Leadership Perspectives on High-Stakes Testing in a South Texas School Urban District

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Abstract: Policymakers and the public see standardized tests as simple quantifiable measures of school quality and student learning, and they assume that highs takes tests will influence teachers and students to try harder and that the results will be used rationally to benefit all students. This qualitative study explore show the high stakes testing in Texas urban school district have influenced elementary principals 'approach to preparing students for standardized tests. Research findings revealed that the elementary principals dealt with the following themes while coping with high stakes testing: stress, preparation, and collaboration.

Introduction

High-stakes testing has become one of the most debated issues in modern American education. Sara son (1959) suggested that we live in a test conscious and test giving culture in which lives of people are in part determined by their test performance. The pros and cons of high-stakes testing have been weighted seriously by parents and educators like, and many wonder whether or not implementing testing standards hurt or help students. States have adopted standardized state wide testing programs to measure student achievement, but there is more at stake than just grades (Munoz, 2012). Many educational leaders contend that high stakes achievement tests inspire students to work harder, provide teachers with a way to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and permit educators to focus on failing schools and provide additional help needed. One the other hand, some critics assert that high stakes testing narrows and alters the curriculum, holds students and teachers with unequal resources to the same standards, and guarantees class and ethnic inequalities.

The unintentional consequences of high stakes testing programs can occasionally result in narrowing of the curriculum, higher degrees of student test anxiety, and heightened pressure on teachers. In addition, high-stakes tests have been found to negatively impact low-performing, low-income, and minority students (Segool, Carlson, Go forth, Der Embse, & Barterian, 2013). Although unintended consequences are negative, researchers have discovered that high-stakes tests also have some encouraging effects on education. These include more teacher professional development, improved alignment between instruction and state content standards, more effective remediation programs for low-achieving students, and greater use of data to guide teachers' instruction (Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009).

High-stakes tests are typically standardized tests with consequences for students who do not perform well (Au, 2007; Nichols & Valenzuela, 2013; Reardon, Atteberry, Arshan, & Kurlaendar, 2009). In Texas, high-stakes testing is required in reading and math in grades 3-8 and in high school core subjects (Au & Gourd, 2013).

Review of Literature

High stakes standardized testing has become pervasive in the United States (Au & Gourd, 2013). The U.S. educational system has increasingly relied on high stakes testing as a form of accountability since No Child Left behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) (NCLB) was implemented (Zimmerman & Dibenedetto, 2008).

This reliance on high-stakes testing has been influenced by political, economic, and social factors (Au, 2007, Grant, 2004). A generation of students has gone through the American educational system under NCLB, but not much improvement has taken place in narrowing what is known as the "achievement gap" between white and Latina/o students.

Prior research has examined the effect that high-stakes testing has on curriculum, pedagogy, administrative pressures, and other aspects (Baker & Lang, 2013; Holme& Vasquez Heilig, 2012; McNeil, 2005; R. W. Solorzano, 2008).

Testing as Method of Assessment

Researchers have discussed the opinions for and against high-stakes tests as methods of assessment. They have concluded that supporters for high stakes testing maintain the achievement gap that currently exists between minority and white students will close.

Other researchers have opposed the perpetuation of the high stakes testing as forms of assessment (Au, 2013; Ravitch, 2015). Many parents have had their children "opt out" of the exams in response to the continuation of the high stakes testing movement. This is being done in many school districts across the country (Ravitch, 2015). Federal efforts to advance the achievement scores of American students through high-stakes testing have led to significant apprehensions about the objectivity and efficiency of standardized tests (Zimmerman & Dibenedetto, 2008).

Not performing well on these tests affects the students themselves as well as teachers, administrators, and school districts. Some outcomes of low performance on tests include grade advancement, graduation, teachers' salaries, and admission to colleges. Research indicates that high-stakes testing hinders educational advancement because it narrows curriculum and instruction, alters school climate, and promotes differential treatment because of performance on the exam (Au, 2007; Booher-Jennings, 2005, 2006; Nichols & Valenzuela, 2013). Nonetheless, states continue to rely on high-stakes tests as a method of accountability.

The burden prompted by the achievement tests sometimes results in dishonest practices by some teachers and administrators which leads to deviating from the standardization processes. These practices, because of anxiety or hopelessness, destroy the validity of the tests, and the interpretations that are expected become useless (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, & Rideau, 2010).

Research shows that high-stakes testing affects classroom practices and that such testing promotes the standardization of instruction, which disembowels and diminishes teachers' skills (Crocco and Costigan 2007). For example, a national study showed that 71 percent of the districts removed at least one subject to increase time spent on tested subjects in response to the NCLB mandated high-stakes testing (Renter et al. 2006). In recent state court cases, complainants have declared that exit-testing systems violate due process and equal protection rights established under state constitutions because of resource disparities between schools or disparities on opportunities to learn (Holme& Heilig, 2012).

Federal courts refuse to do away with high stakes exit testing, and state courts decisions and settlements have mainly focused on bureaucratic changes. As a result, many educators in schools serving big numbers of at-risk students are confronted with vast organizational challenges as they attempt to improve student outcomes in the high stakes exit testing era (Holme& Heilig, 2012). These challenges are disregarded or discounted by the courts arguing that states' use of high stakes exit exams are a way to fix social inequities. However, the research suggests that exit tests have not produced substantial positive changes in either school performance or student outcomes for at-risk students (Holme et al., 2010).

Teachers and administrators regularly aim at enacting "best practice" teaching and learning strategies. In the context of a politically dictated education reform movement, this becomes quite challenging. According to Fullan (2000), school personnel work urgently trying to deal with "a sea of excessive, inconsistent, relentless demands". New policies replace existing ones before they have had a chance to completely implement the existing policies, so they contradict each other (p. 12).

Information learned from high-stakes tests is thus converted into an assortment of disconnected facts, processes, procedures, or data primarily needed for rote memorization as students prepare for the state tests (McCarthy 2008). Therefore, students increasingly acquire knowledge considered lower level thinking, mainly in garmented chunks within the context of the tests alone. Thus, high stakes testing eventually restricts the way knowledge itself

is organized in teachers' instructional practices.

Although the legitimacy of high school exit exams has been reviewed repeatedly in courts throughout the country, exit exams continue to be employed across the country (Holme& Vasquez Heilig, 2012; Valenzuela, 2005). In addition, the federal government controls funding for low-income schools, which allows them to use test scores to hold the schools liable.

High-stakes testing has clearly delayed the growth or reduced achievement in the schools in spite of the pressure it produces and the attention it certainly receives from educators. According to Berliner (2009, 2010), it is very difficult to eradicate the achievement gaps between blacks and whites, Hispanics and whites, the underprivileged and the rich. He asserts that the gap has only a little to do with what goes on in schools and a lot to do with social and cultural issues that affect student performance.

High-stakes test are foolish according to The National Research Council (2011), who reports that the tests are engrained in discrimination and classism.

Additionally, a decade of high-stakes testing has not closed the achievement gaps. In some situations, the uses of mandatory high school exit assessments required for graduation have made it worse (Au & Gourd, 2013). Since standardized tests offer slim information on many forms of aptitudes, depending on them greatly harms students since they do not accurately measure student potential for success.

The United States can radically improve its school systems and generate more opportunities for all students to succeed by implementing high stakes testing as only one technique together with other types of assessments (Morgan, 2016).

The overwhelming stress on high-stakes standardized tests keeps educators from considering students' creative, research, debating, and public-speaking skills in the overall assessment (Jorgenson, 2012). Undeniably, these tests do not assess many of the aptitudes Harvard University Professor Howard Gardner (2009) recommended having a well-rounded education, including the interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, kinesthetic, and naturalist intelligences. High stakes tests only focus on the linguistic and mathematical intelligences.

The recent climate of high-stakes testing and test-based accountability intended to improve student products, focuses on classroom instruction and modifies what and how teachers teach (Mehta, 2013; Santoro, 2011). While we know that accountability policy guides classroom instruction, research so far has not examined the effect that present policy has on one of the most important facets of teachers' experiences, the degree to which teachers access fundamental rewards from their teaching (Au, 2007; Mintrop and Sunderman, 2009; Valli and Buese, 2007).

High Stakes Testing in Texas

In the United States, the political conversations of NCLB have contributed to the definition of teacher efficacy with an emphasis on evaluating student success through high-stakes testing (Liston, Whitcomb, &Borko, 2007). This is no different in the state of Texas. State and local education policies have imitated NCLB by applying evaluation procedures that enforce sanctions on public schools when they do not meet minimum student achievement standards.

Before NCLB, Texas used students' standardized test results to employ a policy grounded on holding schools responsible. According to Morgan (2016), schools, especially in the Houston area, asserted that the test results were very good. This was referred to as the "Texas Miracle". Texas students' apparent achievement encouraged President George W. Bush to implement NCLB. His idea was that the "Texas Miracle" strategy would promote success nationally. However, after closer analysis, it was discovered there was no miracle in the academic achievement of students. Many students scoring high on the Texas state tests were performing low academically (Morgan, 2016).

In Texas, there are various constituencies that have direct interest in school accountability. These are parents, community, teachers, administrators, and school boards. Other very interested groups include the Latina/o and African American community leaders, the business community, and elected and appointed officials, including

legislators (Valenzuela, 2005). This "Texas-style accountability" does not appear to truly improve education. It is more of a varied assortment of new and old ideas with changeable levels of popular appeal. "It is a political "grab bag" that has been deftly used by powerful elite to move a larger agenda forward" (Valenzuela, 2005).

Valenzuela (2005) postulates that there are deep flaws with the Texas approach to testing. It attaches high-stakes consequences in the areas of retention, promotion, and graduation to a single measure of students' academic abilities. It also attaches highs takes consequences to schools and districts, which encourage a "reductionist, test-driven curriculum". Finally, high stakes testing promotes an unchanging and objectivist way of knowing, which disadvantages other cultures, languages, and methods of knowledge (Valenzuela, 2005). High-stakes testing is considered unethical and unsuitable for determining students' talents, abilities and potential. Moreover, it has guaranteed effects, such as narrowing curricula and marginalizing students. The Texas accountability system can deprive children of a quality education.

Typically it can foster their mental, emotional, and, sometimes, literal physical removal from school (Valenzuela, 2005). As a result some students become disconnected from school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of a sample of experienced elementary principals on how high-stakes testing impacted their leadership.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based upon Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1966), also known as the Two-Factor Theory. This theory affirms that good feelings are commonly associated with job content or motivators and responses about bad feelings are associated with job context, or hygiene factors. Motivators result from factors built into the job itself, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement. Hygiene factors are related to feelings of dissatisfaction within the employees and are extrinsic to the job, which include inters personal relations, salary, supervision and company policy (Herzberg, 1966). Hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction, but they do not lead to satisfaction. These factors are essential only to avoid bad feelings at work. On the contrary, motivators are the real factors that motivate employees at work. Motivation is a result of future expectations while satisfaction is a consequence of past events (Carr, 2005). The theory nudged principals in this study to voice how high-stakes testing influenced their leadership.

Research Question

How does the impact of high stakes testing affect the leadership as reported by the participants in this study?

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative case study that attempts to understand how elementary principals, who are directly involved in high-stakes testing, perceived the impact on their leadership. Yin (2003) emphasizes that a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer how and why questions,(b)you cannot influence the behavior of the participants in the study, (c)you want to cover appropriate conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon in the study, or (d) the limitations are not clear between the phenomenon and context. A trademark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Possible data sources may include, but are not limited to: documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. In case study research, data from these different sources are then combined in the analysis process rather than analyze separately. Each data source an be seen as one piece of the puzzle in which each piece contributes to the researcher's understanding of the entire phenomenon. This merging of different data sources strengthens the findings as the various strands of data are interwoven to promote a better understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Participants

Purposeful selection was used to select the three elementary principal participants of the study. With purposeful selection, "particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1998, p.88). The selection a criterion was based on each principal's potential to add to the understanding of the processes and procedures educators adopt in response to high-stakes testing (Maxwell, 1998).

Participants were recruited for the study by the district assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. Since the study intended to investigate principals' responses to the demands of high stakes testing, only experienced elementary principals with ten or more years as a principal were considered.

Three elementary campus principals from American City CISD (Pseudonym) (ACCISD) were interviewed for the study. ACCISD is in South Texas and includes four high schools, six middle schools and 31 elementary schools. The district received an accountability rating of "Met Standard" for the 2016-2017 school years. Sixty-two percent of the students are considered at risk of dropping out of school. Thirty-two percent of the students are enrolled in bilingual or English learning programs

The first participant, Principal Henry is a principal at Central Elementary School and has worked in the field of education for fourteen years. In 2015, he became the principal at Central City Elementary. This campus has an enrollment of400 student. The second participant, Principal Arthur was a principal at East Elementary School and has worked in education for twenty years, sixteen of those years with the American City CISD. He was an assistant principal at two middle schools for a combined eleven years.

Where he spent eleven years, two years at one school and nine at another one. He is now in his second year as a principal of East Elementary School. The third and last participant, Principal Monica has worked in the field of education for 35 years, most of those years in American City CISD at the elementary level. After eight years as acurriculum assistant, she became the principal of North Elementary School, a position she has held for seven years.

Data Collection and establishing Reliability and Validity

Since this is a qualitative study, a robust study multiple sources of data were utilized. One of the tenants of research is establishing the validity and reliability. By establishing both validity and reliability, this study took on a more credible and accurate tone; therefore, it added to the body of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, data collected and analyzed was subjected to triangulation, member checking, and auditing.

Triangulation was used to ensure comprehensive results that revealed the participants' understandings as precisely as possible. Yin (2003) and Stake (2000) agree that triangulation is fundamental to conducting a case study reliably. Researchers use additional sources of data to create a story that respects participants' meaning-making processes. Interviews, note taking and purposeful sampling were utilized. Analyzed written and audio-recorded data following the first audio-recorded interviews. Transcribed the audio recordings.

Conducted "member checks" after transcribing. Began the manual coding process for identification of emerging themes based on participant terms. Identified patterns and facilitate ensuing data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This study used the following sources of data for triangulation: Observation notes from campus visits, focus group interviews, and member checking of the transcription notes. By using multiple sources of data, the researchers ensured accuracy of the study.

Secondly, Member checking was utilized in this study to establish validity and reliability. Member checking involves the researcher going back to the participants and asking them to verify the transcribed notes and correcting any inaccuracies or misleading information. By doing so, the findings assured a complete and realistic accounting.

Thirdly, an audit was used in this study. The audit, which is often referred to as an external audit, is a process of asking an unbiased colleague to review the methodology and findings of the study. The task of the auditor is to

provide any feedback to the research. Typically, auditors investigate the study's findings to see if they are supported by the data or if themes are appropriate (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988).

Data collection Instrument

Qualitative researchers use many methods for collecting information. Interviewing is one of those methods with a research base. Sideman (1991) associated the core of phenomenology with qualitative philosophy and stated that, "…interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides way for researchers to understand the meaning of behavior"(p.128).Sideman(1991)like wisee stablished the idea that abasi cassumptioninin-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of the inexperience affects the way they carry out that experience. "Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provide access to understanding their action"(Seidman, 1991, p. 128). The primary data collection instrument used in this study involved the use of audio recorded open ended question interviews. The researcher used a semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 1998) and a uniform set of open-ended questions to obtain: (a) demographic information on the participants, and (b) participants'perceptions and experiences with high-stakes testing for the purpose of improving student performance on their state assessments. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews to encourage subjects to respond freely and openly to questions (Bogdan&Biklen, 2003;, 2002; Kvale, 1996). To encourage participants to elaborate on or clear up a response, probing and/or follow-up questions were used, when necessary (Denzin &Lincoln,2011).

Each of the principals was interviewed individually on their respective campuses to encourage the participants to speak openly and feel comfortable. The interviews lasted approximately 45-55 minutes and they were asked open ended questions. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed within a realistic amount of time after the interviews. The researchers conducted observations of the participants and took notes during the interviews. Follow-up informal contact was initiated, and each participant was given his or her respective transcript for member-checking and to verify transcript content. The researcher coded the data for emergent themes.

The interviews generated very valuable information regarding high stakes testing and how it impacted each principal individually with regards to daily operations of schools, class room instruction and their sense of professionalism.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research studies involve continuous interaction between data collection and data analysis (Strauss Corbin, 1990). The transcription process began immediately after the first interview. To ensure transcript accuracy, the research err viewed each transcript while listening to the audio recordings. Additionally, the transcripts were presented to each interview participant for their review to confirm accuracy, as a form of member checking.

After reviewing the transcriptions and importing the raw data into an qualitative software program NVivo, the research began the process of data analysis. The researcher followed the data analysis and coding techniques suggested by Creswell (2009)and Ester berg(2002). Esterberg (2002) proposed that open coding is a process where "you work in tensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest" (p.158).

As the researcher did this, he was able to identify patterns and facilitate en suing data collection (Strauss Corbin, 1990). Qualitative analysis is a form of intellectual artistry. Since data analysis is a process of making meaning, there is no single way to accomplish qualitative research. It is a creative process, not mechanical one (Denzin&Lincoln,2011).Similarly, qualitative study takes advantage of ordinary ways to make sense of participants 'experiences(Stake,1995).Stake(1995)remindsqualitativeresearchersthat,thereisnoparticularmomentwhendataanalysi sbegins.Analysis,heexplains,"essen tially means taking something apart"(Stake, 1995, p.71).In this case, it not only means understanding the ways educators use and makes ensue of student data, but also identifying and outlining the patterns that surface from that meaning-making process. Qualitative data analysis, then, gives meaning to first impressions and final compilations. It is an analysis that tells the story of educators 'purposes to make (and their results from making) informed decisions that define and guide student success in this

schooldistrict.Esterberg(2002)suggests"gettingintimatewithdata"(p.157),anddescribesthemainobjectiveofengaging oneselfininterviewtranscriptstoloadupyourmemorywiththecollecteddata.Thisresearchwillfollowthedataanalysisandc odingtechniquessuggestedbyCreswell(2009)andEsterberg(2002).

Ester berg (2002) proposed that open coding is a process where—you work in tensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest‖(p.158). Additionally, Creswell (2009) mandated the traditional approach in the social sciences that allows the codes to surface during the data analysis. Once the data from this research was examined meticulously through the open coding process, the research err viewed the codes for emerging themes in the data.

Results

The interviews with the principals regarding high stakes testing and how it impacted them produced the following three themes: stress, planning for instruction, and collaboration amongst all district staff.

Theme 1: Stress

Although each of the principals interviewed talked about the stress that comes with wanting every student to do well academically and in their state tests, it was also interesting to hear how well they deal with that stress. As Principal Arthur stated, "Principals know what they are getting into when they apply to be a campus principal. Stress comes with the job. You just have to know how to deal with it." The introduction of high-stakes testing a few decades ago, according to Arthur, created a lot of stress for all educators, and it has increased every year since them because the stakes keep going up, and so does the rigor on the tests. Principal Henry stated that, "There is just too much testing throughout the year, according to Henry. Benchmark tests are important and provide valuable data that will help in tailoring instruction, but there is just too much testing. Adding to the stress, even if a particular student does not pass every test, it is every educator's responsibility to ensure that students, at the very least, make progress. All of the principals stated that student achievement on the state's test constitutes most of their stress every year. Principal Henry further stated that, "School districts and individual campuses too are just focused on making the grade when it comes to high-stakes testing, to meet the accountability demands of state testing. Testing is not a bad thing. It's what is tied to the testing that prevents educators from doing what they are supposed to do to educate children".

The principals also agreed that as leaders of their campuses, it is their responsibility to maintain that stress in check not only for themselves but for their staff as well, especially the teachers, who are probably he group that gets most stressed with testing. Principal Henry said, "That is why it is important to develop in care, trustingrelationshipswithyourstaff.Theyhavetobelieveintheprincipalandbelievethateverything will book."

According to the principals, the pressure of testing is sometimes self-inflicted. Principals are expected tonsure that their students and respective campuses are high-performing and that they will meet their goals with the accountability measures, but principals, as natural born leaders, are very competitive with themselves as well as with others. They want to be the best above every other campus in the district.

Principal Arthur spoke specifically about the stress that parents and students undergoes result of high-stakes testing. He has observed that this stress seems to increase every year. Students and their parents continuously worry that the student will not pass their tests at the end of the school year and having to attend summer school in preparation for the next round of testing in the summer. Students and parents also worry about the student not passing the grade level, which means that students must be retained for the following year. Students and parents must then have to deal with the humiliation from their peers as they move on while the failing student must repeat the grade level.

There is a much stress for everyone in education due to high-stakes testing .The pressure for students to do well on the state's achievement tests begin with the community. This pressure then trickles down to the school board who is expected to hold the superintendent responsible to ensure that the completed is stricter forms well and makes the state grade. The superintendent then makes principals and their administrative staff accountable to support and guide their teachers. This support and guidance can translate into pressure for teachers to work hard

er for students to be successful on state tests.

Theme 2: Planning for Instruction

Planning for instruction and the state test was another theme from the interviews with the principals. Principals spoke about the constant monitoring and planning with regards to student academic improvement. They reviewed benchmark and formative assess ments regularly to gauge how individual students are doing and if any intervention programs need to be Putin place. Principal Henry stated,

"Ihad to modify intervention schedules a couple of times this year based on student academic performance".

Planning for instruction and testing is very deliberate at campuses throughout ACCISD. The new school years begins two months before the arrival of students in which administrators and teachers review testing data. Teachers are group edby grade levels, review data for pattern sin concepts or skills, and they develop strategies and activities to address those concepts and skills that students had overwhelming trouble with. Principals and curriculum assistants then guide teachers as they set student achievement goals for the school year. The principals also indicated that the goals are placed in individual classrooms to remind teachers of their goals. In addition, posters comparing performance goals for classrooms and even district campuses are displayed throughout the campuses to encourage students to perform better than their peers.

These goals increasing student performance on tests to ensure students not only pass their tests but make gains from year to year. After reviewing student data and setting yearly goals for the different student groups, principals design staff development training to address the student expectations or concepts that were troublesome for students. Teachers and curriculum assistants then design individual student profiles to ensure that student groups receive targeted instruction. This is collaborate effort so that teachers do not have to design individual strategies and activities for instruction. The process of reviewing individual student data and tailoring instruction for students is ongoing throughout the year, especially after benchmark testing.

Principal Arthur said, "Teachersandadministratorsmeetregularlytoplanandstrategizebasedonstudentdata.Wecannot just teaches with a one-size fits frame of mind. Weoweit to the students to provide them with in dividualized and differentiated instruction." He stated that providing instruction and intervention is not the sole responsibility of the teachers.

Administrators, support staff, and paraprofessional staff are utilized as well, so the principal has to come up with a plan for them. For example, the role of the counselor is not just to counsel student's when they have personal problems or to provide academic counseling. They too are assigned group of students on a regular basis.

Sometimes principals will find a pattern in teachers who have repeatedly had students perform unsatisfactorily in their state testing even with continuous support. Although it is not common for principals to recommend termination for teacher, they do elect to move these teachers to another grade level, possibly to a non-tested grade. Sometimes teachers may be moved from third to fourth grade or fourth to fifth grade because they have done so well with a specific, struggling group. This type of moving of a teacher is called looping.

The idea behind looping is that teachers will already know last years' students and what their academic strengths and weaknesses are. With this type of movement of teacher from one testing grade to another, principals hope to keep the momentum going for the students to continue doing well in the state tests.

"Loopingcanbeverybeneficialforstudentseventhoughtheteachersmightnotbeveryhappyabout the move, but it is for the benefit of the students not for the convenience of the teachers", stated Principal Henry.

Theme 3: Collaboration

In addition to planning for instruction, the principals that were interviewed spoke about the regular collaboration that occurs not only among the teachers at their campuses but throughout the district as well. They share ideas to help improve student achievement.

As Principal Monicastated,"Wehaveparticularlyexperiencedprincipalswhohavebeencampusadministratorsfor along time, and they have really awesome ideas that everyone can use for the benefit of the students.

We are not a fraid to call each other and ask for help." They canals call central office content-area specialists who are always a call away, but they understand that there are just too many campuses, so many students, and it is difficult for them to make it out to every campus. Besides, there are campuses that have greater needs, and principals understand that as the lowest performing campuses, the district has to focus on them. Teachers, campus administrators, and central of face staff all work in partnership frequently that students are learning as high levels. Sometimes school districts cannot afford to provide so much out-of-school intervention. Instead, teachers are encouraged to give up their time, such as before school, during lunch, afterschool, and even during teachers' conferences or planning times to provide the extra help to students. Other staff, besides the teaching staff, provides additional help to students, and this includes the campus principals. They too adopt a group of students to mentor and tutor throughout the year. Getting students to increase their academic performance is not the job of only one person. Principal Monica stated, "Iam the instructional leader on my campus, and as such, I need to model what I expect from my staff. Therefore, when I ask other staff such as the custodians, cafeteria workers, or any other paraprofessional to tutor child, they know I am asking them to do what I do myself." She also stated that every teacher gives his or herfreetimetopreparestudentsforthestatetesting.Usuallythoselower-performing ~~focus~~ campus esareal located the necessary funds.

One of those campuses was North Elementary School whose student population includes largely of lowsocio-economic status. Principal Monica, the campus principal, stated, "There is no excuse for our school not to exceed the state's and district's expectations of our students. The distric tonsures that we are provided enough resources, and there is much collaboration between teachers and campuses in Valley ISD."

Another example of how teachers collaborate with each other involves lower-level teachers helping other teachers. To build students' skills, kindergarten teachers give up their conference periods to help first and second teachers with students that are not at grade level in phonics. These kindergarten teachers want those former students of theirs to bready when they rein the tested grades. Otherwise, they will struggle and possibly not pass their state tests. In some cases, teachers have difficult time getting a group of students to grasps pacific concepts or skills. These teachers will visit master teacher son campus in order to acquire additional strategies. In addition, the curriculum assistant and the principal will also model for struggling teachers. "As the instruction all eaderonmy campus, it is my responsibility to provide the support and model what needs to be done," stated Principal Monica.

Another example of the collaboration that exists among teaching staff at the campuses is between the testing teachers and the elective teachers. Students from elective classes are pulled out from electives classes such as physical education, art, etc., to provide them with the needed additional tutoring for the state test. Elective teachers understand the stress that the testing teachers undergoes a result of high stakes testing, especially when the testis around the corner, usually in late spring. They collaborate with the testing teachers in this way because in their eyes, the success of the students on state testing is the responsibility of each and every staff member on campus. In physical education during the winter or rainy season when students cannot go outside, the coaches allow teachers or tutors to take their students and work with them. In some cases, the coaches themselves provide instruction and tutoring. No longer do they stay in a classroom to watch movies."We have to take whatever opportunity tonsure we provide maximum teaching, tutoring, and mentoring for these students so that they perform satis factorily on the tests," stressed Principal Henry. The three principals that were interviewed expressed unwavering appreciation to the central of ficead ministration for the help they get from them. ACCISD has content-area specialists in the tested subjects that are accessible when called upon by the principals and curriculums are tents. Aside from their routine visits to all campuses, they ass is group of teachers or individual teachers with strategies to address the varied academic skills that not only will be tested on the state tests but skills that will help them past high school.

Collaboration between parents and educators is critical for the success of students not only academically but instate testing. Principals, curriculum assistants, and teacher's meet regularly with parents of all students early in the fall to begin planning for each student's performance on the state tests. As the year progresses and teachers and other staff members get clearer picture of how students are performing on benchmark tests, they meet more regularly with all parents, not only with parents of struggling students. Parents need to understand that their children must not only pass the state's academic achievement tests but make progress from year to year.

Discussion

Research Question

Based on the interviews that were conducted with the educators in the research, high-stakes testing drives instruction today. All of the participants acknowledged that achievement testing is necessary to gauge student learning, but some ways, it hinders the way teachers teach and ultimately, the way students learn. Principals worked closely with teachers expressed that they would like to be more creative in the classroom, they feel pressured to teach to the test, and they feel that they are killing students 'curiosity to learn. Educators also expressed that students are not acquiring information and essential soft skills that are necessary to navigate post high school and life. Teachers are expected to follow the scope and sequence that is developed by the district, and they need to make sure the TEK Sare covered within the specified timeline. Because teachers are so pressed for time to cover the TEKS in preparation for the state tests, they cannot spend too much time on hands-on activities, educational games, and others strategies that would address the individual student learning styles.

Working in collaboration with teachers, principals reviewed student achievement data throughout the year by district and campus staff, especially teachers, playsabigrolein monitoring whether students are prepared to pass the state achievement tests that is conducted late in the spring and early in the summer. Even before students begin school in the fall, teachers and administrators would have already reviewed data and prepared their teaching materials to address the TEKS that student's had trouble with.
According to some of the participants, teacher planning has never been as essential and deliberates it is now.

During the study, there was debate among teachers and administrators whether or not they teach to the tests. Some of the participants explained that the TEKS, the state's recommended knowledge and skills, are used to develop the scope and sequence for each content area, and this is what guides the teachers to teach in the classrooms. The STAAR, the state's achievement tests, are developed based on the TEKS. Therefore, if students are successful in mastering the TEKS, then they should master the STAAR. However, participants also explained that students need to know the structure of the test, and therefore, it is acceptable for teachers to review the types of questions that will be asked on the tests. When discussing the actual test itself, teachers and administrators expressed that many of the students in their schools struggle with the tests because of the vocabulary that is used in the tests. The majority of the students' in their schools are English learners. Their first language used at home is Spanish, so their English vocabulary is not as extensive as that of students' who se first language spoken at home is English.

High-stakes testing has had a great impact on elective programs such as art, music, and physical education, to name a few. Students who struggle to master the knowledge and skills that will be tested on the state tests are pulled from the elective programs to get additional tutoring.

Conclusions

The participants in this study demonstrated a high degree of pride in their work with children despite the demands and stress that high-stakes testing places on them. They described how important it was to them that all their students not only passed their state tests but that they demonstrated growth from the year before. There search participants also expressed the awe-inspiring feeling of satisfaction when the district bench mark and the state test scores came in and all of their students had done well is what they said they worked hard for all year. The countless volunteer hours before, during and after school made it all worthwhile. This, the participants claimed, is what leads them to a high-degree of self-worth and professionalism. It also motivates them to continue to find ways to improve their craft year after year. Yes, times have changed throughout the years as a result of high-stakes testing. However, educators believe that the demand placed on them by the state has made them more skilled, and students are able to compete globally due to the rigor of state testing.

Frederick Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, also known as the Two-Factor Theory, was used to demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts that were relevant to the topic of educator perspectives of high-stakes testing and the impact on instruction and their sense of professionalism in relation to testing.

According to this theory, there are certain factors (motivation factors) in the workplace that because job satisfaction while a separate set of factors (hygiene factors) caused is satisfaction. These factors act independently of each other.

Motivation factors include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Hygiene factors include organization policies, supervision, relationship with supervisors and peers, work conditions, salary, job status, and security. For the purpose of this study, Herzberg's theory was appropriate because some of the research participants identified some of the motivation and hygiene factors.

Most of the motivation factors in Herzberg's theory were evident in the interviews with the participants. For example, all of the participants stated that their students'achievement in the state tests was a reflection of their hard work, which translated to their professional achievement as educators. The talked about how their students 'academic success was the reason why they went into the field. They also spoke about the pride that they felt working for a district that is high performing in different areas, not only in state testing. American CISD is recognized not only in the region, but in the state and nation as well. This, the participants stated, is very important for them. All the elementary principals spoke about the pride they feel when individual teachers, campuses ,and the district is recognized when they receive the state test results and their students performed exceptionally well in comparison to other teachers, campuses, or districts. The participants in this research also expressed a great commitment to the education of the children. They spoke about how important their jobs as educators are. Their responsibilities to ensuring that students do well academically and on the state test are not taken lightly.

Herzberg's theory also applied to this research because it addressed the hygiene factors that might exist in any organization. These factors might include organization policies, supervision, relationship with supervisors and peers, work conditions, salary, job status, and security..Another hygiene factor, supervisor and peer relationships, greatly influences how teachers, curriculum assistants, and principals see their roles at their respective campuses and in the classrooms.

Principals also indicated that central office staff provides much support for them, especially if they are first-or second-year principals. They also provide extra support if their campuses are low-performing campuses. According to Fredrik Herzberg, providing effective, supportive and non-intrusive supervision will yield high her gains from staff. Herzberg also states that having appositive working relationship with supervisors and peers will create a culture of respect and dignity for all team members. Another of the factors that can have a big impact on the performance of campus educators which leads to gains in student achievement is the factor of salaries. The group of participants spoke very little regarding this factor, other than that of bonuses that were provided one year to educators. These bonuses, which occurred only one year, were given to staff members in return for high performance on high-stakes tests by their students. However, American CISD remains one of the school districts with the high est salaries in the region. Because of this, the district has a very low turn-over rate. Herzberg asserts that maintaining competitive salaries eliminates dissatisfaction in the organization and increases productivity. Job status is also a factor that needs to be addressed in order to create higher satisfaction among employees. According to Herzberg, building job status by providing meaning ful work for everyone creates an environment in which members of an Organization feel valued known and inspired, which leads to higher productivity. Connected to all of the factors previously mentioned leads to job security, another of the factors that leads to employees to work harder.

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory was used as a means to guide this research. This theory, in particular, is largely responsible for the practice of allowing people greater responsibility for planning and controlling their work, as a means of increasing motivation and satisfaction.

The relationship between motivation and job satisfaction is not too complex. The problem is that many employers look at the hygiene factors sways to motivate when, in fact, beyond the short term, they do very little to motivate. When seeking to motivate members of an organization, it is critical to do away with things that are annoying them about the organization and the workplace. The staff needs to be treated fairyland with respect.

Once this is done, organizations need to find ways to help people grown within their jobs, give them opportunities for achievement, and praise that achievement whenever it occurs.

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