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An Evolving Change in Public Schools: An Assessment of Teachers' and Administrators'

Perceptions and Classroom Changes Concerning High-Stakes Testing

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Selena Marie Kiser

August 2007

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Dr. Terrence Tollefson, Chair

Dr. Kathryn Franklin

Dr. Elizabeth Ralston

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ABSTRACT

An Evolving Change in Public Schools: An Assessment of Teachers' and Administrators'

Perceptions and Classroom Changes Concerning High-Stakes Testing

by

Selena Marie Kiser

The intent of this study was to investigate changes in the curriculum caused by high-stakes

testing mandates within 3 Southwest Virginia school systems to find best practices for

instructional application in classrooms. This qualitative study was comprised of indepth

interviews and observations with elementary school teachers and administrators.

 High-stakes testing has impacted the nation in myriad ways. The mandates from the

government presented teachers and administrators with conditions that must be met according to

the *No Child Left Behind Act* and individual state's standards. Teachers' perceptions of

curriculum changes, Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), testing mandates according

to high-stakes testing, and accountability were examined through personal interviews and

classroom observations. This study focused on policies and practices of esteemed teachers'

creative abilities as they adhered to mandates and captivated students' abilities to perform in the

classroom.

Teachers and administrators shared their feelings and perceptions regarding new policies and

how they made changes within the classrooms and school systems. The findings indicated that

the most prevalent ideas concerning teachers and administrators developed into the patterns:

educators' level of satisfaction, students' stress, school changes, and our future. Educators' level

of satisfaction was the most frequent theme that demonstrated high-stakes testing affected their

overall happiness level. The research reflected that educators were negatively affected by high-

stakes testing. Constructive ideas were identified as to how they maintained creativity within the classroom that could inspire critical thinking. A model was developed to demonstrate the findings for best instructional practices for teaching high-stakes standards in the classroom.

This research should add to existing research in this area and provide information that other educators might apply to their own classroom or educational environment. The participants in this study were the change agents, and their attitudes regarding the changes affected the decisions they made with the school curriculum.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the most important people in my life: my family and friends. To my husband, Joe, thank you for being everything I have ever dreamed of. You are the love of my life, my precious husband, soul mate, and friend. Thank you, Joe, for being more than anyone could ever wish for. I appreciate everything you have done for me during this journey and know that I love you with all of my heart. I only wanted to please you and make a better life for our family. I want to thank my precious sons, Hunter and Tanner, for sharing mommy with classes and homework. I did everything with you in mind. You are motivation enough to reach for the stars. I will hold your hearts in my hands forever.

I want to dedicate this to my mom who is the epitome of a humble spirit. I appreciate all of the late evenings baby-sitting, long talks, and encouragement to complete this goal. I know that without you, none of this would be possible. I am so thankful for a best friend like you. I also want to thank my dad and brother for their encouragement and help with my sons for countless hours. You will never know how much I appreciate what you have done. I love you both very much. Also, I want to thank my mother and father in-law for their help baby-sitting and being so good to my sons. Thank you is not enough, and your sacrifices have never gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

I want to thank Mr. Otis Bowen, my school principal. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me about my educational pursuits and, most of all, for believing in me. You will never know how your influence has impacted me. I hope to make you proud! I want to thank all of the wonderful teachers and administrators who have made this study a success. You are the reason for the great results that might change other teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and best classroom practices.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Is it possible for tests and test scores to overtake other aspects of adolescent learning that are hard to score, such as learning from conversation, from experience, from reflection?" (Berger, 2006, p. 481). The nature of educational ideas and practice in the United States has been determined by economic, social, intellectual, and political movements (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Assessment has become one of the most enveloping aspects of the American educational landscape. Greene (2006) stated the current century has been "test century" where scores have been developed to assess students' ability and intelligence.

Today's students live in an era of high-stakes testing and accountability. High-stakes testing has drastically changed instruction to the point that teaching to the test has become a part of the curriculum taught in schools across the nation (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). According to Berger (2006), the consequences of high-stakes testing have been severe, especially for failing schools. In the past, teachers relied on grades and credits to determine promotion and graduation. The changes led by *No Child Left Behind* stemmed from the fear that schools were not producing students who possessed sufficient knowledge (Johnson & Johnson). Thomas (2005) stated that the demands for increased accountability included in *No Child Left Behind* have been among the most controversial of education reforms in the United States. The expression "high-stakes" testing meant there were important consequences for students, parents, and American society in general. The high-stakes movement has compiled a record of positive and negative outcomes. Grey (2006) described some scholars who argued that high-stakes testing made easier for America's educators to calculate the state of our schools in this age of accountability. Throughout many decades of educational reforms, schools have transformed in many areas, including curriculum. Some of these changes were beneficial to students, and other changes brought apprehension to educators and public schools. Altenbaugh (2003) reported a

study by Charles Silberman that revealed public schools were sometimes termed depressing places of contempt for students. In this study, it was suggested that subject matter did not meet students' needs. Savala (2002) affirmed that a resolution must be sought that would please everyone involved in education including politicians, school districts, and educators; at the same time, it should represent student achievement without sacrificing students' creativity.

Smith and Fey (2000) stated that tests have become the elemental structure by which educational institutions demonstrate their accountability because tests might provide a system of standardization and accountability over teaching and learning. Cohen and Rosenzweig (2006) acknowledged that tests represented the image of American education. Abrams (2004) affirmed that content standards, state tests, and accountability were influential in improving the quality of schools. According to Elford (2002), content and performance standards laid the structure for an information system based on standards and created a common language for describing learning in school. Giordana (2005) stated that tests were designed to measure students' progress and later became the foundations for curricula, learning materials, and practice. This expansion has gone beyond schools into various public and private institutions.

Berliner and Biddle (1995) found differing opinions although some researchers they reviewed were passionate in their negative beliefs about high-stakes testing. The ideas behind high-stakes testing have been noble; however, they also have appeared unattainable and unfair. According to Berliner and Biddle, knowledge is immense, and students cannot memorize all that historians would like for them to know.

Calkins, Montgomery, Santman, and Falk (1998) affirmed that test scores were regarded as the measure of a school's quality, good or bad. However, the question remained: Has the current wave of high-stakes assessment provided students with an adequate education? (Pipho, 2000). In the past, administrators, teachers, and parents understood that tests were just one indicator of a child's progress. Johnson and Johnson (2006) stated the message was that state government officials did not trust educators' opinions and needed a score as sufficient evidence.

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The Intent of the Study

The intent of this study was to investigate changes in the curriculum caused by high-stakes testing mandates within three Southwest Virginia school systems to find best practices for instructional application in classrooms. Teachers and administrators shared their feelings and perceptions regarding new policies and how they made changes within the classrooms and school systems. There were several reasons for conducting this study such as identifying outstanding ideas and sharing these with other teachers and administrators and offering instruction on how they maintained creativity within the classroom that could inspire critical thinking. I also found out how teachers motivated students to be creative in the classroom while teaching standards. Observations were conducted in classrooms and revealed innovative ideas and techniques in addition to providing positive results while teaching high-stakes standards.

Research Questions

1. How does high-stakes testing influence teachers, administrators, and students?
2. What are specific curriculum changes that have been made in classrooms?
3. What are the best instructional practices for teaching high-stakes standards?
4. How have teachers maintained creativity under high-stakes testing mandates?

Significance of the Study

Berliner and Biddle (1995) stated that American educators have managed in the face of barriers to educate many students at a high standard. With this study, teachers and administrators might develop more appropriate strategies in the classrooms in response to high-stakes testing mandates. When reviewing the literature, I could not find an answer to my questions regarding best practices in the curriculum with high-stakes testing. Teachers and administrators might receive feedback from this study on specific curriculum changes. I expressed the influence of high-stakes testing on teachers and administrators so that the research and responses from teachers might better prepare students and encourage positive outcomes.

The results of this study might help classroom teachers use innovative ideas while maintaining creativity during the learning process. The techniques and ideas teachers used to master high-stakes standards might influence the use of best practices in the classrooms for mastering high-stakes testing.

Scope of the Study

This was a qualitative study of the responses of 12 educators and administrators in Southwest Virginia concerning curriculum and school changes caused by high-stakes testing mandates. An objective of this study was to identify the curriculum changes and their effectiveness in the classroom. The teachers and administrators shared those curriculum changes that have proven to be successful. The educators revealed best practices within the classrooms for meeting high-stakes standards.

Researcher's Bias

I observed and volunteered in several elementary schools; I also served as a classroom teacher for 7 years in the public school system. Having served in these capacities, I developed a strong opinion regarding high-stakes testing and curriculum change. High-stakes testing has been prevalent in Virginia since 1997 with the Virginia Standards of Learning. *No Child Left Behind* also brought about many changes within schools and I felt many of these changes were negative. I have seen the impact of testing in many classrooms. I believe that such extensive influence should not be placed on one test and that schools should not be limited to a set of local and national standards. I feel teachers have lost some of their autonomy because of high-stakes testing. I found best practices within specific classrooms that encouraged and increased creativity among all classrooms. This opinion did not influence the collection and analysis phases of the study.

I maximized reliability and validity in this study. Merriam (1998) stated that external validity was the accuracy of the inferences made from the information heard from the data to the

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resulting theory. Direction and focus warranted the validity of the voices heard to the resulting

theory. Internal validity referred to how closely the resulting theory reflected reality. In

exploring the stated intent of the study, I used triangulation as a means to improve validity by

interviewing teachers and administrators from three different Southwest Virginia public school

systems, and I also used several sources including lesson plans, class schedules, and member

notes during this research process. I heard the opinions from educators with different

experiences and expertise. The differing experiential and educational backgrounds added variety

and prevented stagnation within this research process. I used personal interviews and

observations to add variety to the data collection process.

I incorporated member checks as part of the data collection process by ensuring that the

participants reviewed research findings and the transcripts represented their thoughts and ideas

toward high-stakes testing. The participants read the transcripts and made sure the data from the

interviews represented their thoughts correctly. The research design was congruent with the

proposal. I selected participants with criteria specific to the study. The use of rich, thick

descriptions including direct quotes from the participants enhanced external validity of the study

(Merriam, 1998).

Definitions of Terms

The following terms were defined for the purposes of this particular research only:

1. *Accountability*--A term used with high-stakes testing as a means of holding schools
   accountable for what is being taught and achieved by students (Savala, 2002).

2. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*--This *r*epresents the minimum level of improvement
   that schools and school divisions must achieve each year as determined by *No Child
   Left Behind* (Virginia Department of Education, 2006, n. p.).

3. *Best practices*--Strategies that produce effective teaching and learning outcomes. The
   strategies are used and perfected by teachers (Billings, 2007).

4. *Creativity*--"The mental phenomena, skills and/or tools capable of originating innovation, inspiration or insight" (Wikipedia, 2007a, n. p.).

5. *Curriculum*--A sequence of content units arranged so that learning of each unit may be accomplished (Elford, 2002).

6. *Standards*--General expectations for student knowledge with very specific performance requirements and used as a basis of assessment; expectations for learning and teaching (Anderson & Helmick, 1983; Reeves, 1998; Wilde, 2002).

7. *Standardized tests*--Standardized tests are identical and given to students in a variety of schools. The results are marked in the same way, and there are various types of standardized tests including those marked with bubble sheets, open-ended essay questions, and other kinds of performance-based tests (Phelps, 2003).

8. *High-stakes tests*--Tests that bear serious consequences for students, school systems, and the school community. The tests may have consequences that have an effect on students and teachers and can be used to determine if a student should be promoted or graduate (Berger, 2006, Marchant, 2004; Thomas, 2005; Wilde).

9. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*--An Act enacted by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush in 2001. It stated no child would be left behind academically. The legislation was intended to increase academic achievement for all students and hold schools accountable; it was a controversial law (Berger; Bromley, 2006).

10. *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools (SOL)*--The Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools describe the commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12 in English, mathematics, science, history and social science, technology, the fine arts, foreign language, health and physical education, and driver education (Virginia Department of Education, 2006).

11. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*--"that which is recognized about child development and learning; students' assets, interests, and needs of each child within appropriate times and social and cultural perspectives" (Pence, 2005, p. 9).

Overview of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 included an introduction, the intent of the study, research questions, purpose and significance of the study, the scope of the study, researcher's bias, and definitions of terms used in the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the pertinent literature concerning high-stakes testing and an overview of the impact of *No Child Left Behind* and the Virginia's standards of learning and curricula. Chapter 3 contains the methodology and procedures used in the study and gives a brief overview of the participants and interview questions. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of data using the participants' own words. Chapter 5 contains a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

High-Stakes Tests

"If something exists, it exists in some amount. If it exists in some amount, then it is capable of being measured" (Rene Descartes, as cited in Phelps, 2003). One of the most well-known Americans, Benjamin Franklin, documented his own failures in a diary of high standards he set for himself. Educators embraced the spirit of Benjamin Franklin in that a good education should begin with assessment and diagnosis of deficiencies (Riggins, 2006). High-stakes tests compelled fundamental change within school systems, and there were varying opinions as to whether or not they improved the quality of education (Abrams, 2004). High-stakes tests and assessments with significant consequences have been used for accountability for students, teachers, and schools (Lewis, 2000). Nearly every state has used high-stakes testing (Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001). *High-stakes* has meant that the present-day testing practices conveyed important consequences for students, parents, school systems, and society (Thomas, 2005). The test results led to important decisions for students including promotion-retention, qualification for a high school diploma, and access to specific programs. High-stakes testing has affected school districts and determined which schools would receive awards for high performance and which ones would experience accreditation loss or school closing punishment. The stakes were high when students, teachers, and schools experienced costs for the outcome of assessments (Lewis). Pianta, Belsky, Houts, and Morrison (2007) warned that relying on regulations and test scores as the metrics for the quality of schools might not actually drive improvement in learning opportunities.

Hoffman et al. (2001) stated that high-stakes tests have become the public scale of educational quality. The high-stakes tests were assessments of challenging and rigorous academic standards. They provided an equitable basis for evaluation while connecting to the

technological advances that have shaped the 21st century. Assessment and accountability led the education system in instructional decision-making, allocation of resources, classroom practice, and administrative techniques (Reeves, 1998). Houston (2001) stated that accountability for results was a new agreement between schools and the communities they served. Accountability comprised more than test scores; it also included an understanding of what students have done. Elford (2002) said kindergarten- through 12th-grade content and performance standards were the basis for a standards-based information system. According to Vinson and Ross (2004):

> The current system uses 'carrots and sticks' to coerce compliance with an alienating system of schooling aimed at inducing conformity among teachers and students through high-stakes testing and accountability. This system alienates teachers from their work by stripping it of all creative endeavors and reduces it to following scripted lesson plans. We believe that teaching is a matter of the heart, that place where intellect meets up with emotion and spirit in constant dialogue with the world around us. We call for the elimination of high-stakes standardized tests and the institution of more fair, equitable, and meaningful systems of accountability and assessment of both students and schools. (p. xiv)

Throughout the literature, there were positive and negative aspects of high-stakes testing and subsequent curriculum changes (Marchant, 2004). Tests were used as measuring sticks for evaluating the success of students, teachers, administrators, schools, districts, and states (Marchant). High-stakes testing was the reigning means of assessing aptitude in American education (Gravois, 2005).

History of High-Stakes Tests

Over 2,500 years ago, many believed that the legacy of Socrates introduced the idea that education was better in the past than in the present. Many advocates for high-stakes tests had the same philosophy because researchers suggested that this might be one of the foundations for standardized testing (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). According to Young (2006), standardized testing has a long history. From China to parts of Europe, standardized or high-stakes testing was used for various occupations and entrance exams to colleges in the early 19th century. Standardized tests did not appear in the United States until the middle of the 19th century in the form of written

exams; in 1851, Harvard started to use the first entrance exam. In 1916, Stanford's President Terman expanded on the intelligence test, the popular model for IQ tests (Young). Traub (2002) pointed out historians have shown that American schools were structures of conflicting principles since their founding in the mid-19th century.

Finder (2004) stated that during World War I, the Army used the first standardized multiple-choice IQ test. Testing grew in popular acceptance after the Army Alpha Test of World War I. Today, these tests have become a contentious issue in the teaching profession. Berliner and Biddle (1995) said the first SAT appeared in April 1941 and provided the judgment that American education of 12 years could be measured by one test.

Since the 1950s, many writers have been concerned with learning and assessments (Janesick, 2001). According to Johnson and Johnson (2006), social and political movements determined educational thought and practice. The Russian launching of Sputnik in 1957 influenced and dramatically changed American schools. Young (2006) stated that many wondered why America was not first to launch this type of satellite and thus questioned the educational programs. In 1965, the government passed the *Elementary and Secondary Education* Act. This Act was part of a larger movement demanding accountability and educational test results. The National Assessment of Educational Progress was launched in 1969 in pursuit of assessing educational progress in the United States. According to Kliebard (2002), Americans looked to schools as the answer when major problems of almost any kind arose.

According to Firestone, Monfils, and Schorr (2004), "Most people date the beginning of modern state testing with the passage of Florida's *Education Accountability* Act in 1971. Eleven years later, 36 states had mandated some kind of testing program" (p. 4). In the 1980s and 1990s, the challenge of foreign markets on American business and technology also influenced educational thought (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

In 1981, the U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence assessed the quality of education in the United States. President Ronald Reagan endorsed this call for educational accountability in a speech. The White House released a provocative

document highly critical of American education entitled, *A Nation at Risk.* This publication was deemed as the origin of current reform efforts for improvement in schools. The publication demanded higher performance standards, increased learning time, and increased teacher preparation; thus began the states' views of developing accountability standards (Behnke, Hayes, Maslin, & Abouzeid, 2006; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). Berliner and Biddle (1995) stated in *A Nation at Risk,* although most of these claims reflected evidence, the evidence presented showed that American schools were not failing. They also said that government and industry commissioned this publication.

According to Smith and Fey (2000), the publication stated public schools were failing to meet academic standards and this threatened the success of American economic competitiveness. The report declared that each state should take responsibility for adopting new policies to solve the academic problems developing in society (Smith & Fey). Governmental officials blamed educators for the economic problems of the 1980s and focused on making more consistent education policies. These policies ultimately resulted in higher standards and implementation of standardized tests. Most states developed curriculum standards with tests to assess whether students were achieving the standards (Hursh, 2005). Contrary evidence presented by Berliner and Biddle (1995) revealed that student achievement in America actually grew in specific ways for a generation or more.

George H. W. Bush's administration initiated the first National Education Summit in 1989 after federal funds were allocated to support the development of new state standards. This summit led to the *Goals 2000: Educate America* Act that was signed by Bill Clinton in 1994. Goals 2000 presented grant funding to states for 5 years and based the project on the development of an educational blueprint for school advancement (Behnke et al, 2006). The reform effort of the 80s and 90s is still alive today in the form of high-stakes testing and the controversy has continued (Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Sever, 2004).

High-stakes testing was prevalent throughout the nation's schools and has required various mandates affecting the curriculum. The demand for increased accountability was one of

the most apparent and controversial educational reforms in the United States (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004). The history of education revealed a number of changes including new testing requirements that adversely affected the curriculum. In the past, legislation made students the focal point of rewards and sanctions; the current trend in education has been high-stakes testing (Pipho, 2000). Standardized testing affected the population and the methods of classifying intelligence for many years (Janesick (2001). It has increased in the United States over the past 25 years in frequency and significance. High-stakes testing has become a foundation of educational practice and policy making (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). The question now has become whether or not high-stakes tests have caused more negative than positive changes in education. Gardner (1993), one of education's most influential figures, stated that education should not be measured by standardized tests because of the depth and brevity of the learning process. Berliner and Biddle (1995) revealed that anything that diminished teachers' flexibility and autonomy had no chance of succeeding with the students.

Benefits of Testing

 According to Phelps (2003) and Mayo (2005), standardized tests have been beneficial and popular for a variety of reasons such as the numerous studies supporting high-stakes testing and maintaining that the tests encouraged achievement. Other reasons were they provided information from an exclusive perspective that allowed the public to know what was taught and tested and when tests had high stakes, they motivated students to learn more than what they normally would. They also provided affirmation to students who worked hard academically (Mayo). Phelps affirmed that high-stakes testing allowed teachers to become partners in students' quest for achievement. They helped provide clarity, focus, direction, and coherence to curriculum and instruction systems. Phelps found that many believed standardized tests were superior in quality because professionals trained in testing and measuring results designed them. More often, they became the only objective measure of student achievement. Proponents of testing stated that graduates needed strong accountability measures while in school; otherwise, it

might be harmful to their careers as the larger world would judge them outside of the school setting. The public promoted high-stakes testing that provided students with accountability as to how they were performing in the workforce. Standardized tests used computer matching and different forms with changed order of questions, and this made it harder to cheat in comparison to regular schoolwork. High-stakes tests induced improvement in students' academic achievement (Phelps). According to Hoffman et al. (2001), many teachers approved of high-stakes testing because they knew exactly what was expected of them and what to expect on the test. They stated this was a better method of training to prepare students for postgraduation requirements.

According to Janesick (2001), another positive aspect of high-stakes testing was that this was a way to accurately measure performance when dealing with a large number of students such as college admission candidates. Few were opposed to excellent standards and intense displays of priceless student achievement (Donlevy, 2000). Proponents viewed high-stakes tests as powerful curricular tools that guided the educational system to be more productive and effective (Vogler & Butler-McCullough, 2004).

Observations, work samples, and limited information were low-stakes evidence of achievement for accountability purposes. The rationale for early testing relied on research in reading development and the lack of literacy nationwide. Paris and Hoffman (2004) maintained that early diagnosis of difficulties might improve children's achievement. Schools' successes measured by high-stakes testing and improving scores were popular in this era (Thomas, 2005).

High-stakes testing proponents such as Kohn (2000) asserted that teachers needed accountability measures such as high-stakes testing to improve their teaching. Many teachers needed to be involved in meaningful learning that would induce them to strive for academic excellence and maintain a sense of accountability. Ediger (2001) agreed, stating that pressure placed on teachers ensured they would do better in teaching. Whether it involved solving a mathematics problem or writing an essay, students accomplished more when the achievement of standards became the primary focus (Reeves, 1998). High-stakes tests had the importance of

specifying content and performance targets and encouraging high aspirations and achievement. According to Marklein (2006), academic achievement and college readiness improved, and this might be because of the demanding graduation requirements set by individual states.

According to Roderick and Engel (2001), another benefit of high-stakes testing was that it better prepared students for the global community. The problem of student motivation was characterized as an American dilemma. According to *No Child Left Behind* (2007b), U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings stated that *No Child Left Behind* helped businesses by ensuring students gained the skills they needed. Spellings also said that our nation would lose its economic and competitive advantage if the schools did not improve.

Roderick and Engel (2001) found that students seemed unaware that knowledge was important and that hard work paid off. Villani (1998) stated that children must be able to think critically, communicate effectively, master the assessment of information, locate resources, and display global awareness. They must be able to work well in teams, function in a multicultural society, and understand and respect racial differences. They must possess the ability to work as leaders.

Kozol (2006) observed that schools served many purposes, and one purpose of school was to prepare youth for future productive employment. Lewis (2000) stated the educational system was adamant concerning accountability for teaching and learning. Standardization, accountability, and competition were powerful terms referring to the factors that shaped schools and the entities they provided. Accountability was important for many reasons such as the business world needed workers with the ability to make decisions and critically think about comprehensive processes.

Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000) stated that in international comparisons of achievement, low student effort appeared to be a reason for poor performance on tests. In comparison to other countries, American students did not do as well in several areas as did students from other developed countries. According to Pence (2005), those in favor of high-stakes testing believed

that it raised the level of instruction in schools. Proponents said they also believed that *No Child*

Left Behind guaranteed that all children learned at a better rate.

Detriments of High-Stakes Testing

Along with the high objectives of testing, high-stakes tests have been complicated with

strong political overtones (Rudner & Schafer, 2002). Marchant (2004) identified negative

consequences on teachers, curriculum, and schools as result of high-stakes testing. According to

Wilde (2002), the idea of testing was not the main concern; rather, it was the emphasis placed on

one score. Johnson and Johnson (2006) observed that high-stakes testing had caused a restraint

of teaching and learning. Teachers reported they were experiencing intensified stress levels in

public schools. Parents expressed uncertainty about the various educational and intellectual

costs of high-stakes testing. Ediger (2001) stated there was much anxiety and tension pertaining

to these highly important tests and Reeves (1998) maintained, "A nation that expects to have its

children compete in the 21st century can ill-afford such a primitive and unrealistic approach to

education" (p. 19). According to Mayo (2005), the problem with high-stakes testing was that it

limited education. The current frenzy over test scores has distracted teachers from appreciating

their students' individuality. Donlevy (2000) affirmed that teachers have focused on tests, test-

taking strategies, and alignment of curriculum to master state and nationally mandated standards.

As stated by Thomas (2005) and Kozol (2006), some of the noted damages attributed to

testing were: teaching to the test, neglecting the study of history, providing inadequate civic

education, overlooking social studies, and eliminating physical education and study of the arts.

Other criticisms of testing included increasing the burden of information to teach, overlooking

students' cultural heritage, and reducing recess and field trips. In addition, teachers often drilled

students on the answers to specific test questions in an attempt to improve test scores (Thomas).

There were specific cases where a principal's ability to claim that children were practicing a

musical instrument, performing dance, or other arts did not protect the school from punishment

from the state if that school's scores were not satisfactory (Kozol). Kohn (2000) suggested that

upon entering the classroom on the first day of school, some teachers saw certain students as being detrimental to their test scores because of their academic history.

One of the most extraordinary political charges against high-stakes testing was that it lowered educational expectations (Reeves, 1998). Walker (2000) stated the curriculum was referred to as "dumbed down" because of high-stakes testing restrictions. Fugate (2007) stated that in the efforts to obtain equality for all students, legislation chose the lowest level for everyone, so that everyone could pass by 2014. Kohn (2000) confirmed there were other negative aspects of high-stakes testing such as creating defensiveness and competitiveness, driving good educators out of the profession because of the increased stress load, and narrowing the curriculum to test-taking skills. According to Pipho (2000), evidence of cheating on tests has become more prevalent. In some instances, teachers and principals supplied students with answers to the tests to prevent failing scores and public embarrassment. Smith and Fey (2000) discussed how teaching to the test was encouraged and recommended because it ensured that even the students in the least advantaged settings received basic instruction and even inflated scores up to 6 months. The teachers' familiarity with the testing items has led to classroom practices that produced suspicious gains without showing actual performance gains. In addition, several states tied consequences such as merit pay and other promotions to achievement scores (Smith & Fey).

Marchant (2004) stated that the process of taking standardized tests did little to improve the knowledge level of students. The feedback they received was also limited and did not contain much potential for improving their learning. According to Fugate (2007), high-stakes testing stifled student learning and teacher creativity and provided only a minimal education for many of the students.

Kralovec and Buell (2005) as well as Horn (2003) noted an increase in the dropout rate because of high-stakes testing. Confronted with the pressures associated with *No Child Left Behind*, some teachers and administrators did leave many children behind. There were instances of teachers and administrators encouraging students to drop out of school to improve the school

district's statistical performance. According to Horn, the state-mandated demands suggested that "Youths must work harder, be monitored by objective, quantifiable standards, and be sanctioned harshly when they fail to meet those standards" (p. 17). Many have feared high-stakes tests because of what was at stake. Walker (2000) stated this fear led to negative attitudes, anxiety, and resentments. Parents in some areas asserted that high-stakes tests placed extreme pressure on students. Marchant (2004) said that many students felt the effect of high-stakes tests for the rest of their lives.

Reeves (1998) reported that in Plato's *Republic* 360 B.C., Plato promoted a system of classification based on men of gold, silver, or bronze. Plato and other philosophers were in the first category--men of gold. If any of the bronze men challenged a man of gold, they were denied opportunities to succeed by limiting their access to everything including basic needs. The supporters of a competitive model of education represented the present day men of gold. The competitive educational system was less likely to challenge students.

According to Amrein and Berliner (2003), there was insignificant proof to affirm that these tests improved students' performance. Vogler (2003) maintained that high-stakes tests were focused on constriction and conformity rather than uniqueness, creativity, and individuality (traits that Americans value in society and need as a democracy). Kozol (2006) revealed that the serious reliance upon high-stakes testing has led teachers to distrust their effectiveness in their teaching as they customarily observe students and make conclusions based on their observations. According to Jones and Johnston (2004), mandated tests often resulted in methods that emphasized lower-level knowledge and skills, and teaching techniques were not consistent with best practices to promote students' learning and motivation. Reeves (1998) stated that some stakeholders viewed the implementation of standards as inequitable, racist, and sexist. According to Mitchell and Salsbury (2002), there were ill effects of high-stakes testing on students' learning.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was a congressionally mandated project within the U.S. Department of Education. The NAEP assessment was administered annually to a national sample of private and public school students in grades 4, 8, and 12 to gather information as to what American students know (Rudner & Schafer, 2002). It assessed what students knew in all academic subjects. Measuring educational achievement trends was vital to measuring progress toward the National Education Goals (National Assessment Governing Board, 2004a). Over the past 35 years, the NAEP has provided a measure of what students across the United States know in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other core subject areas (Nation's Report Card, 2005). As the nation's report card, the NAEP has reported how well students perform in various subjects. The assessments helped educational professionals learn students' strengths and weaknesses in performance to make informed decisions about education. The NAEP has never specified how subjects should be taught; however, broad implications for instruction were inferred from the assessment (National Assessment Governing Board, 2004b). According to the Nation's Report Card:

> Policymakers, educators, and parents rely on the national and state data to help them understand how their state's performance compares to the national average and to that of other states and to assess the extent to which the performance in their state is moving forward or falling behind. (p. 3)

The NAEP allowed one state to compare its educational outcomes with those of another state or with the entire nation. The Nation's Report Card enjoyed a reputation as being a fair and accurate measure of students' progress. The assessments were given to representative samples of students throughout the nation and within various states. The assessment was criterion-referenced and designed to demonstrate students' performance according to specific criteria. The NAEP collected information regarding a school's characteristics and students' and teachers' instructional practices as well as school curricula (Whirry, 2004). The NAEP has gathered information regarding student achievement in subject areas since 1973. The results have informed citizens about the nature of subject comprehension and student understanding (National

Assessment Governing Board, 2004a). Results from the NAEP have revealed that at the end of the 20th century, scores in mathematics and reading were at an all-time high, dropouts were near all-time lows, and our nation's economic dominance was unquestioned (Mathis, 2003). While the NAEP was voluntary, *No Child Left Behind* provided strong incentives for school districts and states to participate in the NAEP assessments (Finder, 2004).

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No Child Left Behind
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Thomas (2005) pointed out that when the U.S. Constitution was framed in 1787, the federal government was given no control over educating the nation's population. Nevertheless, since its founding, the federal government has gradually passed legislation that has dramatically affected the nation. The *Elementary and Secondary Act* of 1965 was the federal government's most determined venture of this sort until the newly mandated *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. This Act became the nationwide achievement testing prerequisite scheme. *No Child Left Behind* (2006) was touted as a highlight in education because it was designed to close achievement gaps and improve student achievement (Thomas).

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind* Act with great fanfare about historic turning points and enthusiastic promises to America's children and parents (Mathis, 2003). This act extended what many states began after the launch of the publication, *A Nation at Risk* (Hursh, 2005). The notion affirmed that all children, regardless of race, disabilities, socioeconomic status, or other factors, had equal access to a successful public education. The bill increased the claim for testing of public school children (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). *No Child Left Behind* mandated that all states execute standardized tests in reading and math in grades three through eight. By 2008, science will be added and the testing will increase in grades 9 through 12. Every state has been required to develop standards, standardized tests, and accountability systems. Schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress. *No Child Left Behind* has represented an attempt to control education through increased guidelines and examinations (Hursh). The *No Child Left Behind* Act has used state standards and

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entailed increasingly harsher penalties on schools with low or nonpassing scores (Mathis). As a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965, *No Child Left Behind* demonstrated that policymakers had remarkable confidence in testing and assessment systems to improve public education (Vogler & Butler-McCullough, 2004). *No Child Left Behind* was often deemed the greatest revision of federal education policy in decades (ESEA/NCLB Implementation, 2006). However, according to Altenbaugh (2003), the current reforms for school improvement seemed to be ideologically driven. In some cases, there were great instances of disinformation. According to Berger (2006), this act has been very controversial and required sanctions for schools that repeatedly did not meet the requirements.

The *No Child Left Behind* Act was based on four pillars: emphasis on effective practices based on results from scientific research, accountability, new parental options, and expanded local control (*No Child Left Behind*, 2006). Annual state and school district report cards have informed parents and communities about progress by states and schools. Schools that have not made progress must provide supplemental services such as free tutoring or after-school assistance (*No Child Left Behind*, 2006). Schools have provided the public with information about disaggregated test scores for students of all races, genders, ethnicities, and with or without disabilities (Hursh, 2005). The government has taken corrective actions, and if a school failed to make adequate yearly progress after 5 years, it made dramatic changes to the way the school was operated (*No Child Left Behind*, 2006).

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states and school districts had unique flexibility in how they used federal education funds. It emphasized eminence on determining which educational programs and practices were effective through research. *No Child Left Behind* supported scientifically based instruction programs in the early grades called the *Reading First* program and in preschool under the *Early Reading First* program. Parents of children in low-performing schools had new options in that if schools have not met state standards for at least 2 consecutive years, parents could transfer their children to better-performing public schools, including public charter schools, within their respective districts (*No Child Left Behind*, 2006). Another

requirement of *No Child Left Behind* was a demand for highly qualified teachers in every classroom. Teachers were certified in the subjects they were teaching and the school provided tutoring and remediation to students falling behind (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

Rodney Paige, George W. Bush's former secretary of education, spoke of *No Child Left Behind* concerning increasing educational efficiency while increasing the nation's economic competitiveness and decreasing educational inequality. He argued that *No Child Left Behind* could be compared to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Paige (as cited in Hursh, 2005) stated:

> The educational achievement gap is the civil rights issue of our time. The law creates the conditions of equitable access to education for all children. It brings us a step closer to the promise of our Constitution. It fulfills the mandate in *Brown v. Board of Education* for equal education opportunity. It honors the trust parents place in our schools and teachers, with a quality education for all children, every single one. (p. 611)

Longstreet and Shane (1993) stated there was a vital need for a new kind of global literacy in a world of cultures connected by technology and media. Houston (2005) maintained the "success" of *No Child Left Behind* was attributable to our nation's teachers and administrators, who despite the law's details, were working hard to implement the changes into our school systems.

Dessoff (2006) affirmed that The *No Child Left Behind* Act allowed education to be modified and ensured that every child received an education despite his or her race, ethnicity, income, or background. Dessoff maintained that *No Child Left Behind* was likely to stay because it brought about vital academic improvement in the country's public schools. It required states to set annual assessable objectives of aptitude in reading and mathematics, administer tests in specific grade levels, and set specific requirements for graduation and attendance. These objectives were in addition to the high standards for learning and achievement required under Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) curriculum (Virginia Department of Education, 2006).

According to U.S. Secretary of Education, Spellings (2007), the nation will lose its economic and competitive advantage if our schools do not improve. Spellings also stated that the nation could not lose the opportunity for the creativity and potential of so many children. In

a speech given to school superintendents, Spellings also affirmed that the goals of reading and math proficiency by the year 2014 were working. Fugate (2007) stated that this was not a reasonable, logical expectation as students did not have the same intellectual capabilities and a one-size-fits-all concept did not measure individual students' achievement. Fugate maintained it was not rational to think that every child in America would score 100% on the same reading and math assessment and it was illogical to think that every student could take the same high-stakes barrier test. However, Fugate did agree with Spellings that every child in America deserved a high quality education regardless of circumstances.

According to Berliner and Biddle (1995), Jones (2004), and Vinson and Ross (2004), many opponents of high-stakes testing strongly disagreed with the idea that high-stakes testing promoted creativity and opportunities for students. Jones stated, "Far from the noble idea of leaving no child behind, current policies, if continued, were bound to increase existing inequities, trivialize schooling, and mislead the public about the quality and promise of public education" (p. 584). According to Altenbaugh (2003), studies revealed that the American public schools were succeeding quite well. Vinson and Ross confirmed that *No Child Left Behind* set impossible standards in which schools failed, thus providing evidence that private institutions needed control of public schools. This was just one negative aspect of *No Child Left Behind*. According to Berliner and Biddle, there was a structured promotion of unbstantiated claims for years regarding public schools. Berliner and Biddle supplied evidence of the opposite claim: that public schools were not failing. They offered several reasons for the maligned arguments including the idea that if private corporations were to take over, they could see substantial profits. Berliner and Biddle affirmed this was a type of exploitation of public schools.

According to the most current blueprint for *No Child Left Behind*, the act was working (Spellings, 2007). There was great progress and this occurred as the academic bar was raised. Spellings maintained that children who were once left behind made some of the largest gains. In 5 short years, the Act evolved from an idea, to a law, to a way of life. Educators, public officials, and the media had engaged in conversation regarding the Act and debated whether the standards

were high enough. Spellings discussed how these ideas would not be happening without the *No Child Left Behind* Act. According to *No Child Left Behind* (2007a), President George W. Bush and congressional leaders agreed that the nation could not afford to miss the brainpower and creativity of so many children. However, former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Thompson (2007), who served as director of the agency during George W. Bush's first term, called *No Child Left Behind* a blunt instrument that needed to be changed. Throughout this body of research, there were similar sentiments as the participants deemed *No Child Left Behind* both "unrealistic" and "unattainable." The *No Child Left Behind Act* is up for renewal in congress, and whether it is working has remained in question. A new study has shown that test scores are rising. However, it is still unclear whether *No Child Left Behind* should get the credit. For many educators, the verdict on the law has remained undetermined (NPR, 2007).

Virginia Standards of Learning

States have been evaluating students' progress towards precise standards (Calkins, Montgomery, Santman, & Falk, 2006). From the beginning of Virginia's school reform initiative, the Board of Education has recognized the need for an ongoing process of evaluation and revision (Virginia Department of Education, 2006). Whereas the current wave of education reform has continued to emphasize accountability, it was tied more to the setting and implementing of state standards in the areas of content and performance. States aligned their assessments to their standards and demanded much more from students. Virginia joined the *Goals 2000* initiative in 1997 as it implemented the Standards of Learning (Behnke et al., 2006). In 1998, Virginia began to assess third, fifth, and eighth graders on the Virginia Standards of Learning in core subjects including English, math, history, and science. The Standards of Learning for Virginia's public schools expressed the commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades kindergarten through 12 in English, mathematics, science, history-social science, technology, the fine arts, foreign language, health and physical education, and driver education. These standards represented a broad agreement of what parents, classroom

teachers, school administrators, and business and community leaders believed schools should teach and students should learn. In the four core areas of English, mathematics, science, and history-social science, a curriculum framework was also provided that detailed the specific knowledge and skills students must possess to meet the standards for these subjects (Walker, 2000).

Virginia wanted to ensure that all high school graduates had the reading and writing skills necessary for success in college or in the job market. A diploma from a Virginia high school was a guarantee that the graduate whose name it bore possessed those vital skills. The long-term interests of students and society were not served by awarding diplomas to high school students who were illiterate (Virginia Department of Education, 2006).

According to Main (2000) and Pasi (2000), there were criticisms of the SOLs, and many were opposed to such a standards-based curriculum. The SOLs did not measure students' creativity and critical thinking. The tests also did not consider students' learning styles. Teachers realized the need for accountability, but many started to feel limited in their work. According to Grogan (2001), many teachers said they felt they sacrificed teaching for compliance. Conversely, one of the keys to successfully responding to the negative effects of accountability was a teacher's idea of meaningful learning experiences for students.

Virginia's public schools demonstrated accountability for preparing the youth for success in today's global economy with the implementation of the SOLs. The educators remained focused and committed in ensuring that all children possessed the necessary skills and knowledge (Virginia Department of Education, 2007).

Changes in Curriculum

The implementations of standards ultimately have led to curriculum reform (Reeves, 1998). According to Longstreet and Shane (1993), in the current millennium, changes in the way of life continue to accelerate. Knowledge has continued to expand at an ever-increasing rate. The decisions about what was most important for children to learn became increasingly complex.

The curriculum was what was taught and represented a process by which subjects responded to changing times and needs. Subjects comprised the curriculum and served as the building blocks from which a curriculum was constructed. "The related major shift entails a movement away from the textbook as controlling the subject matter of study to a curriculum entailing a planned sequence of learning replete with standards" (Longstreet & Shane, p. 7). Kliebard (2002) stated these structural changes amounted to a pedagogical revolution. According to Marchant (2004), teachers taught in a more traditional style with lecture and recitation. There were repeated instances of teachers narrowing the curriculum to what was tested, thus leading to omission of more innovative teaching techniques such as cooperative learning. Bonham (1979), who supported an extensive curriculum, stated that educated persons must be able to think critically and write efficiently; they must be able to gain and apply knowledge of the universe and society. They should have an intellectual experience with literature and the arts, and they must be familiar with the concepts of social science. They must know of other cultures and other times. The curriculum must meet the needs of the students. Burks (1998) affirmed that the quality and impact of curricula were assessed by those assessments and the data were used to change the curricula.

Bruner (as cited in Rudner & Schafer, 2002) stated, "The curriculum of a subject should be determined by the most fundamental understanding that can be achieved of the underlying principles that give structure to that subject" (p. 7). According to Finder (2004), Ralph Tyler knew and devised effective ways to evaluate the progress of the nation's schools. He also published a book entitled, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, in which he expanded upon concepts of curriculum. Schugurensky (2006) reported that Tyler called for the application of four basic principles. The four basic principles included:

1. defining appropriate learning objectives;

2. establishing useful learning experiences;

3. organizing learning experiences to have a maximum cumulative effect; and

4. evaluating the curriculum and revising those aspects that did not prove to be effective. (n. p.)

According to Finder (2004), Tyler did not support the use of standardized tests as instruments of assessment in teaching; instead, he argued that tests did not measure achievement but were designed to rank and classify. He stated that teaching was a purposeful endeavor and standardized tests had nothing to do with evaluation (Finder).

"Defining Curriculum" (2005) stated curriculum might be defined by state standards that were connected to high-stakes tests and might be defined by classroom methods such as project-based learning, direct instruction, and cooperative learning. Vogler (2003) declared teachers were using states' curriculum frameworks and devised a new curriculum. The new curriculum used students' interests as a way to integrate the content-area standards. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2006) stated assessment of student learning was undergoing profound change as modifications were taking place in content standards, learning goals, and curriculum instruction. High-stakes assessments must be based on strong educational foundations such as school curriculum changes. Villani (1998) stated that moving forward with an educational curriculum went beyond incorporation, beyond interdisciplinary units, and beyond high-stakes tests to a curriculum that was rich, complex, challenging, and met the needs of all students.

According to Brimijoin (2005), "One-size-fits-all accountability across our nation dramatizes the importance of ensuring that all students have access to appropriate curriculum, engaging instruction, and supportive resources" (p. 254). Over the past 30 years, many attempts for curriculum reform were made (Villani, 1998). Kliebard (2002) stated critics claimed that fads in the curriculum occurred with greater haste and they were often alternatives for genuine and needed change in the educational system. Sometimes the changes were in interaction with social trends. A change in curriculum was more than it appeared to be. From the top to the bottom of the educational ladder, state departments of education, school boards, and school administrators responded to the public's outcry, media attention, and pressure from interest groups as to what was included in school curriculum. Educators such as Hurwitz and Hurwitz

(2000) stated that high-stakes tests were aligned with curriculum and instruction and teachers were involved in the learning process. Jones (2004) affirmed high-stakes testing dictated the curriculum, thus, there were fewer choices available for students and teachers. According to Rudner and Schafer (2002), some policymakers gained support for a national curriculum. According to Kliebard, there were four hypotheses that accounted for the occurrence of curriculum change:

1. the expansion of the scope of the curriculum in conjunction with direct utility as the supreme criterion of success;

2. reform was more powerful and was inaugurated without the accompanying structural changes that were needed in order to make it succeed;

3. the changes were not one curriculum ideology, but they were a function of social and political climate changes with ideas of how the curriculum should be organized; and

4. rapid changes in curriculum were related to the rise of a social class of school administrators whose professionalism depended upon being current with other schools. (p. 77)

The changes in curricula had many objective opinions. Reeves (1998) and Thomas (2005) acknowledged that evidence accumulated to support the suggestion that high-stakes achievement testing was causing schools to accentuate certain subjects, to de-emphasize some, and to eliminate others. School subjects were condensed because of high-stakes testing mandates. Vinson and Ross (2004) revealed that all students should have the chance to discover the fine and performing arts, physical education and sports, and extracurricular activities. These classes and activities aided in social skills and responsibility and enabled students to excel in society.

According to Donlevy (2000), a school's purpose was to involve educating students in appreciation of multiple traditions and cultures, encourage civic understanding, and promote historical awareness. Schools also encouraged morals, values, and personal character. Cheney (1991) declared that young people needed to appreciate the social complexity of the world.

Prevailing educational reforms did not advance, but inhibited, this cause. Educators need to be reminded that a democracy was stronger when its citizens knew its history. According to Vogler (2003), many teachers thought they were misunderstanding demands that were being placed on them. They could not believe they were asked to shorten certain classes such as social studies and science to add more time for English and mathematics. The high-stakes tests converted curriculum control to policymakers. Test-based reform was responsible for changes in curriculum and instruction. Vinson and Ross (2004) affirmed that 21st century students dealt with problems that other generations had not considered such as global warming, loss of civil liberties, ecological disasters, and global conflicts. The curriculum was relevant and addressed the needs of current issues.

Kohn (2000) stated that teachers often became directed to set aside other subjects and devote themselves to boosting students' scores. Excitement about learning represented one end of the spectrum and covering material on the test represented the other. Hursh (2005) pointed out that schools concentrating on test preparation were likely to spend most of their curriculum budget for test-preparation materials. Giordana (2005) revealed that curriculum theory was built around the notions of what was valuable for students to learn not what was going to be on the standardized tests. In a standards-based system, state department of education officials found out what was on the tests and defined curriculum goals to match them. Teaching in a high-stakes environment focused on what was being tested. The question remained how tests originally designed to assess student progress became the focus of curricula and expanded into public and private institutions

Are High-Stakes Tests Developmentally Appropriate?

With the current changes in curricula, issues evolved about whether or not the changes were developmentally appropriate. According to Thomas (2005):

> In nearly all characteristics of importance for success in school, students are unequal-- quite different from each other. In effect, the only way all fourth-graders are alike is that they are all in fourth grade. In all other ways, fourth-graders vary-in height, skin color,

acuity of eyesight, English-language fluency, social skills, self-control, self confidence, fears, worries, contents of their consciousness, brain-structure patterns, ambitions, motives, frustrations, study habits, their parents' child-rearing practices, and on and on. (p. 11)

According to Pence (2005), "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" was all that was known about child development and learning, strengths, interests, needs of each individual child, and knowledge of social and cultural contexts. Johnson (2005) stated that students were unequal and teaching students and evaluating their progress led to grade promotion and retention or whether or not they graduated from high school during this era of testing. Clay (2005) stated, "High-stakes testing decreased the number of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in the classroom" (p. 70).

Gardner (1993), one of the most influential figures in education, determined a theory of multiple intelligences that included how the mind works. He argued that our minds were complex, as was the way we learn. He stated we must try to understand the full range of human intelligence and it was more than providing the correct answers on a test. There was a multitude of commonalities and variations in child development.

According to Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000), from the thinking of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner, and others, the constructivism concept considered learning as an active, group-oriented process where students construct an understanding of knowledge (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences gave simple expression to what people understood as different approaches to learning. Gardner's theoretical work outlined the different ways people learn and emphasized how to reach each type of learner. The progressive leaders, including Gardner, debated that education led to deep forms of understanding that could not be properly measured by standardized tests (Traub, 2002).

There were limitations and biases inherent in testing because testing did not address the real equity issues related to educating minority and disadvantaged students (Rudner & Schafer, 2002). Although standards were recognized and students enjoy benchmarks and challenges, many developmentalists questioned whether these tests inhibited critical thinking. Students were

in a new era where:

> Teenagers learn via questions more than answers, hypotheses more than facts, deduction rather than induction, their own opinions and experiences more than adult conclusions. Too much emphasis on right or wrong answers on a single test might narrow the curriculum, reward rote memorization, and discourage students. This may be one reason why, despite intense effort and increased testing, achievement scores for U.S high school student appear to be stagnant. (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001, p. 63)

Are Minority Students Tested Fairly?

There has been increasing diversity in the population in America (Longstreet & Shane, 1993). Accountability failed to take into consideration that children were different (Knowles & Knowles, 2001). President George W. Bush concluded that testing attempted to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged student and their peers. Orfield and Kornhaber (2001) reported that Bush, apparently, considered that the combination of accountability, information, and sanctions enabled students to achieve more in school. When performance on a standardized test was attributable to what teachers taught, and if all students came to school equally ready to learn, then minorities and special needs students' scores would reflect great success. However, performance on standardized tests exhibited connections between prior knowledge and family support.

Johnson (2005) stated that students varied in aptitude, readiness, and learning capacity. Diversity has become the norm in the classroom representing approximately 460 languages and a variety of cultural backgrounds. Diverse students had different perspectives concerning roles within schools, families, and society (Nisbet & Tindall, 2006). According to Janesick (2001), high-stakes tests were accurate, but they were also culturally biased. Educators continually searched for ways to educate minority students, and standardized tests created more barriers. Our schools were multicultural, multilingual centers with students possessing different needs. Students learned by different methods, and possessed strengths in different areas.

Some teachers made special accommodations in order to obtain valid scores on high-stakes tests. Milby and Rhodes (2006) stated that linguistically and culturally challenged

classrooms require teachers who possess understanding of family traditions and know how to incorporate the context to increase effectiveness at school. Firestone and Riehl (2005) stated principals and administrators viewed minority students as students who had needs that the school knew and understood. The teachers and administrators addressed their needs individually so that they learned at higher levels in accordance with high-stakes testing.

All classrooms had students with a range of learning needs and teachers struggled to provide all students access to the appropriate curriculum and focused on fundamental principles for students' success. The dependence on state-mandated assessments as the dominant criteria for promotion and graduation was a detriment to teachers' abilities of meeting diverse needs (Brimijoin, 2005). Tests measured unequal circumstances and negative consequences were considered to affect African Americans, Hispanics, and poor youths more than those with a more enriched preparation (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). Minority groups continued to contest the use of high-stakes tests as the only norm to measure students' achievement. Confidence on tests also had a negative impact on the African American community (Library of Congress, 2006). Educators were challenged to educate students who were ethnically and linguistically diverse (Firestone & Riehl, 2005).

Are Special Needs Students Tested Fairly?

Fugate (2007) stated that it was irresponsible legislation to believe that all students come to school ready to learn. He maintained that many students did not come to school well rested, well nurtured, and well nourished. Some students have not had the same opportunities as others, and one test could not possibly measure student achievement. High-stakes tests were disturbing for special needs students. Nelson (as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2006) wrote about a 9-year-old girl from Louisiana who was in a car accident. The crash killed her sister and brother and left her with traumatic head injuries. Along with the challenges of mental disabilities and difficulty holding a pencil, Nelson noted she also had other challenges awaiting her at school: the state-mandated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program test. Her teacher acknowledged the

test was unrealistic and unfair. The girl's parents said they did not want her to "feel ashamed" (p. 225). Critics of high-stakes tests agreed that the tests further disadvantage the disadvantaged students (Smith & Fey, 2000). Steps need to be taken to ensure that test scores accurately reflect the intended concept when testing students with disabilities (Janesick, 2001).

Teachers who educate special-needs children were absorbed in developmental difficulties, emotional handicaps, learning problems, and behavioral challenges. They worked with some of the neediest children and understood the importance of individual development. Donlevy (2000) stated that young people with special needs were the most affected by rising educational mandates and high-stakes testing. The majority of these students faced challenges of a very different sort not to mention lack of funding, limited resources, and intimidation of school curricula.

The new mandates implemented across the country allegedly presumed several factors, and made such promises as an endless number of resources and a vigorous level of instruction. Unfair conditions in poorer school districts often made it appear that they did not care about meeting high-stakes standards. According to Donlevy (2000), the truth entailed that these groups of students and teachers were not given ample resources and marginal programs.

Marchant (2004) stated children were not randomly assigned to teachers, schools, school districts, or states. There were qualitative differences in students that were not the product of sound instructional quality or educational policies. Donlevy (2000) acknowledged that perhaps the greatest inequality of the high-stakes era was the lack of understanding for the most vulnerable population in education--the poor, the learning disabled, and minorities. These populations must be upheld in their abilities to progress along the educational scale. The proper mechanisms must be in place in order for everyone to achieve success. Schools existed for a variety of reasons and educators helped students realize their gifts and prepared them for the larger society. They provided remedial programs to those who have learning, behavioral, or emotional disorders (Donlevy).

Suggestions for Practice

A resolution is being sought that would please everyone involved in education including politicians, school districts, and educators and that would represent student achievement without sacrificing students' creativity (Savala, 2002). Reeves (1998) stated the curriculum changes concerning high-stakes testing affected everything taught in schools and, more importantly, the way concepts were taught. Teachers creatively identified ways that their instruction helped students master academic standards. According to Paris and Hoffman (2004), one assessment could not sufficiently represent the intricacy of a student's ability. The tests could not represent the curriculum and instructional diversity. The criteria of high-stakes tests were threaded through the curriculum to achieve student success and represented accountability. Popham (2006) discussed how principals and administrators expanded their knowledge about assessment as they continued for improvements in educational testing. Sever (2004) stated teachers were supplied with practical ways to use test results. They also possessed knowledge used to identify needs for curriculum changes that provided meaning and validated the time spent on administering and implementing tests.

Paris and Hoffman (2004) suggested that teachers dedicate more attention to engaging children in discussions that connected their experiences to written text. They taught new vocabulary words, explored characters' motivations, and promoted comprehension of text associations. Longstreet and Shane (1993) stated that new vocabulary words needed to be integrated with the known terms based on detailed explanations. Assignments were rich in facet and complex in achievement. They assimilated cumulative knowledge with a variety of academic disciplines. Students demonstrated proficiency when assignments were opportunities for them to revise and improve their work. Teachers knew the expectations of students so that students achieved competence in given areas (Reeves, 1998). According to Firestone and Riehl (2005), school principals understood what role leadership played in approaching the challenges and opportunities within accountability-oriented policy contexts.

Reeves (1998) discussed how school and central office administrators understood the standards for high-stakes testing. Their responsibilities for practice included assessing students' progress, analyzing classroom activities, and identifying faculty leaders. They also created professional development opportunities for school faculty to improve on their knowledge of standards on tests. They continued to improve, reflect, and revise the curriculum to remain current in the high-stakes educational movement. According to Glenn (2004), some school leaders felt desperate to find answers that helped their students meet the standards on high-stakes tests.

Paris and Hoffman (2004) suggested other ideas including reinforcing school practices to seek community literacy resources. Studies of children's literacy development revealed that reading at home and engaging in interactive conversations led to increased literacy during students' adolescence. According to Longstreet and Shane (1993), planning a set of varying methods was considered the most effective approach to expanding literacy. Learning and discovery contained all subject fields--sciences, mathematics, arts, and social studies.

Educators researched behind the façade of test scores into what made real learning take place. Bromley (2005) suggested that teachers who provided instructional and emotional support received higher scores on students' standardized tests. High-quality teachers used a variety of formats to keep students interested in course content and gave them a range of opportunities to display and perform new skills. They also gave expanded, detailed feedback beyond a right or wrong answer on a test (Bromley, 2005). Whirry (2004) declared assessments did not mark the end of learning and should be followed with specific, detailed feedback for improvements where students had weaknesses. Teachers' approaches to teaching skills were strengthened and this engaged students in learning that was more appropriate. The teachers accommodated students' learning differences and intelligences. Additionally, Holmes (2006) discussed how teachers added to their repertoire of instructional resources that made learning more meaningful. Clay (2005) stated testing made immense achievement demands.

According to Johnson (2005), educators considered that high-stakes tests were only a snapshot in time and could not wholly reflect an entire school year's academic program. Educators emphasized that they used a variety of other assessments such as homework, quizzes, projects, and portfolios to measure progress and assessment. According to Phelps (2003), many educators considered students who acquired self-esteem and an ability to work well with others as great educational successes. Shorr (2006) stated all participants of a school used their gifts to make a successful school.

Whirry (2004) said that teachers believed in the value of assessment. Kralovec and Buell (2005) pointed out that teachers, administrators, and students worked hard to achieve success on high-stakes tests and were to be held accountable. Since the late 1980s, multitudes of Americans provided remedial instruction for employees as jobs in the technologically demanding society placed more burdens and challenges on the work force. Documents revealed the need for increased literacy levels in the United States (Longstreet & Shane, 1993). Kliebard (2002) claimed:

> No matter what is the accepted precept and theory, no matter what the legislation of the school board or the mandate of the school superintendent, the reality of education is found in the personal and face-to-face contact of teacher and child. The conditions that underlie and regulate this contact dominate the educational situation. (p. 8)

Phelps (2003) asserted that few educators maintained that learning should be judged primarily on high-stakes testing. The primary responsibility for the implementation of standards was teachers (Reeves, 1998). There was a way to hold teachers accountable without diminishing trust in their creative capabilities (Evans, 2005). According to Adams and Hamm (2005):

> Students need to be actively involved in learning and in the decision-making process. Rather than textbooks and worksheets, students need to work on group projects, write about issues and ideas important in their lives, discuss, research important questions, debate, and work cooperatively. (p. 192)

Evans (2005) confirmed this involved the creation at local, regional, and national levels of new political institutions that provided public spaces in which citizens drawn from different sectors in society debated curriculum. These institutions had the power to get agreements that

emerged into policy initiatives. The professional educators then experimented with the proposed solutions and came up with more solutions. They also accounted for and provided evidence of all solutions that were externally audited and made available to the public.

Ediger (2001) stated, "Daily work and achievement of students can be entered into the pass/no pass philosophy of high-stakes testing" (p. 5). In other schools nationwide, it seemed that every elementary school teacher began his or her day with errors on the board and then asked the children to correct the sentences in response to the testing language of high-stakes testing. Many stories of teachers changing their lesson plans were evident of what was going on in classrooms. Standardized tests are a part of life for the next few generations--at least for American school children. The debate continues as to whether or not high-stakes testing produces positive or negative effects.

Award-Winning Teachers

Many students achieved at high levels because of award-winning teachers with a demonstrated commitment to these students (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). According to Jones and Johnston (2004), teachers have been changing their teaching methods. They were trying to adapt their instructional practices to meet the new demands placed by high-stakes testing. Hebel (2003) revealed that a different type of thought process was required for success in testing. Sutton (2004) suggested that tests influenced what teachers taught, but they did not influence how they teach. Teachers were powerful representatives in bringing academic performance of children to high levels in spite of obstacles such as poverty, bilingualism, or special needs. There were teachers who created powerful educational environments and were not perplexed about how to raise achievement levels. According to Hilliard (2000), those teachers are the ones who:

> . . . see the universal genius, spirit, and humanity in all children. Things like poverty, bilingual status, single-parent families, and even threatening neighborhood environments present no obstacle to the attainment of excellence for their students. (p. 293)

As pointed out by Hilliard (2000), the teachers who succeeded despite all impediments were those who had different perspectives. They knew there were trials and errors. They had a vision and a sense of destiny. They talked about the school as a family, a safe haven for children. They were part of the community and strived to involve all in it. They viewed each child as a special gift with massive potential. The challenge was assigning all children the teachers who made them reach high standards. Master teachers and educational leaders designed teaching and learning processes and assessment approaches to display standards of excellence and valid relationships to educational achievement. They also helped liberate lower performing teachers to become more powerful managers of students' successes (Hilliard). Williamson, Langley, and Mayne (2005) agreed that teachers use a variety of strategies to help students make sense of and understand new skills and concepts. Teachers learned and shared ideas with one another. The concept of teachers observing, learning, discussing, and thinking critically was essential to success (Sever, 2004). Murray, Shea, and Shea (2004) maintained that educators did the exact opposite of what researchers suggested. They were forced to aim instruction toward what was on the test and not teach students what they really wanted to learn.

Sever (2004) stated that reform-minded teachers attempted to overcome the inadequacies of the high-stakes testing movement by giving enough attention to the narrow goals in the assessments without sacrificing instructional attention to deeper conceptual understandings or broader curricular goals. Coaches used data to examine strengths and weaknesses in plays and learned how to do better next time. Educators used this same example and used data to improve their teaching abilities.

According to Sutton (2004), there was no doubt that teaching under high-stakes testing became more complex. Many teachers wanted to know how to prepare students for high scores on standardized tests without compromising their beliefs about teaching. Bromley (2006) stated that teachers related to their students and got them excited about learning by being involved in the learning processes and being committed to valued learning techniques. Improved assessment

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of academic achievement required better techniques such as disciplined inquiry, integration of knowledge, and value beyond evaluation (Archbald & Newmann, 1988).

Houston (2005) said testing provided teachers with the information needed to improve instruction and filled in gaps in students' understanding. As stated by Whirry (2004), assessment based on state standards provided feedback and included qualitative and quantitative information that guided teaching and curriculum. Teachers used assessments, provided corrective instruction, and gave second chances to demonstrate success. Hilliard (2000) maintained award-winning teachers saw children in a different way. The children succeeded at the highest levels of excellence when offered appropriate instruction. According to Fugate (2007), schools that did not stop doing all the fun things made meaningful learning experiences for the students.

Summary of the Literature

"High-stakes testing has swept across the nation as the most recent means of measuring the progress of public schools and holding them accountable for student achievement" (Jones & Johnston, 2004, p. 1). Brimijoin (2005) affirmed that testing has afforded a means to provide feedback to teachers, administrators, schools, districts, and states about student achievement and teacher quality. Testing was here to stay for the predictable future. Johnson and Johnson (2006) agreed that assessment of students at all grade levels, ages, and stages was vital to success in academia. Standards and accountability equated to the quality of education and there were various benefits and detriments of high-stakes testing.

According to Brown, Galassi, and Akos (2004), the educational process has never been under so much pressure. Educators and administrators recognized that they could not return to the past when they were free to do what they wished in their classrooms. Hursh (2005) asserted the government changes required some form of accountability to the public.

The reality of high-stakes testing was complex and needed to be examined from several perspectives (Johnson, 2005). According to Pence (2005), examining teachers' perspectives to mandated curriculum changes in classrooms constructed invaluable resources such as ideas for

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classroom practice. Calkins et al. (2006) stated, "A single test could never compare to the complete picture a teacher has of his or her students" (p. 5).

Roderick and Engel (2001) stated promoters of high-stakes testing argue that students have more effort and motivation when given strong incentives. On February 6, 2006, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, Henry L. Johnson, said that national data showed increases on standardized test scores; therefore, the high-stakes testing movement was working. He also stated that the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites was the smallest since 1990 (as cited in Bromley, 2006). According to Whirry (2004), all assessment is a way of evaluating a complex educational process. Testing provides data as to whether or not students are learning and serves as an accountability system for educators. Every student deserves to be in an educational system that expects all to achieve at the highest levels possible.

However, opponents maintained that high-stakes policies set students up to fail and that the threat of retention undermined their engagement in school (Roderick & Engel, 2001). Assessments served as meaningful resources for students, teachers, administrators, and the public. Whirry (2004) stated assessments were an integral part of the instructional process and they were essential components to improving education and student learning. Bromley (2006) agreed that in the world of high-stakes testing, the elements of success included highly qualified teachers who knew their subject matter and used a rigorous curriculum that engaged students in complex thinking followed by proper assessment. However, according to Fugate (2007), there were serious flaws in evaluating school performance. There was something wrong with the initiative *No Child Left Behind* that inflicted punishment on schools rather than support for struggling schools. It was unrealistic to believe that every student passed the same standardized tests and attained the same goals. Everyday heroic school personnel nurtured the unloved and tended to those who were weak in different areas. Children are different and will always learn in different ways.

According to Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000), high-stakes tests were transforming the educational landscape. They were powerful tools for raising standards and stimulating long-term benefits. Our nation fortified the call for accountability and precise testing. High-stakes testing formed a debate in wondering if it were possible to achieve both excellence and equity in American education. Mitchell and Salsbury (2002) confirmed the controversy continued because arguments against standardized testing and its unnecessary pressure still existed. Effective instruction and learning are at risk. The disparity of statewide standards and tests and cheating of test scores by teachers, administrators, and state officials continue in the testing society.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as an approach where the inquirer makes knowledgeable claims based on constructivist perspectives and emerging data to develop themes. According to Merriam (1998) and Rubin and Rubin (1995), constructivism was the dominant philosophy in contemporary education. Qualitative research celebrates the uniqueness and triumph of the human spirit. According to Pence (2005), qualitative research was appropriate for this type of study because it "seeks to explore where and why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds and research that delves indepth into complexities and processes" (p. 62). I immersed myself into the teachers' and administrators' stories and retold them to make meaning from the stories. These stories revealed what outstanding teachers have done in the classrooms to meet high-stakes standards and creatively captivate students' minds.

This qualitative study focused on perceptions of teachers and administrators in three Southwest Virginia public school systems. The 12 participants were comprised of novice and experienced elementary school teachers, administrators, and superintendents. The educators participated in interviews based on their experience, skill, and involvement with high-stakes testing, curriculum change, and best practices. Creswell (2007) stated that a qualitative study might add to existing literature; this was my plan with this study. Throughout the literature review, there were minimal references of best practices within classrooms. I wanted to highlight specific areas within elementary school classrooms from teaching and administrative standpoints that might be beneficial for other educators.

I used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach; this was a qualitative research method designed to aid the collection and construction of a theoretical model. Using Creswell's (2007) suggestions, I examined educator's theories about best practices that explained how they were achieving creativity within testing mandates. Existing theories were nonexistent for the population of teachers and administrators, and there was a need for this type of study.

The grounded theory found from this study might provide a general framework for other educators.

The educators were asked a series of questions about their thoughts and views regarding high-stakes testing and curriculum changes. They answered inquiries about classroom practices and questions relating to the tests' perceived effectiveness. Creative classroom practices were identified from teachers and administrators that were effective in mastering high-stakes standards. This chapter includes information on the research design, interviews, instrumentations, procedures, and data analysis used in the research.

Creswell (2007) affirmed the steps in this process: I conducted 12 interviews, collected and analyzed observations and documents, and took information from data collection and compared it to emerged categories and called this the constant comparative method of data analysis. I allowed the theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Research Questions

1. How does high-stakes testing influence teachers and administrators?
2. What are specific curriculum changes that have been made in classrooms?
3. What are the best instructional practices for teaching high-stakes standards?
4. How have teachers maintained creativity under high-stakes testing mandates?

Pilot Studies

This project was designed to examine curriculum changes concerning high-stakes testing within school systems, participants' perceptions of these mandated changes, and their suggestions for best instructional practices. Using the qualitative process, teachers' perceptions regarding the classroom changes were explored and presented as applications for practice in the classroom.

Creswell (2007) stated that pilot studies refine data and develop appropriate questions. One teacher and one administrator completed a pilot interview session. The respondents offered suggestions and included comprehensive discussions on high-stakes testing changes within

schools. The pilot studies did deviate from the original questions that I planned to use. I made

notes regarding questions that developed as a result of the pilot interview sessions. I thought

about different aspects regarding ideas for best practices. I realized that some of my questions

were vague in reference to what I planned to find out from the participants. I changed the

interview protocol to include more probing questions that explored their best practices and

perceptions. The interviews were recorded and the tapes were transcribed for further evaluation.

The pilot studies were useful in varying the interview questions and provided suggestions for

changes, additions, and omissions. I used an emergent design and I altered the questions in the

interview guide.

The interview questions began with an inquiry about how the teachers perceived high-

stakes testing in general. These questions revealed a lot about their feelings toward testing. This

set the mood for the remainder of the questions and led to further questioning. The next

questions regarded ways teachers and administrators used their attitudes to influence what they

changed in the classrooms or schools. On the last questions, I asked the respondents to share

what the positive and negative impacts of testing were on the climate of the school. Teachers

and administrators shared their stories about how they have implemented the authorized changes

in schools and classrooms. I then combined data from interviews, field notes, observations, and

the research log that portrayed a sufficient description of the participants' perceptions and best

practices.

Sampling Criteria

Twelve educational professionals participated in this study. There were two purposeful

samples including (a) novice teachers with less than 3 years experience, and (b) experienced

teachers with more than 15 years experience. The participants worked in one of three rural

Southwest Virginia counties. I used a snowballing sample to select participants who could best

explain the phenomenon of best practices in classrooms under high-stakes testing. The sample

was based on the following criteria: (a) elementary school teachers working for three public

schools in Southwest Virginia, (b) teachers who have a genre of knowledge regarding best practices because of high-stakes testing, and (c) Title I schools with placed, at-risk students.

Three participants were in charge of school systems with populations ranging from 700 to 7,000 students. Three participants supervised schools that had student populations ranging from 400 students to 700. Nine participants had at least 25 years experience and three participants had fewer than 3 years experience. A more balanced distribution was originally considered; however, some of the teachers declined to be interviewed.

Recruitment Protocol

I contacted each of the three school districts' superintendents before the interview session for permission to interview the participants (see Appendix C). The superintendents provided names of the school principals for interviews. I contacted each of the principals for interviews. The school principals each provided the name of one teacher based on high-test scores, one teacher based on average scores, and the last teacher with less than average scores. I interviewed three teachers and one administrator from each school district. One of the teachers with less than average test scores refused the interview. The teacher did not give any reason for not wanting to participate. The school principal suggested another teacher who was interviewed.

I informed the participants of their anonymity and confidentiality during the entire process. The teachers did not know the reason they were chosen as a participant in this study. They were informed of their ability to withdraw without penalty at any time during the interview process. I maintained fairness to all participants involved in this research.

Ethical Protocol for Research With Human Subjects

Each interview began with an overview of the study and an explanation of the informed consent form (see Appendix B). Before the overview, an introduction to the use of the tape recorder was made and the assurance of confidentiality was presented through a brief discussion of the data collection and the NVIV07 software. Each session concluded with a summary in

order to enhance the experience for the participants involved and to be sure they received some gratification as they contributed their time and experience to the study. They were given a copy of the transcript following the interview session for revisions. Two of the participants added ideas on the transcripts from the original interview. The consent forms and interview transcripts were kept on file for future reference.

Most of the participants scheduled the interviews upon contact because of their upcoming testing schedules. All of the participants were interviewed in their offices or classrooms except for one participant. This participant was interviewed at my home by request. The interviews were conducted at times and locations conducive to the participants and the environments chosen by the participants allowed them to feel at ease and respond with sincerity. The selected participants had strong opinions, beliefs, and ideas regarding the subjects; this enriched the study's results tremendously.

Data Collection

Interviews

Each participant was interviewed individually for an average of 60 minutes. Most of the interviews went as planned; however, there were two interviewees who did not elaborate on specific practices or perceptions. The interview questions were open-ended to gain knowledge of participants' beliefs based on their experience with high-stakes testing (see Appendix D). The open-ended questions led to further discussions and ideas regarding curriculum changes applicable for classroom practice.

The administrators and teachers provided additional information including their interpretations of high-stakes testing and curriculum changes in reference to what they had observed throughout education and their experience. They also provided specific ideas and stories that supported their perceptions of testing. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The digital files were emailed to a professional transcriptionist who typed the

interviews verbatim. A copy was saved and emailed to me as a text document.

Observations

During this study, observations took place in six classrooms for additional ideas regarding curriculum changes. This type of data collection allowed me to observe direct ideas in the classrooms. I observed each teacher to view how he or she used school curriculum to master academic standards to achieve scores on high-stakes testing whether the scores were high or low.

I did not observe the principals or superintendents because of the nature of their positions. Most of the administrators were in various locations throughout the day and it would have been difficult to observe their practices. The teachers were welcoming and their classrooms were inviting. I observed them as they were teaching and their practices were exactly what they told me during the interview. Four of the six teachers were enthusiastic and energetic and these qualities were very accommodating as the students were engaged in the classroom activities. I learned a lot from the observations and it was encouraging to me as a teacher. I was challenged to try new ideas to master the high-stakes testing standards. The other two teachers seemed to be a little more burned out; however, they still tried very hard to meet the Virginia Standards of Learning in their classrooms. They were solid in their teaching practices but lacked the innovative ideas that were successful with high-stakes testing.

I kept extensive field notes and recorded in a research journal the practices that the teachers used in the classroom. The notes included ideas regarding the atmospheres of their classrooms, their attitudes toward the students, and my overall feelings as I observed their teaching styles. The Model of Best Practices (see Appendix A) illustrates the matrix conveyed by educators throughout this study as result of compilation of best practices used for instructional practice. The themes for the Model of Best Practices were supported by the practices observed in the classrooms. I observed the teachers being positive with the students and this attitude seemed to be the most valuable for the students. Being positive was also the most common theme throughout the data collection. Their enthusiasm was apparent and it kept the students

engaged in the lessons. Many teachers told the students how well they were doing. They linked some of the things they discussed to prior lessons. Some of the teachers allowed the students to get up in front of the class and elaborate on the lessons. The teachers' attitudes were uplifting and they seemed to remain happy and upbeat with the students at all times. They managed their classrooms effectively and minimized behavior issues by keeping the students focused on the lessons. They included all of the students and seemed to use students' interests to focus their attention. There were many instances of positive reinforcement throughout this study; it was obvious this practice was very effective.

Another practice evident in most of the classrooms was that of using a variety of activities and allowing the students to take part in the learning process. The teachers monitored the students and made sure they were active with the lessons as they met different learning styles. Many of the classrooms had SMART boards and the students were engaged in the lessons and games with the Standards of Learning. Some of the games were *Jeopardy*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?,* and *Survivor*. The teachers used the games as review for specific standards. The entire class played the games and it was amazing how well they knew the answers to the questions. The teachers served as facilitators in these classrooms as the students engaged in different learning activities.

After each observation, I reflected on each classroom regarding the unique and creative practices. I noted anything that I had questions about or that I wanted to discuss further with the teachers after the classroom observations. The observations were significant because of the nature of this study in seeing the best practices in action.

Interview Questions

An interview guide was created for this study (see Appendix C). The first set of questions addressed the effects of high-stakes testing on students, teachers, and administrators. The participants were asked about their experience with high-stakes testing and what they considered positive and negative outcomes. They were asked to share their opinions on high-

stakes testing and how they have adapted to federal and state-mandated curriculum change because of high-stakes testing.

The second part of the interview guide included specific questions about curriculum to garner educators' ideas regarding creative ideas for classroom practice. They were also asked if their attitudes and beliefs affected the change process.

The last part of the interview session included questions regarding practices and how to find the best solutions for the students. The interviewees had sufficient time to reflect on the questions and offered valuable responses.

Quality and Verification

The validity of this study was enhanced by ensuring that the participants' responses were accurate and represented exactly what they said. I used multiple methods to improve validity in this qualitative study including triangulation, member checking, thick description, and classroom observations. All of these methods were used to determine the accuracy of the findings. Triangulation provided an extensive representation in this research project. I used multiple data collection methods including interviews, observations, access to lesson plans, class newsletters, class schedules, and curriculum guides. I analyzed these documents throughout the process for relevance to this study. I used the lesson plans and found out what types of lessons and activities were planned and the frequency of each activity. The lesson plans directly aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning and each grades' curriculum guides. Through the observations and access to supplemental sources, the dialogue from the interviews was congruent with the observations.

Member checking by the participants ensured that the transcripts represented their opinions and thoughts toward high-stakes testing. This ensured the teachers that their thoughts were accurately represented on how they felt regarding testing. I made sure that my opinion regarding testing was not overpowering the salient points of their own perceptions regarding testing. The interpretations from the data were discussed and the teachers were asked if their

thoughts were accurately represented. Many of the respondents' comments were not regarding the accuracy of the data. Notes were made on two of the transcripts for additions to thoughts represented in the interview. One of the teachers wanted to add that many students were from single-parent homes, foster homes, or had never met their own parents. The teacher also added that students were affected by external factors, especially socioeconomic status.

Thick descriptions ensured that this research presented an indepth understanding of the effects of high-stakes testing and might provide creative curriculum changes applicable to classrooms. The educational participants' own words were used extensively and represented their feelings toward high-stakes assessments. I may have biases regarding high-stakes testing and the resulting curriculum changes because of my experience in education and my belief in Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the classroom.

Through the use of multiple methods, triangulating data while in the field, spending time observing and interviewing, and a continual search for validating evidence, the validity was thoroughly addressed in this study. The reliability of the study was improved by testing the interview questions on several educators to receive feedback in all areas.

Data Analysis

Teachers, administrators, and superintendents were interviewed and observed for this research project. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparison method was used to analyze the data from the interviews and observations. Their six-step method was used to develop a theory regarding best practices for teaching high-stakes standards. First, I achieved a microscopic view of the data. Merriam (1998) suggested that an analysis be made after each interview. I recorded thoughts and reflections and noted memo statements during and after each interview in a research log. I captured my first impressions of the themes and noted overall feelings.

The information was summarized into short synopsis of thought. The codes were single words that best summarized a recurring concept. Merriam (2002) suggested assigning code

words to elicit new insights from the data. Examples of code words identified in this study

included: *positive, communication, collaboration*, and *design ways*. There were 183 code words

identified in this study. After each interview, all subsequent transcripts were read to verify the

existing codes and to add new codes. I read each transcript and determined coding categories.

These were a selection of the code words that developed into several theories. I also used

NVIV07 to read the transcripts and compare the categories to determine differences in coding. I

joined the ideas and made the proper coding categories.

A codebook was developed within the coding process and NVIV07 was used to classify

each perception and best practice (QSR International, 2007). NVIV07 is a qualitative software

program used to analyze and archive qualitative data. The codebook contained labels and

definitions of the codes. I reduced the coding categories into pattern codes. I combined

individual codes into larger categories that helped to portray the patterns. Then I used open

coding or theming to bracket the data into individual categories and put the pieces together based

on the interpretation of the phenomenon. This ensured that sufficiency of information was

gathered and applied to the purpose of this study. The interviewing and observation process

continued to a point of redundancy and until sufficiency of data was achieved in the collection of

information.

I visualized patterns from the participants' words. There were many instances of

repeated terms and ideas. According to Franklin (2002), the researcher must begin to see each

piece that lies within the whole. I began to see each part of this study. I saw the theories of

teachers' and administrators' perceptions and best practices develop as I listened to each

interview session repeatedly. The units of thought were organized into those that provided

answers for the interview questions and those that supported the educators' thoughts by

examples. The supporting information was then sorted into that related to their perceptions and

that related to best practices. I used selective coding or patterning and moved the patterns into a

grounded theory regarding educators' perceptions and best practices with high-stakes testing.

Then, I coded for process by identifying relationships between the themes and patterns. The

information was then applied to the four research questions that served as the primary purpose of the study:

1. How does high-stakes testing influence teachers and administrators?

2. What are specific curriculum changes that have been made in classrooms?

3. What are the best instructional practices for teaching high-stakes standards?

4. How have teachers maintained creativity under high-stakes testing mandates?

The phenomenon of high-stakes testing contained a variety of patterns, and the theoretical framework revealed that high-stakes testing mandates included in *No Child Left Behind* and the Virginia Standards of Learning had a negative impact on education. The negative patterns included were stress, pressure, and not enough time to meet the demands. In trying to meet the demands, there were patterns of best practices that were discovered throughout this study. I applied the creation of conditional matrix or theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The visual graphic of the theoretical framework is demonstrated in The Model of Best Practices (see Appendix A).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

"America's students are tested regularly, and the results serve as justification for closing schools, firing principals, awarding merits, and focusing professional development and curriculum reform" (Pianta et al., 2007, p. 1795). The ultimate goal of this research was to obtain information from a distinguished group of teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of high-stakes testing. Each participant also revealed best practices used in the classroom as he or she mastered high-stakes testing and maintained creativity in the classroom. The search for best practices in the classroom was intriguing. Teachers and administrators revealed a myriad of ideas that made each of them unique and creative as they exhibited dedication and heartfelt thoughts. Each teacher and administrator demonstrated common practices and ideas that led to supporting themes that became obvious and were reinforced through observations and follow-up discussions.

The intent of this study was to investigate changes in the curriculum caused by high-stakes testing mandates within three Southwest Virginia school systems to find best practices for instructional application in classrooms. There were 14 themes regarding educators' perceptions and best practices that developed into four patterns. Pattern 1 was educators' level of satisfaction; the themes developed were: (a) teachers' and educators' perceptions, (b) teachers' stress, and (c) early retirement. Teachers and administrators shared their feelings and perceptions regarding new policies and how they made changes within the classrooms and school systems.

Pattern 2 was school changes; the themes developed were: (a) curriculum changes, (b) not enough time, (c) changes as result of *No Child Left Behind* and SOLs, (d) curricular emphasis and (e) school activities and field trips. High-stakes testing brought many changes to the school

systems and the participants discussed the changes thoroughly within this study. Pattern 3 was students' satisfaction; the themes were: (a) students' stress and (b) external factors. The educators discussed how students were negatively affected by testing. Pattern 4 was the future; the themes were: (a) changes needed in *No Child Left Behind* and SOLs, (b) teachers as life changers, and (c) successful practices. The participants expressed concerns about the future and stated that changes were needed in education.

Observations

The classroom observations represented the visual aspect of best practices in regards to high-stakes testing. The observations were interesting and exciting as the teachers revealed the ways they maintained creativity. The classrooms were vibrant. Most of the classrooms were set up in cooperative learning arrangements. Each classroom displayed the students' work, facts about the skills being worked on, and classroom rules. Most of the classrooms displayed vocabulary words; in one classroom, the teacher displayed approximately 200 words on the wall. Each of the words was sectioned into SOL categories. They were useful for students use as visual aids. All of the teachers had a variety of books on display. The bulletin boards were instructional and informative for the students. In addition, in each classroom there was evidence that the teacher used learning centers as part of his or her instruction. Teachers' lesson plans were organized around the SOLs and artifacts displayed in the rooms were closely associated with the SOLs. Teachers were very knowledgeable about the content of the SOLs and about how they were to be assessed.

According to Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2000), master teachers presented an integrated, vibrant, and effective type of instruction. Fugate (2007) stated these teachers embraced learning styles and connected with students. Master teachers figured out that some students learned best by talking and cooperative learning. Others learned better in a traditional classroom setting with lectures. The teachers also realized that some students flourished as they worked independently. Teachers exhibited best practices as they considered students' learning styles and organized

instruction that met all the students' needs (Fugate). The teachers and administrators represented in this study exhibited best practices during the observations in how they considered learning styles and integrated a variety of learning activities. They organized instruction and engaged all of the students in the learning experiences. They played games and used the SMART boards to review concepts and skills in preparation for the end-of-year SOL tests. Three of the teachers practiced the SOL tests and recorded each child's skill proficiencies.

The students wrote on the SMART boards, played games, used centers, and practiced the skills in class. One teacher commented, "I keep the students moving all of the time." This concept was important and useful because students seemed to learn more as they varied the activities and lessons. The teachers made positive comments and interacted with constructive ideas that kept the students focused. Hands-on learning was frequently displayed during the observations. The teachers used different strategies and brought their lessons to life. The most remarkable classrooms were those that used hands-on learning and actively engaged the students. During one science lesson, the teacher used a slinky to demonstrate sound waves. The students were immersed in this lesson as the teacher demonstrated and they practiced this skill. In another classroom, the students played *Jeopardy* on the SMART board. The students were on teams and played for classroom rewards. They answered questions that were on the SOL tests. They reviewed many of the skills from previous lessons, and the teachers restated the important facts to remember. Another teacher grouped the students during reading intervention. This teacher individualized learning for all children during reading. In all of the classrooms, SOL skills were not isolated but integrated into the lessons.

Another theme frequently observed was review. The observations took place near the end of the year SOL tests as the teachers reviewed all of the SOLs for the year. The teachers were stressed and pressured for time. They tried to minimize behavior issues and everything else not related to their class work. They emphasized SOL questions and often used phrases such as, "This may be on the test" or "Please remember this because it has been on the SOL test for the past few years." The students recited answers almost as if they were machines. Themes

concerning teachers' and students' stress emerged during the observations. However, because of the vibrancy of the classrooms, the teachers' positive attitudes, and the interesting lessons, the students did not seem adversely affected by high-stakes testing. The teachers presented situations that allowed the students to be creative while they reviewed the Standards of Learning.

A profile of successful practices emerged. The practices included the teacher having a deep content knowledge and love of teaching, sustaining positive relationships with students, and managing and organizing the classroom effectively. The teachers also planned carefully for instruction, used games and review for student mastery, and demonstrated a wide range of instructional skills and strategies. These outstanding teachers had high expectations for all students.

The teachers in this study displayed methods congruent with social constructivism. According to Wikipedia (2007b), social constructivism was developed by Lev Vygotsky who argued that learning was a process by which learners were integrated into a knowledge community. Social constructivism was based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning. The teachers in this study displayed teaching methods that demonstrated meaningful learning had occurred when the students were engaged in social activities.

Throughout the classroom observations, I noticed many examples of social contexts such as the games played, the cooperative learning atmospheres, and the way the students interacted with each other during the lessons in the classrooms. The teachers demonstrated diverse teaching methods and brought assorted interests to the classrooms. The teachers collaborated and created atmospheres conducive to learning within the high-stakes testing era. The teachers' use of the social constructivist approach brought much meaning to successful best practices in the classrooms.

Theme 1: Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions

Educators spent more time thinking about the degree and controversies of the curriculum than they did the actual curriculum. Many did this because they realized their students faced

high-stakes tests and the basis of their scores had a major impact on their futures. What teachers and administrators do in the classrooms and schools could affect many people (Berger, 2006). Teachers possessed the ability to perform and creatively engaged students to master the standards as this allowed them to think critically and discover learning.

The teachers' and administrators' responses in this study varied and were often intense as to how they felt about testing. When asked about their perceptions of high-stakes testing, many gave responses and perceptions that began to present the picture of how testing has affected them. These responses presented an overall disheartening image of high-stakes testing. However, some administrators placed a more positive emphasis on high-stakes testing. As one administrator stated:

> I really think the standards of learning have helped us meet the needs of those children that were not achieving. I think that through *No Child Left Behind* and adequate yearly progress, we're all striving to meet the needs. I just think it needs to be looked at by someone in education and changed a little bit. Some of the guidelines are not attainable.

Administrators assume responsibility for students, teachers, parents, and the testing scores that are linked to their school systems. With this enormous responsibility, the question could be posed, "What motivated them to remain in education with all that it entailed?" Throughout the interview process, I observed a level of dedication that was envious.

One administrator devoted a lot of time to the school system and possessed a true love for the students and teachers. This administrator stated that the changes that high-stakes testing brought into education were needed; however, there were things that needed to be changed:

> I don't have a problem with our schools being accountable to educate children. I think every one of us should be accountable. I think some of the issues with *No Child Left Behind*, in particular, are unrealistic. We're leaving behind those students that we say we don't want to leave behind.

Although the positive changes were considered and taken seriously, the entire concept of education has changed within the last decade. Along with the positive aspects of adapting to high-stakes testing from the new testing era, there were also intense feelings of discontent as one administrator adamantly confirmed:

While we're teaching children how to jump through the hoops and play by the rules, are we really wanting critical, creative, intellectual, interactive people? Then, we haven't done it with the SOLs. We have created a standard and an expectation. Is that what we really want? Are we limiting ourselves? And we need to look at this in a new angle and find a different way to come at this. Teachers are losing their creativity and their desire to really teach and experience by helping children fly. Are we really pumping people up or are we really looking at the child? Are we legislating learning or do we really understand learning? We've scared the pants off of 'em with SOLs. And we said, "You will be accountable."

One teacher established that the changes made by educators were not positive. The

teacher displayed feelings of discontent with high-stakes testing and acknowledged:

I think a lot of times their adaptations. . . may not be for the best. They're pushing themselves; they're pushing the kids, but, sometimes their adaptations are not a good thing. I think they need to realize that even though we have all these standards that we have achieved, they still have to fit in hands-on projects; they have to fit in, for example, history. . .I think a lot about adaptations-- that a lot of teachers are doing bad. They're rushing through, trying to get the material. They're trying to do the standards, and they're missing out on some important things, you know. I think that can be detrimental.

Some of the teachers expressed a loss of autonomy. As one teacher stated:

I think we've had no choice. I think we've had to sink or swim. My first year teaching was 1995, and I don't know the actual year that sort of tests started happening but it was right around there. And I remember my principal, the first 2 years, probably, said, "Don't worry. You're teaching everything fine. Just do what you normally do." And our SOL scores were terrible.

Another teacher shared the same concerns:

Well, I guess you have to adapt to high-stakes testing because that's part of your curriculum that you don't want your kids to be left behind. I wish we had time to do more of the socialization-type things to where it wasn't … a lot of stress on, you know, 'You've really got to get this skill down pat before you can go to first grade.' Some activities that I've had to leave out that I don't have time for in kindergarten makes me feel sad because I think they were important for the total all-around kindergarten student.

Another teacher learned to adapt to the changes and realized testing was here to stay.

The teacher explained:

I think everybody has learned, or the people that I'm surrounded with have learned, that this is your curriculum and you absolutely need to find a way to teach this the best way that you can. So I think they've learned to adapt. All of us have had to adapt in order to get those objectives taught in the time frame that you have. It was my understanding-- and of course, it's just my understanding; it could be right or wrong. My understanding was the standards were coming anyway. They were going to be handed down from the

national level, so every state was needed to form their own standards anyway. So Virginia's just happened to be more strict than most.

The educators' perceptions and feelings disclosed how predominant this issue in education has become. There were far more expectations for teachers and administrators than there were in the past. One administrator pointed out that it was not only important to teach the standards but to teach above the standards as well:

> There's really only one alternative for people, and that's to adapt. I'll just tell you, it's been. . . I'll probably have to give an example that when they first came out, it was like some educators wanted to kill somebody. The teachers were just crazy; and now, X amount of years later – almost 10 years later – and now we're into the fact where everybody's accepted it. And you have to adapt. The biggest challenge is getting teachers to adapt to the testing--which are still, they're a little bit above minimum standards. Still, they're standards. We want to go above and beyond standards, so, you know, the biggest thing's getting teachers to be able to adapt and not lose their individuality and their outside… And say, "Ok, we know we have to teach standards. You've got the blueprint. You've got everything. You've got your pacing guides. You've got all the things you need for that. Now, I want to know what you're going to do above and beyond that."

Many participants stated that they did not feel the standards were bad; however, there were too many, not enough time, and too much emphasis placed on specific standards. According to Smith (2003), the real issue was whether the test scores should mean so much as they are only measures of school output that serve as judgment on institutional performance. What about other aspects, such as history, that are being left out? What about socialization skills for which there was no time to reinforce? These concepts were all considered when discussing high-stakes testing. The major concerns seemed to lie within the amount of time spent on specific standards and the emphasis that was placed on certain tests. One teacher affirmed:

> I do not think SOLs are bad. I really truly do not. I think they hold teachers accountable for what they're teaching. I think it puts everybody on the same page. It keeps people from teaching what they know out of 10 units and picking one and staying on it way too long. So I think those kinds of things are good. I think it's the sheer volume of things about the SOLs – sometimes we're asking them to remember a tremendous amount of information, you know, in a very small amount of time.

Several participants displayed positive attitudes in the midst of testing and curriculum changes. They quoted one of life's best philosophies, "You just have to do the best you can."

Two teachers discussed how they knew the standards were here to stay and said they would do the best they could. One teacher said:

> Well, I think initially, when SOLs were first introduced, everybody thought these would go away. Actually, I think their very first thoughts were, 'OK,' you know. I think to begin with, there were people who were resistant. You know, sometimes you find people that are just totally resistant to change. But, once they figured out these are here to stay, I think everybody has learned, or the people that I'm surrounded with, have learned that this is your curriculum and you absolutely need to find a way to teach this the best way that you can. So I think they've learned to adapt. All of us have had to adapt in order to get those objectives taught in the time frame that you have.

Another teacher agreed and stated:

> I think that those that do the best, actually realize now that this is here to stay. You need to decide that you're just going to make the best of it and do the best you can. I guess, in other words, realize that it is here to stay and it's not something that's going to go away.

One teacher said:

> I don't have a real big problem with SOLs. I was in 3rd grade the very first year the SOL test was given, when it was given as a field test, and it was very hard. The print was very small; it was very hard. The questions were worded more like what a fifth grader should have. So, over the years, I have seen the SOL test develop to where I feel like it's more appropriate for third graders to take the third- grade test. I think one strong thing about the SOLs is that it's given us a curriculum. It's given everybody in the state of Virginia a curriculum to follow. Because before then, if you liked dinosaurs, when you taught 1st grade, you taught dinosaurs. If you taught second grade and liked dinosaurs, you taught dinosaurs. If you liked dinosaurs in kindergarten, you taught… So, a child could have dinosaurs 3 years in a row because their teacher liked that. So I think it took away teachers teaching their favorite topic, their favorite unit.

The teacher continued:

> So that's one thing I think it's done. It has given us a guideline that everybody in the state goes by. I often say it's a minimum. You know, the SOLs are really your minimum curriculum. It's not everything you should teach. But, also, as a 3rd grade teacher, to get through the SOLs, it's about all I can teach to get through them because the SOLs are pretty intense.

Theme 2: Not Enough Time

Throughout the interview process and during the time spent with each participant, many revealed how much education has changed over the last 3 decades. One teacher was remarkably touched during this interview and expressed how teaching had changed:

. . . sometimes I feel that we're missing out on some activities. Leaving these activities out makes me feel sad because I think they were important for the total all-around kindergarten student. Education has changed tremendously since I first started teaching kindergarten as far as the aspects of what I have to teach within my room. I just feel like there's a lot of art things that I don't do as much of because we just don't have time.

Many of the frustrations that the participants revealed were caused by having to rush and move at a faster pace. They said they felt they could not elaborate or take time to spend with students and their interests. This was confirmed when one teacher said:

You have to move at a faster pace. I feel like they're rushing through, and I think that is because of the standards. A lot of things that they leave out is still important. You can teach facts and we have to do this, but, by trying to get that, we're leaving out so many important things, including social skills. I think a big part of that is being left out. You don't have time anymore. By the time you get through your SOLs, then it's push, review, review. We've got to get review done, and then your SOLs are upon you, and it's just… It makes me feel awful because you cannot get to all their needs.

Another teacher affirmed the ideas and stated:

Like on the kindergarten level--what I call work areas or play time--where they actually play in the kitchen area and with blocks, art and different things. We might get that time into our day, maybe once every two weeks. I had it on an everyday basis before. I still think that's important. You know, my kids are so excited. 'Is today going to be the day when we get to have work areas? Are you going to think about it at least?' And, used to, I could sit down and work puzzles with them. I could go over to the blocks and sit down and play blocks with them.

Many participants said they wondered what the big rush was now with testing. Others said they wondered why there was so much to cover and not enough time. Many teachers expressed sadness as they pointed out things and one teacher expressed, "Hurry, hurry; we've got to get this done" or "We've got to get this next thing out. We've got to get this done before it's time to go." Another teacher added:

I think the curriculum's really tight. And you just don't have time. You must emphasize and review just the things that are going to be on the test. With all the SOLs that have to be taught, there's not enough time to reinforce the skills, which would help the weaker readers. If you get behind, the curriculum goes so fast and you can't slow it down. It's very difficult for a child that's behind in their reading skills to keep up. A lot of this stuff gets crunched because of having to include so many objectives. You have to stick to a simplified curriculum and I think you leave out a lot of good things.

One of the saddest comments made was that the teacher did not have time to celebrate the holidays. This statement revealed much as to what our educational entity has become. The interviewees seemed bitter at times because of the lack of time they had to teach. One teacher elaborated:

> I don't have time to celebrate Christmas; I don't have time to do anything for Easter; I don't have time to do this; we've got to get ready for the SOLs. We don't do a lot of making crafts and things. When I taught 3rd grade before, we did. I did a whole unit on Christmas around the world and we took all these different countries and we made an ornament from each country and that sort of thing. I do miss not being able to do that.

To some participants, accountability had positive aspects; however, the perceptions of many were negative regarding how testing has changed the educational landscape. With these changes, the curriculum was affected in a myriad of ways.

Theme 3: Curriculum Changes

Villani (1998) stated that moving forward with an educational curriculum went beyond incorporation, beyond interdisciplinary units, beyond high-stakes tests to a curriculum that is rich, complex, challenging, and meets the needs of all students. The curriculum changes have brought about great apprehension with some educators. Many of the participants said they worried about students' levels of reasoning and thinking abilities. They discussed the differences in the curriculum and said they wondered if the students possessed the skills to apply their knowledge on higher levels. An administrator stated:

> And I just worry about whether our children… They can memorize information. They can do these details; but can they take that to the higher level and apply it? And, you know, isn't that really learning?

Another administrator said:

> I do think we should have accountability. And SOLs are supposed to be the minimum. But, with all the pressure on the high-stakes performance, SOLs are your curriculum. We say they're the minimum and yet we're also saying, 'You don't have time to hobby teach.' If it's not an SOL, you don't have time to instruct on it. You know, I worry about our students when they leave school. Have they spent so much time memorizing, focusing on the real specific SOL so that they can regurgitate the information. Can they apply it?

The curriculum has undergone vast changes in the last decade. The veteran teachers elaborated on the fact that the curriculum has changed so much. One teacher said:

> A lot of our curriculum centered around the students… I tell parents from day one, 'If you had an older child and now you have a younger child, it's nothing similar to what it used to be.

One teacher said:

> It's almost frowned upon to have your child go into the vocation center. It's kind of like you're looked down upon if your child does that. Your child's not very smart or they really couldn't learn to do something else or… children feel different instead of special. You know that's a great thing to be able to do—and those people are making $30-$40 an hour. And everybody's not cut out to go to college.

Another teacher stated:

> I think we're pushing too much in the curriculum. Since we've given our high-stakes tests, the curriculum is geared to teach to the test. Therefore, only state objectives are taught, leaving out a lot of important information that could be in the curriculum. Objective testing is practiced, leaving out short-answer and essay-type questions. I have never particularly liked standardized tests. They are okay as long as we look at what the students are doing and try to get a better curriculum. I think we're teaching only the state objectives, and we don't teach anything else. As educators, we're under a lot of stress, and this stress can be passed on to the students. I also think, on the positive side, that the curriculum is expanded to include things that I would never have taught. For example, I would never have taught a second grader about ancient Egypt and ancient China. Or I would have never thought to teach them about economies, such as supply and demand.

Theme 4: Changes as a Result of No Child Left Behind and Standards of Learning

The *No Child Left Behind* Act, a controversial law passed in 2001, required annual testing and imposed achievement standards as well as sanctions for schools that repeatedly fall short, as many schools do. The impression that children were not learning led to this federal law; however, throughout the qualitative interview process, the question arose "Are children learning better now after schools have implemented the changes necessary for *No Child Left Behind*?" When discussing how the participants' perceived the law, there were passionate and debatable responses. For instance, one administrator replied:

> … *No Child Left Behind* is a misnomer. We've never left a child behind. Nobody ever wanted to. We probably needed to talk more about understanding that each child is unique and different. So what if Johnny is 15 and he's not ready for algebra? That

doesn't mean he is dumb. *No Child Left Behind* asking for 100% of children to be on the same place at the same time is irresponsible legislation because a child that was born on September 30 versus a child that was born on October 1--they're a year apart in physical, mental, emotional age-- and you're asking them to be on the same place at the same time on the same day? I hope that one day…if I was ever asked-- I could go before Congress and speak, I would be very impassioned for the child. And I would be very distraught that they would imply that we would leave children behind. I don't think anybody gets into education with the desire to leave a child behind.

Another administrator stated:

I think that, when *No Child Left Behind* came about, the federal government was under a lot of pressure for kids. Whatever the perception was, that you had kids that can't read and you have kids that are not doing well. This was the federal government's way of saying, you know, 'We're not going to leave any more students. We're going to try to educate every child the best we can.' I don't think standards are ever going to leave within the next decade.

Many of the teachers and administrators did not have a problem with accountability although they stressed that some of the aspects of *No Child Left Behind* were unattainable. They expressed concerns that educators actually were leaving children behind now because we were making other considerations when applying this law to schools. One teacher said politicians were asking too much of educators. The teacher explained:

I think it's important to have accountability, and it's important to show that we're making progress. I think *No Child Left Behind* is unrealistic, and we have so many schools that are not able to meet those goals. I think there're going to have to be some adjustments made as politicians realize that these goals are unrealistic.

Another teacher said:

We really started changing our instruction and focusing a little more on our pacing guides, our curriculum guides, just narrowing our focus of what we were doing down. And then the testing grades, unfortunately, had to spend a lot more time on the test-prep skills. We definitely made some changes.

One of the teachers stated similar ideas:

I think that politicians look at other countries, and they're seeing that these other countries are doing so well. Yet, in comparison, we seem so far behind. But I'm wondering if we're behind because we are teaching certain standards. The standards are like my Bible. I read my Bible everyday, and my standards, word for word – I follow it word for word.

Another teacher added:

Not every child can do the same. I think a lot of things--especially on the fourth-grade level-- if you looked back years ago, probably some of those things were not taught until they were in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. These days we're forcing them to do things. I realize that kids are exposed to a lot more technology, and things are a lot different, but I do think sometimes we're expecting too much.

One administrator stated:

I think that having high expectations for every child is good. I think we should have expectations for learning. So, you know, there have been some good changes; there have been some things that I'm not sure how we're going to do yet.

One teacher added:

SOLs have changed and administrators have relaxed a little bit about that; but then *No Child Left Behind* brought in a whole new ballgame. And, I don't think *No Child Left Behind* is a fair assessment of what children… *No Child Left Behind*, to me, teaches the middle of the road. Your lower kids. . . You can't make accommodations for them because they've all got to be up here in the middle. Your gifted kids--you don't make accommodations for them. They've all got to be in the middle. So, you're meeting the needs of the middle group, but your low group and your high group are getting left behind with *No Child Left Behind*. We're not able to meet their needs because we're not able to make those accommodations for them. Everybody has to be graded and assessed in the same way. I think the expectations of *No Child Left Behind* are totally unrealistic. To say that every child should be reading on 3rd grade level in 3rd grade--I've got a little boy who's dyslexic in here. I mean, comprehension wise, yes, he understands on a 3rd, probably a 4th grade level, but, as far as reading by himself, he can't read on a 3rd grade level. And he won't be able to read on a 3rd grade level when he leaves 3rd grade. And, to me, that's an unrealistic expectation of a child who has a disability to expect them to do that. I don't feel like I'm meeting their needs. Because you can't teach a kid above his head and expect him to learn what you're teaching. And you have to get down to their instructional level. I feel like *No Child Left Behind* doesn't give the teacher enough credit. The teacher's the most important asset you have in your room--not the textbook series--not the workbook--the teacher. A good teacher, who can assess the child's strengths and weaknesses and determine what needs to be done to meet those strengths and weaknesses, is the best asset in the classroom.

Inhibiting students' creativity with developmentally inappropriate curriculum was a major concern of the participants regarding high-stakes testing. Many participants said they felt that this was one of the most detrimental factors when they took all of the changes into consideration. One administrator recalled:

When I was growing up, I was so far ahead in math I did multiplication tables when I was in first grade. So, you know how the teachers handled me? They'd take me more work-sheets to do. They just kept giving me more--the same work. They didn't let me fly;

they kept me right here. So, 'Okay, if you've done 100 addition problems, we'll give you 200 more.'

He continued:

And so, when the other kids finished 100, I'd finished 300. And that's what I think the SOLs are doing to us. Instead of saying, 'Oh, you got it? You're ready to move on? Okay.' So I just felt stagnant all the way up through about fourth or fifth grade. And you lose your desire. And where are we and where are reports on the state? You know, in Virginia, they will report that you didn't have 100% test and everything else. Are we going to make our children a factory product?

One teacher spoke with passion:

You can't test creativity; you don't test problem solving. You don't test the really important things that we need in our society. I think students may begin to feel that passing a standardized test is more important than learning because we don't emphasize the importance of learning just for the sake of knowing things. We emphasize the importance of passing standardized tests. I think they will begin to understand the system and just figure out ways of getting through it. So it's kind of like that's all education is. I also think that all students are assigned the same objectives, and that leaves us little time for students to develop their own interests.

The teacher went on to tell stories of how frustrating it was because parents would be in

tears wanting to know how to help their children study for the SOLs and master them when they

just did not understand certain skills. The teacher clarified:

And I would even have parents say, 'We've gone over this and they don't understand it.' Because 2nd graders are having a hard time understanding how to count money, much less understanding these other concepts. The only thing I tell them is that it will be repeated in a later grade. So that, if they get an introduction in the 2nd grade, then some of this will be repeated later on and it'll be more understandable as the child grows. But some of the objectives are above the children's heads.

Another teacher said:

I think their thinking is inhibited. I think they have been trained to look for the right answer. No, they won't think outside the box. If it's not a right or wrong answer, some of them say, 'What's the answer; what's the answer?' Well, you have to think about that. I feel like I've had to sort of teach them to analyze things and look beyond just what the right answer is. I've had kids who've cried. I've had kids who were very upset. I've had kids who'll sit there and wait for me to tell them the answer. I mean, because I feel like we are so, 'This is the answer and this is not,' by the time they get to 3rd grade that's all they're interested in – the right answer. And they'll half listen, and then they just want you to get to the part where you get the answer. And I'm like, '"The answer's not the important thing, guys. I can give you the answer to this question, and you'll have the answer for this question. But, if you get another question that's similar to this question

but the answer's different, you won't get that question. So you have to be able to think about what's going on rather than just finding the right answer."

One teacher said, "I think at the younger age I just wonder what damage we're doing by not allowing them some of those activities to really be creative."

The volume of material, the intense emphasis that test scores have placed on teachers, administrators, parents, and students, and the publicity of test scores and identification of those schools that are not making it has created immense stress. Stress was one of the most frequently found themes in this research. Education and stress has seemingly now become one common bond in American society. The teachers and administrators discussed how they felt about stress and how stress has affected them professionally and personally.

Theme 5: Teachers' Stress

One of the teachers was an example of a dedicated, devoted professional. This teacher had only taught for a few years and discussed the extreme stress felt from teaching SOLs and adhering to *No Child Left Behind* mandates. This teacher was a proponent of hands-on learning and stated frustrations about not being able to include many types of activities because of the volume of material that must be mastered by the end of the school year. When asked to describe the stress level, the teacher told me she felt:

> . . . Stressed to the max, wondering if I've covered it all well enough for the kids to know the questions. And my husband has noticed it. I've heard him make comments like, 'This isn't a good time for her. It's SOL time.' And that carries on to the students. The students are stressed as well because they feel the pressure.

Another teacher said:

> I think everybody, if we had to be honest, would say we all feel the stress from it. We're all a stakeholder in this. All the stress – most of it comes to the third- and fourth-grade teachers; I don't know how they handle it during those weeks of testing.

One administrator observed:

> I think we still have this fear of, from some of the teachers, you know, 'If my class doesn't pass, 3rd grade or 5th grade SOLs, you know, am I going to be able to stay or am I going to be let go?'

Sometimes it was not just the stress teachers felt from testing, it was the enormous responsibility they had taken upon themselves and the ownership of the students' scores each year. This was evident when one teacher related:

> Teachers feel very responsible. I think teachers in the test grades feel a whole lot of pressure. It's because they want to do the best job they can do. They want all of their children to be successful, and I admire that. That's what we all want, but I know they take it very personally.

The stress ultimately affected everyone: students, teachers, administrators, and parents. The teachers' stress was evident in the classroom and the students realized it. One teacher said, "I'm sure they get that feeling because they probably have a good teacher that's as stressed as they are. I mean, everybody feels it – administrators, teachers, kids – all the way down the line."

Many teachers expressed how they felt the tests were only one score in time and did not give credit to the students' gains or consider anything else about the children. One of the teachers told a story about another teacher's frustration with testing and described how it was not fair:

> And he was just about in tears last night. He said, '. . . I have a child that started on the first-grade writing level and now is at the fourth-grade level.' So that child in one year has made three years of development growth, but yet is still failing, still below grade level. And then there's another child in his room who started on the fifth-grade level and is still on a fifth-grade level. And to quantify that and to say that this child is fine because they're still on a fifth-grade level, but the child that made three years' growth is still a failure is a hard thing. I mean, I'd like to see us measure children's growth, and sometimes all children don't meet the same benchmark at the same time.

One of the administrators affirmed this by saying, "I think we shouldn't just judge kids on one test, you know." Stress and pressure were common terms used by almost every participant. Related terms associated with stress were: nervous tension, constant worry, pressure, and anxiety. All of these terms presented negative consequences. How educators and students dealt with these negative terms was influential to success in learning. One administrator declared:

> I think it's just really hard for them. Then I look at, as a general education student, or a general education teacher, 3rd grade is the only grade that is a test of K-3. And, you know, that's an enormous amount of pressure.

A teacher said, "I think we're under a lot of stress. I think that the students are over-stressed. I think that they believe that standardized tests are the only way we can assess the students now."

Another teacher affirmed her stress by saying, "I feel pressure as a teacher. I felt it last year, especially--and I feel it this year too."

Theme 6: Students' Stress

Most educators have made a positive impact on students' lives. It was stated by many participants that stress was more prominent now because of high-stakes testing. How students deal with this stress ultimately affects the schools in a positive or negative way because of their test scores. The test scores follow the students for many years.

One administrator pointed out, "I think students get concerned, especially in high school, about graduation. But, you know, in one sense we have to deal with that all of our life."
One teacher concurred:

> The students get stressed as well because they feel the pressure. I think they try to make it difficult for the students. And one of the questions I get every year from just about every student is, 'Why do we have to write all this or learn those big words?' So you put somebody with a second-grade reading level and they have to read *chlorophyll* and *organisms* and *microorganisms* and they can't read it; they're lost.

According to the participants, students get extremely stressed about taking the tests. It was disturbing to hear some of the stories about how detrimental the scores were to students' self-confidence. One teacher related a story about a student that was very disturbing, yet moving. The teacher described this student as an overachiever but said the SOLs seemed to get the best of him. The teacher added, "If he had failed and couldn't have gone on to sixth grade, he would have--we would have just had to have his funeral because he was so stressed." The teacher also told a story of another parent's frustration with testing as the parent spoke of her son:

> He was taking AP history. Well, he lacked one point passing the AP history SOL test. So, they sent us a letter saying that he was to show up at school and he would do

remediation on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 7:30 to 8:00 with the teacher. He was getting ready to be a senior. And I'm like, 'He made an A in the AP class.' You know, he had better than a 4-point average going into his senior year – graduated with a 4.3. And I'm thinking, 'Okay…'

She continued the story:

So I called the school board and I said, "[Student] is not going to show up for remediation. He will be a senior next year.' Maybe it was during the first semester of his senior year. And I'm like, 'No, he's not taking this.' Because he's got one more semester left, and hopefully in his life he will never have to face another SOL test. I'm not going to embarrass him by saying, 'You have to show up at remediation class when you made an A in this class. It was better than an A grade-point average, you know, and he has a 4-point average in high school. I really don't believe that I'm going to make him do this.' This kid makes excellent grades but yet you're going to say, 'You're a failure, and you have to go to remediation class and take this test over again.'

One of the other teachers agreed by saying, "I think if we put pressure on the kids that it affects them because they feel so tense and uptight." There are many things to be considered when placing high-stakes on tests. It is important to realize that all students are unique and possess different genetics, learning styles, support systems, and circumstances. It is a mystery how education has been placed with certain criteria and educators are not allowed to fluctuate from these principles. Many participants discussed how external factors directly influenced students and aspects that should be considered when facing the tremendous responsibility of passing an SOL test before graduating from high school. It is amazing to think that a child who has worked for 12 years toward his or her culminating experience could be bombed out on the day of the SOL test. The consequences can be devastating.

Theme 7: External Factors

Students' circumstances must be taken into account because what about the little child who watched his or her family fight or lost a mother to drugs the week before the test. One of the administrators confirmed this sentiment by stating:

What about the kid who sat out at the bus stop, and I've seen this happen, and watched their dog get run over? And then you're going to ask them to test? 'Oh, no, we wouldn't do that. We're going do a makeup day.' What about the child that's 3-years old, and she gets up and her mom and dad are in a drunken stupor and they're calling her names and

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slapping her in the head as she walks out the door? Or what about the 8-year-old girl that gets on the bus, and she and her best friend have a fight on the bus and she tells her, 'I don't like you any more; I will never be your friend ever again'?

One of the teachers said, "If they just realize, I don't think anybody's going to look at one class not doing well one year. There can be too many factors with that."

The teachers and administrators were exposed to a variety of situations; some were better or worse than the others. The overall feeling received from discussing these situations with the educators was that of a lost generation. Teachers were exposed to children who have been tossed around from home to home; this presented an absence in their lives, not to mention the pressure they felt from testing. A teacher observed:

> I think they need a lot of encouragement today, because I don't think they're getting it. And it's just our society. I think, because of our society, so many parents now are both working or there are so many divorced. You don't have a traditional family anymore. I think I have, out of 15 students, 4 that have the same last name as the parents. I think that's just the way our society is, kids are not being encouraged. They're being left alone a lot. I think maybe that's what's happening also to our educational system. It's very difficult, you know the horror that some of these children live in. You know, how are they expected to even perform and to try and pass these tests?

One administrator agreed with many of the other participants and said:

> I'm glad that we're looking at socioeconomically disadvantaged, and I do think that's a contributing factor. I don't think minorities are different from us. I think it's good that educators look at the tests so that we make sure that we're not putting a stereotype on them because minorities can perform at the same level as anybody else. It comes back to another element in learning--family structure and expectations. Experiential learning, you can't live it. Family is such an important role. Community is such an important role. The instruction and the importance of a teacher and the emotional, and then you've got to look at the experiential, the family and everything else.

One of the teachers introduced a new aspect, saying:

> I've said for a long time that there's a piece of all this testing that's missing. And that's the parents. The administrators have a stake; the teachers have a stake; the students have a stake; but there's never any mention of what the parents' responsibility is for this. And, being a teacher, you know that the home life of a child makes the biggest impact of all. It's whether they're going to come to school able to learn or not. And I just feel like some responsibility needs to be placed with the parents. I can't do this by myself. I have very good parents in here who, their children want to learn, and they want their children to learn. And I have parents who have no idea what their children are doing.

The teacher continued to discuss parents:

We have a lot of children who don't have anybody to put them to bed, never have anybody to wake them up, or never have anybody to fix their breakfast. I'm talking about 8- and 9-year-old kids that are totally taking care of themselves. So, how does that child come to school and learn everything they need to learn? It's a very difficult situation. And the parents don't have the responsibility for doing that, and nobody's forcing them. I know we have Social Services in [Name of County], but they're very limited in what they can do.

High-stakes testing has greatly influenced education. The outstanding educational professionals throughout this study presented ideas. Their stories, outlooks, passions, beliefs, and attitudes were invaluable. The innovative ideas they presented were worthy of sharing with other educators for instructional practice.

Theme 8: Successful Practices

The participants suggested a number of successful practices for mastering high-stakes standards without sacrificing high-quality teaching or students' creativity. Several educators shared outstanding ideas that they used successfully in allowing students to remain creative and receive a well-rounded education while adhering to *No Child Left Behind* standards and the Virginia SOLs. The teachers engaged the students with activities and provided emotionally supportive interactions. These suggestions provided opportunities to learn, improved analytical skills, and interacted extensively with teachers. According to Pianta et al. (2007), high-quality teachers challenged children to use reasoning, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking. There was great interaction between the teacher and the students. Teachers remained rich and intense in ways that elicit thinking and learning. When considering Developmentally Appropriate Practices, the rich interaction and positive ideas given by the participants were consistent with that recommended by Bredekamp and Copple (1997) in their statement on best practices for children in elementary grades.

One teacher said many of the best educators exemplified best practices by attitude, engagement with the students, and the variety of activities used to teach specific skills in the classroom:

There's a lot of ways to look at an activity, and create some kind of creative way of teaching a skill. The students feel like they're playing but they don't really know deep down, 'Hey, the teacher was really trying to get this point across to us.'

The successful practices suggested by the participants included many abstract and concrete ideas. The participants contributed many concrete ideas, and I discovered that the heart of mastering high-stakes testing was within abstract principles such as being positive and creating atmospheres conducive to learning. Throughout the process, I noticed the participants' feelings as they shared their dedication to the students, and how they would stop at nothing to help them pass the tests. The extra time spent individually with students (during or after school), and the ability to look into each of their situations and create activities that would allow certain students to learn was admirable. The teachers were inspiring as they revealed their feelings and thoughts.

When discussing practices that would be helpful with testing, many teachers mentioned that learning styles were vital in mastering high-stakes testing because students learn differently. Many mentioned that it was hard to teach different types of learners when everyone had to master a standardized test at the end of their school year.

Consider Learning Styles

One teacher was encouraging as she discussed her expertise on different types of learners:

I think you have to meet each individual child's needs because there are going to be years when you have special-needs kids within your classroom that are identified. You may have a child who actually has a special need, but really has not been identified legally as a special-needs child. I think you just have to access that some kids learn different things in many different ways. Some of them are more hands-on learners. Sometimes it may take a lot longer to learn the same SOL skill than it does another child. But it's very rewarding when you see that light bulb click on, and they really make a sense of what you're getting across, whether it happens in the middle of the year or toward the end of the year. You still know the light bulb has clicked and they realize what it is that they're trying to figure out. You know, to make sense of what all you've worked on for the whole year.

When considering learning styles, teachers got to know the children's abilities and

prepared for them. It was important to work with students on their levels as they found out how

they learn best. One administrator demonstrated this thought:

> It's so important that I understand the level of children. You know, I think teachers
> always sat in a room and said, 'Well, man, there's that [Name] coming, he's a dangerous
> child. When we get in Math, he's hyper and I had to send him to the office five times
> because he was over there playing with his pencil and throwing it up in the air because
> he's just a hard-to-handle child.' I was finished with the work; I was bored with it. And
> I became defiant and outspoken at times. So, they help to bring you back into the box
> and put you back in the box.

Collaboration and communication were successful practices that 10 participants

discussed. One administrator pointed out:

> We need to collaborate as teachers, to come together and share ideas, because if you have
> 20 different children in your room, you have 20 different learners. But I don't think high-
> stakes testing brings into the account that child that's on the far right side of the brain or
> maybe on the far left side of the brain. It doesn't take into account where you'll find your
> most gifted children. They're not going to be centered.

One teacher related, "You know, one child thinks of things one way and another child

thinks of things another way. So you try to keep all kinds of avenues so that something will click

with them." According to Traynor (2002), in a typical school or classroom with students from a

variety of families with different morals, socioeconomic statuses, and child rearing philosophies,

a proper learning setting can only be continued by proficient classroom teachers using effective

classroom strategies. Maag (2001) stated having a positive attitude has had a remarkable effect

on students. This was a universal principle and occurred naturally in almost every classroom.

Having a positive attitude struck a chord that echoed throughout education and society. The

teachers engaged students by using positive attitudes that had the power to create miracles.

Many teachers made a positive difference because so many students have not had positive role

models in their lives. Young people are influenced by many factors and teachers may make the

only positive comments they hear all day. It was astounding to think of some of the situations

students are faced with, yet, they still remain resilient enough to pass and excel on high-stakes

tests.

Be Positive

Being positive was a profound practice that was commendable and favored in all facets, especially in high-pressure school settings. Students react in accordance with how teachers act. If teachers are positive and create a positive climate in the classroom, most likely, students exhibit a positive response. According to DeBruyn (2007), teachers' predictions, support, and imagination about the wonderful things the students can do for the students can be self-fulfilling prophecies. One teacher related remaining calm and positive with the students all of the time. The teacher exhibited this principle and expressed:

> I try to be positive with the kids. So much of our discipline is negative, negative, negative. So, I try to be real positive with the kids. Um, you know, kids that make A's get stickers on their papers; but what about the ones that are failing and they get a 70 on their test, you know? They passed it, but, not by much. I put a sticker on it. I'm proud to death that they did that good. And I think we need more of that. I think we need to look more for the positive in the kids instead of the negative. And I just think that working more positive influences with them. That makes them feel like they're loved and that they can do it.

The teacher also discussed how she used encouragement throughout all aspects of her teaching as she told her students:

> 'You'll go down in history as the first ones that ever passed all the SOLs.' They get excited about that, and that's a goal that they think they can reach. Once you start building on that, that gives them a boost of confidence and they'll try in other areas. And I say, 'Have fun with it. Play some games.'

This teacher epitomized a positive attitude and always had a smile and a kind word. The teacher revealed the secrets for having a positive attitude towards school and testing:

> I keep thinking happy thoughts. I try. I keep trying to watch what I think because I think what you think is what makes your day. And I also pray a lot, and I ask God for help and for wisdom.

Another teacher was the students' cheerleader, and added, "I give them a pep talk all the time."

Other themes emerged through the constant comparative analysis of data that began to reinforce the premise as each interview unfolded. Among the best practices that teachers shared were communication, collaboration as teachers and educators, creation of activities that allowed

students to express themselves, and test-taking strategies.

Collaborate and Communicate

Communication is a key ingredient to many firms' best practices. According to Trahant (2006), communication was one of organization's best practices and improved employees' commitment, behavior, and overall morale for the company. One of the teachers described the best practices used in implementing high-stakes testing within the school:

> I use collaboration and a lot of communication. I think that's one of the huge keys. Everybody has to be on the same page. I mean as far as teachers are concerned. We all have to communicate with each other. We worked together and collaborated. We're all in this together. We do work very closely together. And, we have tried a lot of different things through the years. Every single one of us is responsible. We're a family, and whatever we need to do to pull together and work together and meet these needs of the students. That's what we're going to do. Communication is just huge.

Communication among the school's faculty and administrators was a best practice used and adopted by many organizations as a key tool for success. One teacher described communication practices at school:

> I was working with a team at the time and we would all meet every Friday afternoon after having spent an hour one of the previous days, and then Friday afternoon we'd divide and conquer, and then we'd teach it.

The teachers discussed ideas, compared notes, listened to advice and stories, and said they just collaborated with one another on aspects of teaching such as successful practices. Many teachers said that communication had helped their schools' test scores because they taught the skills similarly and held high expectations collectively.

According to DeBruyn (2007), teachers must be present in the moment by listening, connecting, and reacting responsively to the students. Students engaged readily when they realized they were high priorities to their teachers. Students deserved teachers' attention and conveyed respect and value to them when they knew teachers cared. Another idea given by participants was for teachers to share their interests and be warmly approachable to students. All of these attributes created a positive attitude and atmosphere for the students.

During past years of testing, educators sought practices that offered success with high-stakes testing. One administrator said:

> I think the only good that has come out of high-stakes testing is that we have standardized; we are now talking and collaborating as teachers and we're coming together. There has been good in it because of that.

One teacher noted, "The majority of my classroom has done something. We have worked together." The teacher discussed how communication was also vital with the parents:

> I feel like you have to have a two-way street communication between the parents and yourself. You know if you know at Christmas time that the student is really behind, I think you need to let parents know. You could say, 'These are things you could do with your child at home to see if we can get them up to this point so that we're not considering that they may have to do a 2-year time in kindergarten instead of going on to first grade.' And I think most parents appreciate that.

The ideas given by the participants were invaluable and could not be conferred in writing because it was impossible to share the teachers' hearts and tears. Along with the ideas for best practices, the participants also contributed ideas that they adopted in promoting high-stakes tests. These ideas have been successful for several years and the students have not sacrificed learning because of the narrowed curriculum. They received a well-rounded education and used creative thinking processes about how to solve problems. They have used technology to new heights and depths. Among the best practices given for instructional practices, teachers incorporated games into daily lessons by using SMART boards, InterWrite tablets, computer software programs, and games such as *Jeopardy*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, and *Survivor*.

Use Hands-on Activities and Games

One teacher described the implementation of hands-on activities and games and explained:

> We do games all the time. One day we got on the computer – I call it the clicking game. I have questions on a computer and we have a program we use. I take the overhead projector and put it up, and they each get a little remote. I have a box for each SOL, which is what I keep my study guides. Oh, I have games like this: *We Repair the History*, *Pass the Chicken* game, *Mix and Match*, and I have the *Jeopardy* boards. We can play *Jeopardy*. There is one they really like, and it is using the overhead. You have

fly swats and two kids get up with a fly swatter, and you give them a clue. They have to swat the person that you are giving the clue. At Christmas time, they earn money, and we open up a candy store. So, you know, I do some fun things, too. I feel like I have had to make fun things.

Another teacher shared, "We use computer-based programs and online programs. We do computer programs that the kids enjoy." One teacher described using hands-on activities and allowing students to express themselves and actually perform some type of learning experience. The teacher added, "I try to bring in some hands-on stuff, if they don't really see it, then they don't get it when it's on paper."

Along with incorporating creative games and activities into the curriculum, teachers began teaching test-taking strategies to promote success. The teachers reported that some of the brightest students made lower scores because they did not understand the nature of the tests. With this in mind, the teachers and administrators shared their ideas for review and practice tests.

Use Practice Tests and Review

One administrator said:

And that would mean give them as much practice on similar things throughout the school year. Try to teach things that you feel like is going to be on the test and basically just make them feel how they're going to do on the test.

One teacher's dedication and passion for the students was evident as she conversed regarding all of the different aspects of high-stakes testing. This teacher exemplified many best practices regarding testing and one of the ideas was to take 5 to 10 minutes every day to have a daily review. The teacher said this ensured the material was fresh on the students' minds and was not crammed material. The teacher discussed this idea further by stating:

First of all, from about 2 weeks on in the year, I start a daily review. And everyday we have a five-question review just to keep the material fresh in their mind all year long. And so everyday we do a daily review--five questions. It takes 5 to 8 minutes for the kids to answer the questions. We review it. I use a lot of acronyms and poetry to help them to learn the difficult material they have to learn. And, in Virginia history, you always have to know the rivers, so I teach them an acronym to learn the rivers. They have to learn the bordering states. We learn another acronym. You know, just a funny phrase, 'Kiss Me With No Teeth' to get all the bordering states.

One of the teachers discussed how the students had notebooks of everything they studied that year and elaborated:

> We have an SOL binder and I have study guides. Every so often I'll say, 'Well, take your binder home and study your study guide so that you'll be ready for the SOL test.' So that's one thing that I try to do that gives them information. They have it in their hands all the time.

High-stakes testing was a contentious issue and in discussing this with valued educators it seemed difficult to find best practices suitable for such a controversial subject. It was almost like an oxymoron when trying to find best practices for what seemed to be a negative idea in education. High-stakes testing has affected all areas of education including the curriculum, school activities, field trips, retirement, and teachers' abilities to remain passionate about their profession. These concerns were revealed throughout this study and it became obvious that testing had taken over the landscape of education.

Theme 9: Curricular Emphasis and School Activities

Many participants said they realized that certain subjects were not emphasized as much as others were because of high-stakes testing and time constraints. One teacher expressed this concept of decreased time for teaching certain subjects and said, "We squeeze that in when we can." The teacher elaborated on the fact that there was not enough time to go into depth with certain subjects such as science and history because of the volume of other material covered. The teacher shared:

> It's not because we don't think these subjects are not important aspects, but I think for kids to be able in their later years to do well on any subject in the curriculum, they need to know how to read. I do not do as much in science and social studies.

One teacher brought up the fact that previous generations have not had testing at this level and they were successful citizens in society. There were several reasons for the recent onslaught of testing. However, many participants said they wondered how the federal government justified the sudden changes because students did not seem more in sync with education; on the contrary, they often seemed negatively influenced. This was obvious when the

teacher said:

> Apparently, we have a gap somewhere from the education that they used to receive-- at least in my opinion, education that the older generation had… They did a lot… And I don't know what the gap is. They read a lot of literature; they did a lot of music; they did a lot of art; and what do we cut? We have cut music; we have cut art; and when there are no finances… that is especially when they cut the music and the art classes. They do a lot of studies on the brain, and they say music develops the brain so much more. But we don't do that any more.

Several of the teachers said they felt the same way, especially the ones who had taught for a long time. One teacher had taught for 33 years and had many experiences while teaching more than 650 children. This teacher elaborated:

> I think if you look back, some very smart children graduated from this area who had not taken an SOL test in their whole life. They've become doctors, lawyers, teachers, and professional people who're very, very successful. They have never had SOL testing. I do think accountability is necessary, but I think that needs to be looked at in a different way--more so on primary and middle-school age kids. I could see maybe from 8th grade on, but I do not think you ought to stress kids in third and fourth grade and fifth grade to the point where their whole life is worried about passing a test.

Throughout the literature, there were many instances of decreased emphasis placed on certain subjects, fewer school activities, and field trips. The interviews and classroom observations confirmed these concepts because the participants spoke of how they emphasized testing subjects and other content areas were less accentuated.

Theme 10: Early Retirement

In recent studies, teachers were dissatisfied with teaching because of the stresses associated with testing. Because of their dissatisfaction, some changed professions, and others chose early retirement. Some teachers left the profession as early as possible because of the various stressors related to high-stakes testing. The administrators were asked about how they felt regarding early retirement. One stated:

> Teachers retire for lots of different reasons. But I have come across in my experience sometimes – now whether or not it's true or not, but they've said, 'I just can't take the pressure any more' or 'You know, I'm teaching 3rd grade, and, you know, I just can't…'

One administrator said, "That's probably been one factor that's maybe led somebody to

leave at 52, rather than maybe stay later."

A teacher added:

The amount of stress, not just because it's your first year, but because you have to get all these tests in. You've got to try and get the majority of your kids to pass these tests. You're only making $30,000 a year. You're going to have a lot of people just walk away.

Another teacher said:

I think they were really starting to feel the burden of testing because they had really enjoyed the success of their career, and then they couldn't do what they wanted to do. And then with the change of SOLs and the stress of it, I think, in a lot of their opinions it had taken some of the fun out of teaching because you were so scheduled. It had become such a science instead of an art of loving and nurturing children.

The common theme of whether or not some teachers retired early was evident; all of the participants discussed that many retired and decided that the pressure was not worth it anymore. Many gifted educators with a true love for children have left the profession because of the goals and standards that have been set for children. These thoughts were confirmed as one teacher said:

I think they probably might decide that they want to retire sooner, as opposed to 20 years ago. I know they feel the pressure. Like with the teachers, no matter how much I encourage them and reassure them, they still feel that pressure. And that 's stressful; it causes a lot of stress. And they may decide that, 'If I'm able to retire, maybe I would like to do something else.'

Another teacher said:

I think, unless the demands are decreased, that when people get their time in, they're going to retire, even though they're younger, and do other things. Because there's a lot of pressure. There is a lot of pressure. And it doesn't necessarily have to come from the administration. A lot of my pressure comes from me. I have always felt like if there comes a point that I quit wondering how to be a better teacher, then I need to quit teaching.

It was amazing to hear how teachers felt about early retirement and their personal beliefs. One teacher said, "If I get to the point where I don't want to find something new or I don't look for other ways to do it, then it's time to go." One teacher was an enjoyable participant because the positive attitude displayed was contagious. When asked about early retirement, the teacher stated, "I can't stand the thoughts of retiring because it's just too much fun."

There was not a better feeling than spending time with people who were positive, upbeat, and passionate about their professions. According to Raines (2004), "Children, our most precious resource, require leaders in education who can perform their assignments without the crippling effects of the intense day-to-day pressures visited upon them" (p. 103).

There were many consequences and factors considered regarding high-stakes testing as school systems dealt with new issues in the era of testing. The issues created new boundaries for teachers. According to the literature review and the data from this study, teachers were retiring earlier, and field trips and school activities were aligned strictly with high-stakes testing and timelines.

Theme 11: Field Trips and School Activities

Field trips are considered a capstone to many school activities and oftentimes a reward for hard work and success. When discussing field trips with the participants, it was apparent that they were definitely decreased and less emphasized with the new high pressure to perform well on high-stakes tests. All participants said they felt that field trips were important but they were less emphasized now with high-stakes tests. One administrator maintained, 'I think things like field trips and assemblies have been reduced. You know, not to where it's negative for the kids--because I'm a firm believer that they still need those." A teacher said:

> I think we've probably limited assemblies. In fact, I know we have. The classroom is 'on-task,' make sure your instructional time is guarded. We personally do not do field trips unless it's after SOL testing is over.

> One teacher contributed:

> One thing I would like to do but I'm not allowed to do, is take the students out of the classroom more. We have a state park where they could do experiments in the creek. We could find the organisms and we could look at them through a microscope. But, you know, we're not allowed to do that because we can't take a field trip until after the standards are over. For me, a field trip is all about learning. And they could learn so much more. They could learn it so much better; and when it comes to recall to remember what they saw, what they participated in

> Another teacher expounded on the question, saying:

I think some of it's decreased. I don't think, as an early elementary teacher, I really spend most of my time or at least I would feel good about spending most of my time on just reading and math, but including social studies and science. Although those are important things, you can incorporate them. Our goal is really to get children reading and being able to do basic math skills. With so much of our day just blocked off already, there isn't a lot of time left for centers or a lot of time left for art projects. Our recess is very slim, so a lot of that stuff that takes more time to plan and to, like spend time in the room working on, you just don't have the time for so you have to cut down. If you do all the other stuff that really is mandated that you've got to have done. I think we all try to include special projects now and again because the kids love it. There were a lot of things in my curriculum that I used to do that kids loved and I think it was good for the all-around student to participate in; but you just can't do that.

One administrator stated:

Field trips aren't just a free day off. They're instructionally based. There are two main concerns prior to field trips such as what SOL it is going to work on, and how it is going to enhance your instructional curriculum.

One teacher answered by saying, "All extra-curricular activities, such as field trips had to be scheduled after SOL testing." One teacher said, "I think assembly programs have been cut back, and field trips have been cut back. Although, if you can tie your field trip to an SOL, then you have a good chance of getting it approved and going."

Theme 12: Changes Needed in No Child Left Behind and Virginia Standards of Learning

From the negativity expressed throughout the interviews regarding high-stakes testing, changes seemed to be necessary in *No Child Left Behind* and the Virginia Standards of Learning. One of the administrators passionately stated, "One day, one moment in space. Let's ask these congressmen and senators and every one of them, if we put them through what some of these children go through, and ask them to test–could they do it?"

Some participants expressed minor feelings toward changes with *No Child Left Behind,* such as this administrator, who contributed some excellent suggestions:

I think *No Child Left Behind* could give the state some flexibility. Instead of meeting *No Child Left Behind*, maybe somehow they could coordinate the state's expectations where we're meeting one set of goals, one set of standards, and that satisfies what needs to be done for a national economy and the state economy. This would work if a state has a status *excellent* program, and they feel like it is meeting what that are for all the school

districts. So, that's probably the one thing that I would see that they would work more closely together you know and get – not a national standard – I just don't know that we could ever get to that point. However, if the state standards are being met, then that satisfies what the national standards would be.

All across Virginia, anyone near a school knows what the term SOL means. For 10 years, Virginia's schools have adapted to the Standards of Learning. These changes were discussed and many suggestions were similar. One teacher brought up a new point that many teachers might not have considered and explained:

> If they're going to make other changes, I would like to see them tested every year so that they don't have to remember something this year that they heard in August of 2005. This is what my children in May will have to remember. So whatever I review, whatever I look back over, whatever we've done to go back and review that is what they will get.

One of the administrators had a humorous and practical analogy concerning *No Child Left Behind*:

> You can take a horse to water, but you can't make everybody drink. They might not drink at the speed you think they ought to drink at. And I think, too, with the *No Child Left Behind*, I think the people who make those decisions about some of this stuff are not in the real world of the classroom. I do not think it is in the reality of education, that at some point you're going to get every child that's going to make 100% on their SOL tests.

Many of the educators expressed that *No Child Left Behind* needed more flexibility. One administrator admitted, "I really think that the flexibility is the greatest problem." A teacher answered:

> I understand the need for high achievement. We do need to push our students. But I don't think that testing is the answer. I hope that high-stakes testing will change. My one suggestion is, and it will never happen, is that the politicians need to come into the classroom. And I don't mean visit, walk through the halls, 'Hello,' shake people's hands. They need to be *in* the schools for long periods of time and see what is happening to the students. *No Child Left Behind* – they don't know how many children they are leaving behind. Like I said, if the people that got together and decided we have these standards, and maybe they have, I'm sure they have a background in education and maybe they were teachers in prior years, but I don't think they have been in the classroom and have seen the conditions and see how we're leaving them way behind.

As one teacher acknowledged, "I just think that the testing is unfair. If we're going to do this, I'm not sure it would be a bad idea just to go ahead and have a test in every grade."

Learning styles, DAP, and the realization that all children have different circumstances

were important aspects mentioned by the participants when discussing the effects of high-stakes

testing. One of the administrators also raised a very good point:

> In some children, the triggers haven't happened. And it doesn't mean that they're dumb;
> it just means the abstract brain hasn't fully developed. Why are we so caught up when
> we can physically look at children grow at different rates and speeds? And children learn
> to read at different levels and rates. And even the way testing is written, it doesn't
> advantage the left brain child. It's really for the right-brain child to a point. So, we need
> to look at that.

> A teacher agreed and said,

> I think there's going to have to be changes made in *No Child Left Behind* because the
> expectations are so unrealistic. I mean, do you know that every high school kid has to
> pass Algebra I? Even if they're special ed, they have to pass Algebra I.

Theme 13: Our Future

Throughout the study of high-stakes testing, the idea that our students were not prepared

for the workforce was one of the factors affecting high-stakes testing. However, the opposite

idea was presented numerous times by several educators regarding students being ill-prepared for

the workforce because of high-stakes testing. One teacher stated:

> I hear all the time from Eastman that our graduates don't know science; they don't know
> mathematics. I attended a workshop at Eastman, and that was what the CEO said, 'Your
> students are not prepared. They do not know their science.' I just don't believe that the
> standards are meeting the needs.

> Another teacher said:

> A lot of students that graduate from college may be C students. That does not necessarily
> mean they're going to be a bad employee. I'm sure that there are a lot of people at school
> who probably had a C average when they got out of college.

> One of the administrators put things into perspective by observing:

> I think that the idea is: Are we giving them the tools and the ability and the collaboration
> and the efforts to understand? Are we looking at each child as a unique entity and
> understanding that we could be touching the next Einstein and the next child that's going
> to be the next Nobel Peace Prize winner? Every child, even if they choose to stay in a
> community and be a convenience store owner and work as a volunteer fire fighter, makes
> an impact. And that's okay. It takes all different strokes for different folks to make the
> world go round. We don't read books about the guy that goes out and becomes a brick
> mason. We read books about the kid that goes and becomes a doctor, or lawyer, or a
> teacher. It's not right of people to have these opinions. Some of the brightest men and

women I've ever met in my life didn't have more than an 8th grade education. But I tell you what, I wish I had their knowledge.

One teacher shared:

I believe our future is dependent on being able to solve problems, create new solutions and technology, and work together as a global society. Yet, less emphasis is placed on these skills – high-stakes tests emphasize finding one answer that agrees with the writer of the test.

Theme 14: Teachers are Life Changers

Most of the teachers in the study said their dreams were to make a difference and have a profound and lasting impact on students. There was no greater legacy than to have influenced and enriched students' lives (DeBruyn, 2007). One of the administrators was inspirational when stating:

Teachers are life changers. You can be a teacher or you can be a life changer. The teacher teaches. A life changer helps people experience in a whole new realm. And dares you to step out and ask the big question. And excites you to do it and, and doesn't punish you for doing it. A teacher just wants you to get what's there, and that's it. But the life changer wants to make a difference in your world and sees every child as a new opportunity and a person that might be a life changer.

Students face a lot of pressures and they need encouragement from their teachers and school administrators. One of the teachers encouraged others by stating, "We can't take the fun out of learning, the excitement… Because they're going to have enough issues to face over a life." One of the teachers expressed the same sentiment by saying, "I just think that first year you can make an impression on the child that they really are going to like school."

The participants for this study were selected purposively because of their evident dedication and apparent life-changing attitudes. These educators mentioned the term "teachable moments" several times during the interviews. For the teachers, this term was familiar. Time is of essence in a school day, and it is hard to keep pushing the specified content when there are so many times when the students bring good things into lessons that could be expanded upon, if there were time. One teacher said:

I see the stress level. I have tested for years and teachers still have high pressure on themselves. And I do think that we've lost a lot of teachable moments by not being able to veer from the curriculum for that five to ten minutes that really could've made a difference.

A teacher explained:

And I think, if you miss those opportunities, I think you're doing a great disservice to those children who really want to know, 'Well, what about this?' And I think, if you miss them, they're gone. And I've always told people, if you don't really love children – if you don't love what you're doing – you won't stay in the teaching profession for the long haul.

Another teacher added, "And you may be the only adult who touches them in a positive

way in their whole day. You may be the only adult who can touch them in a positive way."

One teacher warned:

And I'm afraid we close the door on their curiosity. I think kids at this age just want to learn so much and have so many questions. And I guess a couple of weeks ago we were learning about Abraham Lincoln, and they asked a couple of questions about it. And we covered what we needed to cover, but we couldn't go any further because we had to move on to the next unit. So you feel like sometimes you shut the door on the teachable moments.

One of the teachers said, "Teaching is a calling. You know, just like, people who go up

and are missionaries in a foreign country. They are called to do that. I really feel I've been

called to teach." It was evident that these educators were in education for the children. They

referenced how everyone needed to remember that the "test-takers" were children and it was

imperative to remember their age. Another teacher expressed these thoughts about what children

need to do:

…enjoy their afternoon for a while and not be so worried about what's going to happen the next day when they take a SOL test. I think what we've started to do is, we've pushed children to grow up a little faster. Like kindergarten is now like first grade used to be and really preschool is like kindergarten used to be.

Another teacher added the same sentiments and spoke from the heart, "I think sometimes

kids need to be kids and they don't need to have that kind of stress in their life. They're so

dramatic about thinking, 'I'm going to fail this grade if I don't make this on…'"

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The intent of this study was to investigate changes in the curriculum caused by high-stakes testing mandates within three Southwest Virginia school systems to find best practices for instructional application in classrooms. Teachers and administrators shared their feelings and perceptions regarding new policies and how they made changes within the classrooms and school systems. There were several reasons for conducting this study such as identifying exceptional ideas and sharing these with other teachers and administrators and offering instruction on how they maintained creativity within the classroom that could inspire critical thinking. I also found out how teachers motivated students to be creative in the classroom while teaching standards. Observations were conducted in classrooms and revealed innovative ideas and techniques in addition to providing positive results while teaching high-stakes standards.

Through a review of (a) pertinent literature; (b) interviews with 12 participants comprised of elementary school teachers, administrators, and superintendents; (c) member checking; (d) triangulation; and (e) 7 years of experience in public schools, certain conclusions and recommendations for practice have been developed as they related to teachers' perceptions and best practices within outstanding classrooms and schools. The information gleaned from the practitioners and the resulting conclusions might result in greater practices for use with high-stakes testing within classrooms and school systems. The interviews and observations revealed several themes that addressed the research questions.

Each school assignment and the practitioners' experiences were unique because of the wide range of experiences that were brought to life through this study. To teach school and hold an administrative position that is accountable to the state for certain scores is an extremely demanding proposition emotionally, and successful practices might aid in preparing lessons for the students.

Virtually every state in the United States is now using high-stakes tests to determine school promotions and graduation. This change led to and has been promoted by the *No Child Left Behind* Act and individual state's standards. These high forms of accountability stemmed from the fear that some students were not learning much. However, there are differing opinions as to the success of high-stakes testing and it is not a simple route to achieving educational accountability. The curriculum has become much more academic and less child-centered because of high-stakes testing. The perceptions and best practices of teachers and administrators are important because they are the implementers of changes taking place in schools nationwide.

The teachers and administrators in this study were positive role models and affirmed that education is still about the children. They were encouraging and inspirational when they spoke their hearts' cries about their students and experiences. The specific findings were organized into major topics that clustered around the research questions.

Discussion

Research Question #1

Research question #1 addressed how high-stakes testing has influenced teachers, administrators, and students. Regarding the experiences and reflections of teachers and administrators from Southwest Virginia, several issues became apparent. First, there were negative consequences as result of high-stakes testing. Participants expressed feelings of discontent and regret as they have implemented various and profound changes to the curriculum. Their perceptions were also supported by additional research reviewed after the data collection and analysis was completed.

The teachers' and administrators' responses are consistent with ideas presented and considered throughout the literature. The teachers' and administrators' answers reflected the ideas that they were highly stressed because of high-stakes testing and curriculum change. In a test-driven accountability system, many people have responded negatively to the resulting

implications that must take place within the schools (Pence, 2005). These implications often led to tremendous stress for all involved from the state to the local level. Stress and pressure were the most prevalent concerns and themes presented by teachers and administrators when asked how they perceived high-stakes testing. During each interview session and observation, it was apparent that these educators felt stressed. They reported feeling frustrated and overwhelmed in response to the mandates driven nationally and statewide.

They were also concerned with the stress the tests have placed on students. They were dealing with standardized teaching strategies with students from a variety of different backgrounds. Some of the students seem to perform well in school; however, the majority of concerns were with the students who had extenuating circumstances yet were still expected to pass the test that all other students must pass. The participants were concerned that students are ultimately affected by the stress of high-stakes testing because they could carry the scores with them the rest of their lives. There were also expressed concerns regarding learning styles, external factors, volume of material, decreased emphasis on certain subject areas and school activities, and early retirement.

General Conclusions. High-stakes testing has influenced the teachers, administrators, and students negatively. There were several positive aspects of testing and according to Hoffman et al. (2001), many teachers said they approved of high-stakes testing because they know exactly what is expected of them and what to expect on the test. Teachers noted that many students seemed to be "lost" and needed someone to take time for them. Pressure has been placed on schools to perform with high-stakes for all involved. The general theme for this question was that teachers, administrators, and students were negatively influenced by testing.

Research Question #2

Reeves (1998) stated the curriculum changes concerning high-stakes testing affected everything being taught in schools and the way concepts were taught. There were specific

curriculum changes that have been made in classrooms. Although many participants agreed with accountability and having consistent standards statewide, they also said they experienced great frustrations in education because of the curriculum changes.

Critics of high-stakes testing stated that it led to a narrowing of the curriculum (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Many experienced teachers said they felt like they were keeping students' thinking in a box. According to Marchant (2004), teachers were teaching in a more traditional style with lecture and recitation and teaching only what was to be tested. Throughout the observations and interviews, the teachers were only teaching what is tested. There was not enough time to teach anything but the Virginia Standards of Learning and abide by the *No Child Left Behind* guidelines. They revealed they did not feel like they were able to veer from the standardized curriculum enough to meet social, emotional, or physical needs. Time constraints and volume of material were also themes that were perceptible in this study.

Kohn (2000) stated that teachers often de-emphasized certain subjects to devote themselves to teaching test preparation skills. The teachers and administrators in this study agreed with Kohn as they stated that there was great emphasis on test preparation skills. Along with teaching the standards that are tested on the SOL tests, the teachers have taught the students how to critically think about how the questions are formatted. The tests have been written in a certain format and the questions are often complicated. The students know how the questions are going to be set up prior to taking the tests. A teacher contributed ideas pertaining to the test format:

> I teach my students to turn every question into an I-need-to-find-out statement. And look at the key words so that they know exactly what's being asked on the test. So, when they read the question, they'll say, "I need to find out this." So, they turn every question into an I-need-to-find-out. I try to teach them that a 50-50 chance is better than 1-in-4. And, if they have a word like *which word rhymes with this word,* I teach them to say that word with each answer so that they hear it. If it says "In paragraph four," make sure you go back to paragraph four or highlight it and find the word they're talking about. If it's a definition, and if they say, "What word means this – what does this word mean in the sentence?" then I teach them to take that meaning, put it into the sentence, and see which one makes sense.

Findings from this study indicated the curriculum has been narrowed to include only the subjects that are tested. According to one administrator:

> Back before we had standards of learning, I did a lot of little experiments. We did a lot of fun things, but I wasn't on a timetable of I had to have this done by this time. It was just part of my curriculum. Now, we do have a big emphasis on reading and math. You try to fit in other subjects when you've got a block of time to fit them in.

Many of the participants discussed how they do not have enough time to elaborate on certain subjects because of time constraints. Fugate (2007) stated that field trips, assemblies, and school activities have all decreased. The curriculum has been narrowed to include a larger volume of material with specific content that is tested at the end of specific grade levels.

General Conclusions. The curriculum has changed drastically since the implementation of the Virginia Standards of Learning and the *No Child Left Behind* guidelines. The literature and data from this study corresponded in that the curriculum has been narrowed to include only what is on the state tests. In addition, teachers have had to spend more time on the tested subjects to ensure mastery and in doing so minimized other subjects. The participants said they felt that the subjects less emphasized were just as important as reading and math and should be considered. The participants have taught test-preparatory skills in addition to the state standards. Overall, the participants expressed great frustration as result of the curriculum changes.

As stated by Thomas (2005) and Kozol (2006), some noted damages attributed to testing were: teaching to the test, neglecting the study of history, providing inadequate civic education, overlooking social studies, and eliminating physical education and study of the arts. Other criticisms of testing included increasing the burden of information to teach, causing students' cultural heritage to be overlooked, and reducing recess and field trips.

Research Question #3

The experience and expertise from this group of teachers and administrators was essential in finding best practices to share for planning their classrooms' atmospheres and making them

conducive to learning with high-stakes testing. The participants used best practices to master the standards. The participants revealed that having a positive attitude was the ultimate best practice. According to Maag (2001), a positive attitude has been the key to altering almost any circumstance. Adopting a positive attitude can be providing praise, a tangible reward, or an activity to a child when he or she performs or exhibits good behavior. The participants shared that their positive comments to students truly made a difference. They also confirmed that having a positive attitude creates an atmosphere conducive to learning that affects their teaching strategies. A positive attitude is contagious and can offer practical solutions when faced with stressful situations especially when some students have extenuating circumstances outside of school. It is sometimes hard to grasp their full attention to take an SOL test or to abide by *No Child Left Behind* guidelines.

Educators must be positive advocates for the students and create encouraging environments within the schools and classrooms. As these changes have transformed the school curriculum, teachers and administrators have adopted practices that are effective in mastering standards while stirring students' spirits by allowing them to learn in their own way.

Communication and collaboration were apparent best practices that came through the interview dialogues with extreme regularity. Good communication is an essential practice that many organizations recommend for success. According to Yates (2005), communication was an important best practice that school leaders embraced. Schools and teachers must communicate with one another and with other educational professionals to know what is expected and to learn new ways of meeting students' needs. Many teachers mentioned that frequent communication with other teachers, administrators, and parents allowed them to be more successful with testing. Many teachers spoke of teams they were on within the schools that allowed the school faculty to function effectively and coherently. They told stories of how they collaborated with one another on ideas and divided the responsibilities within the schools. Collaboration was important with parents as well because testing has brought many changes to the curriculum; when teachers become partners with parents, students are more successful.

Effective teaching strategies are vital when teaching the Standards of Learning and abiding by the strict *No Child Left Behind* guidelines. Teachers implement teaching strategies that are successful in meeting all students' needs. Teachers consider students' learning styles and get to know their students as well as possible. They let their students know they have a vested interest in them. An example given by one participant was to build on the students' strengths and consider what style they prefer.

High-stakes testing has made testing a regular issue within schools. Tests are designed in certain formats and it is imperative that students be familiar with the test format. The teachers stated that they administer practice tests frequently as a form of review and this allows students to be more successful. They also described how they teach students to break the questions down to eliminate the wrong answers among other test-taking strategies.

Most of the participants said they felt that incorporating games and hands-on activities were best exercises to use in the classrooms and schools. Centering games and activities such as *Jeopardy*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *Survivor*, and using the SMART boards to enhance the learning experience were avid choices as best practices by the practitioners.

General Conclusions. The general conclusions concerning best practices of teachers and administrators concerning high-stakes testing are supported by the studies examined in the preliminary literature review. Teachers and administrators are the apparatus that our nation has to prepare this generation of students for the future. Although there were no magic solutions on how to pass the SOL test or to attain all of *No Child Left Behind*'s guidelines, the educators have adopted instructional practices that are effective in preparing students for success.

The best practices identified in this study were to be positive, collaborate, communicate within the educational system, and to consider students' learning styles when preparing lessons. According to Fugate (2007), teachers were encouraged to teach "test verbs," rehearse practice tests, and plan their lessons according to the test blueprints. It seems to be best practice to align teaching with state curriculum standards. According to the participants in this study, it was

considered best practice to teach test-preparation skills, review, as well as to incorporate games and activities into the curriculum to motivate and reward students regularly.

Research Question #4

Throughout this study, it was apparent that teachers and administrators have adapted to the changes in education and learned ways of maintaining creativity with their teaching styles. These changes have taken time, communication, and collaboration as practitioners to achieve success during the era of testing. The participants in this study identified methods and used creativity in various ways to teach the Virginia Standards of Learning for mastery. According to Sutton (2004), it was vital to vary methods of instruction and model a greater diversity of instructional strategies as opposed to teaching to the test.

The overall premise for maintaining creativity lay within the teachers' and administrators' abilities to apply the best practices to their teaching and administration. The data found by the observations and interviews revealed that the teachers and administrators incorporated a variety of activities within the classrooms and schools by keeping the students involved as much as possible. One of the teachers said, "I changed activities every 10 to 15 minutes." The teachers and administrators expressed that they incorporated lessons that allowed the students to be actively engaged. According to Bredekamp and Copple (1997), instead of pushing students through a set curriculum, many teachers were now looking to use developmentally appropriate techniques. As stated by Sloane (1998), Dewey and Piaget believed that children actively create their knowledge of the world. As teachers began treating children as active learners, they created environments that supported meaningful, hands-on learning.

The teachers in this study discussed how they promoted the ideas that students venture out and actually experience what has been taught. One of the teachers stated:

> In my experience, whenever I do a hands-on project in science, the kids learn so much more than if I just sit and have them read out of a book. I get them involved as much as I can. We get up and we pretend we're in the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War. I pick out the students that have on red, they're the red coats. And

we'll read the story; but then after we read it, we get up and we work it out. We do a lot of group work and we do many hands-on experiments in science. We had the modern Merrimac – two ironclad ships that fought in the Civil War. I can ask any one of my students anything about that battle, boom, they can give me the information--because they were involved in a project. You get them involved and they learn the material so much easier. They love to play *Jeopardy*. They love to play *Around the World*. Even just simple *Tic-Tac-Toe*. You know, they just enjoy games.

The teachers and administrators said they felt these ideas were effective in reinforcing standards of learning and allowing students to creatively conduct themselves. These teachers were enduring and engaging. They exhibited a deep understanding of the subjects and allocated time appropriately. They followed state-mandated curricula and created a variety of learning experiences for the students.

General Conclusions. The teachers and administrators revealed that it was more difficult to maintain creativity in the classrooms with high-stakes testing. The teachers in this study said they saw the universal genius in every child. They shared they saw each child as an individual. They revealed that they discovered each child's strengths and weaknesses and developed lessons from those areas. They used best practices such as being positive, considering learning styles, directing instruction that led to active involvement of the content, playing games with the standards, reviewing frequently, and practicing similar assessments in preparation for the SOL test. Standardized means to be homogeneous, the same, consistent, and unvarying and it has been questionable if this was possible when working with children. All students are different. Raines (2004) stated:

> The world where educating children is the service or outcome cannot be standardized. Children are unique, with unique needs that cannot be measured with a ruler, a scale, or calipers. Consequently, the business of dealing with their education is rarely as simple as two plus two. (p. 55)

Findings Compared to the Literature

The researchers in the literature suggested that there were positive and negative aspects of high-stakes testing. Most of the literature suggested high-stakes testing had a negative

influence on education. However, there were differing opinions as to the success of high-stakes testing and it was not a simple route to achieving educational accountability. The curriculum became much more academic and less child-centered because of high-stakes testing. The perceptions and best practices of teachers and administrators are important because they are the implementers of changes taking place in schools nationwide. Throughout the literature, best practices were not stated concerning high-stakes testing. There were no practical ideas found for application in classrooms that might help maintain creativity during the era of *No Child Left Behind* and individual states' standards.

In this study, the findings were congruent with the literature regarding the negativity of high-stakes testing. This study reflected a relationship between stress and high-stakes testing. The curriculum changes presented a new curriculum with standards, blueprints, curriculum frameworks, and end-of-year tests. Certain subjects and school activities were less emphasized because of SOL testing and *No Child Left Behind* guidelines. Most of the literature stated that *No Child Left Behind* was unrealistic; the participants in this study agreed. NPR (2007) stated that according to one high school principal, this legislation placed pressure and stress on the schools to perform and they could not match the demands.

During the data process, best practices were identified. The best practices were supported by teachers' success stories discussed in the interviews. Subtopics that emerged from the data analysis process were addressed as they related to the research topics. It was from the information in these subtopics that perceptions and recommendations are identified.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Practice

The purpose of this study was to investigate changes in the curriculum caused by high-stakes testing mandates within three Southwest Virginia school systems to find best practices for instructional application in classrooms. The interviews and observations with elementary school teachers and administrators were a snapshot in time and more research should be conducted on

how to continue success during high-stakes testing. The educators' perceptions and experiences were explored to reveal creative ideas for instructional practice. A model was developed to demonstrate the findings for best instructional practices for teaching high stakes standards in the classroom (see Appendix A). I hoped to add to body of research with this qualitative study and provide information for elementary school teachers and administrators to apply within their own school settings. I satisfied my goals of understanding teachers' and administrators' perceptions of testing and how they have adapted to the curriculum changes. I have been concerned about the consequences of high-stakes testing on our students since I began teaching, and I hoped that others were concerned too.

From the conclusions of this study, there were tremendous concerns with the stress that high-stakes testing has placed on administrators, teachers, students, and parents. I have a greater understanding of the pressures faced by educators and I became even more concerned. The main idea taken from this research is the stress that is placed on the students to perform, despite their learning abilities or circumstances. Specific actions should be taken to alleviate some of this stress and to make the goals of *No Child Left Behind* and Virginia Standards of Learning more attainable and realistic. Learning styles must be considered when producing the tests because not all students learn the same way. The findings suggest that it may be time to advance the role of assessment and testing design over to educators, who then could interpret the assessments to cultivate curriculum design. The educators could lead students to genuine student learning and not crush their abilities to be creative and think critically. Time constraints and volume of material should also be considered when creating the tests and the standards of learning for each grade level. Research on developmentally appropriate practices should be considered when developing curriculum for each grade level.

Support systems and networks should be set up to help teachers and administrators learn new ways to include activities and creativity within their classrooms and schools. Networking with other educators should be encouraged by state departments, professional development programs, schools systems, and schools. Professional development opportunities for

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administrators and teachers should include ideas on how to use best practices within their classrooms and schools. Measures should be taken to try to include more functional school activities and field trips that are fundamental to students' overall success.

Throughout this study, educators' attitudes and ideas created success stories within local schools. These concepts are important and attainable in any school setting. There is more research needed on several aspects of high-stakes testing and best practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Pianta et al. (2007) and Bromley (2007) stated that the great emphasis placed on standardized testing and teaching requirements has led to elementary school instruction that is mediocre. Teaching to the test has become an all-familiar term with educators nationwide as high-stakes tests have taken education into captivity. Throughout this study, the goal was to unveil teachers' and administrators' most effective teaching strategies and attitudes towards successful classroom experiences. The educators shared their hearts and advice for all who would receive it as they discussed the changes that education has faced in the last decade with testing. Sometimes just one practice that a teacher could pass along to another could be a nugget of knowledge and might make a lasting impact on his or her teaching career.

It is imperative that more research is conducted on best practices within schools in association with high-stakes testing. Further research should be considered when implementing changes within schools systems in accordance with the *No Child Left Behind* Act.

A follow-up study with administrators and teachers who are currently serving should be conducted to see what happens in the future with high-stakes testing and to determine if any of their perceptions have changed. In addition, further research should be conducted statewide on best practices with other educators as to instructional ideas for classrooms adhering to the Virginia Standards of Learning.

During the research process, one of the administrators stated:

Where are we and where are reports on the state? You know, in Virginia, they will report

that you didn't have 100% test and everything else. Are we going make our children a factory product? I wonder how Teddy Roosevelt would have turned out if we had done it to him. I wonder how George Bush would have turned out.

Another recommendation would be for more observation-based studies to determine what goes on in classrooms and to reveal preparation teachers make to improve classroom instruction. There is also a need for rigorous designs that test effects on observed instruction of specific knowledge or skill-focused teacher training interventions.

Webb (2005) revealed that many states have different testing standards and different benchmark scores. Other states' experiences with testing should provide valuable insight into Virginia's state testing requirements.

One administrator seemed to sum up the frustrations and concerns of not only the study's participants, but possibly those of educators throughout the state, when he passionately proclaimed, "One day, one moment in space. . . Let's ask these congressmen and senators-- every one of them; if we put them through what some of these children go through, and ask them to test–could they do it?"

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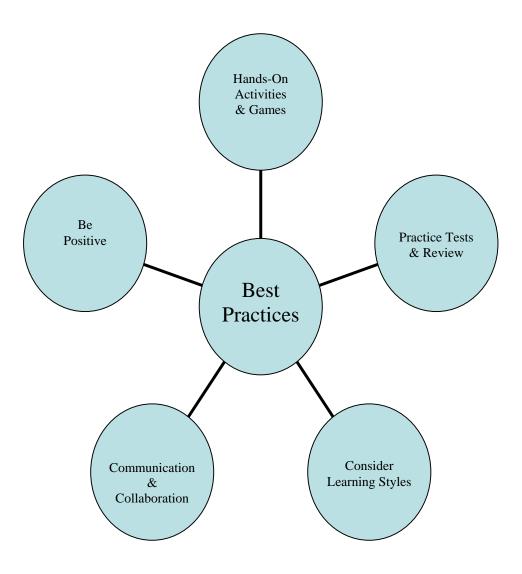
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APPENDIX A

Model of Best Practices

Hands-On Activities & Games

Be Positive

Best Practices

Practice Tests & Review

Communication & Collaboration

Consider Learning Styles

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Please carefully read the following Informed Consent information and sign the Informed Consent if you freely give your permission to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records.

My name is Selena Kiser and I am a teacher at Duffield Primary School in Duffield, VA. I am also a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) program at East Tennessee State University. I would value your participation in this research to enable me to report educators' perceptions and to develop preliminary descriptions of best practices for classrooms concerning high-stakes testing. I appreciate your participation in this study.

- **Researcher**: Selena M. Kiser, MAEd
  Teacher
  Duffield Primary School
  XXX-XXX-XXXX
  smkiser7@hotmail.com

- **Purpose of Study:** To acquire the responses of elementary school teachers and administrators in rural Virginia schools to find the best practices for instructional application in accordance with high-stakes testing mandates. In addition, this study will identify teachers' and administrators' perceptions regarding curriculum and school changes.

- **Request for Participation:** I request your voluntary participation in this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you do have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. In addition, you have the right to withdraw your words from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

- **Research Method:** I will interview two teachers and two administrators employed within three Southwest Virginia school systems for a total of twelve participants. I will ask each

Ver: 3/07/2007   Subject's Initial_____

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of you questions about your perceptions concerning high-stakes testing and the changes in the schools. You will also reveal best practices used in the schools for maintaining creativity and positive outcomes. Data collected from the interviews will enable me to report educators' perceptions and to develop a theoretical framework explaining preliminary descriptions of best practices.

- **Duration of Research Participation:** You will participate in one 60-minute interview in March 2007.

- **Confidentiality:** Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be store in a safe at my house for at least ten years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB, and Dr. Terry Tollefson, Susan Wilson (transcriptionist), and Selena Kiser (researcher) will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to the current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

- **Method of Recording Interview:** I will tape record your interview to ensure complete recall of the interview. The tape will be destroyed upon completion of the data analysis phase.

- **Right of Refusal:** You may refuse to participate in this study without any negative consequences.

- **Right to Withdraw:** You may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. You may withdraw your words from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

- **Alternative Procedures:** There are no alternative procedures except not to participate.

Ver: 3/07/2007   Subject's Initial_____

- **Explanation of Risks:** There are no known or anticipated risks for participation in this study.

- **Feedback and Benefits:** I will send you a copy of the preliminary transcription. If you request it, I will give you an executive summary of the dissertation. The benefit of your participation in this study is to share with scholars and policymakers your opinion about high-stakes testing. The findings from this research project will be submitted to East Tennessee State University with an audience interested in best practices and teachers' perceptions concerning high-stakes testing.

- **Contact Person Concerning Rights or Injuries:** If you have any questions, problems, or research-related medial problems at this time, you may call Dr. Terry Tollefson at (423)439-7617 or Selena Kiser at XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423)439-6055 or (423)439-6002.

- **Copy of Consent:** You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent for your records.

- **Permission to Quote:** Your words may be used in the final research report to clarify or further explain educators' perceptions and preliminary descriptions of best practices. I will not identify the source of the quote. In addition, I will take precautions to ensure that there are no identifiers in the body of the quote.

_____   _____

Signature of Voluntary Participant   Date of Participation

Ver: 3/07/2007   Subject's Initial_____

APPENDIX C

Letters to Superintendents and Principals

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Changes Concerning High-Stakes Testing

February 2007

Dear Superintendent:

Please allow me to reintroduce myself. My name is Selena Kiser and I have spoken with you several times at the XXXXX School Board. I am presently working on the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. As part of my dissertation requirements, I will be conducting a qualitative study, researching teachers' and administrators' perceptions and classroom changes concerning high-stakes testing.

This letter is to request your permission to interview and observe a selection of elementary school teachers and administrators within the school system during Spring of 2007. My study will focus on teachers' and administrators' perceptions and best practices used with high-stakes testing mandated by No Child Left Behind and the Virginia Standards of Learning. There will be no names (teachers, administrators, systems, and students) attached to any part of the dissertation. You will be assured of anonymity. For you to have more information, the interview questions are attached to this letter.

I am requesting your approval to contact the schools' principals in order to fulfill my dissertation requirements. Please sign below if you grant permission to conduct the interviews and observations at XXXXXX. Please contact me personally at XXX-XXXX and/or e-mail me at XXXXXXXXXX if needed. Thank you in advance for your consideration. Your assistance in helping me complete this study will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Selena Kiser   Dr. Terry Tollefson,
Doctoral Student   Dissertation Chair

Signature: _____ Date: _____
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Changes Concerning High-Stakes Testing

February 2007

Dear Principal:

Please allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Selena Kiser and I have spoken with you several times at XXXXXX. I am presently working on the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am currently working on my dissertation. As part of my dissertation requirements, I will be conducting a qualitative study, researching teachers' and administrators' perceptions and classroom changes concerning high-stakes testing.

This letter is to request your permission to interview and observe a selection of elementary school teachers at XXXXXXX within during Spring of 2007. My study will focus on teachers' and administrators' perceptions and best practices used with high-stakes testing mandated by No Child Left Behind and the Virginia Standards of Learning. There will be no names (teachers, administrators, systems, and students) attached to any part of the dissertation. You will be assured of anonymity. For you to have more information, the interview questions are attached to this letter.

I am requesting your approval to interview and observe a selection of teachers and administrators in order to fulfill my dissertation requirements. Please contact me personally at XXX-XXX-XXXX and/or e-mail me at XXXXXXXXXX with your recommendation. Thank you in advance for your consideration. Your assistance in helping me complete this study will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Selena Kiser   Dr. Terry Tollefson,
Doctoral Student   Dissertation Chair

APPENDIX D

Preliminary Interview Guide

1. Please describe your experience and background in education.

2. How do educators adapt to federal and state-mandated curriculum change as result of high-stakes testing in your school system?

3. What are the perceptions of high-stakes testing on teachers, administrators, and students in your school system?

4. What changes do you think are happening as result of *No Child Left Behind* and Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs)?

5. What practices are effective in preparing your students to be successful on high-stakes tests?

6. How do curricular emphasis and school activities change as result of high-stakes tests? Is there reduced emphasis placed on certain subjects? Are certain subjects intensified?

7. Are field trips postponed until after testing in your school system?

8. What changes, if any, do you think are needed in *No Child Left Behind* and the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) mandates?

9. How likely are high-stakes testing changes to be made? If so, when?

10. Will high-stakes testing lead educators to early retirement or change in career?

SELENA MARIE KISER

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: September 24, 1977
	Place of Birth: Big Stone Gap, VA
	Marital Status: Married

Education: University of Virginia's College at Wise;
> Business Administration, Elementary Education Licensure,
> 2000

> Tusculum College, Greenville, TN;
> MAEd in Education, K-12,
> 2003

> East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
> Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D.;
> 2007

Professional
Experience: Tutor, Duffield Primary School, Scott County Schools;
> 2000-2002,

> Classroom Teacher, Duffield Primary School, Scott County Schools;
> 2000-present

> Adjunct Professor, University of Virginia's College at Wise;
> 2005-present

Honors and
Awards: Who's Who Among America's Teachers,
> 2005-06

> Empire Who's Who Empowering Executives & Professionals,
> 2006
> Cambridge Who's Who Among Professional Women in Education
> 2007