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The impact of Louisiana's School and District Accountability System on students' performance on the state mandated criterion referenced test

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THE IMPACT OF LOUISIANA'S SCHOOL AND DISTRICT
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON
THE STATE MANDATED CRITERION REFERENCED TEST

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling

by
Linda B. Tolbert
B.A., Southern University, 1991
M.Ed., Southern University, 1994
May, 2003

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my loving father, Howard Broussard, my supportive mother, Goldie Broussard, and my devoted husband Tyke Tolbert.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I end this long journey, I reflect on the numerous people in my life that have made this dream a reality. Achieving this goal has been a challenging, frustrating, exhilarating, and humbling experience.

My dad, Howard Broussard, has been my spiritual leader and protector throughout this journey. I know that he is looking down from heaven with a smile that exudes pride and honor. He always encouraged me to do more, when I felt as if I could settle for what I already had.

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I've saved the most special person for last. My husband, Tyke, has truly been my grounding force over the last three years. He was my biggest fan and most unyielding supporter. I can never say thank you enough for his encouragement and for being my biggest cheerleader. He provided a soft place for me to fall and picked me up so that I could continue on this journey. He helped me to face reality when I could no longer do it for myself and never allowed me to think that I couldn't overcome this challenge. I share this degree with him. Thanks for continuing to soothe my soul. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at determining the impact of Louisiana's School and District Accountability System on students' performance on the state mandated criterion-referenced test (LEAP 21). The study was designed to determine the extent to which teachers in Title I schools in a large urban district in southwest Louisiana have turned to instructionally unsound practices in response to a high-stakes accountability system.

The specific objectives addressed in this study were to:

- 1) Explore if test scores have changed beyond what would be expected given the cohort design of the accountability model.
- 2) Explore if test scores have changed and determine why?
- 3) Determine where there has been improved learning and identify those practices teachers use to obtain the positive results.

For the qualitative analyses, data were collected from interviews, surveys and observations with 4th grade teachers and principals in the selected school district. Specifically, this study attempted to determine if a measurable increase in student performance on the state-mandated test in grade 4 and determine to what sources the positive change could be attributed.

The results of this study indicated that Louisiana's accountability system has impacted each Title I school in various ways. There was not only a variation in how these schools perceived accountability, but also a variation in the perceptions of teachers and principals with regard to strategies that are being used to prepare students for high stakes testing.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Accountability Movement

Assessment and accountability have played prominent roles in many education reform efforts during the past 50 years. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the minimum competency testing movement spread rapidly with 34 states instituting some sort of testing of basic skills as a graduation requirement in the span of a few years.

Overlapping the minimum competency testing movement and continuing into the late 1980s and early 1990s was the expansion of the use of standardized test results for accountability purposes (Linn, 2000).

Beginning in the 1980s, public schools began feeling pressure to provide evidence of student achievement to their constituency. With the publication of the report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled “A Nation at Risk,” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) the criticism of public education reached its peak. This report stated that the educational foundations of the nation were being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity. State governments, in response, began to implement various forms of accountability systems based predominantly on the performance of students on standardized tests (Comer, 1984).

Bernauer and Cress (1997) define accountability as the belief that teachers and schools should answer to the public for the academic achievement of students. State educational accountability laws and systems were enacted as a way of forcing educators to provide evidence that their students were making sufficient academic progress.

These laws and programs were also designed to spur improvement in student achievement. Since 1999, forty-eight states test their students, with 36 publishing annual “report cards” on individual schools (Olson, 1999). Researchers and practitioners have both praised and criticized these systems, especially concerning their impact on children of color and children from low-income homes. The question being asked is, “Do accountability systems harm the education of children of color and low-income families or do these systems drive educational improvements for these students” (Fuller & Johnson, 2001)?

Generally, there are two types of accountability: system accountability and student accountability. According to Burnette (1999), system accountability can be thought of as a way to keep people, both inside and outside of the educational system, informed about how well students are progressing in school and meeting intended results. Controversy stems from the varied assessments some states administer coupled with the question of, “Who is included in the test and how are scores of students reported?” On the other hand, the purpose of student accountability is to find out how well individual students are achieving in the curriculum or on the content standards that have been established in the state. The individual student reaps the rewards or consequences based on his or her performance.

In state accountability systems, test scores are used to compare schools and districts, establish graduation standards, and are often a component of teacher evaluations (Burnette, 1999). If a school or district performs at less than state expectations, this failure can result in sanctions, monitoring visits, withholding of funds, or even direct

intervention. Schools that perform well on accountability standards may receive monetary rewards and positive publicity.

When test scores are used in an accountability system of rewards and sanctions, it is referred to as “high stakes testing.” Madaus (1988) uses the term “high stakes accountability” to refer to the use of a test to produce pressure and behavior change by associating test results with important consequences. High stakes accountability has generated significant commentary among education professionals. Some have argued that high stakes accountability forces teachers to focus on whatever is thought to raise test scores rather than on instruction aimed at addressing students’ needs (Jones & Whitford, 1997). Others suggest that pressure to improve students’ test scores cause some teachers to neglect material that the test does not include (Smith, 1991).

Testing and Accountability

Many states and districts have supplemented traditional norm-referenced tests (NRT) with criterion-referenced tests (CRT), sometimes known as standards-based assessments. The CRTs compare students against performance standards on the content tested (Clark, 2001). The powerful “standards-based” agenda proposes to spell out in detail “what every student in this country should know and be able to do at each grade level” and therefore, what all schools and all teachers should teach at each grade level (Clinchy, 1998).

As of the 2000-2001 school year, all 50 states test students to see what they’ve learned, and 45 states publish report cards on individual schools, based largely on test scores (“Accountability,” 2002). Currently, 14 states have the legal right to take over,

close, or replace the staff in schools they have identified as failing (“Accountability,” 2002, p. 10).

Many schools and districts face a critical fork in the road: to increase the focus on “passing the test,” or to increase the focus on meaningful student learning. Some believe there has been an increased emphasis on teaching to the test, which undermines students’ motivation to learn. Wagner & Vander Ark (2001) contend that this will likely accelerate the flight of good teachers and principals from the schools that serve the neediest children.

According to Olson (2002), an analysis conducted by Hanushek and Raymond (2001) suggests that state accountability systems may boost student learning. They found that between 1992 and 2000, states with accountability systems on average experienced significantly higher growth between 4th and 8th grade on math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than did states without such systems (p. 2). In contrast, a professor of urban education at the University of Chicago focused on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for elementary students from 1994-2001. He found that as the high-stakes accountability initiatives rolled out – the learning gains flattened (Olson, 2002).

Our nation seems to be reflecting more and more on the well-known Lake Wobegon, the fictitious town where all children are above-average, which symbolizes the tendency for standardized tests to exaggerate children’s actual achievement levels (Bracey, 2000). Cuban (1991), links high stakes accountability to what he characterizes as a form of “test score pollution,” which can be described as an increase or decrease in test scores without an accompanying rise or fall in the cognitive phenomenon that the test

is designed to measure. Pollution is most likely to occur when high-stakes exams are used in an attempt to change curricula and the methods teachers use to teach. Schools often respond to pressure from districts by “sacrificing” their curricula. Simply put, the curricula are aligned completely around the test, making students’ learning experiences as narrow as the tests themselves. By doing this, students are experiencing a restrictive form of teaching that is solely based on raising test scores.

Design of Accountability Programs

Recent reform programs have placed increased emphasis on quality in education, especially on individual and collective growth. The most recent reform program, “America 2000” was instituted to change the “Nation at Risk” to the “Nation of Students” (Obiakor, 1993, p. 3). The key components of the “America 2000” reform program include (a) excessive reliance on national testing, (b) school choice for parents, and (c) instructional accountability at all levels (Obiakor, 1993).

The contemporary accountability movement places an emphasis on results. The Southern Regional Education Board (1998) identifies six essential elements in today’s accountability systems:

Content standards are rigorous; student achievement is tested; standards are used to align professional development; school and district results are reported publicly; rewards are given to schools that demonstrate improvement; and sanctions and targeted assistance are provided for those schools that do not reach growth targets.

According to Rotberg (2001), accountability measures may have weakened the academic standards they were intended to raise. Standards are public statements about what students should know and be able to do and they appear at the national, state, and local levels. Standards are usually divided into academic or content standards and

performance standards or benchmarks. State standards serve as a mechanism for districts to adapt standards further for their schools (Clark, 2001). According to Lashway (2001a), teachers generally use standards to drive curriculum and evaluate student learning. As a result, standards have become more specific and measurable.

This movement, known as “standards-based reform,” is based on the premise that by measuring and reporting student achievement in regard to agreed upon outcome standards, students would improve their performance. Marzano (1998, p.10) refers to the Malcolm Report when she asserts that a clear distinction has come about between content standards and performance-based standards. The report defines content standards as “what students should know and be able to do” as opposed to performance standards which specify “how good is good enough.”

Fuhrman (1999) offers additional features in the newer accountability systems: “The school as the unit of improvement; continuous improvement strategies as opposed to a temporary fix; and measurement that goes beyond pass-fail” (p. 8). The hope is that teachers will remain focused on student achievement because of the desire to attain monetary rewards for successful schools.

Criticisms of Testing and Accountability

Many persons have criticized the increasing reliance of accountability programs on standardized tests. Some believe that teaching to the test is the key to ensuring student success. According to Leuker (2000), schools need to downplay exploration, hands-on learning, and a flexible curriculum and instead drill students in specific, structured academic content.

Others have argued that test scores at many schools have been raised through increased attention being paid to getting students motivated and ready to do well on the state test while little attention is being paid to improving the quality of the learning process (McColskey & McMunn, 2000). The argument of these methods is whether or not schools can defend the strategies they're using in preparing students for these tests as benefiting student learning and growth over time.

An area of concern is content such as reading and math that are assessed for high-stakes accountability. These areas often receive emphasis while others are left out. Meyer (1984) argues, "In a high-stakes accountability system, teachers and administrators are likely to exploit all avenues to improve measured performance. For example, teachers may 'teach narrowly to the test.' For tests that are immune to this type of corruption, teaching to the test could induce teachers and administrators to adopt new curriculums and teaching techniques much more rapidly than they otherwise would" (p. 382).

An additional area of concern is whether teachers are likely to fail students in their current grade in order to receive a gain the following year. Educators are mindful of the fact that teachers may be encouraged to retain students if it means that their scores will receive a boost in the following school year in a tested grade such as fourth or eighth (Shepard, 1991).

Opponents of high stakes testing policies argue that such policies are based on faulty assumptions regarding human motivation. Sheldon & Biddle (1998) argue that rigid standards, narrow accountability, and tangible sanctions may reduce the motivation of teachers and students.

Research on test-preparation strategies used in terms of educational defensibility suggests that exclusively using classroom assessments that mimic state tests is not a sound educational practice (Popham, 1993). Popham suggests that if students only deal with the explicit item format used on a test, they will be far less likely to generalize what they've learned. As a result, test scores may rise, but content mastery may not. This is especially true when teaching students who are considered to be “educationally disadvantaged.” This narrowing of instruction to the material that students will be tested on is prevalent in low-income and minority classes more so than in schools that serve more affluent students (McColskey & McMunn, 2000).

Haberman (1991) argues that instructional orientation that consists of a teacher-directed instructional style is ineffective, yet teachers are held accountable for “making” students learn. In this environment, students become disengaged because these school activities are not connected to students’ out-of-school experiences or real-life situations. Learning must be congruent with students’ learning values. According to Curwin (1994), students are more competent if they reach at least one meaningful learning goal each day. Students must be actively involved in the learning process in order to be motivated to learn.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was to determine the impact of Louisiana’s School and District Accountability System on the performance of students’ on a state-mandated criterion-referenced test. Literature associated with the program has indicated that the accountability system has forced higher standards and a more rigorous curriculum for students. Studies have been conducted to determine the amount of

pressure teachers feel about student test results. However, these studies primarily have involved norm-referenced achievement tests instead of criterion-referenced tests and have not addressed the effects accountability has on the planning and delivery of the curriculum. The question, therefore, remains, “Are teachers teaching to the test?” If so, why?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of Louisiana’s school and district accountability system on the performance of public school students on the state-mandated criterion-referenced tests administered in grades 4 and 8. Specifically, this study attempted to determine if there had been a measurable increase in student performance on the state-mandated test in grade 4. Further, if there had been improvement, this study attempted to determine if the change was a function of (a) teachers teaching to the test, (b) increased motivation among students and educators, (c) accountability-inspired adoption of superior instructional practices, or (d) some other factors. The research questions in this study were as follows:

1. Has there been a change in test scores in the schools studied? Why or why not?

In addressing this question, the following analysis were conducted:

Louisiana’s school accountability model determines change in building level test results by comparing successive cohorts of students. If this analysis indicates that improvement in test scores had occurred, determine to what sources the positive change could be attributed.

Surveys, interviews, and analyses of archive data were used to establish if teachers, school administrators, students and other stakeholders perceived that there had been a positive change in student learning. Among those that reported a positive change, evidence to substantiate this conclusion was solicited and reviewed.

2. To what extent were teachers in the schools studied teaching to the test?
 - a. Surveys and interviews of teachers and administrators were used to determine the extent to which teachers match the content and delivery of classroom instruction with the state-mandated test.
 - b. Surveys and interviews of teachers and administrators were used to comprehend the degree to which the accountability program has directly or indirectly caused teachers to change the content and/or delivery of classroom instruction so that it more closely matches the requirements of the state-mandated test.
3. What strategies have teachers used to obtain a positive increase in student mastery of the material on the state-mandated test?

Surveys and interviews were used to identify techniques and strategies teachers have found to be most useful in raising the test scores of their students.

The goal of this project was to provide research findings that can be used to enlighten educators on best practices when preparing students for success on the criterion-referenced test. Additionally, this project provided insight into how accountability systems directly impacted students who are low-income and of color. It

was expected that this research would contribute to the body of literature that assists policy makers, educators, and parents across the country in best meeting the unique needs of this diverse population of students. Would students who are considered at risk achieve at higher levels of success on standardized tests as a result of better teaching or some other factor(s)?

Significance of the Study

This study provided information about how a school accountability system has directly or indirectly affected instruction in elementary classrooms. Secondly, this study contributed to the body of knowledge that currently exists about designs of accountability systems and whether they accomplish what they seek to accomplish. Moreover, this study examined teaching strategies that are currently being used to prepare low-income students for high-stakes tests.

The analysis of this study's results generated information in understanding why some teachers will feel a need to "teach to the test" to ensure students' success on the criterion-referenced test.

Phase One examined whether there had been a real change in instruction relative to teaching at-risk children. Phase Two focused on if teachers are indeed teaching to the test and if so, why. Phase Three examined what improved strategies teachers are using and why.

Changes in state mandated reform require that learning move beyond simple recall to problem-solving and application. The state curriculum and benchmarks are designed to encourage higher-level thinking and learning. Educators who are interested in the effects of accountability on the curriculum may find the results of this study

beneficial. The study may encourage teachers and principals to use current learning theories to achieve expected levels of student performance and still meet stringent accountability standards by examining which instructional practices are effective or ineffective. Consequently, students' success rates on the criterion-referenced test may increase by scrutinizing how accountability standards can be achieved relative to instructional practices. Teachers would be enabled to assume a more proactive role in

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effects of School Accountability on Student Performance

In preparing this review, I conducted a comprehensive search to find studies or previous research focused on the effects of school accountability on students' performance on a state-mandated criterion-referenced test. Additionally, I researched various factors that contribute to gains in student performance on standardized achievement tests. A search of the literature revealed a powerful theoretical basis supporting the shift in assessment methodologies from standardized, norm-referenced testing to more authentic performance-based measures. The research presented extensive documentation of the effects of standardized, short answer or multiple-choice testing on instructional strategies of teachers. Additionally, research offered a vast amount of literature on methods such as "teaching to the test" used by educators to increase students' test scores. Databases were searched for research relevant to student performance on standardized tests such as educational abstracts, the ERIC system, and dissertation abstracts. I also utilized literature in the form of papers presented at conferences such as the American Education Research Association (AERA) and Southern Review Educational Board (SREB). Most of the references I used in the review were journal articles and books. Finally, I derived the variables used in this study from this review.

Accountability has been a watchword in education for decades. The term 'accountability' is now taken to cover a wide range of philosophies and mechanisms

governing the relationship between any public institution, its governing bodies, and the whole of the society (Kogan, 1986, p. 25).

The definition of accountability is contested, broadly speaking, between those seeking to place it within narrow boundaries and those whose definitions are broad enough to entail assumptions about the consequences of endorsing or rejecting different kinds of relationships (Kogan, 1986). Rowbottom (1977) defines accountability as a particular and concentrated responsibility of the individual for performance in keeping with the expectations of his own particular role (p. 26).

Coons & Sugarman (1978) distinguish accountability from other forms of pressure on schools: “It is a public, political and even legal structure as opposed to the less defined influence that parents might exert in other ways” (p.43). These definitions are tied in two ways: they are restricted to those cases in which evaluating is followed through by processes of sanction and prescription, and they contain no assumptions about the consequences of the relationships specified (Kogan, 1986).

Current accountability systems are based on the belief that students perform better when they have a clear goal and when their performance has well-defined consequences. Lashway (“Holding Schools Accountable,” 2001) maintains that teachers’ desires to attain rewards will keep them focused on student improvement. However, he adds that this kind of extrinsic motivation may be successful in the short run but may lead to undermining the long-term goals of education. Sheldon & Biddle (1998) cite evidence, which suggests that extrinsic motivation is based on control, and suggest that intrinsic motivation is based on trust.

In recent years, many states, including Louisiana, have made attempts to improve the performance of schools and increase student achievement by holding educators accountable for students' scores on assessments. In the 1970s, to accomplish this goal, students were required to pass minimum-competency exams, which were relatively simple. In the 1980s, educators began to be held accountable for scores on standardized, norm-referenced, multiple-choice tests. Today, accountability and assessment have become the tools used by policymakers to ensure students' success.

We exist in an era in which student testing and rigorous standards seem to be the educational position of choice. School districts, principals, and teachers are being evaluated based on how their students perform on standardized tests, with little consideration being given to the numerous factors that influence student achievement. With this pressure to increase test scores, educators often find themselves focusing solely on test scores. The surest way to improve test scores is to teach students how to answer questions on the test.

There are additional challenges at the state level as well. The National Association of State Boards of Education (Olson, 1999) has stated that assessments must be in tune with rigorous state standards and address specific goals. As a result, the state has the obligation to provide additional help to students who need to meet academic goals or offer more instruction to foster student achievement. Regardless of how these issues are raised, assessment has become a high-stakes mechanism that substantially defines the curriculum which teachers will teach in order to have students perform to the best of their ability on state assessments.

Some of the reasons assessment appeals to policymakers are that tests and assessments are relatively inexpensive. When compared to increasing instructional time, reducing class size, attracting more people to teaching, hiring teacher aids, or implementing substantial professional development, assessment is cheap (Linn, 2000). Additionally, testing and assessment can be externally mandated. According to Linn (2000), it is easier to mandate testing and assessment requirements at the district and state level than it is to take actions in what happens inside classrooms.

The Impact of School Accountability on At-Risk Students in Urban Settings

The concern about results has focused attention on achievement of urban students who are considered at-risk. The majority of urban schools serve at-risk children. Of particular concern are questions of ways accountability systems are affecting the education of low-income children of all races, but especially children of color (Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000). Popham (2000) contends that a strong relationship exists between students' socioeconomic status and their standardized test scores. Jones (1997) maintains that the test is the vehicle for separating the rich from the poor in regard to student achievement. Students coming from a stimulus-rich environment tend to do better on standardized tests than those coming from a stimulus-poor environment. The attention is geared more toward outputs rather than the more traditional regulation of inputs.

The urban school is no longer merely an academic institution; it is also a social and welfare institution. These schools today have many things to accomplish under unfavorable conditions. Many urban schools have added responsibilities without the addition of essential personnel. As a result, problems increase, but the means to solve

them are not available (Crosby, 1999). According to Waxman & Huang (1997), there is a growing belief that the best way to improve urban schools is to provide them with better teachers and classroom instruction.

McNeil (2000) found a narrowing of curricula for low-income children. Darling-Hammond & Wise (1983) surmise that research indicates that the general level of teaching quality that existed prior to accountability was consistently low for the overwhelming percentage of children of color and low-income children. Typically, research has shown that these children in particular have not always received the best teaching. Historically, educators through the education system have had “deficit” expectations for low-income children and children of color. Elmore (1988) note that schools can be held accountable only for those factors they can control but controlling for student background or prior achievement institutionalizes low expectations for poor, minority, low-achieving students (pp. 93-94).

The researcher asked the question, “Are state accountability systems hurting the education of children of color and low-income children or are they increasing equity?” The answer seems too complicated to yield to generalized conclusions. We need to be careful about how we judge these systems and their equity effects.

The quality of instruction provided to students in urban schools has been described as a “pedagogy of poverty,” where teachers typically teach to the whole class at the same time and control all of the classroom discussion and decision making (Brookhart & Rusnak, 1993). Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990) considered five key indicators associated with the educationally disadvantaged: racial/ethnic identity, poverty status, family composition, mother’s education, and language background. All are

correlated with poor performance in school, although not always for agreed-upon reasons.

According to Rothman (2000), we should take notice of the fact that material on standardized tests has a disturbing characteristic. Rothman's survey indicated that disadvantaged students are less likely than their affluent peers to receive instruction in science, art, thinking skills, and other areas not included on standardized tests. As a result, tests tend to drive instruction for minorities, who tend to lag behind whites in test performance.

Instructional practices that are currently being used to teach low-income children are also being scrutinized. The question remains, "What are teachers doing to make certain that the instructional needs of all students are being met?" Many sources have offered knowledge about the effectiveness of instructional practices as they relate to elementary children and what constitutes effective instruction (Aviles, 2001).

Certain principles have been identified as being effective when instructing at-risk elementary children. They include directing instruction to meet the needs of individual children, small homogeneous grouping, constant assessment of students' progress, direct instruction from the teacher, and immediate remediation when students don't succeed (Natriello, et al., 1990).

Recent approaches suggest that effective "instruction" can take place in and out of the classroom, and that personal connections with teachers can make a difference in whether a student succeeds or fails (Legters & McDill, 1995). Specific strategies that can ensure the success of students include involving non-traditional teachers, such as mentors

and race/sex role models, adult and cross-grade peer tutoring, and integrating technology as a tool for instruction (p.11).

The researcher surmises that not all poor children are educationally disadvantaged, nor are all minority children. On average, each of these measurable characteristics is associated with low levels of educational achievement. In Texas, it is argued that many educators have settled for not being successful with low-income children, solidifying the belief that low-income children and children of color are not likely to do well academically (Scheurich, et al., 2000).

Racial/ethnic groups are probably the best-known factor associated with the educationally disadvantaged. Historically, members of minority groups typically have failed to succeed in schools at the same levels as the majority of the white group (Natriello, et al., 1990, p. 16). Hence, educators are growing even more concerned about the success or lack of success of at-risk children in an era when reform is measurement-driven.

Measurement-Driven Reform

There are numerous studies that deal with measurement-driven reform (MDR). Popham (2000) outlined the traditional notion of MDR to illustrate the relationship between instruction and assessment. He contends that teachers direct their attention to the content of test items in environments that reward results for success on mandated tests. Popham refers to MDR as the “score-boosting game, which means a set of high scores by students equals more successful instruction by educators.” He adds that this misapplies the information that can be gained from high-stakes standardized assessments.

High-stakes and mandatory testing puts a heavy burden on instructional time. There are several studies to support the conclusion that high-stakes testing shapes the curriculum, but not necessarily in straightforward ways. Darling-Hammond and Wise (1983), for example, found that teachers placed greater emphasis precisely on content around which the test was constructed. Teachers tended to teach only material pertaining to the system's goals and objectives.

Behaviorism vs. Constructivism

The traditional view of measurement-driven reform is grounded in behaviorist pedagogy. Behaviorist theory originated with the work of John B. Watson, but is today mostly associated with B.F. Skinner (Eisner, 1999). Behaviorists view knowledge as given and absolute, and base learning on behavioral changes and responses. This theory was dominant in the 1950s and '60s and formed the basis for how teachers behaved in the classroom prior to 1970. Teaching strategies from this theory rely heavily on direct instruction, with students receiving all information from the teacher and textbooks (Richardson, 1996). According to Eisner (1999), insufficient responses result in repeating the same material until it is mastered, with instruction in "higher order" skills resting on a foundation of "basic skills." In the behaviorist model, pupils are considered passive recipients of knowledge.

Garrison (1995) surmises, learning under the behaviorist learning theory tends to be very rule-oriented. A great deal of time is spent on memorizing rules and procedures, and drill and practice are dominant student activities.

Another important learning theory arose out of a negative reaction to behaviorism. Richardson contends that this theory, known as cognitive learning theory, is based on the

thought processes behind the behavior, with learning taking place through information processing. Knowledge is still viewed as given and absolute, but learning is shifted from largely memorization to being more process-oriented (Garrison, 1995).

Cognitivist learning theory deals more with global units of behavior and focuses on describing mental processes derived from the behavior. The emphasis is not on the students arriving at the solution to a problem, but more on the process by which the solution was derived (Cooper, 1993). The researcher explains, the premise of cognitive teaching strategies is that students are more likely to retain knowledge and concepts that they discover themselves rather than memorizing presented factual information.

In 1983, the trend in teaching styles shifted toward strategies that are well grounded in a learning theory known as constructivist theory. This theory views knowledge as a constant entity that must be constructed by each person, with learning built on previous constructs. According to Cooper (1993), teaching strategies based on constructivism focus on assisting the student to teach himself and allows the student to go beyond the information given. Prawat (1993) believes that in order for public education to meet changing societal demands, teachers must have the opportunity to create constructivist classrooms. The researcher surmises, constructivists emphasize situating experiences in authentic activities and that learners are task managers in those activities. Students often select and develop their own learning objectives.

In the researcher's opinion, some educators feel that high-stakes accountability will force instruction to be test-objective driven, therefore in direct contrast to the most current research and learning theory, a move from the constructivist theory back to behaviorist in terms of teaching approach.

Teaching to the Test

From teaching-to-the-test literature, it can be surmised that test scores can be inflated. Students can appear to know when they don't really know. Shepard (2000) defines teaching to the test as devoting extended time to subject areas that are being tested,

According to Rotberg (2001), as long as teachers and students are held accountable for test scores, cramming for the test is inevitable. In his opinion, many schools spend weeks and sometimes months on test-preparation activities such as daily or weekly practice tests and in-class assignments that mirror material students' will be tested on.

Moreover, high-stakes testing gives school systems incentives to try various strategies to increase test scores. The researcher gives one example that school systems may be encouraged to retain potentially low-scoring students in the grade immediately preceding the test-administration year, feeling that this practice could lead to the appearance of gains in test scores. Another example is that some students may be excluded from taking state-mandated assessments so that potentially low scores wouldn't count.

Principals may be such strong advocates of students' achieving high scores on tests that little room is left for creative and critical thinking as well as problem solving. Rather, what is on the test may make up the total curriculum (Biggs, 1995). Strategies designed primarily to familiarize students with the test may not translate into real learning gains. In a study of third graders in an urban district, researchers found that students performed much worse on tests they had not seen before than they did on their

district's tests, even though the two tests measured the same content. These results suggest that score increases can be a function of test familiarity rather than deep understanding of a particular content (McColskey & McMunn, 2000, p. 5).

McNeil's (2000) findings, as cited by McColskey & McMunn (2000), revealed the following: a) 80% of teachers reported that students spend more than 20% of their total instructional time practicing for the state tests, b) more than 28% reported that students spend more than 60% of instructional time practicing for tests, and c) more than 70% reported that students were spending more time practicing for tests than in the past (McColskey & McMunn, 2000). According to some teachers, "Test preparation sometimes becomes the instruction, with instructional materials mimicking the formats and exercises that appear on those tests" (p. 6). Childhood experts contend that the solution becomes that schools downplay exploration, hands-on learning, and a flexible curriculum and instead drill students in specific, structured academic content (Harrington-Leuker, 2000). Rather than using what is considered to be best practice, teachers spend time drilling children to prepare them for test taking. Many teachers spend more time going over multiple-choice questions and test-taking strategies, which means less time for real learning and fewer interesting things being done in school (Wagner, 1998).

Mallison (1998) contends there are studies that support the notion of teaching to the test. According to Mallison, teaching to the test has its place in classrooms. She contends that this method allows students to become familiar with the exact format of the test and gives them the security of feeling prepared. Additionally, Marzano (1998), states that a district must teach to the specific content in the performance tasks that determine

whether students have met performance standards. This translates into meaning that teachers should determine specific content to be tested and incorporate that content into the curriculum. Furthermore, “teaching to the test is absolutely necessary in order to adequately prepare students to meet rigorous standards”(Marzano, 1998, p. 3).

Popham (1993) encourages educators to look at test preparation practices in terms of professional ethics. He contends that primarily using classroom assessments that mimic state tests to drive instruction is not a sound educational practice. Test scores may rise, but content mastery may not.

Research shows long-term strategies as critical to the success of schools in light of national and state standards. High-performing schools show that improving school quality requires a collaborative effort among teachers. It requires reflecting on how they can make instruction and assessment powerful and engaging (McColskey & McMunn, 2000).

McColskey & McMunn (2000) conclude that overall, the goal is to use strategies that will result in long-term growth and learning of high quality as opposed to exclusively relying on short-term strategies geared more directly at improving test scores. School and district leaders must explicitly give teachers permission, resources, and encouragement to avoid “teaching to the test” in the very restrictive sense of the phrase (p. 13).

Accountability and Curriculum Alignment

The recent movement toward educational accountability has a clear emphasis on outcomes. States develop snapshots of student performance each year. They also use

these snapshots to draw conclusions about schools and teachers (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001).

According to Guskey, Cohen and Hyman (2000), curriculum alignment refers to the resemblance of content that is taught and tested. It offers educators a clear way of conceptualizing the teaching and testing relationship and involves matching course materials by instructional content (horizontal alignment) and knowledge level (vertical alignment).

Horizontal curriculum alignment refers to the progression of material taught from lesson planning to teaching and testing. Material that is horizontally aligned is both taught and tested, as opposed to testing a portion of the material (Aviles, 2001). Vertical curriculum alignment refers to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (i.e., knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) because the knowledge levels are discrete.

Cheng (2000) uses the terms "washback" and "backwash" to describe the influence of testing on teaching and learning. Washback is referred to as the "influence of testing on teaching and learning," which is rooted in the notion that tests should and could drive teaching and hence learning (measurement-driven reform). However, the term backwash is defined as "the unwelcome repercussions of some social action" (Cheng, 2000, p. 13).

Alderson & Wall (1993) also have referred to washback and define it as the extent to which the state-mandated test influences teachers and learners to do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test. Additionally, examinations that come at

the end of a course are seen as working in a backward direction, hence the term “washback.”

Backwash refers to the fact that testing drives teaching methods, the student’s approaches to learning and the curriculum (Biggs, 1995, p. 12). Smith (1991) found from a qualitative study of the role of external testing in elementary schools that “testing programs substantially reduce the time available for instruction, narrow curricular offerings and potentially reduce the capacities of teachers to teach content and to use methods that are or are not compatible with standardized testing formats” (p.8). Shepard (2000) adds that instruction in tested subjects such as reading and math, focused only on skills covered by the test (i.e., word recognition, language usage, spelling, punctuation, and arithmetic operations) (Shepard, 2000).

An unfortunate conclusion that can be drawn from this type of instruction is that skills are taught in isolation in a test-driven curriculum, taking away activities that could lead to a greater understanding of a skill. Students may learn to guess by eliminating wrong answers rather than by gaining a meaningful understanding of material.

Bushweller (1997, p. 21) argues that schools would improve with better curriculum alignment and that ignoring the link between what is tested and taught in the classroom can have painful consequences. Moreover, he surmises that whether it’s called curriculum alignment or teaching to the test -- is just a matter of semantics but could prove to be successful. Bushweller believes that the curriculum should be aligned with the test.

Criticisms of Standardized Assessments

Among major issues that continue to be of concern are those of test bias. The issues of test bias are the topic of debate among politicians, parents, minority groups, and testing experts. From a multicultural perspective, the test is biased if it hinders the success of a particular group of “clients.” Supovitz & Brennan (1997) conclude that standardized tests using a multiple-choice format are the predominant form of testing in America. Their argument is that a diverse society calls for diverse assessment tools that can get at student knowledge and achievement. In order to do this, the test questions must be asked in different ways.

According to (“Criterion and Standards,” 2002), a criticism of the standardized criterion-referenced test (CRT) is that a committee of experts usually sets the cut-off score, while in a classroom the teacher sets the passing score. In both cases, deciding the passing score is subjective, not objective. Some CRT’s, such as many state tests, are not based specifically on a set curriculum, but on a more general idea of what students might be taught. Therefore, the test may not match the curriculum (p. 1). Some state standards have also been criticized for being too vague, for being difficult, for undermining higher quality local curriculum, and for taking sides in political controversies. (“Criterion and Standards,” 2002) argues that if the standards are flawed, the tests that are based on them will be also.

Another concern about high-stakes testing is that of test scores having meaning only in the context of the whole child. (“Criterion and Standards,” 2002) concludes that standardized test results can be useful as one measure of a student’s knowledge but the meaning of a test score is always embedded in the larger context of the whole child.

They further state that this is especially true for students who “freeze” on tests, read slowly and can not finish the test in the allotted time, students with learning disabilities, and students who are just learning English (p. 3).

There is also evidence that the pressure and anxiety associated with high-stakes testing is unhealthy for children—especially young children—and may undermine the development of positive social relationships and attitudes toward school (“Summary of the New”, 2002). Parents, teachers, school nurses and psychologists, and child psychiatrists report that the stress of high-stakes testing is literally making children sick. For example, an elementary school nurse in Massachusetts says she dreads the weeks when children must take the lengthy tests required in their state. She adds, “My office is filled with children complaining of headaches and stomachaches every day” (p. 4).

When the attempt is made to align tests with what is taught, it will inevitably lead to a debate about the quality of standardized tests. It is argued by some teachers and parents that multiple-choice tests require “mindless regurgitation” and fail to adequately evaluate critical thinking and problem solving skills. At the same time, proponents of multiple-choice testing say that essay tests are too expensive to administer and too subjective (Bushweller, 1997).

Finally, an issue that stems from raising the stakes on testing is that of cheating. In an effort to raise student test scores and prevent sanctions in schools, the incentive to cheat becomes larger among educators (Crosby, 1999). There are instances in states where this issue has become a reality. Bushweller (1997) shares that in the state of Virginia, an elementary school teacher was reprimanded for helping students fix wrong answers while they were taking the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). In

Connecticut, an investigation revealed that answers on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) were five times as likely to be erased at one particular school in comparison to others in the same district. In Maryland, officials became suspicious when they noticed significantly large gains in students' test scores at some schools in Baltimore. It was discovered that some teachers had supplied some answers to students to use on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPSP). Finally, the state of Kentucky has been criticized for failing to investigate cheaters on the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS). There have been approximately 150 complaints of cheating on the tests (Bushweller, 1997).

There is also a concern of whom to test. Murnane & Levy (2001) surmise "whom you test is who gets taught." Schools have incentives for eliminating certain students from state mandated testing (i.e., at-risk children), realizing that these students may receive low scores. Educators may be compelled to focus additional attention on those students whose scores will count and those who are not considered at-risk.

Many educators believe America is going "test crazy" and question whether the accountability movement can make a difference in the quality of education in the U.S. (Blair & Archer, 2001). This movement has directed schools to the use of criterion-referenced tests that are closely aligned with state standards and curricula. However, the quality of various criterion-referenced tests in capturing existing state standards has yet to be assessed (Hanushek & Raymond, 2001). The National Education Association categorically opposes the use of tests as the sole criterion for promoting students to the next grade, awarding high school diplomas, and rewarding or penalizing schools (Blair & Archer, 2001).

Popham (2000) argues that many bad things are happening to students due to an unsound accountability practice rooted in the wrong type of tests. He also states that standardized achievement tests do not tell us how well students have been taught. The consequence of using the wrong tests to evaluate instructional quality will lead to scores that don't adequately reflect student achievement.

The Impact of Accountability in Texas

The Texas public school accountability system has been in place for several years. Consequently, the Texas system has proven to be a useful case for analyzing the impact of accountability systems on student achievement. The experiences in Texas over the past several years suggest that a state accountability system is neither an end-all-be-all nor a curse. Rather, it can be considered a tool to be used by local school leadership to improve student performance (Weitz, 2000).

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is the criterion-referenced test used to measure student achievement of the state academic standards and has been administered since 1991. The TAAS is administered in the areas of reading and mathematics to students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, with a writing component administered at grades 4, 8, and 10. Tracking has been done to determine the percentage of students from diverse groups who pass the statewide assessment (Johnson, Treisman, & Fuller, 2000).

Student performance has improved over the past several years in the state of Texas. The percentage of students in grades 3 through 8 and in grade 10 who have scored at the 70% level or higher has risen from 53% to 78% between 1994 and 1999. Meanwhile, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for

Texas students have also been on the rise. Between 1990 and 1997, Texas outpaced nearly every other state in gains on NAEP tests. In 1999, black students in Texas ranked first and Hispanic students in Texas ranked second on the NAEP writing assessment, when compared to their counterparts in other states (Pipho, 2000).

However, this improvement has not come about without consequences (i.e., test-tampering cases in Houston, Austin, and eight other Texas districts) (Johnson, et al., 2000). Some schools have maintained a narrow focus on test-taking skills and have not taught students the concepts the assessment was intended to measure (p. 22).

Additionally, Texas' high-stakes assessment recently survived a court battle that claimed the test harms minority students. The argument was that using the TAAS as a determining factor for high school graduation violates federal civil rights and due process laws. While the court acknowledges the harm to minority students who are refused a diploma, it rejected the idea that those circumstances were sufficient to overcome the state's interest in improving the educational system as a whole (Weitz, 2000).

Principals in Texas can lose their jobs if their school's standardized test scores don't measure up. Bushweller (1997) surmises that if skills that appear on the TAAS exam are not strongly linked to what is taught in classrooms, more than principals can pay a heavy price. Bushweller contends that students will also suffer consequences of having low test scores. Of particular concern are questions of equity in ways accountability systems affect the education of low-income children of color. According to Scheurich, et al., (2000), Texas accountability system is considered to be either a "miracle" or an "illusion" regarding its impact on low-income children.

The director of the Texas Association of School Boards and former teacher says, “If teachers are teaching to the test but they’re teaching good skills... that’s OK” (Bushweller, 1997). In the state of Texas, one such teacher has been criticized for showing educators how to help their students master parts of the TAAS in order for them to receive rewards. She has been criticized for paying little attention to developing critical thinking skills in students. Rather, she has promoted a sort of “alignment mania” which translates into teaching to the test (p. 21). As a result, other states (i.e., Louisiana), have also become concerned about the same issues that plague Texas.

Accountability in Kentucky and Maryland

In the state of Kentucky, the accountability system is ranked one of the nation’s 10 best (“Jeopardizing Our Gains”, 2002). The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was conceived in 1990 and has been a model for other states (i.e. Louisiana) to emulate. According to the Princeton Review of education assessments, Kentucky was ranked in a four-way tie for eighth place, citing it for such “sophisticated” testing methods (p.5). Kentucky is one of only two states that use portfolios, or compilations of students’ work in addition to multiple-choice exams (Orlofsky & Olson, 2001).

However, the researcher contends that Kentucky’s success has not been without some disappointing results as well. According to Orlofsky & Olson (2001), thirty years of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data reveals that overall achievement has increased gradually in reading and math. However, the gap between white and black students has been widening in the past 12 years. Kentucky’s minority students comprise 11% of the student population with 18.6% of children in poverty and 13.4% of their students have some type of disability (Jones & Whitford, 1997).

Kentucky also faces some additional challenges in making sure their ambitious agenda reaches every classroom. Reform advocates and teachers' unions fear that the state's new testing program concentrates on basic skills, slighting more advanced abilities (Hoff, 2001). Moreover, a report published honoring the anniversary of the KERA found that while the overall progress is impressive, a closer look at performance results reveals much work to be done (p. 140). Hoff (2001) sites the anniversary report as concluding that the achievement gap between white and minority students hasn't been closed, and the state's dropout rate didn't improve during the 1990s.

Furthermore, a research-and-development specialist for the Appalachian Education Laboratory, who has tracked KERA's progress since its inception, questions whether the ten years of improvement have made an impact where needed most: the classroom. The specialist suggests, "There's still sort of a cover-the-content mentality" (Hoff, 2001).

In 1997, Maryland formed the Task Force on Education Funding Equity, Accountability, and Partnerships (Portner, 2001). The group was charged with conducting a comprehensive review of programs in grades K-12 to ensure that students throughout Maryland have an equal opportunity for academic success. That group created what is known as the Maryland School Performance Assessment System.

Maryland has decided to take a step back from its reform initiatives to focus on high stakes testing. Realizing that other states were having a high percentage of students failing high stakes tests required for graduation, The Maryland state school board decided to delay using the tests as a requirement for a diploma until 2007 (Portner, 2001).

Maryland administers their state tests in 3rd, 5th, and 8th grades. There is a growing concern in the state about how the new No Child Left Behind Act will affect disadvantaged students that are already in failing schools (Ehrenfeld, 2001). One of the 3rd grade teachers in a high poverty school reacts to the new demands of the forthcoming federal legislation by saying, “The proposal to test children every year in grades 3 – 8 nationwide may become an unstoppable torrent” (p. 1). The teacher adds that she is greatly troubled with the decision to penalize troubled schools that don’t show annual gains in test scores (Ehrenfeld, 2001). She concludes, “The terrible logic involved in the decisions to pay poor schools less and less money over time only adds the final nail to the coffin of the educational system we offer our disadvantaged students (p. 2). Maryland’s minority students make up 45% of the student population with a poverty rate of 6.9%. Students with disabilities comprise 13.1% of the total student population (Orlofsky & Olson, 2001).

The Maryland School Performance Assessment System came under scrutiny in the year 2000. The Baltimore-based Abell Foundation reviewed the program and found problems with the tests, saying the scores were judged more on writing style than on content (Portner, 2001). Additionally, last fall, the Maryland school board announced it would take over or reconstitute three failing elementary schools in Baltimore. However, a state judge rejected a lawsuit filed by the Baltimore Teachers’ Union contending that such a takeover was illegal (p. 144).

Accountability in Louisiana

Despite the efforts of many conscientious educators, Louisiana’s students rank near the bottom as compared to students in other states by nearly every measure of

academic performance. These include test scores, dropout rates, college remediation rates and, ultimately, employability. According to the U. S. Census, Louisiana's poverty rate is 19.6% and ranks 42nd in teenage pregnancy. Louisiana also has a high school graduation rate of 69%. Educational attainment of persons 25 and over is 32.4% with a high school diploma, 15.9% with 9th through 12th grade (no diploma) only, and 9.3% with less than a 9th grade education. Currently, 28% of adults in the state function at the lowest level of literacy (www.quickfacts.census.gov, 2001).

Louisiana's constant struggle to improve the educational system led to the long anticipated adoption of Louisiana's School and District Accountability System. In 1997, the Louisiana Legislature created the School and District Accountability Commission comprising 26 individuals from across the state and charged them with the responsibility of recommending to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) a statewide system of accountability for public education in Louisiana (www.doe.state.la.us, 2000).

According to the Louisiana State Department of Education (LADOE) (www.doe.state.la.us, 2000), the accountability system is based on the concept of continuous growth, which means every school can improve; every school is expected to show academic growth; and every school is compared to itself. The state kicked off the new school and district accountability system in May of 1999 with an emphasis on the state-mandated Criterion-Referenced Test, also known as the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century (LEAP 21). Additional information from the LADOE's website (www.doe.state.la.us, 2000) reveals that Louisiana's new testing program for students has two major components. First, the LEAP 21 test measures how

well a student has mastered the new state content standards. Once fully implemented, LEAP 21 will be given at grades 4, 8, 10, and 11. Second, The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) comprises the state's norm-referenced testing (NRT) program. These tests compare the performance of Louisiana's students to the performance of students nationally. The ITBS is given at grades 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 (www.doe.state.la.us, 2000).

Louisiana garnered high praise from a top federal education official for being one of a few states to be found in "full compliance" with federal Title I laws. In a November 8, 2000 letter to State Superintendent of Education in Louisiana Cecil Picard, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Michael Cohen said, "Congratulations to Louisiana for impressive efforts in the state that clearly demonstrate a commitment to making sure that all students achieve to challenging standards" ("Students Show Improvements," 2002). Myers refers to Education Week ("Nine of Every Ten," 2001) magazine who also identified Louisiana's accountability system as one of the most comprehensive in the nation. Other publications, including the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (2000), have also praised Louisiana for developing a system to raise academic standards for all students.

Louisiana Superintendent Picard echoed comments made by other publications by saying, "Our reforms are top-notch. Our schools are improving and our students are performing better." ("Nine of Every Ten," 2001). State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) President Glenny Lee Buquet said, "We, in Louisiana, have worked very hard to improve schools and our students' academic levels. To be rated in the highest tier of Title I approval is a milestone, and I am proud of all who worked so hard to achieve this distinction." (p. 1)

Louisiana was among a handful of states recognized nationally for making the greatest improvements in math and reading. Since the reforms began in 1998, the state has seen unprecedented gains in student achievement, with higher state and national test scores, more 3rd graders reading on grade level. Once again, Superintendent Picard praised principals, teachers, and students for continuing to progress.

According to Myers (“Louisiana’s School Reforms,” 2002), in the 2002 school year, higher percentages of first-time 4th graders in the participating school district in southwest Louisiana passed English Language Arts than ever before (87% in 2002, compared to 84% in 2001 and 79% in 1999 in English Language Arts.) One percent more first-time 4th graders failed Math this year, but the passage rate is still significantly up from 1999 (77% passed in 2002, compared to 78% in 2001 and 65% in 1999 in Math). Moreover, higher percentages of 4th grade repeaters passed English Language Arts – 78% in 2002 compared to 71% in 2001. In Math, higher percentages of 4th grade repeaters passed – 62% in 2002 compared to 61% in 2001 (p.4).

Although 4th graders had an increase in test scores, average student performance in high schools in the state got worse in the 2002 school year. Lussier (Six EBR schools, 2002) reports scores for high schools decreased from 75.9 in 2001 to 75.7 in 2002. Superintendent Picard expressed concern over these distressing results. The drop in scores means average high school scores are unlikely to reach their state growth target next year. Meanwhile, the school district selected in the study has six schools on a “watch list” by the state. This means if they don’t improve enough by fall 2003, they will land in Corrective Action level 2. Schools in that category have to give their students an opportunity to go elsewhere. If that’s not an option, the schools must submit a strict

improvement plan to the state (“Six Schools,” 2002). This is the fourth year Louisiana has handed out scores for schools throughout the state and the second year high schools have received scores. The new statewide average school performance score is 82.1, up from 79.9. Almost two-thirds of the schools the district studied fall below that mark (p. 2).

With the new LEAP 21, some changes came about. These tests as comparable to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests are challenging. Students no longer receive a simple “pass/fail,” but receive one of five achievement levels:

- Advanced: Superior Performance
- Proficient: Competency over challenging subject matter
- Basic: Mastery of only fundamental knowledge and skills
- Approaching Basic: Has only partially demonstrated fundamental knowledge and skills
- Unsatisfactory: Does not demonstrate fundamental knowledge and skills

A School Performance Score (SPS) is calculated for each school, based upon that school’s performance on four indicators. These School Performance Scores will range from 0 to beyond 100. A score of 100 indicates that a school has reached the 10-Year Goal; a score of 150 indicates the school has reached the 20-year Goal. Data for these four indicators (CRT, NRT, Attendance, and Dropout) is converted using fairly simple formulas to form a single School Performance Score.

Based on the School Performance Score, schools in Louisiana will receive a Growth Label. A school’s Growth Label falls into one of five categories:

- Exemplary Academic Growth: A school exceeds its Growth Target by 5 or more points
- Recognized Academic Growth: A school meets or exceeds Growth Target by fewer than 5 points
- Minimal Academic Growth: A school improves, but does not meet Growth Target
- No Growth: A school shows a change in School Performance Score of 0 to – 5.0 points
- School in Decline: A school has a declining SPS of more than 5.0 points

Additionally, schools in Louisiana receive a Performance Label each year based on their School Performance Score. The Performance Labels are as follows:

- School of Academic Excellence
- School of Academic Distinction
- School of Academic Achievement
- Academically Above the State Average
- Academically Below the State Average
- Academically Unacceptable School

Myers (“State Kicks Off,” 1999) reports in the first year of accountability, results of the LEAP 21 tests given to 4th graders in the spring of 1999 revealed that students fared better than state officials originally thought. 55% of the 4th graders scored Basic or higher in English language arts; 24% scored Approaching Basic; and 21% scored Unsatisfactory (Myers, 1999). The tests were not considered high-stakes during this first year. State officials expressed pride with the results of the first year’s accountability scores.

Myers (“Nine of Every Ten,” 2001) reports after the first scores were released, Superintendent Picard said, “We believe with accountability we can make a difference. Attendance rates will increase and dropout rates will decrease.” Picard also added that poverty definitely stands out as a major factor impacting school performance in Louisiana. “We can’t use poverty as an excuse, but we can’t ignore it either. We must come up with more innovative strategies to teach our poor children and provide more resources to schools with large numbers of high poverty children” (p. 3).

If a school fails to meet its mandated School Performance Score in a two-year cycle, the school will enter “Corrective Actions.” A school enters Corrective Actions if it has a School Performance Score of 30 or less or if it fails to reach its Growth Target and has a School Performance Score of less than 100. There are three levels of Corrective Actions. If after two years a school fails to show adequate growth, it moves to the next level of Corrective Actions. Corrective Actions are intended to provide schools with additional tools and resources to help them improve student achievement. The intensity of the Corrective Actions increases if a school fails to show adequate improvement (www.doe.state.la.us, 2001). According to the researcher, schools in Corrective Actions are provided intensive assistance by a state-assigned “Distinguished Educator (DE).” One DE is assigned to each school in Corrective Actions. The DE’s responsibility is to work closely with the school principal and with teachers in tested grades to provide targeted assistance with developing strategies that will raise student achievement. Additionally, a District Assistance Team (DAT) is assigned to a school district. The DAT is charged with assisting the school with reviewing and re-writing School

Improvement Plans and detailing how the school plans to move forward with getting out of Corrective Actions.

In the 2000 – 2001 school year, scores revealed that 93% of Kindergarten through eighth grade schools improved and nearly 70% met or exceeded their two-year Growth Targets (“Nine of Every Ten,” 2001). This was the first year the tests become high stakes for schools. The state’s K-8 schools grew from 69.4 in 1999 to 81.3 for 2001. Students’ higher scores on the CRT and NRT accounted for 9.7 points of the 11.9-point gain, while improvements in attendance and dropout rates prompted the remainder of the gain. In 1999, there were 57 schools that scored below 30 and thus getting a label of Academically Unacceptable. In the 2001 school year, there were 23 (Myers, 2001). Superintendent Picard expressed pleasure with the improvement of most schools.

According to Myers (“Students Show Improvements,” 2002), a new report ranks Louisiana 4th among the 50 states for its plan to strengthen standards and hold schools accountable for student achievement. Education Week’s Quality Counts (2001) report describes the accountability system among the top ten states as having the highest overall grades. Other top ten states were: Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. Louisiana received a new grade of A- (up from a B in 2001) on their accountability system. Their system trailed Maryland, New York, and Kentucky.

According to Lussier, (“Poor, Black, Disabled,” 2002) students having the most trouble in school in Louisiana are usually black or poor or suffer from some sort of disability. Overall, black students in Louisiana in 2001-2002 scored 55.7, while white students scored 98. Asian students scored 101.4, Hispanic students scored 79.8 and

American Indian students scored 74.4. Students living in poverty scored 64.9 compared with 95.9 for students who are not living in poverty. With the new “No Child Left Behind” legislation, all states have to rate how their schools are performing based largely on test scores. Additionally, they have to judge schools based on the annual progress of their subgroups (“Poor, Black, Disabled,” 2002).

A second subgroup being monitored closely is that of students who suffer from some sort of disability. Students with disabilities scored the lowest of all at 42.2 compared to regular education students who scored 82.6 in the 2001-2002 school year (“Poor, Black, Disabled,” 2002). In Louisiana, special education students’ scores are counted just as those of regular education students. According to the researcher, all special education students that have a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP) must take the required Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) and/or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Moreover, test scores of the special education subgroup carry the same weight as non-special education students. Statewide, only three schools with special education students reached a score of at least 100.

With the new federal accountability law, Louisiana will be forced to change the mandated achievement level for all students by the 2003-2004 school year. Currently, fourth and eighth grade students much achieve at the “approaching basic” level to move to the next grade. Beginning in 2003-2004, students will be required to reach the “basic” level to pass (Brumble, 2002).

It is evident why Louisiana may experience some of the same issues and challenges that other accountability states face. When educators are placed in a position to either produce high test scores or lose their jobs, it is not surprising that educators

question instructional practices that are being used in classrooms. The question remains, “Are sound practices being used to lead to success in student achievement?” or “Is teaching to the test the impetus contributing to higher scores on state mandated tests?”

No Child Left Behind

The “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001, signed into law by President George Bush on January 8, 2002, is the newly revised version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA, last reauthorized in 1994, encompasses Title I, the federal government flagship aid program for disadvantaged students (Tomlinson, 2002). At the center of the No Child Left Behind Act are various measures designed to drive broad gains in student achievement and to hold states more accountable for student progress. The measures included in the No Child Left Behind Act are as follows: 1) Annual testing, 2) Academic progress, 3) Report Cards, 4) Teacher Qualifications, 5) Reading First, and Funding Changes (p. 2).

According to Education Week (2002), by 2005-2006, states must begin testing students in grades 3-8 annually in reading and mathematics. Additionally, states must participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing program with a sample of 4th and 8th graders in reading and math. Participation in the NAEP program every year is to provide a point of comparison for state test results. Schools and districts that do not meet these requirements will be subject to corrective action and restructuring aimed at getting them back on track (Hickok, 2002).

Under the area of academic progress, states must bring all students up to the level of proficient by the 2013-2014 school year. Schools must also meet adequate yearly progress toward this goal for both their student populations as a whole and for certain

demographic subgroups. Schools that fail to meet the target two years in a row must offer its students a choice of other public schools to attend (Hickok, 2002). Given large differences in test performance by race, states using accountability systems that require a minimum proficiency rate for all schools and students, face a trade-off between setting a low standard for proficiency and accepting high failure rates for schools containing students from disadvantaged subgroups (Tomlinson, 2002).

With the new No Child Left Behind Act, the intention is to improve education for “disadvantaged” children (“Summary of the New,” 2002). States are also required to have a single statewide accountability system to ensure districts and schools make “adequate yearly progress (AYP).” Within each school and district, defined groups such as low-income, limited English proficient, racial/ethnic minority, and special needs students – must make AYP (“Summary of the New,” 2002). For a school to make AYP, 95% of the students in each subgroup must be assessed (p. 2).

States must also furnish annual report cards starting with the 2002-2003 school year, showing student-achievement data broken down by subgroup and information on the performance of school districts. Districts must also provide report cards showing school-by-school data.

Teacher qualifications are another aspect of the new legislation. By the end of the 2005-2006 school year, every teacher working in a public school must be certified and demonstrably proficient in his or her subject matter. Additionally, any teacher hired with Title I funds must have completed at least two years of college, obtained an associate’s degree or higher, or met an established quality standard (Hickok, 2002).

The act also created a new competitive grant program called Reading First, to help states and districts set up scientific, researched-based reading programs for children in grades K-3 with priority given to high poverty areas. The law also includes a smaller reading program geared toward 3 to 5 year olds in disadvantaged areas. States have already begun to apply for the Reading First program, which shows their commitment to improving reading achievement for all students (Hickok, 2002).

The No Child Left Behind act is expected to better target resources to school districts with high concentrations of disadvantaged, poor children. Districts will also have greater flexibility in how their federal monies are spent, in exchange for improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps (Hickok, 2002). Hickok (2002) contends that the No Child Left Behind Act has been the source of much controversy in the education community. Some of the criticism includes the high-profile testing requirements, which some educators feel are overly broad. The supporters of the act surmise that the outcomes-based approach is just what is needed to spur improvement in schools.

The researcher concludes that with the new No Child Left Behind Act, schools and districts are in a position to prepare for new high-stakes testing mandates. There is much controversy about whether the high-stakes nature of the testing requirements is a sound educational practice that will help all students excel academically. The researcher poses the question, "Will the modern accountability movement and the new No Child Left Behind Act produce the desired results of federal education agencies?"

Summary

Educational accountability has increasingly held the interest of researchers and educators across the country. The literature provided insight about accountability systems in many states and the impact of state-mandated criterion-referenced tests on schools. However, the literature did not provide sufficient evidence specifically examining the impact of accountability on students' outcomes on the state-mandated criterion-referenced tests administered in grade 4. Specifically, what factors contributed to the success of students on state assessments? I sought to examine if teaching to the test or other factors contributed to students' receiving higher test scores on state assessments. In an effort to scrutinize whether or not teachers are teaching to the test as a result of Louisiana's new accountability system, a research study was conducted in order to answer the questions: (1) Are teachers teaching to the test? (2) If they are teaching to the test, why? (3) What improved strategies are teachers using to ensure student success?

A research study was developed, conducted, and conclusions were drawn. This study was intended to determine the impact of Louisiana's School and District Accountability System on student performance on the state-mandated criterion-referenced test. The following chapter will describe sampling procedures used for collecting data and statistical procedures used for analyzing data.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the United States today, it is believed that accountability programs will promote a positive change in student learning. As a result, high-stakes accountability has become a growing phenomenon in education. In most accountability programs, student learning is defined in terms of performance on standardized tests. There is evidence to support the fact that students' scores change as a result of accountability (Abelmann and Elmore, 1999). However, there is no evidence that the change is due to increases in student learning (Davies and Williams, 1997). A common criticism of accountability programs is that they lead to teaching to the test and other instructionally unsound, but pragmatically sensible, practices, especially in low-income settings.

This study was designed to determine the extent to which teachers in Title I schools in a large urban district in the south have turned to instructionally unsound practices (e.g., teaching to the test) or superior instructional practices in response to a high-stakes school accountability program. The specific questions addressed in this study were as follows: (1) have test scores changed beyond what would be expected given the cohort design of the accountability model; (2) if test scores have changed, determine why; (3) in those cases where there has been improved learning, identify those practices teachers used to obtain the positive results.

To achieve this goal, qualitative methods were used to study the impact accountability has on students' performance on the state mandated criterion referenced test in urban schools for a sample of Title I urban elementary schools enrolled in the

school district selected. This chapter includes a description of the research design, instruments and measures, and the data collection and analyses procedures used to address the research questions associated with the study.

Qualitative Methods: Research Design

The qualitative research component of this proposed study generated information through the use of open-ended questions included in the questionnaire packet to be distributed to the sample. According to Patton (1990) the intent is to acquire a wealth of content-rich data. The participants were asked to reflect on the qualitative questions asked by the researcher.

The impact of instructional practices in urban elementary schools was researched with questions directly relating to how teachers and administrators use test scores. The literature suggested that teachers of 4th grade students in urban schools are encouraged to teach to the test (Bushweller, 1997). As a result, items in the questionnaire sought to uncover strategies teachers used to teach students to be prepared for the LEAP 21.

This study utilized three phases to answer the question: How has Louisiana's new school and district accountability system affected student performance on the state mandated criterion referenced test? The first phase looked at whether there had been improvement in test scores in the schools studied. If analyses indicated that improvement in test scores had occurred, the sources of the positive change were determined. Among those that reported a positive change, evidence to substantiate this conclusion were solicited and reviewed.

The second phase of this study examined teacher's alignment of instruction with specific test items. Teachers were interviewed and surveyed at each selected school. The

purpose of the interviews and surveys was to determine the method of teaching strategies that are currently being used to prepare students for state mandated high stakes tests. Additionally, teachers were asked about their perceptions and attitudes toward the new accountability system. Interviews and survey results were analyzed. The information was then broken down into the smallest units of information to seek themes and patterns of responses.

The third phase of this study used qualitative methods to examine the extent to which teachers in the schools studied were teaching to the test. School observations, teacher interviews, as well as data collected in the previous two phases of this study were used to analyze the data in the organization of patterns and categories.

Federal regulations require that all research with human subjects be reviewed and approved by an authorized university-level committee prior to the initiation of the study. At Louisiana State University (LSU), the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the authorized committee. An approval application with the associated information packet was submitted and approved by the LSU committee before proceeding with the study.

This study examined the impact of Louisiana's school and district accountability system on students' performance on the state mandated criterion-referenced test. Specifically, this study was designed to explore linkages between students' success on high-stakes testing and teachers' teaching to the test.

The modified questionnaire of choice had been successfully developed and piloted by Susan B. Nolen, Thomas Haladyna, and Nancy Haas (1992) to obtain information from teachers in the participating school district concerning instructional strategies used in 4th grade classrooms in Title I urban schools. Modifications were

established by implementation of an informal pilot survey of teachers. The focus included teaching strategies (i.e., teaching to the test), pace of classroom instruction, and student achievement levels.

About the Researcher

The role of the researcher in any study is of vital importance. As a result, the researcher's qualifications and background should be shared. According to Patton (1990), the validity of research rests on the skill, competence and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork. The researcher is obligated to share his/her experiences and reasons for conducting the study.

I am an African American female that has been privileged to have a variety of experiences in the field of education both on a personal and professional level. After realizing that I wanted to impact children, I decided to obtain a degree in Elementary Education. Having come from a family of educators, this was an easy decision for me to make. After graduating from college in 1991, I began teaching 5th grade in an inner city school that served low-income, at risk children in southwest Louisiana. This experience was both eye-opening and daunting. Admittedly, I didn't feel adequately prepared to teach such a group of students. However, after a lot of hard work and a wonderful mentor, I succeeded in teaching and motivating my students. That school year proved to be valuable for so many reasons. I realized that these students were just like those I read about in so many of my undergraduate classes. They were intelligent, gentle, humorous, confused, unmotivated and hard to control all at the same time. Finding "what worked" became my sole focus that school year. After becoming mother, nurse, friend and confidant, I slowly became a good teacher. The school year was long, hard and the most

rewarding experience I ever had in my entire life. Unlike a lot of the books I'd read, these students could learn and succeed. They were hungry for knowledge and needed nurturing. That was the year my life changed forever. I recognized that the key was keeping them interested and confident. Don't get me wrong – this was almost impossible some days. However, in the end, we all felt better about ourselves in one way or another. I had to be creative and innovative and I could never rest for a minute. “At risk kids” could succeed!

I quickly realized that I wanted and needed additional training. I decided to pursue a Master's degree in Administration and Supervision while continuing to teach. After leaving the inner city school, I taught at a school that served a middle to upper class community of children. I couldn't believe how completely different this experience was each day. The students were motivated. The parents were involved. The test scores were always great. I had everything a teacher could ever want and need.

After obtaining my Master's in 1994, I began teaching at a semi-private school in East Baton Rouge Parish. I also decided to further my education and gain additional knowledge by working on a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. After teaching a total of seven years and completing all of my coursework toward my doctorate, I felt stagnate. I wanted more. The teaching experience and the students in the inner city school never left me. I continued to correspond with many of the students that I taught that year. Somehow, I never felt that same sense of accomplishment and satisfaction after I left that school.

After talking to my mentor and family, I made the decision to seek an administrative position in education. I believed that if I could be one of the people to

make decisions that affect education, then I could really impact children and administrators. I wanted to work at the Louisiana Department of Education. Surely, I could make a difference in children's lives if I was making some decisions that affect schools. I interviewed for a position at the Department of Education in the Division of Schools Standards, Accountability and Assistance. I was excited to learn that I had been offered a position as an Education Program Coordinator and I would begin in January 1998.

What an exciting time to be in this position! I was able to witness the birth of a new and exciting movement in Louisiana called, "The Louisiana School and District Accountability System." It was going into effect the following year and it meant big changes in the state. The Accountability Commission was made up of business leaders, superintendents, principals, board members and community leaders. This group of individuals was responsible for creating an accountability system that would serve to improve the quality of education for all students by holding teachers, principals and districts accountable for students' success based on standardized test scores. The carrot was going to be monetary rewards for schools and districts with the punishment being firing of principals and teachers and the loss of funding for schools.

After the formal adoption of the new accountability system, I was responsible for traveling around the state providing workshops and seminars to school boards, district administrators, principals and teachers on aspects of the accountability system. I was surprised to learn that many of the audiences I presented to were not excited at all about this new system. Many of them expressed frustration, fear and outright anger toward the Department of Education and the Accountability Commission for coming up with such a

system. The perception was that it was designed to punish the very people it was intended to help – the children. The teachers and principals felt betrayed and confused. In many instances, I took the frustration personally because I represented the entity they despised at that point. “Don’t shoot the messenger” quickly became one of my opening statements as I continued to present to other audiences. Their comments consisted of, “This will go away just like everything else. We’ll find a way around it. There’s a loophole somewhere. This is designed to punish teachers. We can’t control everything. What about the parents being responsible? The Department of Education is clueless.” Rarely did I leave a presentation with happy, supportive people. Instead, there was usually a great deal of bitterness in the air.

As a teacher, I could totally identify with my audiences. It was easy to see that the very children that needed the most attention were going to be the ones at risk of being punished. The students in low-income areas were generally the students that didn’t do well on standardized tests and everyone knew they should be concerned. All I could think about were those students I taught just a few years prior and how they would be affected by this new system. Was it going to be the success the “powers-that-be” said it was going to be, or was it going to be the beginning of a chaotic, finger-pointing revolution against schools that serve low-income children?

After serving in that position for over a year, I decided to resign to begin my residency year in the Ph.D. program. I had acquired a great deal of knowledge while working at the Department of Education and I knew that I could utilize that knowledge in my future endeavors. I had strong feelings about accountability and how it would affect schools. I agreed with the concept of accountability, but my main concern was about

those inner city schools that served at risk children. How would these students be affected? I knew firsthand how difficult it was to motivate and teach these students. I also knew that some of my brightest students were not good test takers even when they knew the material. How would this all work out? Who would benefit? Who would suffer? What about students in non-tested grades? Would accountability accomplish what it set out to accomplish?

After completing my written and oral general examinations, I had no trouble deciding on a topic for my dissertation. It was obvious – Louisiana’s new School and District Accountability System and its effect on student performance. My emphasis would be on students in Title I schools in urban settings. Those same students I had taken with me everywhere I taught. How would they be affected? How would their teachers and principals be affected? I wanted to talk directly to the teachers and principals in those schools? Besides, they were the ones living with the wrath of accountability everyday. I wanted to know what made some Title I schools successful and what hindered others who served the same population of students. So, my journey began.

Qualitative Instrumentation

Quality and Credibility

The credibility of the researcher is established using standards such as the data collection instrument and the data analysis facilitator. The first standard ensuring credibility is the comprehensive disclosure of the researcher, with regard to experience and training. The next measure used to increase credibility is triangulation. According to Patton (1990), the triangulation process can be used so the researcher can guard against

allegations that the findings in the study are derived using a single method, source or evaluator's opinion. Teachers and principals who participated in the study were allowed to verify their statements by reviewing the interview transcriptions for accuracy. Additionally, member checking was used to add strength to the study. Three Title I principals in the selected school district were solicited to read transcriptions and data analyses to review the researchers findings for accuracy and completeness.

According to Patton (1990), for the qualitative phase of the study to ensure the highest degree of reliability and validity, three elements must exist. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1981) explained that the researcher must be concerned with validity and reliability of instrumentation, the appropriateness of data analysis techniques, the degree of relationship between conclusions drawn and the data that is utilized in the research. First, the techniques and methods for gathering high quality data were carefully analyzed. Second, the credibility of the researcher was increased by sound training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of ones self. Third, the qualitative researcher maintained the philosophical belief in the phenomenological paradigm that is a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, and holistic thinking.

Trustworthiness

Quantitative and qualitative measures of credibility are examined in various ways. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research presents four alternative constructs: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These constructs demonstrate the truth-value of the qualitative research. Quantitative studies

are measured through internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) surmise that it is not up to the researcher to determine transferability of findings. Instead, succeeding researchers must judge how to appropriately apply findings. However, it is up to the original researcher to accurately provide thorough conclusions for future interpretation. Researchers must depend on thick descriptions of the original context, which include the organizational culture and setting. Transferability of this study was strengthened by the arrangement of long, verbatim interview quotes and survey results, providing thick descriptions while continuing to secure the anonymity of participants (Patton, 1990.)

Dependability

This study provided an organized assemblage of interview tapes, field notes, surveys, transcriptions, procedural notes and peer review findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) encourage using an auditing process to ensure dependability. The researcher organized relevant materials that assist the researcher with carrying out sound procedures. The researcher, as the investigator, should keep in mind that changes occur over time in reporting results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

The researcher has carefully implemented clear strategies to increase confirmability. One such practice is to describe the experiences and perspectives of the researcher. The researcher was fair and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The

researcher also implored a process of data analysis that sought to reinforce the neutrality and confirmability of the reported results.

Selection of Participants

For the qualitative method, 4 of the 45 Title I schools in the selected school district were chosen. This made it possible to include only urban schools. Only 4th grade classes in these schools were used in the study. In order to provide a content-rich comparison of Title I schools in the selected district, the researcher chose two schools that were in Level I Corrective Actions and two schools that successfully reached their school performance scores.

The target population for the study was 4th grade students from a large, urban school district in southwest Louisiana. These schools provided a diverse student population with the major ethnic and socioeconomic groups represented. In addition, all Title I elementary schools in this school district are in urban areas.

The subjects of interest to this study are 4th grade teachers in Title I elementary schools in urban settings. The target population shall be limited to elementary schools within a large, urban school district in southwest Louisiana. The targeted grades are those who take the LEAP 21 test. Those grades are 4th, 8th, and 10th.

The researcher contacted each principal in the four selected Title I schools to set up a meeting to discuss collecting data for the study. The researcher requested to speak to and interview at least two 4th grade teachers in each school. The researcher felt that by interviewing at least a total of eight teachers would be more than sufficient to generalize findings. The principals in two of the selected schools did agree to allow the researcher to interview both 4th grade teachers in their schools. However, the two remaining

schools' principal felt the researcher would gain more accurate data by speaking to one 4th grade teacher in each school site. The principals' decision to allow only one 4th grade teacher to be interviewed was due to both schools having only one fully certified teacher in 4th grade. The two remaining 4th grade teachers in each school were non-certified and one of those teachers had only been at the school for a period of two months prior to the requested interview. The researcher agreed to interview the one teacher in the two remaining schools per the principals' request. This allowed the researcher to interview a total of six fourth grade teachers.

Of the public elementary schools throughout this school district, 45 are Title I. Of that number, there are 2 Title I charter schools in urban settings. The responses of teachers in these settings were used to test my hypotheses. The assumption was that findings could be generalized to the total population.

The school district in southwest Louisiana was selected for this study because it contains a heterogeneous cluster of schools that are most representative of the state as a whole. Of the parish's public elementary schools, approximately four were selected for the distribution of questionnaires. According to Patton (1990), qualitative inquiry focuses on relatively small samples, selected purposefully. In order to select information-rich cases that will bring insight to the questions of the study, purposeful sampling was most appropriate.

This is a large school system in southern Louisiana serving approximately 54,000 students. This school system is made up of approximately 70% Black students and 30% white students. This school system has 45 Title I elementary schools, all of which are considered to be urban. This school system provides the researcher with a largely

accessible and convenient population. This accessible population will be generalizable to the target population of urban elementary students.

Each school in Louisiana was classified in 1 of 5 categories, based on their Growth Label from 2000 to 2001. Those growth labels are as follows: 1) Exemplary Academic Growth, 2) Recognized Academic Growth, 3) Minimal Academic Growth, 4) No Growth, and 5) School in Decline.

Design of the Study

The research design of the study was conducted through the use of standardized, open-ended interviews. Additionally, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. Using this questionnaire permitted the participants to read and respond to pre-determined written questions in his or her own words while reflecting upon his/her ideas and perceptions about a defined topic (Gall, Borg, Gall, 1996). According to Patton (1990), the questionnaire format will allow several participants to be researched at one time and make data collection systematic for each respondent. Patton also contends, “the purpose of the research is to contribute knowledge that will help people understand the nature of a problem so that human beings can more effectively control their environment.”

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data collection was conducted through the use of informal observations, open-ended interviews and completed surveys. Informal observations allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the culture in each 4th grade classroom. Additionally, the researcher was able to experience first-hand the types of instructional practices being used to instruct students as they prepare for the CRT and to

what extent teachers were teaching to the test. Open-ended interviews allowed the participants to respond to pre-determined written questions in his own words while reflecting upon his perceptions about a defined topic (Gall, Borg, Gall, 1996). The open-ended format also ensured that participants respond to the same set of questions, thus increasing comparability of responses. This reduced the researcher's personal views and biases sometimes associated with qualitative interviewing.

The qualitative component of the questionnaire sought to solicit responses that provide a greater understanding of the instructional strategies being used to prepare at-risk students for high-stakes testing and the impact of Louisiana's accountability system on these urban schools.

Data Sources and Research Questions

1. Have test scores changed in the participating schools studied? Why or why not?

The following analyses were conducted:

- a. Surveys, interviews, and analyses of archive data were used to establish if teachers, school administrators, students and other stakeholders perceived that there had been a positive change in student learning. Among those that reported a positive change, evidence to substantiate this conclusion was solicited and reviewed.
- b. School Accountability Reports and School Report Cards for each selected Title I school were downloaded from the Louisiana Department of Education's (LDOE) website to determine if a change in scores occurred.

- c. Additionally, certain archival data were also downloaded from the LDOE's website to provide insight into increases in accountability scores over time in the schools selected.
2. To what extent are teachers in the participating schools studied teaching to the test?
 - a. Observations, surveys and interviews of teachers and administrators were used to comprehend the degree to which the accountability program has directly or indirectly caused teachers to change the content and/or delivery of classroom instruction so that it more closely matches the requirements of the state-mandated test.
 - b. Observations, surveys and interviews of teachers and administrators were used to determine the extent to which teachers match the content and delivery of classroom instruction with the state-mandated test.
3. What strategies have teachers used to obtain a positive increase in student mastery of the material on the state-mandated test?

Surveys and interviews were used to identify techniques and strategies teachers have found to be most useful in raising the test scores of their students

The data collection began in the spring semester, 2002 after the four Title I elementary schools had been selected. Once four schools had been selected, each of the six fourth grade teachers were mailed a questionnaire attached to a cover letter explaining the importance and significance of the research study as well as definitions of responses. Additionally, each questionnaire packet included a return self-addressed stamped

envelope. A return date was emphasized to encourage respondents to act as swiftly as possible. Follow up letters and second attempt surveys were sent out as needed. Some surveys were collected at the conclusion of the face-to-face interview.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The procedure for analyzing qualitative data in the proposed study is called Constant Comparative Method of Unitizing and Categorizing. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss created the Constant Comparative Method. As referenced Lincoln and Guba (1985), define this procedure by stating the importance of understanding what things fit together. To accomplish this, the data must be broken down into the smallest units of information, individually record each unit of data, and sort. The researcher must look for “reoccurring” regularities that represent patterns that can be sorted into categories. Patton (1990) explains that these categories should be internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are that samples were drawn from one large urban school district in southwest Louisiana. The results are generalizable and likely limited to students in urban areas attending schools in similar school districts in the southeast United States region. A study could look at individual students’ success rates on high-stakes tests. Individual students could be interviewed and surveyed to gain an understanding of how students perceive instruction relative to high-stakes tests. Student retention and student mobility may also limit the study.

Finally, a qualitative limitation of the study is the use of survey questions. These questions don’t permit the researcher the luxury of clarifying responses or ask follow-up

questions that a face-to-face interview would allow. Following up on research rich data wouldn't be possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF SCHOOLS STUDIED

Introduction

In this section, a brief description of the teachers and principals who participated in the study is presented. Due to concerns with confidentiality, the names and identities of the participants are not revealed. Basic demographic information provided by the participants is included later in this chapter

Six teachers and four principals in Title I schools were interviewed on four campuses in southwest Louisiana. These interviews were done face-to-face on an individual basis. The researcher met with principal participants on two occasions and teacher participants on at least three occasions as deemed necessary by the researcher to follow up on previous information given. Interviews were conducted during the spring semester after testing was completed.

Three teachers out of six had two to four years of teaching experience, and two out of six had ten or more years teaching experience in the selected school district. Additionally, five out of the six teachers interviewed had taught fourth grade since the beginning of their teaching careers.

Of the six teachers interviewed, three were African American females and three were Caucasian females. Furthermore, five out of the six teachers had Bachelor's degrees and only one had a Master's degree. None of the teachers had terminal degrees.

Four principals in Title I schools in the participating school district were interviewed. Two were males and two were females. Three of the principals were African American and one was Caucasian. Additionally, only one out of the four

principals interviewed was in their first year as a principal. One out of the four principals had two to four years experience. One out of the four had five to nine years experience and one out of the four had ten or more years experience as a principal in the parish.

Each principal was asked if their school was currently in Corrective Actions according to the accountability system. Participants revealed that two schools were currently in Level I Corrective Actions at the time the interviews occurred and two were not.

A demographic profile of the fourth grade teachers who participated in the study indicated that one teacher was in his/her first year of teaching experience. Three of the teachers had three years of experience and two teachers had ten years or more of teaching experience. Additionally, one teacher was teaching fourth grade for the first time and three teachers had taught fourth grade for two to four years. One teacher taught fourth grade for five to nine years and one taught fourth grade for ten years or more.

Of the six teachers interviewed, 50% (3 out of 6) had two to four years teaching experience in the fourth grade in the district. Half of the participants were African American and half were Caucasian. Surprisingly, none of the teachers interviewed were male.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study consisted of spending at least two days at each school site. Additionally, phone conversations and e-mail messages were exchanged with the participants to seek further information or clarification of responses. Activities that occurred during each site visit included:

- 1) Informal school observations in third and fourth grade classrooms to gather information about principal presence throughout the school and the manner in which classroom instruction was delivered in the fourth grade classrooms.
- 2) Principal interviews were conducted at each school. Interviews were conducted in the principal's office before speaking to the fourth grade teachers. Each principal was asked eight open-ended questions, which included the goals of accountability, accomplishments of accountability, instructional strategies used by teachers, pace of instruction, pressures of accountability, correlation of ITBS scores with LEAP scores, impact of accountability on their school, and future of accountability.
- 3) Teacher interviews with either one or two fourth grade teachers at each site were conducted as deemed appropriate by the school principal. Teacher interviews were conducted either in fourth grade classrooms or in the teacher's lounge area. Teachers were either pulled out of their classrooms to conduct the interview or it occurred during their planning period. Each teacher was asked about the focus of lessons, pace of instruction, pressure of high stakes tests, increase of accountability scores, correlation of ITBS and LEAP scores, impact of accountability, and future of accountability.
- 4) Principal and teacher surveys were also used to gather information about the year in professions, length of time at current school, school's growth label, teachers' use of CRT scores, administrators' use of CRT scores, time spent preparing students for test, and methods used to prepare students for test.

The school observation data was used to add depth to the school profiles. Elements of the data collected during the study are presented to triangulate the interpretations and conclusions developed from the data analysis. Contrasts among the schools and common themes emerged in the analysis of the data.

Through the use of informal observations, surveys, and interviews, the researcher triangulated data collected to enhance the validity of the findings. Triangulation is a method used by researchers when using multiple processes to collect data. Triangulation helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data-collection method, source, or theory (Gall, et al., 1996).

Each school principal was asked to set up interviews between the researcher and the fourth grade teachers. In two of the schools, the principal only agreed to allow the researcher to interview one of the two or three fourth grade teachers. The principal's decision to do this was based on the fact that the non-interviewed teachers were non-certified, full-time substitute teachers. Therefore, the researcher proceeded to interview the fourth grade teachers that were recommended by the school principal.

Principal and teacher surveys were mailed prior to and disseminated again just before the open-ended, face-to-face interview. When each participant was given a survey, the researcher explained each category and provided in depth definitions of responses to choose from to answer survey questions. Additionally, the researcher clarified any questions participants had prior to the completion of the survey. There were some questions asked where participants responded "Not Applicable."

The first set of survey questions required participants to choose either "routinely" or "often" to respond to questions. The term "routinely" is defined as occurring on a

seldom or rare basis. The term “always” is defined as occurring very often or more often than not.

The final set of survey questions required participants to choose either “always” or “usually” to the set of questions asked. The term “always” is defined as occurring often or most of the time. The term “usually” is defined as occurring some of the time but not very often.

Descriptions of Participating Schools

School A: Campus Description

In order to understand the culture of the Title I schools where teachers and principals were interviewed, a description is offered. Descriptions were collected from personal observations by the researcher. Due to the confidentiality agreement made with the participants, the researcher will not use actual names of schools or participants.

A sampling of Title I schools in the southwestern part of Louisiana was used due to the time constraints and limited resources. All of the participating schools used were located in southwest Louisiana with the emphasis being on the state’s new state accountability system relative to Title I schools. The southwest Louisiana school district was chosen to conduct the study because it is the largest school district in the state. Additionally, the district is comprised of a substantial number of Title I schools, all of which are in urban areas. The schools were accessible to the researcher. Moreover, the researcher has had over ten years of experience in the district.

The first interviews were conducted at School A in the selected district. School A is located in the northern city limits. Many apartment complexes and low-income housing projects surround School A. Most students depend on school buses to transport

them to and from school, but a few students walk. Very few students can be dropped off by their parents because cars are considered a luxury for the majority of parents from this community.

The school is over twenty years old with two main buildings and several temporary buildings located in the back of the campus. The school is well maintained and freshly painted, although the classrooms are obviously outdated and bare. School custodians can be seen often walking around campus cleaning up hallways, picking up trash or keeping up the school grounds.

The school culture is best defined as cordial, yet guarded. The researcher was greeted by a school receptionist and waited for several minutes for the principal to meet with me. While waiting, I observed a couple of teachers walk by with their classes. The teachers seemed to show frustration on their faces as they attempted to control the students in line. The teachers didn't greet me as they walked by, as it seems they were focused on discipline at the time. The students, however, were friendly as they walked by and offered smiles as well as hellos. Ironically, I discovered later that one of those classes walking by was indeed a fourth grade class.

School A is a Pre-Kindergarten to fifth grade school and has approximately three hundred seven students with 89.2% being regular education students and 10.5% in Special Education. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students comprise 0.3% of this school's population. Regular education reflects students who are considered gifted, talented Section 504, and those with speech or language impairment. Special education includes those students with disabilities and LEP refers to students who speak English as

a Second Language. School A's racial makeup is 97.5% African-American and 2.5% Caucasian.

School B: Campus Description

School B is a Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade school and serves approximately two hundred forty seven students. 88% of the students are Regular Education and 11.8% are Special Education students. 100% of the students at School B are African American and live in the community. Most students are transported on school bus or walk to campus.

This Title I school is located in the northeast part of the city in an area that is surrounded by a residential neighborhood and numerous small businesses. The building is over thirty years old, but is in good condition. Upon entering the school, I noticed many samples of students' work displayed in the hallways. A very cordial and welcoming secretary greeted me immediately and invited me to sit in the office to wait for the principal. After only a couple of minutes, the principal greeted me and had a warm personality. We conducted the interview in his office.

School C: Campus Description

School C is located in south Baton Rouge amidst a community that is home to numerous low-income families and is known to be a high crime area. As a result, a high fence surrounds the Title I school. This is a Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade school that serves approximately two hundred thirty six students. Regular education students make up 90.8% and Special Education 9.2%. The racial makeup of this population is 99.3% African American and .7% Caucasian.

On my first visit to School C, I was delighted at the attractiveness of the school's building. The walls were freshly painted and displayed many samples of students' work from all grade levels. Even though the secretary was occupied with someone at the time, she was polite and permitted me to wait for the principal who was observing in classrooms. While waiting, I observed a couple of classes walking by in the hallway. The students were well behaved and the teachers acknowledged my presence as they approached me. There appeared to be numerous visitors to the campus on this particular day. After a few minutes, the principal emerged from the upstairs classrooms and greeted me. He had a very pleasant personality and we immediately went to his office to begin the interview.

School D: Campus Description

School D is a Title I Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade school located in the northern part of the city. Low-income housing projects and many abandoned houses and small businesses encircle the school. The school's population consists of 98.28% African American students, all of whom live in the community and either walk to school or are transported by bus. Regular education students make up 91.6% of the school's population with an 8.4% Special Education population. Over half of the teachers at School D are non-certified and the turnover rate is one of the highest in the district with 80% of the faculty being new this school year.

The school is over thirty years old and is surrounded by several temporary buildings on the side of the main building. The hallways were well maintained and the lobby area was furnished and welcoming. I noticed a class of second graders walk by on their way to lunch. The children were smiling and friendly. The teacher was paying

special attention to how her students were behaved as they walked in a line. As I sat in the hallway observing, a couple of other teachers walked by in a hurried state, going to the teachers' lounge and office to check mailboxes and grab bag lunches.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The general purpose of this study was to explore how Louisiana's School and District Accountability System impacted students' performance on the state mandated Criterion Reference Test (CRT). All schools in the state of Louisiana are faced with a new accountability system that has impacted the entire educational system. The specific questions and objectives addressed in this study were to:

- 1) Explore through interviews if test scores have changed beyond what would be expected given the cohort design of the accountability model.
- 2) Explore through in-depth interviews if test scores have changed and determine why?
- 3) Determine through observations, surveys, and interviews, where there has been improved learning and identify those practices teachers use to obtain the positive results.

The first phase of the study involved interviewing the principal at each selected school. The purpose of the interviews was to establish the structures in place at the school level that are a direct result of the accountability system. The interviews were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method of Unitizing and Categorizing to divide the information into categories. The units of information were analyzed to facilitate the emergence of themes and patterns of response.

The second phase of the study involved interviewing the fourth grade teacher(s) at each selected school. The purpose of the interviews was to determine the degree to which teachers were teaching to the test and the strategies that were being used to prepare

students for the state mandated Criterion Reference Test. The interviews were analyzed also using the Constant Comparative Method of Unitizing and Categorizing to divide the information into categories to facilitate the emergence of themes and patterns of response.

The third phase of the study employed a survey administered to principals and teachers at each school. The survey collected demographic information and information regarding principals' and teachers' perceptions of Louisiana's accountability system. Additionally, the survey sought information to gain a greater understanding of the instructional strategies being used to prepare at-risk students for high-stakes testing. The data were also analyzed using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) method as discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to determine patterns of responses.

The following sections of this chapter examine the results of the first three phases of the study. The first section begins with a review of the research questions under examination, and then presents the results of the data analysis. This chapter concludes with a summary of the data in these phases and the interrelationship of these results.

Selecting the Schools

There are 45 Title I schools in the school system studied. All of the Title I schools are considered to be urban, serving at-risk children. Each Title I school had an equal opportunity of being selected.

Each of the four schools selected was classified by the state in 1 of 5 categories, based on their Growth Label from 2000 to 2001. The categories were: 1) Exemplary Academic Growth, 2) Recognized Academic Growth, 3) Minimal Academic Growth, 4) No Growth, and 5) School in Decline. Two of the schools selected were in the category

of Exemplary Academic Growth. One school had a growth label of Minimal Academic Growth and the final school selected had a growth label of No Growth. After the schools were selected using purposeful sampling, the data collection began in the spring semester of 2002.

This chapter will focus on the findings from the analyses of the data gathered from quantitative and qualitative sources by addressing the research questions proposed in Chapter Three. This chapter is organized into three primary sections: (a) campus descriptions, (b) the findings, and (c) a summary of the findings.

Research Question # 1

Have test scores changed in the schools studied?

The principal of School A explains their School Performance Score:

Well, we did show some growth this year but it was minimal, hence, our label of Minimal Academic Growth. That's what is so disheartening. We're trying but it's just not enough to get us where we need to be in the state's eyes.

The fourth grade teacher at School A reveals her feelings about their School Performance Score:

We've looked at scores from the first cycle and second cycle and they did get better. There are some areas we still need to work on. 1998-99, 70% of our students scored Unsatisfactory. This year it was 62 so it was better. English/Language Arts 98-99 49% scored Unsatisfactory. 2000-2001, 38% scored unsatisfactory. So we're moving forward. We're not going south but we still have a long way to go.

The principal in School B reacts to their School Performance Score:

There continues to be an improvement every year. We're a school of Exemplary Academic Growth. We've exceeded our growth target by five points or more. We're very, very excited about that. We've all worked very hard to achieve this goal. I was told the LEAP test seemed a little easier this year. I don't know if it's because teachers are doing a better job

of preparing them but they said it seemed easier.

The fourth grade teacher in School B shares her views on the test scores:

I think a lot of that depends on the students. Last year we had just a great group from the year before that. It just goes with the kids. Last year we had very few special education kids. We had some resource kids that were just borderline resource. The more we know about the content and get more in depth as teachers, the more we take them a little further. Usually the lower ones remain low but the average to above average if you push them a little harder with them you can make their scores come up. If they don't have the ability, we're not going to put it there. Just like everyone isn't college material. Everybody can't pass Algebra or Chemistry. I don't care what they're going to do, the state's going to end up losing teachers. People aren't wanting to go into that because you can't hold people accountable for something that's beyond their control. Come in and hold teacher's accountable, make sure they're teaching the material and they're in there teaching. I can see making sure a child has some growth but you have to look at each individual child.

The principal at School C reveals if scores on the CRT have improved:

Our students have scored really well on the LEAP in previous years. We had a big jump in scores from 1998-1999 to 2000-2001. Our teachers have worked very hard to achieve this goal. It's been a collaborative effort from many entities that has led to this improvement. Well, I have kids that did so well until the state is out here to see what did we do right. If you do well and they know the demographics of your kids, they're going to publicly recognize your students and your school. We received \$9,000 in funds for exceeding our Growth Target.

Teacher 1 at School C reacts to the School Performance Score:

We had a significant change from last year. We did really well. We were so proud of our kids. We don't have a clue. I don't know how well they're going to do this year. This year our kids started a little lower. We have some kids that came to us on a 2nd and 3rd grade level. We only had two kids that were ready for 4th grade out of forty. The lower grades are doing a better job now with reading recovery so we're expecting kids to be reading even better as they come up. It's going to help as we're all on the same page.

Teacher 2 at School C reacts to the improved test scores:

Well, we definitely have increased. We know that.
That's why we're treated like lab rats and fish in an aquarium.
There are always these eyes staring at you.

The School D principal shares whether scores have improved from previous years:

Unfortunately, they have not. Our score isn't a true reflection of how hard we are all working, especially our fourth grade teachers. We didn't show any growth from 2000-2001. That was heartbreaking. We have the cards stacked against us. Both of our fourth grade teachers are new and our turnover rate is really phenomenal. We have added tutorials for fourth grade students and provided additional help for them to prepare them for LEAP but it just doesn't seem to be enough.

Teacher 1 in School D reacts to the scores on the CRT:

We were so disappointed by the low scores from previous years. This is my first year here but I'm overwhelmed by some of the things that I hear that the kids go through. There are some kids who go home who don't have help at home that they can get on certain assignments; whereas, they can bring things in. I know it's putting a lot of pressure on this school and being that we are in Phase 1 of Corrective Actions. I think it's just overwhelming everybody. Everybody's just really concerned about what's going to happen if the scores don't improve.

Teacher 2 discusses the low test scores on the CRT:

Most of the students had excelled in the Language Arts. Faculty members told me that they concentrated on Language Arts; more so now they're trying to focus on Math. My kids are strong in Language Arts and they're very weak in Math. I go back and teach a lot of skills they should have gotten in 3rd grade. I feel confident that they have improved this year. I don't know how much because I wasn't here last year but I feel they have improved because we've gotten more support this year.

Research Question # 2

To what extent are teachers in the schools studied teaching to the test?

School A principal discusses fourth grade teachers teaching to the test:

My 4th grade teachers spend a great deal of time trying to

fill the gaps. They're getting children that are functioning on second grade levels and they're expected to get that child at least to the end of third grade because if they're at the end of third grade, they're going to score at approaching basic. So, you have children that are two, three, sometimes even four years behind and you're trying to play that catch-up teaching and a lot of the problem is because they have not had good teachers. It's not because these children have a learning disability, it's just they haven't had good teachers.

School A fourth grade teacher reacts to teaching to the test:

Normally when I'm teaching my skills I focus on material that they should know for fourth grade so they will be ready for the test. Certainly, I teach to the test. It's too much pressure to avoid doing anything but that. Everything is geared toward the test. There is no time for anything else. I focus on Language Arts and Math because they carry the most weight on the test.

The principal in School B responds to his teachers teaching to the test:

I wouldn't say that I encourage them to teach to the test but they are encouraged to focus on skills that will be found on the test. That's the only way we can be prepared to meet this challenge. When we first learned about this accountability, I remember leaving a meeting and on the way back to school thinking - Lord I have to do something to ensure the kids do reasonably well. My teachers are encouraged to use a variety of strategies to teach skills that will be found on the LEAP.

The fourth grade teacher in School B discusses teaching to the test:

I don't know if you'd call it teaching to the test. Of course, we focus on skills that will be found on the LEAP. We use all sorts of strategies to get them to learn what they need to learn. We use sample tests and they do a lot of writing and answering open-ended questions. I guess you could say we teach to the test because we focus on little else. We can't afford to do anything but that.

The principal of School C shares thoughts on teachers teaching to the test:

A lot of emphasis is being placed on testing and I believe the kids are getting shortchanged because they're not getting an array of information. Keep in mind that the state says in

order to be successful, you have to do well on this test. A lot of concentration has been geared toward the composition of this test. The kids as a whole is missing out on some skills there. I have been a proponent of teaching to the test. I told my teachers language arts, English and mathematics is a major portion of that LEAP test. Those are the academic components that they must focus on a whole lot. Science and Social Studies are becoming a major part in this accountability plan but emphasis has not been on there. You can always integrate those subjects with English, language arts or math. A lot of emphasis has been placed on mathematics and on language arts.

Teacher 1 in School C responds to teaching to the test:

This is my 24th year of teaching. I absolutely have changed the way I teach. I'm not saying I wasn't doing these things but they weren't geared toward the benchmarks. There's certain ways I expect the children to perform on the LEAP test in their short answer responses and in the strategies they use. The things that they have got to have to do well on that test. Yes, I have changed the way I teach and I'm very focused on that. I make sure I've covered all of those things so they'll be prepared.

Teacher 2 in School C shares her thoughts on teaching to the test:

This is only my third year in 4th grade. The first year I came into 4th grade was the first year of accountability so for me, that was a given from day one. My opinion, from what I know from other teachers and people in the system that I've talked with, there is a dramatic difference in the way they began to teach and the focus that they had once the accountability for LEAP 21 has begun. I did feel a tremendous amount of stress coming in as a new teacher. I had to create a classroom, try to find materials and do all the kinds of things you have to do when you're starting in a new school. I had to get a group of kids ready to pass a test and that's was going to be priority and not really knowing what on that test.

The principal in School D replies to her teachers teaching to the test:

We are encouraging teachers to teach to the test. I really think we've taken our time with it more this year than previous years. We focused in on things that we knew we lacked. We focused in on just those places we were low and the time was spent on making sure students understood and the pace we could make up for it later on.

Teacher 1 in School D discusses teaching to the test:

We only focus on skills. We don't have time to do anything else. We're already under so much pressure because we're in Corrective Actions. I teach skills that will be on the test and everything else gets taught when the test is over. At the end of the year we can do projects since the test is over. Before it is just skills.

Teacher 2 in School D replies to teaching to the test:

The content that I cover is focused on the LEAP test and that's why I cover it. We are encouraged to teach to the test. All of the fourth grade teachers do it. We're so desperate to do well and get out of Corrective Actions. We only focus on skills that are on the LEAP test. We can't afford to spend time on other things that won't be on the test. We don't have enough time to really teach all of the skills.

Research Question # 3

What strategies have teachers used to obtain a positive increase in student mastery of the material on the state-mandated test?

The principal in School A discusses strategies used by fourth grade teachers:

The thing that we used this year is direct instruction and I have a person that I hired and that's the person that does direct instruction. Grouping, making sure we group children according to their needs. Small-group instruction, cooperative learning, and these are the things that I really emphasize because I think it's important that children are able to work in groups and they learn so much from their peers, so there are some of the things that I encourage.

The fourth grade teacher in School A reveals strategies used:

Normally when I'm teaching my skills I focus on material that they should know for fourth grade so they will be ready for the test. I give the students sample tests and all of their homework relates to the test material. If the skill is something that I think they don't have difficulty with, sometimes I will speed it up and it just depends. When it does get closer to the test, sometimes I'll start cramming so I'll have a chance to get all the skills that I need taught. I go back and re-teach and that's taking up more time having to go back and re-teach

skills. It just depends on what I'm teaching at the time. If I need to stretch something out, I will teach at a slower pace. Sometimes I may spend two or three days on a skill until I know they have mastered the skill and sometimes I duplicate on my lesson plans because I'll go back if I know they didn't get it. I do speed up when the test gets closer to make sure I've covered everything. At least they'll have the background for it and it won't be like a foreign language to them. I need to expose them to what they may see on the test.

The principal in School B shares strategies used by fourth grade teachers:

The first strategy we adopted was I had beginning in December a couple of weeks before the holidays, I had some of my ancillary staff- one was the librarian and my guidance counselor both of whom had been classroom teachers. I had them go in the mornings to help the 4th grade teachers break their classes into small reading groups and I also sent in the resource teacher so I had a team of three going into each 4th grade classrooms so that there were enough teachers there to do small group instruction and I did the same thing in the afternoons with my Title I staff. From the onset our scores were pretty good compared to schools with similar populations. We're a typical inner city school. We're 98% free and reduced lunch. The poverty level is quite high yet we manage to do pretty well. The school scored in the top 30 in the parish in the past year and continues to make gains. Other things are the teachers integrated technology very well. Both 4th grade teachers bring their classes to the computer lab everyday. Yesterday I was in there doing an observation and a teacher was working. They were doing a social studies lesson and the children were putting together a PowerPoint presentation on famous African American people ranging from sports figures to politicians to authors – you name it. Everybody had to pick somebody different and it was really gratifying being able to see the 4th graders doing that and they did the research on the web.

The fourth grade teacher in School B talks about strategies used in her classroom:

Well we're focusing more on test taking skills. Getting the children to read – especially on the reading part. We used to strictly go with the basal type of material. They would read the story and we would ask them questions about the story. Now, we're giving them more reading material that's not familiar to them and testing them on it. During the test, you're not going to have a story for the whole week where you've drilled and drilled and drilled a story so we're giving

them more things like that. Also, unfamiliar things, we're taking in more information. Just making them think more – more open-ended questions. We're doing a lot more with writing in that respect where they have to do a lot more critical thinking, whereas before it was a lot more multiple-choice, paper-pencil and we're not doing that anymore. We're really making them go back and think and write.

The principal in School C reveals strategies used by fourth grade teachers:

You definitely have to try a variety of teaching practices and if you're not aware, the whole textbook method is gone. I've stressed to my 4th grade teachers that things must be high level thinking skills now and must be technology oriented. We have to do a better job of teaching to the standards and the benchmarks. I tell my teachers that curriculum is now being driven by those standards and benchmarks. No longer can they follow page by page in a textbook. They know they'll receive a citation from me if I see them in a classroom using a textbook page-by-page or word-by-word. The textbook does bring some good information but it's only to be used at this site and with other material. Technology in the curriculum is the way to go. As a matter of fact, that's why my students here have been very, very successful. My 4th grade teachers have bought into letting those kids go to the Website, doing different searches. They use technology in those classrooms to the utmost. I feel it has played a major role in the success of the students here.

Teacher 1 at School C discusses strategies:

I've always worked groups and I've always been real structured anyway and pretty organized. I can't say that it's been that different because I have four reading groups and we rotate. I have one group with me and one group on the computer. They have an assignment on their level with some task they have to do. Actually, I incorporate everything. I really theme teach so it just depends on that day what they're working on what they'll do on the computer. One group always does the DOL (Daily Oral Language). We call it DAT but it's the DOL and then a writing project. The last group is always doing something in conjunction with what we're covering in reading or science or math. It just depends. I've always done that. I'm more focused on the skills that they do in those groups or in the past we may have done something really fun. I've had to cut down some of that stuff and really get down to serious content area.

Teacher 2 in School C reveals strategies used:

There's X number of subjects and skills that must be covered if they're going to take the test and pass it. There would be a luxury if we didn't have to do that of staying longer on certain things to make sure they got it. In our situation, we get about $\frac{1}{4}$ of our class that is literally on a 2nd grade level. Those kids have usually already failed twice and we're getting them because they're overage. Under any other circumstance, they probably wouldn't be with us. At the same time, those kids have matured and many of them are reaching adolescence. We end up having kids that are 2nd grade level up to high 3rd grade level and we probably have four students max that are truly where they need to be. When you take into consideration that there's a four-year span, but we have to get them ready for the very top and we only have maybe four kids max in the class. So we only have one choice and there's two examples I give for that – one is triage like on M*A*S*H and that's exactly what we have to do. We have to say, "Is this a throw away - is this a keeper? To what degree is this a throw away?" How much can I do for this child that's on a 2nd grade level because if I spend the time to get that child to where he belongs, there's not much chance and what's going to happen to the kids that really could make it if I spend the time on them. So that becomes a critical issue. Another example is crashing for an exam. If you were getting ready to do your GRE or as you're preparing for your thesis, boards or whatever –when the time comes for that, you're going to have to crash for it. Are those books that you would be reading everyday? No. You wouldn't be doing that kind of thing everyday. But that's the position we're put in every single day in 4th grade. If the kids that came to us were at the lowest mid 3rd grade and had repeated a maximum one time, we would have a more homogenous group to work with. But we don't have that so we have to immediately going into a serious sort of decision-making process. It's going to be cut and dry. Some we think are going to make it and we have to make decisions based on that.

The principal in School D reveals strategies used by fourth grade teachers:

We know that each of our 4th grade teachers is new so it's a learning process for each one of them. It's a matter of putting into practice what they've learned. We have two people who are freshly out of college and one Teach Baton Rouge. So it was a matter of getting our teachers to understand what it was all about and then being able to

translate to the students.

Teacher 1 in School D discusses strategies used in her classroom:

Everything is geared toward LEAP. If it's something that they really need to know and I feel like they're not grasping it, then I will take more time on it. If it's something they're getting, I'll move on. I have to get a lot of stuff in so they'll be prepared for the test. We have tutorials and people who come in our classes to help us get the students ready. The problem is these students don't get any help at home and we can't do it all. It seems that no matter how hard we try, it's just never enough.

Teacher 2 in School D reveals strategies used:

LEAP Camp begins October 10th until the week before the LEAP test. We also have some retired teachers (2 to every 4th grade class) to come in and help. The content that I cover is focused on the LEAP test and that's why I cover it. We spend all of our time on LEAP. We can't afford to do anything else or these kids really won't have a chance. It's not fair because we work very hard but everyone seems to be looking down on us from the district to the state.

Other Related Objectives

Principals and fourth grade teachers in the schools studied also responded to a set of sub-questions that related to the above-mentioned research questions. Participants were asked open-ended questions regarding the goal of accountability, pressures of accountability, and the overall impact of accountability on their schools.

There were numerous similarities in principals' responses when asked about various aspects of Louisiana's accountability system. Each principal was asked to give his or her opinion about the goal of the accountability system. Additionally, principals shared whether the accountability system has accomplished what it set out to accomplish. Each principal responded in the following manner:

School A principal believes the goal of the accountability system is:

To raise standards, to make sure that all children benefit and not one group of children. I think that one of the main assets of the accountability plan is to help refocus teachers because we all have this perception that children from certain groups cannot achieve to certain levels. I think it could be two-fold to make sure that children are receiving a quality education and to make certain the expectations of educators is the same for all children.

School B principal responded in the following way:

Well, I'm assuming that it would be to raise the education level of the populace. We have too many kids slipping through the cracks and the illiteracy rate is terribly high.

School C principal believes the goal of the accountability system is:

What they've tried to convey to us is they're trying to raise the academic level of all students within a 20-year period. That's supposed to be the goal to increase student achievement across the state. Now the means that they're using, I differ a little bit but ultimately their goal is to improve student achievement.

School D principal shared her beliefs about the accountability system:

First of all, I feel the goal is that every child learns at his maximum potential no matter where he is, The idea is that in Louisiana – what we have been told is that we have to reach children and bring them up so they can become lifelong learners.

Principals in each Title I school were also asked if they felt the accountability system had accomplished what it set out to accomplish.

The principal in School A responded in the following manner:

I think partially it has because student achievement according to what it's being assessed by has increased. But when you look at children from populations as we serve, are we actually meeting children's needs? We're trying to make sure they pass the test but are

we teaching the total child and my answer to that is no. Our focus is, they have to pass the test. They have to pass the test and there so many social needs that these children-so many other needs are we actually educating the total child?

The principal in School B shared his views on the accountability system:

Not yet but I believe it's on its way. It looks to me like the kids in our district are making significant strides in providing a better education. Schools that aren't---I see the district coming together to try to give support and aid they would need to make those gains but I think we're on our way.

The principal in School C revealed her opinions about accountability's accomplishments:

That's a difficult question in that I know that its goal was a long range goal. They wanted to bring a child to a certain level of performance and if that child isn't at that level of performance, they're retaining them. I guess I'm looking at 4th grade again. We have been able to bring those kids from the Unsatisfactory performance to the Approaching Basic now to the Basic and they're saying within the next three years if a child is not performing at Basic, then they must be retained. So I would have to say yes that goal is being achieved.

The principal in School D responded to accountability's accomplishments:

It has wavered at times and I think we're refocusing ourselves now to get back on track. My thinking is for that we were so test oriented; it was all about test, test, test. Now I think we've gotten on track with I think yes we want to raise our test scores but it's learning that's important more than test scores.

Principals in each school were also asked if scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) correlate to scores on the Criterion Reference Test or LEAP test. Each response had similarities among all principals.

School A principal revealed if scores on the ITBS correlated with scores on the LEAP:

As I review the data, with some children yes, but then with others no and I think that's largely because of the format of the test. It's easier for a teacher to teach the format of ITBS than it is for the LEAP. It's a lot more energy for them to prepare students for the LEAP test so overall I'm going to say, I want to say no. It's hard to correlate the two because they're totally different tests. Now as far as children having the skills, ITBS will tell you what skills they have. Now if they can't apply those skills to the format of the LEAP, it serves no purpose because they are so different.

School B principal shared his view on the scores of both tests:

Well, it's kind of a different scoring system but I think they do. What we do see is the group in 3rd grade coming up to 4th grade, we know we have our work cut out for us. In that sense, the test – I was told the LEAP test seemed a little easier this year. I don't know if it's because teachers are doing a better job of preparing them but they said it seemed easier.

School C principal discloses whether scores correlate on both tests:

I did some analysis and I think there's a pretty good correlation. Honestly, at this point, I really can't say but I know my 4th graders did extraordinarily well last year and I expect them to do well this year but I won't know that until I get their scores back the second week in May. Just looking at the makeup, I gave small group testing to the 4th graders and to some kids with disabilities and also last year, I managed to give 5th grade IOWA to some 504 kids. The type of questions and responses are different because the LEAP test is open-ended. There's a lot of reasoning involved as opposed to the IOWA test, it's just multiple choice. I think there's some correlation there.

School D principal tells how their scores correlate:

I think its apples and oranges almost – a totally different kind of thing. You get them set for certain kinds of test for 4th grade and they go on to 5th and 3rd, 4th and 5th is different so I'd like to see some uniformity in there somewhere.

Principals and teachers were asked if they feel pressure as a result of the high stakes nature of the Criterion Reference Test.

The principal in School A responded in the following way:

Absolutely. Yes, yes, yes. I feel it from teachers, parents and students because during testing week, we've actually had children to get sick and it should not be like that. The emphasis should not be on testing. It should be on learning. We try to de-emphasize the test but when the media is telling you everyday that, your child doesn't pass this test they're going to fail and no parent wants their child to fail no matter where they're coming from.

The fourth grade teacher in School A shared her feelings on the pressure:

I'm completely stressed. If they don't learn anything, it's going to be my fault. That's how you end up feeling because the pressure is on you and if they don't do well, to me that's a reflection on me. I didn't drill enough or I didn't teach it as well as I could have. I should have gone about it another way. It's still a reflection regardless.

The principal in School B revealed how he feels about the pressure of accountability:

Sure I do. What the heck do you mean by that?
As principal I take a lot of pride in my staff. We are probably the most stable faculty in the whole system. I went to staffing the other day and they told me I don't have any teachers applying for transfer. I feel the pressure that they're under and I want to see the teachers succeed in bringing the kids as far as they can and doing well on the test since that's the measure of success these days.

A fourth grade teacher in School B discussed her feeling about the pressure:

The pressure is unbelievable. I always use the analogy that you go to a doctor with a cold and he gives you medication but if you don't go home and take it, you're not going to get well but they're not accountable. We can do everything we can at school, but there are some things that have to be done at home. If they don't do that, parents don't back you up. We can't

make them do it. I have no control over intelligence yet these children – everybody takes the same test regardless of intelligence. From our special education kids on up and I'm accountable for that. If I had that kind of power, I wouldn't be teaching. This year, I said you know what – we ought to just tell people when their children are born and they have special needs when they discover that, tell them don't worry about it – wait till 4th grade because when they get to 4th grade the teacher has to take care of it. It will be fixed and we can't do that. These kids are graded the same way. Their scores are put in with our scores. So when you look at those scores, you don't know if that school had 15 special education students that were reading on a 1st grade level that had to take this test. It's just not fair. It's not fair that they allow these kids to come into – in fact it happened to me this year. The week before the test I got a new student. The other school had gotten rid of them because she was performing below standards. She came to me a week before the test and her score will be on my school. How fair is that?

The principal in School C reacts to the pressure from accountability:

To be frank, I'm a very calm person but I'm under a tremendous amount of pressure and stress. It's so much pressure and so much stress until if I could find the amount of money I'm making now, I'd be out of here in a split second. It's a lot of stress and a lot of pressure. I complain to my wife and they're a lot of times when I can't even rest at night thinking about what I need to do at school tomorrow to make sure those kids are getting what they need when they take that test in March. It's a lot of stress.

Teacher 1 in School C tells how she feels about accountability's pressures:

Absolutely, it is horrendous. 4th grade is 60% of our school grade depending on what we do with our kids and how well they respond. I take that very seriously.

Teacher 2 adds:

Oh Lord. Well, I've been around the block a few times so I don't think I get as uptight about that as some of the teachers that have been in teaching for their entire lives. I think for them they have more at stake because their whole life if they have been considered a good teacher in the past and if they've come up through the ranks and have never had

to have accountability and they have done the best job they could and have done a good job and all of a sudden, they're whacked with accountability. It's a different ball game now and they have to do it and change and if you don't come up to par, you're not good enough when twenty-five years they've been good enough. There's something real crazy with that. I don't have to deal with that. All I have to do is get mad and say this is ridiculous and stupid. This is just malarkey. It does make a difference to me because I love to teach. On one level, I approve of the standardized testing. I think when you have employers in the state of Louisiana who can't find graduates from high school who can write a paragraph that makes sense and you can't read their writing and their punctuation is horrible and they can't go through a simple math problem and schools are letting them graduate. There's something wrong with that. I think the one thing they've done for us – a lot of people say well it's not right and it's not these children's language and they have to take a test that's standardized. It's Standard English and the children we have don't speak Standard English. Well, the truth is, the world they have to get a job in speaks Standard English. Somewhere along the way, they have got to learn it and they have to have teachers who teach it from Kindergarten on and a teacher has to speak Standard English well. If a teacher doesn't speak Standard English well, the students aren't going to learn it. It has to be patterned for them everyday. I'm lucky. I'm Caucasian, I grew up in America in the west and I just happen to speak Standard English well. I feel so sorry for really good teachers who don't speak Standard English well. That's tough. If it's minimal, I don't think it's going to hurt the kids but if it's a major problem, that's a major problem for the kids and the kids have to learn early. You're in a bilingual class. One is hip-hop and you learn it on the street and you learn it at home. The other is Standard English and you're going to learn it in my class. I don't think schools do that from the ground up and I think that's something that needs to be done and it's necessary.

The principal in School D shares her feelings on the pressure at her school:

Definitely, the pressure is there. We had to let them see us sweat. There was a lot of pressure and at this point it's difficult to find teachers that want to teach 4th grade. They would teach 3rd and 5th but because of the pressure in 4th grade, it's difficult to find anybody. There's so much required for 4th grade teachers.

Teacher 1 reveals the pressure she feels:

Of course, it's a lot of pressure on all of us. I saw it during the week of the test but during the week before, I don't know if it was they didn't care but a lot of them didn't realize how serious this test was. When they got the test, and they said you told us and each time they finished a part I could see the relief when they finished and they were very glad that it was over. So I think when they got the test they saw it was serious business but until then I don't think so. They understand that they will fail if they don't pass.

Teacher 2 reacts to the stress level:

I feel so much pressure that I do not want to be a 4th grade teacher next year. I also see more pressure from the students that are repeating 4th grade. Students have a fear that if they don't pass it, they'll be sitting in 4th grade again but as far as the new kids are concerned – no pressure. They don't seem to show the pressure like the other ones.

Principals and teachers in each school were asked to respond to the impact accountability is having on their school overall.

The principal in School A revealed the impact of accountability:

I haven't even thought about it. But I feel it will have an impact. I really think once the powers-that-be see the effect its going to have on schools, on educators, on children, on parents, that they're going to revise it. I don't think it will go away and I don't want it to go away. We all need to be held accountable. I think it's too much too fast. Research has shown that before you can see growth with any new strategy you need at least five years. We haven't actually given ourselves time to show the growth. I think accountability is here to stay but I think it's going to be revisited. Looking at the leave no child behind, that is scary.

The fourth grade teacher in School A shared her view of the impact:

Well, I think it will make me re-teach more than I have been to make sure that all the skills that need to be

accounted for are covered. I think it's going to make me work harder. Right now after the test it's so hard to get them to do the things I want them to do but I think it will make me push them harder and go full force at what I'm doing. I'm on them really hard about doing their homework, following directions, making sure they're doing everything they're suppose to be doing. I think I'm going to re-evaluate myself as a teacher because I need to make sure I'm doing everything I need to be doing to make sure that I'm covering myself as well as the children.

The principal in School B explained the impact on his school:

Well, so far it's been fine. The teachers are prideful about their accomplishments. The parents look at us favorably because they know this is a good school. The word's out and we've gotten some recognition and we got \$10,000 this year. We bought some new duplicating machines and a new laminator. We still have half of it left. I was supposed to get back with the grade level chairperson.

The fourth grade teacher shared her opinion about the impact:

Well, I'm looking at four more years and I'm out of here. Well, I think a lot of 4th grade veteran teachers - It's hard to get a teacher to teach 4th grade. Nobody wants that because regardless of what everybody's saying, they're looking at those 4th grade scores. I think overall you're going to lose people. People aren't going to want to go into this profession.

School C principal tells about the impact of accountability on his school:

Well, I have kids that did so well until the state is out here to see what did we do right. If you do well and they know the demographics of your kids, they're going to publicly recognize your students and your school. We received \$ 9,000 in funds for exceeding our Growth Target. Other than that, I don't know. The question lies in the state accountability program The question is, "Is the accountability program really going to make kids more productive for society?" Will they really be ready to go into the workforce and be productive by the time they finish high school? At this point, I cannot see that

happening now. Something may happen in the next couple of years. I understand that a lot of kids statewide are doing well in 4th grade but when they get to 8th grade there's a decline in student achievement so something is not working.

Teacher 1 in School C gave her views on the impact of accountability:

I hate it but I can see that if a teacher takes it seriously you can really have to work hard to stay focused to keep your kids focused. In a way, I think it has brought out the best in everybody and I think most teachers are willing to work hard. I think that I like it in that way because it really has in fact forced me to teach content and strategies and covering things that I need to cover and I like that but on the other hand, these are just 4th graders. They have so much pressure on them and you can see it. If nothing else, I put pressure on them. We don't have a lot of parent involvement but everything, I'm always referring to - these are the kinds of things they're expecting a 4th grader to do and I'm always saying it so that puts so much pressure on them and they're swift - they know that this one test in one week's time determines whether they go on or not and that's a lot of pressure. I don't know how to weigh that. I'm glad I've been in the system as long as I have and not just starting out because I don't think I'd last with all of the pressure that we're under.

Teacher 2 responded:

Well, I think it's good and necessary. I think we have some good teachers and I think we have some teachers who shouldn't be in the system. I also think we have teachers who are very well meaning; who work very hard but they really don't know how to teach. I think the accountability system could separate those different groups. I understand in our school next year, we're going to have a faculty study program that's very focused. If that's run correctly, I think that it can be very valuable because teachers who are well meaning and want to make it work but who have some deficits in their teaching will have the opportunity to learn from teachers who do have it all together. Not only that, we all learn from each other. I've been in business for myself so I know what accountability is all about. People who have never been in business don't really understand. The buck stops

somewhere in accountability. We have not had that in the school system. I understand teachers who are in the process of getting out of the system and they don't want to deal with it. They don't want to talk about it. I don't blame them. I don't know if I'd want to if I were at their stage. There should be a place for them.

School D principal reveals the impact on her school:

It already has. I would really like to see – we're saying now we have to be accountable and it's a shame that we're accountable to what we teach but the children are the ones that are penalized. I'd like to see something come together so teachers know I'm buying into this. It's a part of whatever I do, it's going to affect the child so I want to do the best job that I can do. The accountability for teachers and students – if a student fails, I feel I've missed it somewhere too. I know you don't have perfect people but I think somewhere in there you can find some leeway to get teachers to understand that this is all about “my life and the child's life” at the same time.

Teacher 1 in School D shares her views on accountability's impact:

I know it's putting a lot of pressure on this school and being that we are in Phase 1 of Corrective Actions. I think it's just overwhelming everybody. Everybody's just really concerned about what's going to happen if the scores don't improve.

Teacher 2 tells her opinion about the impact:

I think with accountability, we're going to be – it's going to take us a while to get out of corrective actions. We don't have the parental support that we should have and administration seems to look down on us because the scores are low at this school and the faculty is probably 80% new. I think the district looks down on us and we have people coming in from the state (District Assistance Team); they find fault in everything we do. They don't have anything good to say, so if the teachers are discouraged, how are we supposed to encourage our kids?

Data Analysis

The focus of Research Question 1 was to examine if there had been a change in test scores in the schools studied and why or why not.

Each principal and fourth grade teacher in the school studied responded to this question. The following categories emerged as a result of participants' responses:

School A acknowledged that minimal growth was made on the CRT during the 2000-2001 school year. The scores did increase slightly. However, School A was unable to meet its expected Growth Target making their label one of "Minimal Academic Growth." The category that emerged from this scenario was that of "Unsatisfactory but Optimistic." Both principal and fourth grade teachers were hopeful that CRT scores would continue to increase each year. The principal responded to this question by saying, "We did show some growth, but it was minimal. We're trying, but it's just not enough." The teacher concluded, "The scores did get better. We're not going South, but we still have a long way to go."

School B surmised that there continues to be an improvement each year in their scores. The scores increased by five points or more making it possible for School B to attain its required School Performance Score. As a result, the new label was one of "Exemplary Academic Growth." The category that surfaced from this set of circumstances is referred to as "Keep up or Be Left Behind." The rationale behind this category is that fourth grade teacher(s) stated that the students performing below grade level were not given the same amount or level of instruction as those average or above-average students. Teacher(s) explained that the lower students would most likely remain

low, not being able to effect gains in CRT scores. Hence, the higher-level students received more instruction so that they would carry the weight of the class.

The principal shared, “There continues to be an improvement each year. We’ve all worked very hard to achieve this goal.” The teacher revealed, “Lower students remain low, but average to above-average students can be pushed to improve. Last year, we had a great group of kids. If they don’t have the ability, we’re not going to put it there.”

School C revealed that their fourth grade students have scored better than in previous years, making their Growth Label “Exemplary Academic Growth.” School C was able to meet or exceed its Growth Target by five or more points. The principal and teachers were extremely proud of this accomplishment and so was the Louisiana Department of Education. Supervisors from the Department had been visiting the school for several weeks to determine what methods were being used to explain such an increase in CRT scores. The category that emerged was “Worker Bees turned Lab Rats.” Both principal and teachers expressed both pride and a little uneasiness about the state Supervisors showing such an interest in their techniques.

The principal stated, “Students have scored much better than in previous years. We had a big jump in scores from 1998-1999 to 2000-2001. Our teachers have worked very hard to achieve this goal. It’s been a collaborative effort from many entities that has led to this improvement.” The fourth grade teachers added, “We had a significant change from last year. We did really well. We definitely have increased. The lower grade teachers are doing a better job with Reading Recovery.”

School D had a totally different situation than the other three schools. This school was unable to show any growth at all. Hence, their Growth Label was “No Growth.”

The principal and teachers expressed disappointment with this label but shared that they feel targeted and left to fail. The category that surfaced was “Victims of the System.”

The reason for this label was that the principals and teachers felt that they are in a unique situation with their large turnover rate and uncertified teacher ratio. It appears that there is no end in sight for rising out of Corrective Actions.

The principal shared, “We have not increased our scores. Our score isn’t a true reflection of how hard we’re working. We didn’t show any growth but we have the cards stacked against us. The teachers revealed, “We’re disappointed by how scores from the previous years. These kids have no help at home. It’s just overwhelming everybody. The students excelled in Language Arts but they are very weak in Math. They lack skills they should have gotten in 3rd grade.”

Research question two asks, “To what extent are teachers in the participating schools teaching to the test?” Principals and teachers in the participating schools responded to this question. They were then placed in categories based on information provided in the interviews. School A was in a category labeled, “It’s all about the test.” Responses from principal and teacher reveal that most classroom time is spent teaching to the test.

School A’s principal revealed, “Teachers spend a great deal of time filling in the gaps. They have to get kids caught up that are below grade level. They do spend much of the time teaching skills that are on the test.”

The fourth grade teacher in School A shares, “Everything is geared toward the test. There’s no time for anything else. That’s all we do until March.”

School B responds in much the same way as School A to the research question. For this reason, they are placed in the same category as School A. School B principal shares, “Teachers are encouraged to teach skills that will be found on the test. That’s the only way they can be prepared to meet this challenge. My teachers are encouraged to use a variety of strategies to teach skills that will be found on the LEAP.” School B teachers adds, “We focus on skills that will be found on the LEAP. We use all sorts of strategies to get them to learn what they need to learn to pass the test. We can’t afford to do anything else but that.”

School C reveals that they are also proponents of teaching to the test. They are also placed in the same category as Schools A and B. School C principal tells, “I am a proponent of teaching to the test. A lot of emphasis is being placed on the test. Kids aren’t getting an array of information. I told my teachers they must focus on Language Arts and Math because they are a major portion of the test.”

Teacher 1 in School C adds, “I’ve changed the way I teach. I’m very focused on skills. I make sure I’ve covered everything. I use a variety of strategies to help the students.”

Teacher 2 in School C adds, “There’s a dramatic difference in the way I teach now because of accountability. Getting the kids to pass the test is a top priority.”

School D concurs with the above-mentioned schools by revealing the degree to which they teach to the test. School D, as with the other schools, also falls into the category of “It’s all about the test.”

The principal in School D discloses, “We are encouraging teachers to teach to the test. We focus on areas we know we lack. We focus on just those places we know we are low.”

Teacher 1 shares, “We only focus on skills. We don’t have time to do anything else. Everything else gets taught when the test is over. We mainly focus on Language and Math.” Teacher 2 adds, “All of the content I cover is focused on LEAP. That’s why I cover it. We are encouraged to teach to the test. All of the fourth grade teachers do it. We’re so desperate to get out of Corrective Actions.”

Research question three asks, “What strategies have teachers used to obtain a positive increase in student mastery of the material on the state-mandated test?”

Principals and fourth grade teachers in each school responded to this question.

Categories emerged as a result of their answers to the above-stated question. The category that emerged for School A is referred to as “Not quite on the same page.” The principal had a different view of strategies that were being used to prepare students for the CRT.

The principal shared, “We use direct instruction. There is a person who goes into each class to facilitate small-group instruction. We group the children according to their needs. I really emphasize grouping, small-group instruction and cooperative grouping.”

The fourth grade teacher in School A adds, “I give students sample tests and all of their homework relates to the test material. I’ll start cramming in material so I’ll have a chance to get all the skills that I need taught. I also do a lot of re-teaching as the test gets closer. I duplicate lesson plans if I feel the students didn’t get the material the first time.”

School B reacts to the research question in a very dissimilar way from School A. For this reason, the category that came about as a result of their responses was, “It Takes a Village.”

The principal in School B reveals, “Ancillary staff is required go into each fourth grade classroom in the mornings and afternoons daily to assist with small group instruction. I have a team of three going into the fourth grade classrooms daily to assist with instruction. Teachers are also integrating technology daily by going to the computer lab.”

The fourth grade teacher discloses, “We focus more on test-taking skills – especially on the reading part of the test. We give them more reading material and test them on it. We use more open-ended questions and do a lot more writing. We do more critical thinking and less multiple choice.”

School C shared strategies used in their school to prepare students for the CRT. Their responses varied from principal to teachers. For this reason, the category most appropriate for this school was two-fold. The category is named “More Critical Thinking Activities or Throw-Aways.” One fourth grade teacher explained that they have to decide which students are worth spending the time on and which are not. It seems that at least one of the two teachers feels that her time is more effectively spent on students that can effect gains on test scores.

The principal said, “We use high level thinking skills that are driven by the standards and benchmarks. We also integrate technology into the classroom to the utmost. Technology in the curriculum is the way to go.”

Teacher 1 shared, “We rotate small groups with the teacher and the computer. We theme teach and do Daily Oral Language (DOL). We also do more writing. I’m more focused on the skills now where in the past we may have done something more fun. Now, we really get down to serious content.” Teacher 2 added, “There’s X number of skills that must be covered if the students are going to pass the test. We have to spend more time on things to make sure they’ve got it. We have to say, ‘Is this a throw away or a keeper.’ Some kids are so low that if we spend the time on them, they’re not going to do well anyway. What’s going to happen to the kids that really could make it if I spend the time on the low ones? That becomes a critical issue.”

The principal in School D discusses strategies used by her fourth grade teachers when preparing students for the CRT. The category most appropriate to describe this school is “Tutorials and Re-teaching Skills.” Both the principal and teachers refer to the tutorials that are provided for the fourth graders only that target specific skills found on the test. Additionally, teachers re-teach the same material as many times as necessary to ensure students are grasping the skills. The principal of School D revealed, “We encourage all sorts of strategies. We have tutorial and aides for our fourth grade teachers. Each one of our teachers is new so it’s also a learning process for each of them.”

Teacher 1 adds, “I take more time on skills they don’t know but will be tested on. If they grasp it quickly, I’ll move on. We have tutorials also and people who come into the class to help.”

Teacher 2 shares, “LEAP Camp begins in October and retired teachers help in our classrooms a lot. I spend all of my time drilling LEAP skills. We re-teach and drill constantly.”

Related Objectives

Principals in each selected Title I school responded to a set of questions relating to accountability. The responses were then analyzed in the same manner as the research questions and placed into categories.

Research Objective # 1

What is the goal of the accountability system? Has it accomplished what it set out to accomplish?

School A principal replied, “The goal is to raise standards and make sure all children benefit and not one group of children. I think it has partially accomplished what it set out to accomplish because student achievement has increased. We’re trying to make sure they pass the test, but are we teaching the total child? My answer to that question is no.”

School B principal shared, “I’m assuming the goal of accountability is to raise the education level of the populace. However, I don’t believe it has accomplished its goal yet. It looks like the kids are making significant strides in getting a better education. I think we’re on our way.”

School C principal reveals, “The goal is supposed to be to raise students’ achievement across the state. I do believe the goal is being achieved. If a child doesn’t perform at the level mandated, they are retained. They continue to raise the standards and we have to meet those standards.”

School D principal adds, “The goal is that every child learns at his maximum potential no matter where he is. I think accountability’s accomplishments have wavered at times but now we’re getting back on track. The focus should be on learning but it has been on nothing but the test.”

Based on overall responses to the above-state research objective, each principal appears to have a clear understanding of the goal of accountability. Additionally, principals seem to agree that accountability is on its way to accomplishing what it set out to accomplish. For these reasons, the category that came about is called “Raising Student Achievement.”

Research Objective # 2

Have Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores correlated to Criterion Reference Test scores (CRT)?

Principal of School A said, “As I have reviewed the data, there has been a correlation with some students but not with others. The format of the ITBS test is very different than that of the LEAP.”

School B principal shares, “It’s a different scoring system but I believe they do correlate. We are able to see what 3rd graders lack before they get to 4th grade so we know what we’re dealing with.”

School C principal reveals, “I think there’s a pretty good correlation. The type of questions and responses are different because the LEAP test is open-ended and the ITBS is multiple choice.”

The principal in School D adds, “I think it’s apples and oranges. The tests are very different. It’s difficult to see the correlation.”

The category that related to all of these responses is “Apples and Oranges.” Each principal seemed to reveal that some correlation is detected but the format of the tests differs greatly. As a result, it’s rather difficult to distinguish the degree of correlation between the two tests.

Research Objective # 3

Do you feel pressure as a result of the high stakes nature of the CRT?

School A principal shares her thoughts by saying, “Absolutely – I feel it from the state, district, teachers, parents, and students. The emphasis should not be on testing, but when you tell students they will be retained if they don’t pass, the pressure is on.”

The fourth grade teacher in School A reveals, “I’m completely stressed. If the students don’t learn, it’s my fault. The pressure is on me if they don’t do well.”

School B principal says, “Of course, I feel pressure. I feel the pressure the teachers are under and I want to see them succeed. The kids doing well on the test is the measure of success these days so I want them to do well.”

The teacher in School B shares, “The pressure is unbelievable. I have no control over the intelligence of these children and they get no help at home but I’m responsible. How fair is that?”

School C principal adds, “I’m under a tremendous amount of pressure and stress. If I could find another job making the same amount of money, I’d leave today. I can’t rest at night trying to figure out what I can do to help our students succeed.”

Teacher 1 in School C responds, “The pressure is horrendous. 60% of our school score depends on how well 4th grade does. I take that very seriously.” Teacher 2 shares, “Well, yes, but I’ve been around the block a few times so I don’t think I get as uptight

about that as some of the teachers that have been in teaching most of their lives. It's a different ball game now and they have to come up to par."

School D principal discloses, "Definitely, the pressure is there. We have to let them see us sweat. It's difficult to find teachers to teach 4th grade because of the pressure."

Teacher 1 in School D reveals, "Of course, it's a lot of pressure on all of us. Even the students were very stressed during test week. They know if they don't do well, they won't pass." Teacher 2 shares, "I feel so much pressure until I don't want to be a 4th grade teacher next year. I also see more pressure from the students."

All of the responses to Research Objective 2 reveal that everyone from the principals to the students is under enormous pressure due to the high stakes nature of accountability. The category that emerged is, "All stressed out and no end in sight."

Research Objective # 4

How has accountability impacted your school overall?

School A principal reveals, "I haven't even thought about it. I feel it will have an impact. I think the powers-that-be will have to revise it when they see the impact it's having on schools, students, and parents. I think it's too much too fast."

The teacher in School A shares, "It has made me re-teach more than I have in the past. I make sure all of the skills that need to be covered are taken care of. I need to cover myself as well as the children."

Based on the response to Research Objective 4, the category that emerged for School A is, “Negative Impact.”

School B principal reveals, “Well, so far, it’s been fine. The teachers are prideful about their accomplishments. The parents look at us favorably because they know this is a good school.”

School B teacher discloses, “I’m looking at four more years and I’m out of here and so are a lot of veteran teachers. No one wants to teach 4th grade. The profession will continue to lose people.”

Based on their responses, School B falls under the category of “Positive for Principal and Negative for Teachers.” The principal and teacher had a difference of opinion regarding accountability’s impact.

School C principal adds, “I have kids that did so well until the state is out here to see what we did right. We have been publicly recognized for our kids because of the demographics. Other than that, I don’t know how it’s doing to impact us.”

Teacher 1 in School C shares, “I think it has brought out the best in everybody. It has forced me to teach content and cover things that I need to cover. However, these fourth graders have so much pressure and we don’t have a lot of parent involvement.”

Teacher 2 in School C adds, “I think accountability could separate the good teachers from the ones who should not be teaching. That’s a good thing.” Based on their responses, School C is in the “Positive Impact” category. Both principal and teachers feel that good things have come about because of accountability.

School D principal reveals, “The children are the ones penalized for what we teach or don’t teach. Something needs to come about to get teachers to buy into this and realize that it’s a part of what they do.”

Teacher 1 in School D shares, “It’s putting a lot of pressure on this school because we’re in Phase I of Corrective Actions. It’s just overwhelming everybody.” Teacher 2 discloses, “It’s going to take us a while to get out of Corrective Actions. Our faculty is 80% new and the state finds fault in everything we do. We’re doing the best we can.”

School D falls under the “Negative Impact” category because the principal and teachers feel as if they are targeted because of accountability.

Survey Findings: Principals

How are teachers encouraged to raise scores on the state-mandated test?

Who is encouraging teachers to raise scores?

(Participants responded “yes” or “no”)

Table 1: Principals’ Responses

	School A	School B	School C	School D
By focusing on test-taking techniques	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teaching test-taking techniques	Y	Y	Y	Y
Using same format for class tests	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teaching actual test items	N	N	N	N
Spending class time for test preparation	Y	Y	Y	Y
Spending more time preparing students for test	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Teachers are encouraged by:</i>				
Department of Education	Y	Y	Y	Y
District Administrators	Y	Y	Y	Y
Principals	Y	Y	Y	Y

What do teachers do to prepare students for the state-mandated test?

(Participants responded “always” or “usually”)

Table 2: Teachers’ Responses A

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Demonstrate marking procedures	U	A	A	A
Give tips on test taking	U	A	A	A
Discuss importance of test	A	A	A	A
Encourage attendance during test week	A	A	A	A
Discourage attendance during test week	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Use commercial test-preparation packages	N/A	A	U	U
Teach test-taking skills	U	A	A	A
Practice sample questions	A	A	A	A
Practice items from last year’s tests	A	N/A	U	U
Teach topics covered on test	A	A	U	A
Teach items form current year’s test	N/A	N/A	U	A
Teach vocabulary that will be on test	A	A	A	A

How do school administrators use Criterion Referenced Test scores?

(Participants responded “routinely” or “often”)

Table 3: Teachers’ Responses B

	School A	School B	School C	School D
To identify teacher strengths/weaknesses	R	O	O	O
Identify curriculum strengths/weaknesses	R	O	O	O
Evaluate teacher effectiveness	R	R	R	O
Evaluate materials	R	O	R	R
Evaluate teaching methods	R	R	O	O
In “highest score” competitions	O	R	R	R
Advertise the school	O	O	O	O

Survey Findings: Teachers

How do fourth grade teachers use Criterion Reference Test scores?

(Participants responded “routinely” or “often”)

Table 4: Teachers’ Responses C

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Guide instruction	O	O	O	O
Diagnose learning problems	O	O	O	O
Communicate with parents	O	O	O	O
Predict student performance	R	R	O	O
Identify remedial students	O	O	O	O
Place students for instruction	O	O	R	O
Measure class effectiveness	O	O	O	O
Evaluate teaching methods	O	O	O	O
Stimulate curriculum review	R	O	O	O
Identify students for special services	O	R	O	O

What do fourth grade teachers do to prepare students for the CRT?

(Participants responded “always” or “usually”)

Table 5: Teachers’ Responses D

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Demonstrate marking procedures	A	U	A	U
Give tips on test taking	A	A	A	U
Discuss the importance of test with students	A	A	A	A
Encourage attendance during test week	A	A	A	A
Discourage attendance to certain students during test week	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Use commercial test-preparation packages	A	A	A	A
Teach test-taking skills	A	A	A	A
Practice sample questions	A	A	A	A
Practice using items from last year’s test	A	A	A	U
Teach/review topics covered on test	A	A	A	A
Teach vocabulary that will be on test	A	A	A	U
Teach items from current year’s test	N/A	N/A	A	N/A

Summary of Survey Findings: Principals and Teachers

Table 6: Principals and Teachers Responses

School A	School B	School C	School D
Discuss importance of test	Give tips on test taking	Demonstrate marking procedures	Discuss importance of test
Encourage attendance during test week	Discuss importance of test	Give tips on test taking	Encourage attendance during test week
Practice sample questions	Encourage attendance during test week	Discuss importance of test	Teach test-taking skills
Practice items from last year's test	Use commercial test-preparation packages	Encourage attendance during test week	Practice sample questions
Teach topics covered on test	Teach test-taking skills	Teach test taking skills	Teach topics covered on test
	Practice sample questions	Practice sample questions	
	Teach topics covered on test	Teach vocabulary that will be on test	
	Teach vocabulary that will be on test		

Principals and teachers in each school were asked to complete a survey regarding instructional practices in fourth grade classrooms. Survey results indicated that principals in all four schools encouraged fourth grade teachers in their schools to teach test-taking techniques. Additionally, principals promoted teachers spending class time preparing students for the test and using same format of standardized tests for class tests.

Survey results also indicated that all four schools took the following measures when preparing students for the CRT. Some of those steps included discussing the importance of the test with students; encouraging attendance during test week and practicing sample test questions. Schools A and D, which are currently in Corrective Actions, also taught topics covered on the test. However, survey results indicated that

Schools A and D did not offer additional measures to students to prepare them for the LEAP.

In contrast, Schools B and C, which currently have an Exemplary Academic Growth rating, also gave students tips on test taking, taught test-taking skills, and taught vocabulary that was found on the test. Schools B and C also provided opportunities for fourth grade students to receive skill-related computer instruction on a daily basis.

Analysis of School Observations

The researcher conducted informal observations in all six participating teacher's classrooms prior to the interviews. In an effort to scrutinize the natural setting of each fourth grade classroom, the researcher sat in each class on two occasions for at least forty-five minutes each visit. The researcher did not reveal to the teachers the exact day and time the observations would occur. The teachers were aware of the week the visits would take place. The researcher's goal was both to increase the level of comfort among the teachers with the researcher, and to gain insight into the everyday instruction provided by teachers to fourth grade students (i.e. teaching to the test). The researcher took field notes on activities as they occurred in each classroom.

In School A, the researcher sat in one of the two fourth grade classrooms two times to observe daily instruction. On the first visit, the teacher was doing Daily Oral Language (DOL), which consisted of students copying sentences from the overhead projection screen and correcting grammatical errors. There were three students that didn't appear to be working consistently on the activity. Instead, those students were talkative and non-attentive to the activity. Other students worked on this activity for approximately thirty minutes and the teacher reviewed orally with the whole class for

approximately fifteen minutes. The whole class answered questions regarding the sentences and the teacher-led the activity. The three students who were not engaged during the activity were not participating in answering the questions asked by the teacher.

On the second visit, students were working on a reading lesson that consisted of reading paragraphs from a handout and answering multiple-choice questions that related to the passage read. Students worked quietly on this activity for approximately forty minutes as the teacher walked around the classroom looking at their work. The teacher began to correct the activity orally with the entire class until the bell rang for recess. Once again, at least two students were not engaged in the lesson.

On the researcher's visit to School B, she observed in a fourth grade teacher's classroom. On the first visit, the students were engaged in small groups working on a reading lesson. Students were reading from the basal reader in a round robin fashion. Each student in every small group read as the other students followed along while the teacher walked around listening in on each group. After each group appeared to be finished with the story, the teacher stood in front of the classroom asking each group a series of questions related to the story. Most students appeared to be engaged and the teacher involved each student by calling on all of them.

The second visit was in the afternoon and students in School B were in the computer laboratory. The researcher walked to the computer lab and conducted the observation there. Each student sat at his/her own computer and there appeared to be a great deal of excitement on the faces of the students. After the teacher finished giving instructions on the day's lesson, students began working on the computers. Students worked on a series of skills in language arts and mathematics. The students needed very

little guidance from the teacher as they went through a series of skills. The teacher walked around the lab looking at each student's work on the computer. Students were to answer questions asked on the computer software and choose a multiple-choice answer. After approximately forty-five minutes, students stopped working on the computer lesson and the teacher reads from a printout of students' results on the skills they worked on for that day. The teacher shared with the researcher that she uses those results from the printout to guide her lessons for the coming week.

The researcher observed both fourth grade teachers two times each in School C. Teacher 1 was observed teaching reading on the researcher's first visit. A group of six students were at a round table with the teacher reading from a basal reader while the rest of the class was divided into groups and working in centers around the classroom. The group working with the teacher was taking turns reading orally and answering questions. The groups working in centers appeared to have specific activities to do. One group in particular was disruptive and required the teacher to stop at least three times to re-direct them. The writing and math centers had worksheets to complete while in that particular center.

The second visit to Teacher 1's class was during a math lesson. Students had manipulatives on their desks and were working on a pre-test sheet taken from their math books. Students were using the manipulatives to assist them with working problems. At least four students appeared to be working very slowly and in some instances, putting their heads down on their desks. The teacher did not attempt to re-direct those students during this activity. Students worked on this activity for approximately forty-five

minutes. The teacher told the researcher that she would pick up those tests and grade them.

Teacher 2 at School C was observed during a reading lesson on the researcher's first visit. As the researcher walked in the classroom, students were working on Daily Oral Language (DOL). There was a transparency with a topic or theme projecting on the screen in the front of the classroom. Students were to write at least a page reacting to the theme on the screen. The teacher walked around to answer questions and give some suggestions on getting started with the activity. All students appeared to be engaged and asked the teacher questions as she walked by. After approximately thirty-five minutes, the teacher asked two students to read their stories orally to the class. The teacher explained that this activity helps students to improve their writing skills for the LEAP test.

On the second visit to Teacher 2's class, students were working on a science activity. Students were divided into small groups of four as they worked on a project dealing with magnets. Students were working together following a sheet with directions on how to conduct the experiment. One student in each group was the group leader as deemed by the teacher. The teacher walked around to each group asking questions about the methods they were using to conduct the experiment. The students appeared to be focused and excited about the project.

The researcher visited with two of the three fourth grade teachers in School D. On the first visit to Teacher 1's classroom, the researcher observed a language arts lesson. The teacher was in front of the classroom directing students from an overhead projector. The transparency appeared to come from a book with pre-typed activities and lessons.

Students were copying from the transparency and had to complete numerous skills ranging from correction of grammar to spelling errors. The teacher was reviewing each question and calling on various students to answer orally. At least two students did not appear to be engaged as they were talking to fellow classmates as the teacher reviewed the lesson. This activity lasted for at least forty-five minutes. The teacher shared with the researcher that this sort of activity occurs daily to review skills that will be found on the LEAP.

On the second visit to Teacher 1's classroom, the researcher observed during a math lesson. Once again, the teacher was in front of the overhead projector with a pre-typed transparency. The transparency consisted of math problems ranging from two and three digit multiplication to word problems. Students were copying again from the transparency and answering problems. The teacher walked around after approximately ten minutes observing students' work. Some students appeared to be having some difficulty working some of the problems. The teacher directed a couple of fast-working students to assist those having trouble.

The researcher observed in Teacher 2's classroom in School D. On the first visit, students were working on a spelling lesson. Students were completing an activity from a spelling textbook that consisted of correcting misspelled words in sentences and writing a story using as many spelling words as possible. The teacher stood in front of the classroom to direct students and then walked around looking at individual students' work. Students worked on this activity for approximately forty minutes before the teacher led the whole class in correcting the activity orally.

The second visit to Teacher 2's classroom was during an afternoon. Students were working individually on a math test. Each student had a two-page test with at least fifteen problems on each page. Students were being timed on this test. The teacher walked around the class during the first ten minutes of the test. Students were being given thirty minutes to complete the test. Two students appeared to have a frustrated or confused look on their faces during the test. Others appeared to be working as quickly as possible to finish within the assigned time. The teacher shared that she gives students timed test at least once every two weeks to help students prepare for standardized tests.

At the conclusion of the observations, the researcher surmised that at least four of the six teachers appeared to be teaching to the test during the times the researcher observed in their classrooms. Students worked on specific skills in three of the four schools on the days the observations occurred. Students worked on skill-specific activities ranging from DOL lessons, copying questions from the overhead, taking timed tests, and writing stories from a given topic or theme. All of the above-mentioned activities are skills students will need for the LEAP test. Additionally, most participating teachers led the lessons to the whole class at the same time.

Only the teacher in School B was not observed using classroom time to teach skill-specific activities that would be considered teaching to the test. The students in School B appeared to be using critical thinking skills to complete tasks. Moreover, the use of the computer laboratory seemed to be a valuable tool for students to use higher order thinking skills. Consequently, test scores in School B have been getting better each year.

Cross-Case Summaries

This chapter provided in-depth interviews and survey results to examine how Louisiana's school and district accountability system impacted students' performance on the state-mandated Criterion Referenced Test. Four urban, Title I schools in the participating school district in southwest Louisiana were selected and differentiated on the basis of their Growth Label. The four schools profiled in the interviews were examined using the Constant Comparative Method of Unitizing and Categorizing. The survey results provide a picture of the opinions of the four principals and six teachers toward instructional practice used to ensure students' success on the CRT.

The answers to the four research questions, which examined how the accountability system has impacted students' performance on the state-mandated CRT, can be summarized as follows:

1) Have test scores changed in the schools studied?

Each principal and fourth grade teacher responded to this question. Two of the four schools studied had a growth label of "Exemplary Academic Growth." One of the schools had a growth label of "Minimal Academic Growth" and the other school had a growth label of "No Growth." The schools with the labels "Minimal Academic Growth" and "No Growth" are currently in Level I Corrective Actions.

2) To what extent are teachers in these schools teaching to the test?

Principals and fourth grade teachers responded to this question. Based on responses given by each principal and teacher interviewed, results

indicated that all fourth grade teachers were being encouraged to spend the majority of classroom time teaching to the test.

- 3) What strategies have teachers used to obtain a positive increase in student mastery of the material on the state-mandated test?

Principals and fourth grade teachers provided information regarding this question. Analysis indicated that numerous strategies (i.e., cooperative grouping, small group instruction, skill-specific activities, computer instruction, teacher-led instruction) were being used to ensure students' success on the CRT.

School A appeared to have discrepancies between the principal's response to strategies being used by teachers and the fourth grade teacher's response. The principal revealed that teachers used small-group instruction and cooperative grouping daily. The classroom teacher shared that she used sample tests, duplicating lesson plans as needed and a great deal of re-teaching.

Schools B and C disclosed that they use a variety of critical thinking activities on a daily basis to ensure student's success on the CRT. For example, technology is an integral part of lessons and ancillary staff is available to fourth grade classrooms daily to assist with small group instruction. Moreover, teachers focus more on reading and writing skills.

School D also revealed that most of their time is spent on after-school tutorials for fourth graders and re-teaching skills. Additionally, retired

teachers are utilized in each fourth grade classroom to assist teachers with the reinforcement of skills taught.

Other Related Objectives

Principals and teachers also responded to four research objectives in an attempt to provide additional insight into the opinions of principals and fourth grade teachers about the impact of accountability. The responses were analyzed in the same manner as the research questions. The objectives are as follows:

- 1) What is the goal of the accountability system? Has it accomplished what it set out to accomplish?

Principals in each selected school responded to this question. All four principals appeared to have a general understanding of the goal of accountability. All four principals believed the goal is to raise student achievement for all populations. Additionally, all four principals seem to agree that accountability had not yet accomplished its goal but that it is close to achieving what it has set out to achieve.

- 2) Have Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores correlated to Criterion Reference Test (CRT) scores?

Principals unanimously revealed that the ITBS test is drastically different from the CRT hence, making it impossible to really compare the two.

Three of the four principals did seem to believe there is a correlation of scores even though the format of the tests is dissimilar.

3) Do you feel pressure as a result of the high stakes nature of the CRT?

Both principals and teachers shared that the pressure to do well on the CRT is enormous and frustrating. All four principals revealed that the pressure on them as well as the teachers is horrendous. All six teachers collectively agreed that the stress and pressure of teaching fourth grade is too much for one grade to bear.

4) How has accountability impacted your school overall?

Principals and teachers responded to this question revealing that either a “Positive” or “Negative Impact” is felt as a result of accountability. Schools A and D are distinguished in the “Negative Impact” category because they both related negative reactions to the effects of accountability on their schools. Ironically, both of these schools are in Level I Corrective Actions. School B had an interesting variation in their response to this question. The principal of School B felt as if accountability has had a “Positive Impact” on his school. However, the fourth grade teacher felt as if it has had a “Negative Impact” on her and her students. She went on to add that she is counting the years until she is eligible for retirement because of the impact of accountability. School C had a “Positive Impact” from both principal and teachers. They all agreed that accountability has forced them to work harder to get their students to succeed.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to examine the impact of Louisiana's school and district accountability system on students' performance on the state-mandated Criterion Reference Test. Specifically, the researcher studied Title I urban schools and their experiences with accountability and its impact on students' performance on the CRT. Principals' and fourth grade teachers' experiences were explored through a detailed analysis of their stories as told in their own words. The final chapter begins with the summary of the study and discusses the common themes that emerged during the data analysis. The data analysis is followed by implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

The participants for this study were principals and teachers in four Title I urban schools in Louisiana, specifically, the school system studied. The interviews were conducted as individual interviews. Additionally, surveys were administered to each principal and teacher and collected at the conclusion of the face-to-face interviews. I conducted ten interviews on four different campuses, interviewing four principals and six fourth grade teachers. The schools were randomly chosen from 45 Title I schools in the parish. The same questions were used for the individual interviews and the surveys. I followed up with additional phone conversations and e-mails with principals and teachers after the original interviews had taken place.

This study included schools with enrollments ranging from 236 to 307 Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade students. Each school has over 95% of its population on

free or reduced lunch. Additionally, each school has at least 98% of its population serving minority students. All of these schools are located in highly populated; inner city areas of the district and many are considered high crime areas. Many students live in either low-income housing or in apartment complexes and are transported to school by bus.

The results of this study indicate that Louisiana's accountability system has impacted each Title school in various ways. There was not only variation in how these schools perceived accountability, but also a variation in the perceptions of teachers and principals with regard to strategies that are being used to prepare students for high stakes testing. There appeared to be a strong relationship between certain strategies being used by fourth grade teachers and the support being provided to teachers by administration at the school level.

Survey results and observation notes indicated that strategies being used by fourth grade teachers to prepare students for the LEAP were consistent with responses teachers revealed in interviews. Teachers were encouraged by principals in their schools to use most classroom time to teach test-taking techniques. Additionally, the researcher observed teachers using methods such as teacher-led instruction to the whole class and assigning activities daily to students that focus on test-related skills. Moreover, teachers in three of the four schools used most of their class time, as indicated by observations and survey results teaching specific skills in language arts and math that students must know for the CRT.

From the LADOE's website, the researcher downloaded the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores for 3rd graders in the participating schools. The 3rd graders scores

were from the 2000-2001 school year. Consequently, this is the same group of students that are now (2001-2002) 4th graders in the participating schools. Interestingly, the scores for 3rd graders in School A on the ITBS showed a composite national percentile rank of 27. The 3rd grade scores for School B were a composite score of 38. The 3rd grade scores for School C were a composite score of 29 and the scores for School C had a composite national percentile rank of 28.

In the participating school district, black students in the 3rd grade in the 2000-2001 school year scored a total reading average standard score of 32. In the area of language arts, black students scored an average standard score of 50 and in math black students scored an average standard score of 36. The same set of 3rd grade white students scored an average standard score of 59 in reading, 73 in language arts, and 68 in mathematics.

The ITBS Scores of 4th graders when they were in 3rd grade reveals that overall students in all four schools didn't fare well. Students in School B had the highest average standard score of 38, which is relatively low. Schools B and C had the highest LEAP scores of the four participating schools giving them an Exemplary Academic Growth rating. However, the ITBS scores for that same group of students when they were 3rd graders don't reflect the same level of mastery in reading, language arts, and mathematics. As a result, the researcher may conclude that LEAP scores for 4th graders in Schools B and C were actually higher because teachers in those schools were making a concentrated effort to target skills that are found on the high stakes test. This effort could come in the form of spending more time on tested skills, teaching narrowly to the test,

using small group instruction, providing additional help for weaker students, integrating technology into the curriculum, and re-teaching skills as needed.

Discussion of Common Themes

The answers to Research Question 1 through 4, which examines a) if there had been a change or improvement in test scores; b) the extent teachers are teaching to the test; and c) strategies teachers used to prepare students for the CRT can be summarized as follows:

School A Outcomes

- a) School A reported a growth label of “Minimal Growth,” indicating that there was an improvement in scores but the School Performance Score was not achieved. As a result, they are in Level I Corrective Actions.
- b) School A principal and teacher indicated that the majority of their time is being spent teaching narrowly to the test on a daily basis.
- c) According to the principal, strategies being used by fourth grade teachers are: small group instruction and cooperative grouping. Teachers indicate they are using sample tests, duplicating lesson plans and re-teaching.

School B Outcomes

- a) School B reported a growth label of “Exemplary Academic Growth,” indicating that they had exceeded their School Performance Score by five points or more.
- b) Principal and teachers in School B revealed that they are spending class time teaching to the test to ensure students’ success on the CRT.

- c) Strategies being used by teachers in School B consist of integrating technology in their classroom lessons daily, more reading and writing activities, and more critical thinking activities. Moreover, ancillary staff is assigned to each fourth grade classroom daily to assist with small group instruction.

School C Outcomes

- a) School C reported a label of “Exemplary Academic Growth,” indicating they had also exceeded their required School Performance Score by five points or more.
- b) The principal and teachers in School C did agree they are teaching to the test. However, they provided additional activities they implemented to assist with instruction. Additionally, one teacher described how she decides which students are “throwaways” and which are “keepers.” Throwaways are students that are below grade level and are given less direct instruction than those students performing at or above grade level.
- c) School C also disclosed that they use a variety of teaching strategies when preparing students for the high stakes test. Teacher use Daily Oral Language and integrate technology daily also. They encourage the use of critical thinking skills by using advanced reading and writing activities.

School D Outcomes

- a) School D reported a growth label of “No Growth,” indicating that there was no improvement in test scores. As a result, they are in Level I Corrective Actions.

- b) Principal and teachers in School D shared that they are encouraged to teach narrowly to the test. Teachers spend no time teaching subjects that students will not find on the test.
- c) Strategies being used by fourth grade teachers include: re-teaching skills on a daily basis and utilizing retired teachers in their classrooms. Additionally, students are required to attend an after-school LEAP Camp that begins in early October and ends in March after the test is administered.

Implications of the Study

The implications of this study can be divided into two types, practical and theoretical. Practical implications explore how the findings fit into everyday use. Theoretical implications explore how the findings of the study fit into a larger philosophical base to help explain the outcomes. Each type of implication is discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Implications for Practice

The major implication for this research is the lack of prior studies concerning Louisiana's accountability system. The system is only two years old and it is therefore difficult to find literature that can speak to its effectiveness or lack thereof. With this in mind, it may be that the Louisiana Department of Education should develop a method to measure its ongoing effectiveness to ensure that the goals of accountability are being met. Another aspect that may strengthen the concept of accountability among principals and teachers may be to develop workshops and forums where principals and teachers can express their concerns and opinions about the impact of accountability on students' performance or learn successful strategies for preparing students for high stakes tests.

Title I Schools

The Department of Education and School Districts might consider implementing orientations or workshops for Title I principals and teachers to address this conclusion. The orientations or workshops would serve to assist Title I schools with implementing strategies and activities that would allow them to be successful. Additionally, Title I schools with low School Performance Scores could have an opportunity to compare strategies with Title I schools with the same demographics that have proven to be successful.

Principals

Principals are in a key position to either encourage or discourage accountability and its impact on teachers and students. Districts might consider creating opportunities for principals with successful School Performance Scores to confer with those principals having more difficulty reaching desired School Performance Scores. These opportunities would allow principals to ask questions to other principals who serve the same type of students. Additionally, principals should have an opportunity to meet with district administrators to voice their concerns about accountability's impact and seek services that the district or state can provide. Moreover, principals may find it necessary to meet with third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers on a weekly or biweekly basis to facilitate planning and coordinating of skills and lessons taught.

Teachers

One of the most outstanding conclusions of this study is the numerous methods being used by fourth grade teachers to prepare students for the CRT. For example, teachers revealed to the researcher that they are spending more time preparing students

for the LEAP, re-teaching skills as needed to ensure students mastery, integrating technology into the curriculum, using sample tests, small group instruction, after-school tutorials, teaching test taking techniques, and teaching to the test by mainly focusing on skills and subjects that will be tested. All of the teachers expressed a great concern about the tremendous pressure placed on fourth grade due to the high stakes nature of the test. The Department of Education and the District might consider allowing a forum for teachers to express their opinions about the effects of accountability in their classrooms. Additionally, teachers may also be given opportunities to plan together on a daily basis and meet with fourth grade teachers from similar schools to gain ideas that would assist them with preparing students for the CRT.

Teachers might consider planning and coordinating lessons with third and fifth grade teachers to assist with recognizing students' deficiencies that can be addressed.

Theoretical Implications

From the results of this study, three general areas were identified where the implementing of an accountability system was insufficient to bring about increased student mastery of knowledge needed to sustain success. These areas are: narrowing of the curricula by mainly focusing on skills tested, teaching test taking skills, and creative methods of losing students.

High stakes accountability has generated significant commentary among education professionals. Jones and Whitford (1997) noted that it is becoming increasingly clear that accountability forces teachers to focus on whatever is thought to raise test scores rather than on instruction aimed at addressing students' needs. Smith (1991) found that pressure to improve students' test scores caused some teachers to

neglect material that the test does not include. A finding of this study indicated that teachers feel they have no choice but to teach to the test to ensure students' success on the CRT.

Research on accountability and high stakes testing indicates that test scores can rise without students' actually gaining the knowledge that should accompany successful scores. Cuban (1991) refers to "test score pollution," which can be described as an increase or decrease in test scores without an accompanying rise or fall in the cognitive phenomenon that the test is designed to measure. Pollution is most likely to occur when high-stakes exams are used in an attempt to change curricula and the methods teachers use to teach. Schools often respond to pressure from districts by aligning their curricula completely around the test, making students' learning experiences as narrow as the test themselves.

A finding of this study indicated that at least two teachers interviewed are in such pandemonium over the high stakes nature of the test until they or their colleagues have resorted to finding creative ways to "rid themselves" of those students that may not do well on the CRT. Teachers indicated that some students are encouraged to transfer to other schools just before the exam is administered. Other teachers explained that they make decisions early in the school year about which students are "worth" spending the time on and which are not. As a result, many at risk students have little or no chance from the beginning of being successful.

Recommendations for Future Research

For researchers interested in explorations in an area similar to the one in this study, several topics for deeper study come to mind.

- Replicating this study with a larger sample of Title I schools would either facilitate the emergence of patterns of implementation found in this study, or would show that within the larger population the findings of this study are not representative.
- Conducting a study similar to this that includes eighth grade also. This would help to determine if the patterns found with fourth graders are unique to elementary schools or have a broader generalizability.
- Replicating this study with non-Title I schools would facilitate the emergence of themes that could be compared to those of Title I schools.
- Continuing the study in a longitudinal fashion, to see if there is a change in the schools over time, would help determine if the nature of accountability is fluid or stable.
- In order to fully comprehend the creation and implementation of an accountability system, it would be interesting to trace this reform initiative from inception to full implementation, with a more focused intent on its effectiveness.

Summary of the Study

Louisiana has been at the forefront of developing an accountability system to raise academic standards for all students. The state has been recognized as having one of the most comprehensive accountability systems in the nation. State Superintendent Picard and State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education members have expressed pride

with the hard work of principals, teachers, and students for continuing to progress. This is the fourth year that Louisiana has handed out scores for schools throughout the state. In as much as Louisiana has made strides to move its students forward, it has not come without some disappointments especially for those students who are considered poor and minority. Almost two-thirds of the schools in the participating school district fall below the statewide school performance score. Obviously, the state still has a long way to go with its reform efforts. Louisiana is contending with some of the same challenges that other states are facing.

With the new No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states are, once again, facing new challenges. The new act is expected to better target resources to school districts with high concentrations of disadvantaged, poor children. The high stakes testing requirements are rigorous and outcomes-based. Supporters of the act conclude that this is just what is needed to spur improvement in schools. It remains to be seen if this new legislation supported by federal education agencies will produce the desired effects on student achievement. Moreover, will the new act achieve successful results for those students who are at greatest risk of failure?

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APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

1. How long have you been a teacher in East Baton Rouge Parish School System?
 This is my first year
 2 – 4 years
 5 – 9 years
 10 years or more

2. How long have you taught 4th grade?
 This is my first year
 2 – 4 years
 5 – 9 years
 10 years or more

3. How much formal education do you have?
 Bachelor's degree
 Master's degree
 Master's degree + 30
 Educational Specialist's degree
 Doctorate

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONAL ANALYSIS MODEL

Please respond to the following questions by checking one box to the right.

<i>Teachers in my school use scores to:</i>	<i>ROUTINELY</i>	<i>OFTEN</i>
Guide instruction		
Diagnose learning problems		
Communicate with parents		
Predict student performance		
Identify remedial students		
Place students for instruction		
Measure class/school effectiveness		
Evaluate teaching methods		
Stimulate curriculum review		
Identify students for special services		

<i>School administrators use scores to:</i>	<i>ROUTINELY</i>	<i>OFTEN</i>
Identify teacher strengths/weaknesses		
Identify curriculum strengths/weaknesses		
Evaluate teacher effectiveness		
Evaluate school effectiveness		
Evaluate materials		
Evaluate teaching methods		
In “highest score” competitions		
Advertise the school		
Make merit pay decisions		

Please respond by marking “yes” or “no”

	<i>YES</i>	<i>NO</i>
Are teachers encouraged to raise scores?		
How? By focusing on skills tested		
Teaching test-taking techniques		
Using same format for class tests		
Teaching actual test items		
By whom? Principal		
District Administrators		
Department of Education		
Do administrators advocate spending class time for test preparation? Required:		
Suggested:		
Do teachers spend more or less time preparing students for the test?		

Do teachers spend more or less time than required preparing students for the LEAP 21 test?

_____ More

_____ Less

Please respond by marking “always” or “usually.”

<i>What do teachers do to prepare students?</i>	<i>ALWAYS</i>	<i>USUALLY</i>
Demonstrate marking procedures		
Give general tips on test taking		
Send notes to parents about nutrition & rest		
Discuss the importance of test with students		
Encourage attendance during test week		
Discourage attendance to certain students during test week		
Use commercial test-preparation packages		
Teach test-taking skills		
Practice sample questions		
Practice using items from last year’s tests		
Teach/review topics covered on test		
Teach vocabulary that will be on the test		
Teach items from current year’s test		
Nothing		

Please respond to the following open-ended questions.

1. Are your lessons more focused on the content of the LEAP 21 than they were in the past? If so, have you made this change in response to the new accountability model?

2. Has the pace of instruction in your classroom been faster or slower as a result of preparing for LEAP 21? Why?

3. Do you feel added pressure as a result of the high-stakes nature of LEAP 21? Please explain.

4. Have accountability index scores on the LEAP 21 increased from the year 2000 – 2001? If so, to what can this be attributed?

5. Do student scores on the LEAP 21 correlate with their scores on the ITBS. Why or why not?

6. How do you feel Louisiana's Accountability System will impact you and your school?

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX C

LETTERS OF CONSENT

To: Mr. John Doe, Superintendent
123 Anywhere Street
Southwest, LA 70806

From: Linda Tolbert, Ph.D. Student
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

You are being asked to give permission for selected schools within your school district to participate in a research study examining the impact of Louisiana's Accountability System on students' performance on the criterion-referenced test (LEAP 21). Please read the details of the study, which are provided below and sign the bottom of the form if you give your approval.

Title of Research Study: The Impact of Louisiana's School and District Accountability System on Student's Performance on the State Mandated Criterion-Referenced Test

Research Director: Student Investigator: Linda Tolbert

Purpose of the Study: The proposed study investigates the impact of accountability on students' performance on the criterion-referenced test. In particular, the study will investigate how accountability has affected teacher planning and the delivery of the curriculum.

Procedures to be Used: Researchers will meet with each identified teacher who will participate in an interview and complete a survey. The interview takes about 15 minutes to complete.

Potential Risks to Subjects: There is no apparent risk to the subjects involved in this study.

Potential Benefits of the Study: By identifying the impact of accountability on instruction, teachers, schools administrators and parents/guardians can develop strategies to increase the student success rate on the criterion-referenced test.

Protection of the identity and privacy of the subjects: The teachers will be instructed to answer only the questions on the instrument and not add any additional markings. Other than the survey questions, only general demographic information will be asked. Teachers will be asked to complete instrument and return it in an envelope, which will be sealed

(Superintendent's letter continued)

and given to the investigator. Once returned to the investigator, the instrument was sorted by school for analyses.

We will be pleased to send you a summary of the survey results if you desire. Thank you for your cooperation.

I have been fully informed of the above described study and the associated procedures, the possible benefits, and risks and I give my permission for selected schools within my district to participate in the study if they should so desire.

_____ Right to refuse: Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may change their mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be entitled.

Superintendent's Signature

Date

To: Principal
1234 Anywhere St.
Baton Rouge, LA 70806

From: Linda B. Tolbert, Ph.D. Student
Louisiana State University
Southwest, LA 70803

I have received permission from the Superintendent of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System to gather data for a research project as a part of my Ph.D. program at Louisiana State University. Enclosed is a copy of the letter granting me permission to proceed. Likewise, I have attached a narrative discussion of my dissertation, which provides some information about the study I would like to conduct in your school and the potential benefits the results might contribute to the improvement of education. I would like to meet with you and the fourth grade teacher(s) and discuss the steps we need to initiate to proceed with data collection.

At this point, I have completed all of my course work in my Ph.D. program of studies in Educational Leadership, Research and Counseling at Louisiana State University. I have successfully defended my research proposal and have been approved by the internal Institutional Review Board (IRB) at LSU. The IRB reviews studies that are going to be conducted in a school setting. As previously mentioned, the School System Superintendent has approved the details of the study, but I need to have your approval as the principal of a targeted school before I can proceed.

The following is a brief overview of the study:

Title of the Research Study: The Impact of Louisiana's School and District
Accountability System on Student's Performance on the State Mandated
Criterion-Referenced Test

Research Director: Student Director: Linda Tolbert

Purpose of the Study: The proposed study investigates the impact of accountability on students' performance on the criterion-referenced test. In particular, the study will investigate how accountability has affected teacher planning and the delivery of the curriculum.

Procedures to be Used: The researcher will meet with each identified teacher who will participate in an interview and complete a survey.

(Principal's letter continued)

Potential Risks to Subjects: There is no apparent risk to the subjects involved in this study.

Potential Benefits of the Study: By identifying the impact of accountability on instruction, teachers, schools administrators and parents/guardians can develop strategies to increase the student success rate on the criterion-referenced test.

Protection of the identity and privacy of the subjects: The teachers will be instructed to answer only the questions on the instrument and not add any additional markings. Other than the survey questions, only general demographic information will be asked. Teachers will be asked to complete instrument and return it in an envelope, which will be sealed and given to the investigator. Once returned to the investigator, the instrument will be sorted by school for analyses.

Thank you in advance for your support. I can be reached by phone at home at 352-332-0278 or by e-mail at labrous@aol.com.

_____ Right to refuse: Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may change their mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be entitled.

Sincerely,

Linda B. Tolbert

Principal's Signature

Date

To: 4th Grade Teacher
1234 Anywhere Street
Southwest, LA 70806

From: Linda B. Tolbert, Ph.D. Student
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

I have received permission from the Superintendent of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System to gather data for a research project as a part of my Ph.D. program at Louisiana State University. Enclosed is a copy of the letter granting me permission to proceed. Likewise, I have attached a narrative discussion of my dissertation, which provides some information about the study I would like to conduct in your school and the potential benefits the results might contribute to the improvement of education. I would like to meet with you and the fourth grade teacher(s) and discuss the steps we need to initiate to proceed with data collection.

At this point, I have completed all of my course work in my Ph.D. program of studies in Educational Leadership, Research and Counseling at Louisiana State University. I have successfully defended my research proposal and have been approved by the internal Institutional Review Board (IRB) at LSU. The IRB reviews studies that are going to be conducted in a school setting. As previously mentioned, the School System Superintendent has approved the details of the study, but I need to have your approval as the teacher of a fourth grade class before I can proceed.

The following is a brief overview of the study:

Title of the Research Study: The Impact of Louisiana's School and District
Accountability System on Student's Performance on the State Mandated
Criterion-Referenced Test

Research Director: Student Director: Linda Tolbert

Purpose of the Study: The proposed study investigates the impact of accountability on students' performance on the criterion-referenced test. In particular, the study will investigate how accountability has affected teacher planning and the delivery of the curriculum.

Procedures to be Used: The researcher will meet with each identified teacher who will participate in an interview and complete a survey.

(Teacher's letter continued)

Potential Risks to Subjects: There is no apparent risk to the subjects involved in this study.

Potential Benefits of the Study: By identifying the impact of accountability on instruction, teachers, schools administrators and parents/guardians can develop strategies to increase the student success rate on the criterion-referenced test.

Protection of the identity and privacy of the subjects: The teachers will be instructed to answer only the questions on the instrument and not add any additional markings. Other than the survey questions, only general demographic information will be asked. Teachers will be asked to complete instrument and return it in an envelope, which will be sealed and given to the investigator. Once returned to the investigator, the instrument was sorted by school for analyses.

Thank you in advance for your support. I can be reached by phone at home at 352-332-0278 or by e-mail at labrous@aol.com.

_____ Right to refuse: Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may change their mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they may otherwise be entitled.

Sincerely,

Linda B. Tolbert

Teacher's Signature

Date

VITA

Linda Broussard Tolbert was born in 1969 and lived in Opelousas, Louisiana, until she moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to attend college in 1987.

Linda graduated in 1991 from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. In 1994, she received a master's degree in educational administration and supervision from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Linda attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she pursued a doctoral degree in educational leadership and research.

Linda was employed as an elementary teacher by the East Baton Rouge Parish School System in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, from August of 1991 to May of 1994. She became an instructor at Southern University Laboratory School from August of 1994 to January of 1998. She was also employed by the Louisiana Department of Education as a Program Coordinator from January of 1998 to January of 1999. She became a full-time graduate student from January 1999 to January 2001. She began working as a Project Manager for Teach Baton Rouge in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System from January of 2001 to March of 2002.

Linda is currently living in the state of Florida. She plans to pursue a career in higher education at the University of Florida in fall 2003.