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## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING

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### **Abstract:**

In recent years, the issue of high-stakes testing has been widely debated in the field of education. Studies have shown that high-stakes tests do little to promote learning in schools, yet there are still widely used. While many studies have examined how testing affects students, schools, and communities, little research has been done to determine how teachers perceive high-stakes tests. It is important for us to study not only how these tests impact our students, but how teachers feel about them as well. This study used a structured survey to question elementary school educators from three Midwestern schools. The purpose of the study was to determine the viewpoints, opinions, and attitudes that teachers have regarding high-stakes tests. The results showed that teachers feel there are some benefits to high-stakes testing, in that it allows students to be compared to their peers. The majority of teachers surveyed, however; felt the weakness of such testing outweighs the benefits. Teachers cite pressures from testing and feel that tests are not a valid way to assess what students know. Tests also shape curriculum in that more time is spent in tested subjects, while time spent in untested subjects is reduced or eliminated.

### **Keywords:**

High Stake testing; Assessment; Elementary Teachers; Teacher perception

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of high-stakes testing has been a popular topic in the field of education for years. The achievement gap between those who are successful in school and those who are not has been highly debated. Policymakers, parents, and the general public are clamoring for higher standards and increased student achievement, particularly in the area of literacy (Oszakiewski & Spelman, 2011). In recent years, high-stakes tests have been widely administered as a way to assess whether or not students are meeting these standards.

The background for high-stakes testing began with a series of educational movements such as 1983's *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR). This report was published by the U.S. Department of Education as a culmination of criticism that had been mounting since early in the cold war and had gained traction when the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957 (Bracey, 2008). The *Nation at Risk* report states that, "If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our education system" (p. 2). One of the implications of this reform meant keeping closer tabs on student achievement through high-stakes tests.

The use of these tests continued to grow throughout the 1980's. In the 1990s when a number of states introduced performance-based assessments that included open-ended questions, written explanations of problem solving, and even experiments-researchers found clear evidence that these assessments influenced instruction (David, 2011). In 1994, President Clinton signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 was a revolutionary attempt to promote education reform on a national scale by spurring systematic reform through increased standards, flexibility, and assessments (Superfine, 2005). High-stakes tests continued to be popular with a series of reforms implemented in the 2000's.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) promoted an increase in the use of high-stakes testing. In order to receive federal funding, schools were required to give students assessments to determine whether or not the high standards and measurable goals of the NCLB Act were met. Studies from the NCLB era concluded that the higher the stakes are for educators, the more curriculum and instruction reflect what's on the test, particularly in low-performing schools where the threat of sanctions is strongest (David, 2011).

More recently, President Obama's *Race to the Top* campaign awarded states points for meeting criteria such as complying with desired educational policies, standards, and performance-based standards for teachers. With the reforms and acts past in recent decades, states are requiring more out of both teachers and students, and relying on high-stakes testing to assess if these goals are met. Several studies in the last few decades has documented that these high-stakes assessments can affect both curriculum and teaching methods (David, 2011). Researchers have found clear evidence that these assessments influenced instruction (2011).

The demands to perform well on tests to secure funding, has increased the amount of pressure felt by teachers, administrators, and students. This pressure has even caused cheating on tests by both administrators and teachers. Cheating has escalated considerably since enactment of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, with its

requirement that schools report Adequate Yearly Progress (Dessoiff, 2011). Currently, up to 58 schools in the Atlanta, Georgia Public Schools are the focus of an ongoing investigation over allegations stemming from the state's 2009 Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (Dessoiff, 2011). With teachers and administrators willing to risk so much to perform well, more studies need to be done to see how teachers truly feel about these tests and their value in our educational system. This study focused on the perceptions of teachers regarding high-stakes testing.

In school districts around the nation, students are required to take one or more high-stakes tests to assess the learning. Teachers are often told which tests they will administer and have little or no say in whether or not they feel that these tests are useful, valid, or should even be given. In the past, there have been no great desire by the state or administrators to seek the opinions of teachers even though they are the ones expected to teach the standards that are being assessed on these tests. As there continues to be an increasing emphasis on the importance of high-stakes tests, it is imperative that we know how teachers feel these tests are impacting themselves, their teaching, and their students. Many studies (Moon, Brighton, Jarvis & Hall, 2007) have looked at how children, schools, and communities are influenced by high-stakes tests, but few have attempted to seek the opinions of educators. Since there is currently a lack in the amount of information on teachers' perceptions about high-stakes testing, this study will strive to fill that need. We need a richer, more in-depth understanding of the relationship between state-mandated tests and teaching in actual school settings (Cimbricz, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing. Participants of the study included teachers from a local suburban elementary school. Teacher's perception concerning high-stakes tests and their validity, as well as their benefits and weaknesses, was examined. Eight teachers from several different grade levels were surveyed. By comparing the perceptions of the educators at varying grade levels, this study sought to explore some of the similarities and differences that teachers have towards high-stakes testing.

This study was intended to inform policy-makers, test-makers, and administrators about the perceptions teachers have concerning high-stakes testing in their classrooms. The results of the study were meant to raise awareness about the thoughts and feelings that teachers have about the high-stakes tests. Test-makers would be able to get opinions about the quality and validity of their tests from those who administer them. Administrators would be able to see how their teachers, their curriculum, and students are being affected by high-stakes tests. Finally, policy-makers would be better informed about teachers' perceptions and beliefs so that they can make better decisions in regards to high-stakes testing in the future.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section contains an overview of the literature that was reviewed for the research study. Elements included are the high-stakes testing background, effects of testing, teachers' perceptions, and the future of high-stakes testing. Little research exists in the area of teachers' perceptions towards high-stakes tests. Therefore, this research study attempted to aid in that area of literature.

## 2.1 High-Stakes Testing Background

The rationale for high-stakes testing is that the promise of rewards and the threat of punishments will cause teachers to work more effectively, students to be more motivated, and schools to run more smoothly—all of which will result in greater academic achievement for all students, but especially those from poverty and minority backgrounds (Nichols & David, 2008). It was this rationale that had driven high-stakes testing to its current place at the forefront of education.

Business models have been applied to our educational system in order to increase productivity. High-stakes tests have been chosen as a means of measuring that productivity (Nichols & David, 2008). To many Americans, this seemed like a viable way to improve schools, which is why so many people bought into the idea of high-stakes testing. In an educational setting however, where mobility rates among other variables can be high, this business model system is not well matched with how schools operate.

## 2.2 Effects of Testing

The premise behind high-stakes tests is that by giving schools serious consequences for not showing achievement it will force teacher to pay more attention to what is on tests and change their curriculum. Unfortunately, the consequences we are actually seeing in schools aren't the ones that were intended (David, 2011). One of those unintended consequences is the narrowing of the curriculum. Since assessments only cover certain subjects, there has been more focus by schools to place their main focus on subjects covered on tests, leaving other subjects like social studies and art out of the curriculum. Au's (2007) synthesis of 47 different studies on time spent in each subject showed that in 80% of the studies, changes in curriculum and an increase in teacher-centered instruction occurred. In addition, past studies of the amount of instructional time spent on each subject were steady until the No Child Left Behind Act, with which more time became allotted to tested subjects like language arts and math.

Nichols & David (2001) cited Donald Campbell's law to illustrate how high-stakes testing is causing damage to our educational system. Campbell's law states, "the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures, and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor" (Campbell, 1975, p. 36). According to the law then, the pressure to score well on a single test is so intense that it leads to nefarious practices (cheating on the test, data manipulation), distorts education (narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test), and ends up demoralizing our educators (Nichols & David, 2008).

## 2.3 Teacher Perceptions

An article written by in Education Week examined a recent study conducted by Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation regarding teacher perceptions of high-stakes testing (Rebora, 2012). The study was based on a survey of over 10,000 public school teachers. Rebora found that only 28% of teachers thought standardized tests were essential and only 26% thought that the tests were a good reflection of what their students knew. Teachers felt that tests were not well-matched to their students' current learning goals. While the draw of high-stakes tests is that they give you a number, teaching and learning is too complex to be captured in that way.

A study by Davis (2011) was conducted with the purpose of examining the effects that standards based reform and high-stakes testing had on teachers' practices and beliefs in high school classrooms. The results showed that teachers felt that high-stakes testing limited them in creativity, time, and the ability to examine topics in-depth. The researcher also concluded that while most teachers felt pressure from the implementation of high-stakes tests, the practices among teachers who actually gave these tests and those who didn't, did not greatly differ.

Researchers Taylor, Sheppard, Kinner, & Rosenthal (2003) aimed to determine the perceptions of over 1,000 teachers regarding high-stakes testing and state standards. Researchers found that standards had a greater impact on instruction than testing. While results showed that teachers felt the state standards helped them to focus their instruction in reading and math and improve their writing, their perceptions regarding high-stakes testing were mixed. They found that while teachers felt the tests improved their writing instruction, it also changed curriculum (80% agreed), took instructional time away from subjects that were not tested, increased test practice time, and lowered faculty morale by (81% agreed).

A study by Yamashita (2011) in the District of Columbia Public School system, examined how teachers changed their instruction due to high-stakes testing. Interviews were given to teachers who administered the newly implemented assessment in order to comply with the NCLB act. Results of the study showed that the instructional strategies that teachers used did not change because of tests, but teachers did make changes to their instruction at the content level. She concluded that while teachers felt pressure to perform well on tests and adapted their teaching, tests alone were not enough to change the ways in which teacher are instructing their students.

Reese, Gordon, and Price (2004) conducted a study of over 900 Texas teachers about their perceptions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In a survey, participants reported that tested curriculum received more emphasis and did not motivate students to learn. Teachers also reported that high-stakes tests were not an accurate way to measure student learning or school effectiveness. Results revealed that there was an incongruence among teachers' perceptions of test effects, proponents' arguments for testing, and research among authentic pedagogy and student achievement. One part of the survey assessed the stress levels that teachers felt from pressure to perform well on high-stakes tests. Stress levels appeared highest in elementary schools (90% agreed), followed by middle schools (74%), and high schools (67%).

In a similar study by Jones & Egley (2004), researchers wanted to determine whether or not teachers felt that high-stakes testing programs were taking public schools in the right direction. The study was based on survey results from 708 teachers in Florida schools. Teachers surveyed taught 3-5th grade. Participants were given an online test with yes/no and open-ended questions. Over 79.9% of teachers felt that the high-stakes testing program was taking schools in the wrong direction. They felt that the tests were used improperly and that a one-time test was not an accurate assessment of students' learning and development (2004).

The results of the tests cited both positive and negative results of testing. Teachers cited negative effects from the tests on their curriculum, teaching and learning, and teacher

and student motivation (Jones & Egley, 2004). The positive effects that researchers found were fewer, but included the fact that tests held students, educators, and parents responsible for their actions (2004). They concluded by stating, "We agree with others (e.g. Grant, 2000) that for teachers to support a testing program, they need to have their voices heard by policymakers and be a part of developing the testing program" (p. 24).

## 2.4 The Future of Testing

More recently, a movement has begun to push for broader assessments besides the current high-stakes tests that are being given. Parents, teachers, administrators, and academics are taking action to stop test and punish policies that have failed to improve academic performance in our schools (Schaeffer, B., Neill, M., & Guisbond, L., 2012). The second largest teacher organization in the nation, AFT (American Federation of Teachers) has just taken stand against high-stakes testing at its annual convention. The resolution stated that standardized tests have undermined the United States' educational system. They unanimously agreed that testing should be used to inform, not impede classroom instruction.

Protests over high-stakes tests are not new. In the early years of NCLB scattered boycotts occurred in many communities. The difference now is the breadth and depth of protests. The biggest protests have been taking place in Texas, where high-stakes testing began, and in New York. In New York, 1,400 principals signed a letter protesting the new test-centric teacher evaluation policy (Schaeffer, B., Neil, M., & Guisbond, L., 2012). Included in their statement was a reminder of the 2011 report by the National Research Council that found that high-stakes tests have produced little learning progress.

Schaeffer, B., Neill, M., & Guisbond, L. (2012) pointed out that the U.S. is the only economically advanced nation that relies heavily on multiple-choice tests. Other countries such as Finland rely on performance based assessments, even though studies have shown they outscore the U.S. on multiple choice tests. Although public opinion polls consistently show support for cutting back on high-stakes tests, policy makers and their close supporters continue to push for the status quo, even though evidence reveals it has not succeeded.

In order to better understand the effects of high-stakes testing, we need a richer and more in-depth understanding of the relationship between state-mandated testing, and teaching in actual school settings (Cimbricz, 2002). She felt this will give us important direction for future research. Therefore, more studies in this area are greatly needed. If the use of high-stakes tests continues, more research needs to be done to ensure that it is better aligned with the curriculum (David, 2011). She suggested expanding the number of tested subjects and developing more coherent curriculum. Unless a well-designed curriculum is developed that embodies state standards, accountability tests will continue to be the standards in struggling schools.

Literature in this area reveals that there are two distinct groups of researchers, those who believe testing has a significant influence on teachers' beliefs and practices and those who feel that there is little or no influence (Cimbricz, 2002). A review of current studies, however, shows that high-stakes testing does influence what teachers say and do, whether or not that influence is positive or negative is more complicated than clear (2002).

The literature also shows that teachers do feel pressure to perform well on tests, but results on how the tests affect them are mixed.

There needs to be more research done in the area of high-stakes testing and there needs to be greater reform in regards to the content and curriculum of the tests. While there were some positive effects of high-stakes tests, such as focusing curriculum, the overall majority of studies reviewed cited negative effects from participants. One of the main concerns that teachers had was the narrowing of the curriculum. Teachers did not feel that tests were an accurate assessment of what their students knew and studies supported the fact that little learning progress has been made with high-stakes tests.

### **3. Methods**

This study was based on a mixed-methods design in order to provide a more holistic approach to the study. Mixed-methods research can help a researcher investigate questions that cannot be adequately researched through the use of quantitative or qualitative studies alone (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 585). Participants were given a structured, online survey and the data that resulted was analyzed in order to help determine the results of the study. The goal of the study was to use this survey to determine the viewpoints, preferences, and opinions that teachers have about high-stakes tests. The results of the study were formed from both the participants' answers of the survey questions and current research about high-stakes tests in schools.

The participants were chosen from three elementary schools in a Midwestern state using criterion-based selection. All participants taught for at least five years or more and were working at a grade level where high-stakes tests were administered.

The three elementary schools from which participants were chosen were part of a consolidated school district which is located in a small town, suburban setting. The first research school had an enrollment of 333 with 13% of those students coming from low-income families. Approximately 95.5% of students meet or exceed state testing in all subjects. The second research school had an enrollment of 316, with 9% of students coming from low-income families. The third research school had a population of 309 students with 30.7% of their students coming from low-income families. 95.1% of the third school's students meet or exceed on state tests.

### **4. Instrumentation**

The researchers used a structured survey with 13 questions. Eight questions used a Likert scale and five questions were open-ended questions that were developed by the researcher. The Likert scale consisted of a five point scale in which participants selected whether they strongly agree, agree, are not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree with the given statement. The survey was delivered via Google Docs, an anonymous online survey tool. The questions included information about the participants' feelings towards high-stakes tests, and allowed for open-ended responses. The participants' answers provided information about the benefits and weakness of high-stakes tests and their perceptions of them. The survey questions included language that teachers were familiar with, so that the proper responses were elicited and there was no confusion. Validity and readability were checked by giving the survey to a panel of teachers who checked it for accuracy.

Creswell & Miller (2000) suggested that the validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption, so in order to validate the research instrument, the researchers asked participants to check the accuracy of the research report. After reviewing the participants' answers to the survey, researchers determined if rich, thoughtful, and consistent responses that answer the research questions were provided, and then decide if a follow-up interview was necessary.

#### **4.1 Research Questions**

What were teachers' perceptions regarding high-stakes testing?

#### **4.2 Definition of Terms**

**High-Stakes Testing:** a high-stakes test was defined as any test that has major consequences or is the basis of a major decision.

#### **4.3 Limitations**

There were limitations that could possibly affect the results of the survey. One limitation was that there were only twelve participants which is a small sample. Since small, criterion-based sampling was used, there was a possibility that the viewpoints were not varied, or an accurate representation of the overall perceptions of teachers in today's classrooms. Also, the study only focused on three schools within the same district, so the selection of teachers was not as diverse as it could be if the focus was on several different school districts.

#### **4.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to collect data, the survey was sent via email to all the participants. The purpose of the survey was explained to the participants, and they were asked to respond back within two weeks. If the surveys were not returned in the allotted time, the researchers sent a follow up email to remind them.

The researchers analyzed the qualitative portion of the survey by coding and categorizing the data into different themes to see if there were similarities or differences in the responses across participants. This helped determine if any conclusions could be made about teachers' perspectives on high-stakes tests. Data triangulation was also used to analyze data and establish validity. The questions which required participants to answer on a Likert scale were analyzed through statistical analysis to determine the mean and standard deviation of the data.

### **5. Results**

The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing. Teachers' perceptions concerning high-stakes tests and their validity, as well as their benefits and weaknesses, were examined. Participants of the study included teachers from three suburban elementary schools. A structured survey was delivered to selected participants via Google Docs, an anonymous online survey tool.

Out of the twenty selected participants, a total of eighteen teachers responded to the survey. The return rate was 90%. The survey given was constructed of a total of 13 questions. Eight of the survey questions used a Likert scale and five questions were open-



ended. By comparing the perceptions of educators at varying grade levels, this study sought to explore similarities and differences among perceptions teachers have towards high-stakes testing.

The questions which required participants to answer on a Likert scale were analyzed through statistical analysis to determine the mean and standard deviation of the data. The Likert results were separated into two distinct tables, one of which shows the perceptions teachers have about how tests affected their students (see Table 1). The other table shows the perceptions teacher have about how the tests affect them and their teaching (see Table 2).

Table 1: *Perception of Ways Tests Affect Students*

Survey Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
High-stakes tests are an accurate way to assess what students know	2.47	.87
High-stakes tests cause students anxiety.	4.29	.77
High-stakes tests should not be the only assessment tools to measure students' performance.	4.76	.97

Table 1 displays how teachers felt that high-stakes tests affected their students. The mean response of 4.76 showed that the majority of respondents felt that tests should not be the only tools used to measure their students' performance. The data also showed that teachers feel high-stakes tests were causing their students anxiety. The mean response to this question was 4.29.

Table 2: Perception of Ways Tests Affect Teachers

Survey Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
High-Stakes tests affect my teaching	4.24	.664
Students' high performance on high-stake tests is an indication of good teaching.	2.24	1.033
Students' low performance on high-stake tests is an indication of weak teaching.	1.82	.809
Do you think teachers should be evaluated based on their students' scores on high-stakes tests?	4.00	1.173
Do you feel pressured to score well on high-stakes tests?	4.76	.437

The results from Table 2 show that most teachers surveyed felt that high-stakes tests were not an accurate way to assess what their students know. The mean response of 4.24 shows that teachers also felt that high-stakes tests affected their teaching. The mean response of teachers who thought scoring well on tests indicated good teaching was 2.24, while the mean response of teachers who felt that low performance indicated weak teaching was 1.82. Teachers felt pressure to score well as shown by the mean of 4.76. Teachers are also opposed to being evaluated based on these scores. The mean response to this question was 4.00.

The qualitative portion of the survey was analyzed by coding and categorizing the data into different themes to determine if any conclusions could be made about teachers' perspectives about high-stakes tests. Teachers felt that tests affected their teaching in a variety of ways. Most teachers felt that they adapted their curriculum to be sure and cover topics that would be on tests. One teacher described how high-stakes tests affected their teaching:

With high stakes testing now being part of the teacher evaluation, it is more difficult to be confident that with my teaching alone, students will score well on these tests. I have shifted what I teach and have to pay closer attention to what is on these tests to be sure that I teach them in my class.

Teachers saw the benefits of high-stakes testing being greatly varied. Some felt there was not benefit at all, while many felt that tests help to compare students to each other and to national norms. Regarding the benefits of these tests, one teacher stated, "It provides data as to how individuals compare to students across the state." The disadvantages of testing provided more consistent results. The majority of teachers felt that the tests caused them and their students' anxiety. The most common disadvantage

was that tests were a “snapshot” of students at one point in time and did not take into account other factors that affect students. One teacher replied:

Through our years in education, we have all learned that to create an accurate picture of a students' progress, one needs multiple and varied assessment opportunities. High-stakes tests assess take a snapshot of students at one point in time and in one manner. Therefore, one cannot get a true picture of a student's strengths and weaknesses. That only comes from multiple and varied assessments given over a longer period of time.

Teachers who felt pressured to score well believe that the pressure came from either their administrators (at the district or building level) or from themselves. One teacher stated that, “Administration makes me feel pressured to achieve high scores and meet growth targets because scores are printed and teachers and schools are compared.” Another felt, “Individually, you want your students to do well. You want your school to meet AYP, so pressure can come from within yourself, administration, and overall community.”

All participants surveyed felt that too much emphasis was placed on high-stakes testing. One teacher stated the reason that he or she felt this way:

How can my teaching be evaluated if a student comes to school on a day of high-stakes testing and is not able to perform at his or her best level because of something that happened at home or just a poor attitude? Why am I punished? Of course, I would love all the accolades if students did well, but must admit it wasn't all my teaching and that this is a compilation of home as well as previous teaching success! High stakes should be replaced with good old achievement tests. I like to know where the students came in at in my room and what growth they accomplished individually.

By analyzing the survey responses, it was easier to get a better picture of teachers' perceptions towards high-stakes tests. The quantitative data from the Likert portion of the survey was analyzed by looking at the mean and standard deviation of the responses. Data from the open-ended responses was coded and analyzed to illustrate common themes within the responses. The qualitative data themes that emerged showed that teachers were affected by tests. They felt pressured to score well and felt too much emphasis was placed on testing. Teachers also shined light on some of the advantages and disadvantages that they felt accompanied students taking high-stakes tests.

## **6. Discussion**

The key idea behind this study was to determine how teachers felt about high-stakes testing. The rationale for high-stakes testing was that the promise of rewards and the threat of punishments would cause teachers to work more effectively, students to be more motivated, and schools to run more smoothly (Nichols & David, 2008). This study showed, however; that this idea seemed to differ from what real teachers are actually feeling regarding high-stakes tests.

High-stakes tests were perceived to affect not only students, but teachers as well. The majority of the elementary teachers surveyed feel that they were pressured to score well on high-stakes tests. These results were conclusive with a similar study by Reese,

Gordon, and Price (2004). Out of over 900 teachers surveyed, over 90% felt stress from high-stakes testing. The reasons for this pressure, however; were varied.

Respondents cited pressure came from themselves, administrators, and the community in which they worked. Although tests were meant to help teachers compare students academically, it seemed that teachers were the ones being compared. Most teachers felt pressured to help their students meet growth targets and their school to meet Adequate Yearly Progress. This pressure, regardless of its source, causes the curriculum to change as well.

This study results showed that the majority of teachers felt high-stakes tests caused a narrowing of the curriculum. Tests seemed to dictate what was taught, with less time being spent on untested subjects like social studies or art. The stress that teachers felt for their students to perform well on tests caused them to focus on the parts of the curriculum that were on tests. This result was consistent with the results of Au's (2007) synthesis of 47 studies that showed time spent in tested subjects increased after the No Child Left Behind Act. Davis (2011) also showed that teachers feel limited by high-stakes tests in areas of creativity, time, and ability to examine in-depth topics.

The benefits and weakness of these tests were also varied, which coincides with the results of several current studies. The 2012 Bill and Melinda Gates survey of over 10,000 public teachers showed that only 26% of teachers think that the tests reflected what their students know (Rebora, 2012). Teachers felt that too much emphasis was placed on high-stakes tests. Tests were described by one teacher as a "snapshot" of what students know at a certain time. Students learn in a variety of different ways and a one-time test does not give us the full-picture of what a student knows.

Jones & Egley (2004) showed similar reactions from educators in their survey of 708 teachers. Participants of that survey felt that one-time tests were not an accurate assessment of students' learning and development. Teachers surveyed did not feel that students' high performance was an indication that they were good teachers, and they did not feel that a student performing poorly was an indication of weak teaching either. These results showed that teachers were questioning the validity and purpose of the high-stakes tests that have become such an important part of our current educational system.

Furthermore, teachers did not feel they should be evaluated based on their students' scores. There are many other factors that come into play when students are taking tests. Are students having a bad day? Do they test well? Have they been absent from school during instruction? These are just some of the variables that must be considered when evaluating teachers based on students' scores.

The significance of this study is that it showed us how teachers perceive high-stakes testing. Testing has become so widespread that it is common practice in the majority of U.S. schools. We are the only economically advanced nation to rely on these tests, however; and public opinion polls consistently show support for cutting back on testing (Schaeffer, B., Neill, M., & Guisbond, L., 2012) This study showed us that teachers, who are on the frontlines of giving these tests, were not in support of them either. We need to involve teachers more in the decisions that are being made that affect them and their students. If teachers are not in support of high-stakes tests, then why are they still being given?

This study proved that most teachers have concerns about the validity of high-stakes tests. We want students to have critical and higher level thinking skills, yet we limit their thought process to choosing which of four multiple-choice bubbles to fill in. Teachers know that these high-stakes “snapshots” of their students and don’t tell a student’s whole story. Any good teacher knows truly gauging your students’ abilities means having a holistic picture of them. This implies different modes of assessment that occur more than a select few times per year.

Most teachers don’t disagree that there is some value in high-stakes tests. The issue seems to be more about the “high-stakes” part than the testing. The “stakes” are so high that these tests have become the end all determining factor of students’, teachers’, and schools’ capabilities. If students don’t do well, schools are punished financially, teachers can be evaluated poorly, and students’ placement in special education, gifted programs, and colleges are affected based on the score that they receive. It comes as no surprise then, that teachers are citing pressure from high-stakes tests.

There is such a drive to perform well that time is spent teaching to the test in many classrooms. Teachers feel they are changing, many times narrowing, their curriculum to accommodate test material. Tested subjects get more emphasis, while untested subjects are given little class time or eliminated completely. In light of these findings, it seems that high-stakes tests have taken the role of telling teachers what they should be teaching and what their students should know.

As these tests continue to be a dominant force in our educational system, it seems that no one is really stopping to ask questions. Teachers don’t feel tests are accurately assessing what their students know and few seem to want to ask why. Should we continue with the status quo of high-stakes tests? Are the tests effectively assessing our students? Should we only use high-stakes tests to evaluate what students know? Those who care to ask teachers these tough questions are hearing a loud and resounding “no.”

As long as high-stakes testing continues to be an imposing factor in our classrooms, we need to have a better understanding of its legitimacy. If future research in this area is to be useful, there needs to be more studies examining teachers’ perceptions of the tests. Teachers are a vital, untapped resource that can help us to undertake the crucial task of reexamining high-stakes testing. Given the limited number of studies that are currently available and the limited nature of the data on which many of these findings are based, studies that provide a richer, more in-depth understanding of the relationship between state-mandated testing and teaching in actual school settings will not only point toward important directions for continued research in this area, but are greatly needed (Cimbricz, 2002).

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