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Supporting Teachers Through Standardized Testing: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Administrator Support

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SUPPORTING TECHERS THROUGH STANDARDIZED TESTING: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERSEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATOR SUPPORT

By

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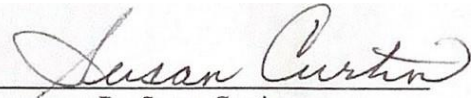
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ABSTRACT

In recent years, standardized assessment has played a major role in the American school system. Standardized testing, sometimes refened to as high-stakes testing, is a measure to ensure accountability and equity. One standardized test, the NWEA MAP assessment, is used to measure growth and proficiency. When students complete the assessment, they receive a Rasch UnlT (RIT) score and a prediction of growth for the next time they take the assessment, as well as a projection of whether or not they are on track for that expected growth (NWEA, 2021). The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of the supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the NWEA MAP assessment. For this study, 1 1 elementary teachers were interviewed via Zoom. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed following Creswell and Poth's suggestions for analysis specific to phenomenological research. Five themes were discovered: preparing for the N WEA MAP assessment is twofold; analyzing the data post-test; testing pressure affecting self-efficacy; feeling a sense of support from colleagues; desiring a focus on holistic assessment. These results may be useful for building leaders as they work to support teachers with standardized testing and using the data and to prepare for professional development based on teacher and student needs.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In recent years, standardized assessment has played a major role in the American school system. In 1983, led by David Pierpont Gardner, the National Commission on Excellence in Education raised concerns about the educational foundation being eroded by mediocrity, threatening the future of the United States and its people as other nations surpass our educational attainments (United States, 1983). This raised concerns as well as prompted the nation to strive for excellence in education. More recently, the United States passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015. This law replaced the No Child Left Behind Act but did not eliminate standardized assessments, which have been kept in place to hold schools accountable to ensuring every student receives an equitable education regardless of their zip code. ESSA requires students in the United States to be taught to high standards in order to be prepared for college and the workforce. Annual statewide assessments allow educators, parents, students, and the community to stay current on the progress schools are making toward meeting high standards (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). While ESSA reduced the federal testing accountability in place under No Child Left Behind by expanding state responsibility over schools, standardized tests remain a common practice in schools.

Teachers report a higher level of anxiety about their students' performance on standardized assessments than they do with classroom assessments (Segool et al., 2013). This is likely due to the fact educators are responsible for raising test scores while also being expected to prepare students to be 21st-century workers and citizens (Scot et al., 2009). For years, standardized testing has been common practice in secondary education, but in recent years more education policy decisions are based on test score outcomes than ever before in the United States

(Croft et al.,2015). At the same time, fewer people are making the decision to choose teaching as a career (Frazier et al., 2019). While this may not solely be due to standardized testing, more needs to be known about elementary teachers' experiences with standardized testing and the support they perceive they need from building leaders. Thus, studying the support of teachers by building leaders in the area of standardized testing may potentially aid in the reduction of teacher stress and support retention of educators in the professions. For the purposes of this study, the terms building leaders, school leaders, and administrators will be used interchangeably to describe those in charge of overseeing teachers and leading schools.

Theoretical Framework

Building leaders have the potential to increase teacher retention based on how they lead the assessment process. Transformational leadership centers around treating followers as humans by focusing on emotions, ethics, and goals, and could be a useful framework for leading assessment systems. Transformational leadership theory was first established by the work of Downton (1973) and gained popularity due to the work of Burns (1978) who wrote about the importance of leaders tapping into the motives of followers in an effort to achieve the goals of both leaders and followers. A transformational leader is one who is aware of and attentive to the needs of followers and works to help followers reach their full potential. Whereas transactional leadership is based on an exchange relationship, transformational leadership emphasizes individual development. Thus, performance is enhanced, leading to growth of the organization. To reach the goal of follower development, transformational leaders display four characteristics: charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspiration (Kirby et al., 1992). In addition, transformational leaders are aware of their environment and look ahead to the

future. Bass (1985) went further to describe the transformational leader as one who alters their environment and creates, rather than reacts, to environmental circumstances.

Today's effective principals rely on the skills and knowledge of faculty to assist in leadership roles. This view of effective leaders embodies factors at the center of transformational leadership. School leaders need to communicate goals and influence staff members to perform at high levels (Lunenburg, 2010). These findings on what makes school leaders effective are all found within transformational leadership. Further, the leadership style of the principal is directly related to teachers' sense of wellbeing, and burnout is becoming topical in schools (Heidmets & Liik, 2014). Transformational leadership has been effective in different situations, and with an emphasis on follower needs and values, this style of leadership aligns with the current needs in educational settings.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, high-stakes testing has played a major role in school systems across the country, becoming a common topic for debate in education (Gonzalez, Peters, Orange, & Grigsby, 2017). Standardized testing, sometimes referred to as high-stakes testing, is a measure to ensure accountability and equity. Often, standardized test scores are reported to states and directly impact school funding and employment decisions (Segool et al., 2013).

The NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment is an online test used to measure growth and proficiency. NWEA MAP provides assessments pre-K-12. For grades 2-12, assessments are available for reading, language usage, mathematics, and science. For grades K-2, assessments are available in reading and mathematics (NWEA, 2021). However, which assessments are given, how often they are administered, and what subjects are tested is left up to individual school districts.

NWEA MAP is known for being less difficult to administer than some tests and takes students about an hour to complete each test (Maranto, 2016; NWEA, 2021). While most students complete a test in less than an hour, the tests are not timed (NWEA, 2021). Scores are reported instantly, and NWEA MAP is nationally normed. Every three to five years, NWEA conducts a norming study to ensure comparisons are reflecting the current demographics. NWEA also conducts linking studies at the state level. These norms allow educators to see if students are making growth at the expected, regardless of where they started from (NWEA, 2021). Another perk of NWEA MAP is it provides students with individual goals. For instance, a student can make a jump from the eightieth percentile to the ninetieth while another student can go from the first percentile to the eighth percentile. In this case, both students have the opportunity to see growth and feel success (Maranto, 2016).

The purpose of the NWEA MAP assessment is to measure growth and proficiency. The assessments are computer adaptive, meaning as students answer questions correctly, they get asked more difficult questions. Similarly, as students answer incorrect, the questions get less challenging. This makes it possible to measure a student's current academic level as well as their growth since the last assessment (NWEA, 2021).

 When students complete the assessment they receive a Rasch UnIT (RIT) score, as well as a prediction of what their RIT score will be, if they are on track to make a year's worth of growth, the next time they take the assessment. The RIT score is measured in equal intervals no matter the students grade level or performance. The RIT stays stable over time, meaning a student in 1st grade and a student in 12th grade receiving the RIT score of 120 would show they tested at the same ability level. This aids in measuring student performance and whether they are performing below, on, or above grade level (NWEA, 2021). Each students' RIT score can be

compared to the average RIT score of students in their district, as well as students across the nation. These reports can be printed out and shared with parents if the district chooses. NWEA data can be used to inform and prepare instruction. In some districts, NWEA MAP, or another standardized test, may be tied to a teacher's evaluation. This study focuses on the teachers who not only prepare students for the MAP assessment but also are directly impacted by the outcomes. The purpose of this study is to explore teacher perceptions of the supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the NWEA MAP assessment.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests?

2. How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods?

3. What meaning do teachers ascribe to standardized test experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA?

Significance of Study

Standardized tests are common practice in education. State report cards may rely on information gained from standardized tests (Maki, 2009). Thus, pressure is high for both teachers and administrators to improve scores (Berliner, 2011). Yet, some teachers do feel stress associated with standardized testing (Maranto, 2016). However, it may be necessary to look beyond the test to address the stress teachers feel regarding standardized testing. It is known that principal leadership plays a stronger role in teacher attrition than other factors, including the demographic makeup of the school (Kraft et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2020). Thus, leadership surrounding standardized testing may be crucial for retention of teachers and a reduction in test-

related stress. This study may potentially benefit building leaders, and teachers, as teacher voices will be heard and their perceptions of supportive building leader practices regarding standardized testing are shared. Building leaders may be able to use these findings to plan for professional development and provide supports that will be helpful to teachers as they implement standardized testing. In addition, these supports may help alleviate some of the stress teachers feel surrounding standardized testing and may contribute to a decrease in attrition.

It is important to retain teachers in the classroom, as fewer teachers are choosing the profession (Frazier et al., 2019), and this study may provide information that could potentially help building leaders understand teacher perceptions and what supports teachers feel they need from building leaders surrounding standardized testing. Ultimately, findings from this study may be beneficial in aiding building leaders and teachers to reach a common understanding and shared goals as they work together to help students become not only proficient test takers but learners who are capable for the real world.

In addition to helping building leaders identify supportive practices they may be able to implement or continue using, ultimately these supports may go on to benefit students and their success and learning.

Definition of Terms

Elementary Teachers: For the purpose of this study, elementary teachers refer to teachers in grades K-5.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Successor to the No Child Left Behind Act, the ESSA provided states more leeway surrounding accountability. This act also encourages the use of multiple measures of success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP): Standardized test used to measure student

growth and proficiency over time (NWEA, 2020).

Standardized Tests: Academic achievement assessments used for accountability purposes (Segool et al., 2013).

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leaders work toward tapping into the motives of followers in an effort to achieve the goals of both leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). This is done through fostering collaboration and building trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Assumptions

The following assumptions were used in this study:

- All participants who were interviewed answered truthfully.

- Supportive leadership practices are something that can be studied objectively.

- Conclusions were drawn from a sample of elementary teachers implementing MAP in South Dakota. Therefore, findings may potentially be used by leaders of elementary teachers throughout the state.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature and Research

Chapter 2 will provide an extensive review of the literature and research related to standardized testing, teacher perspectives surrounding standardized testing, and current leadership practices. This chapter will provide a thorough discussion of standardized testing, including the history of testing, the role of standardized testing for accountability in the school system, and current support models that leaders adopt in the education system.

History of Testing

One of the goals of the public school system is to provide every student the opportunity to develop at a rate consistent with their ability and potential (Saam, 1919). In the early twentieth century, the term standardized testing may not have been in every teacher's vocabulary, but intelligence testing was already playing a role in the lives of students and teachers. British statisticians Francis Galton and Charles Spearman were on a quest to measure intelligence. Galton, who founded the Eugenics Society and firmly believed intelligence was a mostly inherited trait, developed statistical techniques to measure cognitive ability (Sacks, 1999). Inspired by the influence of Galton, Spearman published the 1904 paper titled "General Intelligence." In this paper, Spearman reported his discovery of a general factor of intelligence, which became known as "g." This discovery came about after a series of experiments Spearman conducted with students at a school in Berkshire. These experiments measured abilities in the classics, French, English, mathematics, responsiveness to light, and music. These abilities were ranked into a hierarchy in the order they were associated with Spearman's independent measures of intelligence: Classics, French, English, mathematics, sensory discrimination, and music.

While Spearman claimed to have discovered a general factor of intelligence, his study was based on a sample of a few dozen students and lacks a cause and effect relationship (Sacks, 1999).

Following Galton and Spearman, Alfred Binet of France is credited with creating the first practical intelligence test. In 1904, the French Minister of Public Instruction named a commission to create a means of identifying defective children. The goal was to not remove students from the regular school into special classes without first undergoing pedagogical and medical examinations (Binet & Simon, 1916). Binet was not interested in a subjective measure. Rather, he insisted children deserved a careful method that was not subjective (Binet & Simon, 1916).

At the time, there was concern over a lack of definition to distinguish the categories of idiot, imbecile, and moron. Binet referenced a physician at the Vaucluse Asylum who labored over children being sent in with certificates that were not consistent in the diagnoses of the child. For example, one certificate labeled the child an imbecile while the next labeled the child a moron. This caused suspicion of the diagnoses and hindered the ability for comparisons (Binet & Simon, 1916). Thus, there was a need for a common measure in order for doctors and educators to be able to best work with the children. Binet, along with a physician named Simon, developed the Binet-Simon Scale for measuring IQ. This scale established practices that are still used today on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. On this scale, the highest level performed is equivalent to the child's mental age (Sacks, 1999).

While the quest to measure intelligence was underway in Europe, the United States was beginning to use standardized tests to hold schools accountable. In the mid-1800s, Massachusetts became the first state to require standardized tests. These first tests were meant to measure individual student achievement and included only 30 questions to cover a whole year's worth of

curriculum. Public officials began using test data to compare and rank schools, even though the purpose of the standardized tests was to assess the achievement of individual students (Sacks, 1999).

In 1983, led by David Pierpont Gardner, the National Commission on Excellence in Education raised concerns in its report *A Nation at Risk* about the educational foundation being eroded by mediocrity, threatening the future of the United States and its people as other nations surpass our educational attainments. In the report, it was noted that student achievement had been squandered since gains were made in the wake of Sputnik due to essential support systems being dismantled, which was referred to as an act of educational disarmament (United States, 1983). This raised concerns as well as prompted the nation to strive for excellence in education. More recently, the United States passed the Event Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015. This law replaced the No Child Left Behind Act but did not eliminate standardized assessments, which have been kept in place to hold schools accountable. ESSA requires students in the United States to be taught to high standards to be prepared for college and the workforce. Annual statewide assessments allow educators, parents, students, and the community to stay current on the progress schools are making toward meeting high standards (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Standardized Testing in the School System

Policymakers have searched for a formula that is ideal to ensure both equity and quality for students in education (von der Embse, 2017). More recently, standardized test scores dominate the school system in the United States at both the elementary and secondary levels (Levine & Levine, 2013). From the moment children enter the school system, various forms of standardized testing, such as achievement and placement assessments become common practice

(Maki, 2009). The current focus on testing has stemmed from the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Under NCLB, schools could receive financial incentives for sufficient academic progress. The most common means of holding schools accountable since the adoption of NCLB has been standardized tests (Levine & Levine, 2013; McCluskey, 2017). NCLB was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which became law in 1965. The idea behind this act was a means to attribute deviations in student outcomes to the quality of education students receive (Wiliam, 2010). This is when a focus on minimum competency began (von der Embse, 2017).

The purpose of standardized testing remains to quantify student abilities (Howard et al., 2017). This allows educators to get a snapshot of where students are and if progress has been made and a way to hold schools accountable. For accountability, it is not necessarily individual student performance that matters; rather, the number of students proficient in the grade levels needs to be seen increasing (Wiliam, 2010). Most often these tests are only assessing reading and mathematics (Howard et al., 2017; Levine & Levine, 2013; McCluskey, 2017). This means that not all subjects taught in school receive the same form of testing, such as science and social studies.

While the intention was to ensure all students receive a quality education from teachers and the school meets performance expectations, the testing process has become quite controversial. One may be tempted to think testing would be a straightforward way to show educators, parents/guardians, and the community what students have learned (Wiliam, 2010), but testing has become anything but straightforward. Go back half a century and standardized test scores were used to provide information to teachers and parents about how students' achievement compared to peers. Data was also used to help in the placement of students. Now,

due to advances in technology and a belief that more testing will improve student achievement, standardized tests are being used in ways other than how they were intended (Henning, 2006).

Increasingly, high standardized test scores have become a major goal in education (McCluskey, 2017). In fact, standardized tests are often referred to as *high-stakes* tests because the stakes are high (Levine & Levine, 2017). There can be consequences for schools failing to raise test scores to a proficient level. "Schools that did not improve rapidly enough to have 100% of their children proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014 could have teachers and administrators fired, be reconstituted or closed" (Berliner, 2011, p. 287). However, test results can be a way to identify gaps in learning between students of different socio-economic backgrounds, gender, or racial groups (Schneider, Feldman, & French, 2016; Starr, 2017) and lead to improved instruction.

Today, one form of standardized test used in many schools is the NWEA MAP assessment. NWEA is a not-for-profit organization that for 40 years has offered pre-k-12 assessments geared toward helping students along their learning path. The assessments are computer adaptive, which allows the questions to become more difficult as they are answered correctly and easier when students are answering incorrectly (NWEA, 2021). To stay relevant, NWEA conducts norming studies every three to five years to ensure comparisons are reflecting the current demographics (NWEA, 2021). NWEA uses anonymous data from more than 11 million students to create national norms. These norms can be used to place students and schools among a national sample (NWEA, 2021).

Benefits of Standardized Testing

While the teacher accountability movement, which relies heavily on standardized testing, has been controversial, accountability is necessary and has many benefits. Parents and the

community have the right and even an obligation to be concerned about teacher quality (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017). Standardized testing provides nationally normed data and ultimately does more good than harm (Maranto, 2016) if the results are used to improve student outcomes.

Standardized testing can be especially beneficial when looking at equity. Often, it is the tests that help districts identify needs for marginalized groups including economically disadvantaged, minority populations, students for whom English is a second language, and students with an IEP. Identifying these gaps can move educators on the path toward ensuring high levels of education for all. Simply being faced with the task of administering standardized tests prompts schools and districts to intensely focus on student achievement (Schneider et al., 2016; Starr, 2017).

Traditionally, grading is a subjective practice that varies from teacher to teacher. No matter how well-meaning teachers are, when teachers assign grades, it is not always consistent across grade levels or even from one classroom to the next. What one teacher assigns a "B" might be a "C" in another classroom. Teachers tend to take other factors into consideration when grading, such as effort and participation. This makes it difficult to rely on classroom assessments as accountability measures. Standardized testing puts everyone on common ground (Maranto, 2016; Phelps, 2006; Schneider et al., 2016).

Standardized testing may not be perfect, but abandoning standardized testing is not without consequences either. Without standardized testing, there is the risk of promoting students whether or not they earn passing grades. The motivation piece can be removed for some students without standardized testing, and thus, they may quit putting forth effort. When the bar for passing grades is lowered, colleges are forced to compensate and offer remedial classes to make up for what students missed during their elementary and secondary years (Phelps, 2006).

Concerns with Standardized Testing

While standardized tests are not new in the school system, student performance on these assessments is playing an increasing role in the evaluation of schools and teachers on top of simply assessing student progress (Saeki et al., 2018). One form of standardized testing required under the No Child Left Behind Act was the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment. NAEP testing became required every other year in grades 4, 8, and before students graduated high school as a means to check in on the progress of education in individual states (Levine & Levine, 2013).

Since testing focuses mostly on reading and mathematics, there is some concern about the impact this has on time spent and the quality of other subjects taught. It is not only science and social studies that have taken cuts. Time for music and art education as well as recess has been reduced (Levine & Levine, 2013). These time cuts have been significant in some cases. Roughly, a 47% increase in time spent on reading instruction and a 37% increase in time spent on mathematics has been seen since the implementation of standardized testing (Berliner, 2011). With these increases, time has been taken from science, social studies, art, music, physical education, and recess due to a reallocation of minutes during the day. Decreases from 28-35%, or on average an hour a week, has been taken from these areas (Berliner, 2011). With these cuts to other subject matter, a disservice is done to students, as they miss exposure to important content and opportunities for physical movement (Levine & Levine, 2013).

Another concern with standardized testing is a lack of validity. It can be hard to know if the scores give an accurate report of what the tests aim to measure. For instance, a lot of class time can be spent preparing students for tests—in some cases, teachers spend months on test preparation (Levine & Levine, 2013; Maranto, 2016). It could be students simply do better on

tests the longer they are exposed to testing materials. Essentially, students can learn how the tests work, and thus, perform better (Levine & Levine, 2013). This increase in scores would not show an actual increase in content knowledge as much as test-taking knowledge.

Aside from validity concerns, problems occur when tests are used in ways other than how they were intended. Standardized tests can be diagnostic, norm-referenced, or criterion-referenced. In some cases, criterion-referenced tests meant to show mastery of grade-level content are used to make judgments about the quality of education in the district (Wiliam, 2010). It is crucial to use tests the way they were intended in order to increase the likelihood inferences made from the analysis are in fact accurate.

In addition to this, standardized tests require every student to perform in the same way. Yet, it is known not all students learn at the same rate or in the same way (Maki, 2009). Little room is given for the diverse needs and diverse learners. One example of this is the working memory of the student. Students with higher working memory will generally perform better on standardized tests (Howard et al., 2017). Tests require students to use working memory and non-verbal reasoning, so it may be a disadvantage to students who struggle in these areas, as their results could be skewed. Instead of lacking in reading and mathematics content knowledge, it could simply be a reasoning error. While this may skew student test results, this should not interfere with making comparisons between schools or students. The problem is going to come when educators use standardized test data to plan for intervention and further instruction. Educators may see deficiencies in reading or mathematics and plan to enhance content in those areas when the interventions the student really needs are working on non-verbal reasoning skills (Howard et al., 2017). This could create a situation in which test scores measure test-taking

ability rather than a student's knowledge of the subject content being tested (Levine & Levine, 2013).

Elementary Teachers and Standardized Testing

Since the dawn of the testing era, students' test scores have been directly attributed to teacher effectiveness, and some teachers do feel stress associated with standardized testing (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017; Levine & Levine, 2013; Maranto, 2016). As a result, it is not surprising pressure has been felt to raise scores. This can have effects not only on learning but on teaching as well (Gulek, 2003). While this may concern teachers, there is also growing concern surrounding the narrowing of curriculum. A great deal of the school day is spent preparing students for tests, which are mostly reading and mathematics (Berliner, 2011). This can put teachers in a tough position of wanting to prepare students to do well and wanting to expose students to diverse classroom experiences. ESSA improved upon NCLB because some punitive consequences were removed, and more flexibility was granted, creating a more comprehensive accountability system (von der Embse, 2017). However, research shows there are still pressures and restraints placed on teachers in light of standardized testing.

However, it is also important to highlight that there are many stressors in the school environment. When instructed to write a paragraph about what stressors they have at work, responses from 64 teachers indicated stress fell into two categories: contextual and personal. 91% identified political and educational structures as being a stressor. This same number reported instructional factors. Student factors came in at 67%, and parent and family factors at 63%. School climate was reported by 35% (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). This supports prior research and shows testing is a contextual factor and falls into the high-stress category. Many teachers reported a lack of time to actually teach due to paperwork, procedures, and policies or

feelings of only being able to test and document. In all, standardized testing was brought up several times, both the stress it puts on teachers as well as students. In addition, many commented on feeling a lack of support and respect from leaders and a feeling of having to keep up with trends on their own time (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

The 21st-century workforce calls upon workers to be able to perform a broad set of skills (Berliner, 2011). Project-Based Learning is hands-on and allows students to create, but the time teachers spend implementing PBL has dropped due to test preparation. Further, teachers have had to decrease the time spent on science, social studies, physical education, art, music, and recess on average about an hour per week (Berliner, 2011). In some schools, science is hardly taught (McCluskey, 2017). With the demands of the 21st-century workforce, this is not viewed positively by all. Teachers may feel they have to teach to the test rather than to their students. This can hinder student and teacher motivation and simply have a negative effect on education (Jones & Egley, 2006; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Teachers are required to spend a great deal of time on test preparation, which often surrounds multiple-choice, closed-ended questions, leaving critical thinking compromised. Students who come from more affluent families may still have opportunities to visit museums and go on trips (Berliner, 2011). This is a good thing for those students. However, going back to the original purpose of standardized testing, a gap may be forged. Aside from improving academic achievement, another purpose of standardized testing is to decrease the gap between minority and majority students, but this gap is not being closed. The money being spent on tests and test preparation materials could be spent on field trips and other activities to enrich the curriculum and provide opportunities students may not otherwise have (Levine & Levine, 2013).

Time for test preparation takes a central focus, but time is not the only factor teachers deal with the time to prepare for standardized tests. While time has been reported as a stressor for teachers, it's not just about having time to cover all the required materials and standards and prepare students for tests. It takes time to get students ready to learn, especially those who are easily distracted (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Teachers report a higher level of anxiety about their students' performance on standardized assessments than they do with classroom assessments (Segool et al., 2013). This is likely due to the fact educators are responsible for raising test scores while also being expected to prepare students to be 21st-century workers and citizens (Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009). For a number of years, standardized testing has been common practice in secondary education, but more key policy education decisions are based on test score outcomes than ever before in the United States (Croft et al., 2015). Further, fewer people are making the decision to choose teaching as a career (Frazier et al., 2019).

School demographics do have a strong influence on teachers' decisions to keep teaching at the school (Miller et al., 2020). This certainly cannot be attributed to standardized testing alone, although testing could be a stress factor for teachers. There is an abundance of contextual factors that contribute to teacher stress (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). While districts vary in which grade levels implement standardized testing, even if testing does not begin until later grades, teachers in K-2 classrooms may feel the pressure (Saeki et al, 2018).

One specific study set out to explore the influence of test-based accountability on early elementary teachers (Saeki et al., 2018). This study included 541 K-2 teachers from three states. These teachers did not administer standardized tests, but this study set out to find out what influence tests have on K-2 teachers' stress. Perceptions of school climate were measured using

the Delaware School Climate Survey-Teacher/Staff Short Form (DSCS-T/S), which is a 24-item

scale used to measure quality of life as well as social relationships in the school. Responses were

recorded using a four-point Likert scale. Test stress in the school environment was also measured

on a 5-point Likert scale. Results indicated accountability policies were not related to teacher

stress. However, test stress was a significant factor in K-2 teachers. The teachers in this study did

not directly administer standardized tests, but appear to be indirectly influenced through the

school context. Essentially, there may be test stress around the workplace (Saeki et al., 2018).

Another reason why all levels of elementary teachers may feel exposed to testing stress

and pressure is the lack of being able to meet the social-emotional needs of students. Social-

emotional learning is important (von der Embse, 2017). However, a great deal of teachers'

attention is spent on reading and mathematics. While there is little evidence to support

accountability pressures are among the causes of mental health problems among students, if

teachers are able to spend time promoting mental health by using evidence-based interventions,

student stress associated with testing may be reduced (von der Embse, 2017). With time for

teaching science and social studies already down, little time is left for social-emotional learning.

Different Points of View

Standardized testing plays a large role in elementary teachers' professional day. Teachers

need leaders' support now more than ever (Jones & Egley, 2006). There are pressures on both

ends, but teachers and building leaders often are left viewing testing from different lenses (Jones

& Egley, 2006).

In a survey with 708 teachers and 325 administrators, both groups agreed testing had a

negative effect on public schools, but teachers identified more negative aspects of testing than

administrators (Jones & Egley, 2006). In fact, administrators could identify more positive effects

of testing than teachers. Sixty-three percent of administrators claimed testing had a positive effect on the overall quality of education at their school. Ninety-seven percent of teachers said students would learn the same or more in reading without being given a state standardized test (Jones & Egley, 2006). However, it is important to note teachers were not asked the question given to administrators regarding if testing had a positive effect on the quality of education at their school, and administrators were not asked the question given to teachers about students learning the same or more without taking the state standardized test. Perhaps more can be gained from the interview responses. Teachers did report that different perceptions in testing could be determined by different roles within the school. Administrators want overall data, and teachers are more focused on individual students. Administrators focus on increasing scores, and teachers take scores personally. The teachers and administrators that were on the same page both wanted to use data in ways to improve student learning (Jones & Egley, 2006).

To achieve this goal of improving student learning, suggestions have been made for building leaders to spend more time in the classroom to understand the challenges teachers face. More successful leaders visit the classroom frequently and unplanned, with the belief that teachers can grow (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). It is known teachers feel pressure surrounding testing, and observations can help leaders become better instructional leaders rather than simply being seen as a manager (Jones & Egley, 2006).

Building Leader Support

Actions leaders can take or implement to possibly aid in supporting teachers through the testing process will be explored. Research has focused on improving student learning outcomes due to accountability pressures (Goddard et al., 2019). An important factor in improving student learning outcomes is supporting teachers in this endeavor. Recently, more attention has been

given to school leader practices and their influence on creating learning environments for teachers and students (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

In the traditional school model, the principal serves as the leader of the school, with the praise or blame for success or failure being placed on him or her (Ya-Ling & Yi-Cheng, 2016). While teachers play a direct role in the preparing and administering of standardized assessment, building leaders are crucial to the endeavor. Instruction is the number one school factor leading to student success, but the second most important factor is leadership (Goddard et al., 2019; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004). This means leaders play a crucial role in enhancing student achievement. This role in enhancing student achievement is done through the support leaders provide to teachers, which can then lead to changes in student achievement (Goddard et al., 2019).

At this time, not a lot is known about the best supports to provide teachers in regards to standardized testing. What is known is teachers and building leaders view testing from different lenses. Both feel pressure. Tension can happen when either or both groups focus solely on how testing impacts them and their position (Jones & Egley, 2006). However, instructional leadership does have the potential to influence instructional practices in the school (Goddard et al., 2019). In fact, building leaders could play more of a role in student success than test scores (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). The instructional leadership building leaders provide could then benefit teachers as they embark on standardized testing.

For the purposes of this study, instructional leadership can be defined as building leaders setting high standards, being knowledgeable about the curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment. Instructional leadership also involves providing support and establishing and maintaining a climate where teachers can discuss instruction (Goddard et al., 2019). Research on

effective leadership usually does not override past research but will add to it (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). For instance, it is a basic understanding that successful leaders possess excellent communication skills. This will not be taken away as leadership research progresses, but it may be further developed as new modes of communication are understood.

Leaders build the foundation on which the school stands. In order for the school to not only stand but thrive, leaders have the responsibility to build a firm foundation. This can be called anything from principal responsibilities, basics of leadership, or even leadership domains (Leithwood et al., 2004; The Wallace Foundation, 2012). No matter the name, the underlying characteristics are the same and will be discussed next.

First, in order for leaders to be effective, they must set the direction for the school. This includes shaping and conveying a vision, which should include setting high standards for academic success. Direction setting has the potential to take up the largest amount of the building leader's impact if they set a vision and goals that will be both compelling and challenging, yet achievable (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Essentially, teachers want to have high standards and goals to achieve and rely on building leaders to help establish and put those goals in place within the school's vision.

After setting the direction and the vision, the remaining principles or domains of leadership may vary in importance based on the particular building and staff members' needs. A factor that is agreed upon is the importance of creating a hospitable climate or a supportive organization (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; The Wallace Foundation, 2012). In fact, teachers have reported it is difficult to work for unsupportive or unfriendly administrators who do not work to build up staff morale (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

One way building leaders can help support teachers is by being a liaison between teachers and the central office. Building leaders can advocate for more resources and explain demands to teachers. This may also aid in teacher buy-in. Building leaders can solicit ideas from teachers for dealing with shared accountability pressures, incorporate teachers in shared decision making, such as curriculum changes, and, whenever possible, give teachers information ahead of time. These actions can provide teachers with a voice and a sense of empowerment (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

On top of these characteristics, simply providing a listening ear may go a long way. It is known teachers face stress in the school environment (Maranto, 2016). Teachers will naturally go to their leaders when they are stressed. Leaders can listen and provide space for teachers. Just acknowledging teacher stress may help. Teachers want to know they can approach their building leader. Teachers want to be heard, and building leaders who seek to listen are modeling the ethic of care, which can build trust and nurtures respect (Jones & Egley, 2006; Stauffer & Mason, 2013). Thus, active listening is crucial for building leaders.

Once a hospitable climate is created, leaders will be able to develop people by building professional capacity within the organization. Developing people involves providing opportunities for intellectual stimulation and support that is individualized (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004). Not only will this empower other staff, but it can also take some of the pressure off the leader. Essentially, this can be seen as a decentralizing of leadership where some responsibility is taken off the leader and shared with members of the organization. This can strengthen other members of the organization (Ya-Ling & Yi-Cheng, 2016).

Leading with Transformational Leadership

While many common basics or domains of leadership can be identified, there is caution when approaching leadership by adjectives. Some of these adjectives include instructional, participative, democratic, transformational, moral, and strategic (Leithwood et al., 2004). These approaches certainly are not bad. Rather, it is about finding and honing the practices that work rather than sticking to one adjective.

Interestingly, the characteristics of transformational leadership seem to be those that teachers desire in a leader (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). In a study designed to test if principal leadership style is of great importance to the educational process, a survey was sent to teachers to identify if their principals had high or low levels of transformational leadership. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaires were received from 77 schools. In addition, interviews were conducted with teachers from schools that had five or more responses. In all, ten teachers were selected for interviews. Of these ten, five worked under high-transformational leaders and five under low-transformational leaders. The purpose was to determine which behaviors teachers found most desirable. Having a mix of teachers working with leaders who exhibited high and low levels of transformational characteristics allowed for contrasting to be done between the characteristics of these leaders (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Teachers working with high-transformational leaders provided clear descriptions and examples for each variable of transformational leadership (idealized influence, individualized concern, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation). They could not report enough positives about their leader. In contrast, teachers working with low-transformational leaders had a difficult time giving examples of intellectual stimulation. Under leaders who exhibited high-transformational characteristics, teachers were given opportunities to share their own leadership

skills, and leaders worked collaboratively to increase personal and school support while working toward a consistent vision (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

There may be further reason to believe the characteristics of transformational leadership are those that teachers want in their leaders. Teachers spend a great deal of time preparing students to be successful. Response to Intervention (RTI) has become a model many schools have implemented to aid in the efforts to promote student success. RTI enables students to receive intervention as soon as the academic difficulty is seen. With this, students can potentially be supported within the inclusive classroom before they are referred for special education services (Maier et al., 2016). This may be important because RTI requires all school staff to be working together and sharing the responsibility for student success. Leadership in the school is a critical variable to RTI success (Maier et al., 2016). Ninety-seven school psychologists and other professionals associated with RTI in the schools completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to rate principals on leadership styles. This survey included 36 items measuring passive/avoidant, transactional, and transformational leadership styles, with higher scores indicating more of a certain leadership style. Results indicated more principals exhibit transformational and transactional styles in schools where RTI was more fully implemented, and transformational styles were significantly associated in a positive way with RTI scores. On average, more school leaders are transformational and transactional than passive/avoidant (Maier et al., 2016). This study indicates that RTI may not get off the ground successfully without a transformational leader. Since RTI and standardized testing can be used to target interventions to support learning, it is possible the characteristics of a transformational leader may be beneficial in standardized testing support.

Transformational leaders prioritize professional growth (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Principals practicing transformational leadership help teachers with problems and encourage reflection and place importance on collaboration. Essentially, with an emphasis on teamwork, high levels of trust are able to be developed. Transformational leaders are seen as visionary, role models who do the right thing for the right reasons and are respectful and considerate to staff (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Considering all of the responsibilities teachers face regarding standardized testing, the characteristics of transformational leaders may just leave teachers feeling supported in what can be a stressful endeavor. It is the school leaders who are in key positions to mediate contextual stressors that affect teachers (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Influence on Instructional Practices

It is known instructional leadership influences instructional practices and student outcomes (Goddard et al., 2019; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwoo et al., 2004). This means leadership and influence on instructional practices may naturally play a factor in teachers feeling prepared and supported with standardized testing or feeling unsupported. Thus, classroom instructional practices and the leaders' role in putting those practices into place cannot be ignored. After all, it is a challenge in schools today to instruct the diverse capabilities and differences among students (Goddard et al., 2015). This may be especially challenging to meet the diverse needs of students when standardized testing is taken into account.

For about as long as public education has been in the United States, educators and stakeholders have worked toward meeting student needs in the classroom and offer alternatives if this one-size-fits-all approach does not work with a student (Goddard et al., 2019). However, the benefits in student learning that come with differentiated instruction should not be overlooked. In fact, differentiation may be associated with higher fluency and comprehension in reading

(Goddard et al., 2019). It also should not be ignored that the building leader plays a significant role in fostering a climate where differentiated instructional is encouraged and considered the norm.

In a sample of 95 rural elementary schools, surveys assessing reports of differentiated instruction use were sent to teachers. These surveys were used to measure instructional leadership and differentiated instruction. These surveys did not include the term differentiated instruction, but rather described factors so teachers did not have the opportunity to simply say differentiation was practiced in their classroom and school. Statements included terms designed to assess principal leadership, knowledge surrounding curriculum, assessment, and culture. In addition to surveys, student math and reading achievement data were collected from state standardized tests, with 4, 229 students participating at the baseline. There was a high response rate with 1,585 teachers, or 92%, participating (Goddard et al., 2019).

Survey results would go on to support the belief that instructional leadership is a significant positive predictor of differentiated instruction. In fact, instructional leadership was the strongest predictor of the school-wide implementation of differentiated instruction, even more so than factors such as poverty. Overall, teachers were more likely to take on challenging practices such as differentiated instruction when they felt supported by strong instructional leaders. This was the case regardless of the demographic makeup of the school (Goddard et al., 2019). Creating a culture where differentiated instruction is the norm may be worth working toward, as when the school's climate allows for flexibility in the delivery method of instruction and allowing for students to express their learning in various ways, student achievement may increase more so than schools who choose a one-size-fits-all approach (Goddard et al., 2015).

Implementing Collaborative Learning Communities

Traditionally, the principal was more of a middle manager, overseeing management responsibilities such as buses and books. This cannot be the case anymore. Principals are responsible for developing a team to be effective leaders of learning (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). It is accepted that professional development can aid in improving teaching, and it would be hard to find a teaching contract that does not require teachers to participate in some form of professional development each year (Kennedy, 2016). Recently, building leaders have taken to fostering collaborative learning communities, study groups, and incorporating instructional rounds to aide in the development of staff. Incorporating distributed leadership and delegating professional development responsibilities related to study groups can promote a sense of community (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

Study groups are part of a larger professional learning community (PLC) framework. These groups may be beneficial because there is some evidence there is a connection between professional community and higher math scores on standardized tests (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Study groups are a method to improve teacher professional development by combining adult learning with student needs (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). The most effective PLCs are ones where teachers are given data to analyze while being led by a discussion leader who could keep the conversation flowing. It has been less effective to give teachers data on student achievement and leave them to make sense of it on their own (Kennedy, 2016).

Study groups can range from voluntary book clubs to mandatory study groups. These groups usually are made up of job-alike teachers. The content may change from group to group, but study groups are centered around teacher learning. These groups give teachers a chance to work collaboratively while targeting student achievement. Teachers participating in study groups

can study results from standardized tests as well as other curricular assessments. Study groups provide teachers with the opportunity to put student needs first and work toward school improvement goals (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

Successful implementation of study groups cannot be done without the building leader paving the way. Leaders serve as a scaffold for study group learning, peer coaching, and teacher mentoring. Thus, building leaders are essential in developing and continuing study groups (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). Leaders do not need to take over or lead study groups. Rather, leaders play a key role by protecting study group time and attending study groups or keeping up with documents to stay involved with what is taking place in these groups. They do not need to be in control, but they are responsible for ensuring study groups are focused on student learning. Being present and up to date communicates with teachers that both student growth and teacher learning are non-negotiable (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

Study groups are just one method leaders can implement to foster teacher growth and set up a system of a supportive atmosphere. It's important to remember that there will not be one way to guarantee that teachers feel supported and students will be successful. After all, most variables associated with schooling have a little effect on student learning. It is when these variables combine that a cumulative effect can be seen. It is the leader's job to foster an environment where this can occur (The Wallace Foundation, 2012).

In addition to study groups, instructional rounds could provide an opportunity for staff to work together as well as learn from each other and grow professionally. Instructional rounds have the potential to build social connections that have not been previously formed in the school. This is done through staff members visiting classrooms and observing teachers and students, and reflecting on observations (Hatch et al., 2016).

These rounds are not another way to conduct an evaluation, but rather are intended for staff to learn from each other and grow. Most professional development requires teachers to be outside of their classroom to participate; yet the professional development is expected to have an impact on what happens inside the classroom (Kennedy, 2016). Instructional rounds take place right at the school inside the classroom and provide professional development opportunities for all involved. Building leaders, district leaders, and teachers can participate in the process, which could be beneficial for getting all staff on the same page. While there is not a lot of evidence to say instructional rounds improve classroom practice and thus student performance, rounds are more of an idea leaders can try in order to learn more about what goes on in the classroom and focus on instruction (Hatch et al., 2016).

In a study with three districts, superintendents participated in instructional rounds with the intention of developing their understanding of instruction, identifying equity issues, and developing strategies to work on issues surrounding instruction. Prior to visiting classrooms, a problem of practice or issue to focus on was identified for the observation, which consisted of 10-20 minute visits in a series of classrooms. After these observations, groups would meet to share observations, identify patterns, and discuss feedback they would provide to the host teacher. Further, social network surveys were used. These surveys centered on relationships between and among each district's central office and school-based leaders. In these surveys, participants described the frequency during which they talk to other district leaders about teaching and learning. Interviews took place with some leaders (Hatch et al., 2016).

Results indicate engaging in instructional rounds may support the development of networks among those who participate in rounds. Those who took part in rounds had a better understanding of their district's problem of practice. However, no clear relationship was found

between instructional rounds and understanding the changes in teaching and learning networks over time. Leaders should be connected in a community of practice, but participating in instructional rounds does not guarantee a community of practice will develop. What it does is create opportunities for the development of common language, collective understanding, and practices that ensure coordinated and consistent work toward aiding in instruction (Hatch et al., 2016).

Study groups and instructional rounds are just two avenues that are different than traditional professional development models. Whichever avenue is taken, the goal is ultimately the same: professional development can change teacher knowledge, then change practice, and ultimately change student learning (Kennedy, 2016). These are important steps for leaders to remember and ensure regardless of the method of professional development. If any of these steps are skipped, the results may not be as effective. Often, extra steps that are easy to overlook get added to the process. For instance, having teacher-coaches lead professional development adds another step to the process because first, the coach has to be trained (Kennedy, 2016). In adding this step, the knowledge gained or the way the information is presented will become filtered through the extra facilitator. In some cases, this can alter the meaning of the content being presented.

Analyzing Standardized Test Data

Most college programs don't teach data analysis skills that teachers will need as they implement testing and use standardized testing through the school improvement process (Henning, 2006). Knowing this, it may be beneficial for building leaders to coach or assist teachers in the data analysis process.

In one study, 24 elementary and middle school teacher leaders analyzed standardized test data with the purpose of improving instruction and student achievement. All teacher participants were in a graduate program for teacher leaders and had been recommended for the study by their principal. For this particular study, teachers were analyzing the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for their own school. Teachers from the same building worked together to perform three analyses. The first examined building scores; the second compared subgroups in the building; and the third analyzed a particular subject. After analysis, a short write up was completed (Henning, 2006).

For the Henning study, the importance comes when looking at the four different analysis approaches that were used: Comparing to the norm, analyzing trends, correlating data, and disaggregating data. It is important to understand the purpose of the test (Haertel, 2013). Comparing to the norm is used to compare strengths and weaknesses of students or a group of students, such as students in a particular class. This can be a helpful analysis when differentiating instruction and locating gaps in the curriculum. Analyzing trends, on the other hand, is useful when identifying if standardized test scores have improved over time. Correlating data is used to see relationships between standardized test scores and grades, attendance, or another factor. Disaggregating data is used to define the proportion of high and low performing students within a specific group or class of students (Henning, 2006). Essentially, knowing what is being looked for and analyzed is an important factor when reviewing standardized test data.

While it is ultimately up to those administering tests, including building leaders, to take responsibility for using tests properly, test developers would be doing their part if they note the intended use of the test (Haertel, 2013). Standardized tests have both intended and unintended consequences. For instance, an intended consequence is using standardized tests to evaluate

curriculum or instructional approaches to guide decisions about future practices. This relies

directly on information found in test scores (Haertel, 2013). This is likely the most

straightforward and common approach when thinking about the use of standardized tests. There

are also indirect intended consequences, which can be harder to identify. One example of this

type of consequence is increasing student effort. Educators and leaders would not argue about

wanting to see an increase in student effort, but this is a harder area to evaluate (Haertel, 2013).

Since the increase in effort would take place prior to testing, it is hard to know or prove if the

level of effort is directly tied to the test.

However, there are also unintended consequences with testing, which include narrowing

of the curriculum and interpretations that are made in error. These can be more difficult because

it usually takes longer to see these unfold before a connection is made to the test (Haertel, 2016).

Knowing the intended consequences and potential unintended consequences will be important

when using test data to plan for the future or make decisions regarding instruction. Working with

colleagues and exploring testing effects should be done to make sure the value of testing is being

maximized to improve decision making and educational practices (Haertel, 2016).

At the end of the day, teachers feel concerned over the effects of testing on their teaching

and individual student learning, while building leaders look to testing to make data-driven

decisions regarding teachers, programs, and curriculum (Jones & Egley, 2006). This is part of the

job of being a leader and overseeing all of these areas. Testing provides a way to obtain data

surrounding teachers, programs, and curriculum. It is a fact of the position that teachers will look

to leaders. Building leaders are always on display. Others notice what they are doing and how

they are doing it (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Perhaps this can open the door for the opportunity for

building leaders and teachers to work together to ultimately improve student success. Successful

leaders will count on others within the organization to help them develop. This can include other

district and building leaders as well as teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004).

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher perceptions of the supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing. The research design and procedures for the study are presented in this chapter. This chapter is broken down into four sections: First, the research questions are listed. Next, the researcher's stance and paradigm declaration are given. Third, the research design and methodology are provided. Last, procedures for data collection and analyses are given, as well as validity measures and ethical considerations.

To best address the research questions in this study, a qualitative design was appropriate. A qualitative design is best when quantitative statistical analyses are not appropriate, such as attempting to capture the meaning or essence of an experience. A qualitative design allows for the uniqueness of individuals' perspectives to be heard when the study centers around a concrete human experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Creswell & Poth, 2013). Because this study seeks to interpret teachers' perceptions of supportive practices, a qualitative method is appropriate.

Further, when a qualitative study reports stories surrounding the lived experiences of individuals or their concept of a phenomenon, a phenomenological design is appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2013). Phenomenology stems from the writing of Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician, and has philosophical components. Phenomenology has become a popular method in the social and health sciences, psychology, and education. Essentially, phenomenology centers around studying the lived experiences of persons (Creswell & Poth, 2013). This study focused on teachers sharing their perceptions of supportive building leader practices. Thus, a phenomenological approach was appropriate.

Research Questions

When seeking to explore an issue or phenomenon and hear perspectives that cannot be easily measured, qualitative research is appropriate. Qualitative research allows individuals to share their stories and have their voices heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was guided by three general, flexible questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests?

2. How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods?

3. What meaning do teachers ascribe to standardized testing experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA?

Researcher's Stance and Paradigm Declaration

At the time of this study, I am in was tenth year of teaching in an elementary school. After earning my B.A. in elementary education and student teaching in 3rd grade, I spent a year as an education assistant in a middle/high school special education life skills class. Following that, I began teaching elementary school and earned my M.S. in Education, studying Teaching, Learning, and Leadership. For the first six years of my teaching career, I taught 2nd grade, and currently, I am teaching 1st grade. Throughout my career, standardized testing has been an often talked about topic. However, at the start of my career, testing began in 3rd grade. During the 2017-2018 school year, when I was in my 7th year teaching, my district began implementing the NWEA MAP testing beginning in kindergarten. When this happened, I was teaching 1st grade and administering standardized testing for the first time. My interest in the topic of supporting teachers in regards to standardized testing comes from my own experiences administering

standardized testing, as well as conversations I have heard and reading I have done over the years. I have an interest in student growth as well as professional growth. I believe standardized testing can be a useful tool to track student progress and identify gaps in learning. However, it often saddens me when I hear the topic approached from teacher fear—fear of looking bad or being reprimanded for low scores. If test scores are low, I envision teachers and administrators coming together to improve for the students. If test scores are high, I envision teachers and administrators sharing with others what is going well and helping them be successful. Ultimately, I envision teachers and administrators thriving off the growth that can be made due to what is learned from analyzing standardized test data. This professional growth will ultimately benefit students, which is the goal of educators everywhere.

Population and Sample

Following the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, this research study was conducted in South Dakota. The researcher was interested in gathering perceptions of elementary teachers regarding supportive practices of building leaders surrounding standardized testing. The researcher hoped to identify strategies and practices that teachers find supportive and helpful when it comes to standardized testing. Thus, this may aid in teachers' retention and increase feelings of success and support. The population for this study included kindergarten-fifth grade teachers from a rural Midwestern school district.

Purposeful, maximum variation sampling was used in this study. In qualitative research, sampling is purposeful, meaning that researchers "intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell, 2018, p. 148). In this study, the intentional sample included K-5 teachers in the district who were invited to participate in the study. In addition, maximum variation sampling was planned for to

ensure a diverse pool of teachers would be selected to participate in the interviews. Maximum

variation sampling involves predetermining inclusion criteria to ensure a variety of participants

who represent variations in one or more characteristics are selected. When participants are

selected based on a variety of qualities, the findings of the study are more likely to reflect a

variation of perspectives rather than a limited point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria

used in this study to ensure maximum variation was the grade level taught and years of teaching

experience. When teachers were initially contacted regarding this study, they were asked to

identify the grade level they were currently teaching as well as how many years they had been

teaching. This additional sampling technique was planned for to limit the chances of

interviewing teachers who may share the same perspectives, such as interviewing teachers who

all have 1-5 years teaching experience and increase the likelihood that a range of teacher

perspectives will be elicited (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Maximum variation sampling was planned

for in the event more than 20 teachers were interested in participating in the study. Since 11

teachers agreed to participate, all were interviewed and maximum variation sampling was not

used to determine participants.

After requesting and receiving permission from the school district via e-mail (Appendix

A), an e-mail describing the purpose of the study and the three research questions was sent to

elementary teachers in the participating district. Interested participants were asked to provide

information regarding their years of teaching experience and grade level currently taught

(Appendix B). Interested teachers replied to the e-mail to set up an interview time via Zoom. A

total of 11 teachers were willing to participate and interviewed until saturation was reached. The

11 participants were currently teaching in grades K-4 at the time of the interviews. Participating

teachers ranged from 5 years of experience in the classroom to over 17 years and all had 3-4

years of experience administering the NWEA MAP assessment. All participants taught within the same school district in three different buildings.

Data Collection

A qualitative, transcendental phenomenological, design was used to allow for gaining perceptions of participants regarding supportive leadership practices for standardized testing. Participants participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews to allow for participants to guide the direction of the answers. In addition, participants were notified a second interview may be proposed by the researcher or participant if it is determined that a follow-up interview would be helpful to either clarify or provide additional information surrounding the experiences of the participant. However, no follow-up interviews were requested.

Qualitative interviews are designed to probe in detail the human experience and give access to subjective experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). Interview questions were open-ended to allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives of supportive practices (Appendix C). One-on-one interviews were conducted in a distraction-free location of the participant's choice via Zoom (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed for a quiet space to further preserve confidentiality, as well as prevent further spread of COVID-19. Through the interview, participants had a chance to share information about their background and teaching experience, how many years they had administered standardized testing, their experience administering standardized testing, and their perspectives about the essence of feeling supported surrounding standardized testing. Further, participants had the opportunity to skip any questions they did not want to answer or end the interview at any time. All 11 participants completed the entire interview.

Interviews were recorded using a phone recorder as well as a tape recorder as a backup. Each interview was transcribed using rev.com. Numbers were assigned to participants instead of using their names to protect participant identity. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher engaged in memoing. Memoing is the process of writing down field notes as data is being collected to sketch out the flow of the process and identify any patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was done in a notebook kept by the researcher. All interview recordings were deleted after transcription. Transcripts are being stored in a locked box by the researcher and will be stored for five years and will not be shared.

Data Analysis

Since this is a phenomenological study, a thematic analysis was used to describe the personal experiences surrounding the phenomenon of support surrounding standardized testing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following the one-on-one interviews with a sample of 11 teachers, which were conducted one-on-one via Zoom to preserve confidentiality and prevent further spread of Covid-19, member checking was used. Member checking is a technique that involves taking data and interpretations back to participants so they can determine accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant received a transcript of their interview to read through to ensure their meaning was captured correctly. Through this process, participates had the opportunity to add or eliminate comments as they saw fit. Member checking did not result in any changes being made to the initial transcripts. After the member-checking process was complete, transcripts were sent to the co-researcher for analysis to allow for interrater reliability. The transcripts sent to the co-researcher had all identifying marks removed, with each interview being marked with a number from 1-11 for the protection of the participants' privacy.

Interview transcripts were read through three times by the researcher before themes were identified. On the first read, interview transcripts were simply read from beginning to end. During the second read-through, notetaking was used. During this process, words and phrases that were repeatedly mentioned were jotted down in a different color to more easily identify related ideas. After the third read-through, five themes emerged. These themes were typed up in a different color with phrases corresponding to the theme listed beneath each theme. After my analysis was complete, I met with my advisor, who also color-coded and typed up emergent themes, to compare notes and make sure our analysis resulted in similar conclusions. The five identified themes will be presented in Chapter 4. Within each theme, subthemes emerged and will also be represented.

Ethical Considerations

Before proceeding with this study, as well as throughout the study, there were some ethical issues that were considered. First, no data was collected until permission was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the participating school district, and consent of the teacher was received. Before reaching out to teachers, the purpose of the study was disclosed and permission received from the school district to conduct this study with teachers in the district. After this, I reached out to elementary teachers via e-mail (Appendix B). This e-mail contained the details of the study as well as a copy of the informed consent with IRB stamped approval.

One-on-one interviews with a sample of 11 teachers regarding their experiences of support surrounding standardized testing were conducted. Interviews were conducted one-on-one via Zoom to preserve confidentiality and prevent further spread of Covid-19. The detailed interview protocol was followed and field notes were taken. Interviews were tape-recorded. Transcripts are being stored in a locked box by the researcher for five years and will not be

shared with anyone besides the advisor (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The recordings were deleted after transcription.

During data analysis, member checking was used but did not change any of the initial transcripts, and findings were reported honestly and not limited to a single perspective. Further, the researcher collaborated with an advisor to allow for inter-rater reliability to ensure the same themes were found after analyzing the interview transcripts. In order to avoid providing information that would identify participants, each was assigned a number that was used when communicating with the advisor. These numbers were used in the transcripts as well as in the written report (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to increase the trustworthiness of the study findings. There are four areas qualitative researchers use to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility refers to the study measuring what was intended; transferability refers to the extent that findings of the study can be applied to other situations; dependability refers to how well the techniques and methods in the study can be repeated with a new sample of participants; and confirmability refers to the objectivity in the overall interpretation (Shenton, 2004). Thus, steps will be taken throughout this study to ensure trustworthiness in all four of these areas.

Credibility

To enhance credibility, or confidence that the phenomenon was accurately captured, the following techniques suggested by Shenton (2004) were employed. First, an in-depth literature review was conducted to identify the previous studies that explored perceptions of and issues with standardized testing, so that findings from this study could be framed within the larger

research context. Next, participants were encouraged to answer interview questions honestly, and were given the opportunity to refuse to participate or answer specific questions to help ensure honesty. While this opportunity was available, all participants answered all of the interview questions. Throughout the study, appropriate and well-recognized research methodologies were followed, including iterative questioning in the interview protocol, frequent debriefing with my advisor, and peer scrutiny of this project conducted by my committee. In addition, reflective commentary in the form of field notes and memoing through the project, as well as a description of the researcher's role and background were provided. Following the interviews, member-checking was used, as participants were invited to read transcripts for the interview in which they participated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, the creation of thick, rich, descriptions of the phenomenon after data analysis was completed bolstered the credibility of the study.

Transferability

While the findings of qualitative research are specific to the small number of people who participated in the study and not generalizable, steps were taken to allow practitioners to decide whether findings from this study are transferable to their own context (Shenton, 2004). These steps included following the established interview protocol, as well as disclosing sufficient contextual information about the participants in the sample description. This provides readers and future researchers an accurate description of the participants in this study. Thus, if readers believe their positions to be similar, they may be able to relate the findings to their own positions (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Dependability, which is closely tied to credibility, ensures that future researchers could repeat the study in the same way following the same procedures (Shenton, 2004). Dependability in enhanced when the researcher provides an in-depth description of the methods used in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As previously mentioned, the outlined interview protocol is reported and was followed in detail, thus enhancing dependability (Shenton, 2004). In addition, the sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures were clearly detailed earlier in this chapter, as a means of strengthening dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability techniques were used throughout this study to ensure objectivity on the part of the researcher, reduce researcher bias, and ensure that participant perspectives were reflected in the results. Throughout the study, it was my aim to stay objective. One of the key criterion for confirmability is the researcher being open about his or her predispositions (Shenton, 2004) and bracketing, or setting aside my experiences and positions to allow for the participants experiences to lead the study (Creswell & Poth, 2013). Through my positionality statement, I shared my experiences with education and standardized testing. Field notes, memoing, and bracketing were used throughout the research process to reduce researcher bias. Researcher bias was also reduced by the co-researcher analyzing the data. In addition, one committee member suggested a point of clarification in my interpretation of the design and purpose of the NWEA MAP assessment. My own bias led to hearing the teachers suggest that the MAP assessment was not aligned to content as being something to change. As it is a computer adaptive assessment designed to measure growth over time, it does not measure content currently being taught. This presents challenges to teachers and students. The insight

changed one of the initial implications and strengthened my analysis. Further, an audit trail was created, such that the research procedures could be traced step-by-step and repeated if desired (Shenton, 2004). Finally, limitations of the study were identified and disclosed to the reader to support confirmability.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Chapter Overview

This chapter will begin with an introduction of the research experience and go into describing the sample demographic's background. The thematic analysis is detailed below, showing the five themes and sub-themes that emerged following the analysis of the interview transcripts. The first theme that emerged is Preparing for the NWEA MAP Assessment is Twofold. This includes technical aspects as well as testing content. The second theme is focused on Analyzing the Data Post-Test, both how teachers are currently using testing data to group students according to certain skills as well as a desire for more direction from administrators for how to use testing data to further support instruction. The third theme centered on a concern about Testing Pressure Affecting Self-Efficacy, both in students and teachers. The forth theme highlights teachers Feeling a Sense of Support from Colleagues who are in the same boat when it comes to administering and using testing data. Finally, theme five describes teachers Desiring a Focus on Holistic Assessment. These five themes will be discussed further below.

Introduction

A total of 11 teachers began and completed the interview process. While K-5 teachers were invited to participate in this study, the 11 participating teachers currently taught in grades K-4. Participating teachers ranged from 5 years of experience in the classroom to over 17 years. All participants have been administering the NWEA MAP assessment for 3-4 years.

Before beginning the interview, five participants asked to see the interview questions and received them via e-mail. The remaining six participants did not see or hear the interview

questions prior to beginning the interview. All participants were courteous during the interview process, and the interview protocol was followed in entirety.

Demographics

As stated, a total of 11 teachers were interviewed for this study. To begin this chapter, a breakdown of their demographic information is included. Table 1 displays the number of participants teaching each grade level K-4 and breaks down the years of teaching experience participants possess.

Table 1				
Teacher Demographics: Grade Level and Years Experience				
Grade Level	5-9 years	10-15 years	16+ years	Count
Kindergarten	1	1		2
First	1	2		3
Second	2	1		3
Third			1	1
Fourth	1		1	2

From these demographic tables, we gain some understanding of the participants' background information. This information was collected to assist with data analysis. For instance, if discrepancies were discovered in data analysis, it may be beneficial to know if teachers in similar grade levels or possessing similar years of teaching experience played a factor in the way questions were answered. With this study being specifically focused on the NWEA MAP assessment, with all teachers administering the test for 3-4 years, no big differences or discrepancies were found while analyzing interview transcripts that could be tied to these factors. However, to ensure transparency throughout the study, demographic information is reported.

Thematic Analysis

Following the one-on-one interviews with a sample of 11 teachers, which were conducted one-on-one via Zoom to preserve confidentiality and prevent further spread of Covid-19, member checking was used. Each participate received a transcription of their interview to read

through to ensure their meaning was captured correctly. Through this process, participates had the opportunity to add or eliminate comments as they saw fit. After the member-checking process was complete, transcripts were sent to the advisor for analysis as a co-researcher. The transcripts sent to the advisor had all identifying marks removed.

Interview transcripts were read through three times before themes were identified. On the first read, interviews were simply read from beginning to end. During the second read-through, notetaking was used. During this process, words and phrases that were repeatedly mentioned were jotted down in a different color to more easily identify related ideas. After the third read-through, five themes emerged. These themes were typed up in a different color with phrases corresponding to the theme listed beneath each theme. After my analysis was complete, I met with my advisor, who was serving as a co-researcher and also color-coded and typed up emergent themes, to compare notes and make sure our analysis resulted in similar conclusions. The five identified themes will be presented here. Within each theme, subthemes emerged and will also be represented. Finally, this section will conclude with teacher suggestions for improvement.

This study focused on three research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests?

2. How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods?

3. What meaning do teachers ascribe to standardized testing experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA?

Research question number one will be addressed in Theme 1: Preparing for the NWEA

MAP Assessment is Twofold, Theme 2: Analyzing the Data Post-Test, and Theme 3: Analyzing the Data Post-Test. Research question 2 will be addressed in Theme 4: Feeling a Sense of Support From Colleagues. Research question 3 will be addressed in Theme 5: Desiring a Focus on Holistic Assessment.

Preparing for the NWEA MAP Assessment is Twofold

During the interviews, teachers discussed what they do in order to prepare for the NWEA MAP assessment. A theme that emerged during the initial read-through is that preparation is twofold. First, there is a technical preparation. Second, there is content preparation. Both of these aspects of preparation were talked about separate from each other with both requiring teacher attention in the preparation process.

Technical Preparation

When discussing what they do to prepare for NWEA MAP testing, teachers often referred to the technical aspects of the online test. Teachers shared that they were trained in how to get on the test, including setting up and assigning tests as well as getting students logged into their testing session. Participant 1 stated, "We were trained on how to get on the test." Participant 10 also stated, "They initially taught us how to administer it in general." Participant 11 agreed by saying, "The first year we did MAPS testing, our principal gave us a list with instructions on how we were supposed to do it, which test to click on." Participant 3 explained further what getting students onto the test looks like in the kindergarten classroom: "I set it up all on my own on the computer and I call up each student with their name and their computer. I set it up on their iPad and they go off and take the tests. While they're taking the test, I am still getting students logged in."

Going beyond getting onto the test, teachers discussed needing to prepare by making sure equipment was available and working properly. When asked about recent experiences preparing for NWEA MAP testing, Participant 4 said, "just making sure that they have the proper equipment that they need and headphones are working and things like that. And then doing the practice assessment with my kids so that they know what to do."

Preparing students on how to navigate the test was primarily discussed by K-1 teachers. Participant 7, a kindergarten teacher, further explained, "Preparing for the test in a kindergarten classroom, basically just looks like getting the kids ready for what the test is going to look like in terms of how to click on the answers, like doing the practice tests." Participant 2, a first grade teacher, also discussed preparing for the test by showing students how to select their answers; "…especially on math, it's not a touch and slide. You got to click four or five times to get your parts moved to where you want them." Participant 4 also shared, "in some of the MAP data you have to read or do a problem, then they have to push each button to hear the questions. And some kids just struggle with that piece."

Content Preparation

Beyond the technical aspects of preparing for the NWEA MAP testing, teachers described preparation in terms of content. Or, as it came out, a lack of ability to prepare students in the content areas because the content on the test does not match the content taught in the classroom. When specifically discussing the reading portion of the NWEA MAP test, Participant 1 shared, "It's asking questions on the author's purpose or point of view, and the meaning of a passage. And what we're doing in first grade is primarily phonics based." Participant 4 echoed this by saying, "the reading portion I think was difficult because it didn't match a lot of what we were teaching."

Participant 2 had similar experiences with the math test: "It was multiplication and division, and perimeter and none of that stuff is taught in first grade." Not only did teachers discuss content on the test that was not taught in the classroom, but sometimes the questions were displayed a different way on the test than they were instructed to teach in the classroom. Participant 4 described one instance where this has been the case with the way math problems are laid out: "A lot of times our curriculum has it going vertically, the math problems, instead of horizontally is just something that our kids aren't as familiar with. It just feels like we weren't prepared for that maybe with using our curriculum."

Content discrepancies were noticed across the board, not in one specific grade level or just lower or upper elementary. Participant 8, a third grade teacher, talked about students being tested on fractions in September and December when fractions are not taught until later in the year. "For one thing in particular, fractions are always a low standard for third grade. It's a brand new concept. When we start taking the MAP tests in September, and then again in December or January, we haven't even taught fractions yet." Even though the content is not matching the curriculum, teachers have found ways to adjust to help with these discrepancies. Participant 8 went on to explain," By the time we get ready for that third test, we've developed lessons, games, ideas, that we see kids are already struggling with with the math scores and with activities in the classroom to help kids have a better understanding."

Analyzing the Data Post-Test

While teachers described feeling prepared to administer the NWEA MAP assessment, analyzing and using testing data was not discussed with as much confidence. This can be seen in another theme that emerged which was centered around post-test analysis. Some teachers shared they do use testing data to assist with small group instruction. In fact, using data to assist with

small group instruction was the most common way teachers reported using testing data. Most of the discussion came back to a desire for more guidance during post-test analysis. Specifically, teachers discussed not knowing what to do with the testing data. Some teachers talked about themselves not knowing what to do or not using the data very much, such as Participant 11, who shared, "I feel like I don't…Administration wants me to use it for a lot more than I actually do use it for. I don't use it a whole lot on my own."

Use Test Data to Group by Skill Level

For those teachers who discussed using NWEA MAP data in the classroom, the biggest way it is used by participants is to assist with grouping students by skills in small group instruction. Participant 7 explained, "I look at the standards piece by piece and where the kids are at what level they're at, and what would be the next level to get them to. That's how I determine my reading intervention groups." Participant 8 also discussed using the data to group students for small group instruction: "When I group them together, I look at what skills they need to be working on…I feel like when I group them by abilities, that's where the learning becomes equitable for them, because it's what they need." These sentiments were shared by Participant 6 who said, "I also use it when I'm developing my reading groups and what that student needs to work on and making sure that they have equal access." Participant 9 referenced using data to form small groups and said, "We use MAP data when we're making, whether it's small groups for math or reading, we use the MAP data to compare the data we've gotten from the different curriculums we're doing, and seeing if it's a good fit."

Aside from small group instruction, a few participants talked about using the data to help them assign math activities on the Dreambox app. Participant 2 shared, "The Dreambox program at one time had a spot where you could put in their scores and then it would run them through

activities that matched up with their MAP data scores." Like Participant 2, Participant 4

discussed using NWEA MAP data to assign activities on Dreambox: "I look at their MAP scores

and look at the different areas within like math, like operations, number operation, measurement,

and data and geometry, and just see their lowest area and use that information. I use it to assign

some of them stuff in our Dreambox software that we use." Participant 6 also shared, "One of the

programs we use is Dreambox. So I try to assign lessons that are going to actually meet the needs

of students when they have gaps, and so I use the math data for that."

Lack of Direct Support for Data Analysis Designed to Support Instructional Planning and

Implementation

When asked how they use NWEA MAP data to assist them in providing an equitable

education for the students in their classroom, the majority of participants mentioned needing

more support in this area. There were comments about not knowing what to do with the data and

needing more training on all of the reports that become available once testing is complete. Some

of this came out as frustration, such as when Participant 2 described getting conflicting

information, "I don't necessarily feel like they're great about explaining to us how to use the data

that comes after right away…you get conflicting information from the district, and from your

principal, and from this place and that place…I can't say I feel super supported in knowing what

to do with my MAP data." These sentiments came out throughout the interview process.

Participant 3 simply said, "I feel like I need to know more about looking at the data." Similarly,

Participant 1 stated, "We haven't really, I guess, gotten too far into what to take away from the

testing data as far as what we're supposed to do after that."

Participant 8 also talked about needing more training with what to do with the testing

data and also brought out the importance of this when new staff are hired. "I feel like we don't

really have enough training to delve into what's there that would be helpful, I think, especially when newer teachers come in, it's like, 'Well, here's your score.' But there are so many pieces if you go into the reports queue of what I think could be beneficial, but it would be nice to have more training on how to access those different cases."

Testing Pressure Affecting Self-Efficacy

Throughout the interview process, the theme of self-efficacy emerged. Specifically, a concern about the self-efficacy of students as well as teachers' views on standardized testing being tied to their own self-efficacy based on experiences when they themselves were taking standardized tests. Therefore, this theme of self-efficacy is broken up into two subthemes. The first will focus on students, and the second will focus on the teacher.

Pressure on Students

The biggest concern teachers talked about during the interview stood out clearly: A concern about putting too much pressure and stress on students because of standardized testing. Participant 6 talked about wanting to take the stress out of testing and make it more like an everyday activity and shared, "I think it puts a lot of unnecessary stress on students and part of that's I think from teachers putting the stress on students or feeling stressed ourselves."

Participant 7 shared, "I don't think it's developmentally appropriate in the primary grades. I don't think our kids are…I think it's too much stress to put on our youngest learners." Some of these comments were tied to the content of the test and how some of the questions on the test are above the grade level standards being taught, as reported earlier. On the other hand, some of the teachers shared concerns about student self-efficacy not only because of their content observations but because of the reactions they have seen from students.

"I've heard kids say, 'I hate MAP testing,'" shared Participant 6. "It's a moan or a groan when I say the word MAP…I've seen kids who just shut down in the middle of tests where they've just put their head down." Participant 8 echoed this. "Tears, lots of tears. Some kids just give up and put their heads down." Participant 2 also described having students in tears while testing. "I had one about in tears cause she's like…'I have no clue what to do.'" Participant 7 summed it up by saying, "I feel like my frustrations towards standardized testing and my attitude towards it is effected by the level of frustration from the kids."

These sentiments were reflected across the board and were not specific to primary or intermediate grade levels. In fact, Participant 3, talked about this stress and test anxiety that is taking place in kindergarten. "Some parents e-mail me and let me know that the child is concerned that they're nervous about going and taking the test the next day…Seeing that they're concerned at such a young age, it concerns me." Participant 2 also shared concerns about starting testing in the primary grades. "I feel like starting our kids on standardized testing this early is already giving them test anxiety."

Other teachers talked about the amount of time spent testing and how this is simply too much. Participant 11 noticed this when their own son was testing. "…in 5th grade, I felt like they tested for, it seemed like a month between all the Smarter Balanced…the MAP, and then they had something else too they had to do this year. It was too much." Participant 5, a 4th grade teacher, agrees. "We literally spent five weeks testing here this spring, and that's too much." Teachers reported noticing all of the testing having an effect on students. Participant 10 shared, "They'll pop through the test in 10 minutes, 15 minutes, whatever, because they don't read the questions or care about the questions so they'll just click random answers."

Whether it is because of what they have seen with students in their classroom or the experiences of their own children, teachers are concerned about the stress testing is placing on students. As Participant 5 stated, "I have seen the stress that comes with this kind of testing. And I think that sometimes we don't maybe get the most accurate picture of what the kids can and can't do."

Teacher Self-Efficacy Affected

In addition to a concern about the pressure placed on students to perform on standardized testing effecting their self-efficacy, teachers also pointed to their past testing experiences and their own self-efficacy playing a large role in the beliefs they hold about standardized testing today.

When asked how they feel about standardized testing and why, many teachers went back to discuss their own experiences in school, such as Participant 1 who shared, "I got good grades and did well in high school, but unfortunately, I didn't do very well on my SATs, so that really effected my scholarship or going to college." Participant 1 went on to describe how knowing what is riding on test scores can create feelings of nervousness while administering the test. "I've always felt a little nervous when I'm giving the test because of how I feel like a kid's score is not going to count because if they get kicked out if I'm not doing it right."

Participant 1 was not the only one who had this type of experience. "I hated taking test," said Participant 2. "I'm not stupid. I'm a very smart person, but when it came to testing, I had really bad test anxiety." Participant 4 reflected these same feelings and shared, "I suppose my own testing experience in school…I personally was never one that could study or prepare for those big tests." Similarly, Participant 10 said, "I always, as a student, didn't do very well on standardized testing and it was so heavily weighed."

Feeling a Sense of Support from Colleagues

When it came to identifying who or what teachers feel supported by during NWEA MAP testing periods, teachers mentioned their colleagues (often referring to them as their team), instructional coaches, and administration. Table 2 shows how often each of these came up as a person of support.

Table 2 *Who or What Makes Teachers Feel Supported*		
Person or Persons of Support	Number of times mentioned	How they provide support
Colleagues	7	Troubleshooting and talk about scores without being critical
Instructional Coach	6	Troubleshooting, setting up test sessions, color coding data
Administration	4	No specific examples given

In total, 11 teachers participated in the interview. However, some of these teachers identified feeling supported by more than one of these. In some interviews, teachers only identified one area of support. When this happen, it was colleagues or instructional coaches mentioned. Often, colleagues and instructional coaches were mentioned together, and everytime administration was mentioned, it was alongside colleagues and instructional coaches.

When colleagues were brought up, teachers often referred to them as their team or team of teachers. Most often they felt support from colleagues because they were living through the same experience. Participant 9 explained this by saying, "I feel like my team of teachers, because we're all in the same boat. We all feel the pressure of our scores. I think when we get together, we try to look at it as a way to help each other with our teaching in our practices without being critical." Participant 11 talked about colleagues in a similar way by sharing, "Mostly my colleagues just troubleshooting ahead of time…people who are willing to talk about their scores

in a general way too, so I don't feel like I'm completely isolated. It's nice to know that there's

other teachers who maybe had some of the same struggles and the same successes as I did during

a test."

When teachers mentioned instructional coaches, they felt supported by coaches with

troubleshooting and setting up testing sessions. Also, this is where teachers felt the most support

looking at the data. This was seen by participant 3 who described the support the instructional

coach offered by sharing,

I would say our building instructional coach. She did a great job last year, printing off our

results and color coordinating each child's scores. Since we were able to take the MAP

test at the beginning of the school year last year, before COVID, we saw the growth. She

was able to in the winter highlight and color code green, yellow, and red, where the

students were and who needed to grow, who didn't meet the growth of their RIT score.

Participant 7 also spoke about going to the instructional coach with questions and said, "It's been

nice to have our instructional coach to go to for questions."

Participant 5 discussed planning with the team of teachers and working with the team to

figure out scheduling during testing times and also added, "I definitely feel administrative

support from that as well."

Desiring a Focus on Holistic Assessment

Throughout the interviews, teachers talked about wanting a focus on more than test

scores. When asked if they could change anything about standardized testing, Participant 9

shared, "Yes, use the data, but just that it's not weighed to heavily, and more on what they've

actually completed and learned in the classroom." Participant 10 shared a desire for what is

happening in the classroom to be more noticed by saying, "I feel like I can tell by their daily work and what I'm seeing in teacher observation on a daily basis."

While some teachers expressed wanting to do away with standardized testing, such as Participant 2 who shared, "I would take it away, but I know that won't ever happen," most expressed wanting testing to not play the biggest role in what matters. Participant 1 said, "I think we can give it, but it doesn't have to be such a huge thing."

The kindergarten teachers expressed they did not feel standardized testing was appropriate in kindergarten. These teachers did not say they want standardized testing to go away completely, just a desire to not have kindergarten students take the tests. Some of this went back to the pressure testing puts on the students, and some of this was due to testing simply not seeming appropriate at a young age. This was shared by Participant 3 who said, "They're learning their social skills and all the fundamental parts of being in school and life skills. Eventually, I do agree with standardized tests in the older grades." Participant 7 had similar thoughts and shared, "…in kindergarten, because there's so much pressure on our young kiddos. And there's fear, and there's just so many emotions that during the first month of school, I do not appreciate adding one more thing to their plate, like having to worry about doing a MAP test."

Some teachers, like Participant 6, described wanting to have other ways besides a standardized test to assess students: "a way to somehow have a student do some sort of project or maybe demonstrate orally or in a written way. Something that's maybe just different than just clicking and answering." Similarly, Participant 1 shared, "You could maybe take a few different things, take a work sample, or some of it could be orally. How they respond to a question and not just ABC."

While a couple teachers expressed desires to eliminate standardized testing, the majority just desire a balance between standardized testing and other forms of assessment. Participant 4 summed it up by saying, "I just wish there was more emphasis on the whole child and what they can do instead of just one piece of information."

Conclusion

The demographics give us a good start when looking at the results of this study. All of the teachers who participated in the interviews had been administering the NWEA MAP assessment for 3-4 years, so they were all generally coming with the same amount of experience when it came to administering the test. Addressing Research Question 1, which asked, what are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests? It became evident that teachers were ready and able to administer the NWEA MAP assessments as far as the technical side of testing. Teachers felt like they need more support during the post-test analysis period. Specifically, teachers expressed a desire to have more guidance knowing what to do with the testing data and how to use it going forward with classroom instruction. Teachers also worry about the pressure testing is placing on students, especially the youngest leaners.

Research Question 2 asked, how do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods? Throughout the testing process, teachers identified feeling supported by their colleagues and instructional coaches, as well as administration. Teachers mentioned their colleagues when discussing support most often because they are in the same boat. Instructional coaches were mentioned as providing support at times when reviewing testing data, and administrators were mentioned as providing support. However, specific examples of support were not given.

Research Question 3 asked, what meaning do teachers ascribe to standardized testing in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA? In this study, teachers expressed a desire to move toward a focus on holistic assessment by considering the work and learning taking place in the classroom throughout the year as well as possibly providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning orally or in written form to provide ways for all students to demonstrate learning, as teachers did not think clicking multiple choice answers provided an accurate picture of what all students in their class know.

Based on this specific context, these results echo some of the research conducted in prior studies. However, there are some insights into what can be done to further support teachers and ultimately students through the testing process. This will be discussed further in the section below.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This chapter will use the findings from this study to suggest implications for leadership. Limitations of the study and directions for future research will also be discussed. Five themes emerged from this study. In this section, the themes are presented in relation to the review of literature presented in Chapter 2 along with implications for leadership.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of the supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the NWEA MAP assessment. Standardized testing is common practice in school, and it is known that some teachers do feel stress associated with standardized testing (Maranto, 2016). It is also known that principal leadership plays a stronger role in teacher attrition than other factors, including the demographic makeup of the school (Kraft et al., 2020). This led to the development of three research questions to guide this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests?

2. How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods?

3. What meaning do teachers ascribe to standardized test experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA?

In a Stauffer and Mason (2013) study, when instructed to write a paragraph about what stressors they have at work, 91% of

teachers surveyed identified contextual factors, including testing, as high-stress areas. In the Stauffer and Mason study, standardized testing came up several times, including the stress it puts on teachers as well as students. Many teachers commented about feeling a lack of support from leaders and a feeling of having to keep up with trends on their own time (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). In another study, a survey of 708 teachers and 325 administrators, both groups agreed testing has a negative effect on public schools, but teachers identified more negative aspects than administrators. There are pressures on both ends, but teachers and administrators are often viewing testing from different lenses (Jones & Egley, 2006).

While many studies have been conducted surrounding the subject of standardized testing, and testing is often cited as a stressor to teachers, this study sought to examine teacher perspectives on what is supportive surrounding standardized testing.

Methodology

A qualitative, transcendental phenomenological, design was used to allow for gaining perceptions of participants regarding supportive leadership practices for standardized testing. In total, 11 elementary teachers participated in this study. The participants, who are referred to with number throughout this study for confidentiality, were interviewed independently of one another via Zoom.

A thematic analysis was used to describe the personal experiences surrounding the phenomenon of support surrounding standardized testing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following the one-on-one interviews with a sample of 11 teachers, each interview was transcribed using rev.com, and those data were coded and organized into themes by the researcher and the advisor. In addition, member checking was used prior to data analysis to ensure the correct meanings of

the participants were captured. After data analysis, five themes emerged. In Chapter 4, these five themes were discussed.

Findings

Five themes emerged as a result of this study. Those five themes were discussed in chapter 4 and will be presented briefly here.

Theme 1: Preparing for the NWEA MAP Assessment is Twofold

Teachers shared they face two aspects of test preparation when preparing students for the NWEA MAP assessment. First, there is the technology aspect. Separate from that is a preparing for the actual content of the test. This can put teachers in the position of wanting to prepare students to do well and wanting to expose students to diverse classroom experiences. While the upper elementary teachers interviewed expressed concerns over the amount of time students spend testing due to all the different tests they have to take, they did not specifically express concerns over a narrowing curriculum. Rather, the teachers interviewed expressed concerns over curriculum not aligning with the standardized tests.

Teachers interviewed discussed the tests being too long for some students to stay focused. In fact, one teacher talked about wishing the test could be broken up into 20 minute sessions so if a student lost focus they could come back and complete the remainder of the test at another time. One teacher commented, "Kids that I've taught with severe ADHD in the past, have a really hard time focusing, and so their attention goes everywhere else and then they just get frustrated and start clicking buttons." In general, teachers expressed concerns over how long the tests are and how some of the content on the test is above grade level standards.

The data from this study suggests that teachers face two aspects of test preparation when preparing students for the NWEA MAP assessment. First, there is the technology aspect. Separate from that is a preparing for the actual content of the test.

Theme 2: Analyzing the Data Post-Test

Perhaps the most shared sentiment by teachers in this study was a desire for more guidance on what to do with the data from the NWEA MAP assessment. Overwhelmingly, teachers talked about wanting more training on what to do with the data or even how to read the data. One teacher commented, "I think the MAP scores are beneficial, especially if you know how to look at them. I feel like we don't really have enough training to delve into what's there that would be helpful."

For those teachers who discussed using NWEA MAP data in the classroom, the biggest way it is used is to assist with grouping students by skills in small group instruction. One participant shared, "I look at the standards piece by piece and where the kids are at what level they're at, and what would be the next level to get them to. That's how I determine my reading intervention groups." A similar sentiment was shared by another participant who shared, "When I group them together, I look at what skills they need to be working on…I feel like when I group them by abilities, that's where the learning becomes equitable for them, because it's what they need."

Theme 3: Testing Pressure Affecting Self-Efficacy

This study suggests that teachers feel concerned about the pressure of testing effecting self-efficacy. Specifically, a concern about the self-efficacy of students as well as teachers' views on standardized testing being tied to their own self-efficacy based on experiences when they themselves were taking standardized tests.

In this study, teachers spoke of the frustration of students when taking tests. This came out in comments such as, "I've heard kids say, 'I hate MAP testing,'" and "I had one about in tears cause she's like…'I have no clue what to do.'" Another teacher stated, "I feel like my frustrations towards standardized testing and my attitude towards it is effected by the level of frustration from the kids." Certainly, there was a feeling of concern for the wellbeing of students, which could be tied to an unequal playing field.

In addition to concerns over student self-efficacy, teachers in this study shared about their past experiences with testing themselves and how these experiences have carried over into their views about testing today. Specifically, one teacher said, "I'm not stupid. I'm a very smart person, but when it came to testing, I had really bad test anxiety." Another teacher mentioned, "I personally was never one that could study or prepare for those big tests." Ultimately, these experiences shaped these teachers' self-efficacy and their feelings toward standardized testing today.

Theme 4: Feeling a Sense of Support from Colleagues

When it came to identifying who or what teachers feel supported by during NWEA MAP testing periods, teachers mentioned their colleagues (often referring to them as their team), instructional coaches, and administration. More than anyone else, teachers in this study mentioned their colleagues as their greatest source of support surrounding testing. This was expressed in comments such as, "I feel like my team of teachers, because we're all in the same boat. We all feel the pressure of our scores. I think when we get together, we try to look at it as a way to help each other with our teaching in our practices without being critical."

Theme 5: Desiring a Focus on Holistic Assessment

In this study, teachers talked about wanting a focus on more than standardized test scores. Specifically, a desire for holistic assessment was apparent. When asked if they could change anything about standardized testing participants shared, "Yes, use the data, but just that it's not weighed too heavily, and more on what they've actually completed and learned in the classroom" and, "I feel like I can tell by their daily work and what I'm seeing in teacher observation on a daily basis."

Teachers in this study shared a lot about wanting to provide opportunities for all students to share their learning because not one method works best for all students. One teacher described what they would like to see by saying, "a way to somehow have a student do some sort of project or maybe demonstrate orally or in a written way. Something that's maybe just different than just clicking and answering." This would provide opportunities for all students to show what they have learned.

Implications for Educational Leaders

Clarify curriculum and assessment alignment

A review of the literature revealed many concerns for the narrowing of curriculum due to standardized testing. A great deal of the school day is spent preparing students for tests, which are mostly reading and mathematics (Berliner, 2011). This can put teachers in the position of wanting to prepare students to do well and wanting to expose students to diverse classroom experiences. While the upper elementary teachers in this study expressed concerns over the amount of time students spend testing due to all the different tests they have to take, they did not specifically express concerns over a narrowing curriculum. Rather, the teachers in this study expressed concerns over curriculum not aligning with the standardized tests. Research has shown

another concern related to test preparation is the time it takes to get students ready to learn, especially those who are easily distracted (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Prior research has focused on the time standardized testing takes and has shown there is some concern about the impact this has on time spent and the quality of other subjects taught. It is not only science and social studies that have taken cuts. Time for music and art education as well as recess has been reduced (Levine & Levine, 2013). These time cuts have been significant in some cases. Roughly, a 47% increase in time spent on reading instruction and a 37% increase in time spent on mathematics has been seen since the implementation of standardized testing (Berliner, 2011). With these increases, time has been taken from science, social studies, art, music, physical education, and recess due to a reallocation of minutes during the day. Decreases from 28-35%, or on average an hour a week, has been taken from these areas (Berliner, 2011). With these cuts to other subject matter, a disservice is done to students, as they miss exposure to important content and opportunities for physical movement (Levine & Levine, 2013).

Teachers in this study mentioned some students have a hard time focusing, especially those who have ADHD. Prior research points out concerns about the time it takes to prepare students who are easily distracted. Thus, building leaders may want to take this into account when setting up testing schedules. If possible, students can be given a break in the middle of the test or complete one test per day instead of multiple tests at a time. Further, since teachers expressed concerns about curriculum not aligning with assessments, building leaders may want to ensure teachers are aware of and trained in the purpose of the NWEA MAP assessment. Since the NWEA MAP assessment is a computer adaptive assessment, it is not meant to directly align to a specific curriculum, but rather measure the academic level and growth of students. Understanding the purpose of the NWEA MAP assessment may help teachers not expect or be

alarmed when students are receiving questions that were not covered in the curriculum. However, if large numbers of students are not making growth, there might be a need to review the adopted curriculum.

Build capacity for data literacy and leadership in PLCs

In addition to preparing students for the test, teachers in this study discussed a feeling of being unsure of what to do with the testing data and a desire for more direction. Prior research shows most college programs don't teach data analysis skills that teachers will need as they implement testing and use standardized testing through the school improvement process (Henning, 2006). Further, knowing the intended consequences and potential unintended consequences will be important when using the test data to plan for the future or make decisions regarding instruction. Working with colleagues and exploring testing effects should be done to make sure the value of testing is being maximized to improve decision making and educational practices (Haertel, 2016).

Research has shown that the most effective professional learning communities (PLCs) are ones where teachers are given data to analyze while being led by a discussion leader who could keep the conversation flowing. It has been less effective to give teachers data on student achievement and leave them to make sense of it on their own (Kennedy, 2016). One way to do this is through study groups. Study groups are part of a larger PLC framework. These groups may be beneficial because there is some evidence there is a connection between professional community and higher math scores on standardized tests (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Study groups are a method to improve teacher professional development by combining adult learning with student needs (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). Study groups give teachers a chance to work collaboratively to target student achievement. Successful implementation of study groups cannot

be done without the building leader paving the way. Leaders serve as a scaffold for study group learning, peer coaching, and teacher mentoring. Thus, building leaders are essential in developing and continuing study groups (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

Considering how the majority of teachers in this current study discussed needing more direction as far as what to do with the testing data and prior research that points to the effectiveness of PLCs and study groups, building leaders may want to consider using the PLC model and forming study groups with teams of teachers to aide in the process of testing analysis. Since teachers also mentioned their colleagues as the biggest person of support regarding testing, study groups may be a beneficial way for teachers to support each other and work together to not only analyze testing data but assist each other in using testing data to make informed decisions and modify or enhance instruction to meet the needs of the students they serve.

Traditionally, the principal was more of a middle manager, but this is not the case anymore. Principals are responsible for developing a team to be effective leaders of learning (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Recently, building leaders have taken to fostering collaborative learning communities, study groups, and incorporating instructional rounds to aide in the development of staff. Incorporating distributed leadership and delegating professional development responsibilities related to study groups can promote a sense of community (Mullen & Hutinger, 2009). While teachers did not explicitly talk about having professional development responsibilities, the fact that teachers mentioned colleagues as the best or most useful source of support would further support the idea of building leaders incorporating distributed leadership into the area of professional development, as teachers could continue to learn from and support one another.

Jones and Egley (2006) suggest teachers and building leaders often view testing from different lenses. This could be why teachers expressed feeling the most supported by the colleagues. After all, these are the people who are in the same boat. Sharing the same experience makes it easier for teachers to view testing and all that comes with it from the same lens, thus being in the best position to support each other. Interestingly, the characteristics of transformational leadership seem to be those that teachers desire in a leader, including idealized influence, individualized concern, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Taking into consideration that teachers in this study reported their colleagues as the greatest source of support and prior research suggesting teachers prefer the characteristics of a transformational leader, there are a few ideas I would suggest.

Create a culture of self-efficacy

First, the building leader may want to work on building a supportive culture surrounding standardized testing. This could be as simple as pointing out and celebrating what is going well to ease the stress that may be felt during this time to providing continued training on analyzing the data, including understanding the purpose of the NWEA MAP assessment. It will be necessary for building leaders to be clear to teachers what they expect them to do with the data. A good way to do this is to implement a PLC (Professional Learning Community).

Principals are responsible for developing a team to be effective leaders of learning (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Recently, building leaders have taken to fostering collaborative learning communities, study groups, and incorporating instructional rounds to aide in the development of staff. Incorporating distributed leadership and delegating professional development responsibilities related to study groups can promote a sense of community (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). Recent research has supported implementing collaborative learning

communities, and the findings of this study support this approach. Specifically, implementing a

PLC model and incorporating study groups where teachers can facilitate the learning may be

beneficial in ensuring teachers' needs are met and they are ready to administer and analyze the

NWEA MAP assessment.

Further, Instructional rounds can be incorporated. Instructional rounds are done through

staff members visiting classrooms and observing teachers and students, and reflecting on

observations (Hatch et al., 2016). An individual teacher could participate in an instructional

round by observing a colleague, or a teacher could participate in an instructional round with

another teacher or instructional coach. This would allow for more dialogue to take place and

perhaps deeper reflection and two people are likely to notice more than one. I would not suggest

using instructional rounds to observe a testing session, as this could be distracting for students.

However, if teachers are responding to student needs after analyzing testing data, such as

teaching an intervention group, this may be a beneficial time to participate in an instructional

round.

Teachers in the current study shared a concern regarding student self-efficacy as well as

teacher self-efficacy. Standardized tests require every student to perform in the same way. Yet, it

is known not all students learn at the same rate or in the same way (Maki, 2009). One example of

this is working memory. Students with higher working memory will generally perform better on

standardized tests (Howard et al., 2017). This could play a part in student attitudes toward the

tests or ultimately about themselves if they take their performance personally.

Research shows teachers report a higher level of anxiety about their students'

performance on standardized assessments than they do with classroom assessments (Segool et

al., 2013). This is likely due to the fact educators are responsible for raising test scores while also

being expected to prepare students to be 21ˢᵗ-century workers and citizens (Scot et al., 2009).

Teachers recognize the importance of students performing well on standardized tests and

teachers in this study hinted at or specifically mentioned their own anxieties, such as one teacher

who shared, "I've always felt a little nervous when I'm giving the test because of how I feel like

a kid's score is not going to count because if they get kicked out if I'm not doing it right."

Since teachers in this study reported anxiety on students as well as themselves, building

leaders may want to consider putting a focus on social-emotional learning, both for students and

to benefit teachers as well. Social-emotional learning has recently started to become more of a

prevalent topic in education. Responses teachers shared in this study lead me to recommend a

focus on social-emotional health both for students and teachers. This shift would be supported by

research that suggests a reason why all levels of elementary teachers may feel exposed to testing

stress and pressure is the lack of being able to meet the social-emotional needs of students.

Social-emotional learning is important (von der Embse, 2017). Building leaders may want to

promote mental health to help students with test stress, as well as teachers. Further, building

leaders may want to work with teachers and students on the purpose of the NWEA MAP

assessment and what to expect with a computer adaptive assessment. This understanding may hel

lesson anxiety in both students and teachers.

Assess student progress holistically

As previously stated, not all students learn in the same way (Maki, 2009) and students

with higher working memory will generally perform better on standardized tests (Howard et al.,

2017). Prior research has pointed out that since standardized tests require students to use

working memory and non-verbal reasoning, it may be a disadvantage to students who struggle in

these areas, as their results could be skewed. Instead of lacking in reading and mathematics

content knowledge, it could simply be a reasoning error. While this may skew student test results, this should not interfere with making comparisons between schools or students. The problem is going to come when educators use standardized test data to plan for intervention and further instruction. Educators may see deficiencies in reading or mathematics and plan to enhance content in those areas when the interventions the student really needs are working and non-verbal reasoning skills (Howard et al., 2017). This could create a situation in which test scores measure test-taking ability rather than a student's knowledge of the subject being tested (Levine & Levine, 2013).

Further, prior research has focused on preparing students to perform a broad set of skills (Berliner, 2011) by promoting Project-Based Learning, which is hands-on and allows students to create. However, the time teachers spend implementing PBL has dropped due to test preparation. Further, teachers have had to decrease the time spent on science, social studies, physical education, art, music, and recess on average about an hour per week (Berliner, 2011). In some schools, science is hardly taught (McCluskey, 2017). With the demands of the 21st-century workforce, this is not viewed positively by all. Teachers may feel they have to teach to the test rather than to their students. This can hinder student and teacher motivation and simply have a negative effect on education (Jones & Egley, 2006; Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Taking into account that the teachers in the study shared a desire for a focus on holistic, and prior research that emphasizes not all students learn in the same way, building leaders may want to consider other forms of assessment when possible. While building leaders cannot eliminate standardized testing requirements, and that is not being suggested here, there may be some things building leaders can do to utilize other forms of assessment when it comes to making decisions. Teachers in this study talked about too much emphasis being placed on

standardized testing when looking at placing students into summer school or other programs. Something as simple as using the NWEA MAP assessment along with classroom data provided by the teacher may be an easy way to ensure the students who could benefit most are placed in summer school or other school programs.

The teachers in the current study discussed wanting more holistic forms of assessment in order to meet the diverse needs of students who do not all demonstrate mastery in the same way. These more holistic forms of assessment have been highlighted and presented in a more positive light in the literature than the traditional standardized tests.

Limitations

As with any study, this study does have some limitations. First, the desired sample size for this study was 20, with the intention of recruiting teachers from more than one school district. All of the teachers in this study work within the same school district. This could potentially limit the data able to be collected (Shenton, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of the supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the NWEA MAP assessment. However, not much information was given on what building leaders do to support teachers or what teachers want building leaders to do to support them. This could have been due to the way interview questions were worded.

Further, the teachers' relationship with their administrator is unknown. It is unknown if this relationship was positive or negative prior to this study, so it is unknown whether this was a factor in any of the answers given. Similarly, the teachers' current group of students could potentially have played a role in responses, as this is also unknown. For example, if a teacher had

a class with a large portion currently performing at a lower academic ability, he or she may have felt more stress and negative reactions toward standardized testing.

Finally, this study was conducted during a global pandemic. While standardized testing is often a hot topic in the school, it may not have been at the forefront with teachers facing health and safety concerns. In fact, a couple participants mentioned their grade level not administering the NWEA MAP assessment in the fall like normal due to the pandemic. This could have made it more difficult for some teachers to answer all the questions in depth, as this year was different from a typical year.

Suggestions for Future Research

More research needs to be done to specifically explore teacher perceptions of the supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing. I would suggest wording interview questions to directly ask teachers what they consider supportive and building leaders have done to be supportive as well as what they have done to not be supportive. These questions may make it easier for teachers to provide their perspectives on building leader practices.

The data collected through this study raise further questions about what is supportive to teachers in regard to standardized testing and how best building leaders can support teachers. Following is a suggested list of recommended research:

Future research should include building leaders. Researchers could conduct a study similar to this one and then include a focus group with building leaders to discuss the findings and hear their perspective of providing support to teachers.

Self-efficacy was a theme that developed in this study. Interestingly, teachers reflected on their own experiences with standardized testing when describing what has shaped their beliefs

about standardized testing. Researchers should look deeper into the relationship between standardized testing and teacher self-efficacy.

Conclusion

Teachers in this study shared their experiences preparing for and administering the NWEA MAP assessment in the elementary classroom. Their experiences often aligned with those shared in prior research. While standardized testing provides useful data, building leaders may want to consider classroom data when making decisions about summer school or interventions; provide continued training on the purpose of the NWEA MAP assessment and how it is computer adaptive and not meant to align to any one curriculum, as well as analyzing data and be clear what teachers are expected to do with the data; promote social-emotional health to help students and teachers with test stress; build a supportive culture by implementing PLCs and incorporating study groups and instructional rounds. Standardized testing provides nationally normed data and ultimately does more good than harm (Maranto, 2016) if the results are used to improve student outcomes, so supporting teachers regarding the standardized testing process and guiding them to use the data in meaningful ways will enable teachers to better support the students who they serve in the classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Initial District E-mail Contact

Initial E-mail Contact with District Administration

_____,

My name is Erica Neeves, and I am doctoral student at the University of South Dakota.

As part of my doctoral program, I am working on a dissertation study that examines supportive practices of building leaders prior to, during, and after standardized testing periods, from the perspective and experiences of teachers. This e-mail is to provide you with some information about my study and to ask if your K-5 teachers can be invited to participate in my study.

The purpose of my study is to explore teacher perceptions of supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) assessment. I want to investigate three questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests? (2) How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods? (3) What meaning to teachers ascribe to standardized testing experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA? My study is a qualitative study and would include a one-on-one interview with up to 20 participants, with the possibility of a follow-up interview. The individual interviews will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom.

My study has been reviewed and approved by my dissertation committee as well as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). By allowing me to conduct this study with teachers in your district, you will not only be assisting me with this study, but there will be potential benefits to your district as well. This study may provide information that could potentially help your building leaders and teachers reach common understanding and goals as they work together to help students not only become proficient test takers but learners prepared for the real world. In addition, building leaders may be able to use these findings to plan for professional development and provide supports that will be helpful to teachers as they implement standardized testing.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have further questions regarding my study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Erica Neeves

Erica.Neeves@coyotes.usd.edu

Appendix B: Initial Participant E-mail Contact

Initial E-mail Contact Protocol with Potential Participants

_____,

My name is Erica Neeves, and I am doctoral student at the University of South Dakota.

As part of my doctoral program, I am working on a dissertation study that examines supportive practices of building leaders prior to, during, and after standardized testing periods, from the perspective and experiences of teachers. This e-mail is to provide you with some information about my study and to ask if you would be willing to participate in it.

My study is a qualitative study and would include a one-on-one interview with each participant with the possibility of a follow-up interview. The purpose of my study is to explore teacher perceptions of supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the MAP assessment. I want to investigate three questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests? (2) How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods? (3) What meaning to teachers ascribe to standardized testing experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post-implementation of ESSA?

The individual interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience and take place at an off-site location to protect confidentiality. My questions are not created to be difficult. In fact, it is my hope it will be a pleasurable experience for each of us as you share your perceptions on supportive building leader practices.

If you are interested in learning more about this study and would possibly like to participate, please let me know by responding to this e-mail with your **name, years of teaching experience, and grade level you currently teach**. You may also contact me if you would prefer to not be part of this study.

Should you choose to participate, we will go over your Informed Consent document and I can answer any questions you may have about my study.

Thank you for considering being part of this study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Erica Neeves

Erica.Neeves@coyotes.usd.edu

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

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Interview Questions

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Warm up Questions

-How are you today?

-Tell me about your teaching background.

-How long have you been administering the MAP assessment?

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of teachers administering and using standardized MAP tests?

1. Please describe for me your recent experiences preparing for and administering MAP tests, and using testing data?

2. How do you feel about standardized testing? Why?

3. What experiences have shaped your attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about standardized testing?

Research Question 2: How do teachers describe the essence of feeling supported by building leaders before, during, and after standardized MAP testing periods?

4. Who or what helped you feel supported before, during, and after MAP testing periods?

5. Who or what left you feeling unsupported?

Research Question 3: What meaning do teachers ascribe to standardized test experiences in the context of the elementary classroom post implementation of ESSA?

6. How do you use MAP data to assist you in providing an equitable education for the students in your classroom?

7. If you had a magic wand and could change anything about standardized testing, what would it be and why?

8. Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D: Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Statement

Title of Project:	Supporting Teachers Through Standardized Testing: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Administrator Support
Principle Investigator:	Susan Curtin, Delzell Education Center, 414 E. Clark St., Vermillion, SD 57069
	Susan.Curtin@usd.edu
Other Researchers:	Erica Neeves. Erica.Neeves@coyotes.usd.edu

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study: You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a K-5 teacher who has experience implementing the Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP assessment). Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore teacher perceptions of supportive practices of building leaders related to standardized testing, specifically the MAP assessment. Approximately 20 people are expected to participate.

Procedures to be Followed: You will be asked to participate in a 30-45 minute individual interview. If you agree to take part in this study, you be asked to provide possible days and times you are available to meet via Zoom. During the interview that will take place via Zoom, you will be asked open-ended questions about your experiences administering the MAP assessment and your perceptions of building leader support regarding the MAP assessment. Following the interview, you will be asked to review the interview transcriptions to ensure I have captured your meaning correctly. You may be contacted for a follow up interview.

Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Benefits: It is possible administrators may benefit from hearing about your thoughts and experiences regarding supportive practices regarding standardized testing. Thus, it is possible your ideas could influence administrator practices, which could be of benefit to you in the future.

Duration: The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. Following the interview, you will be asked to review interview transcripts and emergent themes to check for accuracy.

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Statement of Confidentiality: All interview responses will be held by the researcher to keep individual responses confidential. Your name will not be used on any documents containing transcripts or the final manuscript. Rather, a number will be used. By consenting to participate, you are consenting to be recorded. The researcher will delete interview recordings after transcriptions and transcriptions will be stored in a locked box by the researcher for five years.
If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be included since
your name is in no way linked to your responses.

Right to Ask Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Erica Neeves under the supervision of Dr. Susan Curtin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Erica Neeves at erica.neeves@coyotes.usd.edu or Dr. Susan Curtin at susan.curtin@usd.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of South Dakota- Office of Human Subjects Protection at (605) 658-3743. You may also call this number with problems, complaints, or concerns about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is an informed individual who is independent of the research team.

Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research. You can stop your participation at any time. You may refuse to participate or choose to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Your Consent: Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Participation in the interview implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to participate in the research.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

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