

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

High Stakes testing has been around since the mid 1800s in the United States when “New York State began to use Regents exams for the accountability of college-bound students starting around 1865” (Koretz, 2002). High stakes tests have been used for such areas as entrance into college, measuring IQ scores, placement into certain classes, and licensures for teachers, lawyers, and nurses. Not until recently have high stakes tests been used so widely in public schools to determine proficiency in students. No longer are grades or teacher reports adequate to determine if a student is performing at proficiency level or if they should move onto the next grade level. High stakes tests, in most states are now responsible for this decision.

A lot of controversy has come with the implementation of high stakes tests in schools. No Child Left Behind and the ABC’s have set specific standards for students to reach on these tests. Schools are required to show “adequate yearly progress” and individual students as well as sub groups are required to show continuous growth throughout their school careers. These tests are supposed to be the answer for increasing motivation in teachers and students, accountability, higher standards and closing the achievement gap.

High stakes tests start as early as third grade in many states and often require a certain score in order for students to move onto the next grade level. In many high schools, students are required to pass a test for certain subject areas in order to graduate. No longer does it matter how well or not a student did throughout the school year, the only measure that counts is the end of the year or end of the course test. A student learns

pretty quickly how important high stakes tests are and the consequences of them starting as early as 8 years old.

There are numerous issues involved with high stakes testing, most of them being negative. Educational research in the past few decades has focused on high stakes testing and its effects. Studies have looked at such issues as narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test, rote methods of teaching rather than hands on, increased test anxiety, increased teacher turnover, and increased student drop out rates.

High stakes testing starts in elementary school in many states, including North Carolina where this study will take place. Understanding how elementary students perceive high stakes tests may allow educators to be able to find out the children's views and how they believe they are affected by high stakes tests. These tests are such a major part of these children's lives, yet very rarely do they get to talk about them or tell others how they feel about them. Educators do not truly know if these tests are doing everything they are supposed to do until they talk to the source, the ones taking the tests. Are they motivating students to try harder and do better in school? Are they increasing test anxiety? How does academic achievement affect student performance on high stakes tests? What factors influence student perceptions of high stakes tests and ultimately their success on these tests? These are areas that elementary students need to be able to share with educators. Educators and policymakers need to find out how much these high stakes tests are truly affecting the lives of children.

This current study will try to understand how elementary students perceive high stakes tests. The study will also consider the many areas that may affect their perceptions. Possible factors that may affect elementary students' perceptions of high stakes testing

include variables such as motivation level, test anxiety level, and academic achievement level.

Since there is so little research available on how students perceive high-stakes tests, the current study will attempt to understand this variable more thoroughly as to determine how and why their perceptions can affect their achievement. I will also try to understand the several variables that may affect students' perceptions of high-stakes tests, which may ultimately lead to their success or failure on these tests.

The questions I will attempt to answer through this study include:

1. What are elementary students' perceptions of high stakes testing?
2. What is the relationship between students' motivation and their perceptions of high stakes tests?
3. What is the relationship between student test anxiety levels and their perceptions of high stakes tests?
4. What is the relationship between student academic achievement levels and their perceptions of high stakes tests?