

HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING  
STANDARDIZED TESTING AND COLLEGE READINESS.

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this endeavor to my husband who supported me through this entire process. I would like to also dedicate this to my daughter Carter, who saw mommy work on the computer so many days and nights. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to my parents who have been great examples, motivators, and have given an endless amount of support.

## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore English high school teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. This study provided a thorough investigation of the lived experiences and perceptions of English high school teachers' ability to prepare students for standardized testing, and their ability to prepare students to be college ready. Purposeful sampling was used to select eight participants to participate in individual interviews.

Five themes emerged from the data. *Professional development for standardized testing and college readiness* played an important role in how teachers prepare students for standardized testing while preparing them for college. *Preparing students for standardized tests and college* contributed to their comfort level. *Student and teacher performance on standardized tests and in the classroom* are directly impacted by how students perform on their tests. *The curriculum used to teach students* is all geared towards standardized testing. Lastly, *teaching in the pandemic* was a big concern for the participants as they will prepare students for standardized testing and college through virtual learning.

**KEY WORDS:** College readiness, Standardized testing, Phenomenological, Qualitative Research

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Standardized testing has been a controversial topic for educators, parents, students, teachers, and administrators because testing has become a part of everyday schooling (Minarechová, 2012). The curriculum that teachers use to teach students has been narrowed and aligned to standardization, which is also known as curriculum narrowing (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011). Rubin and Kazanjian (2011) also noted that curriculum narrowing is a form of educational quality control (as cited in Wraga, 1999). This control has limited the teaching and learning process to be prearranged and pre-paced (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011). Educational quality control has also limited originality and creativity in the teaching and learning process for students and teachers (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011).

In some programs, teachers are demanded to teach from a script and are required to give students pre-packaged materials to learn from (Au, 2011). Standardized testing has changed the way students are learning, and how teachers must deliver instruction (Minarechová, 2012). Many teachers are simply teaching to a test, which has decreased the value of what students are learning, reduced the level of creativity, limited teaching strategies, and decreased motivation amongst teachers and students (Smyth, 2008). This decreased motivation has impacted teacher morale. The National Education Association surveyed 1500 of their PK-12 teacher members during Fall 2013 to better understand their perceptions regarding standardized testing and the impact on their teaching. Half of those surveyed (45%) expressed wanting to leave the teaching profession due to standardized testing (Walker, 2015). Both standardized testing and the high stakes

associated with it has taken its toll on teacher morale. Self-efficacy has also impacted teachers and their ability to instruct students, prepare them for standardized assessments and postsecondary education. Self-efficacy can vary in high school teachers depending on the classes they teach. Self-efficacy is also a long-term predictor of quality instruction, which include a supportive classroom environment, classroom management, and cognitive activation (Kënsting, Neuber, & Lipowsky, 2016). It was noted that there are two teacher self-efficacy beliefs that are important (Kënsting et al., 2016). This includes teacher's belief to effectively train other instructors, take care of their needs, and explain the content material to improve their learning (Kënsting et al., 2016). The second belief is to be able to manage classroom disruptions and create a positive learning environment that produces learning (Kënsting et al., 2016). With standardized testing, it has made it difficult for teachers to create a learning environment that produces learning that is not revolved around the test for themselves and their students.

High school teachers are under tremendous pressure to get their students to the point that they are not only performing their best academically, but that they are also prepared for higher education. However, many factors play an integral role when it comes to students' preparedness for college. McCarthy and Kuh (2006) noted that some of these factors include knowledge, academic skills, and practical competencies. Standardized testing has been the driving force in measuring students' academic and teacher performance (Smyth, 2008). Au (2011) noted that the knowledge gained from standardized tests is then converted into disconnected facts and operations. The purpose of standardized tests is to measure students' academic abilities, but these scores are being used to compare students to other students and has objectified them and teachers, which

has transformed them into abstract numbers (Au, 2011). However, standardized test scores are not the only form of information that indicates a students' academic abilities (Schneider, Feldman, & French, 2016). Schneider, Feldman and French (2016) made it known that classroom assessments provide a broad picture of what students have learned and does not have a negative impact on instruction and curriculum. Unlike standardized tests, classroom assessments are distributed more frequently and are authentically embedded into instruction (Schneider, Feldman & French, 2016).

The No Child Left Behind Act ([NCLB], 2001) is one of the most important congressional attempts to advance the quality of elementary and secondary education (Simpson, LaCava & Graner, 2004). During former President George W. Bush's term, the NCLB Act took form 2001, and increased accountability measures to meet certain standards from the state (Smyth, 2008). The goal of NCLB Act (2001) was to guarantee that all children had access to a quality education and should obtain proficient standards on state achievement tests and standards (Simpson, LaCava & Graner, 2004). Due to this act, the expectations of student achievement grew, which added more pressure to schools, administrators, teachers, and students to academically perform well. Because of standardized testing, what students are learning is minimized, as a high school education has been defined as quantifiable and standardized, whereas a college education is constructed to be theoretical, which has made it harder for students to transition into college (Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010).

College instructors have lowered their expectations for incoming college students because they are not proficient in some of the skills required for college bearing credit courses (Fanetti et al., 2010). As a result of the NCLB Act, a greater emphasis at the high

school level is centered more on reading, writing, and math skills (Fanetti et al., 2010). Although these skills are important for college, the way these skills are being taught does not prepare students for college. Chait and Venezia (2009) illustrated that high school math teachers place a greater focus on exposing students to advanced content, whereas college instructors place a stronger focus on understanding the rigorous elements of math fundamentals. For English and writing, college instructors place a greater emphasis on basic grammar skills than high school teachers (Chait & Venezia, 2009). Chait and Venezia (2009) also noted that reading skills are diminished once students reach high school, because it is assumed that students have learned the acquired readings skills in middle school (Chait & Venezia, 2009).

### **Significance of Study**

Standardized testing has tremendously devalued the education system. The educational practice is consistently destroying students' ability to participate in critical, engaging, and self-reflective education as students and teachers are given a script to recite information that has been handed to them by someone else (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011). In addition, creativity and individuality are lacking (Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011). Research has indicated that teachers have eliminated innovative teaching methods, such as creative projects for traditional lectures to mimic testing methods (Blazer, 2011). This study will contribute to educational literature by examining English high school teachers' perceptions with standardized testing in regards to their instruction and teaching methods.

Further, this study will contribute more information regarding how teachers are impacted by standard assessments and test scores, and how teaching methods may be changing to accommodate the expectations of testing. Many school systems do an

inadequate job of developing and evaluating teachers (Baker et al., 2010). Some school systems place pressure on teachers with stringent accountability measures using student test scores to evaluate, reward, and remove teachers (Baker et al., 2010). If student scores do not rise to a certain proficient level, then teachers are at risk of losing their jobs (Baker et al., 2010). These stringent accountability measures diminish the love and motivation that teachers have to ensure their students' success. Many educators voice that high stakes testing is only a snapshot of student achievement, and does not adequately reflect student progress (Blazer, 2011). Many states are creating plans that would allow 50% of the weight in teacher evaluation and compensation-based math and reading test scores (Baker et al., 2010)

In addition, students have been trained to memorize and repeat information because of standardized testing, which has caused their enjoyment for learning to dwindle (Rubin and Kazanjian, 2011). Because students are not learning important strategies to help them become independent critical thinkers, Rubin and Kazanjian (2011) explained that the education system is simply preparing a generation of students to become unquestioning capitalist workers. Since our society is rapidly growing with information and technological advancements, a college education is important for individuals to be successful economically (Ahearn, Rosenbaun, & Rosenbaum, 2016). Although some students will go to college for economic success, some will attend the necessary skills needed to complete a bachelor's degree (Ahearn et al., 2016).

Further, economics and race play important roles in students' ability to learn and prepare for college as there are many racial disparities that negatively impact students' ability to perform well in school and on standardized tests (Smyth, 2008). Economically

disadvantaged students who attend lower performing schools may not have access to a quality education (Smyth, 2008). In addition, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are at a disadvantage because of the linguistic complexity of standardized exams (Smyth, 2008). Because of these issues, schools have difficulty reporting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which causes them to receive less funding (Smyth, 2008). This study will inform educational professionals on how to approach standardized testing so that all students' educational needs are met.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to examine English high school teachers' perceptions about the impact of standardized testing in high schools and students' ability to be college ready. Standardized testing has become the primary objective of instruction instead of measuring the skills that students have learned (Smyth, 2008). In addition, due to testing, high schools and colleges have misaligned standards, which has impacted students' preparedness for credit bearing courses (Royster, Gross, & Hochbein, 2015).

English is an important course that students need because this course provides students with the necessary skills to succeed in other courses. In English, the focus is on writing and reading skills that will stay with students through high school, college, and into the real world. With standardized testing, this is not the case. The pressures of standardized testing have caused the focus to shift towards longhand (words that are written out by hand) test-taking rather than authentic writing (Fanetti et al., 2010). Form has taken importance over content, and the product more than the process (Au & Gourd, 2013).



Standardized tests have also limited students' exposure to other genres of writing such as memoirs, evaluations, and proposals just to name a few. My objective is to understand tenth grade English teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and the impact it has on their instruction and their ability to successfully prepare students for postsecondary education. Students are required to take an English standardized test in ninth and tenth grade English classes. However, tenth grade is the last year that students are required to take the English standardized exam in the state of Texas. It is imperative to study this population as these exams are directly tied to graduation requirements. If students do not pass the exam, then they essentially not graduate. This population will help the researcher understand high school teachers' perspectives as they prepare students for the English STAAR (The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) standardized exams and postsecondary education.

### **Research Questions**

- 1.) What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding the impact of standardized testing on the curriculum they teach?
- 2.) What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding standardized testing and its impact on the curriculum in preparing students for college?
- 3.) What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding their ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized assessments?

## **Problem Statement**

As testing has become more prominent in public education, students are not judged by what they have learned, but by their scores on standardized tests. Standardized tests were implemented in order to measure student achievement (Osburn, et al., 2004), but are considered objective (Au, 2011). These tests do not consider any extenuating circumstances that students may face (Osburn, et al., 2004), as there are many non-school factors that may impact their performance which include; stress, poverty, no access to adequate healthcare, etc. (Au & Gourd, 2013). It was also noted that these tests evaluate the effectiveness of individual schools (Mulvenon, Stegman & Ritter, 2005). In return, these tests are used to compare students, teachers, and schools against each other, which decontextualizes them into abstract numbers (Osburn, et al., 2004)

Further, the curriculum that students are learning is controlled by the content that is accessed on the exams, and teachers have very little voice in what students are learning. Some people view testing as an avenue of improvement and school reform, and others view it as a threat to the value of teaching and learning (Blazer, 2011). Standardized testing has become the norm for gathering data about student learning across public schools in Texas. However, testing has placed many boundaries on student learning, which has in turn, placed limits on the curriculum being taught. In addition, standardized tests have made it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of the students sitting in their classroom (Brimjoin, 2005). In one classroom a teacher is responsible for teaching a diverse group of students. These students may be minorities, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and limited proficient students. Smyth (2008) noted that there are racial disparities within standardized tests because they are bias in

relation to race and socioeconomic status. In addition, it is hard for schools with a special needs population to remain in compliance with legislation because of the lack of highly qualified trained teachers (Smyth, 2008). It was also noted by Smyth (2008) that schools with a high population of LEP students were at a greater chance of not meeting federal legislation expectations because the test has a high demand for English-language ability.

Teaching a diverse group of students calls for differentiated instruction.

However, Fitzgerald (2008) surveyed teachers and 88% felt that the NCLB Act has forced them to disregard pieces of their curriculum. These teachers' instructional methods have changed to cater to NCLB and test taking strategies, while disregarding any form of creative and in-depth teaching methods (Fitzgerald, 2008). Since the passing of the NCLB Act (2001), the focus has not been on preparing students to enter college, but preparing students to graduate from high school. The issue is many students in today's classrooms are not learning how to become critical thinkers. This is an important element that students will need as they prepare themselves for college and adulthood.

Rubin and Kazanjian (2011) questioned that if students are not asked to contemplate, question, and analyze, then how can we expect them to develop into independent critical thinkers as an adult. However, standardized testing and curriculum that is solely focused on standardized testing, students are no longer taught how to think, criticize, and analyze different forms of information, which puts a strain on their ability to become independent critical thinkers as students have learned to recite information rather than receive an education that engages them in a critical and self-reflective education (Rubin and Kazanjian, 2011). Under the NCLB Act, students are being left behind (Smyth, 2008).

Further, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized by former President Obama as Every Student Succeeds Act ([ESSA], 2015) (Darling Hammond et al., 2016). It was noted that the NCLB Act (2001) did improve graduation rates, but student performance in the United States between 2000 and 2012 declined in science, reading and math. Under ESSA Act (2015), there are new possibilities for how student and school success are evaluated in public schools. The ESSA Act (2015) provides a more holistic approach to how schools are held accountable and gives states this responsibility on measuring this accountability (Darling Hammond et al., 2016). However, the challenge is now focused on how states will use their responsibility and flexibility under the ESSA Act (2015) to ensure equity amongst all students and deeper learning (Darling Hammond et al., 2016).

In addition, many students aspire to attend college once they leave high school, and in 2010, 86% of students felt confident they were prepared for college coursework (Moker, Leeds and Harris, 2017). In reality, 67% of students tested into developmental coursework (Moker, et al., 2017). Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2017) illustrated that the best way to help high schools improve college readiness is to align high school curriculum and the requirements for graduation with college readiness standards, and place students into coursework that is more rigorous. The question that remains is how are teachers' instruction impacted by standardized testing and their ability to successfully prepare students for college.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework that will be used in this study is the self-efficacy component under the Social Cognitive Theory that was created by Albert Bandura. Self-

efficacy is an individual's belief in how they conquer their acquired goal and achieve certain results (Pajares, 1996). Bandura (1993) noted that much of human behavior, which is full of purpose, is guided by conscious goals. He further noted that these goals are influenced by an individual's capabilities (Bandura, 1993). This theory also contributes to how an individual approaches their goals, tasks, and challenges (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) noted that the expectations of personal efficacy are derived from four principle sources of information which include, performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Each one of these elements contribute to an individual's self-efficacy. If the perceived self-efficacy is strong, then an individual will set higher goals, and will display a strong commitment to them (Bandura, 1993).

This theory will lay the foundation for how teachers may perceive high stakes testing, their instructional approach, goals, and preparing students for postsecondary education. Each one of the principal sources of information will help guide the study and provide an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. The first source of self-efficacy is performance accomplishments which is focused on personal mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977). This source deals with success and failures. The more success an individual experiences, the less they will fear failure. For this study, the more success that teachers have with high stakes testing will help shape their perceptions and their ability to perform. If teachers do not experience success with high stakes testing, then this can impact their perceptions and their ability to perform in a negative way.

Further, many expectations are anticipated through the next source of self-efficacy is vicarious experiences. Through this source, individuals observe others and

make comparisons to their own efforts. They believe that if others can achieve it, then they can accomplish some improvements in how they perform (Bandura, 1977). In regards to this study, teachers come in contact with many people such as other teachers and administrators. These encounters can help shape teachers' perspectives regarding high stakes testing and college readiness, and their ability to reach their intended goals. Teachers may compare their scores and performance with other teachers, which in return will encourage them to make improvements on how they are performing. This source will help reveal those comparisons and observations of others.

The next principal source of self-efficacy information is verbal persuasion, which is used the most due to its convenience. Verbal persuasion is used to try and influence human behavior (Bandura, 1977). Although there are limitations to this method, individuals can experience success through social persuasion, which provides assurance to them that they are capable of handling difficult situations and are given additional help to assist them in reaching their intended goals. For this study, this source will help reveal how teachers are being persuaded and pressured in different ways to perform well on high stakes testing and preparing their students for postsecondary education. It will also show the impact it has on their mental state, which leads to emotional arousal.

The last principal source of self-efficacy of information is emotional arousal. Emotional arousal is about how an individual copes with situations that may arise (Bandura, 1977). Stressful and taxing situations may impact self-efficacy as Bandura (1977) noted that high emotional arousal weakens an individual's performance. However, an individual can experience success when they are not experiencing a stressful encounter. With high stakes testing comes a different range of emotions which may

include stress and anxiety. Emotional arousal will provide a lens to help uncover teachers' emotional state on high stakes testing and preparing their students for postsecondary education.

To conclude, this theory will provide an understanding on how high school teachers perceive high stakes testing and college readiness. It will also enhance this study and provide more research on what high school teachers encounter and are experiencing, which can potentially help high school teachers and administrators in how they approach high stakes testing. Under this theoretical framework, the researcher will also explore teachers' self-efficacy and how well they perform and are reaching their targeted goals.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Common core standards.** Common core is defined as a set of academic standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019).

**College readiness.** College readiness has been defined as a set of experiences that prepares students for college and a vast collection of knowledge (Maruyama, 2012).

**Standardized testing.** Dishke-Hondzel (2014) defined standardized testing as aptitude assessments that are conducted under conditions that are controlled and consistent (as cited in Omrod, 2012).

**High stakes testing.** High stakes testing is defined as a series of exams that result in evaluations of students, teachers, and schools (Minarechová, 2012).

**No child left behind.** No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is defined as a federal legislation that was passed in 2001 that raised performance levels for all students, including students with disabilities (Simpson, LaCava, and Graner, 2013).

**Every student succeeds act.** Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a federal legislation that was passed in 2015 that replaced the NCLB Act (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations help the researcher understand the boundaries of their research (Ellis & Levy, 2009). One delimitation that will be present with this study is that the participants will be tenth grade English teachers. A second delimitation is that the participants are teachers who teach in a school district in the state of Texas. A third delimitation is that this study will solely be focused on teachers' perceptions with standardized testing and their ability to prepare students for college. The last delimitation of this study is that the research questions are in relation towards teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are defined as uncontrollable threats that can impact a research study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). One limitation that could impact this study is the amount of interest that participants may show during the research process in spite of their voluntary participation. Another limitation could include the amount of time that participants will allow for the interview. The last limitation is that participants may drift from the purpose of the study when addressing the questions in the interview.



**Assumptions**

Assumptions are defined as elements the researcher claim to be true (Ellis & Levy, 2009). One assumption for this study is that this research study will provide a better understanding to teachers' perceptions with standardized testing and their ability to prepare students for college. It will also be assumed that the participants will respond to the interview questions honestly. Lastly, it will be assumed that all participants' motives to participate in the study will be sincere and true.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation will be composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 will include background information of the study, the significance of the study, the problem and purpose statement, research questions, conceptual framework, definition of terms, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. Chapter II will consist of a literature review focused on standardized testing and college readiness. Chapter III will describe the research design, participants, context of the study, instrumentation, procedures, data collection and analysis. Chapter IV will discuss the results of the study, and Chapter V will provide an in-depth discussion of the results in relation to the research questions, literature, and framework. It will also discuss implications and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review contains scholarly literature organized around topics related to education reform, curricular focus and implementation, social and professional opinions on the importance of standardized testing, and an understanding of how college readiness and preparedness has suffered because of stressed importance on standardized testing and Common Core standards. This literature review highlights the relationship between student college readiness and the function of standardized tests as perceived by high school English teachers.

### **Historical Overview of Standardized Testing**

Standardized testing has been presented in different ways throughout United States history. As early as 1838, American educators began a discussion about developing and implementing a formal assessment for student achievement (Alcocer, 2002). Although this type of formal achievement testing was not utilized to the degree it is today, it started a trend in education that would find its way to all levels of education as both a positive and negative force. In 1845, during his tenure as Secretary of the State Board of Education, Horace Mann proposed the idea of written tests for Boston Public School children instead of yearly oral exams (Gershon, 2015). Massachusetts became the first to use written examinations because of pressure from the State Superintendent of Instruction and his concerns about the performance of the students (U.S. Congress, 1992). Mann's primary goal was to research the best teaching methods and duplicate them to ensure that children would have access to equal opportunities (Gershon, 2015).

Originally, written tests were used to assess and categorize a burgeoning number of students (U.S Congress, 1992).

Opposite of Mann's exam, the first standardized tests were designed to measure student ability and not achievement. During World War I, the Army Alpha and Beta tests were created to categorize soldiers by their mental abilities, which became a blueprint for schools to implement into their systems (Gershon, 2015). Testing became a way to track students academically and set them on the appropriate career path (Gershon, 2015). In the early twentieth century, the College Entrance Examination Board was founded (now known as The College Board), and the first tests were conducted around the country (Alcocer, 2002; Gallagher, 2003). The introduction of a universally used and accepted, norm-referenced college entrance exam, helped pave the way for using norm-referenced exams to assess student achievement and ability at other points in their academic progress.

The most notable exams, include the SAT, formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and the ACT, formerly known as the American College Testing (Fletcher, 2009). The SAT was the first created in 1926 by The College Board, which was comprised of a nonprofit group of universities and various educational organizations (Fletcher, 2009). The SAT was acknowledged by many universities, and became a formality for seniors in high school who were college bound (Fletcher, 2009). The SAT was a logic and reasoning test, and the ACT, created in 1959 by Everett Franklin Lindquist, an education professor tested students' accumulated knowledge (Fletcher, 2009). Similar to the SAT, The Preliminary SAT (PSAT)/National Merit Scholarship

Qualifying Test (NMSQT) was used to determine college funding for sophomore and junior high school students.

### **Modern Education Reform**

Controversy surrounding standardized testing has focused on the detrimental impact to teachers and students (Smyth, 2008). Education reform has played a major role in the amount of time students spend testing annually. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed under President Lyndon B. Johnson had been established and created multiple pathways for increasing use of norm-referenced tests to evaluate assessment (Alcocer, 2002), and fight the war against poverty (Kennedy, 2005). The goal of ESEA was to ensure that all students had access to a quality education in America's schools (Kennedy, 2005).

Jennings (2000) noted that Congress advocated the notion that additional financial resources would improve the educational quality of those in poverty and would give the opportunity for districts to provide aid for their schools. The funds allocated to districts were mandated for professional development, resources for educational programs, instructional materials, and to increase parental involvement (Paul, 2018). The ESEA included five titles, and Title I was created to bridge the gap between reading, writing, and mathematic skills for economically disadvantaged families (Paul, 2018). The ESEA, was reauthorized by the government every five years (Paul, 2018). This reauthorization was to provide revisions and amendments to effectively ensure that all students were receiving a quality education (Paul, 2018).

In 1994, President Clinton signed the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The purpose

of the IASA was to continue advancing the quality of education. Provisions were made including; helping disadvantaged children, providing technology for education, creating drug-free schools and communities; and promoting educational equity among other things (edweek.org, 2019). As part of the IASA, standards for educational and facility quality provided a framework for the dissemination of over \$200 million to improve schools with the most financial need (edweek.org, 2019). The IASA served as the modern revision to the 1965 ESEA and established a modified framework to carry American education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) expanded state-mandated standardized testing to assess performance. NCLB, applied to all public schools in the United States, and led the majority of American students being tested each year of grade school as well as in secondary school (Alocer, 2002). NCLB aimed itself at improving literacy and numeracy in American Schools and closing the achievement gap (Ravitch, 2016). Supporting family literacy programs established by IASA, NCLB brought provisions for early reading programs as well as partnerships for math and science to improve educational quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Legislators felt previous reforms brought some improvement to education, but still lacked a commitment to providing an advanced education to all students (Kennedy, 2005). However, many educators believed that the law's accountability provisions were not fair, too rigid, and not consistent with classroom practices (Kennedy, 2005).

Since NCLB, standardized testing is the driving force of measuring student and teacher performance (Smyth, 2008). Education reform has mandated that norm-referenced standardized testing be completed at multiple grade-levels during a student's

K-12 education. Students will approximately take 112 standardized tests between pre-K and grade 12 (Strauss, 2015). This averages out to eight tests a year. Students are mandated to take standardized tests in math and reading in grades three through eight, and at least once in grades 10 and 12 (Strauss, 2015). Students must be assessed in science once in elementary, middle, and high school (Strauss, 2015). For students who enrolled in the ninth grade in the 2011-2012 school year or later, are required to pass specific courses and EOC (End of Course) exams in order to graduate from a public school in Texas (All About the STAAR Test, n.d.). These exams include English I, English II, Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History (All About the STAAR Test, n.d.).

Along with creating a system of standardized testing used today, NCLB established a system for measuring schools and school districts achievement by monitoring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Adequately Yearly Progress was to be measured through the use of standardized tests that were nationally normed to use the national achievement average as a baseline for student achievement across the nation. By 2001, there were forty-nine states with measurable written standards, and fifteen states measuring students' progress annually (Kennedy, 2005). If schools failed to meet AYP, which was defined as improvement from the previous few year's results, funding could be cut, or schools could be taken over by the state. With the NCLB Act, many people raised the concern on how to improve student achievement and still support innovative endeavors within schools (Kennedy, 2005). One of the many failures of the NCLB Act was funding. After a month of the NCLB's Act passage, the budget was cut \$12 million short of its commitment. The NCLB Act was

only able to fund two-thirds of the amount to decrease class sizes, improve instruction, and increase standards for schools (Kennedy, 2005).

With the failures of the NCLB Act under heavy scrutiny, the Obama administration addressed education reform to improve quality in public education. The 2009 Race to the Top (RttT) initiative was part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Centre for Public Impact, 2016). RttT focused on four distinct areas of education growth as a framework for the initiative: the adoption of internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for college and entry into the workplace; the recruitment and training of effective teachers and principals; development and implementation of data systems that inform teachers and principals as to how instruction can be improved; and closing the achievement gap of the lowest-achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). At its core, RttT used many tenets of older education reform initiatives as its foundation. The adoption of standards and assessments under RttT was the most prominent feature of the initiative.

The Common Core standards are a set of tiered learning targets and skills that all students K-12 should be proficient in by the end of their current school year. The primary goal of Common Core standards is to elevate student achievement to produce graduates that are prepared and competitive for post-secondary education and for entrance in careers in a global economy. Developed in 2009 as a joint effort between the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the Common Core standards are a concerted effort to provide a framework for education that is used across the United States (Common Core, n.d.). The Common Core standards are the basis for which student growth, teacher effectiveness, and school is

measured. Furthermore, state tests and nationally normed standardized tests are developed using the Common Core standards as their framework (Polleck & Jeffery, 2017).

The Common Core standards became the foundation of instruction in the classroom and established benchmarks for achievement for each grade level, and teacher effectiveness through how well their individual students performed on the standards-based assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This situation led to further issues with the quality and focus of education in the classroom because teachers felt pressured from the district AYP measures as initiated by the NCLB Act, and they had to concern themselves with individual performance evaluations based on student achievement under RttT (Ravitch, 2016). This change of measures put pressure on teachers to have their students score well on the standardized tests, which led to further efforts to teach to the test rather than focusing on traditional curricular content. Traditional curricular content includes students participating in meaningful learning experiences such as learning about challenging topics, exploring their creativity side, learning different genres of writing, and many other activities that are eliminated from the curriculum (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006).

Another initiative that was mandated to improve education was Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was enacted by the Obama administration through executive power due to congressional gridlock that resulted in the non-reauthorization of the ESEA. The ESSA was the most aggressive education reform in recent history that put more power into the hands of the state governments in legislating education policy (McGuinn, 2016). The ESSA pushed for states to implement policy surrounding charter



schools, common core standards and assessments, and teacher evaluations. Under the ESSA, states controlled how schools were held accountable (Ferguson, 2016).

States were required to submit accountability plans to the Education Department. These accountability plans explained short-term and long-term accountability goals that addressed test proficiency, English-language proficiency, and graduation rates while setting an expectation for closing the achievement gap of those that are furthest behind (McGuinn, 2016). The freedom for states to determine how accountability would be measured provided relief from the federal government involvement in education and that these provisions would allow for states to best serve their populations.

With the ESSA under effect, school districts would have more power to decide how their schools would receive help and improvement (Ferguson, 2016). Once the state determined schools that were in need of help, local education agencies could team with stakeholders and create plans to improve student achievement (Ferguson, 2016).

According to Ferguson (2016), this shift was in response to many years of concern by local educators that school improvement models commanded by the federal government did not meet the needs of their communities. One of the greatest changes under ESSA was testing. Under the new legislation, states were required to test students in language arts and math in grades three through eight, and once in high school, and for science, three different times. In addition, the ESSA then required states to publicly report test data. This data would be pulled and separated for schools to access different subgroups of students (minorities, economically disadvantaged students, special education, and English Language Learners) to determine categorical achievement rates (McGuinn, 2016). The

continued focus on testing and test results required school districts to use quantitative data rather than qualitative.

### **Title I Schools**

Title I, Part A (Title 1) was created as one of the provisions under Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and modified under Every Student Succeeds Act (“The NCES Fast Facts,” n.d.). The purpose of Title I was to provide financial assistance to local education agencies for economically disadvantaged children to meet the expectations of academic standards (“National Center for Education Statistics”, n.d.). Under the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, school districts with a high number of low-income students received extra funds from the federal government for the first time (Johnson, 2015). In 2014, \$14.3 billion was distributed to Title I, and has been considered the largest federal program for K-12 education for last 50 years (Johnson, 2015).

The goal of Title I is to provide more funds to schools with poor students to increase their achievements (Johnson, 2015). The program under Title I was created on the assumption that children from economically disadvantaged families who live in poor areas are considered doubly disadvantaged (Johnson, 2015). These children do not have as many educational opportunities as children from economically advantaged backgrounds (Johnson, 2015).

### **Instructional and Curricular Impact**

The implementation of AYP through standardized testing is one of the most contentious points of criticism for the effectiveness of the NCLB Act because it led to a phenomenon known as teaching to the test. With the testing regime, schools began to shift their focus in the classroom, and school achievement and efficacy were measured by

how students performed (Ravitch, 2016). The result of these practices was teachers instructing students on test-taking strategies and other skills that helped them pass the standardized tests rather than focusing on content knowledge and skills that lay at the core of education for centuries (Fitzgerald, 2008). Standardized testing does not assess content knowledge due to teachers using instructional time to focus on training students how to take the exams (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006).

Teaching to the test has threatened teachers' ability to meet the learning needs of diverse students who sit in their classrooms (Brimijoin, 2005). If students are expected to endure high stakes testing successfully, then teachers should be able to provide differentiation in their instruction (Brimijoin, 2005). Teachers who differentiate give students the opportunity to engage with the subject matter, provide them with in-depth understandings of the material, and allows them to develop the ability to transfer what they have learned when taking tests (Brimijoin, 2005). Teaching to the test hinders teachers' abilities to differentiate and negates high quality teaching (Brimijoin, 2005). Although teaching to the test has resulted in higher test scores, a trend of high school graduates lacking the knowledge and skills had become commonplace (Ravitch, 2016). The importance of test scores led to cases of fraudulent score reporting (Ravitch, 2016).

Perhaps the greatest controversy over standardized testing occurred in 2011 incident with the Atlanta public school district. Nearly three-dozen educators, administrators, and executives were involved in a scandal when it was discovered that they had changed answers on students' tests and helped students answer questions on the tests (Blinder, 2015). Out of fear of losing employment, schools being taken over by the state, a loss of funding, and any other punitive measures regarding standardized testing

that may have been taken against the educators, these professionals decided to take ethically reprehensible actions. The end result of was that eleven educators were convicted of racketeering, a felony carrying a penalty of up to twenty years in prison (Blinder, 2015). Fear of failure led to the manipulation of retaining students and reclassifying them to increase test scores (Blazer, 2011).

When students who do not perform well are removed from the test population, average test scores increase (Blazer 2011). Students were held back a grade to provide them with another year of learning before they took their test. Some schools suspended or expelled low performing students before testing (Blazer, 2011). Schools focused on students who needed a few points to reach the proficient level, and neglects students who were the lowest performing in school (Blazer, 2011). Because of the pressures created by high-stakes testing, schools have been under immense pressure to produce high achieving students regardless of available resources, funding, and other contributing factors (Blazer, 2011).

Researchers documented that teachers use excessive amounts of classroom time preparing students for state mandated test. Blazer (2011) noted that test preparation can be beneficial to students by increasing their test taking skills, but can be harmful when an excessive amount of time is used teaching students the format of the test. As teachers teach to the test, it hinders learning and narrows the curriculum.

### **Impacting the ELA Curriculum**

English language arts have had many instructional changes. The impetus of today's English curriculum has been caused by standardized testing and has contradicted an immense amount of research on teaching writing and literature (Au & Gourd, 2013).

In the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, Common Core Standards and standardized high-stakes testing has, in many school districts, led to the abandonment of the traditional literary canon. ELA teachers have also implemented reading and writing workshops along with mini lessons to instruct students and to prepare them for standardized assessments. Common Core and The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers require a narrowing of what is deemed important in reading and writing standards and comprehension, favoring quantitative features. These features include many different aspects of English including literature and rigorous reading practices (Peel, 2017).

**Traditional literacy canon.** In the ELA classroom, students are no longer using the classic or traditional literary canon with works by the likes of Shakespeare, Joyce, Steinbeck, Hawthorne, Orwell, and Lee as the basis of their education. Instead, the curriculum favors short stories and informational passages with a more upfront meaning. This style of instruction serves the students well when it comes to understanding the type of reading passages found on standardized tests, but it does not serve a greater purpose in preparing them for education outside of the traditional K-12 classroom (Peel, 2017). By abandoning the traditional literary canon in favor of isolated reading passages, students are losing the exposure to complex reading and critical thinking. Students no longer have to consider how a character's actions influence other characters, or how a theme from an earlier chapter leads to the development of a character (Peel, 2017). Exposure to critical elements of the traditional canon is paramount in educating students to consider factors that go beyond the surface of reading. Without exposure and practice to critical reading and critical students will have difficulty understanding the complexities of academic

articles and journals, synthesizing research and engaging in higher-level academic discourse (Peel, 2017).

**Writer's workshop.** Because of standardized testing, writing in the classroom has produced writers who are voiceless and formulaic (Kissel, 2017). Some English classrooms have implemented a curriculum based on a writer's workshop, and have had success in preparing students for college and for standardized assessments. A writer's workshop is focused on writers in developing their craft through the writing process, and the cumulative knowledge which allows writers to utilize their skills (Kissel, 2017). A writer's workshop develops students' writing skills while showcasing their unique writing abilities (Kissel, 2017). In writer's workshop, students learn in a social context where coaching and modeling occurs (Salem, 2013). Writer's workshop creates an environment where students enable social interactions and cognitive processes to become efficient writers (Higgins, Miller, & Wegman, 2006). Utilizing writer's workshop allows students to develop the skills needed to perform well on standardized assessments, and become better writers through authentic writing experiences from a writer's workshop (Higgins et al., 2006).

**Reader's workshops.** High-stakes testing has undermined literacy assessments in the United States (Higgins et al., 2006). Literacy is defined as the power and willingness to use reading and writing to formulate meaning from printed text, in ways that meet the standards of a certain social context (Taylor & Nesheim, 2000). In addition to writer's workshop, reader's workshop has prepared students for higher education and standardized testing. The National Reading Panel recommends that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, are five skills that are needed for

students to become proficient readers (Afflerbach, 2016). A reader's workshop is focused on developing a reading identity and consists of three components, the mini-lesson, work time, and share time ("Reading Workshop," 2016).

Reader's workshop requires a high level of student engagement in order for students to be willing to openly discuss interpretations and feelings toward the chosen reading (Afflerbach, 2016). When implemented properly, a curriculum based on reader's and writer's workshop produces students that are well-versed and competent in reading, analyzing, and synthesizing multiple and complex texts. Since, standardized assessments use material from different genres, reader's workshop exposes students to varied texts, which allows them to perform well on these assessments (Santman, 2002). Reader's workshop can help students build these skills and have the ability to not only comprehend a text, but to make meaning of it in relation to another text, which is an essential part of college preparedness (Conley, 2008).

**Mini-lessons.** English classrooms in secondary-school curricular has adopted the use of mini-lessons that are based on individual skills or standards. A standards-based curriculum allows teachers to not only instruct on skills in isolation, but assess mastery of those skills in isolation (Coble, 2019). From a fundamental standpoint, isolated instruction of skills and standards provides teachers with a lot of feedback and data regarding student achievement. The problem with isolated standards-based instruction is that it takes a lot of time to develop and implement. With each standard, teachers need to develop lessons with materials that work across multiple levels of proficiency, comprehension, and subject matter (Drake, 2007). With a standards-based curriculum where individual standards are addressed in isolation with tiered materials to

accommodate student needs, it is imperative that teachers understand how to implement complex and engaging lessons that combine proficiencies in multiple standards (Drake, 2007).

### **Perceptions on Standardized Testing**

The purpose of standardized tests is to obtain information on how students are performing academically. This practice has placed pressure on administrators, teachers, parents, and students to increase test scores, which has caused many different emotions, one being test anxiety (Mulvenon, Stegman & Ritter, 2005). As standardized test results have become the basis for teacher evaluations, school effectiveness ratings, and the benchmark for securing federal funding, educators may have developed a negative perception of standardized tests. As testing has increased in use, the opinions of parents and students has shifted as well, leading more people to argue against testing rather than for it.

**Parent Perceptions.** Parent perceptions of standardized testing is rooted in issues over student anxiety, stress, and concerns over what appears to be continuous testing, and confusion over what students are actually learning in the classroom. Many parents are not well-informed regarding standardized testing procedures, and not equipped to help their children to prepare for the tests (Mulvenon et al., 2005). Some parents support standardized testing (Mulvenon et al., 2005), but there are some parents who do not understand how to interpret their child's score, and these score reports must be explained with assistance (Mulvenon et al., 2005). Parents expressed that their child's teacher rarely discussed test results with them (Bobowski, 2016). If parents do not fully understand how their child is evaluated on standardized tests, this can discourage parents from being



supportive (Mulvenon et al., 2005). Many states do not have policies in place to communicate results to parents (Mulvenon et al., 2005).

Parents also reported that their children are seemingly always studying for some sort of test or worrying about a test (Osburn et al., 2004), and this worry has turned into stress. Taking too many tests has a negative impact on the disposition of the student (Osburn et.al, 2004). Concerns over the number of tests administered over consecutive years of school has many parents believing that the focus of education has become more about test results than student growth (Osburn, et. al, 2004).

The number of tests that students take throughout the course of the year, and the stress and anxiety that comes with them, leads many students to abandon extra-curricular activities due to being unable to manage the pressures of academics and other activities. It also leads struggling schools to cut extra-curricular activities to focus on AYP on state-mandated standardized assessments (Ciciora, 2009). A study conducted by a University of Illinois professor found that sophomores in high school who participate in extra-curricular activities, earn more money in their job profession, and achieve higher levels of education than their peers who had similar standardized assessment scores and participated in less extra-curricular activities (Ciciora, 2009). Participating in extra-curricular activities also gives students an outlet to channel their stress and anxiety as they prepare for college.

In many cases, parents observed that their child felt unprepared for higher education and those students felt as if their peers were more prepared for standardized assessments (Osburn, et al., 2004). One key element of college preparedness and readiness is that students have entered a university and have already acquired the

requisite skills and knowledge for higher education. According to Bo-bowski (2016), many parents questioned the goals of K-12 public education, specifically in regard to reading and writing, and discussed how their children were not adequately prepared for college. This has led to greater issues such as the need for remedial and developmental coursework. The necessity of remedial coursework or the repetition of courses can cost several thousand dollars in tuition that some families have already struggled to afford (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006).

**Administrators' perceptions.** Along with parental perceptions, administrators' perceptions have been impacted by standardized testing. Data provides information that is crucial in accessing student performance, and a nationally normed test that gives an accurate assessment of how a district's students compare to the national average is informative (Ravitch, 2016). Data gives administrators an accurate snapshot of student performance to make decisions regarding student achievement. The positivity toward standardized testing is not a long-lasting feeling as with more testing comes more demands on administrators.

The most prominent administrator complaint about standardized testing is how it adds stress to the lives of educators. With the high stakes of testing, teachers feel pressure to have their students perform well, and this pressure translates to low morale and teacher burnout (Cook, 2019). When teachers are feeling burnout in the classroom, instruction becomes stale and lacks the necessary engagement, conversation among teachers becomes negative and demoralizing, and good teachers walk away from the profession (Ravitch, 2016). There is little administrators can do to boost morale among teachers in these situations because the root cause of the stress and burnout comes from the emphasis

on testing. In order to maintain employment or an effective rating in teacher evaluations, students must perform well on standardized tests (Ravitch, 2016). Evaluations based on test results also affect administrators. When students do not perform well on standardized tests, administration becomes the target for district superintendents. Low test scores are often attributed to poor classroom instruction, and while teachers are often perceived as receiving the majority of backlash for poor instructional quality, school administration receives its fair share from district level administration (Cook, 2019) due to their responsibility to support high academic standards, model high expectations for teachers and students, and create a positive school climate (Mullevon, Stegman & Ritter, 2005).

From an administrative perspective, the importance of standardized testing places a lot of stress on the year-to-year operations of the school. As standards evolve, tests evolve to maintain alignment with the standards. From an administrative position, this requires constant evaluation of curricular materials, professional development, and state or district mandates passed on to the teachers (Stotsky, 2016). In order to ensure that current best practices are being used in the classroom, it is the responsibility of school administration to provide appropriate and timely professional development for teachers. By having to devote so much time to professional development that is focused on testing, districts lose a lot of valuable professional development time that is needed for the instruction and implementation of social-emotional programs and other wellness or mindfulness programs (Cook, 2019).

**Teacher perceptions.** Standardized testing has been a source of stress and malcontent among teachers throughout the course of modern education reform. Teachers have reported feeling great pressure to increase test scores on state testing (Abrams,

Pedulla & Madaus, 2003). Abrams et al., (2003) expressed that the high stakes of testing has created conflicts over curricular importance, meaningfulness of instruction, and the overall desire and passion for the profession. Many teachers have experienced a decrease in morale and have considered leaving the teaching profession (Walker, 2015). Whaley (2015) noted that a decline in teacher morale is linked towards education reform over the last twenty years. As testing mandates continue to increase, the negativity toward testing continues to grow. As the importance of standardized test results has increased, so has the shift in content focus in the classroom. The high stakes of testing have led teachers to spend more time preparing for the test (Abrams et al., 2003), and teachers find themselves putting immense amounts of time into creating classroom tests that mirror the language used on state mandated tests as opposed to engaging and challenging content for students (Ravitch, 2016). Teaching students the test format has led to the absence of creativity in instruction and lessons.

It is important to note that teachers have a duty to use students' classroom time productively and ensure that lessons are meaningful, intentional, and contributes to growth (Dishke-Hondzel, 2014). The amount of time preparing for tests decreases creativity within instruction and lessons. Dishke-Hondzel (2014) noted that activities that embrace creativity produces student engagement, provides purposeful connections to the real world, and assist students in thinking about meaningful content. Teachers have noted that there is not enough instructional time for experimental and creative teaching strategies (Dishke-Hondzel, 2014). It was illustrated that if teachers are pressured to teach to the test, then they will most likely not foster creativity within their classroom (Dishke-Hondzel, 2014).

In addition to creativity lacking in instruction and lessons, teachers are left with nearly two months of school where students are keenly aware of the fact that they have taken end-of-year tests already (Ravitch, 2016). By this point in the school year, both teachers and students are burned out from test preparation, yet still have several weeks left to go in the year. One of the most prominent issues raised by this phenomenon is that teachers now need to convince students that the content being covered post-test is equally as important as content covered prior to the test. The paradox created by this phenomenon is that if the content is as important, why was it not on the test and taught prior to the test? If it was not on the test then how could it be as important as tested material? (Ravitch, 2016). Teachers spend so much time and energy preparing students for the test and emphasizing how important the tests and materials are that when testing is over, it is difficult to motivate students to continue learning. Between motivating and preparing students for their tests, high-stakes testing has also impacted teachers' health.

High stakes testing has caused many teachers to experience different issues that range from stress, anxiety, fatigue (Abrams et al., 2003), and negative physical and psychological effects (Gilman & Reynolds, 1991, as cited in Franklin & Snow-Gerono, 2007). These issues have not only impacted teachers' health, but teacher's morale and motivation because teachers are being evaluated heavily on the scores provided from standardized tests (Baker et al., 2010). High stakes-testing has greatly impacted teacher's mental and physical well-being as well as students.

**Student perceptions.** Standardized testing has had a great impact on students' learning. Between traditional tests in the classroom and standardized tests, students take too many tests throughout the school year (Strauss, 2015). By pre-kindergarten and the

end of high school, students have taken 112 mandated standardized assessments (Strauss, 2015). In addition to standardized assessments, students take teacher-written tests (Strauss, 2015). For most students, this means that on any given week of the school year, a test is being given. The amount of testing places unnecessary anxiety and stress on students as they feel like they are under constant pressure to perform and prove that they understand what they are learning (Ravitch, 2016).

For most students, there is an inherent disconnect between standardized testing and classroom instruction and testing (Ravitch, 2016). It is difficult for a lot of students to understand how classroom tests and grades are separate from standardized test scores, and what standardized testing says about the value of their education. The materials such as textbooks are other instructional tools for teachers to use in the classroom are selected based on availability and what schools can purchase, which may not have any relation to the curricular standards imposed by the state and local standards (Hammerman, 2005). If standardized test scores are more important to the schools and to legislators than classroom grades, why are students given class grades in the first place? The conflict between the importance of classroom instruction and testing is one that raises questions about the purpose and validity of education, especially when standardized testing does not exist in the classroom outside of K-12 education (Conley, 2008).

Wasserberg and Rottman (2016) conducted a study surveying students' perceptions surrounding test-centered curriculum. In the study, most students expressed that standardized tests were interrupting instruction in a majority of their classes and not much time was focused on preparing for college. To be prepared for college McCarthy and Kuh (2006) noted that students must obtain study habits and developed skills in high

school to carry into college. Students need to be skillful readers and writers and at least efficient in advanced mathematics to be successful in college and well after (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). In order to be prepared for college, self-efficacy is an element that can boost students' confidence. It was noted that standardized testing impacted students' self-efficacy. Wasserberg and Rottman (2016) expressed that students reported that testing had a negative impact on them by generating low self-efficacy and decreased their aspirations because their focus was geared towards their failures (Bandura, 2009, as cited in Green et al., 2012).

Another issue impacting student self-efficacy because of standardized testing is that the lesson content is not challenging enough for students when they have believed they are intellectually capable of deep analysis and critical thinking (Gentilucci & Gentilucci, 2016). Along with not being challenged, students stated that their lesson content was too repetitive, which created an atmosphere of boredom among students especially for those who are more advanced in particular subjects (Gentilucci & Gentilucci, 2016). Repetitive curriculum can come from teachers placing a greater emphasis on the objectives from the content domain from standardized assessments (Gulek, 2003). This has led to students being exposed only to the content teachers believe will be on the test, while other content areas are undervalued (Gulek, 2003). It is imperative that teachers expose students to a variety of assessments and different teaching approaches to allow students to strengthen their skills in different learning situations, and to assess what students know so students can perform well in their standardized assessments (Gulek, 2003).

### **College Readiness**

For many, their perception of high school is to prepare students for higher education. However, there are many gaps that lie between what is taught in high school and what is expected when students enter college. Since the inception of NCLB, Common Core, and high stakes testing, the degree of college-readiness of graduates has been called into question (Friedman, Kurlaender, & Ommeren, 2016). McCarthy and Kuh (2017) noted that many university faculty and employers deplore that high school graduates do not possess the knowledge, practical competencies, and academic skills to perform well in work environments or college. It was emphasized that three fifth of students at a public two-year college and one fourth of those who attended four-year colleges and universities were in need of one or more years of developmental coursework (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). With many students being enrolled in developmental education, there are several areas of concern that are impacting high school students' ability to be prepared for college.

When analyzing the college-readiness of high school graduates, one area of concern among those in high education is the lack of reading proficiency college freshmen have. When comparing the types of reading passages used on standardized tests with the dense and complex academic articles used in college classrooms, incoming college students do not seem to possess the reading fluency nor the exposure to such texts (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). Because of the lack of exposure, educators need to spend more time in the higher education classroom devoted to teaching academic skills than traditionally necessary, otherwise the chance of academic success for students is mitigated.



Another area of concern for college-readiness is the level of reading comprehension that recent high school graduates have. With the density and vocabulary present in most college-level academic articles, the level of reading comprehension among high school graduates is concerning (Friedman et.al, 2016). The majority of text analysis done at the high school level is done using short, simple texts with a clear thesis and supporting evidence. The use of simple texts fits the needs of standardized testing because common core standards are focused on the skill of identification (Friedman et. al, 2016). The standards do not delineate the complexity of texts, although it is assumed that as students' progress through their high school education the complexity of texts used will increase; a problem exists, however, as to who decides which texts are considered complex enough to constitute college-ready reading materials. To ensure that students are college-ready in the era of high-stakes testing, a logical progression of text complexity through grade levels needs to be implemented (Royster, Gross, & Hochbein, 2015). This complexity will give students the tools needed to pass their standardized assessments and be prepared for higher education.

Similar to issues with reading comprehension, students entering college do not exhibit college-level skills in reading analysis and synthesis. A lack of exposure to critical and complex academic texts leaves students at a performance level that allows them to only identify surface-level details in a text; inference skills and comparative analysis skills are lacking, which is an integral part of the college curriculum (Friedmann et.al, 2016). The abandonment of the traditional literary canon and its accompanying critiques have left college students with gaps in literary familiarity and literary analysis skills that goes beyond reading novels (Peel, 2017). The lack of familiarity and ability

with complex reading analysis increases the need for developmental coursework in order to fill the gaps with college-readiness (Friedman et. Al, 2016).

Further, writing requirements for college courses are typically more expansive than those of high school classes, which leads to another disconnect in college-readiness. Standardized tests tend to follow a formulaic response type for writing prompts that uses the five-paragraph response consisting of an introduction paragraph, three body paragraphs that vary on purpose based on the type of prompt, and a conclusion paragraph (Forrest & Moquett, 2016). What this formula does not prepare students for, however, is detailed writing in which idea synthesis occurs, or in which original thought needs to be expressed.

Lastly, a significant problem with college-readiness in high school graduates comes in the form of coherence, cohesion, and consistency in writing. By the time students enter post-secondary education, they should have already developed the necessary skills to create a composition that makes sense and has an organic flow for information presentation (Forrest & Moquett, 2016). This is not always the case with students in recent years, as it seems that students tend to lack any form of organization and relationship among ideas in their compositions. A major contributor to the occurrence of this phenomenon is that essay grading in high school classrooms tends to be subjective in the sense that teachers differ on where they place their emphasis in writing be it mechanics, grammar, process, or product (Forrest & Moquett, 2016). The lack of structure and consistency in grading compositions in high school has led to an inconsistency with presenting coherent and well-organized compositions in post-secondary education. The blame for this major contributor can be placed on standardized

assessments and how teachers are teaching students to produce writing that is only appropriate for standardized writing and format (Shelton & Fu, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

Standardized testing has impacted student's ability to be college ready. There is a disconnect between what students are learning in high school and what is expected of them when they enroll in higher education (Royster, Gross & Hochbein, 2015). Teachers have narrowed their curriculum and have created lessons and instruction that mirrors standardized testing format. This has caused teachers to focus on skills and content that is similar to standardized assessments, while other content is neglected. English teachers are producing formulaic writers and have abandoned exposing students to different forms of literature and writing genres to cater to the demands of high-stakes testing.

This dissertation will provide information about English teachers' perspectives regarding standardized testing and their ability to prepare students for college, and this study will expose their opinions on how standardized testing has impacted their classrooms, how their students are performing on standardized tests, and their ability to prepare students for postsecondary education. Since it has been almost twenty years since the passing of the NCLB Act, which has been the forefront of accountability for teachers and schools for student performance, this study will provide more information on how English teachers are handling standardized testing in this educational era, and preparing their students for higher education under the ESSA that was enacted under President Obama's Administration.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed the history of standardized testing and how it has evolved over the years. Further, information about modern education reform was provided as education reform has had a profound impact on standardized testing and how it has impacted high school curriculum. Information was also provided on the perceptions of standardized testing which included; administration, teachers, parents and students. Finally, the researcher discussed high school students and college readiness.

## CHAPTER III

### Research Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore English high school teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing, and their ability to prepare their students for postsecondary education. This study examined their opinions on how standardized testing has impacted their classroom, how their students are performing on high-stakes tests, and how they are preparing their students for college. The following sections are addressed in this chapter: (a) research questions, (b) research design, (c) participants, (d) context of the study, (e) data collection, (f) role of the researcher, (g) trust worthiness and credibility, and (h) data analysis.

#### Research Questions

- 1.) What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding the impact of standardized testing on the curriculum they teach?
- 2.) What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding standardized testing and its impact on the curriculum in preparing students for college?
- 3.) What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding their ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized assessments?

#### Research Design

The approach for this study was phenomenological research. In this design, the lived experiences of a phenomenon that is explained by the individuals who are participating in the study can be exposed (Creswell, 2018). For phenomenological research, Creswell and Poth (2018) noted the importance of utilizing individuals who

have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can accurately detail how it has impacted their lived experiences. This design allowed the researcher to investigate English high school teachers' perceptions of standardized testing, and the influence it has on high school students and instruction. This approach was used to examine and understand individuals' attitudes and perception of the world (Ellis, 2016). Based on this research, the study examined how standardized testing ultimately impacts standardized testing in English high school teachers' classrooms, and how it has impacted English high school teachers' ability to prepare their students for college.

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling is a method that is commonly used in qualitative research, which consists of distinguishing a specific group who is greatly informed about the subject of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) explain the concept of purposeful sampling and how the researcher must select participants and sites for the study because they can intentionally give an understanding of phenomenon of the study. The participants were knowledgeable about the subject matter as they have had to encounter standardized testing on different occasions.

A small number of participants is required for a qualitative study because the purpose is to gather extensive information from a small sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that for a phenomenological study, two to ten participants are needed. Data collection was completed when saturation occurred. Saturation occurs when new data does not reveal any new insights (Charmaz, 2006, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). A total of eight participants was selected for this study. The participants were tenth grade English teachers who teach in a tested subject area, and

who work in urban high schools in Houston, Texas. A tested subject area is a subject that requires students to be assessed on a standardized assessment that was designed for that grade level (e.g., STAAR English I exam). These urban high schools are considered Title 1 schools, which serves students who are economically disadvantaged. These schools and participants were selected because of their unique experience working with limited resources in order to prepare students for standardized tests and college. Because of their limited resources, these participants are asked to do more with less. Through their instruction, they have to equip their students with the necessary skills to pass standardized assessments and be prepared for college. The opinions of these participants demonstrated how they prepare their students for standardized assessments and for postsecondary education while giving them access to an equitable education.

In a research study conducted by Winkler (2002), it was noted that some veteran teachers felt as if teaching to the test undermines the ability to view the whole picture of the student, and that preparing students for multiple choice tests such as standardized tests, weakens the integrity of their teaching. The participants consisted of high school teachers who have at least three years of teaching experience and who have had some experience with standardized testing, the impact on their instruction, and their ability to prepare students for college. The first two years of teaching can be challenging because teachers are learning new things such as their students, the curriculum they must teach, the expectations of standardized assessments, and etc. With three years or more of experience, teachers have a better understanding of standardized testing and the challenges that comes with preparing students for college.

The researcher sought approval to conduct this study in the selected schools. Once approval was granted, the teachers were invited via email to participate in the study, which included information about the study, the reason the study is being conducted, and how the participants can gain new information that could potentially be beneficial to them in the future.

### **Context of the Study**

This study took place at two urban high schools in a school district in Houston, Texas. The district size is made up of 111 square miles in north Harris County. The school district has nearly 70,000 students, which makes it the 9<sup>th</sup> largest district in Texas with 82 campuses. These two high schools were selected from this district due to the researcher's professional connections and the school's involvement with standardized testing and their preparation of students for higher education.

Since the beginning of 2020, the world has been impacted by a disease called COVID-19. COVID-19 is an infectious disease that can easily spread from one person to another (World Health Organization, 2020). This disease has turned into a pandemic that caused many businesses to shut down. Since the arrival of COVID-19, learning has been interrupted for many students across the world (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). The pandemic has caused many teachers who were used to in person instruction to create online learning materials for students. The pandemic has affected over 55 million school children in the United States under the age of 18 (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). The pandemic has also caused many low-income students to be disadvantaged in terms of resources for learning, access to food and nutrition, healthcare, and financial relief measures (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Teaching online has been a main mode of delivering instruction to students. However, it



is only effective if students have consistent access computers and the internet (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Due to the pandemic, teachers have been faced with the challenge of successfully providing instruction for students in preparing students for standardized testing and college readiness.

### **Data Collection**

Creswell and Poth (2018) mentioned that data collection is utilized as a series of interrelated activities that are focused on receiving valid information to answer forthcoming research questions. This collection of data includes relying on multiple sources of data such as interviews, documents, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher reviewed all forms of collected data, analyzed it, and organized the data into different categories and themes (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Adams (2015) defined semi-structured interviews as interviews that are conducted with a mix of closed and open-ended questions, followed up with why or how questions. Then, an interview protocol was used to guide data collection. Castillo-Monotoya (2016) noted that an interview protocol is a form of inquiry where questions are asked to gain information relevant to the goals of the study.

The interview protocol was developed with questions that revolve around standardized testing and college readiness. The first part of the protocol was made up of questions regarding English high school teachers' experience in teaching because it is through their teaching experience that will help shape the attitudes of the participants in this study (Winkler, 2002). The next part of the protocol contained questions regarding professional development since training is crucial in developing teachers' skills and

abilities to teach their students (Hammerman, 2004). Other questions were focused on instruction and how standardized testing has impacted the way English high school teachers teach and how they prepare their students for college since high-stakes testing has impeded instruction (Minarechová, 2012). The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone, and lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour. Adams (2015) noted that one hour is a reasonable amount of time to avoid fatigue for both the researcher and participant. Only one interview was conducted for each participant. The interviews were recorded to be transcribed at a later date. In addition, virtual interviews were also an option for safety precautions for COVID-19. Data collection occurred over a period of four weeks. During this time, semi-structured interviews took place.

### **Procedures**

After I receive approval from my dissertation committee, research approval was obtained from Sam Houston State University Internal Review Board (IRB) committee. The researcher then submitted a research application to the school district's Office of Strategic Initiatives to obtain permission to conduct the research study. After approval from the school district, the researcher contacted the principals of the two campuses that and obtained permission and to inform them about the research study.

After approval from the principals, the researcher reached out to the English department chairs at both campuses to receive the participants contact information. The participants received a consent form through email that was first reviewed by the dissertation chair to determine that the form was drafted appropriately. The email

contained information about myself, the researcher, the purpose of the study, and how the participants will benefit from this study. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they will not be penalized if they choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study. The participants received pseudonyms in order to preserve their identity. The researcher did not have any affiliation to any of the participants in the study.

Participants were asked their preference of where they feel comfortable being interviewed. Participants had the option to participate in virtual interviews via Zoom or via phone. Each interview of the eight participants lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. The interview process took four weeks and interviews were scheduled during a time that worked for the participants' schedule, or during a time that was convenient for the participants. A recording device was used to record the participants' responses. Participants were asked for their permission to be recorded in the informed consent document, and was also notified that their interview would be transcribed. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts to make any necessary edits or changes. Recordings were destroyed after the research study has been conducted.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were recorded using a recording device as the primary recording device. The device safely stored each interview as the researcher had an individual passcode and facial recognition in order to access the iPhone. A folder was created for each participant and the recordings were immediately uploaded to each individual folder after the interview that was encrypted and password protected. After the recordings were uploaded to the computer, the recordings were destroyed on the iPhone. The folders were

located on the researchers' personal computer, which has different security features to protect the documents.

The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher onto a Microsoft word document. The transcriptions were also organized into the participants' folder. Mondada (2007) noted that transcribing can be a time-consuming task and can take three to ten hours to transcribe on hour of recording. Because of the time it takes to transcribe one hour of recording, only one transcription was transcribed each week. Candela (2019) defined member checking as a process to maintain validity within the study. Transcripts were returned to the participants no later than two weeks after they have completed their interview for member checking to verify and edit the transcripts.

Charmaz (2001) described coding as the critical connection between the collection of data and the meaning of the data (as cited in Saldaña, 2016). The data from the transcripts were hand coded and placed in Excel. Descriptive coding analysis will take place and each unit of data will receive its own unique code. (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher then codified the data, which was to arrange things in a systematic order to categorize it (Saldaña, 2016). After the first round of coding and categorizing was completed, the researcher recoded the data with a more developed perspective (Saldaña, 2016). This allowed the researcher to reclassify and rearrange codes into different categories to determine common themes and patterns that will emerge (Saldaña, 2016).

Some categories contained chunks of coded data that may require subcategories (Saldaña, 2016). This provided a better perspective of the data to advance towards themes. These themes and patterns were reviewed until there were no new themes. Saldaña (2016) stressed the importance of coding one participants data completely before

moving on to the next participant. The second participant's data may influence and impact what was recorded previously (Saldaña, 2016). Since codes can accrue quickly and change, the researcher kept a codebook which contained participants' codes, content descriptions, and a short data example for reference (Saldaña, 2016).

The second round of analysis focused on emotions coding. Emotions coding allowed the researcher to evaluate how participants felt emotionally as they reflected on their experiences with standardized testing and college. Emotions coding allowed the researcher to identify and label the emotions suggested by the participants (Saldaña, 2016). To determine the emotions expressed by the participants, the researcher went back through the participants' statements and began to label the emotions that were described by the participant.

### **Role of the Researcher**

It is imperative that the researcher identifies their biases, culture, values, history, and personal background that shapes their interpretation formed during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The role of the researcher was to provide information regarding a specific phenomenon that is impacting the daily lives of many high school teachers. One assumption that I had made regarding this study is that many educators would feel the same way that I feel, and that they would respond honestly to the questions asked. My overall experience with standardized testing has been negative, therefore, there was a possibility to bring bias to the study based on my own lived experiences. As a teacher who has taught in a tested subject area in the past, I have personally experienced the ongoing challenges that comes with standardized testing. I have been told by administration to stop teaching grade-level content in order to teach the test. I observed

myself and many teachers become disengaged with testing material and have lost interest in teaching because of standardized testing. These experiences have led me to assumptions and potential bias regarding my negative perceptions about standardized testing.

Another assumption made was that teachers would participate in this study because they want their voices to be heard. As a teacher, I often felt voiceless when trying to express my concerns regarding the way administration wanted teachers to instruct their students. We were told what to do without given the opportunity to state how we felt about anything that was occurring. I watched many teachers become frustrated even and return for the next school year. The turnover rate was high each year that I worked as a high school instructor. This experience and observations have led to my assumptions and potential bias regarding standardized testing and feeling voiceless when trying to express my concerns.

The last assumption was that teachers would participate in the interview to add more information to the body of educational literature to help improve how the education system approaches standardized testing and the preparation of students for postsecondary education. Because we were told to teach to the test, as teachers we were concerned about preparing our students for college. Teaching to the test made teachers to neglect grade level content in order to teach the format of the test. Teaching to the test has limited student's exposure to different genres of writing and reading selections that will prepare them for college. My experience to teaching to the test has been a potential bias for this study.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Creswell and Poth (2018) note the importance of reflexivity in which the researcher emerges themselves in self-understanding about their biases, and experiences that the researcher brings to the study. In order to establish trustworthiness and credibility within this study, reflexivity was used to make sure that the biases and assumptions made by the researcher were removed from the results of that data. In addition, analysis triangulation was also be used to establish authenticity through multiple uses of data. A descriptive coding analysis took place as well as second analysis, which focused on emotions coding. Anney (2014) has mentioned that triangulation helps the researcher eliminate biases as the researcher examines the integrity of the participants' responses.

Member checking was another way to establish trustworthiness and credibility because it allowed the participants to verify or deny the accuracy of the data (Candela, 2019). In addition, it was imperative that member checking is conducted because it maintains the validity of the study (Candela, 2019). During member checking, the researcher asked the participant to verify and edit the transcripts. Member checking helped the researcher eliminate biases regarding standardized testing and college readiness.

Last but not least, peer review was also used to establish credibility. Anney (2014) explained that during the peer review process, the researcher seeks guidance from colleagues who are willing to provide feedback about the study in order to help the researcher improve the quality of the inquiry. Peer review is essential because it serves to endorse the quality of the literature (Kirshon et al., 2018). For this study, two of my coworkers served as peer reviewers. Both reviewers are college professors and have been teaching college for several years. The purpose of the reviewers was to evaluate the

accuracy and appropriateness of the study. The reviewers were contacted after IRB (Internal Review Board) approval.

### **Summary**

This proposal followed a qualitative phenomenological research approach, which was approved by the IRB of Sam Houston State University. Interviews and data collection followed ethical standards approved by the university. The purpose of the study was to understand high school English teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and their ability to prepare their students for college. Therefore, a phenomenological research approach was conducted to explore the purpose of this study. This chapter provided information on the research design, population, data collection and instrumentation, procedures, and analysis.



## CHAPTER IV

### Analysis of Data

#### Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine tenth grade English high school teachers' perceptions about the impact standardized testing has on students' ability to be college ready. These tenth grade English teachers teach in a Title 1 School and are often asked to do more with less. They have the great task of preparing students for standardized testing while preparing them for college.

Three research questions guided this study and were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding the impact of standardized testing on the curriculum they teach?
2. What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding standardized testing and its impact on the curriculum in preparing students for college?
3. What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers regarding their ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized assessments?

After receiving consent from the school district and the building principal to conduct the research study, English teachers who taught tenth grade were contacted via email to receive the consent from, and to provide information about the study and solicit their participation. In the email, I explained and obtained informed consent from each teacher who agreed to participate in the study. Eight tenth grade English teachers were interviewed.

Chapter IV begins with the Epoche, which is a bracketing method to alleviate potential preconceptions that are related to the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Step 1 of the data analysis was accomplished by recording all interviews and uploading the interviews to a folder that was encrypted and password protected. Step 2 consisted of transcribing the interviews onto a Microsoft Word document. In step 3, the transcripts were hand coded and placed in Excel. Descriptive analysis took place and each unit of data received its own code (Saldaña, 2016). After the first round of coding, a second round of coding took place to gain a more developed perspective. This allowed the researcher to reclassify and rearrange codes in different categories to determine common themes and patterns that emerged (Saldaña, 2016). Step 4 included emotions coding. Emotions coding allowed the researcher to analyze how the participants feel emotionally as they reflected on their experiences with standardized testing and preparing their students for college. The data from steps 3 and 4 are revealed in participants' responses to the interview questions. From multiple participants, long quotes and quotes are included to add context to the participant's lived experiences and perceptions regarding standardized testing and the impact it has on students' ability to be college ready.

### **The Epoché**

In order to remove my biases based on my experiences about the research topic, I kept a reflexivity journal. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the relevance of engaging oneself in understanding their biases and experiences that the researcher can bring to the research study. A reflexivity journal was also important so that the results from the data would not be tampered by the biases and experiences of the researcher.

It was a challenge separating my experiences and opinions because of my experience as a tenth grade English teacher. In the journal, I was able to document my opinions, observations, and reactions to participants' responses.

My journal allowed me to set aside my opinions in regards to the curriculum that is used to instruct and prepare students for standardized testing and college. This was a challenge because some participants loved the curriculum that was used to teach and prepare students. I noted how much I disagreed with statements such as these because as a previous tenth grade English teacher, the curriculum was geared towards the test only and I spent much time teaching students the test. There was no room for students to learn any other important skills or creativity. In addition, I did not believe the curriculum equipped students with the needed skills for college. Documenting this opinion and reviewing it allowed me to push past my own experiences to focus on the participants' statements regarding the curriculum.

I also used my journal to document some of the statements that I agreed with from the participants. During the interviews, there were many comments made from the questions that were asked that resonated with me because I felt the same way the participants were feeling. I had to be careful of this feeling so that I would not influence or sway any portions of the participants' responses due to my own experiences. I stayed true to my protocol and rarely asked any follow up questions to keep the interview moving forward. It was important to recognize these statements from each interview that I agreed with so that I would limit my comments to avoid compromising any responses.

Overall, I enjoyed my conversations with the participants. It was very eye-opening and nostalgic as I refrained from allowing my biases and opinions to influence the

research study. I kept a reflexivity journal that allowed me to document my biases and opinions so they would not interfere with the study. To help establish trustworthiness within the study, member checking was used to allow the participants to review their transcripts and make any necessary changes or edits. I analyzed the data first using descriptive and emotions coding. The findings in this chapter were determined after two cycles of coding.

### **Individual Interviews**

Purposeful sampling was used to identify a specific group who was knowledgeable about the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants were knowledgeable about the research topic as they have dealt with standardized testing in different capacities. Each participant was a tenth grade English teacher who had at least three years of teaching experience. Each participant was contacted via email to discuss the study, provide information about the study, and provide informed. Participants were asked if they preferred to be interviewed via phone or via Zoom, and all participants selected to be interviewed by phone. Participants were interviewed between July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The list of participants' pseudonyms who participated in the interviews is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Interview Participants*

Participant Pseudonym	<i>n</i> years teaching experience	Gender
Mary	7	F
Zeena	3	F
Selena	4	F
Sabrina	6	F
Jacob	3	M
Layla	3	F
Paul	6	M
Morgan	3	F

**Interview Question 1.** The first question was intended to collect demographic-type background information. I asked participants when they started teaching as an English high school teacher. The information from the participant responses were used to create the Interview Participants Table (Table 1).

**Interview Question 2.** Question 2 was used to ask participants their overall experience as an English high school teacher. All of the participant's stated enjoy being an English high school teacher, but in different ways. Participants described English as "challenging," "humbling," "exhilarating chaos," "complex," and "gratifying." Jacob explained how teaching was his "favorite thing" that he has done with his life. Selena described it best when she expressed, "I think being a high school English teacher is a great place to be...there's something special about being an English teacher. There's

something special about being an English teacher. I think it's because everything is so subjective that it's really easy to connect with what the kids are actually feeling. Because when you're in an English class and you're reading an excerpt, just like with anything you do on a daily basis, we're going to take away from it, according to what we're feeling on the inside that day. So, it's a really unique position to be in.

Overall, participants were very direct about their experience. In spite of their job being “challenging,” “exhilarating chaos,” and complex, all of the participants have had a positive experience with teaching and they enjoy their job.

**Interview Questions 3.** For question 3, participants were asked about professional development that they have participated in that has been beneficial in preparing students for standardized testing. The majority of the participants discussed how any training that was directly related to the test was most beneficial. In order for teachers to be able to instruct their students on how to take the test, teachers must first understand the test themselves and how it is scored. Mary discussed how “rubric alignment” was most beneficial in “trying to see how a STAAR grader would work.” This training gave her an idea on what scorers look for when they are in the process of scoring students’ test. Mary had also attended trainings where she had to sit down and take a STAAR test as if she was a student. This was helpful as she was able to learn more about the test, and to be put in the students’ shoes to better understand what they go through when test time comes around.

Learning how to break down the test was equally important when it comes to “organizing and analyzing the data” (Selena). Since there were six reporting categories on the test, a training on understanding how each category is reported helped teachers

understand how each question is scored, and what questions fall under which category. These reporting categories are the skills that will be tested on the STAAR exam. For English II, according to the Texas Education Agency (2020) the reporting categories include three areas that are focused on reading, which include understanding an analysis of different genres, literary texts, and informational texts. The other three categories are focused on writing which include, composition, revision, and editing.

Understanding these reporting categories gave teachers insight on what students will be tested on. This give teachers time to prepare lessons and strategies that will instruct students on what they are expected to do. Other trainings that were beneficial included learning about strategies such as “color coding, how to eliminate answer choices, how to annotate the text on the test, and essay writing strategies for the STAAR test” (Layla). Zeena also mentioned a training that was important as she “appreciated this training because it just looked up each of the questions and how they’re being asked.” As Layla expressed, “it is strategies such as these that “help teachers instruct students on how to take the test.”

It was noted by the participants that professional development is most helpful when it is related to the test. This is so teachers will have a better understanding of how they need to prepare their students and what they need to instruct their students on so they will be successful. Teachers believe that it is important that school districts continue to provide teachers with opportunities to attend professional developments and trainings that will equip them with the tools needed to prepare their students for standardized testing. Based on what the participants stated, an ideal training for teachers would last an entire day and would be filled with sessions that are entirely focused on the test. These

recommended sessions could be titled (a) rubric alignment, (b) decoding test questions, (c) strategies for taking the STAAR test, (d) what writing looks like on STAAR, and (e) understanding how STAAR is graded. A workshop like this would be beneficial to teachers and would provide them with the necessary tools to be able to successfully prepare their students.

**Interview Question 4.** For interview question 4, participants were asked what trainings or professional development has been beneficial in preparing students for college. Many of the participants have received different trainings or professional development that has been beneficial in preparing students for college. The most beneficial training has been reading and writing workshops. These trainings have given the participants different strategies and skills to instruct their students on how to become writers and reading strategies that will be useful in college. Since students will “do a lot of reading independently in college...students will need to have stamina in their reading ability” (Layla). Students will also need to be strong writers in college, Paul mentioned that learning about the “writing processes” has been helpful in building students’ writing skills.

Many of the participants also discussed trainings outside of their campus that have been beneficial in preparing students for college. Mary has taken advanced placement trainings that she has taken on college campuses, and expressed that “U of H does a really good one and so does Rice.” Morgan mentioned how a training called Humanities Texas was beneficial as she was able to learn “how to help students learn about Shakespeare and literary work, because they will need them in college.” Although these trainings occurred outside of their district, participants were able to learn valuable lessons



and skills that they were able to use in their classrooms to help prepare their students for college.

Reading and writing workshops have helped teachers prepare students for college. Trainings outside of the district has also been helpful in giving teachers what they need to prepare students for college. An ideal training would be filled with sessions that are focused on how to improve students' reading and writing skills. A training such as this would not only help prepare students for college, but for standardized testing as well. Students could easily apply these skills on their test. Some example sessions could be titled, (a) how to think critically, (b) how to annotate a text, and (c) the writing process. Teachers and students would benefit from the knowledge that would be taken from a workshop like this.

**Interview Question 5.** Question 5 asked participants how standardized testing impacts the way they teach. Many of the participants expressed how standardized testing impacts the way they teach on a daily basis. All of the participants had similar responses. Because so much of tenth grade is STAAR driven, the test impacts their teaching life on a daily basis. All of the participants discussed how everything they teach “comes back to how it will be assessed on the STAAR” (Layla). Zeena also mentioned how “your goal is the test.”

It was also mentioned how administration has told participants that they must teach This limits what teachers can teach and what they can expose their students to. Teachers believe that they are their students best advocate and will often “have to do what’s best for the kids...instead of trying to find a one size fits all to make sure they all pass the STAAR test” (Jacob). This will often include participants deciding what they will teach

and what they will leave behind. You sort of have to decide what gets left to the wayside,” Jacob stated. However, I believe that Mary said it best that the way testing impacts teaching “devalues real English education in favor of multiple-choice taking skills.”

None of the participants had anything positive to say regarding how standardized testing has impacted the way they teach. Standardized testing has impacted how they teach and what they teach on a daily basis. Participants made it known that if the material is not covered on the test, then it cannot be taught. This directive has come from the words of administration. When teachers try to add in elements they deemed is just as important as the information on the test, they are told not to. This limits teachers to a certain curriculum, which in return has limited what students are exposed to.

**Interview Question 6.** For question 6, participants were asked about their comfort level when preparing students for standardized testing. Majority of the participants were confident in their ability to prepare students for standardized testing. Since standardized testing impacts teaching on a daily basis, the participants are comfortable with preparing students for the test. Many of the participants felt that the STAAR tests are “relatively straightforward” (Jacob) and because “it’s super formulaic,” (Selena) it is easy to learn what is needed in order to successfully prepare the students. Jacob also discussed, “I feel confident in teaching the STAAR. I understand the STAAR tests because of the kids, because of the practices I’ve done, because of all the talking I’ve done with other teachers, because of the essays I’ve read. I’m comfortable teaching the STAAR.”

Although the participants are confident in their ability to prepare students, the issue lies in getting “the kids to understand how to analyze questions, how to analyze a prompt, and be able to form an argument” (Jacob). Because students are at “different levels academically” it can be a challenge when trying to prepare students for standardized exams (Paul). Zeena summed it up best by stating, “I think that I do a decent job on it. I don't love teaching to the test. It's not my favorite way of teaching.”

Overall, a majority of participants felt confident in their abilities to prepare students for standardized testing. This could be due to the professional development and trainings they have received, and because of what they mentioned, standardized testing is the main focus of what students are learning. Teachers are spending most of their time teaching students to take a test, but the question that remains is, are students learning? Participants mentioned that it has been a challenge getting students to comprehend the material that is being asked on the test. It is important that administration reviews how students are comprehending the information they are learning and if the way teachers are teaching is really preparing them to be successful in general and not just on a test.

**Interview Question 7.** Interview question 7 asked participants their comfort level preparing students for college. Majority of the participants felt comfortable in preparing students for college. Some of the participants reflected on their previous trainings and experience that has helped them prepare students for college. Mary discussed how she feels more comfortable preparing students for college now that she has taken the “AP Institutes” at the University of Houston and Rice University. Another participant reflection on his own college experience and how that plays a vital role in how he prepares his students for college. Jacob was in “grad school for three years” and

even “taught classes while he was there.” This experience gave him a “really strong understanding of what colleges are looking for.”

All of the participants discussed how they would love for their students to be college bound, but do know that some will not attend college. Zeena discussed because of this, she prepares them not only for college but for “job applications or being able to analyze real life skills.” Although teachers try their best to prepare students, a lot of time is still dedicated towards preparing students for standardized tests. Layla made it known that “preparing students for college isn't a major focus.”

Participants shared that there are not many professional development or training opportunities that are focused on preparing students for college. This is because so much time and energy are geared towards standardized testing. Teachers are left with trying to add in elements into their curriculum that will teach students’ skills that are beneficial for college. Not all students will attend college, but some will. It is important that students are learning skills that will help prepare them not only for college, but the workforce too.

**Interview Question 8.** For question 8, participants were asked how much instructional time is focused towards standardized testing. Many of the participants gave a percentage to represent how much time throughout the school year is geared towards standardized testing. The percentages are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participants Percentage of Instructional Time Towards Standardized Testing*

Participant Pseudonym	% of Instructional Time
Mary	50%
Zeena	90%
Selena	90%
Sabrina	95%
Jacob	80%
Layla	90%
Paul	75%
Morgan	100%

All of the participants gave a high percentage number, except Mary. Mary is somewhat different from her colleagues as some of her classes are filled with Pre-AP students. These students are more advanced than those who sit in an on-level class. With her Pre-AP students, a lot of them do not need as much instructional time towards standardized testing because of where they are academically. With her Pre-AP students, she has a high passing rate with their test scores. For participants who mentioned higher percentages than Mary, they are instructing students who are on level and who need more assistance in preparing for the test.

Table 2 revealed how much instructional time is focused on standardized testing. Students are learning skills, but are not spending time preparing for college. Most of the participants teach students who are on level, but one participant teaches Pre-AP. She does

not spend as much time preparing her students for standardized testing like her colleagues. It is important that participants are allowed more opportunities to prepare students for college. Although there is not a specific amount of time addressed in the research regarding how much time should be spent on preparing students for college, it was noted that preparing students for college takes time and starts before a student enters their senior year of high school (Royster et al., 2015). Further, if students do not exhibit college readiness by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students will not be college ready by graduation (Royster et al., 2015)

**Interview Question 9.** Question 9 asked participants in what ways does standardized testing cause too much stress on teachers and students. This question was asked due to the amount of literature that has noted that standardized has increased stress and has decreased morale in teachers (Abrams et al., 2017). This stress is due to the amount of pressure teachers are under to get students to perform well on standardized tests (Abrams et al., 2017). This pressure then falls upon the students and places a great amount of anxiety and stress on them as they try to produce passing scores (Ravitch, 2016).

All of the participants mentioned how stressful standardized testing can be for them and the students. Majority of the participants discussed that standardized testing is stressful for teachers because the “results from the test scores impact teacher performance and school rating” (Layla). This has placed a great amount of “pressure on teachers to ensure students succeed” (Layla). Because these participants teach in a Title I school district, majority of the students are economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient. This can be stressful on the participants as they “grapple with the fact [their]

school is over 75% ESL, [they] are held to the same standards as every other school” (Sabrina).

The participants also discussed how standardized testing causes too much stress on students. Testing comes at a certain time during the school year, and it can be stressful on students because they have a limited amount of time to take the test. Mary expressed that “it is one day that you have to excel...and if you’re having a bad day, you’re done.” It is also stressful on students because there are consequences if students do not perform well on the tests. Students know that passing the STAAR test is a graduation requirement, and if they do not pass it, “they will not graduate” (Paul).

All participants stated how standardized testing can be stressful among students and teachers. Teachers are faced with trying to get students to pass so that they will have good evaluations, since test scores impact teacher performance. Teachers are faced with different challenges such as teaching students who struggle with reading, who are ESL, and students who are on different academic levels in general. In spite of these challenges, teachers are still placed under a great amount of pressure to get them to pass. Students are just as stressed as they are faced with trying to understand the material needed to be successful on the test. Additionally, students only have one day to succeed. That pressure alone can be stressful.

**Interview Question 10.** Question 10 was focused on the barriers that the participants have faced in trying to prepare students for standardized testing. Majority of the participants discussed how basic skills, language and, different reading levels are the main barriers they are faced with in trying to prepare students for standardized testing. It has been noted that many of the students do not have the “foundational knowledge” that

is needed, so many students struggle with “basic skills” such as “spelling correctly” and “writing in complete sentences” (Mary). These are simple skills that students need in order to identify certain multiple-choice questions on the test and to be able to demonstrate these skills in the writing portion on the test.

Because many of the participants teach a lot of limited English proficient, participants noted that language is also a barrier. These students may not understand what some of the questions mean on the test, which makes it harder for them to pass. Paul expressed his concern for his students because he “deals with ESL students,” and their ability depends on where he can get them in their spectrum of understanding English. Many of his ESL students “are far behind grade level,” and getting them to where they need to be is barrier.

In order for students to perform well on standardized test, they must be able to read well to comprehend what is being asked on the tests. Many of the participants struggle with the fact that their students “are all at vastly different reading levels,” which has made it hard for teachers to “differentiate” for their students and meet the learning needs of the diverse students who sit in their classroom (Sabrina). Sabrina is faced with the challenge of trying to meet the needs of all her students as she expressed, “I have to spend so much time catching up the lower students, it seems like the higher reader can barely get an English education. Jacob captured the best picture when he expressed, “I have 15 and 16-year-old students who are on a first, second grade reading levels, sitting in a regular instruction” (sic).

Teachers struggle on a daily basis in trying to prepare students for standardized testing. These struggles are based on the barriers that impact instruction. Students enter



their classrooms at different learning levels, and depending on where they are academically, it can be challenging getting students to where they need to be. Many of the participants stressed how students struggle with reading in particular. Unfortunately, students struggle with reading the most, but students do not get many opportunities to read in class. In addition, some students are ESL, and may have trouble with understanding the test because of the language barrier. Even with all of these challenges, teachers are still held to the same expectations as other teachers, schools, and even districts.

**Interview Question 11.** For question 11, participants were asked to discuss barriers they have faced in trying to prepare students for college. There were two barriers that were discussed by many of the participants such as the STAAR test, and getting students to see college as an option. Since so much of instructional time is geared towards standardized testing, and getting students to perform well on these tests, there is little room left to prepares students for college. Layla made it known that “what we do for the students is more geared towards their success on the STAAR than it is for their success in college.”

One barrier discussed by some of the participants was the financial aspect of going to college. College is expensive and how many students do not have the resources to attend. It was also mentioned how some students may not have the luxury of attending college after high school because they have to enter the workforce to start making money. Selena expressed, “The kids don’t have the money. Or the kids need to go to work immediately.” She also mentioned how there is “not enough scholarship opportunities”

for students. Paul also explained how many kids want to attend college but the financial reality is students “have a difficulty of seeing that there is a way to make it happen.”

Another barrier that participants discussed is getting their students to even consider college as an option. Sabrina mentioned how “there are tons of kids that would like to go to college or want to go to college, and then there are a lot of kids that don’t see any point in it.” Some of the participants believe that it is the “population” that they teach and that it could be “cultural” (Sabrina) as to why “postsecondary education is not at the forefront of the majority of the kid’s mind” (Selena). Participants discussed how students come from families and have parents or siblings who did not attend college, and how they even went straight into the workforce after high school. It has also been hard for teachers to get students “to understand and believe that everything we do in class is necessary to be successful in college (Sabrina). Jacob mentioned college may not be an option to students because they have “never been taught to dream,” so they may “not know what their possibilities are. The students have many expectations placed upon them by their parents, and college may not be one of them.”

One barrier that participants are faced with in preparing students for college is the STAAR test itself. Since so much time is geared towards the test, there is little to no room in preparing students for college. Another aspect is the financial aspect. Some students have the desire to attend college, but they have no way of paying for it. There are also not many scholarship opportunities that are available for everyone. The last barrier discussed is the mindset of the students. Some student will not even consider college as an option because of their background and where they come from. When interviewing some of the participants, they discussed how the students’ culture may play

a role when it comes to viewing college as an option. This is because so many of their students' families enter the workforce right after high school. Watching their families enter the workforce instead of attending college could damper a students' mindset and motivation about learning more about college and even attending themselves.

**Interview Question 12.** For question 12, participants were asked about their thoughts regarding the curriculum they teach. The participants were divided on how they felt about the curriculum they teach. Half of the participants enjoy the curriculum, and are looking forward to this upcoming school year because there have been changes in their curriculum in regards to new TEKS, and a new textbook. The TEKS are a set of learning skills that must be taught to students within that school year. The TEKS are all of the skills that will be covered on the test.

According to some of the participants, the TEKS can be overwhelming because there were so many of them. Mary discussed how there were "37 TEKS," but with the change, there is now only "seven." Since the TEKS changed, "they're so much easier...and much simpler in terms of everything all working together" (Mary). The new TEKS were adopted in 2017, and were amended to take effect in 2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Many ELA teachers in the state of Texas must now begin making changes to implement the new TEKS into their lessons, including teachers who teach English II. With a new set of TEKS, it means a new curriculum and new resources. One of the changes includes the new TEKS having seven strands that makes up the foundation of English Language Arts. In the past, there were five strands. Another change is how under knowledge and skills there are now 11 statements listed instead of 26.

One of the biggest changes is how teachers are instructed to combine reading, writing speaking, listening, and thinking into assignments. For example, in the past, one of the statements under the knowledge and skills read, “Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity” (Texas Education Agency, 24). Instead of listening and speaking being a skill on its own, it is now embedded into other skills. For example, under the new TEKS, one of the skills reads, “Author's purpose and craft: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts. The student uses critical inquiry to analyze the authors' choices and how they influence and communicate meaning within a variety of texts. The student analyzes and applies author's craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances” (Texas Education Agency, 8).

Every statement under knowledge and kills has incorporated reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking into each one. This will encourage students to be able to read, write, think, and engage in discussions on daily basis, which are all key skills they need for college. Another big change is vertical alignment. The TEKS also changed for grades K-8, and will now provide a cohesive education for students as they navigate from grade to grade (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

Layla mentioned how she enjoys the content of the curriculum and the skills that are being taught, she just “does not agree with the way it is taught.” Zeena also enjoyed the curriculum and praised the textbook for how it gave her students “a jump in scores because [they] gave them a higher level of text and questioning that they weren’t necessarily exposed to.

Half of the participants expressed how they do not like the curriculum they teach. They even described the curriculum as “dry,” “uninspiring,” “uninteresting,” and even “garbage. Most of their dislike for the curriculum stemmed from so much of what they are teaching goes back to the STAAR test. Selena painted the best picture when she explained that, “every text you teach, every excerpt, every journal, every book, you have to look at it through the lens of how is this going to help me on the test.”

The participants were divided in regard to how they felt about the curriculum they teach. Half of the participants enjoyed the curriculum, and the other half did not enjoy teaching the curriculum. Some of the participants mentioned that they were excited for the change that the new school year will bring. This includes new TEKS, a new textbook, and potentially new curriculum. When discussing this with some of the participants, they were hopeful for the new school year. For those participants who do not enjoy the curriculum, hopefully with the new changes, this will help change their mindset.

**Interview Question 13.** For interview question 13, participants were asked how they curriculum they teach prepares students for standardized testing. Many of the participants stated how they believe the curriculum does prepare students for standardized testing. Everything that teachers teach goes back to the TEKS, “which can be found on the standardized test” (Mary). Because of this, the curriculum “is driven by the test, which “prepares the students for standardized tests” (Layla). Paul summed up everything by stating that the curriculum has “been designed” to prepare students. “You create the test, and then you come up with your lessons, so that you make sure you teach into the test.” He further explained that “it’s all designed to lead to successful outcomes.”

Participants were confident in their response to how the curriculum prepares students for standardized testing. So much of what teachers do on a daily basis goes back to standardized testing. Everything they teach, read, and review is all centered around standardized testing. This can be beneficial since students must pass their test, but it can be draining for teachers since there is not much diversity within the curriculum. Students are also limited in what they are learning.

**Interview Question 14.** Interview question 14 asked participants about how their curriculum prepares students for college. The participants were divided in how they responded. Half of the participants discussed how the curriculum does not prepare students for college. These participants explained how they “teach students how to answer questions correctly” (Selena). For these participants, it all goes back to how much time is spent towards standardized testing, and how it “does not prepare students for college, but just a means for them to really pass a test” (Selena). Due to this, students are limited in what they are learning and are “lacking in areas that aren’t heavily accessed by STAAR like poetry, drama, and critical thinking” (Layla). They also mentioned that if students are in “honors” or “advanced” classes, then they have more of a chance of receiving a curriculum that will prepare them for college.

The other half of the participants felt as if the curriculum does prepare students for college. Under the TEKS, students are learning a lot of skills that are not only valuable for the test, but for college as well. Layla explained how students are still “learning and building on skills that they will need in order to be successful in college. Sabrina elaborated on these skills that the curriculum offers such as “communication skills, critical thinking skills, close reading techniques, and builds world information.”

It was interesting that participants were divided on if the curriculum prepares students for college. Some participants felt that because so much time is focused on standardized testing, there is not a major focus on preparing students for college. The other half felt as if the skills that students are learning for standardized testing does prepare them for college too. The TEKS are compiled of many beneficial skills that students could easily apply to college. It is uncertain if the participants who are against the curriculum feel it does not prepare students for college because of the repetitive nature that can come with standardized testing or if they truly believe that the curriculum is not giving students what they need for college.

**Interview Question 15.** For question 15, participants were asked about how they felt about preparing students for standardized testing in this pandemic. This question was asked due to the pandemic occurring during this time of the research study. At the beginning of 2020, news reports broke out about a new infectious disease called COVID-19. The virus has easily spread from person to person if certain precautions are not taken such as wearing a mask and practicing social distancing. Many people have gotten infected, and many have died from this virus. In addition, many businesses were impacted as mandatory shut downs were put into place to minimize the spread of disease. In addition, schools also shut down after spring break to decrease the spread of the virus (Carroll, 2020). This placed a great amount of pressure on teachers, administrators, students, and parents to try and navigate their way through an unfortunate and unforeseen time.

This interrupted the school year as well as STAAR testing, which all students were exempt from STAAR testing for this school year. COVID-19 has greatly changed overall

learning as many teachers had to leave their classrooms abruptly, and prepare for a new learning environment that was 100% virtual in a short amount of time (Edweek.org, 2020). Many school districts were faced with trying to transition students smoothly to remote learning, while providing students and their families with basic needs such as sufficient food (Edweek.org, 2020). For the upcoming school year, teachers are not only faced with still providing remote learning to students, but preparing students for standardized testing as students in Texas will not be exempt another year.

All of the participants stated how they are not certain of how teaching will take place and how well they will be able to prepare students for standardized testing. Face-to-face teaching can be challenging enough, so many of the participants are concerned with “teaching online to kids who are used to in-person instruction” (Mary). The content on the STAAR test is difficult for some students to comprehend, and they will need someone to “be there beside the and show them what they’re doing, how it’s right, and how it can be better” (Selena).

Participants were also concerned about the students’ home environment and “conducive” it is to “focusing and learning” (Layla). In this pandemic, many students may have to work to help out their family, or even take care of their siblings while their parents have to go to work, or for some, there may be too many distractions at home. Participants hope that students “are exempt from STAAR testing another year” (Mary), because as Layla concluded, “I know that right now during this pandemic, there’s more on their minds than the tests at the end of the year.”

Participants are concerned when it comes to preparing students for standardized testing during the pandemic. They are concerned with students being able to provide



students with what they need since so all of their students are used to in person instruction. They are also concerned with the home environment that students will be learning from and if it is conducive to what they need to be successful. When students are at school, teachers can help them focus and give them the direction they need. At home, there may be distractions that make it hard for students to concentrate and complete their assignments. Teachers will have to be flexible this school year in how they approach instruction, and how students react to the new online learning environment.

**Interview Question 16.** Interview question 16 asked participants how they felt about preparing students for college in this pandemic. Majority of the participants discussed how an online learning setting in this pandemic will be beneficial in preparing students for college. Since many colleges use different online platforms, students will have exposure to how online platforms work. Sabrina mentioned how the learning models they use are “identical to many college courses” that she has taken in the past. Participants also discussed how an online learning setting will prepare students to be more “self-sufficient” (Layla). Students will have to “rely on their self-motivation,” for logging into their courses and completing their assignments (Layla).

During in person instruction, teachers are by their students’ side guiding them and encouraging them to complete their task. Students now only have access to their teacher through a computer screen, which will force them to be more independent Jacob painted the best picture when he explained how students will have to log in, check their assignments, complete their assignments, “and then we come and talk about it. That's more of a college setting. That's exactly what an online class looks like in college.”

It was surprising that majority of the participants felt as if online instruction will help prepare students for college. Students are not exposed to much technology during the school year since they spend most of that time preparing students for their tests. With learning taking place online due to the pandemic, students are forced to learn new platforms, new tools, and strategies to be successful. This could help them prepare for college as college requires students to use an online platform such as Blackboard, Canvas, or D2L (Desire to Learn) just to name a few. Participants also mentioned how online learning will force students to be more independent and take ownership of their learning. These are traits that students would need for students to be successful in college also.

**Interview Question 17.** To conclude the interviews, participants were asked if they had any final remarks that they wanted to discuss. Only one participant took the opportunity to add to their comments regarding technology. Paul mentioned how the district should provide technology to every student. If there is another pandemic, or a natural disaster, “education doesn’t have to stop because we have tools now,” Paul explained.

### **Emergent Themes**

There were five major themes that emerged from the data. The themes were (a) professional development for standardized testing and college readiness, (b) preparing students for standardized tests and college (c) student and teacher performance on standardized tests in the classroom, (d) the curriculum used to teach students, and (e) teaching in the pandemic.

**Professional development for standardized testing and college readiness.**

Professional development and training are an essential part in teachers being able to successfully prepare students for standardized testing and college. In December of 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act established new practices for professional development that school districts should stray away from quick-hit type workshops that require teachers to travel outside of the classroom, but rather provide in house training that teachers can participate in during the school day (Davis, 2019). For the participants, the district provides in house training for all teachers before the school year starts on various topics that should be covered during the school year. They also provide different English and non-English trainings during the summer that participants can in. There are also several professional development opportunities that take place throughout the year.

All of the participants have participated in a variety of trainings to help prepare students for college and standardized testing. To help determine this theme, the researcher relied on the codes “professional development” and “training.” For standardized testing, the most beneficial training for preparing students was any training that was directly related to the test. These types of trainings have allowed teachers to learn strategies that will help them prepare themselves and their students for standardized testing. Layla summed it up best when she explained, “any professional development for strategies for testing, like color coding, how to eliminate answer choices, how to annotate the text on the test, essay writing strategies for the STAAR essay.”

Another example is from Selena who also learned important elements that have been beneficial in preparing students. Selena expressed:

Any professional development where you are organizing and analyzing data, especially with the STAAR and you've got those six reporting categories.

Professional development where you learn to break down the categories, because each one gets a certain amount of questions. It's really helpful to understand the data that goes into STAAR scores.

Reading and writing workshops have also been helpful as participants were able to learn key reading strategies to help students improve their reading, analytical and critical reading skills. They were also able to learn more about "writing processes," and how students can improve their writing for standardized testing (Paul).

Many of the participants mentioned how training outside of the district has been beneficial in preparing students for college. Participants mentioned how there is not much preparation within the district so professional development has helped the most. Mary has even attended advanced placement trainings on the campuses of "U of H and Rice" to learn strategies and lessons that will help her students be college ready. Morgan also participated in a program called Humanities Texas, which was an important training to her because she learned "how to teach Shakespeare and literary works" to her students. It was not surprising to know that many participants seek trainings outside of their district for help in preparing students for college since so much time is geared towards preparing students for standardized testing.

It is imperative that teachers participate in professional development as it helps them prepare their students for standardized testing and college readiness. For teachers to feel confident in their abilities to successfully prepare students, they must have access to trainings that are beneficial and relevant to the content they need to instruct their

students. If teachers feel confident in their abilities, then they have a greater chance of providing effective instruction. The participants mentioned that trainings related to the test were important to learn the necessary tools and strategies needed to teach their students the required content. If teachers are equipped with that they need for their students, then they are less likely to fear the possibility of failing.

**Preparing students for standardized tests and college.** As a teacher, you can feel as if you have a big responsibility on your shoulder because you are preparing the next generation of doctors, lawyers, and even future teachers. With that responsibility comes great pressure, which can greatly impact your ability to successfully equip students with what they need so that they are ready for what's to come. To help determine this theme, the researcher relied on the codes "college," "college readiness," "college preparation," "standardized tests", and "standardized testing preparation."

Majority of the participants stated they felt comfortable in preparing students for standardized tests. Standardized testing has "impacted the way teachers teach on a daily basis" (Layla). So much of their content is derived from a set of TEKS they must follow, which is a set of skills that students must master in order to be successful on the test. Many of the participants felt that since the test are "relatively straightforward," and "formulaic," they feel comfortable preparing their students (Jacob). However, the challenge for some participants has been getting the students "to understand how to analyze questions, or how to analyze a prompt and be able to form an argument" (Jacob). It is easy to understand why majority of the participants felt confident in preparing students. Once you review the test and how the questions are formatted, the key now becomes in learning about how to convey the information obtained to the students.

In preparing students for college, majority of the participants felt confident in preparing students for college in spite of not having many opportunities to do so. All of the participants want their students to succeed and attend college, but they know that college is not for everyone. So much instructional time is geared towards testing, which leaves little time in preparing students for college. Participants do what they can to try and blend in some college elements into their curriculum. Zeena summed it best when she explained, “I like thinking about a future for them and not all of my students are college bound, but I like thinking about ways to get them just ready for job applications or being able to analyze real life skills.”

Self-efficacy is important so teachers believe in themselves and their ability to effectively instruct their students. A majority of the participants expressed that they felt comfortable in preparing students for standardized tests and college. If participants are confident, then they have a better chance at their students being successful with their standardized assessments and being prepared for college. This comfort goes back to performance accomplishments. The more success that the participants experience, the less they will likely experience failure. Their strong comfort levels will allow them to successfully prepare students for standardized assessments while preparing them for college.

#### **Student and teacher performance on standardized tests in the classroom.**

For this theme, the researcher relied on the codes “student performance” and “teacher performance.” All of the participants mentioned how standardized testing greatly impacts student and teacher performance in different ways. How “students perform on the test” is a direct reflection of the teacher, which puts a great amount of pressure on teachers to get

students to perform well (Zeena). Unfortunately, the scores from the tests “impact teacher and school ratings” (Layla). If their students do not perform well on the test, it can be disheartening for teachers and even stressful because of how much they are evaluated on these scores. Some participants even mentioned how majority of their students are ESL, but yet they are held to the same standards as everyone else. Even though other factors may impact student scores, teachers are still expected to have their students pass and perform well.

Students also have a lot of pressure on them because they have to be successful on the tests because “if they don’t pass the test, then they will not graduate.” Students will also have to complete projects if they do not pass in order to be eligible to graduate. If a student does not pass their standardized test the first time around, students three different times during the year to retake it (spring, fall, and summer). If a student reaches the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade and has failed at least two of their tests, an individual graduation committee must be formed (Partners Network Resource, 2019). This committee is made up of the principal, a teacher of each course the student has failed in, the department chair, and the student’s parent unless they are 18 or older (Partners Network Resource, 2019). In order for students to graduate, students can be placed in additional remediation for each course failed, or they can create a portfolio made up of work samples from that subject area (Partners Network Resource, 2019).

It is also stressful because students only have one day to test, and they must do their best in spite of what other issues may be impacting them at that time. Zeena mentioned how it is “unfair to categorize students’ skills based on one test.” Participants also mentioned how students become “discouraged” or even “nonchalant” about the test

when they do not perform well. When speaking with participants, it was disheartening to hear how some of these students have taken the same test multiple times. This can greatly affect their performance and their self-efficacy. When speaking with the participants, you could hear their concern and the sadness in their voice when talking about standardized testing and the impact it has on the students. Paul added that at the end of the day, “student and teacher performance will be judged by standardized testing.”

Since teachers are evaluated by the scores their students may receive, this can impact their self-efficacy. If their students perform well on their tests, then this can positively motivate teachers to continue to do their jobs effectively and with confidence. If their students do not perform well, then this can be disheartening and diminish teachers’ confidence, which could result in students not receiving the instruction they need.

**The curriculum used to teach students.** There were a few codes to help determine this theme, which included “curriculum,” “reading,” “comprehension,” and instructional time. Majority of the participants agreed that 70% or more instructional time is geared towards preparing students for standardized testing. The participants also mentioned how the curriculum is driven by what is taught on the standardized tests, which means that all of their “lessons feed into standardized testing” (Paul). Participants discussed how they even analyze previous test and develop their lessons around them. Because of this, there is little room for teachers to add in additional lessons that spark creativity or teach additional skills that may not be on the test but could be beneficial for college.



This has led to students lacking in certain skills because so much of the curriculum is STAAR focused. Layla captured the best picture when she stated, that students are “still limited in what they’re learning, and are lacking in areas that may not be accessed by STAAR like poetry, drama, and critical thinking. In addition, reading plays a vital role in how students perform on test, and in the classroom in general. It is also imperative that students know how to read if they plan on attending college, or if they plan on entering the workforce upon graduation. When speaking with the participants, many of them mentioned how students struggle with reading an in-depth analysis and in-depth interpretations. Jacob mentioned how important reading is and how “you learn by reading”, but how there is little time for reading since most of instructional time is getting students to pass a test. Even though students “struggle with reading skills, students are not receiving what they need because of standardized testing. I think Layla also made the best point when she stated, “students read less, but struggle with it the most.”

Teachers know what their students need, but they are constantly being pressured and persuaded to teach to a test. This can make teachers feel belittled and lack confidence in their abilities because they may feel as if they are not being trusted to perform the job they went to school for. This can also impact teachers’ emotionally as they strive to do what is expected of them but do what it needed to ensure the success of their students.

**Teaching in a pandemic.** Since the arrival of COVID-19, learning was interrupted, and many schools were forced to end the school year early. With a new school year beginning, administrators and teachers have been working tirelessly to prepare a plan that will keep everyone safe, but that allows learning to continue. This plan included remote learning. Teachers who have taught in person instruction, were now

faced with developing content and lessons online in a short amount of time. There were two codes that helped determine this theme, which included “online instruction” and “technology”. All of the participants expressed their different concerns with having to teach and prepare students for standardized testing and college in this pandemic. Mary mentioned that “things will go horribly during the pandemic” and she is really “hoping that students are exempt from taking STAAR test another year.”

Participants were mainly concerned with how you “can’t teach online to kids who are used to in-person instruction” (Mary). In person, teachers can give students the emotional support they need for navigating through their educational journey. Additionally, in person instruction allows teachers to give students thorough feedback on their assignments, answer all questions they may have, and give students the motivation they need to keep going. In an online setting, it is hard to communicate through email, some students may not have the best internet connection, and who knows if a student’s “home environment” is conducive for learning (Layla). Students may have distractions surrounding them that may not allow them to focus on their education. Some students may have to work, others may have to take care of their siblings, or even someone who may be sick. During the interview, one participant even cried because of his concern that students may not get everything they need to be successful during this pandemic.

In spite of their concerns with teaching and preparing students for standardized testing in a pandemic, majority of the participants felt that online instruction during the pandemic will be beneficial in preparing students for college. Online learning will give push students to rely on their self-motivation to complete their assignments. It will also allow them to be “exposed to technology platforms” that they may not have had an

opportunity to before (Morgan). Sabrina made it known that “virtual school will prepare students for college as online learning models will be similar to college courses.”

Online teaching in the pandemic can have an impact on teachers’ self-efficacy. Many of the participants are concerned about how they are going to successfully prepare their students for standardized tests and college through a computer screen. They are concerned about being able to provide feedback, and if the home environment will allow students to be successful academically during the pandemic. How students may perform during the pandemic can impact teachers emotionally, and can weaken their confidence in their abilities to effectively instruct their students.

### **Emotions**

Emotions codes identifies and label emotions experienced or recalled by the participant that is implied the researcher about the participant (Saldaña, 2016). It was also noted by Saldaña (2016) how emotions coding is applicable for all qualitative studies. Careful analysis of peoples’ emotions reveals the inward workings of an individual, but also the concealed tone or mood of a community (Saldaña, 2016). When interviewing participants, there were a variety of emotions that were expressed over the information that was discussed. These emotions ranged from stress, anxiety, guilt, depression, and feeling worthless.

At the beginning of each interview, many of the participants discussed how they love their job and how much they enjoy teaching English. However, quickly into the interview, many of the participants mentioned how their job can be stressful when teaching and preparing their students for standardized tests. Mary mentioned that “teaching is stressful because you don’t know where students are.” When teachers

receive their students, many of them are at different levels academically. It is the responsibility of the teacher to take students from where they are and bring them to where they need to be, which can be stressful. There is also a lot of stress on teachers to get students to perform well. Zeena expressed that there is “a lot of stress on teachers about scores and how well you do.” Since teachers are evaluated on how well their students perform, this can be stressful and make it difficult to because there is so much pressure to get students to succeed. Jacob mentioned how he struggles with understanding the purpose of standardized testing and even conveying the purpose to students. He discussed “It’s stressful doing something without purpose.”

Half of the participants explained how they have experienced anxiety while trying to prepare their students. Sabrina expressed how she “has anxiety with the fact that 75% of the student population is ESL students.” Many teachers are teaching a diverse group of students in their classes, but are still held to the same expectations as other teachers. Paul described how the “test creates anxiety for everyone,” and there’s a “great deal of anxiety for preparing students for standardized testing in the pandemic.” Morgan also mentioned how “the curriculum gives her anxiety” in preparing students for standardized testing. There is also a sense of anxiety among the participants as they begin preparing to teach students online for the upcoming school year.

Some of the participants also discussed how they feel guilty at times. When speaking with them, participants mentioned how they would have to do what is best for their students, which even meant leaving some curriculum behind, or adding in material that may not have been assigned in the curriculum. Selena expressed how she feels guilty when she “selects a text that is not STAAR related.” The participants try to adhere to

what is expected of them, but at times, would seek out for additional options to add variety into the curriculum and to expose students to things that their required curriculum does not offer.

Some participants mentioned how standardized testing can be “depressing,” and creates “fear” into the students and teachers. In addition, some participants also mentioned feeling “worthless” and how they feel “undervalued” by the work they do. Sabrina summed it best by stating “the odds are stacked against you,” and “nothing I do matters.”

Overall, all of the participants expressed how they love their job, and enjoy teaching English in spite of the challenges they are presented with on a daily basis with standardized testing. Teachers expressed many different things they were feeling, which revealed that teaching comes with a roller coaster of emotions. These emotions can impact a teacher’s self-efficacy and can impact their ability to instruct their students. It can also impact their students as a teacher’s self-efficacy can influence student motivation and achievement and has been known to positively impact teacher’s belief about instructional behaviors and teaching (Klazen et al., 2011). If teachers are stressed, feeling worthless, undervalued, and experiencing anxiety, it can diminish what they enjoy doing. Teachers love what they do, but that love does not stop the challenges that comes with it. This love for their job can continue to motivate them to continue to do the work they are doing, or it can discourage them and potentially make them leave the profession altogether. Due to the emotions mentioned by the participants, school districts should do more to listen to teachers and show that they are valued and appreciated. If teachers feel

appreciated, then no matter what the challenges may be, teachers would still want to do their job and do it effectively.

### **Summary**

Chapter IV presented the analysis of the data as outlines in Chapter III. In order to look at the data with a new perspective, I first bracketed my own biases and experiences in the Epoche. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were then recorded and transcribed to acquire the participants' experiences. The researcher then collected the data, analyzed it, and organized the data into different categories and themes (Creswell and Poth, 2018). These categories and themes were established using coding techniques by Saldaña (2016). Emotions coding also took place to identify the emotions that the participants were feeling (Saldaña, 2016).

The data collected and analyzed for this study provided English high school teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. There were five themes that emerged which included (a) professional development for standardized testing and college readiness, (b) preparing students for standardized tests and college, (c) student and teacher performance on standardized tests in the classroom, (e) the curriculum used to teach students, and (g) teaching in the pandemic. Chapter V will combine the themes into a complete description of the phenomenon. Implications and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

#### Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze English high school teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. As mentioned in Chapters III and IV, this study examined how high school English teachers described their experiences with preparing students for standardized testing, while preparing them for college. Eight teachers were selected from two schools located in an urban school district.

I chose this study because of my own experiences as a former high school teacher who prepared students for standardized testing while preparing them for college. As a tenth-grade high school teacher, I experienced a great amount of pressure to get students to perform well. It was my responsibility to teach them, and provide them with the necessary tools to be successful. I also knew that how they performed was a direct reflection of who I was as a teacher. Although there were many factors that impacted how my students performed, at the end of the day, it was all about the numbers. The pressure of preparing students for standardized testing while increasing college readiness led me to question whether other high school English teachers were having similar experiences as the researcher.

Specifically, my previous experience as a former high school tenth grade English teacher led me to being interested in learning the perceptions of these teachers and if their experiences were similar to my own. I was also interested in learning where their experiences differed as well. When I taught tenth grade English, it seemed as if majority of the school year was spent preparing students for standardized testing. Not only was I

preparing first time testers for the tenth-grade test, I also had students who had failed their ninth-grade test. Since they failed, it was now my responsibility to prepare them for the ninth-grade retest as well as the tenth grade English STAAR exam. It was like everything we did was STAAR focused. There was no room to add in other elements that were non test related to teach students. Everything came back to the STAAR test. Many times, I was burned because we were teaching from a test and it just was not fun. Being a teacher is not an easy job, and these participants were faced with many challenges such as, teaching a diverse group of students, and teaching students with limited resources.

The self-efficacy component under the Social Cognitive Theory that was created by Albert Bandura provided a framework in which the participants' experiences could be studied. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in how they conquer their acquired goal and achieve certain results (Parjares, 1996). It was noted that much of human behavior, which is full of purpose, is guided by conscious goals (Bandura, 1993). These goals are also influenced by an individual's capabilities (Bandura, 1993). The expectations of personal efficacy are derived from four principle sources of information which include, performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Each of these sources contributed to an individual's self-efficacy, revealing how participants felt regarding their abilities in preparing students for standardized testing and college. In spite of some of the negative feedback received by participants, overall, these sources of information had a neutral influence on teachers' self-efficacy. Participants were faced with many obstacles, which made them feel stressed and pressured, but they still love their jobs, and overall, felt confident in their abilities to prepare their students for testing and college.



Additionally, the study resulted in five themes which include, (a) professional development for standardized testing and college readiness, (b) preparing students for standardized tests and college, (c) student and teacher performance on standardized tests in the classroom, (d) the curriculum used to teach students, and (e) teaching in the pandemic. Emotions coding also took place, which revealed different emotions that teachers experience from teaching students, preparing them for their exams and for college.

In this chapter, I will synthesize the findings from Chapter IV into a detailed description of the phenomenon as well as provide the implications and recommendations for future research. Additionally, I will address the following sections in this chapter: (a) discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions, which includes discussions of how the findings relate to the literature and the self-efficacy framework, (b) recommendations for future research, (c) recommendations for practice, and (d) conclusion.

### **Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Research Questions**

**Research Question 1.** The first research question asked, “What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers’ regarding the impact of standardized testing on the curriculum they teach?” The perceptions of the participants about their experiences with the curriculum they teach focused on themes two (preparing students for standardized testing and college and four (the curriculum used to teach students).

An important element shared by the participants was the amount of time that is spent preparing students for standardized tests. A majority of the participants discussed how more than 70% of their instructional time is focused on standardized testing. In

addition, participants discussed how the curriculum is driven by what is taught on the test. Many of the lessons that teachers create are based on what is found on the test. This has led to students only being taught certain skills that are related to the test, and teachers are left to abandon other skills that may be beneficial to students for college. Layla mentioned that students are “still limited in what they’re learning and are lacking in areas that may not be accessed by STAAR like poetry, drama, and critical thinking.” For example, Layla also discussed how she was told to spend only one day on poetry since it does not show up on the test as much. However, when it does appear, students struggle because they do not spend enough time teaching it.

Participants also mentioned how students struggle with reading and reading comprehension the most, but since most of the time is focused on standardized testing, there is not a lot of time in class that allows students to read. Layla also mentioned how “students read less, but struggle with the most.” Being able to read critically is a skill that students will need if they attend college, and will be beneficial for them when they enter the workforce, but participants are focused on getting students to pass a test than instructing them skills that go beyond the test.

Teachers know what their students need, and teachers have a great responsibility of doing what they need to make sure students are successful. This may include teachers stepping away from what is expected of them for them to meet the needs of their students. From an emotional standpoint, some participants mentioned how they feel guilty when they add in elements that are non-test related. Sabrina expressed how she felt guilty when she “selects a text that is not STAAR related.”

It is interesting that all teachers expressed at the beginning of their interview how much they loved their job. Despite all the challenges they face daily, these teachers show up every day because the love they have for their job. Teachers are confident in their teaching abilities but may lack confidence due to their negative experiences with testing. This negativity is derived from the pressure that comes with testing and teachers' ability to cope with this pressure. The pressure comes from test scores being heavily weighed on teachers' evaluations, and even the curriculum that teachers are being forced to teach.

However, a potential issue that could arise is how participants could experience burnout from the curriculum they are instructed to teach. This burnout could make teachers love their job less, or worse, leave the profession altogether. Allowing teachers to add elements into the curriculum may alleviate this from happening. It will also allow teachers from the feeling of guilt when they incorporate other materials, they deem important for students to learn. For example, participants mentioned how students struggle with reading. Teachers should feel confident in supplementing materials to help students so they can be successful. Instead, teachers are left with guilt for doing what is needed for their students.

It is also interesting that all but one of the participants mentioned that 70% of their instructional time is focused on standardized testing. One participant stated that 50% of instructional time is spent on standardized testing. This participant does teach some Pre-AP classes, which could contribute to her spending less time on standardized testing. To help teachers avoid burnout and ensure that all students are receiving what they need, it is imperative that teachers differentiate their instruction. Teachers must plan lessons that are based on individual learning needs and learning profiles, which are two crucial

elements that are needed when differentiating instruction for students (Parsons, Dodman & Burrowbridge, 2013). It is also imperative that teachers adjust their instruction in real time to meet the diverse needs of those students sitting in their classrooms (Parsons, Dodman & Burrowbridge, 2013). It has been noted that the foundations of differentiated learning include strategy in curriculum planning, flexible grouping, student contracts, and tiered activities (Parsons, Dodman & Burrowbridge, 2013). Since today's classrooms are filled with students from different cultures, interests, language proficiency, and educational skills, differentiated instruction has been known to have positive results on student achievement (Parsons, Dodman & Burrowbridge, 2013).

These findings are consistent with existing literature. Research noted that an immense amount of time is geared towards testing. It was noted that students are mandated to take 112 standardized assessments between pre-kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Strauss, 2015). It was noted that anywhere between 20 and 25 hours are taken every school year due to testing (Strauss, 2015). In addition, teachers are not focused on teaching students content knowledge, but how to take a test (Fitzgerald, 2008). This has caused many students to miss out on other skills such as rigorous reading skills (Peel, 2017). More importantly, the reading comprehension among high school graduates is concerning because in college, students may be presented with college articles and assignments that require a high level of reading comprehension due to the vocabulary used (Friedman, et al., 2016).

In regards to the conceptual framework, these findings are consistent with verbal persuasion, which is one of the principal sources of self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion is used to try and influence human behavior (Bandura, 1977). This source was used to

reveal how teachers are being persuaded and pressured in different ways to get students to perform well on standardized testing. Although teachers know what is best for their students, and what skills they are still lacking in, teachers are being persuaded to stick to teaching the test and abandon certain skills that students will need to be successful beyond the test.

One example mentioned by a participant is how they were told not to teach something from the words of their administrator because it was not on the test. Joel mentioned:

In fact, it's come out of the mouth of my administrator that if it's not on the STAAR, we're not teaching it. And so, that makes your job as a teacher really difficult because you want to do what's best for kids, but you as a teacher, and an educator know that kids are not standardized.

This is just one example of how teachers are verbally persuaded and pressured to perform in ways they may not agree with but feel obligated to comply. It has been noted that teachers will receive some form of feedback or encouragement from their supervisors or colleagues (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). Depending on what that feedback or encouragement is, it can greatly impact teachers' self-efficacy if they lose confidence in their abilities to do what they believe is needed for their students to succeed. If they are going to be persuaded otherwise, they may not want to reach their fullest potential in instructing their students. Teachers may just go through the motions because they believe that their efforts to do anything else will be shut down. If administrators are instructing teachers on what they should teach and what they cannot teach, then administrators

should spend more time in the classrooms to get a better understanding of why teachers are doing what they believe is best.

**Research Question 2.** The second research question asked, “What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers’ regarding standardized testing and its impact on the curriculum in preparing students for college? The perceptions of teachers regarding how standardized testing impacts the curriculum in preparing students for college is focused on themes two (preparing students for standardized tests and college) and five (teaching in the pandemic).

Many of the participants shared that they felt comfortable in preparing students for college. The issue is that there is not enough instructional time to focus on preparing students for college in the curriculum. This is due to so much time being spent on preparing students for standardized tests. Unless students are taking advanced or honors classes, the curriculum simply does not prepare them for college. Selena expressed, “The tenth-grade curriculum doesn’t prepare you at all for college. It doesn’t teach skills, it teaches tests. We don’t teach them how to conduct themselves or dissect complex ideas. Other than if you’re taking honors classes, I don’t think tenth grade prepares you at all.” Paul also mentioned, “If you’re in an AP class and everything, it’s great. Ultimately though, for college readiness, I think our curriculum is weak because it’s geared towards passing a test.”

Although there is not much instructional time in preparing students for college, participants stated that online instruction in the pandemic will help students prepare for college. Since students will be exposed to technology platforms in college, online learning will allow students to get familiar with how online learning will work. In

addition, participants mentioned that this will also push students to motivate themselves to complete their assignments. This will allow them to be more independent and practice skills that they will need for college.

Some participants discussed some of their students have no plans to attend college. They also mentioned how difficult it is to get some of their students to even consider college as an option. Participants expressed how their reasoning could be cultural as some of their students' families enter the workforce after college. Another reason is financial. Many students do not have the money to attend college because of how expensive college can be. There are also not many scholarships available for everyone.

These findings are consistent with literature. Again, with so much instructional time spent on preparing students to pass a test, students are left with gaps in their learning in regards to important skills needed for college. There is an increase in the number of students who need developmental coursework to help fill the gaps of college readiness due the lack of familiarity and students' ability with complex reading skills (Friedman et al., 2016). In addition, a lack of exposure to critical and complex academic text leaves students performing at a level that does not allow them to go beyond the surface when analyzing text, inferencing skills, and comparative skills, which are a crucial part of college curriculum (Friedman et al., 2016).

In regards to the conceptual framework, these findings are also consistent with verbal persuasion, which is to try to influence human behavior (Bandura, 1977). Teachers know that not all of their students will attend college, but they also know that students need to learn more skills that will prepare them for college and even the workforce.

However, teachers are constantly being pressured and persuaded to teach students to pass a test. This pressure can diminish a teacher's ability to believe in themselves. Teachers can make judgements about themselves based on the verbal feedback they receive from others such as their colleagues and administrators (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). This verbal feedback from their peers and administrators can enhance their ability to believe in themselves to achieve what they need to accomplish (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). Teachers went to school to be able to teach students and become professionals in their field. Their degree is a symbol of this knowledge, and when they are persuaded otherwise, it strips them of this achievement and their ability to do their job as they have been trained.

**Research Question 3.** The third research question asked, "What are the perceptions of Title 1 English high school teachers' regarding their ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized assessments?" The perceptions of the participants' ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized assessments is focused on themes one (professional development for standardized testing and college readiness), two (preparing students for standardized tests and college), and three (students and teacher performance on standardized tests in the classroom).

Professional development is very important as it provides teachers with the necessary tools and lessons to be able to provide instruction for their students. Professional development has impacted their ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized tests. Many of the participants believe that any training related directly to the test was most beneficial. Selena mentioned how "any type of professional development where you are organizing and analyzing data, especially



with the STAAR and you've got those six reporting categories." She further mentioned, "It's really helpful to understand the data that goes into STAR scores." Layla also expressed:

Some of the professional development for standardized testing that has really been good for teaching to the test or any professional development for strategies for testing, like color coding, how to eliminate answer choices, how to annotate the text on the test, essay writing strategies for the STAAR essay. Those professional developments have been beneficial for the students, for teaching the students.

These types of trainings give teachers the confidence and tools they need in order to be able to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized tests.

In addition, majority of the participants stated that they felt comfortable in preparing students for standardized tests. Their comfort level greatly impacts their ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized tests. If they did not feel confident in their abilities, then they would not be able to provide students with the tools they need to be successful in the classroom as well as on standardized assessments. Layla expressed that her comfort level is derived from so much of their instructional time being focused on testing "because it has so much of an impact on the day-to-day teaching." Since teachers spend so much time teaching and preparing for the test, they are confident in their abilities to provide instruction while preparing students for their tests.

Also, student and teacher performance on standardized tests in the classroom has impacted teachers' ability to provide instruction while preparing students for standardized tests. Teachers are under pressure to get students to perform well on their tests, and

depending on how students perform, this can impact teachers' ability to provide instruction while trying to prepare them. If students do not receive good scores, then teachers can become discouraged, which can impact their teaching. Layla expressed, "There is a lot of pressure which causes that stress to ensure students succeed. Their results impact teacher performance ratings. It impacts school rating." Zeena mentioned, "There's definitely a lot of pressure on teachers...about scores and how well you do...you want your kids to do well, but you also know that it's a reflection of you. So, you feel disheartened when the scores come back low." When students do not perform well it can negatively impact teachers and how they perform in the classroom.

From an emotional standpoint, many teachers expressed how much stress they are under and the pressure they have received to get students to perform well. This added stress and pressure makes it difficult for teachers to be able to prepare students for standardized assessments. These scores are also used to evaluate teachers, which adds more stress on top of the stress that teachers are already experiencing. Zeena stated it best when she said, "a lot of stress on teachers about scores and how well you do."

Participants have also experienced anxiety when trying to prepare students for standardized tests. Many participants teach a diverse group of students and depending on where they are academically, it can be challenging preparing them. Some of the participants teach ESL students, which can be challenging because these students struggle with understanding the material because of a language barrier. Sabrina expressed how she "has anxiety with the fact that 75% of the student population is ESL students." For example, some ESL students speak a good amount of English, and others barely know how. This makes it hard for ESL students because not only are they trying to learn a new

language, they are faced with trying to understand a test and how to comprehend what is being asked of them on the standardized assessments. Regardless of their English abilities, there are still held to the same standards as other students.

Participants were faced with anxiety because of the upcoming school year and the challenges with having to prepare students through a computer screen due to the pandemic. Since COVID-19 interrupted learning, many students and teachers went on spring break and never returned to a physical classroom. Administrators, teachers, and parents were left trying to figure out the best ways to provide instruction to their students. Some school districts also tried to find ways to give students basic needs such as food (Edweek.org, 2020). Teachers were challenged with developing lessons for students who are used to in person instruction while still giving students the skills they need.

In addition, students were exempt from standardized testing last school year because of COVID-19; however, this school year, the governor of Texas has mandated that students will have to take their test this school year (The Editorial Board, 2020). It has been noted that during normal times, traditional assessments are limited in their value. With the pandemic, assessments are even less useful in capturing what students have learned (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). There are also many disparities between lower income and higher income students (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). These students are mainly minorities who may have uneven access to resources, special instruction and supervised practice that can help them pass assessments (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). This means that results produced by testing will produce results that are closely related to life circumstances than what would be true during regular instruction (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). During the pandemic, standardized assessments may do more harm than good, and

school districts should use or design tests that reflect where students are (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). With many students beginning the new school year online, teachers were overcome with anxiety in how they will be successful in giving students what they need so they too will be successful.

These findings are consistent with literature as teachers are under great pressure to increase test scores (Abrams, Pedulla, & Mandaus, 2003). The pressure can make it difficult to prepare students for standardized tests, but since so much instructional time is geared towards standardized testing, teachers feel comfortable and confident in preparing students. Teachers spend more time preparing for the test (Abrams et al, 2003), and teachers spend a lot of time producing lessons that reflect the test (Ravitch, 2016).

In regards to the framework, these findings are consistent with the first principal source of self-efficacy which was performance accomplishments, and how it is focused on personal mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977). This source is based on successes and failures. The more success an individual experiences, the less they will fear failure. The more success that teachers have with standardized testing, the more that this success will positively impact their ability to perform and provide instruction while preparing students for standardized testing. It is imperative that teachers believe in their ability to prepare students for their tests, since teachers are impacted by how students perform. Without self-efficacy, an individual may not put their all into their endeavors because they may believe their efforts will be futile (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). A teacher's self-efficacy can be related to the effort they put towards their goals, persistence, and ability to persevere when things may not go as planned, especially towards any instructional changes that may occur (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009).

Participants noted that students' scores are a direct reflection upon teacher efforts. This also impacts teachers' self-efficacy regarding other instructional materials. Since teachers can only create lessons surrounding standardized assessments, this may limit their ability to provide additional content and decrease their belief that they can meet all of a students' needs.

Additionally, these findings are consistent with the last principal source of information, which is emotional arousal. Emotional arousal deals with how an individual copes with situations that may arise (Bandura, 1977). Taxing and stressful situations may impact self-efficacy, and a high emotional arousal can weaken an individual's performance. If students are not under stressful situations, they can experience success. This also applies to teachers. If teachers are not under stressful situations, then they may experience success as well. When judging their own abilities, people can rely on their emotional and physiological states (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). Depending on how they respond to their level of emotional arousal whether positive or negative, it can influence their self-efficacy and if they perceive the situation to be a challenge or a threat (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). If the situation is viewed as a challenge, this can improve their performance by focusing their attention and energy on their performance (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). If the situation is viewed as a threat, it can then interfere with their ability to be successful in utilizing their skills to the best of their ability (Tschannen & McMaster, 2009). This principal source of information has revealed how teachers' emotional state on high stakes testing can impact their ability to perform while trying to prepare students for standardized testing. Their emotional state

can motivate them to continue to do their job to the best of their ability, or it can tear them down, stress them out, and impact their mental state in a negative way.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze English high school teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. This study was conducted at two high schools in an urban school district in Houston, Texas. Eight tenth grade English teachers participated in the research study. The delimitations of this study and the findings from this study opened potential possibilities for further research about standardized testing and college readiness. The next few paragraphs will present opportunities for future research.

Future researchers could conduct a phenomenological study with students selected from the same school to explore their experiences related to standardized testing and their ability to be college ready. Since this study was limited to teachers, a research study analyzing student experiences will shed light on their perceptions about preparing for standardized tests, while preparing for college. Results of these studies could be compared to the teachers' experience to better understand what they are going through.

A delimitation of my research was that participants had to be tenth grade English teachers. Future researchers could extend this study to other teachers in other tested subjects like math, history, and science. Analyzing other content teachers' experiences with standardized testing while preparing students for college, could provide a greater picture on what teachers are experiencing with standardized testing and preparing students for college.

Since this study was limited to tenth grade English teachers, this study could be extended to just ninth grade English teachers to examine their experiences and compare them to the experiences of the tenth-grade teachers. Aside from tenth grade, ninth grade is the other grade level in English that mandates students to take a standardized assessment.

This study could also be extended to English teachers who teach seniors to examine their experiences. These teachers do not have to prepare students for a standardized exam for their grade level, but still have the responsibility of preparing their students for college. It would be interesting to see what these participants have to say about their experience since they do not have the pressures of standardized testing. Their perceptions could potentially reveal their emotional state and how it impacts their ability to do their job.

Another delimitation of my research was that this study was limited to teachers who teach in a school district in the state of Texas. This study could be extended to other districts in other states to compare their experiences with their own mandated assessments. A future study could capture the experiences of their teachers as well as the experiences of their students.

Another delimitation was that this study was limited to two high schools in an urban school district. This study can be extended to school districts that are located in suburban areas. These districts may have more resources in preparing students for standardized testing while preparing them for college. It would be interesting to compare teachers' experiences from a suburban school district to the experiences described in this study.

For future researchers, this study could be extended to college professors who teach freshman and sophomore English. Since many students will leave high school to attend college, researchers could examine the perceptions of these professors to provide insight on if they believe their students were college ready. This would provide more information on what skills students are lacking and what professors believe students need in order to be ready for college.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Teachers are faced with many obstacles that hinder them from being able to teach students and to do it freely. Teachers are bound to a curriculum that is regulated by federal and state policies, and district practices. These restraints do not let teachers incorporate elements into their lessons that reflect the full range of needs for their students. Instead, teachers must emphasize the test curriculum despite the costs to the students, including students missing out on skills that are important for college and even for those students who desire to enter the workforce. Students are primarily just learning the skills needed to pass their standardized assessments. Some may believe that standardized testing is needed because it brings a uniformed curriculum for teachers,

School administrators and education decision-makers at the state and federal level, should first listen to teachers. Teachers are on the frontline, and they know what is needed for students. They are the ones who are in and out of the classrooms on a daily basis. They are the ones who are put through an emotional roller coaster on a daily basis to ensure their students are successful. Teachers should help make decisions, and should be included in meetings when legislators are making decisions that impact education. Teachers can give advice, guidance, and suggestions. In addition, education decision-



makers decisions should spend time in the classrooms and observe firsthand what teachers go through, what students are learning, and how mandated instruction is impacting students and teachers.

To ensure the success of teachers, there are changes that could be made. These include allowing more variety in the curriculum, offering focused professional development programs, aligning high school curriculum with postsecondary needs, considering other forms of learning assessments, and emphasizing technology skills to better prepare students for life after graduation. Each of these areas will be discussed in more detail.

First, it is necessary to allow more variety in the curriculum. The majority of participants discussed how all of the lessons they teach are STAAR related. This does not allow any room for teachers to add in their own elements or to teach students skills that may not be test related. Teachers should be allowed to design lessons that contain the skills needed for the test, but will address skills that are needed for college. Teachers should also be allowed to add in lessons that are not STAAR based, which will give teachers the freedom to add diversity and creativity into the lessons that they teach.

Participants mentioned that a lot of instructional time is designated towards preparing students for standardized tests. Teachers should be allowed to spend time on other areas than just preparing students for the test. Some participants explained how students are lacking in other skills such as drama and poetry just to name a few. Drama and poetry allow students to tap into their critical thinking skills, lets them learn about the authors who wrote them, and the skills that can be learned within these genres such as figurative language. Being exposed to these genres also allows students to make personal

and world connections, make inferences, and are great tools for discussions in class.

When teachers are able to teach other skills, it allows them to be creative, and helps build their self-efficacy because they enjoy what they are teaching.

Second, professional development can help teachers prepare for what they need when it comes to instructing students. It is important that teachers continue to receive the trainings they need in order to be comfortable in preparing students for standardized testing. It is also recommended that the district provides teachers with more training that is geared towards preparing students for college. For standardized testing, trainings should include topics such as the rubrics used for the test, how the test is scored, reading and writing strategies to take the test, interpreting data, and the writing process. For college readiness, trainings should include, how to teach critical thinking skills, how to avoid plagiarism, reading and writing strategies.

It would be ideal that these trainings take place in the district so that it is convenient for teachers to attend. Trainers and speakers can be brought inside the district to provide a different perspective on the element's teachers need. These types of trainings do not have to occur all at once but can be spread out throughout the school year. Teachers can decide what trainings they need and register to attend.

Third, it is also recommended that the high school English curriculum standards be aligned with postsecondary education. For every college course, there is a list of learning outcomes that students will know by the end of that course. If high school English is aligned with some of these outcomes, then students can be more prepared for when they begin enrolling in these courses. This alignment will ensure that students receive the skills needed to be college ready. Although all students may not attend

college, these skills can still be beneficial for students who enter the workforce upon graduation. Additionally, college professors and high school teachers should engage in meetings and workshops to try and bridge the gaps that lay between what college accreditors expect versus what students actually learn. In order for these meetings to take place, the state education agencies could sponsor a collaborative effort focused on identifying gaps between educational levels and updating outcomes at both levels for introductory college courses in subjects like English.

Fourth, instead of students taking a mandated English exam, students could create a writing portfolio that demonstrates skills learned during that school year. This portfolio can be carried over from each grade and play a role in deciding if a student graduates or not. By the time they graduate, students should have many artifacts to demonstrate that they have mastered the skills to graduate. And teachers could be evaluated for what students learn across time rather than at specific testing points.

There has been an obsession over standardized testing for twenty years, and it seems now this obsession may slowly be coming to an end for K-12 accountability and even college admissions (Strauss, 2020). The pandemic has caused educational institutions to shift their focus in how they operate (Strauss, 2020). It has been noted that states are learning how to proceed without standardized testing during the pandemic, and the state of Georgia even waived testing for the 2020-2021 school year, and the Ohio House of Representatives passed legislation in early May 2020 to reduce standardized testing (Strauss, 2020). Even colleges have begun to drop their ACT and SAT testing admissions for at least a year (Strauss, 2020). Test programs are expensive, and many schools have had significant budget cuts and deficits due to the pandemic, and they are

realizing that testing may not be worth the cost. Some schools have not even recovered financially from the Great Recession of 2008-2009 (Strauss, 2020). As education institutions continue to navigate through the pandemic, administrators have realized that students can learn and receive what they need without the pressure of standardized testing.

Finally, since COVID-19, many schools have had to turn to virtual learning. This has caused many problems as students and teachers were used to face to face instruction. It is recommended that in the near future, when the pandemic is over, that some form of virtual learning should continue. This would allow students and teachers to be comfortable with online instruction in case of another pandemic, or natural disaster occurs that takes students and teachers out of the classroom. This would require districts to provide laptops for each student in order for this to occur. As costly as this could get, it would be beneficial in the long run so that learning can continue in spite of what the community may be faced with. In addition, this practice would prepare students for virtual learning options when they do attend college such as fully online classes or even hybrid classes. Exposure to virtual learning options could even prepare students for remote work practices offered by employers. As technology has progressed, virtual learning has been changed into a tool that helps close the learning gaps between high school and college (“Is a Virtual Education”, n.d.). Students can benefit from a quality online learning program that includes a rigorous curriculum, relevant teaching resources, and even access to specialized industry training for teachers, students, and schools (“Is a Virtual Education”, n.d.).

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze English high school teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. This in-depth investigation of the perceptions and experiences of the participants with standardized testing and college readiness revealed what tenth grade English teachers are going through as they prepare their students for standardized testing while preparing students for college. The results from this study emerged five themes (a) professional development for standardized testing and college readiness, (b) preparing students for standardized testing and college, (c) student and teacher performance on standardized tests and in the classroom, (d) the curriculum used to teach students, and (e) teaching in the pandemic.

Professional development played an important role in the participants' ability to instruct their students for standardized testing while preparing them for college. Participants discussed professional development that was beneficial for them, which included any developments or training that was related to the test. This gave teachers the insight they needed so they would be informed on what is expected of students when they take their test, and how the test is scored. Participants also mentioned professional development and training that was beneficial in preparing students for college. Many of them participated in training outside of the district. This study suggested that participants sought professional developments outside of the district because of the limited opportunities that are available within the district that are geared towards preparing students for college. The study also revealed that majority of the participants felt

comfortable in preparing students for standardized tests. This is due to how much instructional time is focused on standardized testing. Participants were also comfortable in preparing students for college, they just don't receive many opportunities to do so.

Standardized assessments have been used as one of the products to evaluate teachers. If students do not perform well on their test, it is a direct reflection on teachers in spite of what additional factors may hinder students from doing their best. Teachers are faced with teaching students who are at different reading levels, and even must prepare students who are ESL. These are just a few challenges teachers are faced with on a daily basis as they try to get their students to pass their tests. This study showed that this has placed a great amount of pressure and stress on teachers.

The research also revealed that the curriculum used to teach students is all STAAR related. Teachers review the TEKS, analyze previous test, and create lessons around those elements. There is little to no room for teachers to add in additional elements and skills that may be beneficial for students for college and even the workforce. In addition, participants made it known that students are still lacking in skills they need to know to be successful. If high school is meant to help prepare students for postsecondary education, then more should be done to equip students with the tools they need to be college ready. For this to occur, teachers must have flexibility in what they are able to teach.

Lastly, teaching in the pandemic is a big concern for all of the participants. Since the arrival of COVID-19, teachers have been faced with teaching students through a computer screen. This virus has interrupted traditional learning, and has been a struggle for teachers and students because many students are used to in person instruction and

need physical support to succeed. As the pandemic continues into the new school year, teachers will be faced with the challenge of providing lessons and instruction that prepare students for standardized testing. It is the hope of many of the participants that students will be exempted from testing for another year. It was interesting that participants felt that virtual school will help prepare students for college. Since most colleges utilize some form of an online platform, virtual school will give students an idea of what college will be like.

Overall, in spite of the challenges that teachers are faced with on a daily basis, teachers love their job. It is the passion that they have for their field and the love they have for their students that keeps them motivated. Teachers are important and should be appreciated. It is their duty to teach future generations. This research was designed to be a voice to teachers who feel as if their voice has not be heard. The findings from this research study helped produce the recommendations for teachers, administrators, students, and college professors. Additionally, this study provided insight for teachers who are preparing students for standardized testing and college. Furthermore, this study provided more information that will be added to the body of research that addresses standardized testing and college readiness.

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**APPENDIX A**

## Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym:

Date:      Time:

1. When did you start teaching as an English high school teacher?
2. How would you describe your experience as an English high school teacher?
3. What training or professional development has been beneficial in preparing students for standardized testing?
4. What training or professional development has been beneficial in preparing students for college?
5. How does standardized testing impact the way you teach?
6. How would you characterize your comfort level preparing students for standardized testing?
7. How would you characterize your comfort level preparing students for college?
8. How much instructional time is focused towards standardized testing?
9. In what ways does standardized testing cause too much stress on teachers and students?
10. What barriers have you faced in trying to prepare students for standardized testing?
11. What barriers have you faced in trying to prepare students for college?

12. What are your thoughts about the curriculum you teach?
13. How does the curriculum you teach prepare students for standardized tests?
14. How does the curriculum you teach prepare students for college?
15. Those are all of the questions that I have for you, what did I not ask you about the curriculum?

**APPENDIX B****Sam Houston State University  
Consent for Participation in Research****KEY INFORMATION FOR *(English High School Teachers’  
Perceptions Regarding Standardized Testing and College)***

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about standardized testing and college readiness. You have been asked to participate in the research because of your background and experience with standardized testing and preparing students for college, and may be eligible to participate.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE, PROCEDURES, AND DURATION OF THE STUDY?**

The purpose of the study is to explore English high school teachers’ perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. By doing this study, we hope to learn the impact that standardized testing has on teachers and their ability to prepare students for college. Your participation in this research will last two to three hours.

**WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?**

As someone who has taught tenth grade English while preparing students for standardized assessments and college, you can provide detailed opinions and express your concerns regarding standardized testing and college readiness. Your participation will also provide updated research regarding standardized testing and college readiness. By participating, you will also be able to reflect upon your own teaching experience and the expectations that are upon teacher, and to learn more about the research process.

For a complete description of benefits, refer to the Detailed Consent.

WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

You may choose not to participate in this study due to not having a lot of time or the lack of interest in the study.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer.

You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

The person in charge of this study is Chelsea Davis-Bibb of the Sam Houston State University Department of Developmental Education Administration who is working under the supervision of Dr. Peggy Holzweiss. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study her contact information is: Chelsea Davis-Bibb -*cjd019@shsu.edu* or 713-828-8620 or Dr. Peggy Holzweiss-*pholzweiss@shsu.edu* or 936-294-1144. If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs – Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or e-mail ORSP at *sharla\_miles@shsu.edu*.



# Sam Houston State University

## Consent for Participation in Research

### DETAILED CONSENT (*English High School Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Standardized Testing and College*)

#### *Informed Consent*

My name is Chelsea Davis-Bibb, and I am doctoral student of the Developmental Education Administration department at Sam Houston State University. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study of exploring *English Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Standardized Testing and College Readiness*. I hope that data from this research will yield more information about teachers' experience with standardized testing and preparing students for college. You have been asked to participate in the research because of your background and experience with standardized testing and preparing students for college.

The research is relatively straightforward, and we do not expect the research to pose any risk to any of the volunteer participants. If you consent to participate in this research, you will be *asked to participate in an interview of approximately 1 hour in length*. Any data obtained from you will only be used for the purpose of analyzing the data in order to understand teachers' perceptions regarding standardized testing and college readiness. Under no circumstances will you or any other participants who participated in this research be identified. In addition, your data will remain confidential.

This research will require about *1 hour* of your time. Participants will not be paid or otherwise compensated for their participation in this project. *Interviews will be audio recorded, and only the researcher will have access to the recordings. You will have the opportunity to review your interview once the audio recording has been transcribed and make any changes if necessary. To increase privacy, a pseudonym will be given to your transcript. Recordings will be deleted at the end of the research study. Transcripts will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed.*

**A copy of this consent form is available for your records.**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me using the contact information below. If you are interested, the results of this study will be available at the conclusion of the project.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Chelsea Davis-Bibb or Dr. Peggy Holzweiss. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as research participants, please contact Sharla Miles, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, using her contact information below.

<i>Chelsea Davis-Bibb</i>	<i>Dr. Peggy Holzweiss</i>	Sharla Miles
SHSU Developmental <i>Education Administration</i>	SHSU Developmental Education Administration	Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-XXXX Email:cjd019@shsu.edu	Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-XXXX Email:pholzweiss@shsu.edu	Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-4875 Email: irb@shsu.edu

I understand the above and consent to participate.

I do not wish to participate in the current study.

**A copy of this consent form is available for your records.**

**AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT**

As part of this project, an audio/video recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project for transcription purposes only. This is completely voluntary. In any use of the audio/video recording, your name will not be identified. *A pseudonym will be assigned to your transcript to increase privacy. Once the audio recording has been transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review the transcript of the interview and make any changes you feel are necessary. The audio recording will be destroyed when the transcript is finalized. Transcripts will be kept for a period of 3 years then destroyed.* You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

- I consent to participate in the audio/video recording activities.
- I do not wish to participate in the audio/video recording activities.

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Signature

Date

**A copy of this consent form is available for your records.**

## **VITA**

Chelsea Davis-Bibb

### **Education**

Doctor of Education in Education in Developmental Education Administration, Sam Houston State University, Texas, December 2020

Master of Arts in English-Literature and Creative Writing, Southern New Hampshire University, New Hampshire, May 2016

Master of Arts in Education- Curriculum and Instruction, Sam Houston State University, Texas, August 2014

Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications-Broadcast Production, Sam Houston State University, May 2012

### **Experience**

2018-Present Lone Star College, Associate Professor of English

2020-Present Southern New Hampshire University, Adjunct English Instructor

2016-2018 Lone Star College, Adjunct English Instructor

2016-2019 African American News & Issues, Journalist

2015-2018 Lone Star College, Dual Credit English Teacher

2013-2018 Aldine Independent School District, English Teacher

### **Publications**

Davis-Bibb, C. (2017). *The Overflow*. Sunny Smiles Publishing

Davis-Bibb, C. (2016). *More Than Words*. Tate Publishing & Enterprises.

Davis-Bibb, C. (2019, Fall). A Different Way to Learn, *NOSS Writing Network*, 2

### **Awards**

District Teacher of the Year 2018-Aldine Independent School District

Teacher of the Year 2017-Davis High School

### **Memberships**

National Organization for Student Success (NOSS)- 2018-Present

**A copy of this consent form is available for your records.**