setting. A pattern is suggested across the results such that teachers in urban schools reported spending the most time on test preparation, followed by those in suburban schools, while those in rural schools reported spending the least time on test preparation activities. This pattern is consistent across the four time periods about which teachers were surveyed.

Table 36

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Poverty Level*			
		A	B	C	D
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.6 (.81)	1.7 (.82)	1.9 (.83)	1.9 (.83)
State tests help clarify learning goals		2.0 (.76)	1.9 (.74)	2.1 (.71)	2.0 (.73)
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.3 (.47)	1.3 (.52)	1.5 (.63)	1.3 (.53)
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.4 (.61)	1.3 (.60)	1.4 (.63)	1.5 (.63)
State testing is helping school improve		1.6 (.71)	1.7 (.66)	1.7 (.69)	1.8 (.66)
School more interested in increasing scores than learning		2.1 (.84)	2.1 (.81)	2.2 (.81)	2.2 (.76)
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.4 (.76)	2.4 (.77)	2.5 (.66)	2.5 (.73)
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.2 (.80)	2.3 (.75)	2.4 (.69)	2.2 (.68)
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.2 (.79)	2.2 (.78)	2.4 (.71)	2.3 (.65)
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.3 (.69)	2.3 (.74)	2.3 (.75)	2.5 (.68)
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.4 (.72)	2.4 (.74)	2.5 (.63)	2.5 (.63)
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	3.9 (.90)	4.0 (.84)	4.0 (.89)	3.9 (1.03)
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.3 (.74)	4.5 (.73)	4.3 (.92)	4.2 (.90)

*A=0-5.9%; B=6.0-15.9%; C=16.0-29.9%; D=≥30%

Table 37

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.4 (1.9)	3.6 (1.8)	3.3 (2.0)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.1 (1.9)	3.1 (1.8)	2.8 (1.9)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.5 (2.0)	2.4 (2.1)	2.0 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.2 (1.9)	3.1 (1.9)	2.8 (2.0)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.7 (1.7)	3.6 (1.8)	3.5 (1.9)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.4 (1.8)	3.5 (1.7)	3.0 (1.9)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.9 (2.0)	2.9 (2.0)	2.4 (2.0)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.5 (1.8)	3.4 (1.8)	3.1 (1.9)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.9 (1.7)	3.8 (1.8)	3.7 (1.9)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.8 (1.8)	3.8 (1.7)	3.6 (1.8)
Review/practice using state-released test items		3.6 (1.9)	3.4 (2.0)	3.2 (2.1)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		4.0 (1.7)	3.8 (1.8)	3.7 (1.9)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.0 (2.0)	3.0 (2.1)	2.9 (2.1)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.0 (2.0)	1.8 (1.9)	1.6 (1.9)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.6 (1.9)	1.3 (1.8)	1.2 (1.7)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.2 (2.1)	2.0 (2.0)	1.8 (2.0)

The means shown in Table 38 indicate that elementary school teachers across all three school settings reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators. The means for all five test-related activities administrators engage in with teachers were highest for teachers in the urban schools, followed by those in suburban schools, and were lowest for teachers in rural schools. Across all school settings, elementary school teachers identified pressure to change teaching strategies as the most likely potential consequence of poor student test scores.

Based on the data in Table 39, elementary school teachers across all three school settings most frequently reported teaching to the state test more than they normally would and omitting information due to the time constraints imposed by the state tests as the changes to their instructional practices resulting from test scores. Teachers across school settings identified practices involving test preparation and covering state test topics as the most frequently used of the available items.

Table 38

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high			
Pressure from other teachers		3.0 (1.1)	3.0 (.99)	2.9 (1.1)
Pressure from school board		3.6 (1.2)	3.6 (1.2)	3.5 (1.2)
Pressure from parents		2.8 (12)	3.0 (1.1)	2.9 (1.1)
Pressure from media		4.0 (1.1)	4.0 (1.1)	3.7 (1.2)
Pressure from professional organizations		3.1 (1.1)	2.9 (1.1)	2.9 (1.2)
Pressure from principal		4.0 (.95)	3.9 (1.0)	3.8 (1.0)
Pressure from central office administrators		4.2 (.92)	4.3 (.93)	4.2 (1.0)
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times			
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		2.0 (.75)	1.8 (.80)	1.7 (1.1)
Discusses ways to improve test scores		2.3 (.79)	2.1 (.88)	2.0 (.97)
Provides materials to improve test scores		2.0 (.97)	1.9 (.97)	1.7 (1.1)
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.9 (1.1)	1.6 (1.1)	1.5 (1.1)
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		2.1 (.92)	1.8 (1.1)	1.7 (1.1)
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked			
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		21.4%	18.3%	17.5%
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		36.8%	32.5%	27.5%
Private reprimand		35.8%	28.5%	30.1%
Pressure to change teaching strategies		68.9%	62.6%	62.2%
No consequences		19.6%	24.7%	26.2%

Table 39

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not al all to Strongly			
Influence of recent state tests results		2.0 (.75)	1.9 (.69)	1.9 (.69)
Influence of overall school results		2.2 (.68)	2.0 (.68)	2.0 (.70)
Influence of last year performance		1.8 (.69)	1.9 (.66)	1.9 (.69)
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked			
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		60.4%	61.7%	61.4%
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		54.9%	61.5%	59.7%
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		30.1%	28.3%	30.3%
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		21.2%	19.8%	22.3%
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often			
Frequency of constructed response items		2.2 (.78)	2.3 (.76)	2.1 (.77)
Frequency of long term projects		1.9 (.77)	2.3 (.69)	1.8 (.71)
Frequency of performance items		2.0 (.69)	2.2 (.69)	2.1 (.68)
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.3 (.72)	2.3 (.69)	2.3 (.71)
Frequency of test preparation		2.7 (.56)	2.6 (.56)	2.6 (.62)
Frequency of covering state test topics		2.6 (.62)	2.6 (.67)	2.5 (.72)
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often			
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6 (.54)	2.6 (.54)	2.5 (.58)
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.8 (.44)	2.8 (.43)	2.8 (.46)
Attention given to basic skills		2.8 (.46)	2.8 (.43)	2.8 (.42)
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.6 (.53)	2.6 (.52)	2.7 (.50)
Attention given to topics not on state test		2.1 (.71)		
Attention given to fine and performing arts		1.7 (.61)	1.7 (.70)	1.8 (.71)
Attention given to enrichment		2.1 (.73)	2.1 (.70)	2.2 (.69)

Table 40 presents means and standard deviations for elementary school teachers' attitudes towards state testing. Teachers across all three school settings showed the strongest agreement with the statement that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores. Across the three groups, the highest level of disagreement was shown with the statements that test outcomes are important to measure, and that tests provide an accurate picture of learning. Across all three groups, elementary school teachers reported a high level of emphasis on state test outcomes over the past year, and a significant increase in the emphasis on state testing over the past 3 years.

Middle School

Table 41 below shows the means and standard deviations for middle school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points relative to state testing, classified by school setting. Across the three school settings, teachers reported a decrease in their use of test preparation activities after state testing. The means for teachers in suburban school settings were the lowest of the three groups on 15 out of the 16 response items.

Table 40

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree			
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.8 (.82)	2.0 (.82)	1.9 (.80)
State tests help clarify learning goals		2.0 (.75)	2.0 (.75)	2.0 (.73)
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.4 (.57)	1.3 (.56)	1.4 (.56)
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.3 (.52)	1.3 (.54)	1.3 (.57)
State testing is helping school improve		1.7 (.71)	1.7 (.70)	1.7 (.71)
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree			
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.6 (.69)	2.6 (.69)	2.5 (.71)
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.6 (.66)	2.6 (.66)	2.6 (.67)
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.4 (.75)	2.4 (.72)	2.4 (.74)
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.4 (.71)	2.5 (.67)	2.5 (.72)
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.8 (.51)	2.8 (.52)	2.8 (.53)
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.2 (.87)	4.2 (.85)	4.2 (.84)
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.6 (.73)	4.6 (.73)	4.6 (.73)

Table 41

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.2 (1.8)	3.2 (1.9)	3.5 (1.7)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.4 (1.7)	2.9 (1.7)	3.1 (1.7)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.7 (2.0)	2.2 (1.8)	2.7 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.5 (1.8)	3.1 (1.8)	3.3 (1.8)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.2 (1.8)	3.2 (1.9)	3.4 (1.7)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.3 (1.6)	2.9 (1.9)	2.9 (1.8)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.8 (2.0)	2.5 (1.9)	2.6 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.5 (1.7)	3.2 (1.8)	3.1 (1.8)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.2 (1.8)	3.2 (2.0)	3.4 (1.8)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		3.7 (1.6)	3.2 (1.8)	3.5 (1.7)
Review/practice using state-released test items		3.3 (1.9)	3.0 (1.9)	3.2 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		3.8 (1.6)	3.5 (1.8)	3.6 (1.8)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		2.7 (1.9)	2.5 (2.1)	3.0 (2.0)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.3 (1.9)	1.8 (1.9)	2.0 (2.0)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.6 (1.9)	1.3 (1.7)	1.5 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.4 (2.1)	2.0 (2.0)	2.2 (2.0)

Based on the data in Table 42, middle school teachers across school settings reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators, followed by school principals. Means for teachers in rural schools were the lowest of the three groups for all seven sources of pressure, and this group also had the lowest means on all five items for the reported frequency with which school administrators engage in test-related activities with teachers. Across school settings, pressure to change teaching strategies was identified as the most likely consequence of students' poor performance on state tests.

Data presented in Table 43 indicate that across the three school settings, middle school teachers most frequently reported teaching to the state test more than they normally would and omitting information due to the time constraints imposed by the state tests as the changes to their instructional practices resulting from test scores. Teachers across school settings identified practices involving test preparation, use of constructed-response items and covering state test topics as the most frequently used of the available items.

Table 42

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high			
Pressure from other teachers		2.8 (1.0)	2.8 (.99)	2.7 (.95)
Pressure from school board		3.5 (1.2)	3.5 (1.3)	3.0 (1.3)
Pressure from parents		2.9 (1.2)	2.9 (1.2)	2.7 (1.2)
Pressure from media		3.8 (1.2)	3.6 (1.2)	3.1 (1.3)
Pressure from professional organizations		2.9 (1.2)	2.9 (1.2)	2.8 (1.3)
Pressure from principal		4.0 (.91)	3.8 (.99)	3.7 (1.0)
Pressure from central office administrators		4.2 (.88)	4.2 (1.0)	4.0 (1.1)
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times			
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.9 (.80)	1.7 (.77)	1.6 (.78)
Discusses ways to improve test scores		2.0 (.94)	2.1 (.82)	1.9 (.91)
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.8 (1.1)	1.9 (1.0)	1.5 (1.0)
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.5 (1.1)	1.6 (1.1)	1.4 (1.1)
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.6 (1.1)	1.7 (.98)	1.4 (1.0)
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked			
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		26.9%	12.6%	21.0%
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		30.6%	24.3%	21.6%
Private reprimand		32.8%	32.4%	29.3%
Pressure to change teaching strategies		67.2%	64.9%	62.3%
No consequences		17.9%	25.2%	25.1%

Table 43

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not al all to Strongly			
Influence of recent state tests results		2.0 (.70)	1.8 (.65)	2.0 (.67)
Influence of overall school results		2.0 (.68)	2.0 (.69)	2.0 (.69)
Influence of last year performance		1.9 (.69)	1.7 (.64)	1.9 (.67)
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked			
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		55.3%	46.8%	59.6%
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		59.1%	55.9%	60.8%
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		25.8%	29.7%	31.3%
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		21.2%	24.3%	20.5%
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often			
Frequency of constructed response items		2.4 (.70)	2.4 (.68)	2.4 (.67)
Frequency of long term projects		2.1 (.77)	2.1 (.71)	1.9 (.75)
Frequency of performance items		2.1 (.69)	2.1 (.72)	2.0 (.67)
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.2 (.74)	2.2 (.79)	2.3 (.76)
Frequency of test preparation		2.7 (.54)	2.7 (.49)	2.7 (.48)
Frequency of covering state test topics		2.5 (.67)	2.3 (.78)	2.4 (.74)
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often			
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6 (.55)	2.5 (.59)	2.5 (.61)
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.6 (.51)	2.6 (.53)	2.6 (.56)
Attention given to basic skills		2.1 (.64)	2.5 (.57)	2.6 (.58)
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.5 (.61)	2.6 (.55)	2.6 (.59)
Attention given to topics not on state test		2.1 (.64)	2.1 (.68)	2.1 (.70)
Attention given to fine and performing arts		1.5 (.71)	1.5 (.66)	1.4 (.60)
Attention given to enrichment		2.3 (.74)	2.0 (.71)	2.0 (.72)

Table 44 shows that across all three groups, middle school teachers agreed most strongly with the statement that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores, and showed the least agreement with the statement that tests provide an accurate picture of student learning. Teachers in all groups reported a high level of emphasis on state test outcomes over the past year, and a significant increase in the emphasis on state testing over the past 3 years.

High School

Table 45 below shows the means and standard deviations for high school teachers' reported use of test preparation activities at different points relative to state testing, classified by school setting. Across the three school settings, teachers reported a decrease in their use of test preparation activities after state testing.

Table 44

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree			
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.9 (.77)	1.9 (.76)	1.8 (.75)
State tests help clarify learning goals		2.0 (.76)	2.0 (.67)	2.1 (.81)
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.5 (.67)	1.3 (.53)	1.4 (.59)
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.4 (.63)	1.2 (.50)	1.3 (.59)
State testing is helping school improve		1.8 (.74)	1.7 (.65)	1.8 (.74)
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree			
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.5 (.78)	2.5 (.74)	2.5 (.75)
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.3 (.78)	2.5 (.67)	2.4 (.73)
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.3 (.79)	2.4 (.70)	2.4 (.72)
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.2 (.80)	2.4 (.72)	2.3 (.80)
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.6 (.66)	2.7 (.55)	2.6 (.60)
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.08 (.94)	4.2 (.80)	3.9 (1.0)
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.5 (.70)	4.24 (.73)	4.4 (.86)

Table 45

Use of Test Preparation Activities (Means and Standard Deviations)

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *first 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.1 (1.9)	3.0 (2.0)	2.8 (1.9)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.7 (1.9)	2.4 (1.7)	2.4 (1.7)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.8 (1.9)	1.9 (1.8)	2.0 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.5 (2.0)	2.4 (1.9)	2.7 (1.8)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *second 1/3* of the year?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		3.1 (1.9)	3.0 (2.0)	2.9 (1.9)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.5 (1.9)	2.2 (1.7)	2.3 (1.8)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.8 (1.9)	1.9 (1.8)	2.0 (1.9)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.3 (1.9)	2.4 (1.9)	2.7 (1.9)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities during the *month prior* to state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		2.9 (2.0)	3.0 (2.0)	2.9 (1.9)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		2.8 (2.0)	2.7 (1.9)	2.6 (1.8)
Review/practice using state-released test items		2.4 (2.1)	2.6 (1.9)	2.6 (2.0)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		2.7 (2.0)	2.8 (2.0)	3.0 (1.9)
How much time do you spend in your classroom on the following test preparation activities *after* state testing?	0-5; None to Regularly			
Worksheets for test preparation		2.4 (2.0)	2.2 (2.1)	2.3 (2.1)
Instruction for student on test-taking strategies		1.6 (2.1)	1.3 (1.7)	1.3 (1.7)
Review/practice using state-released test items		1.0 (1.7)	1.1 (1.6)	1.0 (1.7)
Student practice in the kinds of item formats that are on state test(s)		1.3 (1.9)	1.4 (1.8)	1.6 (1.9)

Based on the means presented in Table 46, high school teachers across the three school settings reported feeling the most pressure to improve students' test scores from central office administrators. Across school settings, pressure to change teaching strategies was identified as the most likely consequence of students' poor performance on state tests.

The data shown in Table 47 indicate that high school teachers across the three school settings most frequently identified omitting certain information because of time constraints imposed by the state tests as the way their instructional practices have changed in response to test scores. 38.6% of teachers in urban schools indicated that their practices had not changed at all as a result of state tests, compared with 26.9% in suburban schools and 29.8% in rural schools. Across the school settings, high school teachers identified practices involving test preparation as the most frequently used of the available items.

Table 46

Pressure to Improve Test Results

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
To want extent do you feel pressure from the following groups to improve your students' standardized test scores?	1-5; No pressure to Extremely high			
Pressure from other teachers		2.4 (1.1)	2.6 (1.0)	2.6 (1.1)
Pressure from school board		3.2 (1.4)	3.3 (1.4)	3.3 (1.2)
Pressure from parents		2.5 (1.1)	2.8 (1.2)	2.7 (1.1)
Pressure from media		3.5 (1.4)	3.4 (1.3)	2.7 (1.1)
Pressure from professional organizations		2.6 (1.2)	2.6 (1.1)	2.6 (1.1)
Pressure from principal		3.5 (1.1)	3.7 (1.1)	3.6 (1.1)
Pressure from central office administrators		3.7 (1.3)	3.9 (1.2)	3.8 (1.1)
How often during the year does your school administration engage in the following activities with teachers?	0-3; Not at all to Many times			
Reviews test scores at staff meetings		1.6 (.82)	1.6 (.79)	1.5 (.81)
Discusses ways to improve test scores		1.8 (.99)	1.7 (.96)	1.8 (.95)
Provides materials to improve test scores		1.5 (1.1)	1.4 (1.1)	1.4 (1.1)
Checks to see that teachers are emphasizing areas which showed weakness from past test results		1.3 (1.1)	1.1 (1.1)	1.3 (1.1)
Introduces or discusses important new instructional ideas		1.3 (1.1)	1.4 (1.1)	1.3 (1.1)
What are the potential consequences to teachers whose students perform poorly on state test(s) in your school?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked			
Potential loss of position as a teacher in this school or school district		14.9%	21.4%	22.9%
Reassignment of grade level or type of students taught		24.1%	27.0 %	27.5%
Private reprimand		25.3%	30.8%	29.0%
Pressure to change teaching strategies		55.2%	63.5%	60.3%
No consequences		34.5%	25.2%	29.8%

Table 47

Teacher Attention to Tests During Instruction

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
To want extent do the following factors influence your instructional planning?	1-3; Not at all to Strongly			
Influence of recent state tests results		1.8 (.71)	1.6 (.64)	1.8 (.65)
Influence of overall school results		1.8 (.70)	1.8 (.65)	1.9 (.64)
Influence of last year performance		1.7 (.66)	1.7 (.65)	1.8 (.64)
How have state test results affected your instruction?	0: Not checked; 1: Checked			
I teach to the state test(s) more than I normally would		37.5%	50.3%	48.1%
I omit certain information because there is not enough time to fit it in because of state test(s)		42.0%	52.8%	54.2%
I do not do certain things that look interesting or beneficial for students unless they are on the state test		17.0%	20.5%	21.4%
I do not do anything differently because of the state tests		38.6%	26.9%	29.8%
How frequently are the following practices used in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often			
Frequency of constructed response items				
Frequency of long term projects		2.1 (.68)	2.0 (.72)	2.1 (.69)
Frequency of performance items		2.0 (.66)	2.0 (.74)	2.1 (.69)
Frequency of multiple choice items		2.2 (.81)	2.2 (.75)	2.2 (.74)
Frequency of test preparation		2.7 (.50)	2.7 (.55)	2.7 (.54)
Frequency of covering state test topics				
How much attention are you able to give to the following areas in your classroom?	1-3; Rarely to Often			
Attention given to higher order thinking skills		2.6 (.62)	2.6 (.56)	2.6 (.55)
Attention given to problem solving skills		2.6 (.55)	2.6 (.52)	2.7 (.52)
Attention given to basic skills		2.5 (.65)	2.4 (.65)	2.5 (.61)
Attention given to factual knowledge		2.5 (.59)	2.6 (.55)	2.5 (.60)
Attention given to topics not on state test		2.4 (.64)	2.3 (.65)	2.3 (.65)
Attention given to fine and performing arts		1.6 (.68)	1.5 (.71)	1.8 (.71)
Attention given to enrichment		2.2 (.72)	2.1 (.69)	2.2 (.69)

Based on the means in Table 48, high school teachers across all three school settings agreed most strongly with the statements that teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores, and students are treated as test takers rather then learners. They disagreed most strongly that test outcomes are important ones to measure, and that tests provide an accurate picture of student learning. Teachers across the three groups reported a high level of emphasis on state test outcomes over the past year, and a significant increase in the emphasis on state testing over the past 3 years.

Content Analysis (Survey of Qualitative Data)

Methodology

A team of researchers began the analysis of the open-ended responses by carefully reading each section of teacher comments from the open-ended question regarding the effects of standardized testing on teaching practices (by school type and by metropolitan location). Two separate researchers independently read the responses and compared themes after completion to determine consistency of analysis. The final analysis was completed by a third researcher using the work of the initial analysis as well as the raw data. Although conducted separately, these procedures were followed by all analysts. While reading, researchers made notes in the margins of each response in an attempt to summarize the main points. During this reading/note taking process, researchers began to get a sense of general themes running throughout the sections.

After having read all the comments, categories were created for each section. Tally sheets were made for each section (by school type and by metropolitan location) to track the frequency of common responses. On the tally sheets researchers listed the general categories within each section by analyzing the comments. Categories were established if there were two or more comments that related to it. Initial categories were deleted when there was only one comment for it.

Once several survey sections were completed, the researchers began to use the same categories/themes as a structure for each subsequent survey section. Researchers then look for comments that would match the categories previously used. If nothing fit into those categories, the category was deleted. If comments seemed to fit into a different category, a new one was formed. Researchers used those categories and formulated themes so that any similarities or differences could be seen.

Eleven themes were formulated and organized into four sections for comparative purposes. The final analysis, searching for commonalities and uniqueness among the themes, was performed from these last four sections.

Table 48

Teacher Attitudes About State Testing

Item	Available Range	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree			
Many students I teach are not capable of tests material		1.8 (.79)	1.8 (.85)	1.8 (.83)
State tests help clarify learning goals		2.0 (.75)	2.0 (.74)	2.0 (.69)
Test outcomes are important ones to measure		1.4 (.59)	1.3 (.51)	1.4 (.57)
Tests are accurate picture of learning		1.4 (.64)	1.3 (.55)	1.5 (.67)
State testing is helping school improve		1.7 (.68)	1.6 (.65)	1.9 (.71)
Read each item and indicate your degree of agreement with it.	1-3; Strongly disagree to Strongly agree			
Students are treated as test takers rather than learners		2.4 (.73)	2.5 (.71)	2.4 (.75)
Students are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.3 (.74)	2.4 (.71)	2.3 (.77)
Students see learning as a chore because of state tests		2.3 (.72)	2.3 (.73)	2.1 (.82)
Students feel badly if they do not have high test scores		2.4 (.71)	2.3 (.73)	2.2 (.77)
Teachers are under too much pressure to increase test scores		2.4 (.67)	2.6 (.67)	2.4 (.77)
How would you characterize the emphasis on the outcome of state-level tests in your school during the past year?	1-5; No emphasis to Extremely high	4.0 (.97)	4.1 (.82)	4.0 (.88)
How has the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests changed over the past 3 years?	1-5; Decreased greatly to Increased greatly	4.2 (.89)	4.5 (.70)	4.3 (.88)

Teachers responded to one open question at the end of the survey, which asked respondents to write comments about the ways state testing is helping or hurting their instructional practices. All the themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of teachers' comments about the ways state testing is hurting instructional practices are related or rooted on the overemphasis of test results by the government at all levels, and school administrators. No themes about positive effects of state testing emerged from the teachers' comments.

Pressure and Stress on Educators and Students, and Student Apathy

Regardless of metropolitan status and grade level (elementary, middle, and high school) teachers responded that a lot of pressure to attain or maintain high scores exists at their schools. This pressure comes from the legislature and filters (moves down) from administrators and principals to teachers to students.

> Our principal, school board, and superintendent have stressed teaching to the tests. They want test results to look good in the local paper. That is what they have told us over and over. I have a problem with that. (M.S. B- 145-AR)

> Testing pressure has permeated almost every meeting and discussion, making them more stressful and argumentative. There is less joy and enthusiasm on the part of teachers and students. Finally, the pressure is scaring administrators into making bad decisions with incomplete data or without carefully analyzing the data we have. (H.S. B-371 VT)

> I am extremely opposed to state testing to measure student learning. Some students simply aren't good at taking tests. I know several students who have failed state standardized tests who do really well in the classroom. Some kids feel tremendous pressure, and it affects their scores. Our superintendent is given a bonus of several thousand dollars if test scores increase. He provides no leadership or training, but expects high scores on the TCAP. He takes all the credit, and then we received nothing. There is much pressure from him to "teach to the test" because it affects his yearly salary. It is a shame that some teachers seem to only care about state tests because of administrative pressure. (H.S. C 223-TN)

Students show this pressure with physical signals such as headaches, crying, and problems with self-esteem. "I have students that complain of stomach aches, headaches, and sleeping problems due to testing. They are under too much pressure." (Elem. A 1035-GA).

> The pressure on my kids just before the tests is outrageous. Many cannot sleep and develop psychosomatic symptoms resulting from fear and stress. The moment the tests are over most of them "shut down" for the year. Those who fail (and who have done so previously) tell me openly that they're "stupid, dumb, and

> are gonna drop out" as soon as they can. I spend eight weeks trying to rebuild self-esteem." (C-392 TX)

Only elementary teachers expressed that the pressure of getting high scores on the tests has a negative physical effect on them. They feel that they are not treated well by the school administrators, that their teaching positions are in jeopardy, and they feel unhappy. Many are thinking about retiring or changing careers. Teachers are also showing physical problems due to the stress.

> At one school in our district where school scores were poor every teacher had to re-apply for their position. (Elem. B 158- FL)

> Teaching was one a passion, a belief in society, education and the experience of broadening the mind of a child. It has become rote, dictated, neutral, and robotic. Many of us—qualified, passionate, thinking, professionals are leaving. This is my last year. (Elem. C 1084 - NY)

> The frenzy of testing in this state is appalling. I see teachers "counting down" their years 'till retirement when they have ten years left to teach. I see good teachers feeling frustrated because they are under pressure to use methods that they know won't work for their particular class. I see young, capable teachers leaving the profession. (Elem. A 114 - GA)

> The teachers are stressed. Two of us were admitted with chest pain. Two more had muscle spasms in their back. The fifth one is having surgery to remove a blockage from her esophagus due to increased acid production. The sixth (fourth grade teacher) missed 2 weeks of school after testing trying to get over a cold/bronchitis. There is absolutely NO FLUFF in fourth grade. (Elem. B 812 - FL)

Teaching to the Test, Therefore, Loss of Instruction, Fun Activities, and Enrichment

Regardless of area and grade level teachers responded that because of the state-level testing they are obligated to teach to the test, creative teaching is limited, and time that was previously used to do enrichment activities and fun activities is now used for test preparation and test taking. Teachers comments also suggest that higher level thinking doesn't prepare kids for tests.

> Because so much emphasis is placed on test results, teachers are being told, "If it's not on the test, don't teach it." This results in an atmosphere of drill and practice, with little or no time for work on higher level thinking skills or those "projects" that excite or engage students. (MS. C-201 AR)

> Time spent "practicing" for the "real" test wastes at least 2-3 weeks of instructional time. Add 1-2 weeks for testing and making up tests, and that accounts for over a month *LOST* to these tests. (Elem. B-10 OH)

> There is so much emphasis on testing and the format until teachers aren't able to teach concepts. We are left to teaching how to take tests. I see funding for enhancement dropping so money can be spent on testing. I lost 10% of instructional time this year because students were in required standardized testing, this does not take into account the times many students were pulled out for remediation prior to testing. I also see good students who do not test well being retained and totally "turned off" to education. With emphasis on teachers treating students as only "test takers and passers" the discretion that teachers should have on using alternative assessments is negated. All we are doing is educating students to "PASS THE TEST!" (HS- C-183 FL)

In elementary school, teachers responded that social studies and science are being left out of the curriculum because they are not tested.

> Science and social studies curriculum is being so de-emphasized that I have been told—"if you teach any science or social studies, great! But if you have to sacrifice it for more math or longer literacy block, that's ok too." (Elem. B 1294-CO)

> The tests put too much pressure on the kids and teachers! We end up phasing out science and social studies since they aren't tested and push too much review on the students. (Elem. B 661 - NC)

> However, the pressure to raise scores lead many principals in our district to tell their teachers not to teach science and social studies during Jan., Feb., and March but to focus on the tested skills only. (Elem. C 714-Fl)

> In our school this year we had to drop science and health to spend more time each day preparing for the state test. (Elem. C 1293-AR)

Elementary teachers also responded that because of time constraints due to the state testing they are not able to address student's interests in their classes.

> I really feel that my classroom was more open and interesting before all the pressure caused by state tests. I am rushing to get through all the material that needs to be covered and can not stop and experiment with ideas that the students and I find interesting. (Elem. D 435-MO)

> If the children in one classroom are excited about meteors, we are no longer able to design units that build around that particular theme; we must make sure that we've covered what the state has chosen as appropriate for fourth graders to know. (Elem. B 1135 –ME)

Too Many Tests

Elementary and middle school teachers from all areas expressed that there is too much testing going on in their school districts. High school teachers did not write comments on this topic.

> Besides state testing, our district has increased the tests we must give. There are too many tests. The teachers and students are burned out. (Elem. B-929 MN)

> Our state has many tests. Each nine weeks we had a criterion referenced test. In addition to that we had a locater test, a level test, the benchmark and aptitude test. Each of these took time out of the curriculum by needing review days and testing days. I would love to see only one test each spring. (M.S. C 325-AR)

> We have state tests, national tests, local criterion tests, etc. When do the students have time to LEARN all of the information they are being tested over!? (M.S. B-59 KS)

> We are testing too much and they are taking too much instructional time to administer. This year we lost the equivalent of eight instructional days on testing. TOO MUCH!!! (M.S. B-292 ID)

Timing/Calendar Issues

Elementary and middle school teachers regardless of area expressed that the time in the school year when the tests are administered is inappropriate. At the elementary level, for some teachers the tests are administered too early in the year therefore they have to cram the material to be sure that everything is covered before the test. Others expressed that students stop studying once they are tested. For other teachers the tests are administered too late, therefore the results cannot be used to help students. High school teachers did not comment on this topic.

> Time of test is not appropriate for my school. This year we tested the third week in April. Our school year ends June 9. The testing should be closer to the ending date of school. Students stop studying once they are tested. (Elem. D-1277 KY)

> Our state test is given in early March, over 3 months before the year ends. Therefore, I have to cram some math concepts, not usually taught until late spring, into January and February. I can only give the basics with little practice. (Elem. D-123 IN)

> It is very difficult to interpret the students' scores, and by the end of the school year, the scores do not help you help the child. Help has to wait for the next year's teachers—a person who does not know the child and who does not have to answer to the test scores and so does not have a vested interest in good results for the child. (Elem. A-337 NJ)

At the middle level the reasons are different. In the rural areas teachers wrote about the weather and the time between the test and the time when instruction took place.

> I believe testing should be done in the winter months. My students are generally taking the test on 80+ degree days. (M.S. B-410 IN)

> I do not like the testing in the fall. Students forget during the summer and there is not enough time given before the tests are given in the fall. (M.S. C-97 AR)

In Suburban areas teachers also prefer the tests later in the school year.

> State testing is done too early in the school year, takes up too many potential instructional days. Testing should be administered on 1/2 days with students sent home afterwards. (M.S. A-210 NJ)

> If we have completed our standards of learning by test times—what are we to do for the last month of school? Babysit? Oh, ok, do those things I did not do??? (M. S. B-261 VA)

Too Much Emphasis on Tests and Test Scores

Regardless of area and grade level teachers expressed that there is an enormous emphasis on getting high test scores. Getting high scores instead of learning has become the goal of education.

> I think there is too much emphasis put on testing, and not enough on learning for life. The test scores were higher when we were teaching the basics. (Elem. D-174 TN)

> There seems to be too much emphasis on state test-taking, rather than overall learning. Too much emphasis is put on test scores because of the Sandeis Model and Value Added Assessment. Some of the most important skills my students learn can't be assessed with a state test. (Elem. D-1030 TN)

Test Scores Should Be One Measure or Tool

Many teachers from all areas and grade level expressed the belief that the test scores should be viewed only as one measure of students' ability. Different measurements should be used to assess their ability because some students are not good test takers.

> While test results can give important information about student progress, they must be carefully considered along with many other educational factors. (Elem. A-79 WI)

> Students I have had that are very intelligent and good oral communicators—have done poorly on assessments. I, as their teacher, know this isn't a good indicator of their true ability. (Elem. B-211 DE)

> Tests are only one measurement of a student's ability. If they are not a good test taker and do poorly on standardized tests, does that mean they are not good students? Of course not. (Elem. A-761 NJ)

> State testing should either change its assessment style or use it as *one* of the many assessments of a student. (M.S. A-136 MA)

> The test is valuable but should *not* be the only measurement of learning. (M.S. B-61 CA)

> The state tests reflected neither teacher effort or student knowledge. (H. S. B-19 GA)

> Tests are *limited*, short-term reflections of what happens in schools. (H. S. B-270 IL)

Concerns Regarding Use of Test Score Results: Accountability, Rewards, and Comparisons

Teachers from all areas and grade level expressed that they are tired of being blamed for the students' failure on these tests, of the results being used to compare districts, and of being rated as ineffective teachers if their students do poorly on the tests.

> Test scores should never be needed for anything but tracking the progress of the child. Unfortunately, they are used to compare state to state, county to county, school to school, and as a whipping force for teachers. (Elem. B-541 GA)

> I have asked administrators, teachers, and other state personnel "how can I raise test scores on a third grade level when my students are on a first grade level?" I have tried many kits, ideas and other assessments to try to help these students. My point still is, if they can't read at a grade appropriate level, they certainly can't pass a test. I'm very tired of all the blame being placed on us teachers. (Elem. D-278 AL)

> Rating teachers as good or bad depending on their students' test scores is out of line. How can I be responsible solely for Johnny's performance in grade 7 if I have had no input for grades K-6? (M.S. C-113 AR)

> I consistently get "high school students" who read at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade level. After a semester of hard work, perhaps I can get them to read one grade higher, if they apply themselves and want to improve. They are required to take a ninth, tenth, or eleventh grade test. Of course, they do poorly. The state

> and district therefore assumes I am a poor teacher—no pay incentives—school receives a poor rating. Brilliant deduction. (H.S C-200 CA)

Money incentives for school districts and teachers' salaries of the schools with high scores while penalizing those with low scores.

> Texas ties money incentives to high performing schools which adds to the pressure. Schools that perform well get money, those who perform poorly are punished by not receiving money. They (low performing) need it the most. (Elem. B-1160 TX)

> To base a teacher's salary on their test performances is just plain stupid. What these students need is more accountability. They should not be passed if they can't do the work. (Elem. C-1298 CA)

> The *money received* as "*rewards*" for improved performance, or the *threats received* as a *potential punishment* for *not improving* as to the state (or federal) requirements has turned teachers and districts into whores and chickens with no initiative. It is amazing that the only people accountable for the low scores are the teachers. (M.S. D-400 PA)

> Rewards to schools or teachers for high test scores for high test scores sets us a climate for unhealthy competition perhaps even cheating both of which have little to do with student learning. (H.S. C-70 CA)

Test Format Concerns and Related Curricular Alignment Problems/Developmentally Inappropriate

Many teachers from all areas and grade level answered that the tests do not measure students' ability or knowledge due to a discrepancy between what is being taught in classes and what is asked on the tests. The tests are not aligned with the curriculum.

> We make our curriculum to match the state proficiencies. Then the state makes up tests that don't match those proficiencies. Doesn't make sense! If you want better test scores then have the state get their act together. It's like telling the children we're having a social studies test, then turning around and handing them a math test!! (Elem. A-869 IN)

> The current test being used in WV is the STATE9. I teach world geography in the seventh grade and the state's eighth grade is WV studies. The test does not address either of these subjects. (M.S. D-184 WV)

> Kansas tests do not coincide with what is being taught at that grade level. Textbooks for some areas are inadequate because the tests cover material in textbooks for other children. Elementary teachers have to teach square root to children; high school math teachers have to teach Algebra II concepts to freshmen

> for the state tests. The social studies test covers what we offer seniors, but the juniors take the test. (H.S. B-48 KS)

Elementary teachers from all areas expressed concern for the way these tests are constructed. The consensus among teachers is that these tests are poor constructed, too long, and the language used is not familiar to their students.

> I also feel that our state test is in some areas asking our students to do levels of things that are unrealistic for the average fourth grader. Many times the questions are asked in such a manner that is seems they're trying to trick the students. I've also felt that sometimes it's like a "trivia-game show" kind of test become of the random-type questions. (Elem. B-1322 OH)

> I don't have a problem (discrepancy) with the information students are tested on—but often on the format of the test. Often the wording is confusing/foreign to my students and the students at my school. Students then do poorly, but they are unfamiliar with, or unable to understand the way the questions are asked. (Elem. B-1185 AZ)

> The SOL questions have been perceived as often a trivia test. The presentation so difficult and unclear that—especially in third grade—the students cannot determine often what is being asked! (Elem. A-926 VA)

Elementary teachers from all areas (rural, suburban, and urban) also expressed that these tests are developmentally inappropriate for the students.

> State testing might be helpful if it were done in age/grade level appropriate ways. However, when a test for fourth graders is written using twelfth grade level vocabulary and questioning methods, it is unfair to everyone. (Elem. C 1088-OH)

> First grade is a developmental grade and most of the skills taught are not developmentally suitable for this grade level. Many of the students are not ready to learn these skills, but they are being tested on them. (Elem. B-1207 NV)

> We try to teach students in a developmentally appropriate fashion to meet their individual needs, yet when tests are given, each child is measured on a standard. That means that on a given day everyone should know the exact amount of knowledge at the same time. We know that learning takes place at different times. The tests are given for longer periods of time than young students should be expected to work. (Elem. C 825 MI)

Media and Political Agendas

Many teachers from all areas and grade levels expressed their belief that behind the state testing movement lies a political agenda.

> The state has found an inexpensive way to profoundly influence what is taught in Michigan schools through the use of tests. At first, it was a positive influence. However, it has been misused and politicized. The tests have become a tool used by conservative pro business groups and against public education and teachers' unions. (Elem. B 25-MI)

> The major factor concerning testing is the political agenda of politicians who appoint [people to the] state board of education. The movement to destroy the public school system is underway! (Elem. A-62 VA)

> Testing is a political issue, not educational! (Elem. B-810 PA)

> Politicians make the standards—very political and not educational (ex. In NH, only one political party is mentioned-Republican and no other.) (HS B-363 NH)

Many teachers also believe that the media attention to test scores is adding to the pressure of getting high scores.

> The problem is the media picks up on scores and then ranks schools by scores. This is not *fair*. (Elem. B-1281 IL)

> Newspapers often publish county scores and the schools are not similar in SES. (Elem. D-601 PA)

External Factors/SES

Teachers from all grade levels and areas responded that there are many external factors that affect students' scores on the tests in addition to the instruction they received in the classrooms. Among these factors mentioned are students' health, their families, and socio-economic status.

> No one has ever looked at a child's score and said "How many times has this child been absent/tardy? Do the parents read to the child? Do they value education in the home? What does the child leave and go home to every evening? I am happy to take responsibility for my own actions, but I cannot be held responsible for factors I have no control over. (Elem. B-541 GA)

> There are too many uncontrollable variables beyond teacher's reach: family support and interests, student IQ's (especially those who don't qualify for L.D. adaptations), poverty, and lack of school supplies. (Elem. B-659 VA)

> Socio-economic status is not considered as an important enough factor when examining these test results. I feel that this should be your main factors (even before teacher, funding, low numbers, etc.) when considering results (and comparing schools). (Elem. C-969 AL)

> We have not addressed the issues and reasons for student poor performance. Family, environmental, and social problems have a huge impact on student performance. It does not matter what test objectives or standards are defined. Performance will not change until underlying problems are addressed. (M. S. C-50 AR)

> Also, low socio-economic and limited English speaking districts are at an inherent disadvantage when it comes to standardized tests. Children from theses communities traditionally do poorly on tests and in terms of achievement. Children who come from poverty generally contend with issues ranging from neglect, illiteracy, abuse, foster care, and a wide array of learning disabilities. Most of our students receive free breakfast and lunch in our districts which means are struggling to support their kids. How can we assess a student's achievement through such limited means? (M. S. B-61 CA)

> State testing hurts schools like mine that deal with a hard populations of students—those who are poor, have truancy problems, and are severely behind in academics. (H.S. C-68 UT)

Issues Concerning Special Students (ESL, Gifted, Special Ed., Transient)

Elementary teachers from all areas believe that these tests are unfair to some populations. For example, ESL students do not speak and/or understand English; students receiving special education services might not be exposed to the curriculum that is tested on the tests. Transient students stay for short periods of time in a specific school, missing instructional time and exposed to material that might not be included in a particular test.

> Because my students are bilingual and ESL, they have not had the time to learn all the nuances of subject matter material. Their scores are, therefore, lower than many/most of the regular ed. students. My students are, or turn, resented because their lower scores lower the school achievement level. (Elem. C-112 MA)

> Many of my students are bilingual and their level of proficiency in English is low. After 3 years in the program they have to take a test that they are not capable of doing. Not fair to them. (Elem. C-317 CT)

> State testing is hurting my ESL students who are required to take a grade level test for which they are not ready. (Elem. D-410 MN)

> Since I teach many recent immigrant children they do not have a good handle of the English language. Often the state tests (math) test reading rather than math skills. These students can calculate, but their reading skills are poor. We pressure these children to perform on grade level while they are only in America for 3 years. Their capabilities cannot be compared to American born students. (Elem. C 399-NY)

> Special education students are at a disadvantage taking standardized tests. Most of these students show growth in raw scores, but many appear to do poorly because of age norms. (Elem. B-916 IN)

> Children move around so much that in some cases, it's very difficult to get accurate results. This year I'm held accountable for 1 students who was in my class for only about 3 months with 1 school before and 2 after. This isn't right. (Elem. D-477 TX)

> In our building, we have a large transient population and it is almost impossible to judge our teaching prior to the grade (the test is given)—we don't have the same children in fourth grade we had in kindergarten. Sometimes it is only 7-8 children (out of 40-50) that have been with us the entire time (sometimes lower!) yet we are judged by these children's scores. No continuity for these children. (Elem. B-381 MI)

Urban middle school teachers responded about the negative impact of testing on gifted students.

> Waste of resources and time! Talented and gifted children are bored out of their minds with the repeated emphasis on basic skills. (MS. A 100 CO)

> The G/T kids tell me it was an easy test, but complain that they were nervous during it anyway. Most resent the time ("BORING") spent on preparation for it. (MS C 392 TX)

CHAPTER 4: Phase II—Qualitative Results

Schools Without Mandated Accountability Policies

Phase II of the study involved observations and interviews with multiple stakeholders in two types of states: (a) schools where there were no formal state or district accountability mandates; and (b) schools where there were formal state or district accountability mandates. Chapter 4 presents the themes from schools without accountability pressures and Chapter 5 presents the themes from schools with accountability pressures. Five schools from the state of Iowa, all located in the same district, were the sites for observations and interviews. Specifically, 3 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 high school participated in the year long study.

Elementary Schools

Theme 1: Teachers Determine Instructional Methods

1.a. Teachers given flexibility in how they teach. Teachers indicated that they were given flexibility in determining the way in which they instructed their students. They did not appear to have any guidelines or directives to follow in constructing their instructional plan. An observer noted this dynamic, commenting, "The district's approach to instruction appears to be a hands-off approach: letting teachers (teams or departments) use their professional judgment on how best to teach kids" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, p. 5). The district did not appear to prescribe the pace of instruction or the method in which information should be delivered to students.

Teachers appeared to appreciate the flexibility they were given to develop their own instructional practices and to determine their own classroom pace. One teacher noted:

> And it really hasn't changed all that much over the years when you look at what you do in reading and writing at a third grade level, there are just some basics there. And yet I'm left at my discretion still, how much time to spend on that. And I've never had anybody come to me and say, "Well, you better start doing this." (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI, #2, p. 5)

The teachers appeared to feel empowered as the primary decision-makers in instructional matters and as the experts who knew the needs of the students best. One teacher had the following interchange with the interviewer:

> T: "Because who would know better than the people in the classroom?"
> I: "Know better about what?"
> T: "Know better about curriculum and what it is that the kids should be leaving the classroom with."
>
> (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI, #2, p. 6)

While some teachers appeared to develop their own instructional methods and pace, the teachers seemed to work in teams to develop broad, grade-level expectations and plans. One teacher commented, "I mean the grade levels work together on instruction. You're responsible for your individual class, but we work as teams. Because the district gives us that latitude, it's helpful" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, p. 1). The teachers, therefore, coordinated with each other in developing general instructional guidelines and plans, while independently determining the instructional methods that would work most effectively for their particular class.

1.b. Teachers emphasized interactive instruction. Teachers indicated that they focused on being interactive in their instruction, finding ways to connect to the student's life outside of school and providing opportunities for hands-on learning. One teacher noted their focus on the applicability of the instruction to the students' future endeavors beyond school: "And would they use that again in real life? That is the bottom line. I look for application. Would they use that as an adult? And at this grade level, in sixth grade, that's what I think about" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 17). Some teachers appeared to focus on the value of curriculum and instruction separate from its school-related function.

Some teachers appeared to focus on the enjoyment students experienced in learning material. One teacher emphasized the connection of the mind and body in their instruction, adding elements to lessons that would be fun for the students: "I look for things that makes learning more fun, that's brain compatible, MI-balancing approach, so now I have brought in music, poetry, etc. Purposeful fun to create 'non-threatening learning . . .'" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, p. 3). Teachers made efforts to include opportunities for hands-on, interactive learning that would engage the students and be a fun experience for them to learn the material.

Some teachers indicated that the increasing constraints on their instructional time, a result of mounting curricular requirements, were making it difficult to continue to include hands-on activities in classroom lessons. One teacher addressed the effort they made to continue to include hands-on activities despite competing pressures for time:

> I try to use as few worksheets as I possibly can so that I can go ahead and have some application time, I will buy time from other things. I have not given up on application. But it is sometimes, I probably push my students a little faster because I want them to have it all. And that could be a little stressful on them. I'm not sure. I just have that inner drive that they need to have that application as well as the basics. (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 15)

Therefore, teachers emphasized interactive, project-based learning; however, they were also focused on covering required curricula and instructing students in "basic" skills, which often limited the amount of time available for learning activities.

Theme 2: Curricula Is Prescribed and Standardized

2.a. Teachers had little control over content taught. Teachers did not seem to feel that they had the ability to add or delete content from the curriculum. They indicated that this rigidity had escalated recently, and that they used to be able to bring content into the curriculum that was of interest for them or in which they had a particular proficiency. One teacher attributed the increasing limitations on curricular control to the time constraints inherent in the standards and test-based curriculum:

> Well, it used to be that if you had some interest or extra expertise in something, you had time to honor that and let the children experience it. And now our curriculum is so achievement driven and so test driven that we don't really have time. If it's not in that curriculum, district curriculum, it's probably not going to get taught. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 1)

The teachers seemed to feel precluded from changing the prescribed curriculum.

The limitations that resulted from the curricular requirements also affected the use of classroom resources. In some cases, there appeared to be particular books, teaching models, and other resources that were mandated in the curriculum. An observation following a teacher interview illuminates the inability of teachers to include non-prescribed resources: "She wanted to be able to use more chapter/trade books and it was not possible because of all of the excerpts and mandates of basal instruction" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, FN, #8, p. 2). The teachers seemed to want greater curricular control. While they indicated that they did have control over their instructional methods, they appeared to be inhibited by the lack of authority and decision-making power with regard to the curriculum.

The time restraints imposed by the mandated curriculum seemed to be particularly challenging for some teachers. Most teachers seemed to have found ways of accommodating instruction to the requirements through managing their schedules and their instructional pace. One teacher commented, "I have learned to economize my time" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 15). Some teachers seemed to carve out time in the day during which they would not be disturbed by school events or by students leaving for special subjects. This allowed them blocks of instructional time during the day.

2.b. Curriculum not responsive to student needs and interests. Some teachers seemed to feel that the time limitations imposed by the mandated curriculum made it difficult to address student interests that were not already a part of the standards. This, they indicated, made it difficult to allow students to study particular topics of interest in-depth, or to explore a new topic outside of the lesson. One teacher commented:

> So that if the kids have a certain interest that comes up in discussion, it is really very difficult, unless you do it on a sideline. It is very difficult to allow them to take time to explore that because it cuts away from the time that you have to give

> the mandated curriculum. And by mandated, I mean district mandated. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2 p. 2)

Teachers seemed to be able to include non-mandated material to varying degrees, depending on the grade level taught and the curricular requirements at their particular school.

Some teachers were frustrated by the necessity to teach all students the same material, irrespective of their knowledge or ability level prior to the instruction. One teacher discussed her desire to pretest students and to only teach and subsequently test those students who demonstrated that they have not already mastered the topic:

> She was very upset that she couldn't do pretesting on the reading tests so that she didn't have to cover the material with them, but she said that the tests do not allow for pretesting of skills because the materials do not come with pretests. She is concerned that she would give her gifted kids the posttest and then they wouldn't pass and she'd be viewed negatively, so she covers it all with all students, even if she knows that they already know it. (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, FN, #2, p. 1)

Some teachers felt that the curriculum was generally too restrictive, thereby making it difficult for them to differentiate instruction and to determine what content would be appropriate for their students. This concern was only mentioned by some of the teachers, however.

Theme 3: Influence of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills

3.a. Pressure placed on teachers varied. Teachers reported feeling varied levels of ITBS-related pressure exerted on them by parents, school administrators, the community, and themselves. Perceptions of this pressure seemed to vary by individual and between schools. In general, there did not appear to be a great deal of pressure exerted on teachers with respect to the standardized testing.

Parental pressure did not seem to be a factor for teachers. One teacher even noted the support given to teachers by the parents: "Our parents have been pretty supportive and have felt like our kids are learning. And we communicate with them concerns that we have. They're always very willing to come talk" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 1). Teachers did not comment on any negative pressure directed at them by parents with regard to the ITBS.

Most teachers seemed to feel that their administrators were increasingly under test-related pressure from the district and state levels; however, they did not, for the most part, feel that there was pressure placed on them related to the standardized test. Principals appeared to be reacting to the student performance expectations placed on them by district and state authorities.

It appeared that most teachers did not feel a great deal of test-related pressure from their principals. One observer comment noted, "She said that she really didn't feel pressure from her administrator or from other teachers" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, FN, #3, p. 1). Other teachers, however, did speak to what they perceived to be mounting pressure being placed on them by school administrators. One teacher commented, "Well, I personally don't like being called into the office and asked why 2 kids scored 79 rather than 80% . . . . I personally don't like that as a professional" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 16). This pressure troubled some teachers, who felt increasingly scrutinized by their principals for the test results of their students. An observer stated, "[The teacher] is feeling more pressure than she has in the past . . . . She noted that this pressure was more than she had felt in recent years when she was left entirely alone to do her own work" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, FN, #6, p. 2). The pressure exerted by school principals appeared to vary by school and the perception of this pressure differed among the teachers interviewed.

Some teachers indicated that they felt pressure emanating from the community. One teacher seemed to feel that the way in which the test scores were published made clear which teacher was responsible for particular test results: "And they publish them by building. So in this building, they know it's me" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 5). Teachers commented on the test-related pressure coming from the community rather than from administrators, parents, or teachers. One teacher commented:

> She articulates the pressure from testing, but she says she doesn't feel so much pressure from the principal or administration. She feels the pressure from reporting scores to the community. She says that there is no pressure from parents or teachers, but she characterizes it as "interest." (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, FN, #3, p. 1)

Teachers indicated that there were concerns about how test scores would reflect on the school and the school image teachers and administrators were hoping to convey to the community.

For some teachers, there appeared to be a degree of self-imposed pressure related to the test. One teacher commented:

> As a professional and because my class is not like everybody else's in the sixth grade level, yes I do feel that pressure. But everybody makes sure their students do well on their tests because Lisa Bailey's name will be on there, no matter if she has a student leaving the class that becomes the future President of the United States, it doesn't matter. (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 24)

Teachers indicated that they felt professionally responsible for doing their best to have their students perform well on the standardized test.

3.b. Pressure placed on students varied. In general, students did not seem to feel pressure from parents or students related to the ITBS. Some students indicated that their

parents did not focus on the test administration. One student commented, "Well, my parents don't say anything. I don't think they really know anything about it" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #6, p. 6). A gifted student, however, indicated that their parents would be very upset if they performed poorly on the ITBS: "My parents chew me out" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #5, p. 6). For the most part, students did not seem to feel that their parents emphasized the ITBS at home, nor did they feel performance-related pressure from their parents.

Students did not seem to feel that teachers focused on the ITBS administration or its results. Some students noted that the teacher emphasized the test at varying points during the year. One student commented, "[The teacher] thinks it's more important than our parents. Our parents just say to just like do our best on it. But Mrs. Ribitch, she puts it harder on us" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 14). Students generally did not seem to feel pressured by parents or teachers with respect to test performance.

Some students did describe stress they experienced related to the ITBS. This stress appeared at times to be associated with their perceptions of the consequences of poor performance. Two students commented:

> S: "I feel nervous because sometimes . . . I get nervous sometimes because I don't know if I'm going to get it right."
> S: "I'm afraid if I get a bad grade . . ."
> (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #6, p. 5)

For some students, their stress was related to test-taking in general. The following student exchange demonstrates how some students were concerned about the consequences of poor test performance while some had an inherent aversion to taking tests:

> S: "I was scared."
> I: "Why?"
> S: "Well, my mom said it was going to be really really hard."
> S: "I was kind of stressed because I don't like taking tests."
> S: "I think the same thing as Hanna because I don't want to take these tests, and I don't want to get all of them wrong."
> (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 10)

Generally, students did not seem to feel stress related to test taking; however, feelings seemed to vary by grade level, school, and the individual student.

3.c. General test-related pressure. Teachers seemed to feel that the general pressure related to the ITBS had increased at the state level. This pressure, they noted, emanated from the state and was exerted on the school districts. One teacher commented:

> There are a variety of reports that the district has to send to the state. We have to publish the outcomes to show student achievement. So even though we're not mandated like the other states are, we still have that pressure to show our accountability. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 1)

Another teacher commented on the escalation in state level pressure directed at school districts: "I'd say in the last maybe 5 years, I've been aware, each year more and more, that pressure is coming from the state legislature basically" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 1). The source of pressure, some argued, was the general national emphasis on assessment and accountability.

Some teachers indicated that the pressure placed by the state on the school districts trickled down to teachers and their classrooms. One teacher stated:

> Well, I think because the national focus has put more pressure on the state. Even though Iowa is the only state without statewide standards, they really put their focus and push on the school districts to produce some very concrete standards and benchmarks. Then as that trickles down into my classroom, I now have to be very accountable on paper for everything the kids learn. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 1)

Teachers seemed to feel that their administrators tried to keep pressure off of teachers with respect to test scores; however, the rising pressure placed on the administration inevitably had an effect on their classroom. One teacher commented on the balance they felt the administration strove to achieve:

> I think we have become more aware in the classroom of pressure coming down from the top. And yet, I think our state and our district, in particular, have tried to do that in a common sense way. And still trying to allow a teacher to get to the end as she sees best or sees fit. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 1)

There appeared, therefore, to be a rising emphasis on accountability of scores reported from the district to the state, which in various ways affected the pressure felt by teachers. This pressure was balanced with the state and district's efforts to continue to give the teachers flexibility and control in their instruction.

3.d. Teachers held mixed views on benefits of ITBS. Some teachers were concerned that the ITBS was administered to students irrespective of their readiness in a given subject or skill area. Teachers felt mandated to teach and assess prescribed material regardless of what they felt was appropriate for a particular student. One teacher commented:

> You have a certain amount of material that has to be taught within this time period, and you have to teach it and assess it whether your kids are ready to be assessed or not . . . . That part concerns me. If we can assess after we are sure that the kids are doing a good job and have learned what they can learn, but the

> time periods are not the same. They have to have learned it by this time period. It takes the individualization out of it. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 3)

This concern relates to the teachers' concerns regarding the prescribed curricula, which was required for all students and was out of the teachers' ability to control.

There was also some concern that the timing of assessment did not always adequately correspond with the timing of instruction. This resulted in the assessment of some skills that had not yet been taught to students. Teachers were frustrated by having to decide whether or not to teach the tested material simply because it was tested. One teacher addressed this concern:

> Multiplication isn't even taught until the end of third grade. And you look at the third and fourth grade math computation ITBS test, and it has a lot of multiplication/division, and my kids barely even know [that]. So should we, then you have the decision, should we be changing for ITBS or do we believe strongly enough in what we're doing? Because if they can't add and subtract, and I'm teaching regrouping four digit subtraction, and they still don't know facts when they come in, I certainly don't want to bite off multiplication too yet, or should I? (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, pp. 5-6)

Teachers appeared to feel competing struggles to instruct students in the content they felt was appropriate and to have the students prepared for the ITBS. Another teacher seemed to feel that the district adjusted tests to the standards so that curriculum and assessments were more in line with one another: "She discussed some ways that her district addressed performance concerns. They continue to revise the tests to their district standards to more reflect what is being taught and what needs to be de-emphasized" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, FN, #8, p. 2).

Some teachers were concerned with the way in which the test scores were evaluated by the district and state. Rather than tracking a given population of students as they progressed through grade levels, teachers indicated that grade levels were evaluated across years, thereby comparing different populations of students each year. One teacher voiced concern regarding this method of evaluation:

> It just makes you real nervous because you know the readout is going to go from low to way high and then it is going to drop in some place in there for the next year . . . . I don't think it paints a realistic picture of what's really going on. Where if they tracked the growth from third grade to fourth grade and followed that group up always and make sure that they're making growth. That would make more sense to me. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 5)

Teachers seemed to feel that the method of tracking performance for a given grade level across populations was less informative and logical than following a given group of students to measure progress across years.

Teachers also voiced concern for the performance requirements that mandated that each student make a particular amount of progress each year. Students performing on grade level apparently needed to grow one grade level each year. Those students who were below grade level, however, seemed to be expected to make greater gains. Teachers felt that they were held responsible for this growth, which they felt to be difficult to achieve. One teacher commented:

> For example, if I have students coming in and they really read at a third grade level, but the base level is sixth grade, I am required to make sure that student scores an 80%. Let's get real. How's that going to happen? I give up my lunch? I give up any free time? I tutor that child? (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 14)

Some teachers seemed to feel that performance expectations were unrealistic and an unfair burden to place on teachers.

Some teachers were supportive of the way in which their district was approaching evaluation of test scores. They seemed to feel that the district was focusing on growth, rather than a static assessment of test scores. An observer noted, "Judy was not hesitant to say that the scores [fourth grade reports out on ITBS] were a good thing if they were being used in the right way. That Waverly was looking at growth rather than absolute" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, p. 3). Some teachers voiced support for the ITBS, as long as the scores were used to measure student growth in various academic areas.

3.e. Students held mixed views on value and use of ITBS. Some students indicated that they disliked testing in general. One student noted their strong dislike for testing:

> S: "No, I would seriously barf."
> I: "Why do you think so?"
> S: "Because I get a really bad headache . . . . I hate tests."
> S: "Yeah, tests aren't fun . . ."
>
> (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 1)

Some students also felt that the tests were too long, a factor that upset them, given their dislike for testing in general: "I think [the test] could be shorter. Because I don't like taking tests" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 10). Students also seemed to feel that the high stakes of state testing put those students with an aversion to testing at a disadvantage, as they were more likely to be nervous and not perform as well on the test.

Some students seemed to dislike the ITBS in particular. This seemed to be related to a variety of reasons, including its length and the time taken up in class by test administration. The following student interchange demonstrates this student view:

> I: ". . . You take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills?
> S: "Yes, unfortunately."
> I: "Why do you say unfortunately?"

S: "Cause I hate them."
S: "Yeah, me too."
S: "Cause it's long and boring. And they drag on forever."
S: "It takes like a month to finish it. And you do like 20 problems a day."
S: "It takes like two weeks."
S: "Well, it seems like 20 months."
S: "Yeah, I know. It takes a long time, and it's boring."

(IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG, #5, p. 2)

Some students seemed to find the test boring and disliked having to take it.

Some students found the test to be irrelevant. These students did not see the usefulness of test results for the district or state. The following student comments illustrate this view:

S: "I don't know if they prove anything."
S: "Well, they do prove something. They know how smart you are."
S: "But what good is it going to do the government to know that I'm 13+ in Language Arts and that person is not?"

(IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 12)

Students who found the test to be boring or irrelevant did not seem to have issue with the test on any other level than its seeming lack of purpose and meaningfulness for them.

Some students seemed to enjoy taking the ITBS. These students voiced confidence in their test-taking skills. This view was particularly prevalent among gifted students. One student commented, "I think that [the tests are] kind of fun because I know that I'll get a very good grade because ____ in class. And even if I didn't get a good grade, I'll get to take it next year, so I can get a higher grade" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #6, p. 5). Another group of students noted their strong performance on the test:

S: "Well, I got 13+ on almost all of them."
Several S: "Yeah, me too."
S: "So they were happy."
S: "Yeah, we're in college level according to those things."

(IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 11)

These students seemed to enjoy the challenge of the test and they indicated that they liked doing well on the tests. The test results seemed to reinforce their academic confidence.

There were mixed perceptions among the students as to the use of the ITBS scores. Some students, particularly gifted students, seemed to feel that the test scores were used to determine which students were placed in the gifted program (TAG). One student commented, "If you're going to get into anything like TAG or accelerated math, you have to do well on your ITBS" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG, #5, p. 7). Another

student noted, "If you don't do well on [ITBS], then you can't get into TAG. So if you're a person that doesn't like tests, then you can't get into TAG" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 12). Some students, therefore, seemed to feel that their performance on the ITBS determined their placement in gifted programs and advanced classes.

Other students indicated that they believed their test performance on the ITBS determined their promotion to the next grade level. One student voiced this view:

> S: "So we can move up a grade."
> I: "Ok, so by doing well on ITBS you get to move up to the next grade?"
> S: "Yeah."
>
> (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 12)

These students seemed to feel that their ITBS scores could be used to retain them in their current grade level if they did not perform well enough.

3.f. Little preparation for ITBS. There appeared to be little preparation for the ITBS throughout the year. Teachers indicated that they touched on ITBS material that is specifically targeted to the test at various points during the year, but that there was little concerted effort to prepare the students particularly for the ITBS during the year. One teacher indicated that she focused on ITBS preparation, "incidentally throughout. We look at test-taking practices, key words, multiple-choice problems and strategies. But not as a point of focus" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, #3, p. 4).

Some students indicated that their teachers focused more on ITBS preparation immediately prior to the test administration. Students commented on the teachers' focus on test readiness as the test neared. One student commented, "Well, she's shoving the stuff in our head. Like before the test, like we'll learn something, and she'll say, 'well, that's on the test.' And there's a lot of stuff on the test" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #6, p. 5). The amount of test preparation appeared to vary by school and teacher; however, there seemed to generally be little direct focus on ITBS test readiness throughout the school year.

Theme 4: Influence of Additional Assessments

4.a. Assessments conducted throughout the year. Teachers indicated that they conducted both informal and formal assessments of their students throughout the school year. In some cases, new formal assessments were required by the state or district. Teachers indicated that they were now required to report student scores on unit tests to the district. This bothered some teachers, who felt as though the individualization was being removed from the assessment of each student. One teacher commented:

> You do it more often. There is more formal assessment. For instance, in our fourth grade, we don't just give chapter tests anymore. Every reading unit is reported to the district. Every trimester, we have a major math test that is reported to the district. Where just a few years ago, all of those test scores and

> assessments were just in my classroom and my grade book, show them to parents in conferences, that kind of thing . . . . I find that unsettling because they become just numbers. They don't take into consideration the type of child or the struggles. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 2)

Teachers seemed to feel that there were generally more required assessments mandated by the state or district, where test scores needed to be reported rather than just maintained by the teacher.

Teachers indicated that they used both formal and informal assessments as tools for gauging student readiness and learning. One teacher commented:

> You know the first thing I look at is when you are starting onto a new topic, you can tell if they are learning and if you are presenting it in a good way by their enthusiasm . . . . And then it is down to the assessment, which are either formal or informal. And really, you assess all along. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 3)

Teachers indicated they used a variety of informal assessment tools, including conversations with students, as ways of determining a student's understanding and retention of a particular topic.

Teachers indicated that they used these alternative formal and informal assessments more than the ITBS to determine curricular changes and to monitor student progress. The ITBS, according to some teachers, is used as an additional piece of student information rather than as a decisive measure of student ability. One teacher commented, "ITBS tests . . . I mean it's good to have another piece of data there too, but it's just not everything" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI, #2, p. 3).

4.b. Teachers concerned growing number of tests impacted instruction. Some teachers seemed to feel that the number of tests, and the amount of instructional time taken by the tests, was dominating classroom time. One teacher commented, "The reading tests take three 45-minute time slots. There are six of them. We also have three massive math tests, one per trimester. And those take two 45-minute time slots" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 14). Some teachers seemed to feel that the amount of time taken up by testing was precluding other "extra" activities. One teacher voiced their frustration with this evolution in testing:

> So but right now we're being held to the anthology tests for . . . you know there's six of them, and that was a debate. Is that too much testing? I even went to the Superintendent on that one and said, "This is just not good for kids. We're pushing and driving too hard at the point that you don't have time for plays and other things. You know poetry and other stuff because you're just aiming at that." (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI, #2, p. 9)

These teachers seemed to feel that the focus on ITBS and other assessments had come to dominate instruction to too great an extent at the expense of other important subject areas.

Teachers also indicated that the growing emphasis on assessments made it difficult for teachers to individualize instruction. One teacher noted, "I am unable to individualize my curriculum with each of those students with the number of tests that I am forced to go ahead and set quiet time aside for" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 13). Some teachers seemed to feel that the focus on assessments was detrimental to both higher and lower performing students. One teacher spoke to this concern:

> I'm retesting them and retesting them . . . . My curriculum is being cleaned out by test taking time, which is very hard on the lower quarter of my class because they're not receiving the additional instruction. It's very hard on the top quarter of my class because they don't need to be retested and retested and retested. (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 15)

Teachers seemed to feel that the requirement that all students be taught and tested in all required areas irrespective of their demonstrated proficiency in an area prohibited student development and kept higher performing student from continued academic development.

Theme 5: Student Learning

5.a. Students enjoyed learning new and engaging information. Students generally seemed to enjoy content that they found to be interesting. One student commented, "Oh, I like to learn about Iowa history." Another student noted, "I like art because I really like to draw" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #4, p. 1). Another student indicated that their interests in school were tied to there personal areas of interest: "I kind of like science because I like the space unit. Because I like to watch airplanes in the sky. And I'd be in an airplane, kind of like Amelia Earhart" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 6). Students also seemed to like new information that intrigued them. One student commented, "[I like] hanging out with all my friends, and learning stuff that I've never learned before" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #4, p. 5).

Students indicated that they enjoyed learning more when the teacher showed genuine excitement for the content being taught. One student commented, "Make it more exciting for us. When she's excited, we're kind of more excited than we are when she just sits there" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 12).

5.b. Students enjoyed hands-on and interactive activities. Students consistently indicated that they preferred lessons and activities that were interactive and that provided opportunities for hands-on learning. A pair of students voiced their enthusiasm for hands-on learning opportunities.

S: "I like making things. Like hands-on."
S: "Hands-on! Yeah! That's fun."
(IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 4)

Students noted specific interactive activities that they enjoyed. One student interchange noted the students' enjoyment of drawing:

S: "I like illustrating. I like drawing. If we could do everything in drawing, then . . ."
S: "Yeah! Draw pictures."
S: "Like if everyone was assigned a word, and then we had to write the word and draw a picture of the word, that'd be so cool."
S: "Or draw something that interacted with the word."
(IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 6)

One student requested that more hands-on and interactive learning activities be made available: "Do more like projects with stuff. Like make a volcano and see what makes the lava come out. And like airplanes- how they get to work or something" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 8). Students indicated that they preferred projects to tests, voicing displeasure with the worksheets required for particular classes.

5.c. Students disliked teacher discipline. Students indicated that they disliked the strict practices of some teachers. In some cases, strictness seemed to be measured to some degree by the amount of homework given by the teacher. One group of students made the following comments: "Some teachers are really strict," "Like, too much . . . um . . . they give us a lot of work," "They like lecture us," "This year, we have a lot of homework" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #4, p. 2). Students indicated that they disliked homework in general.

Some students appeared to feel that their teacher yelled at them in class, thus seeming strict through instructional behavior. One student interchange demonstrates this point:

S: "Our teacher's more strict."
I: "Ok, tell me about her being strict. In what ways is she strict?"
S: "She yells at us a lot because she wants our work in a certain spot . . ."
(IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 4)

Students in this same class noted the fear they seemed to feel as a result of the teacher's instructional methods. One student commented, ". . . I did kind of bad on math for some reason, and Mrs. Ribitch kind of put me down. And it kind of scared me sort of." Another student noted, "She scares us" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 13). Students, in general, seemed to respond negatively to teachers who seemed "strict," or those who raised their voice to the students.

Theme 6: Academic Diversity

6.a. Academic diversity varied. Most teachers did not reference the academic diversity in their classes. One teacher did indicate that there was not a tremendous amount of academic diversity present in her classroom, particularly with lower performing students:

> This year I do not have a lot of diversity in terms of academics. The kids that are lower are not real low. And I have a big section of above average that are way up there. So I don't have that first grade reader . . . (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 5)

Another teacher, however, noted the wide range of academic ability levels in the same classroom, and the subsequent challenge faced in trying to accommodate all levels: "It's getting them reading at their level more. So I have somebody reading at very basic red or blue, you know first grade reader all the way up to sixth or seventh" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI, #2, p. 1).

6.b. Some teachers used learning centers. Some teachers indicated that they used learning centers in their classrooms in order to provide additional or specialized learning opportunities for slower or advanced learners. One teacher noted their use of centers to meet the needs of all students:

> Academically I have some kids that are reading on a second grade level and I have some kids that are reading on a seventh or eighth grade level. I usually have open-ended centers. During reading, there are book projects that allow for depth, artistry, music. In math, they might do different problems, it might be repetitive but it's not worksheets. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, pp. 2-3)

Another teacher commented on the role of learning centers in supporting struggling students with their work: "We have special places in the room that only certain kids work because of the way they learn. And the kids have really understood what they need to keep them on task" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 7). Not all teachers mentioned learning centers as a tool for teaching to an academically diverse classroom. This approach seemed to vary by teacher and school.

6.c. Options for gifted students varied. Some teachers indicated that they tried to differentiate instruction to the degree they felt was possible in their classroom. For academically advanced students, one teacher indicated that they gave them more challenging material than the other students, particularly in math. "I do superstar math which is kids working together in groups of 3. I do this with the advanced kids instead of the green sheets, which are 6 problems given on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, p. 3). Another teacher indicated that they allowed students who were working ahead of the rest of the class to expand within the basic assignment given to other students: "So they can expand within the basic

assignment. And when I am allowed to give them those assignments, they can expand" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 22).

In some classrooms, students who completed work early were given the opportunity to work ahead or to do an enjoyable activity. One group of gifted students discussed their ability to work ahead in class:

> S: "We're ahead of people in this year. Like a lot of people."
> S: "Like today, in reading, she said we could go on. And when they were doing something, she said we could draw."
> S: "Yeah, if people knew what they were doing, they could go ahead and draw. And if they didn't, then the teacher would explain it. And while we were doing the worksheet, and if people knew what they were doing, they could go ahead and go on, but if people didn't know what they were doing, then she'd explain it and went through each answer."
>
> (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 10)

Another student commented on their ability to do "fun" things if they finished their work early: "Well, usually we get done with tests faster, so we get to do fun things or extra work" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG, #5, p. 5).

6.d. Aides provided support for struggling students. Some teachers appeared to be supported by teaching aides, specifically in reading. These aides were funded by a state grant targeting lower performing readers. One teacher described the support provided by the aide: "And that [Bill Flack] money was, in our district, put towards reading associates. And I have a reading associate that comes in one hour a day and helps. So I have her pulling out my low level readers" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI, #2, p. 2). Another teacher indicated that the aides were beginning to be used for math as well as reading:

> Yes, we have associates- reading associates, and we've just been given permission to have them help with math also because sometimes it's the same kids that you have needing help in both subjects, individually. So sometimes again going over the test of doing some drill or manipulation individually is what they need, you know. Going over and over time and for instance money. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 3)

The use of aides in the classroom to target lower performing students seemed to vary across the schools, and their presence seemed to be dependent upon special state funding.

Theme 7: Academic Challenge and Pace

7.a. Student perceptions of challenge and pace depended on academic proficiency. Students indicated that work was more challenging when they did not already know or understand the given topic. For some students, these content areas seemed to be too challenging and appeared to be frustrating for them. One student

commented, "I get kind of frustrated when there is something I don't get. Like if it is a long division problem I don't know, I get frustrated" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #4, p. 4). Another student noted, "One reason why some people start to get to stuff is because when she gives it to us, it's hard to understand" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 8). Some students seemed to enjoy the challenge presented by difficult material, whereas other students seemed irritated and discouraged by the challenge. Some students attributed the faster pace of instruction to the state and district curricular requirements and the need for the teacher to cover all material before the end of the year.

Students indicated that instruction was not too fast or challenging when they were familiar with the material being taught and proficient in the subject area. One student commented, "I don't really think that she goes too fast because I learn a lot of stuff quickly. And she kind of gives us an opportunity to learn it. A lot of people should learn it in about that time" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #4, p. 11).

Some students seemed to feel that the pace of instruction was too slow. This seemed to be a perception particularly held by students who had a prior understanding of the material, or who were higher performing students in the class. One student commented, "Yeah, I finish my work early, but we can't get up out of our seats" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 11). Another student lamented, "It goes really really slow" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, SFG, #1, p. 11). Overall, perceptions of pace and challenge seemed to vary among student, with mixed views as to what existed in the classroom and what was ideal.

7.b. Some gifted students bored in class. Some gifted students indicated that classes moved too slowly and were too easy for them. At one school in particular, students voiced frustration with the ease with which they completed assignments and were not challenged. One set of student comments exemplified this view:

> S: "I think the worst thing about school is that it is much too easy for me."
> I: "Tell me about that."
> S: "I'm always ahead of everybody, so it seems like I'm not in the right place."
> (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 1)

Despite the apparent efforts of teachers to offer opportunities for gifted students to work ahead or use learning centers, these students seemed bored in class. One student commented, "If you're doing something boring, but it's easy for you, then it's not fun" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 4). Another student declared, "Redundancy is idiocy" (IA, WSRSD, 5/6, Irving, SFG/TI, #4, p. 4). The strong views voiced by these gifted students were not consistently raised at all elementary schools.

Theme 8: Changing Student Demographics

8.a. Low racial/ethnic diversity present. The elementary schools in Iowa that were a part of this study seemed to have little racial or ethnic diversity. This was noted by the teachers and the observers. One teacher commented, "And ethnically, we are not

diverse at all. We are very Caucasian. Last year, we were much more diverse" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 6). An observer commented on the demographics of a classroom: "There were 19 students in the classroom: 1-Asian, 2-redhead, 3-brown haired, and 13 very blond students" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, FN, #8, p. 1). One teacher described their concern with the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in their school, and the benefits they felt were inherent in diversity: ". . . it's not a good thing that we don't have diversity, actually, you know. At the college too, I think that diversity is good . . . . I think it's a disadvantage really. Now a lot of people don't read it that way" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 8).

8.b. Rising socio-economic diversity. Some teachers commented on their perception that there was rising socio-economic diversity at the district's schools. They noted the increase in students who had greater financial need. One teacher commented:

> But I think the last couple of years, that's changed, and maybe not for the better, but I think Southeast and Shell Rock maybe have higher free and reduced lunch. They have maybe higher percentage of lower socio-economic where they have in the past. I think ours is changing in this school. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 5)

Another teacher, in describing their class, stated, "Economics. This class has quite a range of economics" (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 6).

Some teachers were concerned about the negative effects they believed were associated with the rise in economic diversity. Some teachers indicated that their parental involvement had declined in recent years. In their view, this was in part related to the rise in low-income families in their school. An observer noted:

> Judy indicated that she did not have as much parental support this year as in previous years. She also indicated that her kids came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The school has approximately 28% of kids on free/reduced lunch. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #1, p. 3)

A teacher commented on the frustration they felt with the lack of parental support in helping students with their homework:

> This year, in particular, I don't feel that there's been parental support. I have a lot of needy kids, so homework going home, if it wasn't done well enough or finished or needed more work in it, I didn't feel it was of any use anymore because it either came undone and left the math book at home or came back in a bigger mess and not acceptable. Just all kinds of problems that after about three or four months, I'm beating my head against the wall. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Carey, TI/SFG, #7, p. 7)

Some teachers appeared to feel that there was a correlation with the rise in socio-economic diversity and the decrease in parental support and involvement.

Theme 9: Resources

9.a. Problems related to budget constraints. Budgetary constraints across the state appeared to be hindering some teacher's instructional and programming efforts. Money for classroom materials seemed to be running very short, with teachers feelings as though they were increasingly needing to provide their own curricular resources. One teacher addressed this budgetary issue:

> In the last few years our district tries real hard to get the materials we need. But the budget crunches have really taken a bite on materials . . . . So you come up with other ways to teach the classes. And now with the budget cuts, even more materials are cut this year. (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, TI, #2, p. 4)

The lack of adequate funding seemed to be forcing teachers to reorganize their lessons, and to come up with alternative means of funding necessary materials.

Teachers also discussed the impact of the budgetary restrictions on classroom activities. Field trips had been affected by the lack of funds, forcing teachers and schools to either cancel trips or find other ways of financing the trips. Some students discussed the affect of the budget on their field trips:

> S1: "We get to go on like more field trips than . . . Well, we would have gotten to go on more field trips, but the got cut because of the . . ."
> S2: "Budget cuts."
>
> (IA, WSRSD, ES, Southeast, SFG, #6, p. 1)

Teachers seemed to understand the nature of the budgetary constraints, and to work as well as they could within the system.

Middle Schools

Theme 1: Curriculum

1.a. Curricular guidelines provided instructional framework. Teachers indicated that the state and district provided curricular guidelines, which teachers were generally expected to follow. The prescribed curriculum appeared to be primarily centered around textbooks. An observer commented, "The teacher was lecturing and referring to the textbook. I assumed that they were using it as the primary source of knowledge and that it was aligned with local standards" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #12, p. 1). The textbooks served as the main source of information learned by the students.

Teachers indicated that, while the textbook was the focus of the curriculum, instruction emphasized skill acquisition and understanding rather than drill and practice. The goal was to enable students to use the skills gained through learning rather than just being able to repeat information. An observer noted:

> [The teacher] strongly stated that the curriculum is "textbook driven," but they have chosen very difficult textbooks so that their students are learning more at earlier ages than some of the other published texts . . . . There was not a lot of drill and practice and the purpose of the learning is not what the students just memorize, but what they can do with the skills. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #13, p. 1)

Instruction, therefore, drew from the textbook and the curricular standards provided by the district and state; however, the emphasis was on understanding and application of knowledge and skills.

1.b. Teachers maintained flexibility within curricular guidelines. While curricular guidelines appeared to serve as the basis for instruction, teachers indicated that they were given flexibility in designing lesson plans, feeling able to add content or to spend additional time on a particular area of study. One teacher commented:

> I feel like if I need to take a day and do problem solving- if I want to step out of our text, then I can do that. I feel like I can spend all kinds of extra time if I need to. There are things at the end of the year that I can choose from to do, but I don't feel like I have to do them. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 18)

There appeared, therefore, to be flexibility in the amount of time spent on a particular topic, as well as the specific material included in the instruction.

Teachers indicated that the curricular guidelines were sometimes intentionally malleable, intended to be dependent on circumstances or current events. One teacher noted, "In social studies, we have some leeway in that usually one of the benchmarks in each unit is what is driven by current events at the time . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 19). Some teachers indicated that they try to find ways of connecting curricular material to students' lives in ways that make the information meaningful and relevant to them. One teacher commented:

> Every time I teach a very important concept, I've got a story that goes along with it. And whenever we've got to make an application to that, I can come up with my story and you know there's an image for these kids . . . . It gives us a link to what we've been doing, but we spend a lot of time doing it a different way, a more applicable way. And they see the application. The applications are the fun part of the problems. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, pp. 16-17)

Teachers, therefore, indicated that they felt independence and control of their curriculum, though they generally adhere to the curricular guidelines provided.

1.c. The degree of in-depth teaching and learning varied. The degree to which students seemed to be able to study a given topic in-depth appeared to vary. Some students indicated that they were encouraged to pursue areas of interest further, either in the classroom or on their own time. An observer commented:

> There was an enthusiastic "YEAH" when asked about opportunities for in-depth learning. This group felt that they were provided more than adequate opportunities for investigating self-chosen topics as well as required topics. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #5, p. 2)

A student commented on the option to study areas of interest for extra credit: ". . . If we want to learn more, then we can go research it up and get extra credit points" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 8). Another student gave an example of in-class opportunities to study particular topics in greater depth:

> Well, like today in science, he gave us each our own subjects like strokes or heart attacks or something. We got on the Internet and he gave us the whole period to look up information. And we could copy it down to do a report on it. And that helps a lot. (WJH-#12-p. 18)

Some students, therefore, indicated that there were ample opportunities both in and out of class to pursue areas of interest in-depth.

Opportunity for in-depth study seemed to vary to some degree by subject area. Some students noted particular subjects that were more conducive to deeper analysis or research. An observer commented, "When probed about opportunities to study topics/content in-depth, the students felt that they were allowed to do that mostly in Social Studies" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 2). Conversely, a student commented on the lack of in-depth study in English: "I don't think in English they really go in depth. They just kind of go over it a day or two and then just go onto the next [topic]. They don't really talk about it again until we have a quiz or a test" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 10). It appeared that particular subject areas, or perhaps teachers, fostered greater in-depth study of material.

Teachers also appeared to spend more time on topics that were more challenging or where students were having difficulty. A student commented, "It kind of depends on what class you're in. Like in math, if it's harder stuff, he'll have a two-day worksheet or something. And then if it's not that hard, he'll give us like one day to work on stuff" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 25). One student summarized the variation in in-depth study by stating: "I would say it depends on what we're studying and when we're studying it, and what class" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 9). There appeared, therefore, to be great variation in the degree to which teachers facilitated in-depth study of content.

Theme 2: Instruction

2.a. Students generally enjoyed instruction. Students indicated that, in general, they enjoyed the quality and method of instruction in their classes. An observer commented, "Students readily stated that the teachers at this school are very good and they like the things they are learning. They liked the way teachers explained things . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 1). The students appeared to like the way teachers instructed their classes, reflected in the following student comment:

> I would say in math, lots of times teachers will just teach you the short cuts, but my math teacher, they make you do the regular way, the longest way version, so that way you sort of understand what's going on and how it works, and then after that, they'll teach you the short cut. So that way you know how you got there. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 10)

Students generally appeared to respond positively to teacher instruction and the way in which content was delivered.

Students indicated that some teachers made the material learned enjoyable and tangible for them. One student stated, "Yeah, like she makes it fun. It's like you don't really think you're going to use it, but later you do and you're glad that she made it fun and made you remember" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 6). Another student commented on the varied instructional approaches teachers used to ensure that students comprehended the material taught: "A lot of teachers like get us to learn in different ways, and a lot of them will do it so you can see it. And then they'll do it so you can like write it down" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 1). Students indicated that teachers sought ways to make the learning process fun and to get the students involved in classroom activities.

Students seemed to feel motivated by teachers who demonstrated excitement for the topic they were teaching. An observer commented:

> The number one motivator for them was when the teacher was excited about the learning, too. They thought that it is the number one thing that made them want to get excited, too. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #5, p. 1)

A student noted the ways in which the level of teacher enthusiasm for a topic impacted their own interest in learning:

> I just think they have to be excited about it too, so it makes us want to learn. Because if they're just talking and have no excitement, it makes you bored too. But if they have excitement, it just kind of makes you want to listen more when they add excitement to their voice so you learn better. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 9)

Students, therefore, seemed to feed off of the mood and level of excitement demonstrated by teachers for the topic studied.

2.b. Some instruction was didactic. Students indicated that they disliked didactic, or lecture-driven, instruction. One student commented, "I don't like how they just talk the whole time and then, just a few minutes before the bell, they just give it to you and expect you to do it in half the time" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 9). Some students discussed the negative effect lecture-based instruction had on their motivation to learn. One student stated, "They never like motivated us to do it. They just lectured, so it doesn't make you want to do it anymore" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 5). Another

series of student comments demonstrated this sentiment: "I feel some of the teachers, they don't involve the students," "Yeah, they just like talk," "It's more like a lecture in class" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 6). The students, therefore, indicated that they disliked lecture-based instruction.

Students also noted that they preferred hands-on or interactive instruction rather than didactic methods of instruction. An observer noted, "[The students'] least favorite way of presentation was lecture and [they] wished their teachers would do more demonstrations" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #5, p. 1). Another observer commented reflected the same view:

> They didn't just want to talk and discuss, they wanted to actively "do" something. They hated, but also felt the need for, taking notes in class. They agreed that when you just watched the overhead, the learning didn't happen as well. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #6, p. 1)

Students, therefore, indicated that they preferred interactive activities and ways of learning that drew them into the experience, and that they disliked instruction where they were passive learners receiving a lecture.

2.c. Students preferred hands-on instruction. As was noted in the previous section, students indicated that they preferred hands-on instruction. Students consistently articulated this sentiment, appearing to strongly favor learning through actively doing. An observer noted:

> The students agreed that they learned best when they were "doing" the learning instead of just being shown what to do or learn . . . . They wanted more time in science to work in the lab . . . . They felt they could be motivated by having more hands-on and incentives such as candy, rewards, and opportunities to get better grades. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #3, p. 2)

Students seemed to enjoy being a physical part of the learning, indicating that they preferred interactive instruction and learning.

Students also seemed to like instruction where something was demonstrated rather than just described verbally. One student commented, "I like it when they show me something. Not just say it, but do it" (WJH-#12-p. 17). Anther student comment reflects this view: "I think lots of times by actually hearing what it says or how it works or seeing it. I learn better that way then reading it . . . . I think by hearing it or seeing it helps" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 7). Students, therefore, seemed to prefer learning through either being physically involved in a project or experiment, or through watching the teacher demonstrate how something worked or behaved. They preferred these learning options rather than verbal, lecture-based instruction.

Students gave several examples of hands-on learning that they experienced in their classes. An observer summarized the variety of hands-on learning opportunities described by students:

> All agreed that Home Economics was also a challenging and motivating class because of all the hands-on opportunities for them to do. Some other hands-on activities that helped them learn was the use of microscopes and equipment in science as well as the study guides provided and drawing diagrams. They felt that most of their teachers tried to allow them to learn using motivating methods most of the time. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 1)

Students described hands-on and interactive learning opportunities in a variety of classes. One student commented:

> Yeah, our social studies teachers, they make us draw a lot of maps and practice and stuff. And we had to draw one freehand, and I think that made me learn it better because I like knew all the curves and stuff. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 7)

Other classes, such as physical education, drew praise from a student: "I like P.E. too because you get to move around instead of sitting at a desk listening to a teacher" (WJH-#12-p. 15). Another student described hands-on learning in math:

> Like in math one day, it had to do with something like measuring stuff, so he had groups set up where you had to measure the width of like different items. Like he brought in cups and bowls, and you had to take tape measures, and try to measure around and stuff. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 16)

Students consistently voiced their support of and enthusiasm for hands-on and interactive learning opportunities. They seemed to feel that most of their classes and teachers facilitated this type of learning frequently.

2.d. Academic support was provided for struggling students. Teachers indicated that they provided academic support for students who were having trouble with a particular subject or topic. One teacher commented:

> I have kids in my room at 8:00 every morning, before school starts and after school. They just know that I'll be there . . . . If they've missed or just need extra help or want to go back over something, come in. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 27)

Teachers seemed to make themselves available for additional academic support before, during, or after class. One student described the different types of help offered:

> I know in math, if they go too fast, and you're having trouble, you can usually talk to them. And he'll either just help you with it like in the morning or during study hall, but if it's like three or four people, he'll spend a couple extra days on it to

> make sure we all have it down. And it's nice practice for the other people who already know it, so they get to know it better. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 10)

Another student commented on the availability of teachers before class: "[Teachers] even have a little time before class so if something is confusing you, you can talk to them before the whole class even starts" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 9). Both teachers and students commented on the opportunities for additional academic support for students at various times in the day.

While most students seemed to feel that teachers were accessible and willing to provide academic help, some students did comment on the inadequacy of academic support offered by some teachers. One student stated, "But then sometimes [the teacher] won't answer anything, especially when the students want to know more" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 11). The incidences of poor academic support from teachers seemed to vary among individual teachers.

While many students seemed to seek academic support from teachers, other students indicated that they used support or resources outside of school for help with their studies. One student commented, "Well, I go home and use it as homework and try to ask my parents for help. And I don't have older brothers and sisters. Most of the time, I try to call my friends" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 19). Another student indicated that they look for resources on their own, avoiding seeking personal academic support: "It's just a lot of times I don't want to waste people's time, so I just find it on my own. Like look in a book or something" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 12). Some students, therefore, used family, friends, or their own research to help in areas of academic difficulty.

2.e. Some students expressed frustration with the grading system. Some students voiced concern for what they perceived to be inconsistencies in the grading system at their school. A few students had the following exchange:

> S: And the grades just . . . like all the different teachers have different grading skills. Some of them are harder than others, some of them are easier. It's just their own style- whatever they choose, and we just have to live with it.
> S: Yeah, I just wish they would keep them the same.
> S: Yeah, so they all have the same one.
>
> (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 28)

Students seemed to be frustrated by the lack of clarity or consistency in how teachers graded their work and in teachers' expectations for different classes.

Some students were also concerned by the extra credit system used by various teachers. Some students indicated that this system was not fair. An observer commented:

> . . . Some teachers would ensure that all students passed by adding points to certain tests and giving many opportunities for passing and not penalizing for late work, etc. They did not think that was fair to the students who always did their work and turned it in on time. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #5, p. 2)

Other students, however, did seem to think some extra credit systems were fair. One student stated: "Now when you take a test and you do really bad on it, they don't let you take it over. But they'll let you do extra credit points, which I think is more fair" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 11). There were varying opinions as to the equity and consistency of grading systems.

Theme 3: Academic Challenge and Instructional Pace

3.a. Some students felt instruction was too slow and boring. Some students indicated that their courses were boring. One student commented, "Some of the classes are just so boring. And if they do do things, they think we're just so stupid, like we're little kids" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 6). These students appeared to be frustrated by what they perceived to be a lack of sufficient challenge in the classes.

Some students also complained about the slow pace of some classes. One student indicated that these classes moved slower to accommodate students who struggled with the content:

> I think English goes kind of slow . . . . There are a few people that always ask really dumb questions and then you always have to go back the next morning and go over it. Some classes, I think, just go slow (inaudible) for dumb people. They just don't understand anything. Like they won't pay attention in class and then all of a sudden, they won't understand the homework, and then the teacher has to go over it, and they explain it to the whole class, not just them. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 14)

Only a few students shared the view that classes moved too slowly and were boring.

3.b. Some students felt the challenge and pace of instruction was appropriate. Many students indicated that they felt adequately challenged by their classes. One student commented, "In math, they kind of challenge you more. Like last year, it was real easy stuff, and now it's getting way harder" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 3). The students seemed to enjoy the challenge and pace of instruction. An observer noted, "These students felt that their teachers pushed them hard, but in a good way" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #8, p. 1). An observer also noted the balance students indicated between challenge and fun:

> Students felt challenged by their classes. They felt their classes were difficult and the teachers gave them more than adequate amounts of homework. They felt the teachers provided a good balance, however, of challenging work and "fun" activities to help them learn. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 1)

The students seemed to enjoy being pushed by their teachers to work harder.

Some students conveyed a sense of satisfaction after having completed challenging assignments or projects. One student shared, "After you're done, and you saw what you did, it's kind of fun" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 14). An observer commented on the sense of completion sensed from students after a difficult project:

> They loved the challenge of "Global Night." It took a lot of preparation and after they were finished they felt very satisfied and glad that they had completed such a hard assignment. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #3, p. 1)

The level of challenge in the curriculum and the pace of instruction appeared, for most students, to be well balanced.

3.c. Some students felt the pace of instruction was too fast. While most students seemed to be satisfied with the pace of classroom instruction, some students conveyed their feeling that material was too challenging and that instruction moved too quickly. One student commented on the difficulty of some content: ". . . Sometimes in math, it's kind of hard to understand, so you've really got to think hard. Because you take a lot of quizzes, and you've got to know what you're doing" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 14). Some students found the curriculum to be too challenging for them.

Some students also expressed concern regarding the pace of instruction. For some students, the teacher did not repeat information enough for them. One student commented, "I like some of the stuff repeated more. Like one of my teachers, he doesn't like repeat it that often. He says it once and if you can't remember it, that's your bad" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 16). Another student noted their desire for the teacher to spend more time on each topic:

> I think [she] goes kind of fast sometimes. It's not like I can't do it, I just think sometimes we don't spend enough time on it. I mean, in like one day or two days, we're supposed to know it, and if we don't know it, we're supposed to figure it out ourselves like after school. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 13)

These students seemed to feel as though their teachers did not spend enough time ensuring that the students understood and retained the information taught.

Some students indicated that teachers moved through material too quickly. One student commented on this concern: "Like some people explain it really fast, and . . . Mr. Hoffman will do that. He'll just like zip through it, and I'm like ok, what are you saying?" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 30). Another student noted how one teacher seemed to skip over sections quickly:

> I mean English sometimes, we're just skipping things. Like you're starting to understand what you're doing and then you just leave it. So it's like you can't remember because it's way back there. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 13)

For these students, material was sometimes too challenging and teachers sometimes moved at an instructional pace that left them confused and without adequate time to process and understand the content.

3.d. Some students indicated that appropriate pace and challenge were mixed. Some students indicated that the challenge present in school was dependent on the particular course and a student's proficiency in the area. One student commented, "Some classes are really kind of easy, but for other classes, they're kind of challenging and hard" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 3). Another student commented on the different levels of challenge between classes: "Easy classes, I would say, sometimes science, depending on what we're studying. I'm in an accelerated math class, so that's harder" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 3). In some cases, the challenge of a course seemed to depend on a student's ability in the subject area. One student conveyed this sentiment: "For some people, English is easy. For some, English is hard. It just depends . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 4).

Some students indicated that the challenge a student felt a course held was somewhat dependent upon the student's level of interest in the subject area. One student stated:

> If it's something that you really like to do, it's not really that hard because you're having fun. But if it's something you don't like to do, it's not really fun, and it seems like it takes a long time. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 17)

An observer reiterated this view, commenting, "They decided that the work became significantly harder when they did not like the subject" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #6, p. 1).

In general, decisions about the appropriate pacing of courses varied among students. One observer noted that some students attributed the variance in perspective to differences across teachers:

> There were varying answers when asked about appropriate pacing in classes. They felt it depended on the teacher and not the subject. They cited examples of teachers who go too fast and teachers who go too slowly. There were even differing opinions within the same class/teacher among the students. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 2)

Another observer comment noted the varied responses relative to instructional pace: "The students were divided in their discussion about pacing of classes. The answers varied according to particular teachers, subject matter and student readiness levels" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #3, p. 2).

Theme 4: Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)

4.a. Students were not pressured by parents or teachers. Students indicated that they did not feel pressured to perform well on the ITBS. Rather, they seemed to be

focused on doing their best on the test. Teachers and parents, students noted, emphasized effort over performance. An observer summarized the lack of external pressure felt by students:

> They did not feel an exceptional amount of pressure from teachers, community, or parents. The pressure they felt was self-directed because they wanted to do their best. They did not understand the purpose of the test, but did not mind taking it. They felt that the teachers tried not to worry them about it . . . . The students said that the teachers will talk about the test about a week before it is given . . . (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 2)

Students seemed focused on doing well on the ITBS; however, they did not associate high stakes with the test results or with their testing performance. An observer noted:

> They all said they look at the results and that they knew their parents and teachers wanted them to do [well], but did not feel that any of them pressured them or made them feel stressful . . . . It just was not a big deal to any of them. They never heard their teachers talk about the tests until a couple days before it was to be given and then all they were told was to eat a good breakfast and get a good night's sleep. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #8, p. 2)

Students, in general, did not seem to feel a great deal of test-related pressure.

Students indicated that neither parents nor teachers exerted pressure on them with regard to performance on the ITBS. It seemed that students' parents were not concerned with the implications from test score results. One student commented:

> [Parents] try not to get us worried that we have to do well because it's not part of our grade. It's just to see how you're doing in each subject. And like a lot of the stuff they don't even teach on it. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 10)

Another student indicated that their parents focused on effort rather than results:

> My parents like want us to do good on them, but they like . . . if they know we're trying, then they don't mind if we get really low scores. But if like everyone is low, then they know we could do better than that. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 14)

One student did indicate that their parents were disappointed with poor results, noting that parents took the test seriously and encouraged good test performance: "Well, [my parents] think the ITBS is really important . . . . I mean, they get disappointed if you do bad in a certain area that they think you should be good at" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 14).

Students also indicated that their teachers did not focus on the test beyond general preparedness:

> I feel like our teachers don't really talk about them. Or they don't make you study. Like in English, she just goes over the things like the day before so we like remember it. And they don't really talk about it much. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 13)

Students seemed to feel that teachers generally encouraged them to perform well, but did not exert a great deal of pressure on them to perform at a certain level. Teachers reiterated this view. One teacher noted the emphasis placed on putting forth effort and taking the test seriously rather than strictly on test performance and results:

> And you just tell them, you know, you want them to take the test and be serious. Do the best you can. And you talk about how someday you might be judged on your ACT's. You know somebody might look at you for a scholarship. So every opportunity to develop your ability to do that. You just expect them to do their best, and they know that. They do their best. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 25)

Students did not seem to feel as though their teachers were pressuring them or emphasizing high stakes with regard to the ITBS.

Some students seemed to feel as though the ITBS was not a test for which they could study, a fact that reduced the pressure they felt in preparing for the test. Some student comments reflected this view: "It's impossible to like study for it," "They just ask you questions about nature and you don't really study it," "You don't really study it. It's just basic instinct- what do you know about it?" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 31). These students did not seem to feel that there was a need to spend time preparing for the ITBS.

While most students did not seem to feel a lot of ITBS-related pressure, some students did indicate that they felt pressured by the test and its results. One student commented, "There's pressure on you because you have like math computations on it. And they do that to see how much you can do" (WJH-#12-p. 10). Some students seemed concerned about the way in which the test scores would be used: "The principal is going to see this, and they're going to send it to the government. And the government is going to see this" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 32). The pressure some students seemed to feel appeared to be self-imposed or rooted in worries about the consequences of poor test results.

4.b. Some students perceived benefits of the ITBS. Some students seemed to feel that the ITBS was a good gauge of their academic progress and a beneficial way of assessing their proficiency in different academic areas. One student commented, "Both my parents are teachers, and they think it's a good way to tell where you're at and what you need to study more" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 13). An observer echoed the same view in reflecting on student comments: "[The students] also felt that the test gave parents and teachers an idea about how a student would do in school in the 'long term'" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #3, p. 2). One student also noted how the test results could be

used as a means of comparing students to each other to determine areas of study that need to be improved:

> They kind of compare you to other people, and with your state, so that way if you're really low compared to other people in your state, then that's probably something you need to work on. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 13)

These students viewed the ITBS as a means of evaluating academic progress and of identifying areas of their academic work that needed improvement.

Some students also seemed to feel as though the ITBS could be used to rate teacher effectiveness. One student commented, "I've heard some people say that it really helps us a lot. It helps us understand things better, and it sees how our teachers are teaching in the state of Iowa" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 23). An observer also noted:

> [Students] said they had heard teachers and parents talking about how the test helps them a lot and gave people an idea of "how teachers are teaching and rated teachers" by how well the students did. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #3, p. 2)

Some students, therefore, seemed to feel that the ITBS could be a useful means of rating teacher effectives in the classroom.

Some students also seemed to believe that the ITBS was useful as a tool for placing students in academic programs or tracks. One student commented, "I mean, if you do well on those, you can get into stuff in high school and it decides what classes you can take" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 24). Another student commented on the impact of the ITBS results in shaping future teachers' opinions of a student and their academic ability and work ethic:

> Our teacher says that while it isn't graded, you still want to do good on it because it's going to the state. And your next year teachers are going to see it, and they don't want to think that you're just . . . you're a smart student, you're just not trying. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 14)

Some students, therefore, seemed to feel that the ITBS results were used as part of their larger academic portfolio, facilitating academic group placement and contributing to how teachers perceived their academic work.

4.c. Some students perceived negative aspects of the ITBS. Some students seemed to feel that there were some negative aspects of the ITBS. For some students, the test was too long and was too much of an ordeal. It seemed to be particularly too much for some to do in one day. An observer noted, "The students felt the ITBS seemed like too much to do in one day" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 2). A student commented on the feeling they had of being rushed through the timed test:

> I feel rushed when I take them because I know I have a time limit. And most teachers, if there's like 30 minutes on the test, they'll write every time you have 25 minutes left and then 20 minutes and then 15. And every time you hear them write, you're like oh no, less time, and then you hurry. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 32)

These students seemed concerned by the actual administration of the test, focusing on the length and time taken by the ITBS.

Some students seemed to see the ITBS as meaningless. They did not see the purpose of the test and, subsequently, they did not put forth their best effort in taking the test. One student commented, "A lot of kids just like think it's not graded or anything, so they don't even take their time. They just rush through it and get it done" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 30). Another student noted how some students don't try to put in accurate answers: "There were some kids that just put in answers, and just put designs in there" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 24).

For some students, the fact that the ITBS was not officially graded and a part of their classroom grades led them to not take the test seriously. One student commented on this view: "Because it doesn't go on your grade, the Basic Skills. Some people don't like try to remember anything, so they just draw pictures and stuff . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 15). Another student reiterated this perspective: "I know my parents give me an award every time I do good because they know that if I know it's not graded, I probably won't do my best" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 30). Some students, therefore, did not see the relevance or importance of the ITBS and, therefore, did not put forth their best effort in taking the test.

4.d. Teachers felt little ITBS pressure. Most teachers seemed to feel little external pressure related to the ITBS. Some teachers indicated that they were aware of the publicity surrounding the ITBS, but that it did not translate into pressure for them. One teacher commented, "Yeah, things are going to be reported out but I don't feel pressure like if I don't do a good job, somebody's going to come down on me" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 21). Another teacher comment echoed the same view:

> We have a full-page thing that goes in the paper every year that shows the growth and all of this . . . . But it's not pressure. It's just part of what we do because we see it as important. But I don't feel like somebody's standing over me with a whip saying, "You better score this or whatever." I don't feel like that kind of pressure. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 21)

Another teacher comment summarized the lack of pressure many teachers appeared to feel: "We do ITBS, but there is very little preparation there, and no, I don't think there's pressure" (IA, WSRSD, JH, TI, #14, p. 1).

Some teachers seemed to feel that the ITBS had little impact on instruction in the classroom. One teacher stated, ". . . But [the ITBS] hasn't affected how I teach I

teach them because I want them to know it and understand it more in depth . . . . It doesn't affect me. I don't feel any pressure . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 16). An observer reflected this same perspective, commenting, "Since Iowa did not have state tests, they felt less impact of the ITBS results on their classrooms. They felt there had been very little influence on their personal teaching styles or classroom practices" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #9, p. 1). The teachers did not seem to adjust instruction based on the ITBS, nor did they seem to feel pressure related to the consequences of test scores.

4.e. Little ITBS preparation was conducted. Both students and teachers indicated that little time was spent directly preparing for the ITBS. A student commented on the lack of emphasis placed by teachers on testing content or preparation:

> I feel like our teachers don't really talk about them. Or they don't make you study. Like in English, she just goes over the things like the day before so we like remember it. And they don't really talk about it much. Unless there's like, they'll use an example, like our DOL's and stuff. They'll be like most people forget about subordinate clauses on ITBS. They make sure we know what it is because it will be on ITBS. (WJS-#13-p. 13)

Another student comment notes the brevity of preparation time for the test: "Maybe the week before, but [teachers] don't emphasize it a lot . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 15).

Teachers indicated that they did little formal review for the ITBS. They seemed to focus primarily on test-taking strategies, but even this appeared to garner little time in the schedule. An observer commented:

> The teachers said they spend Zero time on test preparation. They talk briefly about test-taking strategies such as test format and do a little practice on multiple choice questions, but they do nothing on content. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #9, p. 1)

Another observer comment reflects the small amount of time spent on ITBS review:

> He responded that he did not do any formal review. He felt the kids were prepared and that he was confident that they would do well on them without a lot of class time review. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #13, p. 1)

Teachers appeared to focus on their curriculum irrespective of the ITBS, expressing confidence that the students would do well on the test. One teacher did note their eagerness for the students to perform well, apparently as a reflection of their learning and growth:

> So you teach them those strategies, but it's content driven. Because you want them to grow up. You want them to be the best. I want my kids to score the best on tests. The guy down the hall is teaching the same thing I am, and I want my kids to do better than he does. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 24)

While this teacher appeared to be more focused on performance, they were envisioning performance as a gauge of growth.

Teachers seemed to be focused more on other assessments administered throughout the year than on the ITBS. One teacher commented on the variety of assessments they gave during the school year:

> We all give the same final unit test, so that we have identified the goals and objectives that those kids need to know by the end of that unit. However, I still do alternative assessments all the way through that are different from what another teacher might do. But, we all still have the same plan. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 15)

Other than the ITBS, the teachers seemed to have independence in determining which forms of assessment to administer. An observer noted the initiative taken by teachers in formulating assessment strategies:

> [Teachers] really want to continue to study and be active parts in the curriculum development and evaluation process. They do not wait for an administrator or the state to tell them what to do. They seem to be ahead of the state in many decisions about what to test and when to test it. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #13, p. 1)

Most teachers, therefore, seemed to spend more time on alternative assessments than on the ITBS, developing collaborative and independent means of evaluation.

Theme 5: School Environment

5.a. The school appeared to be upbeat and enjoyable. The students appeared to enjoy their school environment. For the most part, they spoke positively about the school. An observer noted:

> These students were extremely content with their school and who they were. They ended the session talking about how much they loved their school and the way it was organized. (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #6, p. 2)

The observers seemed to feel that the school was a "cheery" place to be, and that the students and teachers were content with their school. An observer commented, "These people like who they are and what they are and are proud. They seem to have a realistic viewpoint about themselves as well" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #13, p. 1). This positive sense of being was reflected in teacher, student, and observer comments.

5.b. Little diversity at the school. There appeared to be little racial or ethnic diversity at the school and in the area surrounding the school. There was conflicting information as to the degree of socio-economic and academic diversity present. One observer comment indicated that there was little diversity across all levels:

> The teachers said they had "normal" diversity but most of their students were of the same socio-economic and academic backgrounds. They came to school wanting to learn with good home support . . . (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #9, p. 2)

A teacher, however, indicated that there were students "at-risk," apparently due to the high mobility of some families:

> Well, I think you could say that there are more students at-risk or at-need for . . . maybe not so much the special ed. services, but because they are on the move with these parents . . . (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG/TI, #7, p. 26)

There was not a clear or consistent sense of what degree of various types of diversity were present at the school or in the school's community.

5.c. Students enjoyed their independence at school. The students seemed to enjoy switching classes in junior high school, particularly relative to their experience in elementary school, where they stayed in the same classroom all day. The students seemed to enjoy having a variety of teachers and interacting with more students. One student commented:

> I have to say that it seems like it goes faster because like you get more teachers and if you don't like one, you'll most likely have a teacher that you like. And it keeps you moving. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #1, p. 13)

An observer also noted the student's excitement about switching classes, stating, "The main difference between the current school year and previous experiences, of course, is changing classes. The students loved having different teachers . . ." (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #2, p. 1).

Students also seemed to enjoy the social aspects of switching classes during the day. A student commented, "And you get to meet more people because you change classes. So you get to know more of the students if you didn't go to school with them the year before" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 3). An observer also commented on this sentiment, noting, "The students felt that going to different classes and being able to meet more people was the biggest difference in junior high than other years past" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #5, p. 1). Contrasting with this view, one student seemed discouraged that they were not able to spend as much time with friends from elementary school:

> The only thing that I don't really like is that you're not with all your friends; you're with other people. I mean you meet new friends, but like the people you were with before, you're not with anymore. (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 15)

5.d. Participation in extracurricular activities was high. Students appeared to enjoy the large number of extracurricular activity options available at their school. Students praised the options they had available to them: "I think we have a lot of opportunities in school that we otherwise wouldn't have," "Like we have all kinds of

music- band and chorus and . . . All sorts of academics and athletics" (IA, WSRSD, JH, SFG, #4, p. 2). An observer also commented on the enthusiasm students had regarding extracurricular activities: "The best things about school were seeing friends, basketball, socializing, sports, the variety show and extracurricular activities" (IA, WSRSD, JH, FN, #6, p. 1). Students appeared to generally be involved in school activities and to enjoy the social aspects of the school.

High Schools

Theme 1: Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED)

1.a. Test administration was voluntary. The Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) were administered by each district on a voluntary basis. The districts, however, were strongly encouraged by the state to use the state tests, including the ITED and the ITBS. One teacher commented:

> We administer the ITBS voluntarily but in a lot of ways they force our hands to do so. Historically, ITBS matches our curriculum. They are cheap, comprehensive, standardized . . . . The ITBS are both practical and aligned and we have 10 years of longitudinal data. Using the ITBS, we test in full then use the results diagnostically and for program evaluation. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #22, p. 3)

The state tests, therefore, were viewed as an effective means of gathering diagnostic data about students, which could be used in the evaluation of programming and as tools for helping student learning.

1.b. The ITED focused on skills, not curricular content. The ITED focused on gauging students' skills in specified areas, as well as their academic achievement potential. The testing manual stated, "Standardized tests serve their most valuable function, the authors believe, when they focus on the extent to which students are achieving the long-range educational goals toward which the various methods and materials converge" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 6- Technical Summary I, Design and Content- ITED). The test emphasized students' abilities to draw inferences and make deductions, rather than their knowledge in any particular content area. The test guide further stated, "The majority of the questions require students to interpret and analyze information and to make inferences and deductions. Very few questions are limited to assessing literal comprehension" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 7- Technical Summary I, Design and Content- ITED).

Theme 2: Test-related Stress or Pressure for Students

2.a. Students were aware of the test but ambivalent towards it. Students appeared to be highly aware of the state test (ITED); however, they seemed to generally express ambivalence toward the test, suggesting that little emphasis or stress was placed on the test administration or its results. One observer noted:

> The students didn't have very much to say about testing. They were totally ambivalent about them . . . They didn't feel that kids take it seriously, but generally it is fun . . . they felt it had importance to them in some ways. They declared that teachers never talk about it and put no emphasis on it. "It just isn't an issue." (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #16, p. 2)

The students indicated that their teachers placed little, if any, emphasis on the state test prior to its administration, and that test preparation was minimal. An observer noted:

> They said that their teachers put absolutely NO emphasis on the test. They tell the students about a week before they take the test, but they never go over anything that will be on the test and then the results are mailed to the parents and the teachers talk about it at a conference, but that is all. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #18, p. 3)

The state test, therefore, garnered little attention from students, as teachers and the school appeared to place minimal emphasis on it.

2.b. Test effectiveness according to students. Some students seemed to feel that the ITED was a worthwhile test; however, they did not seem to think that it was an accurate gauge of their academic skills. Furthermore, some students seemed to feel that the test was disconnected from life skills and did not measure the degree to which students were "street smart," but rather focused on their ability to memorize facts. An observer noted:

> A few students saw the purpose of the testing and didn't mind it. A couple also expressed that they [were] "sick of it." They all seemed knowledgeable that the students in Iowa scored high on the ITBS. They used the phrase "book smart vs. street smart" quite a bit. They felt that the test did not reflect the difference and that street smart was a lot more important than the ability to "memorize things." They also felt that the ITBS was worth taking and you shouldn't just fill in the dots. The things tested on, though, don't really affect anything in their lives. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 2)

These students, therefore, valued the test, though they indicated that it only focused on one type of knowledge and aptitude.

Some students suggested that the ITED was too difficult for them. Given the breadth of information covered on the tests, the students did not feel that they could adequately prepare for the exam. An observer commented:

> In response to issues about state testing, the students did not feel that they did very good [sic] on them. They thought the tests were too hard and covered a whole year of concepts and they couldn't study for them. They found that frustrating. They said that they hear from their parents that the school does well

> and they all felt that their parents were a big influence on how they perform on the test. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #18, pp. 2-3)

Most students, therefore, appeared to feel that the ITED was a valuable test. They also indicated that they tried their hardest in taking the test. Some students, however, seemed to feel that the test did not gauge the right types of skills, while others suggested that the test was too difficult.

Theme 3: Test-related Stress or Pressure for Teachers

3.a. Teachers experienced low stakes and little pressure related to the test. There did not appear to be any punitive stakes for teachers associated with the ITED, though the teachers did suggest that incentives were offered to raise student test scores. One observer comment suggested that a merit pay system could be implemented:

> Although the state's accountability seemed so different than the other states we've investigated, there still remains a "carrot and stick" from the state. According to Jim, there apparently is some talk in Iowa about a performance-based pay system that could be locally determined and allocated, although this is not yet in place . . . . Jim described the situation in Iowa as a "balance between support and accountability." (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #22, p. 5)

A teacher comment reiterated the potentiality of this merit pay policy: "Well you hear about high-stakes testing and the legislatures would to do it [sic]. Some talk of basing teachers' pay scale on raising student achievement scores" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 3). The potential for increased stakes, through merit pay or other mechanisms, appeared to be on the horizon, therefore, for Iowa schools.

Teachers indicated that they did not experience any overt pressure related to ITED test performance. Teachers suggested that there was more of an awareness of test scores than any real stress or anxiety associated with the results. Teachers were encouraged to raise the scores of those students who performed poorly. An observer wrote, "When asked if action was taken against teachers whose scores on the tests were low, he indicated that they speak with those teachers and ask them, 'What do we need to do to get you there?'" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #21, p. 1). Teachers also noted that the goal of assessment, for them, was to have it closely correlated with curricular goals. One teacher commented, ". . . the closer a teacher can get assessment to outcome, the more success there would be. If the goal in foreign language is to ask and answer questions, etc., in foreign language, then that's what we need to be assessing" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #3, p. 1). Most teachers, therefore, seemed to focus on test results more as a tool for gauging student progress than as a means of issuing negative sanctions or exerting pressure on teachers or students.

Some teachers, however, did suggest that there was some degree of pressure associated with the state tests. For some teachers, the perceived relevance of their content area determined the degree of emphasis placed on the test scores. One teacher

commented, "Because I'm a reading teacher and reading is one of the big areas that we do have to report. Reading, science, and math. So I feel more pressure than some because they're going to be looking at my kids' scores more" (WSHS-#22-p. 3). For some teachers, test-related pressure emanated both from the publishing of the test scores in the local newspaper and the threat of state intervention if poor test scores persisted. A teacher discussed this pressure:

> But they publish this- yes, they publish this in the paper, so that every school, everybody in the state, can look up and see, well how did their school do. And then I have an article here too that I talked to them about and indeed, if we don't improve after so long, then they do come. The state department will come and find out why." (WSHS-#22-p. 1)

Therefore, while most teachers suggested that test-related pressure was minimal or nonexistent, other teachers did feel some degree of stress or pressure from state testing.

Most teachers indicated that the community provided positive encouragement with regard to education in general, and the state tests in particular. Rather than manifesting itself as negative pressure, the community set high expectations for academic achievement, which led to teachers' self-motivation to foster strong test performances. One observer commented:

> John indicates the pressure he feels comes from the community and parents to do a good job. In that community education is held in high regard. The parents are educated; in most cases, either one or both parents have a college degree. There is a lot of support from the community to be innovative and push students. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #3, p. 6)

A teacher comment reiterates this conception of community pressure:

> Well, there might be some community pressure, some parents, but education is held in high regard. Both parents, or at least one parent, has a college degree or more. There's lots of support to be innovative, to push students to prepare them for college. Plus, those kids who do well in classes receive numerous scholarships. I think the kids last year had over 2 million dollars in scholarships. (WSHS-#4-p. 4)

The pressure coming from the community, therefore, was described as a positive pressure rooted in the parents' emphasis on education and the value of schooling.

Teachers also discussed the personal pressure they placed on themselves for their students to do well in the classroom and on the state tests. An observer noted:

> Mary said, "There is self-imposed pressure. We want kids to leave with life skills to make a smooth and [sic] transition to post-secondary schooling. We want kids to matriculate through school. We want to get kids to get through life with life

> and vocational skills. We track students carefully after graduation." (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #5, p. 5)

A teacher echoed this personal focus on generating positive educative results for students: "Not really pressure other than to be as good as we can be" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #4, p. 4). An administrator had commented on the different types of pressure that foster the teachers' emphasis on improving student academic performance: "Jim explained that teachers in WSRSD felt pressure in a different way. 'There is peer accountability, personal pressure to do their best for their children, grade level pressure to put their best foot forward, as well as some district and state pressure'" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #22, p. 5).

3.b. Pressure from the state threatened to escalate. While most teachers did not seem to feel that the state placed a great deal of pressure on schools or teachers with regard to the ITED or ITBS, they expressed concern that, with the national emphasis on accountability mounting, pressure would increase. An observer noted, "She agreed with her colleagues about the lack of pressure in Waverly, but she also warned that the pressures were knocking at the door, citing the recent issues in Waterloo schools with disappointing test results" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #19, p. 2). Some teachers expressed concern that the state was going to succumb to the national pressure to adopt more regimented curricula, with corresponding assessments. A teacher commented, "You know, we hear about accountability, but . . . We worry that there are legislators that would like to see us follow the national trend" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #1, p. 3). Another teacher stated, "Let's not be naïve about this. We are being pushed to move toward state standards" (WSHS-#3-p. 1). There was concern among teachers, therefore, that Iowa would "cave in" to the national trend towards standards and accountability, thereby increasing the pressure on teachers, schools, and students to focus on test scores.

Theme 4: Other Types of Assessments Were Used

4.a. Other formal and informal assessments were used by teachers. Teachers indicated that they were supported in their use of both formal and informal assessments in addition to the ITED. While the ITED was conceived of as a broad gauge of students' skills, the test creators envisioned teachers developing their own, more pertinent, classroom assessments:

> There is, of course, a real need for measures of the more immediate outcomes of high school courses. However, as the diversity of instructional methods and materials increases from school to school standardized tests become less and less appropriate for this purpose. Moreover, most teachers are usually quite proficient at measuring the outcomes of their own instruction. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 6- Technical Summary I, Design and Content- ITED)

Some teachers, therefore, used various classroom assessments to gauge student progress. An observer noted:

> When asked why he used all three types of assessment, he described how it was important to provide diverse ways of assessment to determine whether students really understood the required concepts. "Some kids succeed in one way and not another. This way there is a real feeling of relevance." (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #5, p. 3)

4.b. Teachers developed customized assessments. Some departments at the high school appeared to have developed their own testing, which corresponded with their curriculum. As detailed in the following observer comment, one teacher discussed how the department developed objectives and assessments:

> Sally intervened with some clarifications: Departments determined their own objectives which were based on national standards. We then developed assessments . . . we worked backwards. Essentially the departments said this is what the objectives are and how they are going to be measured. Everyone in the department gives the same end assessments which are multiple choice, machine scored. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, pp. 3-4)

The development and use of department-based curricula and assessment appeared to be encouraged by school administration.

Some teachers discussed their use of customized assessments in their classrooms. In some cases, teachers indicated that they created their own assessments out of dissatisfaction with other available assessment tools. An observer commented: "He discussed the idea of 'reflective assessment.' Explaining that he was not happy with the national art association's assessments, he thought he needed to find other ways to assess students" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #5, p. 3). Some teachers seemed to use a combination of standardized tests and assessments they created. "Both Mary West and the other teachers reflect that students understand about the objective 'bubble tests' but also recognize the more authentic tasks the teachers seek to include as well" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #5, p. 2).

Another teacher also indicated their use of multiple forms of assessment in measuring student progress:

> The closer I can get to the assessment or my outcomes, the better. I do use some paper-and-pencil tests, but not a lot because they are really not applicable to foreign languages . . . . Basically, I provide them role playing experiences and I have a rubric that supports my unit's objectives and what they are demonstrating. I'm trying to coordinate the rubric to the standards and benchmarks that were developed a year ago. (WSHS-#4-p. 2)

Most teachers, therefore, indicated that they were supported in customizing assessment in their classrooms to most effectively measure student learning.

Theme 5: Teacher Control Over Curriculum and Instruction Varied

5.a. The curriculum was set, but teachers controlled instruction. Teachers indicated that the district provided them with curricular standards intended to guide the content covered in class. Teachers were expected to adhere to the curricular standards; however, the teachers also indicated that they had flexibility in how they taught the material. An observer commented, "[Jim] says that the teachers all have to teach the critical objectives, which are non-negotiable, but how the teachers teach them is negotiable" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #21, p. 1). Another teacher had commented on the discretion teachers are given in determining how best to instruct the class given the curricular standards:

> We don't use stock curriculum. Teachers have the core curriculum given to them as well as assessments at the end, but how they get there depends on their own professional judgment. The instructional methods are not prescriptive but driven from professional decision-making. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #22, p. 4)

While teachers were expected to follow the curriculum provided by the district, they were given great latitude in their instructional methods used.

5.b. Professional development was offered to improve instruction. Professional development appeared to be offered to teachers as a tool for them to think more critically about their classroom instruction and the means of assessment used. Teachers were encouraged to use new ideas in the classroom that were garnered from professional development opportunities. An observer referenced a teacher comment on professional development: ". . . the school district encourages you to look critically about what you're doing. 'I'm learning a lot about instruction and assessment strategies.' The teachers explained that the administration . . . asks teachers to use an active learning strategy each quarter" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #5, p. 6).

Teachers also indicated that the district used professional development as a means of conducting an inventory of which classroom strategies were working and which ones needed improvement. A teacher commented, "Well the school improvement plan puts some pressure but the district spends money on good staff development . . . . The plan really just forces us to take a look at what works, what is not working, where we need to go" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #4, p. 4). Professional development, therefore, was used as a means of facilitating effective change in the classroom through the development and sharing of new instructional ideas.

Theme 6: Teacher Interest in Instruction Varied

6.a. Students wanted teachers to be engaged. Some students voiced their desire that teachers be engaged in the curricula and excited about their instruction. One student suggested that, when teachers were not excited, students were similarly disinterested: "Teachers need to be just as enthusiastic as they want their students to be. Like if a teacher doesn't want to teach it, why should we sit there and learn it?" (WSHS-#21-p. 5).

Another student echoed this view, stating, "When they are motivated, it makes us motivated" (WSHS-#16-p. 2). For some students, teacher enthusiasm in the classroom was an important motivating factor in student learning.

6.b. Some teachers appeared to be disengaged from instruction. Some observer comments indicated that some teachers were disengaged or disinterested in what they were teaching. For some teachers, they conveyed a lack of enthusiasm for the material, reflected in the following observer comment: "[OC: The teacher is teaching math, but is she teaching the students? In other words, is she connecting with the students? She is not projecting enthusiasm, it seems her goal is to get through the material.]" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #11, p. 2). For other teachers, the disinterest was reflected in their lack of interaction with students:

> At this point the teacher sat down at a computer in the front corner of the room and began talking to another teacher who apparently shared the room/office space with him. After a few minutes the teacher circulated the room once, but did not interact with any students. He then went back to his "buddy" and the computer at the front of the room. Twice he directed students from his position to stay on task and keep noise level down. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #13, p. 1)

While most teachers did appear to be engaged in their instruction (discussed below), some teachers did not seem to be as interested in what or whom they were teaching.

6.c. Some teachers showed excitement for teaching. While some of the teachers did not seem to be enthusiastic instructors, others did seem to be highly engaged and excited about their class. An observer noted, "I get the impression that he is truly interested in sharing with me what he does . . . There is a gentle rhythm to the classroom, no frantic pace. The teacher is evidently knowledgeable and engaged in the topic of the course" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #9, p. 2). Some teachers demonstrated their interest in students through regular, personal interactions with their students during class: "The teacher monitored the students by circulating the room and every single student had a one-to-one contact with the teacher at least 2 times during this session" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #14, p. 1).

Some students suggested that teachers and students fed off of each other in their enthusiasm for class material:

> [The students] agreed when the students were excited about a topic that most teachers then got excited, too. They also agreed that the opposite was true, when a teacher was excited about a certain topic then it made the students more excited, too. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #16, pp. 1-2)

Most teachers and students appeared to demonstrate interest in the classroom material and in the process of teaching and learning.

Theme 7: Teachers Used Different Instructional Methods

7.a. Some instruction appeared to be heavily didactic. Some teachers seemed to use lecture as a primary means of instructing students. These teachers also drew a great deal of their instruction from the textbook, with little experiential or hands-on learning. One class observation yielded the following observer comment:

> In this class, the teacher and the textbook [were] clearly driving instruction. The teacher was lecturing from notes in the teacher manual and teacher questioning was being guided from the textbook . . . . The teacher asked 12 questions (8 from the book) and answered his own questions 90% of the time. Student involvement was at a minimum. Only 4 students responded during the 20 minute lecture/questioning sequence. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #13, p. 1)

Another observer comment noted a similar dynamic: "Clearly there was a prescribed curriculum standard driving this class session. Students were being tested on literary terms as they applied to the current short story they had read. A textbook was the source for the reading selection" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #14, p. 1). It appeared that some teachers drew primarily from the textbook in their instruction, omitting opportunities for student involvement in the class.

7.b. Some teachers used hands-on and experiential instructional methods. While some of the teachers seemed to rely on didactic methods of instruction, others facilitated hands-on and experiential learning opportunities in their classrooms. The teachers appeared to be encouraged to use these interactive methods of instruction: "The trend in Iowa, as he sees it is toward Expeditionary Science. In some places, he tells me, this is strictly adhered to, including no textbook and no lecture, classes filled entirely with real life experiences of scientists" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #9, pp. 2-3). As was noted earlier, teachers seemed to feel that how they instructed students was flexible, leaving many to select experiential methods.

Observers commented on some examples of cooperative, group-oriented learning. One observer noted, "Students were directed to organize into their cooperative learning groups. The students assumed the roles of: recorder, investigator, encourager, and checker" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #13, p. 1). Another observer commented on the experiential learning activities observed in one classroom: "They engage in role-playing and experiential learning with support. She offers them a rubric, coordinated with standards and benchmarks that were developed a year ago" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #3, p. 2). Some teachers, therefore, used interactive, hands-on activities to engage students in the material and the learning process.

7.c. Students preferred hands-on activities. Students suggested that the instructional methodology of their teachers was an important factor in their learning. An observer wrote, "They commented that different teaching styles made a difference in how they learned and that was more important than their own way of learning" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #18, p. 2). Students indicated that they preferred experiential learning and that

they disliked "busy work." They appeared to enjoy learning through doing, where they had experiential and physical opportunities to learn and to be engaged in the class. An observer noted:

> The students responded at length about how they want teachers to know that class involvement was a key to learning. Students learn best when the activities are "physical" such as using and making models and developing concepts. These students all referred to themselves as visual learners and needed to be able to apply the learning to their own life and relevant situations. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #15, p. 2)

Students appeared to enjoy activities that drew them physically into the learning process.

Students also indicated that they enjoyed group work, as well as other activities that fostered interaction with other students: "The most fun was when the teacher organized them into groups with a set of questions and then students presented answers in the form of a group round table. Debates were also felt to be useful tools in the classroom" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #15, p. 2). Furthermore, students voiced enthusiasm for classroom activities that were fun and engaging for them. An observer commented, "They got excited about activities that were fun and when teachers mixed the fun with what they were learning, they learned best" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #18, p. 2). Students consistently noted their preference for interactive, hands-on activities, which gave them an opportunity to "do" the material and enjoy the learning process.

Students voiced discontent with activities that they saw as "busy work." They suggested that these rote, repetitive activities were boring for them. An observer summarized these views:

> Their most boisterous response was "I dislike busy work . . . ." . . . They declared they had a lot of busy work. Some of their comments were: "most of the classes could be taught in 10 minutes," "classes should be sorted by different abilities," "next year when we get AP US Honors, maybe it will be different." "It is ridiculous to sit in a class and go over the same work thirty times," said one student. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #16, p. 1)

Other students suggested that routines that seemed overly repetitive were boring, echoed in the following observer comment: "The students agreed that they learned best when they don't do the same thing all the time. They hated worksheets and 'reading the chapters and taking the test'" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #16, p. 2).

Some students indicated that the required, core curricular classes were more boring and redundant than electives, particularly at the freshman and sophomore levels.

> Students also indicated that they hated going to class. Most of their classes were boring and repetitive. The required classes interfered with their desire to participate more in the "elective" options such as band and choir. They have to

> take very routine classes of "stuff" they have learned before. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #15, p. 1)

Students, therefore, indicated that they enjoyed hands-on and experiential learning activities, and that they disliked "busy work," including repetitive activities that left them disengaged from the learning process.

Theme 8: The Pace of Instruction Varied

8.a. The pace was too fast for some students. Some students indicated that the pace of instruction was too fast. These students complained that the teachers focused on getting through the required material rather than the degree to which students had learned the content. An observer commented, "As to in-depth content, the students generally felt that the classes went rapidly in order to 'hurry' through the text book and little opportunity was provided to study something of interest" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #15, p. 2). Another observer comment noted a teacher's behavior during a class session: "OC: Pat never checked for student understanding as she worked through these identities even though she questioned students . . ." (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #8, p. 5). In addition to the fast pace of instruction, some students expressed concern that they were not afforded the opportunity to study topics in great depth. An observer wrote, "These students felt that lots of their classes moved quickly and pushed them hard to get the work done. They covered a lot of material, but not very many topics in-depth" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 2).

While some students did not appear to like the fast pace of instruction, others voiced a preference for a faster instructional pace. For some students, a quicker pace was necessary to cover all of the material, and it was also a way to prevent boredom in class. An observer summarized these sentiments:

> In response to how they felt about the excitement and challenge in their classes, the students unanimously stated that it was o.k. For some classes to be more challenging than others. They felt their required classes moved fast enough and that it was important to move fast so they could get all of the required topics studied. They understood that the teachers could not slow down in those classes, but they liked it because it kept them from getting bored. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #18, p. 2)

There were varied perspectives, therefore, as to the merits of fast-paced instruction.

8.b. Some students experienced a slower pace of instruction. While the pace of instruction for some classes appeared to be fast, other students described a slower pace, which they seemed to prefer. It appeared that the pace of instruction varied by class and, sometimes, by student perception. An observer commented:

> The pace of classes varied according to student and subject. Many of these students were in a more developmental math track and the pace was slower, but they liked that. They only expressed concern about a couple classes they have

> taken in which the pace was too slow. Most classes were paced about right for this group. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 2)

For some students, therefore, a slower pace was both necessary and preferred.

Theme 9: Perceptions of the Challenge of the Curriculum Varied

9.a. The level of challenge was affected by student effort. Some students and teachers indicated that the effort put forth by students played an important role in determining what was gained from the class, as well as the degree to which a student was challenged. A student commented on the role of effort in raising the level of a course's challenge: "It kind of depends on what class you are in. Like in some of them, you can get by without much work, and then others, you have to work at them. You can make some classes more challenging for yourself" (WSHS-#21-p. 3). An observer also summarized this idea, writing, "These students all felt challenged in their classes. They felt that some students just do enough to get by and that they have learned how to make the classes challenging for themselves" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 1).

Teachers also looked to student effort as a gauge of their own teaching effectiveness. One teacher had discussed the use of student attitude in measuring instructional success: "When asked how he determines whether his teaching has been successful, he says he can see it in the results of the projects, in enthusiasm and attitude" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #3, p. 5). Both students and teachers appeared to feel that a student's attitude and effort was an important factor in determining how challenging a given course would be for them.

9.b. Teachers' expectations affected the challenge of a class. The expectations teachers held for students in the classroom appeared to be a factor in the degree of challenge students experienced in their classes. Teachers seemed to vary in the level of expectations they held for students. Some teachers indicated that they set high expectations for students, confident that they could raise their performance to meet the teachers' goals. One teacher explained their philosophy:

> Well, it's a required class. So if [their] report is 1 day late they can still turn it in for half credit, after two days it's a zero. Eighty-five percent of the students here take at least 6 science courses, way beyond what is a requirement. It's kinda a "tough love" philosophy, but I don't do social promotion. Kids seem to understand that's the way it is, here are the expectations, and they seem to be able to do it. If kids fail, and only 1 or 2 do, they have to take the course again. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #4, pp. 2-3)

In some cases, it appeared, teachers consciously raised the level of challenge in their classes in hopes of improving student performance.

There seemed to be varying degrees of differentiated instruction, as some teachers tried to meet the specific learning needs of students in their classes in more individualized

ways. An observer noted, "There was evidence of [the] teacher using differentiation for 2 students who needed more structure and modifications to complete the test" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #14, p. 1). The extent to which teachers differentiated their instruction was not clear.

9.c. Some students believed the level of challenge was inadequate. Some students indicated that the challenge presented by their classes was inadequate, leaving them bored and looking for more difficult class work. The more routine and redundant assignments appeared to garner more frustration from the students. An observer wrote:

> They didn't want teachers to be so "routine" and to make assignments that required a little more effort. The more effort a project took, the more motivating it seemed to be to the students. They wanted more hands-on and information to apply to what they are learning to the "right now." Allow students to explore more options and use less "manufactured" materials. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, pp. 1-2)

This complaint relates to the earlier discussion regarding the interactivity of instruction, and the interest put forth by students to have more hands-on and experiential learning.

It appeared that classes were generally perceived as being more challenging at the freshman and sophomore levels, despite the lack of hands-on learning available in these courses. An observer noted a student's claim that freshman courses were the most difficult:

> They thought their schedules were fairly easy, but that freshman science was entirely too difficult. The senior commented that freshman science was the hardest class he has taken in high school. In fact, he thought that his freshman year was the hardest core of subjects in his entire high school career . . . . The courses these students were taking were all required courses. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #18, p. 1)

Several students expressed the view that freshman and sophomore year classes were the most difficult in high school.

Some students suggested that, during their junior and senior years, they were given greater freedom to select electives and other classes that included more experiential learning. Additionally, higher-level courses afforded some students the opportunity to take classes with other students who shared the same interest in challenging work. A student commented on this dynamic:

> He stated he has more freedom and classes are finally grouped so that you were with more students who were higher motivated. He felt that school began to change in his junior year. The freshmen and sophomores all felt they had too many required classes. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #16, p. 1)

While students appeared to feel that courses were less difficult as upperclassmen, they also felt burdened by the difficulty of applying to colleges. A student commented on the stress associated with the college application process: "The senior in the group felt this year was her most stressful. She has been looking at colleges and filling out scholarship applications and is feeling that her second semester classes were pointless" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 1).

Some students suggested that teachers focused on the "middle" student, rather than challenging the top or lower performing students in the class. An observer commented on this perception, writing, "They felt that most classes teach to the middle instead of trying to challenge the top students" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #15, p. 2). The degree to which students felt challenged in class, therefore, appeared to vary widely by student ability level, their grade level, and their academic interests.

Theme 10: Gifted Education

10.a. Students were screened for gifted programs in elementary school. Teachers indicated that students were screened for gifted education programs (TAG) beginning in the fourth grade. Once a student was labeled, it appeared that they were not re-screened in a later grade. A teacher discussed the philosophy of the district's gifted programs:

> Our philosophy changes from Kindergarten through twelfth grade. I think it evolves along the line. In K-4, we really try to begin early identification, but we really try to bring in classroom instruction through a TAG specialist, that really would serve all students. That process, then we can deliver specialized instruction focusing on high-level thinking skills and we can also begin to do some early identification of kids. (WSHS-#23-p. 1)

Separate TAG programming appeared to begin in fourth grade, with escalating levels of intensity with each grade level.

At the high school level, TAG classes were offered; however, there was not a structured class format. Rather, a gifted resource teacher would meet with students periodically to work on independent projects. There appeared to be some concern with regard to the availability of advanced classes, which will be discussed below.

Theme 11: Access to Courses Varied

11.a. Access to courses varied by grade level. Students indicated that they had less control over their course schedules at the freshman and sophomore levels. These students were required to take particular courses, precluding their registering for elective courses. Upperclassmen, on the other hand, seemed to have greater freedom in selecting their courses. An observer commented:

> The students were quite enthusiastic about their teachers and how they relate to students. They agreed that the junior year was a lot better than lower grades,

> because there was more freedom and choice of classes. The teachers made learning fun. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 1)

There appeared to be considerable variance in students' access to courses based on their grade level.

11.b. Access to courses varied by student ability level. Some teachers indicated that special, "modified" courses existed for those students who were either in vocational education, or who were in need of additional instructional help beyond what was available in non-modified classes. A teacher described the difference between modified and non-modified classes:

> He indicated that he taught 4 regular tenth grade American History classes and 2 "modified" classes that contained kids who need extra help. Bill went on to explain that all classes were responsible for the same objectives but that the textbook was different . . . it had a lower reading level, shorter chapters . . . . He also indicated that the modified classes had less homework but were responsible for the same information. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 4)

For some teachers, the modified classes carried with them a negative connotation, reflected in the following reference made by a teacher: "Pat described this class (the vocational math class) as the 'last ditch' math class" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 2).

Those students who were perceived as being "college-bound" appeared to take courses beyond what was required, particularly in math and science. A teacher described the extra courses taken by these students: "Pat continued to tell us that 80% of her students were on the college-bound tract with most of them taking 3 years of solid higher level math courses, despite a graduation requirement of only 3 semesters" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #2, p. 2). The college-bound students were seen by some teachers as being more ambitious in their coursework than other students. This seemed to contrast sharply with the perception of those students in "modified" classes.

There appeared to be considerable limitations on students seeking to take advanced classes. Students were allowed to dual enroll at the local college and take courses there; however, the high school did not offer any AP courses for students. Teachers indicated that AP courses were supposed to be offered beginning in 2002-2003; however, it is not clear whether this occurred. An observer discussed the expected availability of AP classes:

> Waverly has no AP classes at this point, but is looking to add some offerings in the near future. The plan is to add AP Government, History, and AP Literature/Writing in the 2002-03 school year. Instead, she explained that high-ability students could dual-enroll in Wartburg College to take several college level classes when they complete the high school offerings. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #1, p. 2)

Access to remedial or advanced courses, therefore, appeared to vary widely based on a students demonstrated ability level.

Theme 12: School Environment

12.a. The environment appeared friendly and supportive. The community within which the school was situated appeared to be friendly and family-oriented. The area consisted mainly of blue- and white-collar workers, and most students seemed to have at least one college-educated parent. Teachers indicated that the community was very supportive of the school. An administrator described the school community as follows:

> Jim explained that the community was "a nice mix of white-collar and blue-collar families." Further he elaborated that Waverly was "stereotypical Iowa" characterized by "family values" with mostly Caucasian families with 2-parent households that highly value education perhaps because so many parents were educated themselves. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #22, p. 2)

Teachers and administrators appeared to feel that the school and community were very stable, and that any difficulties that arose with the community could be resolved amicably.

Observers who visited the high school noted how polite, clean, respectful, and well-behaved the students were. Furthermore, the observers commented on how much the teachers appeared to enjoy working with the students. One observer noted, "Students were very polite saying excuse me or pardon me . . . . The teachers seem relaxed and to enjoy the kids" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #4, p. 5). Another observer also discussed their impression of the high school students:

> My general impression of Waverly-Shell Rock High School was "middle of the road America." The students were clean, well-dressed, and articulate. They talked candidly and with pride about their school experiences. They respected home and family and discussed the importance of their parents in their academic life . . . . I saw no "left of center" characters . . . meaning there were no gothic outfits or makeup, long hair, or less than fashionable "Gap" type of clothing. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #12, p. 1)

12.b. The school had little racial or ethnic diversity. There appeared to be little racial or ethnic diversity at the high school or in the surrounding community. Most students (almost 98%) were white. An observer noted, "The school district's demographics are approximately 2.3% non-white, and this small percentage has no dominant minority group. He explained that, 'this year 4-6 kids from each school were non-white'" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #22, p. 2). The following comment also addressed the demographics of the school community:

> We have no ethnic diversity. I think there are 2 black kids in the school this year. They fit in fine. This is an educated, white, white collar, rural community in the

> heartland of Iowa. Family, family values, Christian religious values . . . I guess it's a stereotypical community. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #9, p. 4)

The school, and its surrounding community, appeared to be fairly racially homogeneous.

12.c. Students had numerous extracurricular options. Students appeared to have the opportunity to participate in varied extracurricular activities, including student clubs, artistic groups, and athletics. An observer commented, "The school had lots of clubs and plays and any type of extracurricular activity that a student wanted" (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #17, p. 1). Some students, however, expressed frustration with the perceived preference given to athletes at the school, as well as the general emphasis placed on sports by the school community. An observer commented on these concerns raised by some students:

> Interestingly enough, these students also responded that "privileges" granted the athletes were what they hated the most about school. They felt unanimously that teachers treated the other academic competition participants unfairly when compared to the athletes. They experienced that no recognition was given for the achievements of academics and special privileges were given to winning athletic programs. (IA, WSRSD, HS, FN, #15, p. 1)

Therefore, while students appeared to have varied options in their extracurricular activities, some students felt that athletics garnered greater attention and undue preference at the school.

CHAPTER 5: Phase II—Qualitative Results

Schools With Mandated Accountability Policies

Chapter 5 presents the themes from schools with mandated accountability policies. Thirteen schools participated, representing 3 states. Specifically, 8 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 3 high schools served as the sites for interviews and observations over the course of one year.

Elementary Schools

Theme 1: Pressure Exerted on Schools from State and District Levels

1.a. Pressure filters down. The testing mandates that began at the state level appeared to filter down through the system, affecting the districts, the schools, the teachers, and, eventually, the students. Both students and teachers seemed to recognize the pressures exerted on them that had resulted from state-level policies that had subsequently rippled through the system. One teacher commented, "I think the pressure comes from the TAAS, and the superintendents are pressured, and they pressure their administrators, and administrators pressure teachers, and it flows down to the students" (TE-y1-#1-p. 2). For some teachers, the pressure manifested itself as stress that emanated from the top of the system. One teacher contended, "Stress is really a reality . . . and it just starts at the top and filters down to the poor child" (CE-y1-#2-p. 3).

Some students appeared to perceive a hierarchical dynamic of the pressure related to state testing requirements. They seemed cognizant of the pressure imposed on their teachers, which were then exerted on them. One teacher described a student's strong reaction to this pressure: "I had a student who went up to the principal and said, 'I really wish you'd quit pressuring the teachers about TAAS, because they're pressuring us, and we can't take it anymore . . ." (TE-y1-#1-p. 3).

1.b. Pressure is increasing. Teachers seemed to feel that the pressure related to state testing was increasing at all levels of the system. This appeared to be related to more stringent test requirements and more comprehensive curricular requirements. One teacher noted how the standards were continually raised, stating, "Each year the standards are raised, that's every year. And they add more information per subject and that's not fair . . . . So every year the standards are a little raised" (MC-y1-#1-p. 1). This continually evolving level of expectations seemed to make the teachers uneasy and wary of future changes.

Some teachers associated the increase in test-related pressure with the adoption of a new exam. This major change seemed to cause anxiety in teachers who were fearful of what was rumored to be a more challenging test. One teacher expressed their concern regarding the new test: ". . . I am personally nervous about not preparing those children that are going to move on, because from what I understand, [the new test] is going to be

from a creative point of view, rather than just being given a prompt" (TE-y2-#2-p. 1). Another teacher commented on the increasing difficulty of this new test: "We have been in in-services with the new [state test]. It's something that is just a little more difficult. The test is just a little more difficult" (MC-y2-#5-p. 1). The teachers seemed uncertain of the changes in expectations and how they could prepare the students to successfully complete the exam.

1.c. Pressure to compete and unfair comparisons. There appeared to be a level of competition fostered by the district and the state to provide incentives at the school level regarding state testing performance. In some cases, financial incentives appeared to be used as a reward for "exemplary" performance. One teacher expressed their concern with this incentive structure: "The importance of the TAAS, the fact that the state is giving these schools who are exemplary extra money to be funded because they did so well on the TAAS . . . you are actually giving that TAAS too much importance" (MC-y1-#1-p. 1).

Incentives were also used at the school level to encourage strong test performance. A student noted their principal's promise: "He said that if his school got exemplary . . . he was going to walk from his house and it is very far away from the school" (GE-y2-#3-p. 7). The incentives seemed to be viewed as fun and encouraging by some, and as overt pressure to compete by others.

Some teachers were dismayed at the types of comparisons made between schools. They felt that the comparisons were often unbalanced and poorly matched, with different schools facing unique obstacles to improving test performance. One teacher commented on what they perceived to be unfair comparisons:

> The biggest pressure is when the district or the state tries to compare apples to oranges. Students at our school compared to students in an inner school and we are not the same. We are not the same demographics. We are not the same cultures. Everything is different and you cannot do that. (MC-y2-#5-p. 6)

While some teachers seemed to be upset by these comparisons, others were proud of their school performance and appeared to welcome the opportunity to be compared to others. The feeling one had about these comparisons seemed to relate to some degree to their school's performance on the tests.

Theme 2: Pressure on Students

2.a. High levels of pressure on students from school and teachers. Teachers seemed to be particularly concerned about the pressure placed on students regarding the standardized tests. They indicated that the students were feeling both physical and psychological effects of the testing and its requisite preparation. One teacher commented, "Some of the kids will get sick. Some of the kids will throw up. Some of the kids will cry" (MC-y2-#5-p. 6). Another teacher noted the effects of the test-related stress on student's physical well-being:

> . . . You know, last year, I had a student who would get headaches . . . . And the doctor said she's stressed. And so I had to tell them don't get stressed. I know I'm putting pressure on you, and you feel the pressure because the Stanford 9 Tests . . . and you feel all this pressure. But just relax and take what you can and eventually it will come. (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, p. 6)

The teachers seemed to feel that the pressure was too high on the students and that the stress that was manifesting itself was unhealthy.

Teachers seemed to feel that the stress placed on students was emanating from teachers, parents, and the students themselves. One teacher noted the pressure students could feel from both parents and teachers:

> I think with the kids I know there is pressure from the teachers to them, but I noticed that my children that are very conscientious about Stanford 9, their parents are too and they get it from both, not only the teacher but the parents. (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 6)

The teachers seemed to feel that the students were cognizant of the high stakes involved for themselves as well as for their teachers and their school.

Teachers also noted the negative effect this high level of stress actually had on a student's test performance. They indicated that the higher the pressure and stress, the more difficult it was for the student to do well on the test. One teacher noted, "They know that [the test] reflects everything and I think it is too much pressure for them. Then they start to feel the pressure and get all tensed up and they can't do as well as they should be able to do" (VA, BES, TI, Terchick, #9, p. 7). Another teacher commented on the adverse effects of students' stress on test performance:

> I feel that there is a lot of pressure . . . . It almost does the opposite of what you want them to do . . . . You can almost see that they don't perform as well . . . . Children are pretty flexible, and they're pretty forgiving, but . . . . If they feel that you have the pressure, they're going to feel it too, even if you don't tell them. They're going to feel it. (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, p. 6)

Not all teachers shared this level of concern for student stress and pressure. There were some teachers who felt that they de-emphasized the test to the degree that they could in class and that students were not reflecting any feelings of stress or pressure regarding test performance. The views were mixed, seemingly dependent to some degree on the grade level and ability level taught.

Students appeared to generally feel that there was a great deal riding on their test results. Some students seemed eager for the challenge, while others appeared wary of the consequences. These reactions seemed to be highly correlated to a students' proficiency in tested areas and their confidence in their test-taking ability. One student summarized their feeling about the importance of the test by asserting, "It's like the whole year

depends on TAAS" (BE-y1-#1-p. 2). Another student spoke of their concern about their test performance, commenting, "Oh yes, like two months before, I was like, oh my God, what am I going to get on the SOL and I still don't know" (VA, BES, SFG, Jackson, #16, p. 2). Another student focused on their fear of the negative consequences of a poor performance on the test: "It makes you nervous because if you know that in your mind that you get the majority of them wrong, then you have to . . . you fail, and that makes you really nervous" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, SFG, #3, p. 4). The students were not all apprehensive of the test results; however, there was a consistent focus on the importance and magnitude of the results and their meaning for the student's academic future.

2.b. Student fear of retention. Students in Texas expressed fears that the results from the state tests could result in their retention in their current grade level. While this would be true with the future iteration of the state test, this was an erroneous assumption based on current practice. Students appeared to arrive at this conclusion from information given by teachers and parents.

Some students saw the use of test scores in a positive sense, expressing that they are a means of getting to the next grade, rather than as a way you are held back. One student said, "The TAAS is the final test. If you pass it, you do real good . . . you get to go to sixth grade" (TE-y1-#4-p. 1). Another student commented, "It gives you stuff that you have been learning to see if you are ready to pass to the next grade" (GE-y1-#2-p. 1). This view conceived of the test as a gatekeeper to future grade levels.

Other students saw the test scores in a negative sense, focusing on the ways in which they could be retained in their current grade level. One student voiced this notion, saying, "I heard that if you don't pass the TAAS, that you'll flunk. Like you'll stay in the same grade" (MC-y2-#6-p. 7). Another student referenced the impending changes with the TAAS exam, where test scores would in fact be used as a means of determining grade level promotion:

> With the objectives, what's the use of sending them to the next grade level if they are not doing anything? So the government decided that this year we are having a TAAS test 2 which will be more difficult than the first one. So like if you don't pass this one, you are staying there. You have to pass it. Until you pass it, then you'll be able to be promoted to the next grade. (GE-y2-#3-p. 7)

Students in Texas seemed to be particularly fearful of this notion of being retained. Some students appeared to feel a great deal of stress around this potential threat. One student voiced their fear: "I feel stress because, I think, what if I don't pass it? It would be embarrassing if I wouldn't and everybody else goes to the next grade" (MC-y2-#6-p. 8).

2.c. Teacher emphasis on testing varies. The amount of emphasis teachers placed on state testing and testing preparation appeared to vary by class and by school. This appeared to be related to a given teacher's tactic for encouraging good test results. Some students indicated that their teacher mentioned the test constantly, seemingly to try to make them fully aware of its importance so they would focus on getting ready. One

student commented, "[My teacher] is always saying if you don't do your homework, if you don't study, you're never going to pass TAAS . . . you're going to stay in fifth grade again, so that is why you need to study, study, study" (TE-y1-#4-p. 2). Another student noted their teacher's threatening tactic: "My teacher, instead of saying try your best, she would say you better or she is going to hold you back really bad, she says she is going to make you do harder work than the third graders that are coming in" (GE-y2-#3-p. 9).

Some teachers appeared to increase the pressure on students as the administration of the test neared. Students understood this increased emphasis as a sign to pay attention or risk getting in trouble. "Last year my teacher got real strict near the end of the year. She go real strict because she still needed to teach us all this stuff for the SOL test so it's either learn or get in trouble" (VA, BES, SFG, Jackson, #16, p. 3). One classroom observation highlighted the frequency with which the test was mentioned in the classroom by the teacher. The observer noted,

> (OC: At this point, I start a tally mark on the side of my paper to mark the number of times the teacher refers to the Stanford 9 test. In the 10 minute direct instruction portion of the lesson, she mentions the test 11 (eleven) times.) (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, FN, #10, pp 2-3)

Some teachers appeared to be mentioning the test often to defray any stress associated with the test. One student commented, "My teacher talks about it very often so we won't be nervous when it is the day of the TAAS . . ." (GE-y1-#2-p. 2).

Some students indicated that their teachers avoided mentioning the test to keep the students from feeling too much stress. Rather than mentioning the test, the students felt that these teachers just focused on the necessary tested material without emphasizing its relevance to testing. One student noted, "My teacher, she tries not to mention the TAAS so we don't get nervous and stuff so she just teaches us stuff to get us ready for the TAAS, but she tries not to mention it so we don't get nervous" (GE-y2-#3-p. 9). Observation of another teacher highlighted their emphasis on engagement with the material rather than testing: "Mrs. Graves seemed willing and able to challenge her students to engage in the material, and she did not seem to burden the children by stressing the importance of the SOLs or the tests" (VA, BES, FN, Gregorek, #7, p. 3).

2.d. Parent pressure and support varies. Parents appeared to have varied opinions as to the value of the standardized tests. Some parents appeared to be supportive of the basic skills taught in preparation of the exam. One student commented, "My parents like TAAS because it teaches us more about reading, math, writing, and how to write compositions" (BE-y1-#1-p. 2). Other parents, however, seemed to dislike the emphasis placed on testing, feeling that other important content was sacrificed in order to prepare for the tests. One student said, "My dad totally disagrees with TAAS. It just interferes with school" (BE-y1-#1-p. 2). Another student noted their parent's concern with the stress level that accompanies the testing, commenting, "My mom says that sometimes they are stressing us too much because it's like the TAAS test this, the TAAS

test that. She says sometimes even the teachers are too stressed out to think about how the kids are feeling . . ." (GE-y2-#3-p. 8).

Parents appeared to differ in the degree to which they emphasized the test and focused on test performance with their children. Some students indicated that their parents place great importance on preparing for the test. One student commented, "My parents tell me to study, study, study because they want me to pass the TAAS" (TE-y1-#4-p. 1). Some students seemed to feel pressure from their parents to focus on the test, noting the emphasis placed on comparative results. One student asserted, ". . . [O]ur parents kept telling us like how big of a test it is and how we are going to get judged from the rest of the people" (VA, BES, SFG, Jackson, #16, p. 2).

In some cases, the parents appeared to use threats and punitive measures to encourage students to try their best on the test. One student conveyed their parents' use of pressure, saying, "[My parents say] you better pass the TAAS or else we are not going to buy you any more stuff or you are not going to have your allowance anymore" (GE-y1-#2-p. 2). Another student commented, "[My parents say] you better pass the TAAS. It is that or you are going back to second grade" (GE-y1-#2-p. 2). Some students appeared to be intimidated by the pressure exerted by parents, reflected in the following student comment: "I get stressed because I'm afraid my mom would get mad if I don't pass it" (MC-y2-#6-p. 8).

In addition to negative consequences for poor test performance, some students indicated that they receive rewards from their parents for passing the test. One student claimed, "If I pass the TAAS, they'll take me to the zoo and out somewhere to eat and they will raise my allowance" (GE-y1-#2-p. 2). The occurrence of rewarding and punitive consequences for test performance seemed to vary widely within and between schools and classes.

Some students indicated that their parents are very supportive of them with regard to test taking. They noted that their parents encourage them to do their best on the tests and not to worry about the results. One student's parents apparently say, "If you don't make it, you don't make it. But if you do, you do . . . . We hope you do it" (JE-y1-#1-p. 1). Another student commented, "My mom tells me that as long as I try my best, she won't worry about me" (GE-y2-#3-p. 8). Some teachers seemed to feel that the degree to which the parents focus on the test with their children is directly related to the emphasis placed on the test by the school and the teacher. One teacher claimed, "When the teachers don't stress SOL tests to the parents, like in our weekly newsletters home to parents, then the parents don't pressure their kids" (VA, BES, FN, Gregorek, #27, p. 3).

2.e. Students place testing pressure on themselves. Irrespective of parent and teacher pressure to do well on the state tests, some students appeared to place a great deal of pressure on themselves with regard to test performance. The type and nature of this pressure appeared to vary by student group. Gifted students in particular appeared to set high expectations for their test performance, expecting to pass the test and to receive very high scores. One teacher noted:

> I think just because I see how stressful, how stressed the kids become. Like our GT kids I know from my classroom they wanted to get the 100, they wanted to get that perfect test . . . . They wanted that perfect test and that stress kind of, I see them and they get sick and feel you know, have a headache and they want to go to the restroom and they just, it's horrible. (CE-y1-#2-p. 10)

Gifted students expressed their confidence in their test performance, assuming they would continue to perform well and conscious of the use of the tests for academic placement in gifted programs.

For gifted students, the pressure appeared at times to be a compilation of parent, teacher, and self-induced stress related to test performance. Teachers were concerned that the pressure on gifted students was compounded by the expectations of parents and teachers that the students would do very well on the tests. One teacher commented, "I think many times, gifted students just absolutely almost explode from pressure, because they pressure themselves. Then they have the outside pressuring, the two together are volatile" (TE-y1-#1-p. 3). Another teacher commented on the physical effects this triangulated pressure has on students: "And they feel it too. And you can see it. Their little body language and that shake. And they, because they're putting it on themselves, we're putting it on them, their parents put it on them. I expect this, you've always gotten this" (TE-y1-#1-p. 12).

Teachers also noted the self-imposed stress faced by students with learning disabilities or other learning challenges. These students, who struggled with the test-taking process, appeared to experience a great deal of stress related to the actual administration of the test. One teacher noted, ". . . they get very tense and all the pressure's on them. They're so stressed because they don't know which way to go sometimes, because they just see so many answers there and I think it's 'I hate the TAAS'" (CE-y1-#2-p. 5).

Not all students seemed to feel pressured or stressed with regard to state testing administration or results. In one school, the observer noted, "[the] children didn't express much angst about testing . . . " (VA, BES, FN, Brighton, #14, p. 17). One student expressed their enthusiasm for the test, stating, "I think it is a great test" (CE-y1-#4-p. 1). To some degree, the level of pressure and stress experienced by a student appeared to be related to their proficiency with tested material and their facility with test-taking skills.

Theme 3: Pressure on Teachers

3.a. Teachers impose some pressure on themselves. Teachers appeared to place a great deal of test-related pressure on themselves. This was rooted in a sense of professional obligation to improve student test scores and a desire for the school to be reflected well through the test scores. One teacher commented, "And it's not so much that they pressure us as we ourselves put the pressure upon ourselves. We want to do well" (TE-y2-#2-p. 4). Another teacher discussed the scrutiny with which they analyzed the test scores of each student, questioning their role in the child's test results: "When

you look at the individual kids' scores, because we get those too, and I'm like I know this kid, why didn't he do very well . . . . But you feel like, what happened here, why didn't they do that right? Personally as a teacher" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 8). The degree to which teachers expressed this self-imposed pressure appeared to be related to the perceived consequences of test scores held by teachers. The higher the teachers seemed to feel the stakes were for students and the school with respect to test score results, the greater the self-imposed pressure seemed to be.

3.b. Assessment and accountability of the test. Teachers had varying perspectives as to the level of accountability they were held to by principals and the district with respect to their students' test scores. Some teachers seemed to feel that test results were used by their principal or their district to assess their instructional performance. One teacher commented, "Yes, because if they don't pass, we get a black eye. We look bad and they talk about us and they make graphs about us" (MC-y2-#5-p. 5). Some teachers seemed to feel that both aggregate and individual student results and growth were analyzed, and that they were held accountable for scores that were below expectations or requirements.

The general level of pressure and perception of accountability seemed high for many teachers. One teacher exclaimed, "[We feel] a lot of pressure!" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, p. 6). Students seemed cognizant of the additional pressure and level of expectations exerted on teachers. One student noted, "If the child gets a wrong answer, it comes back on the teacher" (CE-y1-#4-p. 1). The scrutiny felt by some teachers appeared to come more from the district level than from the teacher's principal, though there were some teachers who felt assessed by their principal based on their students' test performance. One teacher commented, "But I think the pressure is coming from above [our principal]" (GE-y2-#2-p. 4).

With some exceptions, most teachers seemed to feel that their administration was very supportive of them and did not hold them directly responsible for student test results. The teachers indicated that their principals emphasized working towards a positive increase in test results rather than focusing on reprimanding a teacher for a given student's scores. One teacher commented:

> . . . [W]hen it comes down to looking at the scores [the principal] doesn't really come down on anybody or she doesn't ever say anything negative. She just says . . . [t]his year let's try this and she is very positive, she is very supportive. (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, pp 11-12)

There were some teachers who felt they were being pressured with respect to the test scores of a particular child or group of children; however, most teachers expressed their feeling that the administration was supportive and that most accountability pressure stemmed from the district and state levels.

While budgetary constraints appeared to be an issue in securing some resources, teachers seemed to feel that their principals were also very supportive in providing any test-related resources requested, if possible:

> The administrative team at Brumfield was very supportive of its teachers . . . their principal was extremely willing to help her teachers. She regularly provided any materials they would request for the purpose of curricular enrichment or SOL preparation, and she did not exert pressure on teachers to obtain a certain result on their students' SOL exam scores. (VA, BES, FN, Gregorek, #4, pp. 2-3)

Another teacher reiterated this support in obtaining classroom materials and resources: "She believes her administration to be very supportive of her and the other teachers . . . . She believes the principal would get her whatever materials she needed if at all possible . . ." (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, FN, #10, p. 5).

Teachers did not seem to feel that their job was in jeopardy as a result of poor test scores. Most teachers seemed to feel that their job performance was evaluated based on more than simply student test scores. Those teachers with longer tenure, in particular, appeared to feel that the pressure related to test scores was in no way a threat to their job security. An interviewer commented, "She did not fear losing her job based on the fact that she knew she was a good teacher, she had experience, was certified, and that there is a serious teacher shortage" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, #10, p. 5). Therefore, the pressure related to test score accountability most teachers experienced appeared to correspond more to levels of oversight and programming changes rather than to job security.

3.c. Community pressure. Teachers seemed to feel both direct and indirect state testing pressure stemming from the community. This appeared to be related to the publication of test scores by school and district, as well as the focus of the community on school performance and test results in general. To some degree, community pressure resulted in the teachers' desire to improve their students' test scores. One teacher commented, "But I think that you see all these nice write-ups in the paper about so and so school being exemplary. Well, we want to be in there too. So, yes, in a way it is pressure" (TE-y2-#2-p. 5).

For many schools, the test scores by grade or school were published in local and regional newspapers. This publicity seemed to heighten the anxiety some teachers had about test results. One teacher said, "I think that the pressure is there because you have benchmarks a couple of months after school starts, and those scores are publicized, again the pressure starts early" (MC-y2-#5-p. 8). Another teacher commented, "I think the Stanford 9 looms over our heads with all the scores being published in the newspaper and sitting in the parent conferences. And I know that some of the parents get really upset" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, p. 6). It appears, therefore, that some teachers feel pressure related to the distribution of test results to the community. This pressure manifests itself in a desire to have themselves and the school reflected positively, as well as a sense of concern that they are directly scrutinized by the community for their students' scores.

Theme 4: Student Perception of State Tests

4.a. Students' knowledge of the test. Students varied in their knowledge and understanding of the state tests. Most students seemed to comprehend the basic elements of the content and administration of the test; however, most students were not familiar with the specific dates the test was taken and the purported purpose and use of the test results. One student explained the state test as, "It is just a big review about what you have been doing over the months just to test how far you can get" (GE-y2-#2-p. 1). Students seemed to conceive of the test as a larger version of the preparation assessments they had been doing throughout the year.

Some students appeared to be somewhat confused by the use of the test results. As was noted earlier, some students had the perception that the tests would be used to determine grade retention or promotion. Other students had the idea that the state or federal government would somehow use the tests for some unknown purpose. One student said, "You might get a trophy if you pass" (JE-y1-#1-p. 1). In general, most students seemed focus on passing the tests based on instructions and encouragement from parents and teachers. They were less focused on how the results would be used by administrators or the state.

4.b. Negative perceptions of the test. Some students indicated that they disliked the state tests. Reasons for this discontent included feelings that the test was boring, easy, and too long. Students who found the test to be too easy for them seemed to feel that it was not a relevant assessment of their knowledge and that it was a waste of their instructional time. One student commented, "I don't think we need to take the TAAS because it is just stuff that we already know" (CE-y1-#5-p. 1). Another student remark was, "It's just stuff we already know. It's just a long review of what we've done all year. Even though we've reviewed it already before the TAAS. It's like a waste of time" (CE-y1-#5-p. 1). Other students found the test to be boring and too lengthy. One student noted, "[The test is] boring. It should be shorter and [it is] not that important" (BE-y1-#1-p. 2).

4.c. Positive perceptions of the test. Some students saw benefits in the preparation for and administration of the state tests. For some, the test served as a conduit to learning. One student remarked, "I have learned a lot and it is so easy for me." (CE-y1-#4-p. 1). Students also seemed to feel that the knowledge acquired as a part of the test preparation process enabled them to progress to higher grade levels in school. One student noted, "It's good to have the test because it gives you like more so you can learn more so you could pass to the other level" (MC-y2-#6-p. 6).

Those students who performed well on the state testing seemed to particularly enjoy the test and they looked forward to taking it. These students seemed to have gained confidence as a result of their strong test performances in the past and they seemed to feel well prepared to take the test. One teacher commented on the positive approach GT students had to taking the state test: ". . . For the majority of the GT kids these are the basic skills and they love testing on it . . . . They just like, you know, the instant

feedback. They want to know because they know they did well" (TE-y2-#2-p. 6). Another observation noted the preparedness many students felt with respect to the state test: "Because the problems are simple, and they have practiced every day, and the teacher has helped them through the years" (GE-y1-#2-p. 2).

Some students approached the test from a very practical, neutral standpoint. They saw the necessity and inevitability in taking the test and they did not seem particularly enthusiastic or concerned about the test administration or results. One student stated, "I think the TAAS is just something you have to accomplish, one of your goals" (JE-y1-#2-p. 1). In summary, there were varying perspectives on the value and efficacy of the state tests. Some students were irritated by the imposition and meaninglessness of the test; other students valued the test for the knowledge it conveyed and felt confident in their performance; and other students were matter of fact about the necessity of taking the test as a required part of schooling.

Theme 5: Teacher Perception of State Tests

5.a. Teachers felt some assessments are useful and necessary. Teachers appeared to feel that assessments were an important means of measuring student progress and for providing a necessary level of accountability to the system. The assessment, according to some teachers, should be used as a guide in gauging student achievement and readiness in particular content areas. One teachers commented:

> I think that the testing is important to some extent, because you have to have a point, a measure from where to go, you know, whether the student has achieved what they should have achieved. So I think the testing is necessary. (MC-y1-#1-p. 1)

Teachers seemed to feel that it was important to have some form of assessment to monitor student progress and to hold teachers and students accountable for the required material.

Some teachers indicated that the state tests were used primarily as a means of adjusting curriculum based on the areas of strength and weakness that emerged from the assessments. One teacher noted:

> Our test scores have always been used basically to align our curriculum and so what we needed to do is to take this course from first year and we needed to see what areas we needed to improve to teach, re-teach or maybe there was an area that we didn't do very well as a whole, the whole class didn't do that particular part well so we would emphasize and go back and teach this new group of children and make certain that we sort of align our programs so that we can go back and teach that particular skill a lot better.(CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 8)

Some teachers struggled in their conflicting feelings that the tests were necessary and important and that it led to a level of pressure for students and teachers that was too high. One teacher explained their concern: "It's so much pressure on everybody. But yet I think that it's necessary for to see where the children are, what you need to do maybe different next time. But basically, I think it's very, too much TAAS" (JE-y1-#3-p. 1).

Some teachers appeared to like the emphasis on basic skills that resulted from the focus on state testing. They seemed to feel it was important for all students to have exposure to and be instructed in core curricular content. This, they indicated, would help to ensure that each student had a minimum proficiency in basic skills. One teacher commented:

> Well I think that one of the benefits has been that across the board teachers have had at least those skills to the minimum level. And I think that really overall it probably has improved teaching of those basic skills. (CE-y1-#2-p. 1)

Some teachers seemed to feel that, prior to the state testing requirements, some students, particularly GT students, were not being taught basic skills as consistently or thoroughly. One teacher voiced their support for teaching and assessing basic skills: "It's necessary to test basic skills" (JE-y1-#3-p. 1).

5.b. State test is an inadequate measure of student progress. Teachers seemed to feel that some form of assessment is necessary to gauge student progress; however, they also appeared to believe that the required state test was a poor assessment of student achievement and growth. One reason for this view was the belief by some teachers that the test was only a snapshot assessment, capturing one moment in time and, potentially, an inaccurate measure of what the student truly knew or understood. One teacher commented, "It's a snapshot test . . . . And forget all the accomplishments that child has made throughout the year" (MC-y1-#1-p. 8). Another teacher complained that this snapshot view of the student disregards all prior or future demonstrations of the student's work and that these results are used to judge the student's academic future:

> And at the same time we see so much progress throughout the year that means so much to us, to the teacher, the staff, but it's not important to anybody else. The only thing that matters is that snapshot that they take that is how we are going to be judged and how the kids are going to be judged when they go from the elementary to the junior high. That one day snapshot, not knowing what was behind their success or their failure, that's all it's looking at. Nothing else is taken into consideration and that's not right. (MC-y2-#5-p. 6)

Another teacher expressed concern that, in evaluating the student on one day's performance, there was the risk that unrelated external factors could impact their results:

> Everything hinges on one day . . . . And it's like everything they're supposed to have learned is going to go down the tubes if they were sick that day. If they had

> a bad night. If somebody had an emergency at home the night before . . . if they're a poor test taker. One day. (MC-y1-#1-p. 8)

Teachers seemed to feel that a more diversified means of assessment, administered over a period of time, was needed to more accurately gauge student achievement and progress.

Another reason for some teachers' position that the state test is a poor assessment tool was their belief that it was sometimes assessing material that had not yet been taught. This seemed to be more of an issue in states where benchmark test were administered in the beginning of the year, testing material that would not be covered until later. One teacher expressed their frustration:

> I agree that we need to probably find out how our children are doing through some kind of a test. But we've got our benchmarks that are probably 6 or 7 weeks into our school year and they expect you to get a 70, which you've maybe taught 25% of the objectives only and if you don't get that 70, it's like your children aren't doing very well. Well, there is a reason why they are not doing well- we haven't taught the material. It is not the children's fault. It's not even our fault, but we are getting the blame. And I know it's not only at this school. I've been in other districts, other states even. (GE-y2-#2-p. 5)

Another teacher reiterated the same position, stating, "And the benchmark was, we were testing skills that were not even, had not even been taught. That wasn't fair" (CE-y1-#1-p. 8).

Some teachers found the state test to be a poor assessment tool because they felt it was poorly written and disconnected from the students' experiences. Some teachers indicated that the test was not developmentally appropriate for their students. One teacher commented, "Some of the things that, we are now, that are now in our curriculum, I don't feel are developmentally appropriate" (MC-y2-#5-p. 2). Other teachers were concerned that the life experiences of the children did not line up with the cultural knowledge assessed by the test. One teacher addressed this concern:

> Many of the students' experiences can't be compared to the other parts of the state. So when they're preparing certain test items, they look at, oh, well, you know everybody should have this. But we have students who don't have washing machines, they don't have a television, they don't have water. They don't have electricity and beds . . . . And they're being measured with the same instruments as all the students. (MC-y1-#1-p. 2)

Another teacher repeated this concern, stating, "Some of my children don't know what fall is. I mean, we tell them 'fall' and they have absolutely no idea. We know summer, and we know spring, but winter and fall are difficult for children to understand" (MC-y2-#5-p. 3).

Some teachers appeared to feel that additional assessments were necessary in order to gain an accurate picture of a student's achievement and academic progress. One teacher commented:

> There's many ways to evaluate whether teachers are teaching and whether students are learning, and that testing with the TAAS is only one. And I think they [the state] need to explore many, many ways of evaluating, not just this one. (TE-y1-#1-p. 2)

Another teacher expressed their view that assessing the teachers and the students on one test was not fair: ". . . [Y]ou can't make that the only assessment that is given. And we are being held accountable with just that one assessment and I don't think that is a fair evaluation" (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 11). The teachers appeared to feel that the limitations of one test, administered on one day, were too great to gain an accurate assessment of student progress and achievement.

5.c. Test disadvantages some student groups. Some teachers expressed concern that the test disadvantaged particular groups of children. Students who had difficulty taking tests, it was argued, really struggled with the high pressure of the administration of the state test. One teacher addressed this issue:

> . . . Some kids have test anxiety and they can't sit down and take a test and it makes them lose self-confidence, I think . . . I have students who make A's all through language arts and when it comes [time] to take that test, they fail it because they cannot sit down and take a standardized test. (VA, BES, TI, Terchick, #9, p. 1)

Some teachers were concerned that the test became more a measure of a student's ability to take the test than an assessment of their mastery of content.

Some teachers were concerned that, as material became increasingly difficult, students would struggle more with the challenging content of the test. This seemed to be a particular concern with respect to students who were already struggling with the curriculum. Those students who performed considerably below grade level, or who had special needs, were seen as being particularly at risk of falling further behind as a result of the increasing demands of the test. One teacher lamented, "It's sad because your low level kids that don't pass [the test] just makes them feel even lower than they already are . . ." (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 6). There was some concern that all students were required to take the same test irrespective of their learning style or ability.

The struggles faced by ESL students in taking the required state tests concerned some teachers. These teachers did not seem to think it was fair to use the same testing instrument with all children. One teacher commented:

> I think a lot of the non-LEP's and ESL students, the recent immigrants, how, if they can barely read and write to begin with, how can you test them on, and

> they've had no basic, they've had no schooling prior to coming to the US, how can you test them using the same criteria as everybody? (MC-y1-#1-p. 20)

Another teacher echoed the same concern, ". . . It seems like it's really not truly fair for the bilingual child to take the same test that a totally monolingual child has to take. I think if they're going to test they should have varying degrees" (CE-y1-#1-p. 4). These teachers seemed to feel that there should be different or modified assessments to address language issues faced by ESL students.

Theme 6: Instructional Focus on Tested Material and Testing Skills

6.a. Focus on testing dominates instruction. Many teachers appeared to focus instruction primarily on tested material. This did not seem to be the case with all teachers; however, many of the teachers commented on this testing emphasis in their instruction. The teachers appeared to be frustrated by their need to teach to the test rather than focus on other skills and material they felt were important for students. One teacher commented, "Especially with the children who need a lot of the skills, but you know we're teaching the test. We are not teaching the skills. We're not teaching the kids. We're teaching the test" (CE-y1-#1-p. 1). Another teacher reiterated this perception, saying, "It's really, you're teaching the test, instead of just doing normal teaching, you know, teaching the skills" (JE-y1-#3-p. 1).

The teachers noted their emphasis on having their students pass the state tests. They indicated that they drill students repeatedly on tested material and that they use all methods at their disposal to ensure that each student is equipped to pass the test. One teacher commented,

> We do everything that we have to do to pass the TAAS test: teach it; reinforce it; make sure that the children learn the objectives or about the objectives that are going to be on the test; and teach strategies for the test. (GE-y2-#2-p. 1)

Another teacher commented on the focus to raise the reading level of students in order for them to meet minimum state requirements: ". . . you drill and drill because the little kids are not at reading level, and you have to bring them up to par in order for them to test and pass, you know, at the minimum level that the state requires . . ." (CE-y1-#1-p. 3).

Teachers indicated that test preparation began in the early grades, sometimes well before testing occurs. One teacher noted the focus on test preparation in second grade, despite the fact that testing was not conducted in that grade: "One of the things I have noticed, and I don't have a TAAS grade, we prepare the children, but second grade is not a TAAS grade, even though we do spend the majority of our day and of our week, and of our year, preparing them for all of the tests. That's all we ever seem to do is prepare for tests" (TE-y1-#1-p. 9). Another teacher complained about the fact that kindergartners were taught testing formats: "I think it is ridiculous that they are trying to teach kindergartners the TAAS format. I mean, they are babies and they are getting tested" (GE-y2-#2-p. 5).

Some teachers did not feel that their instruction was related to test preparation. GT teachers, in particular, seemed to feel that they could focus on other curricular material, as their students were likely to perform well on the state tests without an extensive focus on tested material. One teacher noted, "There's not, not as much [test preparation] as you would have with a regular class, you know, with the regular students. With these students, you don't need to do as much" (JE-y1-#3-p. 3). Another teacher commented on their lack of adherence to tested curriculum:

> I am not marching to the drummer of doing TAAS all the time . . . . Everything is really geared to what I am teaching in the classroom . . . . I am not doing TAAS and I am not going to. The kids do fine. But this is a GT class and GT kids. (CE-y1-#1-pp. 4-5)

Another teacher echoed this view: "I think our curriculum . . . in all the GT classes totally has nothing to do with the TAAS" (CE-y1-#2-p. 7).

6.b. Teachers vary in the amount of time spent on test preparation. While teachers consistently appeared to focus on test preparation in class, the amount of time spent teaching specifically to the test and in efforts to help students pass the test varied by teacher. Some teachers indicated that they focused on test preparation throughout the year, infusing test content into all curricular areas. One teacher commented, "All year in math we're using the strategies that they'll be using on the test pretty much and so for me the math instruction pretty much all along is targeted to the same thing they'll be doing on the TAAS" (CE-y1-#2-p. 6). Another teacher quantified the time spent preparing for the test, saying, "I do spent most of my time, I'm saying 90, 95, and 98% of my time is spent toward the test" (MC-y1-#1-p. 9).

Some teachers indicated that they emphasized test preparation as the test administration neared. One teacher expressed their approach to test preparation, stating, "I did not spend that much time the first semester of school drilling TAAS. But I did the last month. It was TAAS 24/7. It was all day" (TE-y1-#1-p. 12). Another teacher noted their focus on the test in the second half of the year, commenting, "Second semester is when I really start" (CE-y1-#2-p. 5).

6.c. Adherence to prescribed and structured curricula. Some teachers indicated that they adhered to a strictly prescribed and paced curriculum. The existence of such a curricular guide seemed to vary by district and state. The required curriculum was often, though not always, tied directly to the state tests. It appeared to consistently mandate the pace and content of instruction in particular areas of study or across all content areas. One teacher noted the regulated nature of the curricular guides, stating, "The district gives us our scoping sequence, which is essentially the entire school year has been done for us. We follow the scope and sequence on a per week basis" (GE-y2-#2-p. 5). Another teacher commented on the strict adherence to the required curricular guide:

> In our classroom, we basically stick to the essential knowledge . . . [s]o it seems like you are teaching to the test, but you hear that essential knowledge over and

> over and over again so you make sure the kids learn the basics instead of expanding out. (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 2)

Another teacher indicated that they followed the prescribed curricula entirely, not deviating from any of the required components: "I emphasize basically all of my information on the SOL material that I am handed. I teach strictly from my SOLs" (VA, BES, TI, Terchick, #9, pp 1-2).

6.d. Teachers focused on teaching test taking skills. Teachers appeared to focus on test taking strategies and skills throughout the year and, particularly, immediately prior to the administration of the test. One teacher commented on the need for instruction to mirror the testing, saying, "You've got to teach the way they're going to be tested" (MC-y1-#1-p. 2). Another teacher noted the importance of "training" students to take the test: "I think you have to train the kids on how to take a test. And there are certain things that you have to make them aware of . . ." (MC-y1-#1-p. 11). The focus of this preparation seemed to be on gaining a familiarity with the testing format and an understanding of critical test taking strategies. The teachers seemed to see this preparation as a critical factor in the students' success on the test.

Some teachers indicated that they modified other assessments given during the course of the year to be more representative of the state tests. This, they suggested, would help the students to become familiar with the test. One teacher commented:

> Well I think in my class, a fourth of my time was spent making sure everything was TAAS formatted, so they would get used to how it's done- worded and presented and all of that- and then towards the middle of the year, half my time. And then at least three weeks before the test, all of my time, all of my time. All year long you talked strategies every time we read. (TE-y1-#1-p. 9)

Another teacher commented on how they created new assessments in the format of the state test: "Well, I work with the class objectives when testing. If I'm making my own test based on a story that I've read, I'll do the, I'll make out the questions, TAAS format" (CE-y1-#1-p. 20). The focus on teaching how to effectively take a test formatted like the state test was exemplified in the following teacher comment:

> I would say that throughout the year, we do a variety of assessments. Some paper and pencil, and some project grades or presentation grades, different kinds. And then, you know, right before the test we make sure that they know the test format, that they can take that kind of a test. To make sure that we haven't missed any, you know, we give them a couple of practice quizzes. (JE-y1-#3-p. 7)

Theme 7: Perceived Benefits of Prescribed, Test-related Instruction

7.a. Structure and guidance. Some teachers seemed to feel that the structured nature of the prescribed curricula provided a helpful framework within which to teach. One teacher commented, "Our county has put together . . . a statewide essential

knowledge . . . . They kind of mapped it out for us and it's nice so we know exactly . . . what we are tested on, so what they county did is really helpful" (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 1). Other teachers liked the rigorous and repetitive nature of a structured, detailed scope and sequence. One teacher noted, "I especially like the strategies and skills that they are teaching over and over . . . . And we are repeating. And we are going back and forth with stories. So it kind of helped them to remember better" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, p. 4).

7.b. Flexibility in how instruction is given. While teachers did not seem to feel that they had control of what was taught, they did seem to have flexibility in how they taught the prescribed material. They enjoyed this control and found it to be a good way to customize the scope and sequence and required, tested material to their group of students. One teacher commented, "How we teach is a different story. We do have a lot of leeway with that . . . . How we teach yes, but what we teach no" (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 9). While the teachers seemed to like this flexibility in instructional methods, they did not appear to be able to exercise it as much as they would like, given the constraints of the required curriculum and the pressures of the state tests.

Theme 8: Perceived Problems With Prescribed, Test-related Instruction

8.a. Minimal flexibility in what instruction is given. Teachers seemed to feel that they had little flexibility in determining what content would be taught. This was true for both test-related and other standardized curricula. One teacher reflected the belief that the standardized curriculum provided some benefits in its guidelines; however it was limiting for the teacher in terms of what content they were able to teach:

> I think the benefit is it holds teachers to be accountable for what they are supposed to be teaching. They are more likely to stick to what the curriculum is. The downfall is they are not able to expand on things like we like to because you have to stick to the basics. (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 1)

Teachers seemed to feel that they were not in a position to either add content to the curriculum or to expand on a given topic. This perceived limitation was due to time constraints as well as the curriculum requirements.

Teachers generally seemed to feel a lack of control over the curriculum design and its content. On one level, they did not feel that they had the ability to alter the prescribed curriculum in their classroom. An observer noted the frustration experienced by some teachers who lacked the flexibility to change curriculum, even when they felt it was necessary: "More than state tests, they are bothered by the strict policies regarding the Open Court Reading program. The teachers feel they cannot deviate from the package and may not change the order or the components, even if they have student data to suggest that students don't need the activities or skills" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, FN, #10, p. 4). Another teacher referenced their lack of control over how much time would be spent on a particular concept, saying, ". . . it's a little too structured. They should give us, the teachers, a little more flexibility on how long we need to teach a story. Because

each class is different" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, pp. 3-4). Teachers also did not seem to feel that they were involved in the broader process of curriculum design and change. Some teachers indicated that they were not consulted on issues of curriculum revision.

8.b. Differentiation challenging. Teachers seemed to feel that the prescribed curriculum and focus on test preparation made it difficult for them to differentiate instruction. The teachers indicated that those students who have already mastered a concept are forced to go through the instruction anyway. One teacher commented,

> Our kids get confused because they totally understand the concept already and they don't want to take two steps back because they're looking at you like, "hello, why do you want me to draw that stuff, let me just tell you, look, this is the answer, right?" (TE-y2-#2-p. 3)

Another teacher indicated that the students who have already mastered a concept need to go through the same work as the others to avoid student perceptions of inequity: "You know your higher achievers, they can do it without a problem. But you want them to do it as well because the other kids are going to feel that they don't have to do it, why do we? So we make all of them do it. And for those brighter ones, they are spinning their wheels" (GE-y2-#2-p. 7).

Some teachers indicated that the demands of test preparation made it difficult for them to focus on the GT students in the class. Rather, they often focused on the children whose skills needed to be raised to meet minimum requirements in a given area. One teacher commented, ". . . the teacher unfortunately cannot take in the gifted child's needs when she's trying to pull everybody else up who doesn't have the skills. The gifted child loses that year" (CE-y1-#1-p. 9). A student spoke to this experience, stating, "Our teacher, she doesn't really remind to the smart people, but the ones that are down there she has to remind them and remind them and they get a little bit better" (GE-y2-#3-p. 9).

Some teachers indicated that students who either were not prepared for the material or needed extra time on a particular area of study felt the worst effects from the focus on test preparation and standardized curricula. These teachers were concerned about the long-term effects on these lower-performing students. One teacher commented:

> Pre-k is doing what we used to do in kindergarten. We're doing first grade material. And some of those kids are not ready to do that. And I feel like they're falling between the cracks, and those are the kids that we are not reaching. And those are the ones that I am worried about. (MC-y1-#1-p. 6)

Another teacher spoke of the problems faced by lower-performing students who struggle with particular issues and for whom the teacher cannot provide adequate support given the time constraints of the curriculum:

> I think it's harder more for the lower kids . . . . I think it's more difficult for those students who are way below grade level. I've got a student that's in resource, and he's struggling. He can read it, but he can't comprehend it. And I've got 30 kids, and it's not as if I can sit down daily and go over what we just read every single time . . . . So I think it's not as beneficial for those low kids. For the average kids, that you know, I think it's great because it challenges them and gives them a good basis. But for the lower kids, I think they truly struggle. (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #1, p. 5)

These teachers were concerned that the students who were behind grade level in particular content areas would fall through the cracks as the focus on test preparation and a dictated pace of instruction forced the class to move ahead.

Some teachers seemed to feel that all students at either end of the performance spectrum received less attention than the "regular" students. This seemed to be perceived as being a result of the heterogeneous grouping that made effective differentiation challenging. One teacher argued for homogeneous grouping, stating:

> Because of the fact that we have them heterogeneously grouped with our resource students and you have the high end of the pendulum to the low end of the pendulum, you have to teach really to the medium group. Because of that there are some great kids who have really been stifled. If we were allowed to homogeneously group, I think that would be much better. (GE-y2-#2-p. 3)

In general, teachers who taught in "regular" classrooms felt it was difficult to meet each child's learning needs, given the pressures and focus on test preparation and the standardized curriculum.

8.c. Concerns regarding instructional resources. Some teachers were concerned that there were not adequate resources to support the instruction of required curricula. In some cases, it appeared that there was insufficient information provided on a required topic and teachers were left to research the topic on their own to locate appropriate resources. In other cases, the required curricular components were in several textbooks, leaving the teacher to piece together the resources. One teacher commented on their frustration with the lack of a single book containing all required information:

> If you are going to have SOLs for us to teach, have one book with all the materials in that book for me to use as a reference. Going to 6/7 different books and not having any information at all doesn't give me the opportunity to do my best for having these kids to learn. (VA, BES, TI, Terchick, #9, p. 9)

Some teachers were also concerned that the test and the textbooks were not adequately correlated. This, they indicated, was challenging for the teachers to use the textbook as a resource when it was formatted differently from the test they were trying to prepare students to take. One teacher noted, "The textbooks don't have examples like the test. So

that's another drawback. When you're trying to prepare students, you can't really do that because the test is not like what's in the textbook" (MC-y1-#1-p. 1).

Some teachers were also concerned about the resources available for instruction and test preparation with Spanish-speaking students, for whom some teachers were concerned there was inadequate instructional support. One teacher commented, "Materials. We don't have any resources, really, in Spanish, for them to be able, to be successful in the Spanish TAAS" (MC-y1-#1-p. 3). The inadequacy of the resources, it was suggested, made the job of preparing students for the test more challenging for the teacher.

Some teachers shared a different view, asserting that the textbooks were aligned well with the standardized curriculum. Increasingly, it seemed, the textbooks being produced, and those subsequently purchased by the districts, were directly correlated to state testing and curricular requirements. One teacher commented, "If it's in the text, it's open for the TEKS. Just cover all the TEKS and if your textbooks are doing that then just stick to the textbook and cover everything that's in the texts because that's what's going to be on the TEKS" (TE-y2-#2-p. 1). Another teacher noted the movement textbook distributors had made toward alignment with state curriculum guidelines and state tests: "The publishers know that too. Just about every book we looked at was geared toward the TAAS format and assessments" (GE-y2-#2-p. 3).

8.d. Content is spread thin. Some teachers seemed to feel that the time constraints of the standardized curriculum and the emphasis on test preparation precluded them from studying any given topic in depth. Some teachers indicated that they had to adhere to the required pacing guide put forth by the state or district. One teacher noted,

> [I]t would be nice if we felt like we had time to say, "that's great, let's look into that more," but we really don't. If we want to get everything covered that we have to get covered before the test is given we have to stick to the pacing guide . . . (VA, BES, TI, Graves/Webster, #3, p. 1)

> Some students reinforced this perspective, indicating that their opportunities to study material more in-depth occurred either at home or at occasionally at school, but only if they finished their other work early: "The only time when they can study a topic that they like is during free time, after they finish their work or if they have been good, they can read books." (TE-y1-#4-p. 2)

Some teachers, however, seemed to feel that they were adequately able to cover all required material and still have enough time for students to study content in-depth. For the most part, these teachers appeared to teach GT students, and they felt that their students had a sufficient grasp of the tested material to allow them to spend additional time on areas of interest. One teacher commented, "If it's something that sparks the interest of the students . . . [the students can] go up the depth at least where they can handle it" (YJE-y1-#3-p. 5). Therefore, the degree to which a teacher felt they were able

to allow in-depth studies seemed to depend on the speed with which the student grasped the required curriculum.

8.e. Decrease in critical thinking opportunities. Some teachers were concerned that the emphasis on testing and in generating the right answer for exams was diminishing emphasis on critical thinking skills. Teachers indicated that students were not adequately challenged to develop their abilities to analyze and solve problems. One teacher commented, "One thing I don't like about the TAAS is that there's always a right answer. And when you deal with science and social studies, there's not always a right answer" (MC-y1-#1-p. 15). In observing a classroom activity, the observer noted the emphasis on the one right answer:

> One of the more disturbing aspects of the student-teacher interaction was Amanda's constant stress of "the right answer on the test." She repeated ad infinitum things like "This is how the question will appear on the test," or "No, do not write it that way for the test. You should write . . ." (VA, BES, FN, Gregorek, #11, p. 3)

Teachers appeared to be concerned that the focus was on being able to pass the test rather than the growth the student made in their cognitive skills.

Teachers also noted that the extensive testing created a more shallow curriculum that did not challenge students to think on a deeper level or to analyze problems. One teacher commented, "They'll circle the correct one, the one they think is correct. Then go and cross out the other ones, without analyzing and thinking. Their thinking process is not there . . ." (MC-y1-#1-pp 12-13). Another teacher complained, ". . . There's no accountability for the higher level thinking stuff, the digging deeper kind of stuff" (CE-y1-#2-p. 2). Some teachers seemed to perceive that the emphasis on testing was having an adverse effect on student thinking, skill development, and their ability to critically analyze problems.

8.f. Decrease in interactive, hands-on projects. Teachers indicated that the time constraints imposed by the test preparation requirements, as well as the need to cover an increasing amount of material during the academic year, precluded their ability to include interactive projects and experiments. Instead, they appeared to focus more on using quick activities and worksheets in place of hands-on learning opportunities. One teacher commented:

> Because you are teaching to the test, you don't have time to do the actual project, which is a lot more fun; the experimentation, the research, the hands-on versus the handout. Well, the handout is going to take us maybe an hour to do versus a project that may take you a week and we don't have a week to spend on that particular objective. (GE-y2-#2-p. 1)

Another teacher described the competing pressures of wanting to include more interactive learning activities, but also feeling the need to cover the required curriculum: ". . . I

haven't done half as much as I usually do as far as projects, art, science, even social studies. I haven't touched half as much as I usually do . . . . Every time I look up, we have to finish this for Open Court . . ." (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 4).

Teachers appeared to feel tremendous time constraints. They expressed frustration at the realization that hands-on projects and activities were both effective and enjoyed by students, yet they were unable to find the time in the schedule to incorporate them. One teacher commented:

> So, I couldn't do any projects. We don't have time. There is not time to do anything fun for them in the classroom because we have to cover that information [in] my pacing guide. And if I didn't follow a pacing guide telling me I have this time and this time to do it, we would never get finished. And I think that is sad because that is what they like to do. They like to do the projects and they like to do the fun things, and we don't have time to do it because we have 9 weeks to do all that material. (VA, BES, TI, Terchick, #9, p. 2)

Another teacher noted the impact of time constraints on the inclusion of projects in the schedule: "What we'll do is we'll have projects sometimes and we'll do those things. But those projects are limited because of the amount of time that I have. Which is not a lot" (MC-y1-#1-p. 14).

Some teachers did feel that they had adequate time and flexibility to include interactive, hands-on learning activities. In some cases, these were teachers who worked with GT students. They seemed to feel that the students' demonstrated competency with the testing and curricular requirements allowed them to be more creative with instruction and to allow students more learning options in the classroom. One teacher commented:

> There's much more flexibility than in a classroom with regular students. And again, it goes back to with the regular students, you feel pressure. You know, there's so much to accomplish, and sometimes you feel like it's not all getting accomplished. And with the GT, you have, you know, more, it seems like more time on your hands. Even though you don't, but it seems that way, so if, you know, you do have time to let them make choices and go from there. (JE-y1-#3-p. 4)

The sense of time constraints and pressures to eliminate seemingly optional projects varied across schools and among teachers.

8.g. Difficulty in teaching non-tested subjects. Teachers indicated that the focus on test preparation and standardized curricula precluded the inclusion of non-tested subjects and material. In one case, the standardized, mandated curriculum appeared to make it challenging for the teachers to include science, social studies, art, and music. One teacher commented on this dynamic:

> . . . The pressure is there and unfortunately what is getting cut are the things that I still consider important, which is social studies and science. I still consider art and music to be very important, and it is just one of those things that we are lucky to get those things in the course of the day. Open Court has taken so much of our time and it is mandated by the school. Two and a half hours on Open Court. That is basically our day. (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 5)

Teachers seemed to feel responsible for finding ways in which these "endangered" subjects could be included in daily or weekly schedules, as they were no longer included in mandated curriculum. This seemed particularly true for GT teachers, who also felt as though they had more flexibility in including non-prescribed curricular material. One GT teacher commented, "We work pretty hard to do social studies and science every day, almost every day, all year long, in order to make sure that we do them, because we feel like they are important" (CE-y1-#2-p. 9).

The foci within a curriculum appeared to be determined by the areas being tested. Two teachers commented on the shift in focus as tested areas have changed:

> T1: "We used to have a social studies and science [Stanford 9 test]."
> T2: "That is why they are not emphasizing it either."
> T1: "But I think it is still important, but, unfortunately, it is not something that is given a second seat."
>
> (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 6)

Some teachers indicated that the focus of the curriculum was on reading and math, as these were tested subjects and were areas of intense scrutiny. One teacher commented, "But what I see happening is a concentration on math and reading, because those are the things that are going to be tested on the TAAS" (MC-y1-#1-p. 6). Some teachers seemed to feel, however, that if there was evidence that their students were performing well in tested areas, they were able to include the omitted subjects. One teacher addressed this perception:

> I think because of the benchmarks that we take and, you know, they meet with us and if they see that the, all the kids are mastering, then we can see that, well, we don't have to spend as much time with these TAAS skills, you know, whether reading or math, and go above and beyond that, you know and do the science, the social studies, the arts. (JE-y1-#3-p. 6)

The degree to which teachers felt they could include non-tested or non-prescribed subjects and material seemed to depend upon the nature of their requirements and the proficiency of their students with the tested material.

Teachers indicated that they were able to teach non-tested or non-mandated subjects and material after the test administration was complete. The period of time between the test administration and the end of the year appeared to include more interactive, creative opportunities for hands-on learning and the inclusion of non-tested

subjects and material. One teacher commented, "Well, actually, after our TAAS test, the last 5 weeks of school, we do a lot of hands-on. We have our science fair. We have our social studies fair. We do a lot of research. They actually get onto the computers and they type out a report. There is a lot of good stuff that goes on . . ." (GE-y2-#2-p. 4). Another teacher comment notes the change in curriculum after testing, stating, "We call this post-TAAS curriculum" (GE-y2-#2-p. 4).

Teachers commented on the increased instructional flexibility they felt after the test was administered. One teacher commented, "Now that the pressure of TAAS is over with, I can focus on handwriting. Let's do handwriting" (TE-y1-#1-p. 5). Another teacher noted, "Later in the year after TAAS is over, now we get to go on to the creative and the poetry, and we've touched on that throughout the year" (CE-y1-#1-p. 6). Students also noted the change in curriculum after the TAAS administration, and the increased interactive projects and activities that were infused into the schedule. One teacher commented, "Maybe after the TAAS we'll do more. And after the TAAS, we will play more, do more mysteries . . . and get to do more activities" (JE-y1-#2-p. 1). Another student noted the change in the teacher's focus after the TAAS administration: "After the TAAS, the teacher told us that we can bring our toys and everything to school . . ." (GE-y1-#2-p. 2).

Theme 9: Student Preferences for Instruction and Content

9.a. Students enjoyed interesting, new material. Students appeared to enjoy interesting, new material. They generally seemed enthusiastic about learning and they noted their excitement and preference for new concepts and information. One student said, "I agree with her because I like math a lot too. I'm learning something different and new everyday" (GE-y2-#3-p. 1). Another student noted the leverage students felt they gained from new knowledge: "I think learning is great because you get to learn so much stuff that you can pass on to another level and learn even more things" (MC-y2-#6-p. 1). Some students described particular subjects and topics they were exploring that excited them. Some teachers seemed to feel that their attitude affected the excitement level of students towards particular topics. One teacher commented, "I think all of us can agree that it's all the attitude of the teacher. If we have a positive attitude about what we're doing, whether it's science, social studies, math, grammar, writing- the kids are going to be excited about it" (CE-y1-#1-p. 17).

Students generally seemed to enjoy learning material that they understood and subjects in which they performed well. These subjects appeared to elicit the highest praise from students, as they indicated that they liked the subjects where they received high grades. One student commented, [I like] Math because I'm good in that subject. Sometimes it may be challenging, but most times it's easy to remember" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, SFG, #3, p. 1). Conversely, students indicated that they disliked classes that seemed too difficult and in which they did not perform well.

9.b. Students liked hands-on projects and interactive instruction. Students indicated that they preferred hands-on learning opportunities in the form of projects,

experiments, or other activities. One student commented, "I like to learn by sometimes trying to do it yourself. Like trying it out. That's how I like to learn" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, SFG, #3, p. 3). Some students indicated that they do not have enough of these learning opportunities and requested that more hands-on activities be added to their curricula. One student suggested, "Make it more fun, make more experiments, more things that we can get together with friends and have fun" (TE-y1-#4-p. 2). Another student referenced their preference for hands-on projects rather than reading from a textbook: "[We need] in depth for science. Have us create things instead of just like working from the textbook" (CE-y1-#5-p. 1). Students indicated that they disliked worksheets and learning exclusively from a textbook. They appeared to prefer interactive lessons where they became active parts of the learning process.

Theme 10: Students Had Mixed Views on Curricular Challenge

10.a. Some courses appeared challenging. Some students indicated that particular classes were challenging for them. This seemed to be related to either their particular proficiency with a given topic, or with their ability group placement. Math, for example, was noted as being challenging for some students. They referenced the difficulty of problem solving and the concentration required to learn new concepts. Other students, however, found math to be easy, redundant, and boring. One student commented, "Math because we always have to review and review and we already know it" (TE-y1-#4-p. 2). Other subjects, such as reading and science, were also mentioned by some students as being particularly challenging. Students also suggested that their homework was often challenging and, at times, too difficult. Homework, in general, appeared to be disliked by many students.

Students at the higher elementary grade levels seemed to feel that classes were more challenging. This appeared to be due, in part, to the fact that these students were sometimes placed in advanced courses that were more difficult, including algebra and advanced English. Some teachers seemed to feel that classes were more challenging for students when they did not focus on test-related content and the teacher was able to explore other, more challenging content. One teacher commented, ". . . Because the kids are being more challenged, because they're doing less emphasis, or at least we try not to put so much emphasis on the TAAS. And try to challenge them in other areas" (JE-y1-#3-p. 7).

10.b. Students felt basic skills were boring. Students indicated that the focus on basic skills that typified the test preparation and standardized curricula was repetitive and boring for them. Some students seemed to feel that this instruction was covering material they already knew and had mastered. One student commented, "I don't like when you already know the answer, but you still have to do your work" (CE-y1-#5-p. 1). Another student echoed this same view, noting, "We always have to review and review and we already know it" (TE-y1-#4-p. 3). Teachers corroborated this concern with a lower-challenging, basic skills emphasis, placing the impetus for this curriculum on the focus of the state test. One teacher said, ". . . I think it lowers the level of challenge because it's a basic skills test" (TE-y1-#1-p. 16).

Sometimes, the repetitive focus on particular material was related to preparation for the test or adherence to the required curriculum; however, at other times it was a result of students in the class who needed additional time to grasp a given concept. Some students seemed to be frustrated by the redundancy and lack of challenge in the curriculum, sometimes blaming the students who were slower to comprehend material. One student commented, ". . . Students are holding us back . . . . I think they do it on purpose . . . . They say, 'I don't get it. I don't get it'" (JE-y1-#1-p. 2). Students appeared to be frustrated by the heterogeneous classroom and the necessity at times for all students to study the same material in the same way.

10.c. GT students appeared under-challenged. Some teachers seemed to feel that GT students were bored with the focus on basic skills that dominated the curriculum. They noted the lack of challenge inherent in this curriculum for gifted students. One teacher commented, "I think the drawback is that it's really boring. And if you have gifted kids, they get real restless having to do that very much" (CE-y1-#2-p. 2). Some teachers voiced their view that gifted students needed greater challenge and needed to be pushed more in class. One teacher commented, "We need to challenge our gifted children and go beyond that just pencil paper and memory thing and sort of apply it" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 3).

Some teachers indicated that many GT students were able to pass the test prior to any review or test preparation. Despite this pre-existing proficiency, they noted that these students still had to experience the review curriculum focused on basic skills and test preparation. One teacher said, "I think I want to be teaching more at the top level because I have kids that come in that could pass the TAAS the first day they walk in the door" (CE-y1-#1-p. 18). Irrespective of a students' proficiency, they were, at times, apparently required to learn the same material as other students in the class.

Some teachers appeared to feel locked into one instructional model for a heterogeneous classroom, recognizing the need for varied instructional methods, but feeling the pressure of curricular requirements. One teacher commented on the direct instruction used in the classroom in spite of their awareness that this may not be the most effective teaching method:

> I don't feel like comfortable letting them direct themselves when I am doing TAAS. You know, I have got to be right there, directing, directing, directing. And I would like to back off whenever I possibly can. But with TAAS, it's hard to back off. It almost needs a directive teacher, and they do this. And you learn when you're learning about working with gifted, that that's not the way to do things, for very much of the day, that it's better to use these other strategies. (TE-y1-#1-p. 4)

Some teachers seemed to lack the resources or time to differentiate instruction for gifted learners.

While some teachers seemed to feel that they could not provide gifted students with an adequately challenging curriculum given the pressures of testing and the standardized curriculum, other teachers did appear to feel as though gifted students had the opportunity to experience a more challenging curriculum. These teachers indicated that gifted students were already proficient in basic testing requirements and could, therefore, engage in more interactive, interdisciplinary, challenging work. Other teachers, however, were convinced that gifted students also needed to receive instruction in basic skills. One teacher commented:

> I think it's crucial, whether I teach GT or a regular classroom, to remember that, even though we are teaching GT children, we have to teach the basics for that grade level, and then enrich. Because if we don't give them those basics, what's going to happen when they get to the next grade level? (TE-y1-#1-p. 3)

Theme 11: Students Had Mixed Views About the Pace of Instruction

11.a. Pace of instruction sometimes too fast. Some students indicated that the pace of instruction was, at times, too fast. This seemed to be particularly true in math for some students. Students appeared to recognize, however, a need for the teacher to move quickly through the material to cover all necessary requirements prior to the state test administration. One student commented, "If she goes too slow, we won't cover everything, and on the TAAS test, we won't know what it means" (JE-y1-#2-p. 1). Classroom observations at times reflected the fast pace that appeared to be rooted in a perceived need to get through required material. One observer noted, "Her sense of being rushed was clearly transmitted to the students, many of whom could not seem to write quickly enough to keep pace with her talking" (VA, BES, FN, Gregorek, #11, p. 3). The pace of instruction, therefore, appeared to be tied to the teacher's conception of scheduling and curricular requirements, as well as the test preparation necessary.

11.b. Pace of instruction sometimes too slow. Some students indicated that the pace of instruction was too slow for some courses. The slower pace appeared to be more preponderant at lower grade levels and in courses that were perceived by students as easier. Students appeared to be particularly frustrated when they had to go through a lesson slowly despite their proficiency in the area. One student commented, "Yeah, that's something like that we do, except that our teacher is like read it, and then she likes to talk about it . . . . We are just doing it step by step by step and it just frustrates me because I can do it like all at once already" (GE-y2-#3-p. 2). Another student addressed the boredom experienced from courses whose pace was too slow: "I think it's too slow, because you get bored in a lot of the subjects that you already know. Like some people have good memories so it would be easier for them to remember things" (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, SFG, #3, p. 3).

For those students who already had grasped a concept while it continued to be taught or re-taught, there appeared to be varying options. Some students seemed to simply "tune out" while the teacher went through the lesson, tuning back in when new material was introduced. One student commented on this, saying, "Because the things

she teaches we already know, so we are waiting for her to finish so we can start" (GE-y2-#3-p. 11). The same issue from the perspective of a slower learner was addressed by one student:

> Sometimes, [the teacher] explains it except I don't get it. She'll have to explain it over really, really slowly, so some people just like sit there, just not paying attention because they already know it. And when she gets to something that they don't know, they just start paying attention. (VA, BES, SFG, Graves, #13, p. 6)

Students indicated that this experience was very boring, leaving them feeling unchallenged and as though the pace of instruction was too slow.

Other students indicated that they could do other activities, such as reading a book or resting, while they waited for the rest of the class to catch up. One student commented, "I do something else like read a book while he is explaining it to somebody else" (GE-y2-#3-p. 11). Another student indicated that they rested or talked to friends while they waited:

> Whenever my teachers are still explaining the lesson and I am done, I kind of put my head down and rest while the teacher is explaining to the other kids how to do it and I am already done, so me and my friends are kind of like whispering to each other and our heads are down. (GE-y2-#3-p. 11)

Gifted students, at times, appeared to be given additional work to do when they had completed an activity or assignment earlier than their peers. One teacher discussed the use of centers in the classroom:

> I also do give my gifted children additional work. When they finish early, there is always something for them to do . . . . It is challenging, there is critical thinking there, and usually it is my gifted children that want to go to those centers because they finish early and they want something. I think it is good for them. It is something that they can do. They don't just sit there and be bored. (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 2)

The use of additional learning options for students who finished work earlier than others appeared to vary by school and by teacher.

The pace of instruction was, according to some students, slowed by particular groups of students. Sometimes, the slowed pace seemed to be due to learners who needed more time on a given activity. One student commented on their teacher's response to those students who are already proficient in a curricular area that still needed to be covered for the benefit of other students:

> . . . And [the teacher will] say, ". . . some of you . . . don't want to do this. I know you are tired of doing it over and over, but the other kids, they have to learn." So we have to put up with it. (GE-y2-#3-p. 11)

Some students indicated that discipline problems slowed instruction. One student commented, "Our teacher, Mr. Mares, sometimes goes a little bit slow because some kids misbehave and he stops and we are all waiting . . ." (GE-y2-#3-p. 11).

11.c. Pace corresponded to student readiness. In some cases, the pace of instruction appeared to correspond to the readiness of the student or group of students to move forward. Some teachers indicated that they had flexibility to decide how quickly to move through a given topic. One teacher commented, "You go as fast as you want to go, or as slow as you need to go. And so I think there's a lot of flexibility" (CE-y1-#2-p. 10). For gifted students, some teachers indicated that they could and did go faster as needed to maintain student interest in the material. One teacher noted, "I know with my gifted children, I also need to go a little more rapidly in the teaching. I know I can lose them. A lot of times they are bored because they already know it . . ." (CA, LAUSD, ES, Denker, TFG, #8, p. 1). Some teachers, therefore, seemed to feel that they had the flexibility to individualize instruction and to determine their own pace of instruction based on student needs.

Some students indicated that the teachers slowed the pace of instruction and spent additional time on particular content areas that they did not understand. These students appeared to feel that the pace of instruction was appropriate and individualized. One student commented:

> I like it the way it is right now. It's going pretty fast, but not that fast. I want to learn it slowly because, if I learn it fast, it's going to be hard because you try to fit everything in your brain. So I like it slow. (MC-y2-#6-p. 6)

Students, therefore, seemed to have varied opinions as to the necessary and existing pace of instruction. These differences appeared to stem from variations in ability level, learning style, and proficiency with a particular curricular area.

Middle Schools

Theme 1: Curricula Was Prescribed by the State and District

1.a. Adherence to curricular standards varied. Teachers indicated that they were required to adhere to a standardized curricula set forth by the state and district for particular content areas. In some districts, teachers indicated that a curriculum director was responsible for determining curricular expectations. The standardized curricula appeared to be directly correlated with the objectives of the state test. One teacher commented:

> We have to teach the objectives that the curriculum director tells us to teach per semester. For example, in English, she told me to teach objective 5. We have to go in the order that she tells us to go to, the objectives that we are going to concentrate to master the TAAS. So, we can't choose whatever we want. It has to be based on the TAAS. (BLG-y2-#8-p. 1)

Teachers appeared to be given explicit curricular guidelines that they were expected to follow.

Curricular guidelines seemed to take the form of instructional timelines or particular programming objectives in a given content area. In one district, for example, language arts objectives, which were connected to the standardized test, were embedded in a daily language program that each teacher was required to incorporate into their curriculum. One teacher explains this program:

> Well, in English we are required to do what they call the daily oral language, which focuses on TAAS objectives 5, 6, and 7, which are the basic skills that they have to know. We have to do that everyday. We are required to do it. Again, you can't go wild and do whatever you want. There is a format that you have to follow. (BLG-y2-#8-p. 2)

Districts took varying approaches to prescribing standardized curricula that adhered to state testing objectives.

While some teachers appeared to strictly follow curricular standards, others indicated that they used their own intuition in determining which content to teach. One teacher commented:

> After 34 years, I just do what I think the kids need. Changes are coming and some are positive and some are negative. Some of the changes are okay because at least now we all know what we are supposed to be working on. In my class, we will cover all the standards and the kids will be ready, but for me, I do what I think the kids need. (CA, Peary, FN, Moon, #8, p. 3)

Teachers' comfort with deviating from required standards seemed to increase with tenure and vary among districts and schools. To some degree, a teacher's adherence to the curricular guidelines seemed to depend upon perceived consequences of deviance.

1.b. Standardized curricula imposed constraints. The standardized curricula that teachers were required to follow appeared to impose time constraints that seemed to frustrate some teachers. These time constraints appeared to make it challenging for teachers to cover content in depth, or to allow students to pursue areas of interest that were not included in the prescribed instructional timeline. One teacher commented:

> I think that there are times when, especially with gate students, they are interested in something and they want to expand, go over, do more, but we can't because we are [under] time constraints and so because we have to finish a certain section by a certain time because of the curriculum mapping that is set up for us, so it is very frustrating. (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 1)

The predetermined instructional schedule appeared to leave some teachers feeling as though there were time constraints limiting instruction.

The constraints imposed on content by the standardized curricula appeared to preclude in depth study of particular topics or subjects. Some teachers seemed to feel that the curriculum was being narrowed and spread too thin. One teacher said, "There's too many things that we need to cover and not enough time to do it" (BLG-y1-#14-p. 3). Another teacher commented:

> Yes, we did experiments. We did experiments but we had to do, we had to shorten the experiment, you know, take some things out, not really go into, to the depth that I would have liked prior to the experiment as well. You know it's just, everything's fast. It's quick. (BLG-y1-#13-p. 4)

These teachers appeared to feel as though the curriculum moved forward at too fast a pace and that the overall curriculum was spread too thin. The result, they indicated, was that students and teachers were not able to pursue topics to the extent that they would like.

Theme 2: Instructional Methods Varied Among Teachers

2.a. Some teachers used didactic teaching methods. Teachers indicated that, while curricula was prescribed and directed by the district and state, they maintained control over the instructional methods they used in their classrooms. Some teachers seemed to use didactic teaching methods in response to the demands of the standardized curricular guidelines. A classroom observer noted, "They gave them homework examples that were specifically pertaining to [the notes] so it was a very unified focus and clear, but was nonetheless very teacher directed, lecture driven, students take notes" (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 10). Some teachers did not seem to feel that they had the time or flexibility to include project-based learning in their classes, indicating that they felt compelled to use more drill and practice techniques.

Some students agreed with this assessment, indicating that, in many classes, they learned primarily through teacher lectures and note taking. One student commented:

> Our reading class is just like, we walk in the morning, we write what we are supposed to do and everyday is the same agenda. We write the agenda, we write the date, and then we take notes on whatever comparing and contrast, or whatever, and then she goes, "Let me give you a transparency so you can see what to do." She puts the transparency and she goes and sits down. "Are you guys done?" "Yes, we are done." "Well, let me give you another transparency so you can do work." (BLG-y2-#5-p. 8)

An observer commented on the students' perception that their teachers lectured frequently:

> [Students responded in] unanimous agreement that they take notes and that the teachers lecture and they write on the overhead. Even the math teacher that they liked so much and felt that that did such a good job really lectured to the kids, gave them specific notes to take. . . . (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 10)

Both students and teachers seemed to dislike this method of instruction; however, some teachers seemed to feel compelled to use lectures as their primary means of conveying standardized curricula to students.

2.b. Students preferred hands-on instruction. Students seemed to consistently prefer hands-on instructional methods, voicing enthusiasm for projects and interactive activities. An observer noted:

> When asked how they liked to learn, one of the things that they said was that they like to do things with their hands, they like to observe . . . they liked doing projects and that they actually did projects every other week in some of their classes. (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, pp 27-8)

Students provided specific examples of classes in which they were able to engage in hands-on learning. One student commented:

> Our science teacher is amazing. She is cool. We have not needed to actually pick up a book and read through it. She explains it to us, experiments. We have experiments every week . . . . We better understand everything. That's what I like about my teacher, well most about. We do a lot of activities that's helped us better understand everything. (BLG-y2-#5-p. 10)

Students seemed to prefer hands-on activities rather than lecture-based instruction. They consistently commented positively about particular classes where experiments, projects, and other hands-on activities were used.

While students appeared to prefer hands-on learning, it seemed to be present in varying degrees in classrooms. As noted in the previous section, didactic teaching methods sometimes appeared to dominate instruction. One observer commented:

> [The] clear message to me was that the principal acknowledged that little hands-on, student-directed tasks were occurring in classrooms, and her response was to instruct teachers to try to fool the [visiting] team by making the [activity] kits look more used than they actually were. (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, #4, p. 6)

A student commented on their frustration with the focus on lectures and note taking, asserting, "This year we do notes all the time . . . . I need touching and feeling what I am doing . . . ." (BLG-y2-#9-p. 6). Student perceptions about the opportunities for hands-on activities in their classes seemed to vary widely.

One teacher noted the limitations inherent in the standardized curriculum and the required curricular objectives, voicing frustration with their inability to include more projects:

> You're constantly having to drill and working with the objectives. Constantly. And if we had that luxury, you know, giving projects, it would be nice . . . . We can't really do that while we have to work and work on the objectives. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 5)

The degree to which teachers could include hands-on activities appeared to depend in part on the subject being taught. Non-tested subjects, as well as those without standardized curricula, seemed to provide teachers with more flexibility in their instructional practices.

2.c. The relationships between teachers and students varied. Some teachers demonstrated that they maintained a good rapport with students. One observer commented:

> In fact, all of the teachers that I observed and interviewed seem to really like the kids and for the most part all have had a normal tone of voice with them. The teachers also joke and laugh with the students. (CA, Peary, FN, Moon, #8, p. 4)

These teachers seemed to enjoy their positive relationships with the students. Other teachers, however, did not seem to share the same rapport with their students. An observer noted:

> She also didn't seem terribly put off by the fact that the kids didn't like her, just based on reputation and, frankly, I didn't get the sense that she cared too much about establishing personal relationships with kids at all. (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 23)

For one teacher, time constraints imposed by the standardized curricula prevented them from establishing better relationships with students:

> And most of the time I find myself that I don't really get to know them because I'm too busy trying to cover the material. That's one thing that I worry about because I like to get involved with the kids as far as get to know where they're from, get to know what they like, what they don't like. (BLG-y1-#14-p. 4)

The quality and degree of teacher-students relationships seemed to vary widely within and between schools.

Teachers used various reward systems to encourage and motivate student behavior and work. One teacher commented:

> I use humor. I use the "this is just between us kids" and to make them feel like okay, I'm special so only I got this information. No one else will get it. I use reward stickers. I know this is very elementary. Stickers, stamps, and sometimes during holiday season, I might put a candy cane on a paper that was exceptionally good. (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 10)

Another teacher noted the use of games and incentives in class as means of motivating students:

> We come up with incentives, you know, in order for them to do well, so we've got to motivate them that way. One other thing that I try in my classroom, you know when I get a chance, we try learning through games, and they get very excited. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 8)

Teachers appeared to use different reward and incentive systems depending upon their intent and their existing relationships with the students.

Theme 3: Pace and Challenge Varied

3.a. Mixed perceptions of pace and challenge. The pace in some classes was perceived by observers and students as being too slow. These classes also seemed to offer minimal challenges to students. One observer comment following a student focus group noted, ". . . the pace was slow, they often felt bored and under challenged and so those were things that they were all very quick and giggly to describe for us" (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, pp. 9-10). A student commented on the lack of sufficient challenge in their class, stating, "Everything is too easy" (BLG-y2-#9-p. 2). These students seemed to feel that the pace of instruction was slow and tedious, and that the material taught was easy and redundant. These students indicated that they were bored. One student commented, "We want something productive" (BLG-y2-#9-p. 2).

There appeared to be considerable instructional repetition in some classrooms. In some cases, it appeared that teachers covered the same material irrespective of a student's previous exposure to or pre-existing mastery of the content. One observation noted:

> . . . she plunged on through the instruction that she had or was going to deliver, not making any accommodations for the kids that already had it . . . . Kids that acknowledged that they had had it and yet she ignored that and continued on with what it was that she had planned for that day. (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 19)

An observer also noted a student's frustration with repeating material that had already been covered: ". . . the least favorite subject for her was math because actually she had already had it and they just kept on teaching it like she didn't have it. So, that really wasn't very much fun for her" (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 26).

Some teachers commented on the fact that some instruction was highly repetitive, an intentional strategy meant to aid comprehension of the material. One teacher commented, "It's a lot of repetition again, for the next semester, you know, so the kids can comprehend it" (BLG-y1-#13-p. 5). For students, this repetition appeared to be perceived as boring and unnecessarily redundant. One student commented, "We have to do it year after year . . . and repetition, it gets boring because you have to do it over and over again" (BLG-y1-#2-p. 1). Another student complained, ". . . when you taught it, you taught it. Go on, keep on going. But they teach it over and over. We are in the same subject for two weeks" (BLG-y2-#5-p. 12). Student opinions as to the repetitive nature of instruction varied considerably among students, grade levels, and schools.

Some students seemed to feel that the pace of instruction was appropriate. One student had indicated, "[Classes] were smooth. The work was done at what he called a nice speed" (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 8). Some teachers also felt that the pace and challenge of instruction were adequate for students. One teacher commented, "I think the challenge is still there for regular students . . ." (BLG-y1-#13-p. 12). The subject area, grade level, and student ability level appeared to be factors affecting student and teacher opinion of the pace and challenge of instruction.

In some cases, the pace of instruction appeared to be very fast, as the pacing requirements imposed by the standardized curricula demanded that teachers move quickly through material. One teacher commented on the influence of curricular requirements on instructional pace: "In order to cover everything, which is a lot of things, you know you have to, you have to, I have to go faster than I would have if we didn't have TEKS or the TAAS in place" (BLG-y1-#13-p. 4). Another teacher reiterated this view, noting:

> I mean, there's so much material to cover, and you're pressed for time. Like he said, we fly over the material. There's not enough time. There's so much in government, you know, there's so much that you need to cover. And for the students to fully understand a concept you know, you're just, you're pressed, you're pressed for time. I feel pressured. (BLG-y1-#14-p. 4)

The pace of instruction, therefore, appeared to be repetitive and slow in some cases and fast and quickly navigated in other instances.

3.b. Gifted students were sometimes not adequately challenged. Some teachers indicated that gifted students were sometimes taught the same material as other students, despite their demonstrated proficiency with the prescribed content. This seemed to be due at times to the requirement that all teachers follow the same curricular timeline irrespective of the students' proficiency with the content and their ability to move on. One teacher commented:

> You know, the GT teacher has got to follow the timeline also. And, you know, like we said, a GT student can take the test one day, and probably pass the test.

> But she still, you know, she is still expected to follow the timeline. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 7)

Gifted students also commented on the restrictive nature of the required curricular pace. One student noted:

> In history, our GT class is ahead of all the other classes and we often have to do nothing in the class or do the same thing over and over again so we can be at the same level with the other classes. The history teacher told us yesterday, "Well, you are not going to do the first 5 minutes. You are not going to give your opinion. You are not going to do this and this because you are already a day ahead of the other class. You have to wait." Now we are at the same level. We are being kept back for what the other classes don't do. (BLG-y2-#5-p. 13)

The requirements of the standardized curriculum and the corresponding pacing guidelines seemed to be, at times, restrictive for gifted students.

The tracking or grouping of some students also seemed to be a factor in determining instructional content. One teacher noted the diverse academic abilities of students placed in gifted classes. The teacher commented:

> A student who scores a 90 or higher on the TAAS test can be placed in a classroom where you have identified true GT students and that's made it difficult because now you have a combination of students who are truly gifted and talented since day one mixed in with students who have been regular . . . now the teacher is faced with do I continue challenging? Or do I water it down to the middle? And if you challenge it, you won't reach these regular students who are not GT. If you watered it down, then you are not helping those who are truly GT. There are pros and cons to that. I think it does affect the true GT student.

The difficulty in appropriately differentiating instruction appeared to be a frustration for some teachers who felt that they were not adequately meeting the needs of both gifted and non-gifted students.

Theme 4: Testing Pressure Varied

4.a. Teachers varied in perceived testing pressure. Some teachers indicated that they did not feel pressured to have their students perform at a particular level on the standardized test. These teachers indicated that they felt there were inherent limitations on the degree to which they could affect testing results. One teacher commented:

> There [are] a lot of terms thrown out to us about achieving, student achievement, student success, but you know I've been at it long enough that I know you can only do what you can do with the kids that you have that year, and you can do the very best job and do the same job you did last year, you feel, but some years you are going to have better results than [other] years. (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 3)

Teachers with longer tenure seemed to be more confident that their jobs were not in jeopardy as a result of the tests, and less concerned with the consequences of their students' performance. One teacher stated, "After 34 years, it's just the way it is" (CA, Peary, FN, Moon, #8, p. 4). These teachers did not seem to feel threatened or overly pressured to focus on state test performance.

Other teachers, however, seemed to feel highly pressured to have their students perform well on the state tests. One teacher stated, "In math, I feel the pressure of the TAAS tests from day one. Especially since I'm told that I have the GT students, or I'm teaching pre-AP/GT that they should pass the TAAS test" (BLG-y1-#12-p. 3). Another teacher commented on the general sense of pressure related to test performance: "I think that there is a tremendous amount of pressure, especially in the areas that are tested" (BLG-y2-#8-p. 1).

The teachers seemed to feel a sense of accountability related to their students' performance on the state tests. The teachers, in some cases, appeared to transfer this accountability into a sense of responsibility for their students' test scores. One teacher commented on the pressure associated with this accountability: "Because it's accountability for the teachers, and they want to make sure that they do well. And there's a lot of pressure for teachers and, you know, they get reminded of it all the time" (BLG-y1-#9-p. 1).

Some teachers spoke of the continual reminders they were given to focus on testing and test preparation. In some cases, this focus took the form of the curricular timeline, which was correlated with the state test: "We have to follow the timeline, that is what guides us to cover the TAAS, the test material. We are constantly reminded to focus on the test, focus on the TAAS. It is a lot of pressure" (BLG-y2-#8-p. 1). A principal noted the pressure they felt to ensure that the teachers were adhering to the standards in their classrooms to adequately prepare students for the test:

> The pressure that I feel from the state tests is to deal with making sure that teachers teach to the standards and that there are students that know what the standards are and know what a good piece of work looks like. And this is a requirement and this is what I look for in the classroom and I feel the pressure of it if it is not happening. (CA, Peary, PI, Andrews, #3, p. 1)

Pressure, therefore, appeared to sometimes be conveyed through the standardized curricula and instructional timelines.

Some teachers seemed to feel that there was a general sense of pressure, emanating from the state or district level, which resulted in pressure being exerted to increase student test scores. One teacher commented:

> . . . but there is pressure and I think that it is coming from on high because administrators . . . [are] put under pressure and it is a trickle down effect, but hopefully you try to keep the kids away from feeling too much pressure, but I do

> catch myself saying things like, "I think this will be important on the Stan 9." (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 3)

Another teacher noted the emphasis placed on individual student performance and gains made in test score results: ". . . you are constantly reminded that your students are here, they need to be here. Why isn't the student here? It's just that pressure alone when you don't perform. I think we all agree it's very, very stressful" (BLG-y2-#8-p. 6). This sense of direct and overt pressure seemed to vary between the two states included in this analysis to some degree and it varied specifically among the teachers. Those teachers with less tenure and who taught tested courses appeared to feel more explicit testing-related pressure and stress.

Some teachers indicated that state test scores were published in local or regional newspapers. This, they expressed, made them feel scrutinized and pressured to increase student test scores. In some cases, the publication of scores appeared to be discouraging to teachers. One teacher noted:

> Being published in the newspaper makes the teachers feel almost like gosh, we worked so hard and we didn't reach it this year, and the following year the same thing happens. You read the paper. You hear the news. It's difficult. (BLG-y2-#8-p. 5)

These teachers did not seem to feel that this public assessment was based on limited information and was unfairly levied. One teacher commented:

> I think the media, the newspaper, and television, also don't help matters because all they do is announce or write this campus is recognized, this campus is exemplary, but there are so many factors involved with being a recognized campus but they don't publish that . . . . I think that the media does not help in that because they don't give you the full picture. The true picture is how many were exempt, how many were tested, what are the populations. (BLG-y2-#8-p. 5)

For some teachers, therefore, the publication of state test scores made them feel highly scrutinized and frustrated by the conclusions drawn by the media based on limited information.

4.b. Students varied in perceived testing pressure. Some students indicated that they did not feel pressure or stress related to the state tests. Some students seemed comfortable in taking the test and confident in their ability to do well. An observer commented:

> They really didn't seem to be freaked out about it. Kids take some tests or some subject area tests that are state mandated every single year beginning in first grade, so this didn't really seem to be anything that phased them. (CA, Peary, FN, Brighton, Moon, #1, p. 27)

These students, therefore, were not concerned about test scores or their performance on state mandated tests.

Some students seemed to feel that the state tests were boring and a waste of their time. These students also indicated that they did not experience pressure or stress related to the test, but were frustrated by the test's lack of challenge. One student commented:

> Well, it is minimum skills for us . . . but you need to raise the expectations because for a lot of kids it is like it's super easy and that's why a lot of kids do poorly on it, because it's like whatever. So I think that the expectations need to go up. (BLG-y2-#5-p. 2)

These students also seemed to feel as though the state tests were a waste of their time and they failed to see the purpose of the testing. One student stated, "I think it's a waste of time . . . boring and pointless" (BLG-y1-#2-p. 1). Another student commented, "They don't tell us why it is so important that we do so well. They don't tell us why. They don't give us a reason. They just tell us, 'you want to get good grades on the TAAS.' But why?" (BLG-y2-#5-p. 3) The students who felt that the test was easy or that it lacked purpose seemed to be those who were confident in their test-taking performance.

Some students, however, did seem to feel considerable stress and pressure related to the state test. One teacher commented on this stress felt by students: "And I think the kids feel stressed out with this, you know. They feel that there was too much emphasis placed on this particular test" (BLG-y1-#10-p. 1). Another teacher commented on the stress caused by the state test:

> So, you know, they do very well in class, but come test time, they freak out on it that they don't do well. And so I think it scares them when it starts approaching, when it gets closer and closer. (BLG-y1-#13-p. 3)

Some teachers commented on the physical effects that testing stress had on some students. One teacher spoke of a student who got sick during testing:

> I had a student last year that I had to allow him to go to the restroom several times to throw up. He was very nervous. He said, "I can't do this, I just can't do it." He goes, "I can't." So I had to put him aside. (BLG-y1-#13-p. 2)

Some teachers seemed to perceive strong, negative effects related to the testing stress experienced by some students.

Some students commented on the pressure teachers placed on them to perform well on the state tests. One student noted the accountability placed on teachers for their students to do well on the tests: "[The teachers] ride on us even more because if we don't do the recommended scores or better, they get a bad reputation because they are bad teachers or they are not teaching us; they bring it on us" (BLG-y1-#2-p. 1). A teacher commented on this trickle-down dynamic, where pressure filters down to the students:

"It's a domino effect, starting with the top administrators going down to the principals and assistants to the teachers and to the kids" (BLG-y2-#8-p. 5). While some students seemed to feel that teachers focused heavily on test performance, others indicated that tests were not emphasized nor were they a source of stress.

Gifted students appeared, at times, to be placed under particular pressure to perform well on the tests. This seemed to be due in part to the expectation that higher scores from gifted students could make up for lower scores from other students. One teacher commented, "And there's a lot of stress on our GT kids having to bring up the scores of the regulars" (BLG-y1-#13-p. 6). Despite this pressure, however, some gifted students appeared to be eager to take the test, as test scores helped determine gifted track placement. One teacher commented:

> . . . well, you have to look at that is what put them in the GATE program, the test. So, they are all gung ho for the test because they see some rewards there. They know that is something that is going to keep them there. But the rest of the kids, to me, are apathetic about it. (PMS, y2, #2, p. 4)

For some students, therefore, the state test held potential rewards in gifted track placement.

Theme 5: Positive and Negative Aspects of State Testing Were Described

5.a. Positive aspects of state testing included measuring student growth. Some teachers seemed to feel that the state tests helped provide them with a good measure of student growth. One teacher commented:

> There are benefits. We get to see our students, if they've grown. You know, where they're learning. They come in, we test them, a benchmark, so we know which objectives to work on, we know the weakness and which are the strong objectives. So there are benefits. At the end of the year, you know, you also see the growth. It helps in placing the child. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 1)

Another teacher stated, ". . . the TAAS is a way of measuring what the child learned. Okay, that's a plus" (BLG-y1-#13-p. 2). Some teachers seemed to appreciate the information provided by state test results that helped them to monitor student progress throughout the year.

One principal noted the usefulness of state testing in clarifying expectations for student achievement. The principal commented, "One of the things that I think that state testing affects on a school, it makes them more cognizant of the requirements for students to achieve" (CA, Peary, PI, Andrews, #3, p. 1). The test, therefore, appeared to help some teachers and schools understand how to measure student achievement, and to provide useful information for monitoring student progress.

5.b. Perceptions of negative aspects of state testing varied. Some teachers seemed to feel that the state mandated test led to a heightened focus on those courses that were tested. One consequence of this focus was a restriction on what could be taught in tested courses, while non-tested courses offered greater flexibility for instruction. One teacher commented:

> For me, because science isn't tested, I can spend a little bit more time taking from their interest and building on that, but I can't do that in math because that is being tested. So, for the math I've got to keep going. (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 3)

Another teacher commented on the emphasis on reading and math both on the state test and in the classroom: "Yes, it's more reading and math. And that's the way, I guess that's the way it's been. It's because of the TAAS, again, because they're testing reading, math, so we need to focus on reading and math" (BLG-y1-#10-p. 6).

There was some concern that the strict emphasis on tested courses and material resulted in a lowering of academic standards and a narrowing of the curriculum. One teacher stated:

> . . . it's like you only focus, you only teach those 6 reading objectives that are part of the TAAS, not so much on what the state requires of sixth grade. So it's very narrow. The students are being tested over minimum skills, but there is so much more out there. (BLG-y2-#8-p. 1)

Another teacher comment reflected the concern that the state test assessed minimum rather than optimal skills:

> And the problem is, the TAAS is minimum standards. That, you know, it's pushed so hard, and the reality is, it's the minimum what they should be able to do. And we're always pushing just to get them to pass the minimum, and if we were allowed to, or given the proper materials, we wouldn't be worrying about a minimum. Everybody would get a minimum. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 2)

Some teachers, therefore, were concerned that the emphasis on the state test limited what students learned by narrowing and minimizing curricular objectives.

Some teachers also expressed their belief that the amount of time required by the state test and the standardized curriculum prevented the inclusion of hands-on activities and creative projects in the curriculum. One teacher commented: "Too time consuming. There's too much emphasis on the TAAS. Therefore, we're not able to really, like, do, you know, creative projects because there's just too much emphasis on the TAAS and too much focus on the TAAS" (BLG-y1-#10-p. 1). Another teacher complained, "And I don't think it's right to focus on TAAS. It's taking away from the creativity of the students" (BLG-y1-#13-p. 1). In some cases, the emphasis on the skills that were tested seemed to force some teachers to omit experiments and projects. One teacher stated:

> Instead of going and doing all these other interesting and fun activities, I tend to focus more on the skills that the test is asking of our students. Instead of experimenting as I said, doing fun things, I am more worried to make sure that the skills they are being tested on since we are also accountable, that I stick to that so sometimes, I found myself teaching to the TAAS. (BLG-y2-#7-p. 2)

Another teacher comment reflected a sense of obligation to focus primarily on the tested objectives and to steer away from tangential activities:

> . . . we can't be creative as teachers because we have to make sure that our objectives have been met. We feel guilty if we go off and something that may be enjoyable for their learning because we have to be so focused on the objectives. (BLG-y2-#8-p. 3)

Some teachers, therefore, seemed to feel that they focused classroom instruction primarily on tested material and objectives, sometimes at the expense of creative and interactive activities, or material that was not related to the state test.

Some teachers also seemed to feel that there was too much emphasis on the results of the state tests. This test, they asserted, was overemphasized and was not, in itself, a good enough measure of student progress. One teacher stated:

> You know, there's just too much emphasis on this one test. They have to vary it, give different types of tests . . . . I just feel that there should be other types of tests administered to students to show their real capabilities, not one test. (BLG-y1-#12-p. 5)

Some teachers seemed to feel that there were better measures of student growth than the state test. They argued for a more varied set of assessments from which to evaluate student progress.

Some teachers were concerned that the state tests posed unique disadvantages for bilingual students. In some cases, teachers seemed to feel that test was assessing a student's proficiency with language rather than the content area of the test itself. One teacher commented:

> I think it's unfair to them because like some students that are recent immigrants, whether they come from Mexico or anywhere, they have, some of them have tremendous abilities in math, but if they can't read the story problem . . . then they're not gonna pass the test. And it does not mean that they don't know how to do the work. It just means they're lacking in the language. (BLG-y1-#12-p. 7)

Another teacher comment reflected this concern over language barriers raised by the test: "The ESL students, some of them also have language barriers, so they are again faced with a language barrier . . . . It is not that their intelligence is not there. Their intelligence is there, it's their language . . ." (BLG-y2-#8-p. 7). One teacher also

discussed the different learning styles of some bilingual students. The teacher noted that some bilingual students were more capable of responding physically rather than verbally:

> The bilingual kids need more hands-on and more physical response, but you know, where on the TAAS is there an area for physical response? You know, and because their language skills aren't there, a lot of them do respond physically, but TAAS is all verbal. So we have to drill them and train them to answer that way when they're not ready with their language. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 3)

Some teachers, therefore, were concerned that bilingual students were at a disadvantage in taking the state test, since performance could be dependent upon language skills.

Theme 6: Test Preparation Varied

6.a. Some teachers place minimal emphasis on test preparation. The amount of time and focus spent on preparing for the state tests varied widely. Some teachers indicated that they did little "cramming" for the test, choosing to conduct moderate review for the test throughout the year. One teacher noted how they reviewed some basic test-taking skills; however, they chose not to overemphasize the test to reduce the testing stress placed on students:

> Well, I think I go over with the kids things like how to bubble in, make sure you cover things . . . . I do give review a little bit before but not intensive review. It is kind of sporadic because I don't want them to think that this test is the end to all . . . especially if maybe they had a bad day and they bomb out, it is not good for them. (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 2)

The teachers who did not seem to feel a great deal of pressure for test performance also seemed to de-emphasize test preparation.

6.b. Some teachers focused on test preparation throughout the year. Other teachers, however, indicated that they focused on test preparation throughout the year until the test administration. One teacher commented, "Honestly speaking, we start [test preparation] from day one" (BLG-y1-#10-p. 4). Another teacher noted the daily review for the test: "We have a TAAS practice question at the beginning of each period" (BLG-y1-#13-p. 8). The teachers who appeared to be most highly concerned about the consequences of test results appeared to be those most focused on test preparation.

Preparation for the tests appeared to often be centered around test-taking strategies. Some teachers indicated that they formatted assessments throughout the year to resemble the state tests as a means of making the students more familiar with the test. One teacher commented:

> We have to format it to match the TAAS, so when the kids do actually take the TAAS, they're not shocked by the test format. Whereas we might prefer essay questions, or fill in the blank kinds of things, and the TAAS is just multiple

> choice, bubble it in. So a lot of our tests are like that, so they're formatted alike. (BLG-y1-#10-p. 7)

Another teacher comment reflected the emphasis on formatting other tests and materials to resemble the state test: "The materials are pretty much formatted and what they see and what we do is a lot of TAAS formatted material" (BLG-y2-#7-p. 3).

Some teachers indicated that their focus on test preparation abruptly ended after the test administration. A teacher stated:

> So we're always on them, always drilling the objectives and skills. So it's really, like you said, it starts from day one till the day they take the test. And after that, they get to relax. And I think they know that, you know, it's their relaxing time right now. They get to relax because they worked so hard from the first day of school till April 24 . . . . (BLG-y1-#10-p. 4)

After the test administration, teachers indicated that that were able to expand upon concepts and cover material that could not be included during test preparation. A teacher commented on teaching after the state test:

> After TAAS, I'm able to do more activities to where they can understand concepts a lot easier than just ok, this is what you have to know for the test and that's it. You know, I'm able to do, I'm able to expand on what it is we have to know and they understand . . . . If it had been for the TAAS test, it would have had to have been, ok, here's how you do it, that's it. Learn. (BLG-y1-#12-p. 4)

Some teachers seemed to feel that preparation for the state test dominated instruction prior to the test, whereas instruction after the test was more flexible and could be more inclusive of material and activities omitted earlier in the year.

High Schools

Theme 1: Students and Teachers Experienced Varied Degrees of Test-related Stress

1.a. Students experienced testing stress. Students appeared to experience anxiety and stress associated with the preparation for and administration of the state tests. This stress seemed to emanate from varying sources. One student commented, "I think that the TAAS test really stresses out the very people that are going to have to struggle with it" (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 6). A teacher also commented on this general exertion of test-related pressure on students: "And [the parents are] putting a lot of pressure on those kids. The teachers are putting a lot of pressure on the kids . . . . And I think that's too much pressure on the kids . . ." (TX-EcHS).

Students indicated that they felt a great deal of pressure to pass the state tests. One student commented on this pressure: "They put a lot of pressure on you, like you need to study and if you don't, you are going to be here one more year. And that gets you

like, they tell you that constantly. Study, study, study. Too much" (TX-EdHS-y1-#2-p. 6). Another student noted the anxiety that accompanied test taking: "You start getting nervous if you get one wrong" (CA-GHS-#1-p. 8). Students seemed to feel a general pressure to perform well on state tests.

For some students, the stakes associated with the state tests led them to fear not graduating high school if they did not pass the test. A student noted, "Because then you don't graduate. [You've] got to pass" (TX-EdHS-y1-#2-p. 6). Some students seemed frustrated by the graduation-related stakes of the test. One student commented, "I mean, we just study and study all 4 years and then they're not passing the TAAS and don't graduate. What's the point of you like studying?" (TX-EdHS-y1-#2-p. 3). Another student echoed this frustration: "Like you are already going to finish high school. What's the point of like giving you something else that it's just going to make you feel like you can't do it?" (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 5).

Not all students appeared to associate the state tests with stress and pressure. Some students seemed comfortable with the stakes associated with the tests, while others were comfortable knowing they could retake the test if they failed. One student commented on this option: "As a sophomore, you take and, if you fail it, you can take it in the summer. After that, you can take it when the sophomores do and the summer" (TX-EdHS-y2-#3-p. 4). These students did not seem to feel the same degree of pressure to pass the state test expressed by other students.

While some students appeared to dislike the pressure and stakes associated with the state tests, some teachers voiced support for the higher standards and expectations that accompanied the tests and curricular standards. One teacher commented:

> I support the whole idea of standardized testing. I think it's a good idea. And I hope the barometer keeps on getting raised. Anything that would help the students academically is a good thing. And I think it does more good than bad. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 23)

These teachers seemed to emphasize the positive role higher expectations played in academic performance.

1.b. Some students experienced negative effects from test results. Some students indicated that the pressures associated with state tests led to demoralizing experiences for those students who did not perform well. One student described the difficult situation faced by students who failed the test:

> And it's very demoralizing and a lot of them just show up to take the TAAS. I mean, they have already completed all credits, everything for graduation, and the only thing they're lacking is the TAAS. And it's really sad. (TX-EcHS-y1-#3-p. 3)

Some students indicated that failing the test was embarrassing and left those students who did poorly feeling isolated and stigmatized. A student noted the disappointment felt

when poor test results were received: "When you see the scores you say, 'oh my god, I thought I was good at this subject.' And then you see your scores" (CA-GHS-#1-p. 8).

For some students, the pressure associated with state tests appeared to lead to withdrawal from school. This seemed to be particularly true for those students who did not perform well on the tests despite repeated efforts. A student described the process that led some students to skip school:

> . . . like some kids, like, you get something if you do good in the beginning, but then like they don't pass it by a little bit and then they get too much pressure put on their back and they give up. They're like, 'I'm not going to do it anymore.' And that's when they start skipping and taking off from school. (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 9)

For some students, therefore, the pressures associated with test performance led to withdrawal and disengagement from school.

Some students appeared to suffer from stress-related illnesses resulting from high-stakes state tests. A teacher commented, "These kids are getting so much stress, they're beginning to [get] diseases of the reflux, and all this acid, and illnesses" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 14). Another teacher reiterated concern for students' stress-related symptoms: "Yeah, stress related illnesses, and [we] see them in these kids already at the age of 13-, 14-, 16-years-old. Stressed out" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 14). The extent to which students experience stress-related illnesses resulting from state tests is not clear. Only a few teachers discussed these concerns.

1.c. Pressures felt from the testing environment and parents. Some students indicated that their classroom environment during state testing was exceedingly tense. The tension they appeared to sense in the room exacerbated the stress associated with the state test. One student commented, "And it just makes it even worse, the tension. Tension is like you drop a pen, and it's 'shh' . . . . So the tension was really bad and that made it even worse" (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 27). The tension present in the classroom testing environment appeared to vary by classroom and by school.

Students did not indicate that there was test-related pressure placed on them by their parents. For some students, this appeared to be a result of their confidence in their ability to pass the state tests. One student commented:

> . . . but usually I was like, "Oh yeah, mom, I have TAAS this morning." "Oh, you do?" "Yeah." "Well, good luck." And it's not important anymore 'cause it's just a given you're going to pass. You're going to get academic recognition and it's expected. It's not a big thing anymore. Most of the time I don't even realize like they are there. I forget. (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 7)

Another student reiterated the confidence their parents had that they would perform well on the test: "My mother doesn't really tell me, you know, you need to pass the TAAS because she knows that I will and it's no big deal for me . . ." (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 7). For

some students, therefore, parents appeared to be supportive of their successful efforts with respect to the test. There was no indication that other students experienced less parental support or greater parental pressure related to the state tests.

1.d. Teachers experienced testing pressure. Some teachers indicated that they felt pressure and anxiety related to the state tests. This pressure appeared to be escalating for some teachers, reflected in the following comment: "Teachers are no longer teaching. They are not loving the classroom. They are not loving the children. It is so much" (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 13). For some teachers, the pressure did not appear to be targeted at specific teachers, but was felt more as a general pressure throughout the school to improve student test performance. A teacher noted,

> Well, there's a school-wide kind of pressure . . . there has been a push to get the scores up. But there hasn't been a lot of, like, singling out a specific teacher or departments- as far as I know. I know it's just like, "hey, we need to get these test scores up . . . ." (CA-GHS-#6-p. 4)

For some teachers, test-related pressure seemed to become more intense as testing time neared. One teacher commented:

> . . . you do get pressure and you speed up and you, they sense it. And we're all in a real high pitch, I think, when March came TAAS. We were all like, and even I didn't even teach TAAS kids, and everybody was at a level of pitched frenzy. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 15)

The general pressure to improve test scores, therefore, appeared to be present for some teachers in the school climate.

For some teachers, the pressure related to high-stakes testing seemed to cause a nervousness concerning student test performance. One teacher commented on this dynamic: "I feel nervous. I'm nervous that they are not going to pass the test" (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 6). The pressure teachers seemed to feel with respect to student test performance appeared to be exacerbated by their perceived limitations on their ability to affect test scores. A teacher commented, "It's a lot of pressure, and you can't do anything. You can just teach. But if the child is not responding in the actual test, but I told them, 'I am nervous of you not doing well'" (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 6). Some teachers, therefore, seemed to feel concerned over how their students would perform on the state tests, and stymied in their ability to affect positive change in test results.

Some teachers seemed to believe that the pressure exerted on schools related to high-stakes test performance trickled down from administrators, through teachers, to the students. One teacher commented:

> I think they are just passing it down. The administrators are trying to do their jobs and they are going to pass it on to the classroom teacher, the classroom teacher to the student, and there is where it stops. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 13)

This directed pressure that flowed from the administration seemed to be particularly poignant in tested areas, reflected in the following statement:

> The negative impact I see of the TAAS is [that] there is, I think, undue pressure on those who are in the subject areas specifically addressed to TAAS. A lot of pressure that the kids need to pass or it reflects on you. And I think that's too much pressure for teachers. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 3)

Pressure, therefore, appears in some cases to be focused on teachers and students in tested subject areas.

For some teachers, the students' performance on the state tests appeared to serve as a judgment of their teaching competence. These teachers indicated that they experienced test-related stress due to the evaluation of their own performance brought on by student test scores. One teacher noted, ". . . so to me it is stressful when you have a test hanging over you and you have really to look at your performance, how your kids do. To me, it's a lot of stress and I think it is getting worse every year . . ." (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 1).

Some teachers indicated that, irrespective of external testing pressure, they placed the pressure on themselves to have strong student test scores. One teacher commented:

> . . . They are not really putting pressure on us, but I am putting pressure on myself because I know when these kids come in and take the test in 2 years- that new one- and if they don't succeed, they are going to come back to me: "Hey, you didn't do your job when you had them in Algebra I . . . ." (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 1)

Another teacher comment reiterates the responsibility and guilt some teachers seemed to feel if students did not do well on the tests:

> Because what happens is like they get the scores and, you know, whether they are trying to be positive, they'll ask, "Who is the teacher? Who is his teacher? Who is her teacher?" You feel bad because, if your students didn't pass and you were the teacher, it makes you feel like it was your fault they didn't pass. Because they do want to know who their teacher was. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 6)

Some teachers, therefore, deemed the state test results a measure of their teaching effectiveness.

In some cases, job security was perceived to be tied to state test performance or to teachers' cooperation with testing initiatives. One teacher discussed the pressures placed on principals and teachers connecting their jobs to performance:

> . . . when jobs are on the line for a principal, which they are for TAAS. If they don't pass, we do not pass the TAAS, the principals often times are canned. When a teacher can lose a position or not be given a position because they're

> opposed to it. And I've heard stories where people say like, "I said something about TAAS that they didn't like, and I didn't get a promotion or whatever." It's a lot of pressure on us. (TX-EcHS-y1-#3-p. 2)

Pressures from state test scores on job security did not, however, appear to be a common issue.

Some teachers noted the emphasis placed on school recognition by the district or state. This recognition was earned by overall school test performance, and appeared to be considered a mark of prestige by some teachers. One teacher commented on the prestige associated with test-related school labels:

> I think it's also pressure on the school district itself because the state of Texas gives every school in Texas a report card and you can be a recognized school, or so it's a certain kind of prestigious thing to be recognized or whatever, and they print all the schools in the newspaper. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 12)

Some teachers seemed concerned that the focus of the schools' efforts was on the state-issued report card or label rather than on student learning.

> . . . what is happening in schools is this sense where schools are trying to do good just to get a title of recognized or exemplary. And it seems like principals are very adamant about achieving that status. And I think that's unfortunate when our view is for a title for a school to boost our egos. And our view, our emphasis, has shifted from making ourselves look good from when we should be focused on teaching kids and that should be our goal. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 7)

Evaluations of overall school performance, issued through state or district report cards, therefore, appeared to exert additional pressure on some teachers.

Theme 2: The Effect of State Tests on Curricula Varied

2.a. Curricula was not always correlated with the tests. Some students appeared to believe that the curricula and the state test were not adequately correlated. This seemed to be frustrating for them, as they were tested on material they did not feel they were taught. One student commented, "Also the other thing with TAAS is you study and study and study one thing, but then you find out that on TAAS it's a totally different thing . . ." (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 6). Some students, therefore, did not think they were adequately prepared for the state tests.

Some students attributed lower test scores to the lack of connectivity between what they learned and what was tested. A student noted this effect:

> Well, it is hard because mostly what is on the Stanford 9 we haven't learned yet. We haven't gone over it. What we have gone over throughout the school year is

> not on the Stanford 9, and that is a problem. That is how we sometimes get low scores, because we don't know the stuff that is on it. (CA-GHS-#1-p. 7)

Another student reiterated this concern, stating, ". . . I had scored average on the Stanford 9 because I didn't know like half the stuff on the test. It's like they are testing you on some things that you don't learn" (CA-GHS-#4-p. 16).

2.b. The depth of content varied. Some students indicated that teachers went into great depth in exploring curricular areas. One student stated, "And he explains things a lot, like thoroughly. Like he goes down deep, deep, deep" (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 14). The degree to which teachers covered curricula in depth seemed to vary widely.

Some teachers indicated that it was challenging to cover material in depth given the curricular demands requiring that a great deal of content be covered during the school year. Teachers seemed to feel time constraints that sometimes precluded going in depth with a topic. A teacher commented on this, stating:

> Mainly, I'm trying to make them catch up, but I don't have time to go very deeply into what they are going to be covering right now. We have the benchmarks coming up and we are going to have graphing in there and we have little time to cover it . . . . (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 3)

Some teachers seemed to feel as though they were moving on from topics before they were able to adequately teach the material and concepts. One teacher noted:

> Yes, so it's, we don't have the time that we need to teach them properly. It's like right when you are getting in the middle of everything, the activities, you are setting the things up and it is time to pick them up. (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 8)

Curricular pacing demands, therefore, appeared to hinder some teachers' ability to cover content in depth.

2.c. Curriculum watered down. Some teachers seemed to feel that the emphasis on state testing had the effect of watering down the curriculum. One teacher commented, "Curriculum has been watered down because, for the most part, we teach it, because there is so much emphasis on TAAS" (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 1). The required curricular standards also appeared to leave some teachers frustrated with their perception that the curriculum had been watered down. A teacher noted, "The state standards, which are good, but I think they've been narrowed to the point where it's just watered down everywhere" (CA-GHS-#6-p. 11). The emphasis on prescribed curricular standards and high-stakes testing, therefore, appeared to make some curricula seem watered down.

2.d. Curricula was challenging at times. Some students indicated that they enjoyed challenging courses and material. One student commented, "And I always like that and I like a challenge and I do foresee that we do get the challenge sometimes in high school" (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 2). While some students appeared to feel challenged regularly

in class, others indicated that the level of challenge varied, summarized by the following statement: "I think some classes are more challenging than others . . . . It really depends on the classes that you are taking" (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 3). Another student comment echoes this view: "So what I have to bring might not be the same thing as everybody else, and in some of my classes, I don't feel like I'm challenged and in others I do" (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 3). The level of challenge present in classes, therefore, appeared to vary.

Theme 3: Instructional Practices Were Affected in Varying Ways by State Tests

3.a. Instruction was at times heavily test-related. Classroom instruction appeared at times to be tightly correlated with the state mandated curricula and the state test. An observer noted the emphasis on the state test throughout classrooms on the observation day: "We enter the class already in progress (as per our schedule) and find that the mandated Stanford 9 testing prevails in this class period as well" (CA-GHS-#5-p. 12). The emphasis on the state tests during class instruction did appear to vary; however, some students seemed concerned that the state test dominated instruction, as reflected in the following student comment: ". . . that's all we do all day, just TAAS and TAAS and TAAS" (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 7).

While tested courses appeared to focus particularly on tested material, some non-tested courses also seemed to focus on test material and skills. One teacher commented:

> My subject is computers, and even though we're not related directly to the TAAS testing, we're still required, all subject areas are required, to do some sort of work towards improving the TAAS scores, either reading, writing, math, or anything we can help them with. We're still responsible for it. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 1)

Teachers also indicated that they worked on skills or content areas in all subjects that could be useful in improving state test scores. These teachers voiced a sense of shared responsibility for testing results, and for a team effort in instructing students to better test performance. A teacher noted, "We do that in Spanish. We do whatever needs to be done for improvement for the TAAS testing" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 2).

Some teachers voiced support for the emphasis placed on state testing in classroom instruction. One teacher noted the benefits they felt the test had on students' ability to write:

> I support the TAAS because, mostly because it teaches, it forces kids to learn how to write, which I believe is a skill just like reading and talking and walking. I think a human should know how to express themselves through words. And that's something a lot of kids were not learning when they were graduating as adults . . . . And that's why I support the TAAS, because you can't graduate without learning how to write. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 1)

Some teachers, therefore, indicated that the focus on test-related skills in instruction led to the growth of important life skills.

Other teachers seemed to support the way in which the emphasis on the state test standardized instruction. One teacher commented:

> I think standardized testing is good. I mean some people don't. But at least it's some way across the board of testing that we're teaching the same things. That you know one child in Brownsville is getting the same thing as the kid up in Slayton, you know, north Texas or whatever. (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 7)

Teachers' opinions with respect to the standardization of instruction resulting from the state tests appeared to vary.

3.b. Instruction based on student interests and using group work. Some teachers indicated that they used instructional strategies to connect the material to areas of student interest to foster student engagement in what they were learning. One teacher commented, "You have to sometimes relate it to what they are interested in . . . . They enjoy getting up there, and talking about that. So I think you have to relate it in some way to what's going on around them in their world" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 11). Another teacher comment reiterates this emphasis on student interest-derived instruction: "And they just get up there and have fun with it. But they're writing on something that they like, you know, that they would like to have" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 11). The degree to which teachers focused on instructional means to draw on student interests in the classroom is not clear. Only some teachers noted this effort in their instruction.

Some teachers discussed using group work activities as a means of making students more comfortable in the learning process. One teacher stated:

> . . . they are more comfortable with each other not having to go there in their first speech by themselves and feel like it's them against the room. So with partners, it's a lot easier. They feel more confident and when they get up there and they have to do a solo speech, they know everybody in the room. (TX-EdHS-y2-#4-p. 2)

Group based activities appeared to elicit mixed opinions from students. One student asserted their support for group work:

> I used to not like group work, not at the beginning of my high school career. But at this point, it's like I relish group work and that it's another chance to expose me to more people, to more groups and to more ideas, and even though it might be hard in that some people don't want to do as much work . . . . So, I like group work and that you can learn so much more about yourself as well as other people. (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 4)

Some other students, however, did not seem to like group work, as reflected in the statement, "I hate group learning" (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 4).

3.c. Tests may have emphasized minimum skills. Some teachers indicated that they focused on basic or minimum skills in the classroom in preparation for the state tests. One teacher commented, "We focus on the minimum skills so that they can get through it. Rather than teaching what they need to get the most" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 1). Some teachers were concerned that this emphasis on minimum skills left student without diversified abilities in areas such as writing. One teacher expressed this concern:

> . . . the kids that I have that have been regimented through TAAS, they come out with one formula of writing. I mean, it's like the 3 paragraphs and they're, it's all persuasive. It's all persuasive. That's all they can write. So when I ask them to write something else, you know, they fall apart and they go, like, is it like the TAAS? . . . And that concerns me because we're not teaching them how to write and how to write creatively. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 5)

It appeared, therefore, that the focus on the state test in instruction sometimes led to an emphasis on minimum academic skills.

Some teachers indicated that the de-skilling of the state tests left students without adequate skills. The teachers noted that, despite the fact that the students passed the state test, they did not consider them to truly be proficient in particular academic areas. One teacher commented, "And I'll see how atrocious their writing is. And they've all passed the TAAS . . . . So we have kids that are graduating from high school, with that golden TAAS halo around them. They cannot write" (TX-EcHS-#1-p. 9). There sometimes appeared to be some degree of difference, therefore, between testing standards and those held by teachers.

Some teachers seemed to feel that lower test-related standards measured middle school knowledge at the high school level. One teacher commented:

> It's not a high school test. It's really like an eighth grade skills test, stuff that they should know. And it doesn't really test the kids, you know, those that are going on to college, they really won't be ready if they just take the test. (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 1)

Some teachers, therefore, questioned the rigor of the state tests at the high school level and the instruction that correlated with the test.

3.d. Instruction was sometimes redundant. Some students complained that the instruction they received in class was redundant. One student commented, "It's like a routine almost. Everyday is the same" (TX-EdHS-y1-#2-p. 9). Another student expressed frustration with the amount that teachers talked during class time, commenting, "They do a lot of talking, talking, talking, and it gets boring" (TX-EdHS-y1-#2-p. 9). For some teachers, however, repetition was an important means of teaching fundamental skills required on the test that had not been properly learned in past years. One teacher noted, "Yes, because you have to go back and re-teach the kids stuff that they should have learned in the years past . . . they don't know how to do half of the stuff that they

need to do by the time they get to us in the first place" (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 12). While some students seemed frustrated by the degree of repetition and didactic instruction in class, some teachers indicated that this repetition was necessary to adequately prepare students for the state test.

Theme 4: Emphasis on Test Preparation Varied

4.a. General focus on test preparation by teachers. Both teachers and students indicated that instruction focused on test preparation for varying amounts of time throughout the year. One student noted, "They prepare us to pass the TAAS" (TX-EdHS-y2-#3-p. 4). A teacher also pointed to the emphasis on test preparation in class, stating, "I do align the curriculum and still prep them for the TAAS. And it's something. I guess I am just so used to doing it, I really don't even notice it . . ." (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 11). Teachers and students consistently emphasized that test preparation was the focus of instruction for at least some part of the school year.

For some teachers, test preparation appeared to be a regular activity in class, with emphasis on the state test beginning early in the school year. One teacher commented:

> I think the TAAS test is very stressful for the teachers and the students. You know we have to like, I start very early in the year because they get tested in February, and I start in like October, November, December, and then all of January. I mean, I don't do it every single day, but I have the regular students and they need to have it, like, they need to practice TAAS strategies like at least three times a week and I just think it's very stressful, you know, that we have to make sure it's, you know, in our lesson plans" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 1).

Other teachers also described the regularity with which they focused on test preparation in class. One teacher stated, "You just 2 days a week now you're doing TAAS" (TX-EcHS-y1-#3-p. 5).

For some teachers, test preparation appeared to be a daily, year-round practice, rather than just a targeted focus on preparing for the state test. One teacher commented, "In my AP English class, every morning, like as soon as we walk in, we have like a journal that's always TAAS . . . and so now we have TAAS every morning . . ." (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 8). Another teacher comment also reflected the ongoing focus on test preparation:

> . . . after Christmas, it was all TAAS preparation . . . and rarely had time to include something else. And in English that was so tough, because you had so much you could do, and short stories and novels. And after Christmas it was gung ho.

Another teacher stated, ". . . it was a whole 6 weeks that we were going to the library and we were practicing for the whole eighth, my whole eighth period like for 45 minutes . . ."

(TX-EdHS-#1-p. 6). While the amount of time teachers spent on test preparation varied, some teachers indicated that they consistently devoted class time to state test preparation.

Some teachers indicated that they were told by administrators directly to focus on test preparation with their students to the exclusion of other curricular material. One teacher stated, ". . . I have been verbally told by my superiors that all I have to do is teach TAAS" (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 1). Another teacher comment also discussed an administrative directive to focus on test preparation:

> . . . I have also been told verbally that from here to then everything must be TAAS . . . all I must do is that so that leaves out any projects, or discussion, or anything like that. They say that can wait until after the test. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 1)

The degree to which teachers felt mandated to focus on test preparation is not clear. For many teachers, the impetus to prepare for the test appeared to be based on their own concerns with regard to student test performance rather than an external directive.

Some teachers appeared to administer practice or benchmark tests at varying points throughout the year to better prepare students for the state test. One teacher stated, "They're testing every 2 to 3 weeks, they're testing on something" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 4). Another teacher commented, "They're always testing," reflecting the regularity with which students are tested in preparation for the state test (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 4). Some teachers expressed concern that the benchmark and other preparatory testing took up so much class time. One teacher noted:

> And the benchmark test takes up so much time out of a week. You lose, you essentially sacrifice an entire week to administer the test, and that, you do that twice. That's 2 weeks right there of actual teaching time you've lost. You do it again for the end of course. There's another week at least of actual teaching time lost . . . . We lose so much time that we're not able to teach everything that we would like to teach. (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 14)

Another teacher comment reflected this concern with the time constraints imposed by practice testing: "We're dong mach tests and that takes days away from actual curriculum" (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 13).

4.b. Variation in amount of test preparation. The degree to which teachers focused on preparation for the state tests appeared to vary according to the needs of the students. One teacher described the varying amounts of test preparation conducted with different groups of students:

> I still need to review with them because, in that class, I have a lot of Spanish speaking students that speak all Spanish . . . but I feel like with that class I have to do TAAS at least 3 times a week or more . . . . With pre-AP class I do TAAS, but not as often as with my regulars. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 1)

It appeared that teachers spent more time on test preparation for those students who struggled more with tested material and skills.

Teachers also indicated that a greater amount of class time was spent on test preparation in reading and writing. For some teachers, this was because students appeared to struggle with these areas more on the state tests: ". . . they have to do some type of writing because that is our weakest part of the state exam. The kids are not scoring high enough in the writing part" (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 5). Other teachers indicated that reading and writing were areas where it was easier to incorporate test preparation.

> . . . with English and reading because it's a lot easier to align your curriculum with TAAS preparation, because you can just simply implement it into the daily lesson . . . . I could tell you that, up until the test, I spend 100% of my time with TAAS preparation, because we're able. (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 10)

Some teachers, therefore, appeared to use reading and writing activities as means of preparing for the state test.

Preparation for the state tests also appeared to vary based on a students' performance on the exam. For those students demonstrating a lack of proficiency in particular areas, they sometimes were placed in remediation classes to prepare them for that tested area. One teacher commented on the remediation some students experience in English classes:

> I have some seniors who are taking the English 3 TAAS and an English 4 regular class at the same time. I have some other students who are juniors who did not get credit in English 2 and are also taking English 2 alongside the English 3 TAAS.

Some students, therefore, appeared to experience more extensive state test preparation than others.

4.c. Negative effects of test preparation. Some teachers expressed concern that the focus on tested material precluded the inclusion of important non-tested material. Teacher comments included, "We don't teach things that aren't on TAAS," and, "A lot of important information gets left out because you have to focus on TAAS" (TX-EcHS-y1-#3-p. 11). Some teachers indicated that the pressure to focus on the state test negatively affected their ability to include other content that they believed was important to learning. One teacher commented on this pressure:

> . . . intense, the pressure to be prepared for the test, that I put aside other things that I wanted to work on in other parts of the curriculum because of the upcoming TAAS tests. And I think in that sense my students were somewhat shortchanged because that pending test was just all-encompassing. It's all we could think about and prepare for. In that sense, it, you know, that bothered me. That I couldn't put other things into the curriculum. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 1)

Another teacher stated:

> Like I said, from here in 10 weeks all we must do is address in some way or form the TAAS test. So there goes off the window any other lessons that you have planned for the upcoming school new year or for the Christmas holidays or anything. It's just out and just focus on TAAS. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 4)

The focus on state-mandated testing and curriculum, therefore, appeared to frustrate some teachers who expressed concern that other important content was excluded from instruction.

Some students also seemed concerned about the limitations of a test-focused curriculum. They indicated that this curriculum ignored content that was more relevant for college preparation. One student commented:

> I don't like [the test] too much. I think the school puts too much emphasis on it and how important it is and I think that we should be focusing on AP, SAT, and ACT's. Things that are going to help us get into college . . . . (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 4)

Another student comment expressed frustration that the test material was not sufficient preparation for life after high school: "Well, [the test is] a requirement to graduate, but it has nothing to do with going on after high school" (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 5).

Another concern raised with respect to test preparation related to the perceived excessive amount of time the practice tests took. A teacher described the impact of practice testing on classroom time:

> . . . the week of benchmark testing, the week of TAAS testing, you might as well write that week off as teaching time . . . . We tend to frontload the lessons a lot more the week before the test. We try to cover as much ground as we can up to the week of the test so that we are more or less even the week after the test. It's a lot of lost classroom time. (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 1)

Teachers appeared to be concerned that test preparation took precedent over the inclusion of other relevant content and skills.

Teachers and students also noted that the test preparation sometimes focused more on test-taking strategies than on test-related content. Some teachers indicated that this emphasis on strategies was, in part, a means of improving test performance for at-risk students:

> I think that in some areas, particularly in Texas, where you have different portions of your groups who are, for lack of a better term, "at-risk", we are not teaching content as much as we are teaching strategies- how to take a test- rather than giving them the knowledge that they can pass anything put in front of them. (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 1)

The emphasis on testing strategies also seemed to include exposing students to questions formatted in a similar way to actual test questions. This was intended to make students comfortable and familiar with the test format. A teacher noted this intention:

> Yes, we are even given questions very similar to the way they are asked in the actual test, so that we can address or we can ask those types of questions in our classrooms in the same format so that the children, when they see them on the test, don't think is a weird question. So we've been given questions arranged like that for our exams. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 3)

For various reasons, therefore, teachers indicated that they focused on test-taking strategies, at times in lieu of focusing on content.

Some students seemed frustrated by this emphasis on strategies rather than material. One student expressed the view that this approach minimized the teacher's ability to identify a student's real academic need:

> They don't teach us the information that would help us pass the test. They teach us the TAAS, like we, my freshman year, I think we spent a whole week out of every month taking practice TAAS . . . . If you're teaching students just how to get through it, how to like, tips to beating it, then you're not really finding out who is falling through the cracks. They're just finding out who can be taught skills to get through it, but not really know the information that's needed. (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 5)

Some students seemed to dislike the emphasis on preparation for the state test and test-taking strategies at the expense of other curricular material.

4.d. Teachers and students expressed negative attitudes towards test preparation. Some students appeared to have negative attitudes towards activities focused on preparation for the state test. One teacher commented on students' displeasure with test-related activities: "They have a negative attitude towards TAAS test, so no, it's very difficult to bring them any type of activity because it always has to relate to TAAS. And so they have a negative attitude towards anything" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 3). Teachers also commented on how students disengaged from test-related activities and how they quickly became bored with the state test:

> And, like every other person, the kids do get antsy and start to hate it. I feel that sometimes you end up killing the moment because, by the time they get the test, they don't really want to do it anymore, even though we do emphasize you need to do very well or else you don't graduate . . . . They want you to do it continuously, but then at the same time the children are not responding after 2 weeks because they get bored. It's the same thing over and over again. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 6)

Some students, therefore, appeared to become tired of repeated test-related activities and preparation.

Some teachers also expressed frustration with the continued emphasis on test preparation in class. One teacher commented on their dislike for teaching test preparation courses:

> It got to the point where I told the department head, I said, "I don't want a TAAS class. Please don't give me a TAAS class. I'm tired of teaching TAAS." So they gave me one pre-AP and all the rest are TAAS. Be happy with the AP one. (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 6)

Some teachers, therefore, seemed to prefer instruction that was not focused on test preparation.

Theme 5: The Pace of Instruction Varied

5.a. The pace in some cases seemed too fast. The curricular demands some teachers experienced appeared to cause a rapid instructional pace, as teachers focused on covering all required material. One student voiced frustration with the quick pace of instruction:

> Teachers have like, they have their syllabus or whatever, and they, for them it's like, "Oh my god, we have to finish this much by next 6 weeks." And they go so frickn' fast and it's like for me, that's, it was really hard. Like in my algebra classes, it was really hard to catch up because I didn't know half the things and I would ask the teacher for help and he'd be like hold on, hold on, and keep putting me off. (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 11)

The standardized curricula, in addition to the test preparation demands, appeared to lead to some course instruction moving too quickly for students.

In some cases, it seemed that teachers were not able to cover material sufficiently, as they felt compelled to move onto a new topic in order to keep pace with the curricular guide. One teacher indicated that this process of changing curricular topics before they were ready was frustrating for them: "I always get cut off. I start something and then I have to stop. And it's real hard because they lose interest and I have to start something else. I never actually get to finish anything . . ." (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 4). For some teachers, therefore, curricular demands were too great, and they did not feel they were able to adequately cover material, despite the fast pace of instruction.

5.b. The instructional pace was slower in some cases. Some teachers indicated that they slowed the pace of instruction for students who appeared to need additional time to learn material. One teacher commented:

> The students that I do have, there are some that I have to slow the class down. I have to extend say a one week lesson plan into a week and a half, or even 2 week lesson plan in order to make sure that those students are not left behind. And to

> ensure to my satisfaction that the students have developed the skill that we are working on. (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 3)

Some teachers appeared to be able to adjust their curricular pace depending on the demonstrated learning needs of the student, focusing on the apprehension of the material rather than keeping pace with curricular demands.

While the curricular pace appeared to be too fast for some students, other students seemed frustrated that teachers moved too slowly through some curricula, not leaving enough time for them to adequately cover all tested material. One student commented, "The teacher goes too slow with the different chapters, so you end up skipping some and, by the time the test comes, you don't know what you are doing" (CA-GHS-#1-p. 8). Other students indicated that they did not like slow-moving classes: "A lot of times, I think they are going a little too slow. I prefer a more speedy class . . ." (TX-EdHS-#1-p. 6).

5.c. The pace of instruction was sometimes mixed. Some students indicated that the pace was neither too fast nor too slow, reflected in the following student comment: "I don't think it's fast, but I don't think it's slow" (TX-EdHS-y2-#3-p. 4). Students seemed to vary widely, therefore, both in their perceptions of instructional pace in their classes and in their opinions as to what an ideal instructional pace should be.

Theme 6: Effects of State Tests on Gifted Students Varied

6.a. GT students were sometimes given less attention and resources. Some teachers expressed concern that seemingly at-risk students were given more time and attention in the classroom than gifted students. A teacher noted, "There is a lot more emphasis on the at-risk students, migrant students, special ed students" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 12). Another teacher commented on how the time spent on other students prevented them from given enough individualized enrichment to gifted students: ". . . we spend so much time on either at-risk students or students that we want to be pulling up at least to a minimum skills level, we can't enrich enough for our GT students" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 5).

Some teachers appeared to struggle with the competing demands of students with different learning needs. One teacher described their instructional challenge:

> No, as it is right now, we get a set of students, as she said, that are not prepared. Among those, I have one GT or one very, very intelligent student. I am with a whole class, and I have to bring the whole class up to that, to a level . . . . And then so many of the levels are below the level that you're supposed to keep with. Some of them don't know how to subtract . . . you're dealing with these kids and at the same time you have one person in there that wants to try and wants to go higher, and wants to, it's very difficult. It's very difficult . . . . (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 14)

Some teachers, therefore, appeared to have difficulty meeting the learning needs of gifted students, given the competing needs of other students in the class.

Contrasting with this view is the opinion put forward by one teacher that gifted students learn in any classroom environment, irrespective of the attention of the teacher. The teacher commented:

> I think the ones that are affected the least are the gifted and talented students because- I once said this a long time ago and I truly believe it- you could put gifted and talented students in an empty classroom, come in and put a bag of bricks on the desk in front of them with a label that says "teacher," and they will still learn. (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 8)

There is a lack of consensus, therefore, as to whether gifted students were being harmed by receiving less instructor attention due to the implementation of state tests.

Some teachers indicated that gifted programs did not receive adequate funding. The emphasis on state testing, it was suggested, took funds and other resources away from gifted programs. One teacher commented, "It seems to me that the state spends so much more money on this TAAS test and they take away from GT classes. I think the gifted and talented programs in the whole state get less money because of other programs" (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 10). In at least some cases, therefore, teachers perceived that gifted education programs received inadequate funding due, in part, to the emphasis on state testing initiatives.

6.b. Gifted students sometimes got bored. Some teachers appeared to believe that gifted students were not challenged by the curriculum. Teachers commented, "They get bored," and "It's not challenging them at all" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 6). Some teachers indicated that the state test did not pose a sufficient challenge to gifted students. One teacher commented, "I just think that they have been overlooked, because that's not a challenge for them. The test is no challenge, and it may not be a challenge . . . . But it's just that they are so bored with it . . ." (TX-EdHS-y2-#2-p. 10). Another teacher stated, "It's just another fly they have to swap, honestly" (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 9).

Teachers also noted that test preparation activities were not challenging for gifted students: "Because they have to waste a lot of time in what they consider remedial exercises when they could be doing a lot more things" (TX-EdHS-y2-#4-p. 5). The emphasis on the state test, it was suggested, prevented some gifted students from learning at their readiness level, leaving the students bored and frustrated. One teacher commented:

> And that academic level isn't there either, because of all this testing. TAAS testing. And, you know, they put so much stress on the TAAS. TAAS this, TAAS that, TAAS this, TAAS that, that they don't truly get the skills or the, you know, to get them to be curious to ask questions . . . . (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 16)

Some teachers were concerned that the emphasis on tested material and test preparation focused on skills and content that was too easy for gifted students, leaving them bored and unchallenged.

6.c. State tests sometimes appeared to measure low-level skills. Some teachers noted that gifted students performed similarly to regular education and special education students in some tested areas, indicating to them that the state tests measured lower level skills. The teachers expressed concern that, by scoring the same as students in special education, the gifted students would experience lowered self-esteem and confidence. One teacher commented, ". . . they are saying, 'I scored just like a special ed student.' I am sure it doesn't make them feel very good" (TX-EdHS-y1-#3-p. 15). There appeared to be some concern, therefore, that the state tests measured low-level skills and content.

Theme 7: Spanish Speaking Students Struggled With State Test

7.a. ESL students had difficulty with reading on test. Some teachers indicated that ESL students struggled mainly with reading the state test rather than with the content itself. One teacher noted, "A lot of it's, the ESL, it's a reading test. Even the math test is a reading test. And if they don't understand the language, it doesn't mean that they don't know how to do it" (TX-EcHS-y1-#2-p. 8). Another teacher reiterated this concern: "[The test] doesn't test the kids to see what they know. It teaches them, tests them, on can they read word problems and comprehend what they are reading" (TX-EcHS-y2-#2-p. 10).

Problems with respect to understanding test prompts were also noted by teachers as a concern for ESL students taking the state test. One teacher commented, "One time the prompt was . . . 'ought to do.' I didn't know how to translate 'ought' and I wasn't allowed to translate it. They didn't know what 'ought' meant, the ones from Mexico. They didn't know what the prompt meant" (TX-EdHs-y2-#2-p. 8). Some teachers, therefore, were concerned that language barriers could be problematic for ESL students in their performance on state tests.

CHAPTER 6: Summary and Discussion

As high-stakes testing assumes an increasingly prominent role in the policy and practice of education throughout the United States, the need for current research into its impact at the school level is patent. Teachers, who operate at the intersection between policy and practice, represent a key stakeholder within the system of high-stakes testing. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the effects of state testing mandates on curriculum and instruction, and on the pressure experienced by faculty and students. Teacher perceptions were examined across elementary, middle, and high schools, across high- and low-stakes testing environments, and across school poverty levels. An additional aim of the study was to explore the school experiences of gifted and talented students. Prior to this study, the motivation and attitudes towards school of gifted students in the current climate of high-stakes testing have not been addressed comprehensively by prior research.

Recent research has indicated that the centrality of high-stakes testing has significantly influenced the educational system at the levels of curriculum and instruction (e.g., Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). Consistent with such research, data from both the national survey and the subsequent qualitative component of this study indicate that teachers' curricular and instructional practices are substantially shaped by the high-stakes associated with testing. Teachers in high-stakes testing environments testify to a significant school-based emphasis on the outcomes of state tests, and an intensifying focus on test outcomes over the past 3 to 5 years. The impact of this focus on test outcomes is apparent in teachers' decisions about curriculum and instruction, in the pressure they feel to raise student test scores, and in the stress they observe in their students. These effects are most pronounced in schools serving students from the lowest SES groups, where teachers are most likely to alter curriculum and "teach to the test" under administrative pressure to raise test scores. The findings of this study paint a picture of an education system in which school-based (and classroom-based) decision making is driven by the desire to produce high student test scores, and in which some groups feel the pressure of the high stakes more keenly than others. Findings related to test-driven pressure and its impact on curriculum and instruction, the differential effects of high-stakes testing by school poverty level, and the experiences of gifted and talented students are discussed below.

Pressure Associated With High-stakes Testing

A consistent theme of teachers' discourse around state testing mandates is the pressure arising from the perceived need to produce high student test scores. Although there is variation in the extent to which teachers experience this pressure, it is present across elementary, middle, and high school settings in which high-stakes testing is salient. To some extent, the pressure experienced by teachers varied by length of tenure, the previous success of students at their school, and the perceived stakes (or expected consequences) associated with testing. In many cases, teachers acknowledge that they

place pressure on themselves, as they strive to demonstrate their own effectiveness and hold themselves accountable for student performance.

Data from both the national survey and the school visits point to the perceived top-down filtering of test-related pressure. That is, many teachers believe that the pressure to produce high student test scores originates from central office administrators, from whom it is transferred to school principals, who in turn exert pressure on teachers and students. This opinion of pressure filtering down is reflected in one middle school teacher's comment:

> . . . there is pressure and I think that it is coming from on high because administrators . . . [are] put under pressure and it is a trickle down effect, but hopefully you try to keep the kids away from feeling too much pressure, but I do catch myself saying things like, "I think this will be important on the Stan 9." (CA, Peary, TI, Fujii, #2, p. 3)

Thus, teachers make sense of high-stakes testing through their interactions with school administrators, who are understood to represent the objectives of more senior administrators. School administrators communicate the high stakes associated with testing to faculty through formal meetings in discussing ways to improve test scores, and by checking in with teachers to ensure that areas of weakness in past tests are addressed. Few teachers identify a relationship between this administrative pressure to produce high test scores and consequences related to job security. Rather, it appears that the pressure is experienced as a general, school-wide atmosphere of emphasis on test outcomes. School administrators are more likely to place general emphasis on methods for improving test scores, or to mandate that teachers focus on test preparation activities and test-aligned content in their classrooms, than to admonish individual teachers for poor student performance. This perception is reflected in a representative comment from one high school teacher:

> Well, there's a school-wide kind of pressure . . . there has been a push to get the scores up. But there hasn't been a lot of, like, singling out a specific teacher or departments- as far as I know. I know it's just like, "Hey, we need to get these test scores up . . . ." (CA-GHS-#6-p. 4)

In the context of this general pressure, some teachers observe physical and emotional signs of stress in their students. This stress appears to intensify as the test date nears. In part, the pressure experienced by students may be related to the belief that there is much resting on their test results. Some students seem to believe that grade level retention or advancement, or placement in advanced programs, is subject to specific test scores. For some high school students, the need to pass state tests in order to graduate appears to provoke anxiety.

In schools where state testing programs are not associated with high-stakes, teachers and students do not appear to experience the same elevated pressure to produce high test scores. Although individual teachers vary in this regard, there is a general

perception that test outcomes are not a significant source of administrative emphasis or pressure on teachers. In turn, students in these schools generally report little pressure from their teachers or parents to perform to a particular standard on state tests. These students perceive the tests as a tool for teachers to evaluate academic progress and identify areas to be improved, but do not associate the tests with serious consequences.

Notably, the data supported a firm belief among teachers in both high- and low-stakes testing environments that the pressure to improve student scores is steadily increasing. Teachers in low-stakes schools appear to derive this prediction from the heightening national policy focus on standards-driven curriculum and test-based accountability (e.g., NCLB), and from the trend towards a tightening of minimum achievement requirements in their own settings. Says one elementary school teacher of this increasing pressure:

> Well, I think because the national focus has put more pressure on the state. Even though Iowa is the only state without statewide standards, they really put their focus and push on the schools to produce some very concrete standards and benchmarks. Then as that trickles down into my classroom, I now have to be very accountable on paper for everything the kids learn. (IA-WSRSD-ES-Southeast-TI-#2-p. 1)

The consistent perception among teachers that test-related pressure is increasing as national policy objectives trickle down to individual teachers and students complies with the portrait of an educational system in which testing is synonymous with policy. In this system, it is central policy-makers who are understood to "own" the tests, their results, and their usage in decision making. Commensurate with the stated goals of high-stakes testing (Roderick & Engel, 2001), many teachers in this study appear to have internalized responsibility for their students' test scores, and this perceived accountability is reflected in the pressure they feel to produce high student test scores, and in the structure and content of curriculum and instruction.

Impact of High-stakes Testing on Curriculum and Instruction

Data from both phases of this study indicate a strong relationship between the perceived pressure associated with high-stakes testing and the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction in the classroom. Much of the pressure and frustration experienced by teachers seems to arise directly from the perceived mandate to implement a heavily prescribed curriculum that allows for little flexibility in response to student need. Teachers commonly express frustration that the time pressure imposed by a standardized curriculum leaves them unable to explore topics in the depth required to maximize student learning, or to allow students to pursue areas of scholarly interest. Many indicate that the strict pacing and sequencing guidelines of the mandated curriculum force them to skim over material and move on whether or not students have achieved deep levels of understanding:

> I mean, there's so much material to cover, and you're pressed for time. Like he said, we fly over the material. There's not enough time. There's so much in government, you know, there's so much that you need to cover. And for the students to fully understand a concept you know, you're just, you're pressed for time. I feel pressured. (BLG-y1-#14-p. 4)

Students also comment on this feeling of being rushed through curricular content without being offered adequate time or support to deeply understand concepts:

> Teachers have like, they have their syllabus or whatever, and they, for them it's like, "Oh my god, we have to finish this much by the next six weeks." And they go so frickn' fast and it's like for me, that's, it was really hard. Like in my algebra classes, it was really hard to catch up because I didn't know half the things and I would ask the teacher for help and he'd be like, hold on, hold on, and keep putting me off. (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 11)

In some instances, the time pressure experienced by teachers is related to the considerable amount of class time taken up with test-preparation activities, leaving little time for in-depth exploration of course material. The results of this study indicate that in response to both general pressure to improve student test scores and, in some cases, to specific instructions from school administrators, teachers incorporate targeted test-preparation activities into the routines of the classroom. This preparation often takes the form of focused teaching of test-taking strategies, familiarizing students with the format of the test, and tailoring classroom assessments to mirror the structure of the state test. Many teachers report that the majority of classroom activity is based directly around the content and format of the state test, and that they feel compelled to teach through lecture or to incorporate drill and practice to prepare students for the tests. Some believe that test-preparation is now beginning for students even before they reach the grade levels in which tests are administered.

Although many teachers appear to focus on test preparation throughout the school year, there appears to be a consistent increase in this kind of classroom activity in the period immediately preceding the administration of the test. In some schools, the time leading up to the state test is characterized by a focus on drill and practice for students who are expected to struggle. Teachers report being directly instructed by administrators to spend the weeks prior to the test purely on preparation, at the expense of introducing new material or engaging students in project work. The following comment from a high school teacher reflects this view:

> . . . I have also been told verbally that from here to then, everything must be TAAS . . . all I must do is that, so that leaves out any projects, or discussion, or anything like that. They say that can wait until after the test. (TX-Ed-y2-#2-p. 1)

Many students and their teachers feel that the focus on basic skills and test preparation in their classrooms is boring and repetitive. Students are frustrated with the routine focus on test taking, teacher lecture, and excessive repetition of material. They

are irritated by the lack of challenge available to them as they are expected to repeatedly demonstrate their knowledge of previously learned material. As one student comments:

> . . . when you taught it, you taught it. Go on, keep on going. But they teach it over and over. We are in the same subject for 2 weeks. (BLG-y2-#5-p. 12)

For these students then, the pace of progress through the curriculum is too slow. Thus, while some students experience a feeling of being rushed through the curriculum, others are frustrated at the slow pace associated with basic skill development and test preparation. Other students feel that the content of the test is not meaningful to them, and that the consistent classroom focus on test preparation fails to prepare them for life at college or outside of school. These contrasting student perceptions are consistent with teachers' accounts of the difficulty of differentiating instruction in an environment of high-stakes testing. Teachers acknowledge that test preparation leaves many students bored and disengaged, but indicate that the mandated emphasis on test performance leaves them with little time or flexibility to include hands-on or project-based learning opportunities for students. Teachers also express frustration at the lack of time to get to know their students' individual interests and needs, and to tailor the curriculum accordingly. They recognize the need for varied instructional methods to meet diverse student needs, but many feel locked in to a homogenous model of instruction under the pressure of curricular requirements. Students across all settings express a clear preference for learning new and interesting material through hands-on learning and project work, but many teachers feel unable to respond to these preferences. Thus, it appears that as teachers make decisions in a climate of high-stakes testing, they often prioritize standardized curricular requirements and test preparation over individual student interest, academic readiness, or learning preference resulting in a tendency to "teach to the middle."

The results of this study suggest that the intense focus on test preparation ends abruptly following the administration of the test, at which time teachers feel more free to explore non-tested subjects, to pursue areas of student interest, and to go into depth in areas that were glossed over prior to the test. One teacher refers to this as "post-test curriculum." Many elementary teachers indicate that non-tested subjects, such as science and social studies, are taught almost exclusively during this post-test period. In middle and high schools, teachers in non-tested subjects feel greater flexibility and freedom to explore topics in depth and to allow students opportunities to study areas of interest. These teachers do not experience the same level of constraint on their decision making around curriculum and instruction. One middle school teacher says:

> For me, because science isn't tested, I can spend a little more time taking from their interest and building on that, but I can't do that in math because that is being tested. So, for the math I've got to keep going. (CA-Peary-TI-Fujii-#2-p. 3)

Some teachers do express support for standardized curricula and the associated high-stakes tests. These teachers feel that a prescribed curriculum provides a helpful framework for planning the school year. A small number of others feel that the elevated

standards and expectations associated with high-stakes tests, and the strong focus on core academic skills, lead to positive outcomes in terms of student achievement. Some approve of a system that ensures students across school districts have access to the same curricular content. Within the high-stakes testing environment, there are also teachers, although very few, who feel able to use the standards as the framework for developing rich and differentiated curriculum, and teachers who are willing to deviate from a narrow focus on basic skills and test preparation. The extent to which teachers feel able to work in this way appears to depend on length of tenure and feelings of job security.

For most teachers though, there is a clear feeling that the focus on minimum standards and basic skills has diminished both the richness and depth of the curriculum and the professional autonomy teachers have over curricular and instructional decision making. Many teachers feel that the focus on minimum benchmarks and basic skills has served to "water down" the curriculum, narrowing the set of skills considered to be important to develop in learners. These teachers believe that there has been a shift away from critical thinking skills, problem-solving and transferable academic skills in the emphasis of the curriculum. Many worry that the system values the ability to take a particular test over more meaningful learning goals.

In some settings, teachers feel that the practice of publicly recognizing schools based on the overall test performance of their students is indicative of the misguided emphasis of the education system. Some teachers feel that this focus on school recognition has shifted the goal of schooling in a negative direction. One high school teacher's comment reflects this belief:

> . . . what is happening in schools is a sense where schools are trying to do good just to get a title of recognized or exemplary. And it seems like principals are very adamant about achieving that status. And I think that's unfortunate when our view is for a title for a school to boost our egos. And our view, our emphasis, has shifted to making ourselves look good from when we should be focused on teaching kids and that should be our goal. (TX-EcHS-y1-#1-p. 7).

The feeling of diminished autonomy over curricular and instructional decisions expressed by many teachers in this study is not mirrored by the experiences of teachers in low-stakes testing environments. Although test-related pressure on these teachers varies, and although many note a trend towards greater accountability and increasingly standardized curriculum, many of these teachers feel little pressure to meet requirements imposed on them externally. For the most part, these teachers experience autonomy over instructional decisions. While they follow coordinated curricula, these teachers also experience more freedom to add content, follow students' interests, or explore topics in greater depth.

Consistent with previous research (Brown, 1992), the results of this study indicate that high-stakes testing significantly impacts both curriculum and instruction as teachers tailor the content and sequence of curriculum, and the focus of instruction, around the goal of increased test scores. Very few teachers report that their instructional practices

have not changed at all as a result of the increased focus on state test outcomes. Although there is some variation in the extent to which teachers tailor curriculum around state tests, the responses of many teachers are consistent with the perception that high test scores have supplanted authentic learning as the primary goal of public education.

The findings of a clear and systemic impact of state testing on curriculum and instruction might be welcomed by proponents of high-stakes testing. Indeed, it is the intended outcome of widespread high-stakes testing that the increased accountability will result in reform of what is taught and how it is taught in public schools. Some teachers in the study support this view, in that testing ensures that students will all be exposed to the same material, leading to fairer comparisons between schools. For the most part however, the teachers involved in this study were critical of the mandated focus on increasing test scores, and their responses emphasized the negative outcomes of testing on curriculum and instruction. Many teachers felt that they had been forced to relinquish autonomy over their classrooms, and that the increasing pressure to teach to the tests left them unable to adequately teach concepts, or to engage and excite students through hands-on learning activities, project work, and enrichment opportunities. Many reported feeling pressure to "cover" the material that would be tested, often at the expense of depth of investigation, and had a sense that curriculum had been "watered down" to the most basic skills. Teachers indicated that material not covered in the state tests (such as science, social studies, health, and fine and performing arts) was often omitted from the curriculum due to the time allocated to practicing for the state tests. There is a clear perception among teachers that practices stemming from the strong emphasis on testing are occurring at the expense of rich, diverse curriculum, student-centered learning, and high-quality teaching. This perception of the narrowing of the curriculum is consistent with the findings of previous research in multiple states (Herman & Golan, 1990; Lattimore, 2001; Shepard & Dougherty, 1991; Wilson & Corbett, 1991). Taken together, the findings of this study do not lend support to Cizek's (2001) claim that high stakes testing has resulted in widespread improvement in teachers' instructional practices and ability to attend to students with special needs.

Impact of High-stakes Testing on Disadvantaged Schools and Students

Data from the national survey suggest that the perceived pressure to increase test scores is experienced most acutely by teachers serving the most impoverished students. This pressure translates into a differential impact of state testing on curriculum and instruction across poverty levels. Consistent with previous research (Ascher, 1990; Monsaas & Englehard, 1994), there is an enhanced use of "skill and drill" instruction in impoverished schools, with teachers spending more time on test preparation activities involving multiple-choice and constructed response items that mirror the format of state tests. The trade-off takes the form of a diminished focus on long-term projects, and performance-based activities such as hands-on experiments and enrichment activities. Within this study, teachers in high SES suburban middle schools represent the group least likely to spend class time on test preparation activities, and most likely to engage students in projects and hands-on learning activities. In the face of pressure to raise scores, the practice of teaching to the test persists in the most disadvantaged settings despite the lack

of research indicating its effectiveness in engaging students in learning and raising achievement scores on any measure. These students, who are often among the most disengaged in the school system, face repetition of minimum level, test-like information, at the expense of diverse and interesting learning opportunities and subject matter not covered in state tests (such as science and social studies at the elementary level, and fine or performing arts).

The disproportionately high test-related pressure experienced by teachers and students in impoverished settings is understood by some to stem from the practice of publicly comparing schools on the basis of test scores. Many teachers believe such comparisons to be inherently unfair, particularly in light of the myriad social and economic factors affecting the test scores of students within their schools. One teacher's comment reflects this perception:

> The biggest pressure is when the district or state tries to compare apples to oranges. Students at our school compared to students at an inner school and we are not the same. We are not the same demographics. We are not the same cultures. Everything is different and you cannot do that. (MC-y2-#5-p. 6)

Not all teachers disagree with the practice of comparing schools in this way, but the results of this study suggest that those teachers who support the practice often come from high SES schools with high-performing students.

In addition to social and economic barriers to student achievement, teachers in schools with significant second language populations acknowledge the language barriers that also exist for their students. These teachers believe that state tests provide invalid measures of student achievement when students are disadvantaged by their developing English language skills and their lack of experience in the dominant culture. They suggest that the test is primarily a test of reading proficiency, even where math skills are the focus of the test. Some teachers suggest that an alternative assessment should be used for these students, depending on their experience of the language and culture.

This study also suggests a link between high-stakes testing and student disengagement that should be explored by future researchers. For some high school students in particular, the belief that poor test performance could lead to retention in school for another year, or prevention from graduating, appears to create significant anxiety. It seems that for some students, disengagement from or non-attendance at school follows repeated poor performances on tests and an associated feeling that there is no point in persisting with school. High school students note the demoralizing and stigmatizing effect testing can have on students who do not perform well:

> . . . like some kids, like, you get something if you do good in the beginning, but then like they don't pass it by a little bit and then they get too much pressure put on their back and they give up. They're like, "I'm not going to do it anymore." And that's when they start skipping and taking off from school. (TX-EdHS-y1-#1-p. 9)

This pressure associated with high-stakes testing is not experienced by all students. Some report feeling very little anxiety and do not anticipate negative outcomes from taking the test. The level of anxiety students' associate with the test seems to vary with their histories of success in test-taking and their feelings of proficiency.

It is not difficult to extrapolate from these findings to imagine the cycle of disengagement, poor test scores and increasing pressure on teachers that the practice of teaching to the test is likely to perpetuate in impoverished settings. Despite the assertion of policymakers that increased accountability through widespread high-stakes testing will address systemic inequities, there is little evidence from this study that the pressures and practices associated with high-stakes testing are experienced with equal weight across all points of the system.

Impact of High-stakes Testing on Gifted and Talented Students

The results of this study indicate that while some gifted students appear to enjoy and feel challenged by school, others are left feeling bored and under-extended. Gifted students' perceptions of school are shaped by classroom experiences that are heavily focused on test-preparation, skill practice, and repetition. Many of these students report frustration and resentment at the slow pace of learning, the disproportionate amount of class time spent in practice for standardized tests, and the focus on repetition of basic concepts. Teachers note that although many gifted students do not feel pressure associated with state tests, others can become highly anxious in response to the pressure they feel to perform at a perfect level, to maintain their access to advanced programs, and to compensate for lower-performing classmates.

The perception of many gifted students is that the focus on standardized curriculum and test preparation often leaves them waiting for other students to catch up, even when they are ready to move on. Students express frustration that all students are expected to work at the same pace and study the same material in the same ways. This feeling is reflected in the following comment from a middle school student:

> In history, our GT class is ahead of all the other classes and we often have to do nothing in the classes or do the same thing over and over again so we can be at the same level with the other classes. The history teacher told us yesterday, "Well, you are not going to do the first 5 minutes. You are not going to give your opinion. You are not going to do this because you are already a day ahead of the other class. You have to wait." Now we are at the same level. We are being kept back for what the other classes don't do. (BLG-y2-#5-p. 13)

Teachers vary in their perceptions of whether or not the needs of gifted students are being met by the school. Some teachers acknowledge that the needs of gifted students are not adequately addressed in their classrooms, but feel unable to provide appropriately challenging learning experiences and still meet their curricular requirements. Says one middle school teacher:

> I think that there are times when, especially with [identified gifted] students, they are interested in something and they want to expand, go over, do more, but we can't, because we are [under] time constraints and so because we have to finish a certain section by a certain time because of the curriculum mapping that is set up for us, so it is very frustrating. (CA-Peary-TI-Fujii-#2-p. 1)

Some teachers feel that there is a greater focus on struggling learners, who are not expected to score highly on state tests, and as a result the needs of gifted students are left unmet. These teachers feel that this is an outcome of the minimum skills focus of the test. Others say that funding is redirected away from gifted programs as a result of the emphasis on testing initiatives.

In the context of inadequate challenge, some gifted students report "tuning out" or engaging in non-academic activities such as independent reading, resting or chatting to friends while they wait for their teachers to further explain concepts to other students. Some teachers provide learning centers or additional activities for students to engage in if they finish work early, but this varies greatly by teacher and school. In general, it seems that access to higher-level or challenging learning opportunities for gifted students in the regular classroom is contingent on their first completing the standards-based curricular activities. They are often unchallenged by test preparation activities and by the test itself.

In some cases, teachers of gifted students in pull-out classes feel that they have greater flexibility to create curriculum that is not driven by tested material or objectives. That is, because their students are more likely to have already mastered the tested material for that year, these teachers feel more able to extend students beyond instruction in basic skills and knowledge. There is variation in the extent to which this happens, though. In some cases, students are required to cover basic content and skills even where teachers are cognizant of the fact that their students have mastered the material. In other cases, students are given the opportunity to study a topic of interest in depth is after they have finished their other work, or if they have somehow earned the privilege. That is, students must first cover the regular curriculum, and then they might have the opportunity to work at a higher level or more in depth.

Overall, it appears that the current high-stakes testing movement affects gifted students by providing a curricular "ceiling" that is well below their own academic potential, by decreasing opportunities for students' abilities to emerge through engagement with quality curriculum, and by shifting the goal of education away from helping each student to meet his or her academic potential, and towards helping each student contribute an adequate test score to the class or school average.

Implications for Research and Practice

There is every indication that high-stakes testing is here to stay, particularly in the current political climate. Given this assumption, it is recommended that teachers' and students' experiences of high-stakes testing at the school, classroom, and individual levels be examined and taken into account by policymakers. That is, while high-stakes testing

might result in some of the policy's intended outcomes (e.g., focused curriculum), its current implementation is perceived by many teachers to be ineffective, unfair, and detrimental to both student and teacher performance. This discord between the increased policy focus on testing outcomes, and the increased perception among teachers that their professionalism and pedagogical effectiveness is being compromised by the pressure to increase test scores, must be addressed if the public education system is to flourish. Similarly, the disconnect between the political objective of making the system more equitable for students from low income and minority backgrounds through test-based accountability, and the finding that students within the most impoverished schools experience the most narrow, test-driven curriculum arising from the greatest performance-based pressure on teachers should be acknowledged and addressed. The provision of adequate resources and professional development for teachers in impoverished settings to create engaging curriculum that connects to students' strengths and interests should be a prominent priority. Although high-stakes testing has clearly resulted in widespread reform at the level of curriculum and instruction, this reform has not developed in the direction of best practice within many settings.

It is promising to note that at least some teachers in this study describe using state-mandated standards and proficiencies as the basis for the development of rich, challenging curriculum which is concept-driven and connected to students' experiences. The factors that enable a minority of teachers to apply the standards in this way, rather than as a "checklist" or a catalyst for narrowing the curriculum should be further investigated. Clearly, central office and school administrators have an important role to play in creating environments in which teachers have both the permission and the skills necessary to create curriculum of this kind. The present study highlights many teachers' perceptions of administrative pressure to focus class time on test practice and test-based content at the expense of creative and challenging learning experiences. Under the current implementation of high-stakes testing, many teachers recognize little incentive to broaden or deepen curriculum.

A further area of focus for future research and improved practice should be attention to the impact of the high-stakes testing environment on students with special needs. Students of high-ability and high-potential are one such group. It is evident that the current focus on minimum benchmarks and test-based instruction is doing little to consistently meet the needs of these students, who are often bored or disengaged in the classroom. Greater attention should be paid to how teachers can use state standards as the framework for rich, differentiated curriculum that matches the needs and abilities of students at all levels, and to how additional opportunities for challenge and engagement can be incorporated into the practice of education. Current curricular and instructional practices might be particularly detrimental to gifted students from minority or disadvantaged groups, whose potential could easily be masked by their disengagement from test-focused, "skill and drill" classroom environments.

Finally, in light of the significant influence of state testing on curriculum, instruction, policy decisions, and the experience of education for teachers and students

throughout the system, the importance of adopting sound assessment tools that are valid indicators of student achievement is paramount.

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