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## Parents' perceptions of the California High School Exit Exam and some social implications

Susan Leigh Jennings

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL  
EXIT EXAM AND SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Susan Leigh Jennings  
Deborah Kay Perry

June 2004

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EXIT EXAM AND SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

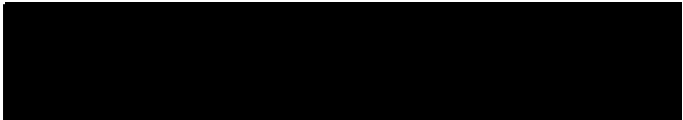
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by  
Susan Leigh Jennings  
Deborah Kay Perry  
June 2004

Approved by:

  
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Social Work

6/1/04  
Date

  
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,  
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## ABSTRACT

California plans, in 2006, to implement a competency exam, the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which will require students to demonstrate passing scores to obtain a high school diploma. A survey was designed and completed in an effort to explore perception about the impact of this requirement on high school students and parents. The study focused on parents' awareness and feelings about the CAHSEE, their children's education, social implications of failure of the CAHSEE and the need for social workers in the San Bernardino County Schools. Findings from the study indicated that students and parents need to be better informed and oriented, in English and the language most often spoken in the home, about the importance of the CAHSEE. In addition, parents who participated in the study also indicated the detrimental effect of lack of high school diploma on the psycho-social development of their children. Furthermore, findings indicated that San Bernardino County Schools could benefit by having social workers on campus to help students achieve academic success.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

Chapter One presented an overview of the project. The problem statement and purpose of the study were discussed. Finally, the significance of the project for social work was presented.

Problem Statement

This study explored parents' perceptions about the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The study focused on how parents view the CAHSEE and its social implications for students who are at risk of not passing it. It examined the knowledge and feelings of parents regarding the CAHSEE, their children taking the CAHSEE, and possible effects of the CAHSEE. In addition, the need for social workers within the County of San Bernardino schools was also assessed.

Senate Bill 2x established the CAHSEE in 1999 to set higher standards for graduation requirements. Effective in the year 2006, all students in public schools will be required to pass this exam in order to obtain a high school diploma. Students, beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, will be given a total of eight attempts to pass this test (California Department of Education (DOE), 2002).



The preliminary outcome in San Bernardino countywide school districts for those students at risk of not passing the CAHSEE appeared discouraging. Overall, the 2002 results for the county showed that only 26% of the students were able to pass the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE while only 46% were able to pass the English-Language Arts (ELA) portion of the test (DOE, 2002).

Students at the high school level are still in the process of developing physically, socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and mentally. They do not get a choice of what they want to study, but rather what the social, political, and school systems mandate is best for them to study (Johnson, 1986). The more new experiences they receive the more tensions they will incur. Teens deal with pressures differently than mature adults (Mullis & Youngs, 1993).

When attaining a high school diploma rests on one solitary test, stress and distress can become a major part of a student's already irrational decision-making processes. If students who are already disadvantaged or at risk of not passing the CAHSEE encounter more obstacles and failures; then, it appears that society has set them up to achieve lower standards for themselves (Gruber,

2000). For example, social implications for students at risk of not passing this exam can include developing such deviant behaviors as anger, rage, violence, unprotected sex, becoming pregnant and parenting teens, drug and/or alcohol use and abuse, dangerous driving, poor nutrition, delinquency, dropping out of school, poverty, discrimination for culturally diverse races and ethnicities, and teen suicides (Gruber, 2000).

Students need to develop a sense of self-efficacy and increased self-esteem to cope with the stress and anxiety that the CAHSEE creates. This will help them to obtain their diploma and graduation. They also need to be better prepared to execute social competency within their families, schools, and communities. Implications for society are the impact of these dangerous behaviors carried over from adolescence into adulthood. Anger and rage can lead to increased violence (both criminal and domestic). Unprotected sex can lead to promiscuous sexual behavior, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS, babies without parents, babies born with diseases and unwanted babies. Drug and/or alcohol use and abuse can continue the cycle of poor nutrition, violence, unwanted babies, unemployment or low paying jobs without health insurance or enough money to meet the growing demands of a

culturally diverse society. Emotionally, there can be an increased hopelessness and helplessness that creates self-destructive behaviors (Gruber, 2000).

According to Pryor (1995), parents need to be included in their children's education. Parents' influences can have a direct impact on their children (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2001). Parents continuously observe their children's behaviors, attitudes, social skills, and all the developmental change their children go through at every stage (Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003; Ruffalo & Elliott, 1997).

This study attempted to capture parents' perceptions toward the CAHSEE as it affected students' graduation from high school. Most of the literature shows that educators and peers are the key influences in students' lives at school. Most studies focused parents' roles on the support process. Few studies sought the direct input of parents about the need to develop school programs (Haager & Vaughn, 1995).

The National Association of Social Workers called for social workers in the schools by stating their ethical purpose is to help people, especially the diverse, culturally oppressed, poverty stricken, and those with individual differences (NASW, 1999).

Looking at these issues from an ecological perspective best fit this study because it involved the "person-in-environment" and how students, families, schools, and communities interact. Problems and concerns that students have in school can be carried over from childhood and family, and be projected into their future becoming social issues. For example, lack of a high school diploma is detrimental in a society that demands that students be educated to find employment. One study concluded that 75% of the jobs require more advanced training or higher education than the high school diploma (Rumberger, 1983).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the awareness and feelings of parents and their perceptions about the CAHSEE and the impact on their children. Also, it looked at the social implications from an ecological perspective. Demographics of participants were identified through variables such as race and/or ethnicity, limited English skills, low income, economic disadvantages and the need for special education services (DOE, 2002).

San Bernardino County statistics, as printed in the California Department of Education report (DOE, 2002),

showed that male students had a harder time of passing the English-Language Arts (ELA) portion of the test, while female students had a harder time of passing the math portion of the test. They also showed that 59% of American Indians or Alaska Natives, 47% of Asians, 54% of Pacific Islanders, 61% of Hispanics or Latinos, and 60% of African Americans were, and still are, in danger of not passing this exam. Only 8% of students who qualified as "Special Education" passed the math portion while only 19% passed the ELA portion. Moreover, 16% who were labeled as "English Learners (EL)" or limited English speaking students passed the math portion while 26% passed the ELA portion. Furthermore, 19% categorized as "Socio-economically Disadvantaged" passed the math portion while 36% passed the ELA portion (DOE, 2002).

Allen-Meares, Washington & Welsh (1986) found that school social workers needed to incorporate practices that were inclusive of more than just the micro level interventions in order to achieve greater resolution for students. Social workers also needed to focus on the individual and their relationships between other students, families, schools, neighborhood, and communities. Research of the ecological theory allows for these interrelationship interventions (Clancy, 1995). Other

researchers found that more solid social foundations and safer environments created a greater occurrence for success and increased self-esteem (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992).

The burden of accountability to receive a high school diploma rested solely on the students to prove they are capable of not only passing the high school exit exam but also of going out into society and becoming more highly educated and productive individuals. Because students are influenced by their home environment, parents may be able to help them identify different considerations or levels of skills needed for them to be successful in completing their educational processes (Schloss, 1984).

Grinnell (2001) found research methods for these issues to be mostly nomothetic and somewhat ideographic, and included surveys to rural parents for exploration of awareness and feelings about the impact of the CAHSEE as it became mandatory for students. Levels of measurements were nominal, ordinal, and continuous using both quantitative a priori and qualitative post hoc categories. It also included data collection and empirical analysis of categories and patterns derived. Finally, inductive and deductive reasoning from extensive literature review

showed the need of having social workers within the schools (Grinnell, 2001).

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

The significance of the project for social work was to identify parental awareness of their children who are disadvantaged and at risk of not passing the CAHSEE and, from an ecological perspective, some of the social impacts on them. Exploration of parents' feelings and attitudes of some social issues showed a need for school social workers. Findings pointed to the need to implement change at various levels: students, families, schools, and communities.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to gather information and feelings from parents' about the impact on their children that have to take the CAHSEE. This information was collected on a mezzo level using the ecological perspective, and included some aspects of diversity (Kirst-Asman & Hull, 2002).

This exploratory study determined whether policy should be changed to include more social workers within schools. Adolescents have gone through critical periods of biological, psychological, and social changes and demands while in high school. Parents needed be aware of these

graduation requirements for their children. Schools needed to know if parents were aware of the risks that CAHSEE presents to their students. Specifically, this research project answered the questions:

- 1) Are parents aware of the CAHSEE becoming mandatory on high school students?
- 2) What are some social implications for students who are at risk of not passing the CAHSEE?
- 3) Given these social implications, did parents feel there was a need for social workers within the San Bernardino County schools?



CHAPTER TWO  
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two consisted of a discussion of the relevant literature. The purpose of this chapter was to investigate parents' awareness and perspectives about the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and to explore some of the social implications of effects on these students at risk of not passing. Specifically, background information was also presented to participants about the CAHSEE. Review of the literature revealed some social issues. Theories guiding conceptualization were presented through the ecological perspective.

Background

The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) is a fairly new and recent development in the educational system. Knowledge and information on CAHSEE had been made public through mailings and websites to both educators and parents. Professionals in the education system had not hesitated to give their input on this exam. On the other hand, little information and input from parents and their awareness had been presented. There was very little to suggest that parents had access to, were aware of, had

even read or understood the impact of this exam on students (Pryor, 1995).

The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) is a difficult exam for high achievers, and could be especially troublesome to academically challenged achievers. The CAHSEE has several sections that must be passed in order for students to obtain their diploma. The content of the exam consists of mathematics and English-Literature Arts (ELA). The reading portion covers "vocabulary, decoding, informational reading and literary reading. The writing portion covers writing strategies, applications, and conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, and grammar). Written responses must be completed to literature or informational passages and another written response to a writing prompt" (DOE, 2002).

The mathematical section of the CAHSEE consists of all multiple-choice questions and includes "statistics, data analysis and probability, numbers and computations, measurement and geometry, mathematical reasoning, and algebra. Students are required to show a strong foundation in working with decimals, fractions, and percentages" (DOE, 2002).

All students must be able to pass all sections of the CAHSEE before they can receive their high school diploma

from a public institution. If they pass one section, they do not have to retake that portion of the test again. However, all students must be able to pass this test in English; and, all students, including disadvantaged or special education students, are required to take the test. Accommodations will be made for special education students to take the test, but not regarding the test itself (DOE, 2002).

### Critical Analysis

According to Gruber (2002), some of the social implications of not passing this exam included test anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, rage, violence, unprotected sex, becoming pregnant and parenting teens, drug and/or alcohol use and abuse, dangerous driving, poor nutrition, dropping out of school, poverty, delinquency, discrimination for culturally diverse races and ethnicities, and teen suicides (Gruber, 2000).

For example, one of these implications was an increased school dropout rate. A recent state report showed that drop out rates for certain districts within San Bernardino County had doubled from the 2000-2001 school year to the 2001-2002 school year (DOE, 2002). According to a study completed by Rumberger (1983), one

out of four students within the San Bernardino school districts dropped out of school. A recent newspaper report in the San Bernardino Sun confirms this to still be the situation (Berg, 2003).

Past researchers have identified several factors as reasons for high dropout rates. One of the strongest indicators to dropping out was "low academic school performance" (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1987). Another factor was age related; if students had been kept back from their grade level, they were more at risk (Frase, 1989; Kreitzer, Madaus, & Haney, 1987). Other factors identified included lack of English proficiency, difficulty with behaviors, and race or ethnic origin (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1987; Hammack, 1986; Pallas, 1986). Vernez and Abrahams (1996) concluded that some of the problems might have been attributed to immigrant adolescents' inability to catch up to their American peers. Other immigrant youths did not even bother to go to school because of the need to support themselves and/or their families. This caused unsafe, overcrowded and poor living conditions as well as limited English-speaking skills and social exposure (Zhou, 2003).

Further investigation showed another example. As the stakes got higher and the demand grew to pass this exam,

there was an increase in test anxiety. Test failures created lowered self-esteem or embarrassment in the presence of student's peers (Lecompte & Dworkin, 1991).

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Research evidence showed the importance of promoting success in education (Fraser, 1997). The ecological perspective emphasized changes in demeanor and growth from the micro systems in which teens operate in (Germain, 1979).

Typically, in past research, there were various models to address individual needs including the school change model, the community school model, and the social interaction model. These were "band-aid" approaches according to the ecological theory (Clancy, 1995).

Ecological theory focused on how the person interacts with their environment (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002). Schwartz (1971) viewed this relationship as one between the schools and the students only. Other studies went beyond this belief by explicitly stating that the students, schools, families, and communities are all interrelated and dependent upon each other (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002).

High school exit exams caused limited learning that created social inequalities (Apple, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Jackson, 1968). Conceptual models showed that limited English learners have adverse experiences in education. Another study argued that the hidden agendas stem out of a need for social control (Giroux, 1983). Social and political agendas can be perceived and organized to hide particular information. Critical theories promoted education as a way to reinforce social injustices on immigrants (Apple, 1990). Another study found students' success in school can contribute to their success in society through attachment, cognitive commitment, social connectedness, and moral expectations (Hirschi, 1969).

#### Argument for Change

Students bring their own personalities and characteristics with them, influenced by school, peers, family, friends, neighborhoods, and communities (Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1998). Coping skills during exams are dependent upon students' dispositions and emotions (Mechanic, 1974; White, 1974). During school, students should be allowed to keep their sense of individuality while they are being taught skills

to increase their ability to solve problems. This helps alleviate stress and reduces anxieties involved in test taking (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002).

Parents play a critical role in not only how their children communicate and interact with their peers, families, and teachers but also how students self managed their behaviors, attitudes, problem solving abilities and decision making skills (Haager & Vaughn, 1995; Sugai & Lewis, 1996). This study's focus on parents gave a greater insight into their perceptions of the CAHSEE, and how they felt it impacted students socially.

Specific social work agencies, such as Child Protective Services and/or Public Health, are able to work for the immediate safety and health of the student, only when a report had been made to them, and sometimes well after the crisis is reported. School social workers are in a position to develop school competency skills, community resources and increase students' goals to succeed in society. They did this by building rapport, advocating, and mediating between students, families, schools, and communities (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002).

In order to obtain and stabilize a "goodness of fit" between students, families, schools, and communities; students must go through adaptive processes to change with

the environment. Sometimes, this can be difficult for the student as needs and goals are continuously changing (Dubos, 1968). School social workers have a chance to change the lives of students by applying preventative measures through the macro system in advance for longer lasting resolution (Clancy, 1995).

#### Summary

The literature important to the project was presented in Chapter Two. Although there was limited literature on the California High School Exit Exam itself and parents of children who have to take the CAHSEE, there was extensive information and literature on the social issues encompassing the exam. The ecological perspective focused on students and their surrounding environments. Parents were identified as key influences in the lives of their children. Exploration of the need for social workers within the school was also presented for the ecological well being of the students.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three documented the steps used in developing the project. Sampling, data collection and analysis were described. Procedures were outlined and the protection in the use of human subjects was presented.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this project was to assess and to explore the feelings and knowledge of the parents of high school students located within the Morongo Unified School District within the County of San Bernardino regarding the CAHSEE. This presented new insight for the social work and the educational field on linking social workers with schools, families, and communities. Data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively through interviews with parents of high school students using the snowball sampling method (see Appendix A).

Qualitative research methods were selected because of the interest in exploring parents' perceptions. Since no previous perceptions from parents were found in existing literature, the purpose was to obtain information directly

from the parents and to interpret the meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The strengths of this study included capturing insight to better understand parent's feelings and their awareness about the CAHSEE. Also, parents who participated in the study were able to gain knowledge about the CAHSEE and its implications for their school-age children.

Limitations of this research project included sampling size. The study sample included only parents of students currently enrolled in high school. Also, the sample did not include parents who were homeless, parents of students who were not yet enrolled in a high school in San Bernardino County or would not graduate in the time aforementioned, and parents of students who may have already dropped out of high school or were in an alternative program to complete their high school diploma (such as adult high school, continuation school, court appointed schools, or home-schooled). This limits generalization to the overall population of San Bernardino County. It may not reach parents of students who have limited English speaking skills. Specifically, the purpose of this research project was to answer the questions: How do parents perceive the CAHSEE becoming mandatory on high school students, what are some social implications for

students at risk of not passing it, and is there a perceived need for social workers within the schools?

#### Sampling

A sample size of 41 parents (participants) was chosen based on time and resources available and on voluntary participation. Convenience sampling included parents from at least one rural at risk high school from within the Morongo Unified School District in the County of San Bernardino. The definition of rural was taken from the Census Bureau. The sampling frame consisted of parents of students who were scheduled to graduate and receive their high school diploma between 2002-2007 and currently lived in San Bernardino County. The parents were chosen because of their responsibility for their child/children and the need to be informed and knowledgeable about the process of graduation requirements. Parents were defined as birth, adoptive, step, and foster or grand parents.

Originally, participants were to be gathered through the Morongo Unified School District student records with specific written permission from the agency (see Appendix B). Because of the sensitivity of confidentiality, permission was given by the school district to talk to parents but not to students. Due to time constraints, the

study focused on adult participation and excluded participants under the age of 18. The school district office was made aware of the nature and purpose of this study. However, district official informed these researchers that there was no need for approval because data collection was obtained outside of agency perimeters.

This district was chosen because it is considered a rural location. It is located approximately 75 miles east of the nearest urban city of San Bernardino. Demographics include 650 diverse students from 4 high schools who had taken, the CAHSEE. Twenty-eight percent passed the math section while 57% passed the English-Language Arts section. Of the 221 who passed the exam, 134 were male and 87 were female; 42% were economically disadvantaged (DOE, 2003).

Snowball sampling was particularly useful in this study as the population is spread out. This method was chosen because the population can be difficult to identify and locate (Grinnell, 2001). First contacts were obtained from within the Morongo Unified School District, outside agency perimeters, and not through school records. Parents were asked to identify other possible contacts that may be in the same groups.

Biases of concern were that the sample size was not conducive to representing the entire population from which it was drawn, and it was dependent upon the first contacts. Also, it may have been inadequate to infer the interest of the entire population from the County of San Bernardino.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

Statistical data was collected from public records obtained from the California Department of Education (DOE). It was used for the purpose of defining those at risk of not passing the CAHSEE. Data was also collected through empirical research methods for identifying specific social implications viewed through ecological perspectives.

An instrument was designed specifically for this study. The design and construction of the instrument was set up to maximize the response rate. Time of completion was approximately 20-30 minutes. A consent form was read to participants (see Appendix C). Debriefing information and a thank you sheet were given (see Appendix D) along with information about the CAHSEE (see Appendix E) and listed resources (see Appendix F) for assistance were handed out.

The survey instrument was pre-tested and evaluated by using two parents (one who had completed college and one who never completed high school) of students between 15-20 years old. This instrument was tested for content and construct validity. Also, it was evaluated for the amount of time it took to complete.

The survey instrument was written at a sixth grade reading level. The written survey had preset question with no more than 5 pages on a neutral color paper. It was given to parents (participants) of students between 15-20 years old to complete. Estimated time for completion was 20-30 minutes.

Questions had levels of measurements consisting of nominal, ordinal, and continuous data. Survey questions were prepared and completed by 2 MSW research students (researchers). Surveys were started beginning the summer of 2003 and were completed by the end of the summer of 2003. The entire project was completed by June 2004.

Demographic variables in the survey included gender of parent, ethnicity of students, income levels of family, language most often spoken in the home, and educational level of parents. These questions were nominal, ordinal and continuous. Some of the exploratory questions included, "Do you feel school is important?"

(Ordinal/Ranking) Why or why not? (Continuous) Are you aware of the CAHSEE? (Nominal) How did you become aware of the CAHSEE? (Continuous) Has your child/children taken the CAHSEE? (Ordinal) Did they pass it? (Ordinal) Do you feel the CAHSEE should be required to pass to receive a high school diploma? (Nominal) Social implications that you feel students are at risk of if they do not receive their high school diploma (such as drop out, smoking, drinking, pregnancy, lower paying jobs, drug use and abuse, etc.) (Ordinal) Do you feel that parents should have input on school curriculums and programs? (Ordinal) What type of support, programs, or classes would you like to see in school to help your child/children pass the CAHSEE? (Continuous) Do you feel students would benefit from having social workers within the school? (Ordinal) Do you have any other comments about the CAHSEE? (Continuous)"

#### Procedures

Participants were approached outside school grounds in the Morongo school district high schools. Researchers approached parents and explained the purpose and nature of the study. Parents were given the opportunity to decline the survey (without any obligation or pressure) or set an appointment. Those who were interested in participating

were scheduled for interviews. Surveys were conducted at participant's choice of location (within reason and safety for the researcher) for comfort and ease. The informed consent, survey instrument, debriefing statement, information on the CAHSEE, and resources available were provided to participants.

At the actual survey site, the researcher opened with nonessential open-ended conversation to establish further rapport with the participant. Informed consent forms were used to explain the purpose of the survey and participants' rights. Reiteration was made that the survey was voluntary and the participant may stop any time.

After the survey was completed, researchers went over the debriefing statement which included a phone number for further contact purposes. A sincere verbal thank you was given along with the written one. Information on the CAHSEE was also explained along with resources available. Actual survey time was approximately 20-30 minutes.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Although the written questions are low risk, anonymity was assured by not reporting names, phone numbers or addresses. Surveys were assigned a number versus a name to provide greater confidentiality.



Participants were advised both in writing and verbally that all information would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only, as well as relating that this was not mandatory for them to complete and they may stop at any time they felt uncomfortable. Along with this information, participants received debriefing instructions and a thank you for participation in the study. Information on the CAHSEE was given along with listed resources available.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis was descriptive because this research project was an explanatory study. It was also exploratory as it investigates CAHSEE awareness through parents' perspectives allowing input and giving meaning to the project. This research was nomothetic and somewhat ideographic.

Data was reviewed and coded systematically to combine information into various categories. Relationships among variables were examined through theme coding and cross referencing. A priori categories were used to define closed-ended questions for quantitative sections of the survey. The post hoc categories were derived from qualitative sections. Interpretive analysis was used for

open-ended questions. Specific categories were developed for the purpose of separating and ease of presenting data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### Summary

Study design was purposefully identified. Sampling procedure was described along with data collection methods, using realistic selection criteria. The survey instruments were pre-tested for content validity. They were presented in the appendices. Protection of human rights was discussed regarding confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consents and debriefing statements were placed in the appendices. Data analysis described approaches to be used in the research along with identifying concepts, constructs and variables.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This section provided a demographic description. Quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented to show how the survey and other information were obtained. Findings and results of the survey are presented for each question from the study survey. Tables are presented to clarify and show significant findings.

#### Presentation of the Findings

##### Demographics

A total of 41 parents within the Morongo Unified School District were surveyed. Morongo Unified School District is a rural area located approximately 75 miles southeast of the city of San Bernardino, in San Bernardino County. Population is somewhat diverse, including Caucasian, Hispanics, American-Indians, African Americans, and a few Asian-Americans. Demographic variables included the gender of the parents being surveyed, the gender and ages of their child(ren), income level of family, ethnicity of child(ren), language most often spoken in the home, and whether or not the child(ren) were in special education programs within the school (see Table 1).

Table 1. Household Demographics

Demographics	N = 41	<u>Percent</u> (%) *
1) GENDER OF PARENTS		
Males	12	29%
Females	29	71%
2) EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARENTS		
Less than 12th grade	11	27%
12th-14th grade	28	42%
15th+ grade	6	15%
3) TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
0-\$20,000	17	41%
\$20,001-\$40,000	18	44%
\$40,000+	6	15%
4) ETHNICITY		
White/Caucasian	22	43%
African/American	3	7%
Hispanic/Mexican American	9	22%
Asian American	0	0%
American Indian	7	17%
Other	0	0%
5) LANGUAGE MOST OFTEN SPOKEN IN HOME		
English	34	83%
Spanish	7	17%
Other	0	0%
6) CHILDREN RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES AT SCHOOL		
Yes	5	12%
No	35	85%
Unknown	1	3%

\*Percentages were approximation

Findings from the other questionnaire items are presented as follows:

In Item 7, "Do you feel that school is important?" All participants reported that school had some importance: 93% of the participants replied that they felt that school was very important, while only 7% felt that school was somewhat important.

When asked why or why not, only 51% responded to the open-ended question. Several themes emerged. Many respondents, 57%, felt that school was important to get better jobs or increased income, 24% felt that it was important for a better future, and 19% felt that it was important for achieving higher education. One participant who felt that school was very important stated, "There is no future without it!," while another stated that, "What a stupid question!" One participant who felt that school was only somewhat important gave a future inference that, "although it teaches reading and writing, it does not teach manners or skills to get jobs."

Item 8 asked, "Based on your observations, do you feel that your child/children have increased stress when having to take exams in school?" The majority of participants (90%) felt that their children do experience increased stress from tests; 7% felt that their children

did not experience increased stress during exams; and only one participant (2%) did not know if their child(ren) had increased stress from taking exams. One parent who felt that exams did increase stress stated, "My daughter is stressed all the time because of school." However, she could not give reasons as to exactly what was making her daughter stress all the time at school.

Item 9 asked, "Are you aware that there is a mandatory California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)?" Results showed that 73% of participants stated that they were aware while 27% stated that they were not aware of the CAHSEE. If the answer to number 9 was yes, the participants were asked to complete questions 10, 11, and 12. If the answer was no, participants were instructed to continue to question number 13. Thirty participants responded to questions 10, 11, and 12.

Item 10 asked, "How did you become aware of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)?" Of the 30 people who provided comments, 30% (9) participants stated they became aware of the CAHSEE through the news or newspapers, 33% (10) through their children, and 36% (11) heard about it through the school, either through conferences, school newsletters, or other staff members.

Item 11 asked, "Has your child/children taken the CAHSEE?" For the most part, parents knew the answer to this question; 63% stated that their children had taken it, 26% stated that their child(ren) had not taken it, and 10% did not know whether their child(ren) had taken it. Interestingly, 5 parents had to ask their child(ren) if they had taken it. Two of these children did not know what it was and could not answer.

Of the students who had taken it, 43% had passed it, 13% did not pass it, 7% parents did not know if their child(ren) had passed it, while 37% left this portion of the question blank.

Item 12 asked, "Do you feel that your child(ren) will pass the CAHSEE?" 53% of parents answered yes, 13% answered no, and 33% stated they did not know if their child(ren) would pass the CAHSEE. When asked reasons why parents who said they did not feel their child (ren) would pass the CAHSEE, 75% of these respondents stated reasons due to learning disabilities while only 1 parent felt that it was due to bad teaching habits of the educational institution.

Item 13 asked, "Do you feel that children receiving special education services should be required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)?" 39% of parents

stated that special educational children should be required to pass the CAHSEE while 41% of respondents stated that special educational students should not be required to pass the CAHSEE, and 20% of respondents stated that they did not know.

Item 14 asked, "Do you feel that there are some students at risk of not passing the CAHSEE?"

Overwhelmingly, 93% of parents stated that they believed that some students were at risk of not passing this exam, while only 7% answered no. Some of the themes that emerged as the reasons given for students not being able to pass the CAHSEE included student disabilities (37%), students blamed for not applying themselves (34%), poor economic factors (29%), poor school system (21%), social and/or personal problems as the cause (18%), lack of parental guidance (13%), while only one respondent was unable to come up with any reply. Several parents stated that "students don't pay attention in class," or "don't show the proper interest," and "don't take the test serious; therefore don't study." One parent stated that "my kids have home problems," while another cited that "not all kids are cut out for school."

Item 15 asked, "The California High School Exit Exam is written and given in English only, how do you feel



about that?" Sixty-three percent (63%) felt that English only was appropriate for the test, while 37% felt that the exam should be given in a language that "accommodates" the student. One parent, who has been in the U.S. for only 2 years and felt that it was not a good idea to have the exam in English only replied, "...even kids who speak English don't read and write so well." Others felt that it "was not fair to the Spanish-speaking only kids," and "it is wrong." Still others felt it was very "good" and it was important when in America to "speak English."

Item 16 asked, "The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) will soon be required to receive a high school diploma. Do you feel that the lack of a high school diploma could lead to any of the following social implications?"

The responses given for this question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceptual Implications

Social Implications	YES (%)	NO (%)	Don't Know (%)
a. Lowered self-esteem?	39 (95%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)
b. Increased Stress?	39 (95%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)
c. Irrational decision making?	30 (73%)	4 (10%)	7 (17%)
d. Low paying jobs?	36 (88%)	4 (10%)	1 (2%)
e. Decreased school attendance?	31 (76%)	9 (22%)	1 (2%)
f. Criminal Behavior	21 (51%)	10 (24%)	10 (24%)
g. Drug/alcohol use & abuse?	23 (56%)	10 (24%)	8 (19%)
h. Unprotected/promiscuous sex?	18 (44%)	13 (32%)	10 (24%)
i. Deviant behavior (ie, anger, rage, violence, aggression, acting out)?	31 (76%)	7 (17%)	3 (7%)
j. Teen pregnancy & parenting?	21 (51%)	13 (32%)	7 (17%)
k. Dropping out of school?	38 (93%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)
l. Teen Suicides?	25 (61%)	7 (17%)	9 (22%)
m. Others? Other reasons listed included smoking (2%), repeat of above information (7%), while 90% had no response to this question.			

Item 17 asked, "Do you feel that the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) should be mandatory to receive a high school diploma?" Twenty-seven percent of respondents replied yes, 61% replied no, and 12% did not know. Several parents felt that if their child(ren) completed the required high school coursework, they (the child(ren))

should not be required to take the CAHSEE as well to receive their high school diploma.

Item 18 asked, "Do you feel that the parent(s) should have input on the content of the CAHSEE?" 68% of parents felt that they should have input on the content of the CAHSEE; nobody answered no, and 32% did not know.

Item 19 asked, "What type of support, programs, or classes in school would you like to see offered to help your child/children pass the CAHSEE?" Some respondents replied with more than one reason. 78% respondents provided responses which were categorized in these themes: social and personal skills (42%), (i.e., classes in substance use/abuse, self-esteem building, handling test anxiety, emotional support, ethics and values, behavior management, and life skills); tutoring classes (34%); teaching to the exam, (27%); miscellaneous programs such as music, fun, and aids in the classroom, (7%); 22% of participants had no response. One parent stated that schools should offer "appropriate behavior classes," while others included, "ethics," "drug and violence," "values," "skills for jobs and everyday life," and "better counseling for those with personal problems outside of school."

answered this question. This question elicited many mixed responses including that the CAHSEE should not be required to receive a high school diploma (38%), the CAHSEE was a good thing (29%); schools should consider each child on an individual basis (19%); not passing the CAHSEE will cause students to drop out of school (19%); and that the CAHSEE was being used as a political and government control tactic (14%). One Spanish-English speaking parent stated that, "it's about time we (our country) started demanding higher standards from our students." One participant asked, "if students pass (their) classes, why do (they) need a test?"

Although no one participant had a consistent theme, one theme was consistent throughout all the surveys--the education of students. These concerns included students getting their high school diploma, educational standards, and educational values. One parent went as far as stating that students should have "one-on-one teaching." Many participants felt that the schools needed to either "better cover everything on the test," or "teach to the test."

## Summary

Chapter Four presented the findings extracted from the survey. Demographics, including tables, were completed for descriptive purposes. Presentations of the actual questions along with results were incorporated together for clarity. Themes from each item were presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

A discussion of the findings was presented from the study results. Limitations of the study related to research biases and data collection methods. Various recommendations were listed. Lastly, the Chapter concluded with a summary of the project.

#### Discussion

This study validated the hypotheses as stated in Sections 1, and 3 of the research project. The main research question was, "Are parents aware of the CAHSEE becoming mandatory on high school students?" This research question was validated in Item 9. 73% of the parents stated that they were aware of the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement. When explored further in Item 10, almost 1/3 (30%) of parents became aware through a means other than their child(ren) and/or educational institution. This was cause for concern because 93% of participants felt school was important, as validated in Item 7. This could be an indicator that some parents are not receiving information through the schools the way they should be. They may not be listening to what their children are saying or may not

be receiving the appropriate orientation and/or letters sent to them by the schools to announce the CAHSEE.

Item 11 showed that only a little over half of the parents knew if their child(ren) had taken the CAHSEE, and less than that number did not know if their child(ren) had passed it. Some parents and/or students may not be able to read what is sent to them if another language is spoken in the home. Although more than half the parents felt that the CAHSEE should be given in English only (Item 15), it seems it would make more sense to "accommodate" the limited English speaking students in their language and English as well as notifying their parents in both the language in the home and English. According to the EEOA (Equal Employment Opportunities Act of 1974, as part Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964), schools are supposed to help students and their families to overcome language barriers by providing communication to the students and parents in both English and the language spoken in the home (Fischer & Sorenson, 1996).

Results from Item 12 showed that barely half of the parents thought their child(ren) would pass the CAHSEE. 53% of parents listed learning disabilities as the major contributor to why students would not pass the CAHSEE. On the other hand, parents were evenly torn between whether

special educational students should be required or not to pass the CAHSEE (39% for and 41% against), as indicated in Item 13. This result seemed to correlate to Item 17, which showed that 61% of parents felt that the CAHSEE should not be mandatory to receive a high school diploma. Parents wanted more input in the CAHSEE (68%) (Item 18), and wanted to see social and personal skills taught in education to help students overcome barriers (42%) (Item 19).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> research question asked, "What were some social implications for students who are at risk of not passing the CAHSEE?" Results showed that parents were very concerned about their child(ren) dropping out of school, lowered self-esteem, increased stress, and having to settle for low-paying jobs which were noted in responses in Items 8, 14, and 16. Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollach, and Rock (1987) believed that "low academic school performance" was a contributing factor to high drop out rates, especially, among the limited English speaking students who have to take the CAHSEE in English. The limited English proficiency population had one of the highest drop out rates in California (DOE, 2002). Students who are not successful in test taking applications were found to have had increased stress and lowered self-esteem (LeCompte & Dwarkin, 1991). Other social implications listed by



parents including deviant behaviors (i.e., anger, rage, violence, aggression, acting out), irrational decision making, teen suicides, and decreased school attendance indicated concern for the education of the students. It appeared that parents had a hard time separating social and educational implications, which means they might have believed that the two go hand-in-hand. In agreement with Mullis and Youngs, (1986), parents believe that students continue to encounter a lot of pressure from test taking and are still developmentally too "immature" to handle them in the same manner as a mature adult.

Research question # 3 asked, "Given these social implications, did parents feel there was a need for social workers within the San Bernardino County schools?" A high number of parents (49%) indicated a need to have social workers within the schools even though they were somewhat confused as to the type of social workers that should be assigned to the school setting. Responses in Item 20 validated Constable, McDonald, and Flynn (2002), Dubos (1968), and Clancy (1995) in their assertion that social workers contribute to the learning processes and successes of students in school. Parents expressed concern over the future of their child(ren)'s education (51%) as shown in Item 21. For example, 29% of parents felt that the CAHSEE

should not be required to get a high school diploma; 19% of parents were concerned about students dropping out if they could not pass the CAHSEE; and, 14% of parents felt the CAHSEE was being used for government or political purposes.

#### Limitations

The following limitations apply to this research project: the small sample size limits generalization of findings to the population of the rural area of the Morongo Unified School District and/or the entire County of San Bernardino. However, the sample's demographics reflect characteristics of the population in this geographic area in terms of economic disadvantaged and ethnic make up (DOE, 2002). Due to the snowball method of collection of participants, this project may be biased based on participants who were polled, creating an inadequate representation of participants. For example, the snowball effect may have included participants who knew each other, were friends, relatives, or neighbors with each other; thus, having similar values and perspectives.

Research bias may have been indicated in the items measuring risks of social implications. In the pilot

survey, participants were unable to identify any response for this question, stating that they did not know what was meant by the question. To help clarify the question, a list of social implications was compiled to help participants in their decision-making processes. This list was generated by these authors based on the literature but was not measured for statistical reliability and validity.

One bias was eliciting some upsetting responses from parents who have little knowledge of the CAHSEE and its social implications for students at risk of not passing it. Also, the researcher may have unintentionally influenced responses when answering questions for parents who were completing the survey.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Languages, other than English, should be considered to accommodate differences in learning skills and abilities. Implications from this social work research showed that limited English proficiency students make up approximately 42% of the California drop out population (DOE, 2003). Students and parents need to be better informed and oriented as to the importance of understanding the CAHSEE and the implication of it if the students do not pass. They should be informed about the

details of the CAHSEE and on other school related topics in both English and the language most often spoken in the home. They need better awareness of the social implications of not passing the CAHSEE.

Social workers are needed in school settings to help students improve social learning skills, such as test anxiety, self-esteem, and social issues (i.e., drug/alcohol use/abuse, teen pregnancy, anger management, etc.). Since students do not get a say in what is being offered on the CAHSEE, allow and encourage parents to participate in the planning and implementation of the CAHSEE.

### Conclusions

The conclusions extracted from the project follows. Parents are aware of the CAHSEE but there are some different aspects of the processes as to how they became aware of it and what it means to their child(ren). Parents' perceptions of social implications of students who are at risk if they don't pass the CAHSEE are limited to those social implications (i.e., lower self-esteem, increased stress, deviant behaviors, dropping out of school, etc.) presented by the researchers. School social workers are needed in the schools to help students

transition personally and socially to provide better educational outcomes.

APPENDIX A  
PARENT SURVEY

## PARENT SURVEY

Please circle the best answer or fill in the blanks as indicated.

1. Gender and Age of Children:  
M F \_\_\_\_ (age)    M F \_\_\_\_ (age)    M F \_\_\_\_ (age)
2. Highest Grade Level YOU have completed? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Total Household Income Level Last Year (Check one):
  - 0-\$12,000
  - \$12,001-20,000
  - \$20,001-30,000
  - \$30,001-40,000
  - \$40,001+
4. Ethnicity of Children (Check one):
  - White/Caucasian
  - African/American
  - Hispanic/Mexican
  - Asian
  - American Indian
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. What language is most often spoken in the home?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you have any children who are receiving special education services through the school?  
Y    N    Don't Know  
If yes, what type of service(s) do they receive through the school?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you feel that school is important? (Circle one)  
Very important    Somewhat important    Not important  
Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Based on your observations, do you feel that your Child/children have increased stress when having to take exams in school?

Y    N    Don't Know

9. Are you aware that there is a mandatory California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)?

Y    N    Don't Know

IF YES, PLEASE ANSWER #10, #11, AND #12:

IF NO, SKIP TO #13

10. How did you become aware of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)?

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11. Has your child/children taken the CAHSEE?

Y    N    Don't Know

If YES, did they pass it?

Y    N    Don't Know

12. Do you feel that your child will pass the CAHSEE?

Y    N    Don't Know

If NO, why? \_\_\_\_\_

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13. Do you feel that children receiving special education services should be required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)?

Y    N    Don't Know



14. Do you feel that there are some students at risk of not passing the CAHSEE?

Y      N      Don't Know

If YES, what do you feel are some of the reasons why students may not be able to pass the CAHSEE?

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15. The California High School Exit Exam is written and given in English only, how do you feel about that?

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16. The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) will soon be required to receive a high school diploma. Do you feel that the lack of a high school diploma could lead to any of the following social implications? (Please circle all that apply)

- |    |   |   |   |            |
|----|---|---|---|------------|
| a. | Lowered self-esteem?  | Y | N | Don't Know |
| b. | Increased Stress?   | Y | N | Don't Know |
| c. | Irrational decision making?   | Y | N | Don't Know |
| d. | Low paying jobs?  | Y | N | Don't Know |
| e. | Decreased school attendance?  | Y | N | Don't Know |
| f. | Criminal Behavior   | Y | N | Don't Know |
| g. | Drug/alcohol use & abuse?   | Y | N | Don't Know |
| h. | Unprotected/promiscuous sex?  | Y | N | Don't Know |
| i. | Deviant behavior (ie, anger, rage, violence, aggression, acting out)? | Y | N | Don't Know |
| j. | Teen pregnancy and parenting?   | Y | N | Don't Know |
| k. | Dropping out of school?   | Y | N | Don't Know |
| l. | Teen Suicides?  | Y | N | Don't Know |
| n. | Others? _____   |   |   |            |

17. Do you feel that the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) should be mandatory to receive a high school diploma?

Y      N      Don't Know

18. Do you feel that the parent(s) should have input on the content of the CAHSEE?

Y    N    Don't Know

19. What type of support, programs, or classes in school would you like to see offered to help your child/children pass the CAHSEE?

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20. Based on the above social implications, do you feel that students would benefit by having social workers in the San Bernardino County schools?

Y    N    Don't Know

21. Do you have any other feelings or comments about the CAHSEE?

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APPENDIX B  
AGENCY APPROVAL

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**MORONGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICES  
PO BOX 1209  
TWENTYNINE PALMS, CA 92277**

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John E. Cole, Assistant Superintendent

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(760) 367-9191 ext. 339

FAX (760) 361-7897

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## **MEMORANDUM**

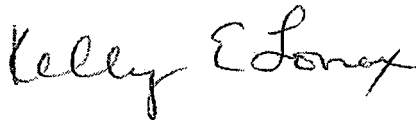
Date: June 4, 2003

From: Kelly Lomax  
To: Whom It May Concern  
Re: CAHSEE

Susan Jennings and Debby Perry are conducting interviews with parents of students that may/may not attend the Morongo Unified School District regarding the California High School Exit Exam for a class they are taking at CSUSB.

The Morongo Unified School District has no objection to interviews conducted as long as no students are involved. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call this office.

Sincerely,



Kelly E. Lomax  
Administrative Secretary

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Debby Perry/Susan Jennings. I am a student in the Masters of Social Work Department at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). I am conducting a study of parents' perceptions of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Participation in this study is completely voluntary and should you choose to participate, you will remain completely anonymous, as no identifying information will be obtained. The results of this study will be presented as a final research project for the Masters of Social Work program at CSUSB. The results will be available at the university in the Pfau Library after June, 2004.

This project has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board. In completing this project, I am being supervised by Trang Hoang, PhD. Dr Hoang may be reached at the California State University, San Bernardino, Department of Social Work 909-880-5501.

This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Upon completion, CAHSEE information will be distributed and a debriefing statement will be given along with resources available to you. Thank you for your participation in this project.

My mark below indicates that I voluntarily agree to participate.

---

Mark

---

Date

APPENDIX D  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## **DEBRIEFING STATEMENT**

You have participated in a study of parent perceptions of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). This study is being conducted by Susan Jennings and Debby Perry, graduate students at California State University at San Bernardino, under the supervision of Dr. Hoang, PhD. This study asked several questions regarding personal issues that may have caused conflict. Due to the nature of these questions, you may feel the need to speak with someone regarding feelings or issues that this survey may have provoked. If you wish to discuss this, please contact Dr. Trang Hoang at California State University, San Bernardino, Department of Social Work at 909-880-5501.

Thank you for your participation.



APPENDIX E  
CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM (CAHSEE)

## CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM (CAHSEE)

### WHAT IS THE CAHSEE?

It is a mandatory exit exam established by Senate Bill 2X in 1999 to set higher standards on public schools for high school graduation in California, beginning with 2004 graduates. In addition to high school classes that are required, students will be required to take this exam in English only to receive their high school diploma.

### WHAT SUBJECT CONTENT DOES THE CAHSEE CONSISTS OF?

Mathematics, including statistics, data analysis, and probability, numbers and computations (decimals, fractions, and percentages), measurements, geometry, number reasoning, and algebra.

English-Language Arts including vocabulary, decoding, informational and literary reading, writing strategies, applications and conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, and grammar).

### WHO HAS TO TAKE THE CAHSEE?

ALL high school students with or without disabilities, in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade who want to receive their diploma.

### HOW MANY CHANCES DOES A STUDENT GET TO TAKE THE CAHSEE?

Eight (8) times and they do not have to retake any portion that they have already passed.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF A STUDENT CANNOT PASS THE CAHSEE?

They do not receive their high school diploma. In some districts, they will not be allowed to graduate with their class. They may receive a Certificate of Completion.

TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION ON THE CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL OR THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ON THE INTERNET AT:  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/cahsee>.

APPENDIX F  
RESOURCES AVAILABLE

## **RESOURCES AVAILABLE**

MORONGO BASIN MENTAL HEALTH CENTER  
55475 Santa Fe Trail  
Yucca Valley, CA 92284  
(760) 365-3022

YUCCA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL  
7600 Sage Avenue  
Yucca Valley, CA 92284  
(760) 365-3391

SKY HIGH CONTINUATION SCHOOL  
59273 Sunnyslope Drive  
Yucca Valley, CA 92284  
(760) 369-6310

MONUMENT HIGH SCHOOL  
72770 Hatch  
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277  
(760) 367-7273

TWENTYNINE PALMS HIGH SCHOOL  
6051 Datura Avenue  
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277  
(760) 367-9591

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Susan Jennings & Deborah Perry

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Susan Jennings & Deborah Perry

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Susan Jennings &  
Deborah Perry

b. Methods

Team Effort: Susan Jennings &  
Deborah Perry

c. Results

Team Effort: Susan Jennings &  
Deborah Perry

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Susan Jennings &  
Deborah Perry