# SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERSPECTIVE ON HIGH-STAKES TESTING: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING ON STUDENTS AND COUNSELORS

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The School of Education in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2014

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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April 15, 2014

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**SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERSPECTIVE ON HIGH-STAKES TESTING: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING ON STUDENTS AND COUNSELORS**

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Reliance on standardized testing has increased over the past 50 years. As a tool to measure student and school performance, high-stakes tests are a focal point of accountability systems in place through state reform and federal legislation. This study explored Allegheny County Counselor Association (ACCA) members' perceptions on the impact high-stakes testing has on the psychological and emotional well-being (motivation, stress, and test anxiety) of students, as well as their perceptions of how high-stakes testing has impacted the role and work environment of professional school counselors. Current ACCA members completed a survey consisting of open and closed-ended questions. Although the results from this study show the impact on the school counselor's role and work environment have not changed dramatically; it appears students are experiencing higher levels of stress and test anxiety associated with the use of high-stakes tests. School counselors stated there is less time available to spend with students due to changes to their role, such as acting as the test coordinator or proctor for high-stakes tests, but high-stakes testing has not impacted the amount of time counselors spend conducting classroom lessons, small group lessons, and individual counseling sessions in the areas of test preparation skills, college and career readiness, personal and social skills, and academic goals that are not test preparation based. Data show the accountability system in place seems to impact student motivation positively, but has increased the amount of stress and test anxiety students' experience, along with negatively impacting student morale. Differences observed among the subgroups studied, *Education-Challenge* and *AYP-Status*, may be significant since research has

shown high-stakes testing widens the educational gap between whites and minorities, and affluent and impoverished. Further exploration may find the differences that exist between the subgroups may negatively impact student performance and play a role in widening the existing educational gap. Although the sample size is relatively small and the findings cannot be generalized, data from this study may provide insight to school counselors, teachers, administrators, and policymakers when considering any future changes to high-stakes testing programs.

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reliance on high-stakes tests has increased over the past 50 years. Only a handful of states required students take high-stakes tests prior to 1980, but by 2000, high-stakes tests were a requirement in nearly every state (Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001). The increase in high-stakes testing stems from national legislation emphasizing state-level accountability in an attempt to improve academic performance (Gunzenhauser, 2007). As a tool to measure student and school improvement, assessments are a focal point of state reforms and federal legislation, emphasizing school accountability and improved student outcomes (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007). The role of high-stakes testing is greater than ever, due to the increased levels of accountability on schools, students, and educators (Amrein & Berliner 2003; Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Gunzenhauser, 2006). It is important to understand the impact high-stakes testing and the current accountability system has on public education because "the very survival of a political democracy depends on a participating and educated citizenry" (Sirotnik, 2002, p. 664).

Research shows benefits exist with the implementation of high-stakes testing; however, much of the research shows the negative effects associated with high-stakes testing are negating any benefits. Benefits, such as improved academic performance and a more focused approach on student achievement by educators may not outweigh the negative impact observed, such as higher dropout and retention rates (Katsiyannis, 2007; Nichols, 2007). Jones and Egley (2004)

believe the policies enacted by the federal government to hold schools accountable are counterproductive. These policies call for greater school accountability in an effort to help increase student learning; however, instead of "leaving no child behind, current policies, if continued, are bound to increase existing inequities, trivialize schooling, and mislead the public about the quality and promise of public education" (Jones & Egley, 2004, p. 1). Educators have issues with the use of these tests, because these tests are oversimplifying and undermining the teaching profession, which negatively impacts students (Jones & Egley, 2004).

Researchers have uncovered potential problems by relying solely on standardized tests, which some states now do, to make decisions affecting so many people. Problems include a negative impact on students, a disproportionately high impact on minority students, negative changes to curricula, and corruption within the educational system. Schools relying solely on the results of high-stakes tests can lead to problems because of factors other than student achievement affecting test scores (Gunzenhauser, 2003). The educational reform efforts occurring have led to unintended consequences that minimize the intended, positive outcomes (Horn, C., 2003).

Some researchers and educators see positive results with the implementation of accountability systems and high-stakes testing. Since the start of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), educators believe parents are more concerned with their children's education and the atmosphere of schools seem more focused on learning (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006). Special education programs and English Language Learners receive more attention and increased funding (Coltrane, 2002). Some school counselors notice a more rigid curriculum with an increased focus on academic goals, all of which may help students succeed in school and beyond; however, there is a give and take when it comes to accountability systems and high-

stakes testing. Teachers are confronted with "the ideological commitment and the practical effects of testing" (Horn, C., 2003, p. 247). Although the policies have raised standards, and some educators see an increase in student learning, they are also aware of the increased stress and anxiety felt by students, as well as increases in grade retention and dropout rates among students (Katsiyannis et al., 2007; Nichols, 2007). As more importance is placed on the results of high-stakes tests to increase accountability, schools curricula may narrow because test and test taking strategies become the focal point for educators. The policies are designed to improve ineffective teaching, and to replace teachers unable, or unwilling to improve, but it also may prevent good teachers from teaching effectively by eliminating their creativity and spontaneity (Horn, C., 2003).

In many schools, counselors have a role during testing. School counselors may administer and coordinate high-stakes tests, complete make-up tests, and score completed tests (Brown, Galassi, & Akos, 2004). Elementary counseling programs may improve academic achievement, behaviors, and can contribute to a positive learning environment (Sink & Stroh, 2003). Students may seek the expertise of counselors to discuss their thoughts and feelings in personal, social, academic, and career areas. Teachers and administrators may also seek the advice of school counselors, asking their professional opinion on student issues. Due to the knowledge counselors possess of the social and emotional needs of students they can provide insight into the impact testing has on students' psychological and emotional well-being. They can also provide insight into how testing has impacted their role and work environment; however, few research studies have explored these areas from the school counselor's perspective.

## 1.1 VIGNETTE

This vignette is about a fourth grade student diagnosed with a learning disability and emotional disturbance, who was required to take the math and reading portions of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSA) individually with the school counselor. This student was a fourth grader reading and completing math at a beginning of second grade level. When the exam was given to the student, he asked the counselor why he had to take the test. He then dropped to the floor; rolled around and whined that he did not want to take the test. He then got up off the floor sat down and said "why don't the teachers have to take these tests, so they can see how hard they are?" After being told that his teachers have taken similar tests, and even harder tests, he stated again that he did not want to take the test. He said if he sat there all day, and did not take the test, he would be able to get on the bus and go home. He was told that the school would keep him until he was done and then drive him home. He said he would just stay there all night. Then he asked what would happen if he threw the test outside, while people waited outside ready to shoot at the person that came to pick the test up, would the counselor still go get the test and make him do it? When he was told yes, he asked what if aliens were attacking the school and we all had to run away so we were not attacked, would he still need to take the test? When he was told yes, he asked if he would have to take it if he were in heaven. At this point, he began to complete some of the test. He completed three questions, and said to himself that he wished he were dead, so he did not have to take the test.

This particular student had to take eight different sections that were similar to this section of the test, spread out over four days. A similar response to the account described above, was witnessed the three other days he participated in testing. Due to his reaction to testing the previous year, the counselor administered the test to him individually each day. For most

students, each section of the test took one hour or less, he took over two and a half hours for each section, because he would continually get frustrated and have a “melt-down”. These “melt-downs” consisted of him repeatedly throwing a pencil, rolling on the floor, screaming loudly, trying to do other things to avoid testing (such as organize books in the room, or pick lint out of the carpet), purposely breaking the pencil point, and asking for bathroom and drink breaks repeatedly. This action was repeated throughout the four days of testing. I was the counselor administering these tests to this student, and so began my interest in the impact high-stakes testing has on students.

As the counselor for this student, I was torn by what to do. It is normally my job to help students through difficult situations, to help them cope with stress and anxiety, and here I was administering a test that was causing this student to experience an extreme amount of stress and anxiety for the better part of a week, multiple times per year. I never had the same relationship with this particular student again. After this experience, I often wondered if other counselors have similar experiences, or if mine was a unique experience.

## 1.2 PERTINENT DEFINITIONS

### 1.2.1 High-Stakes Testing

A test is considered high-stakes when results are used as criteria to determine important factors impacting students, staff, schools, administrators, and school districts. Factors affecting individual students may include high school graduation, promotion to the next grade level, entrance into college, placement into gifted programs, and scholarship opportunities. Student test

scores can affect teacher evaluations, pay increases, bonuses, placement into a different school within the district, and possibly termination of employment. For individual schools and districts, monetary incentives and sanctions, school ratings, and closures or state takeovers exist as possible rewards or punishments (Frase-Blunt, n.d.; Gunzenhauser, 2003; Jones & Egley, 2004; U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights, 2000).

### 1.2.2 Psychological and Emotional Well-Being

The use of psychological and emotional well-being in this study refers to student motivation, stress, and test anxiety.

### 1.2.3 Stress

For the purpose of this study, stress is defined as a person's response to a change, or stimulus, in the environment. This change can be physical and/ or emotional (Burchfield, 1979; Hobfoll, 1989). For example, a bee sting may cause instant swelling and pain and future sightings of bees could lead to fear.

### 1.2.4 Test Anxiety

For the purpose of this study, test anxiety is defined as an emotion, or the cognitive and behavioral reactions of fear, apprehension, and nervousness to the outcomes of a test (Zeidner, 1998).

### 1.2.5 Motivation

For the purpose of this study, motivation is defined as the forces (internal and/ or external) "that lead to the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior" (Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p. 428).

### 1.2.6 *Education-Challenge*

*Education-Challenge* is a phrase used for one of the created subgroups; for the purpose of this study, *Education-Challenge* refers to the construct created for analysis by combining two variables, socio-economic status determined by enrollment in the National School Lunch Program and the racial and ethnic minority population of the school. Respondents were separated into one of two categories, either *low-education-challenge-group* or *high-education-challenge-group*. The *low-education-challenge-group* is defined as a school having 30% or fewer of the school's students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program and 30% or fewer identified as a racial or ethnic minority. The *high-education-challenge-group* is defined as a school having 30% or more of the school's population enrolled in the National School Lunch Program and identified as a racial or ethnic minority.

## 1.3 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

President George Bush's proposal and eventual signing into law, the legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 brought about a change in the way schools and students

are held accountable for their academic performance. High-stakes tests are now used more frequently to make important decisions directly affecting students. This may mean students today face more stress to perform well on tests than ever before. With the implementation of NCLB, the use of assessments increased (Amrein & Berliner 2002; Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Gunzenhauser, 2006). As discussed in more detail in the review of literature, researchers, educators, parents, and students have varying opinions and perceptions of the impact of this legislation, more specifically, the high-stakes tests used to measure student performance to ensure schools are held accountable. Some think student learning has improved; others believe learning has not improved. Some have acknowledged an improvement in scores, but have noted a commonly held belief that testing is creating an environment in which students experience increased levels of stress and test anxiety and decreased levels of motivation "all attributed to the administration of these examinations" (Mulvenon, Stegman, & Ritter, 2005, p. 37). An issue that exists with the current accountability system in place, and the emphasis placed on high-stakes tests, is the heightened concern of the impact testing has on students and other stakeholders, since testing may conflict with the social and emotional well-being of students, impacting school performance (Ruff, 2011). This study explored the impact of accountability policies in place, specifically those mandating high-stakes tests used to measure student achievement from the school counselors perspective.

There were multiple purposes of this study. The first was to explore if professional school counselors perceived any changes in student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress, and test-anxiety); second, to explore if school counselors perceive changes occurred in their work environment; third, to examine if school counselors perceive the role of the counselor changed with the use of high-stakes testing. Each of the three purposes were

analyzed to determine if any differences exist in school counselor perceptions based on a school's *Education-Challenge*, annual yearly progress (AYP) status, and the number of years the participants worked as a school counselor. *Education-Challenge* was determined by combining the variables of socio-economic status (measured by enrollment in the National School Lunch Program) and the percentage of ethnic and racial minorities in the school for which the counselor works.

Data in this study were collected using a survey that included open and closed-ended questions. The survey, developed from a review of the literature, was given to current professional school counselors who are members of Allegheny County Counselors Association. The survey was designed to measure counselor perceptions of changes in student psychological and emotional well-being, changes in the counselor's work environment, and role in the school since the inception of high-stakes assessments.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions used in this study focus on counselor perception data. The questions seek to explore counselor perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being, the counselor's work environment, and the counselor's role with the use of high-stakes tests.

1. How do school counselors perceive the impact of high-stakes testing on their role?
2. How has school counselors' perceptions about their work environment changed since the inception of high-stakes testing?

3. What are school counselors' perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress, and test-anxiety) in school since the inception of high-stakes testing?

Based on the perceptions of professional school counselors the exploration of these research questions aim to bring a better understanding of the impact high-stakes testing has on students and counselors. Educators and policymakers may use results of this study when making decisions on accountability standards and the use of high-stakes tests to measure student performance to ensure these standards are met. An online survey consisting of open and closed-ended questions was e-mailed to ACCA members asking perception questions to explore the effect high-stakes testing is having on students and school counselors. Exploring these questions can help school counselors better serve students and make them more aware of potential changes occurring in their role and/or work environment.

# 2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter contains the review of literature. Although many scholarly articles exist in this review, not all research was reviewed or included. The review begins with the possible reasons for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a history of high-stakes testing and school accountability, moves to the impact testing has on school counselors, and ends with a review of the literature on the impact testing has on students.

## 2.1 POSSIBLE REASONS FOR NCLB AND HIGH-STAKES TESTING

American students' poor performance on national and international assessments is viewed as a "national problem appropriate for federal intervention" (Sloane & Kelly, 2003, p. 12) leading to federal education accountability reform such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Brown, 2010). Under NCLB, for a school to demonstrate Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) it must have at least 95% of all students participate in testing, students must score proficient on AYP targets established by the state, and all students must meet AYP targets set for graduation and/or attendance (Katsiyannis et al., 2007). This is part of a new American mission that is maintained by national pride and is part of an education crusade to establish standards and accountability measures to increase student knowledge (Horn, J., 2003). The driving force behind NCLB may be the thought that all children can learn at a high level. With this belief, changing educational

practices and policies will hopefully motivate students to work harder and have teachers use the most effective teaching practices available (Stecher, 2002).

The politicians and policy makers responsible for the creation of NCLB, and the subsequent accountability systems implemented at the state and federal level, created this system in the belief that they could improve the United States' educational system; because, they believe education can improve by attaching consequences and making sure students have access to clearly defined, and challenging, content (Nichols, & Berliner, 2005). Some proponents of high-stakes testing believe schools should model themselves after companies in the business world; claiming high educational standards are needed in today's economy and the high-stakes exams are the incentive districts need to succeed (Urbina, 2010).

Proponents of high-stakes testing assume it is effective because states may use results from the tests to hold teachers accountable, which proponents think can motivate them to use data from the tests to provide better instruction for individual students. Teachers can use results to determine what they should teach and what students should learn. Based on test results, administrators may get a better understanding of the needs of the students and teachers and may provide professional development experiences for the teachers directly related to the deficits shown by the test results. The curriculum taught in schools might improve by aligning it to state standards and state assessments, which should test students on the information that is most needed to be successful members of society (Nichols, 2007).

Even some opponents to the current system agree with the idea of using high-stakes tests to measure student learning and to hold students, teachers, and schools accountable. Many simply disagree with how the tests are used, such as basing important decisions (graduation, grade promotion, teacher raises, school funding) on the results of a single test (American

Psychological Association, 2001). When students have access to equal educational opportunities, opponents suggest using tests, along with other established criteria, to measure student performance, but recommend to not use the test as the sole instrument to measure student academic performance, which can have unintended consequences (American Psychological Association, 2001).

The following sections provide a brief history of the American education system's move to an accountability system that uses the results of state assessments to hold students, teachers, and schools accountable; trying to explain how the Unites States moved to rely so heavily on these high-stakes assessments.

## 2.2 HISTORY OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING

### 2.2.1 The Early Years

The use of testing to make high-stakes decisions have been around for centuries. The United States tested immigrants as soon as they set foot on Ellis Island to determine which immigrants could enter the country (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Large scale standardized testing on school-aged children is not new either. This type of testing began in the 1920s when schools started using the Stanford Achievement Test to assess the abilities of large groups of children (Mulvenon et al., 2005).

The United States Constitution does not specifically mention education, and before the 1950s, federal policymakers primarily left education decisions to the state and local governments. It was not until the Supreme Court's ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347

U.S. 483 (1954) that education began to play a more prominent role in federal politics. In 1958, in response to competition with the Soviet Union's space program, President Dwight D. Eisenhower enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 to promote the advancement of education in science, math, and modern foreign languages. Schools used money from this act to initiate or expand elementary and secondary school counseling programs, which helped develop them into the counseling programs present in schools today (Perkins & Wellman, 2008). The creation of the NDEA ushered in increased involvement of the federal government in education, by relying on accountability and national achievement testing to assess student learning (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

### 2.2.2 The 1960s and 1970s

After the election of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson fought for an education bill, which helped create the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965; beginning a new era of federal involvement in public education that promoted more equal access to schools. Designed to enhance student learning and teacher development ESEA allocated federal money to help improve educational services and educational innovations to poor children (McGuinn, 2006). ESEA did not have the impact expected on helping poor children, because it did not hold schools accountable for how money received from the act was spent. One of the act's unintended consequences moved power and control for education policy making from the state and local level to the federal government (McGuinn, 2006).

Politicians thought American schools were falling behind because of a lowering of expectations and academic standards evident in a steady decline in SAT scores in the 1970s (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). The result was the "back to basics" movement and implementation

of minimum competency testing for graduation. In an effort to increase student performance and teacher quality, and ensure students were gaining basic skills in math and reading, some states required students take an exit exam starting in the 1970s with the minimum competency testing movement, (Jacob, 2001; O'Neill, 2001). There was one state using a testing program in 1972 (Horn, C., 2003). By 1983 the number of states using minimum competency testing increased to 34 states (Linn, 2000), although minimum competency testing is a far cry from the assessments in place today to hold schools accountable.

### 2.2.3 The 1980s

In 1983, The National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which warned of decreasing standards, highlighted the educational problems in the United States, linked economic competition with academic achievement, and called for the implementation of high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Suchak, n.d.; Ravitch, 2010; Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). The Commission encouraged states to strengthen curricula, improve standards, and increase teachers' preparation and pay all in an effort to improve schools by having funding come from the federal government (McGuinn, 2006; Ravitch, 2010).

In *A Nation at Risk* student performance was compared internationally. American students were last in seven of 19 assessments. Thirteen percent of 17-year-old students tested were functionally illiterate (Margheim, 2001). This led to national concern about the nation's educational system, particularly student achievement. Eventually, this led to further accountability standards and an increased emphasis on assessments, with a minimum competency test mandated by 33 states by the mid 1980's (Perkins & Wellman, 2008). The

National Commission on Education (1983) hoped the implementation of high-stakes testing would raise the nation's standards of achievement, by ensuring children made academic progress through more rigorous testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). States spent more on schools and established curriculums and standards for school districts to follow (McGuinn, 2006).

### 2.2.4 The 1990s

When President Bill Clinton entered office, he continued to push for accountability measures and for the federal government to have a role in education reform. President Clinton insisted on using the federal government to improve schools and increase student achievement through accountability, assessments, standards, and additional spending.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which was designed to improve student learning and teaching through the establishment of national goals. Goals 2000 was designed to provide grant money to states if they developed content and performance standards to improve student knowledge in core content areas. The state developed plans included strategies to improve teaching and learning and "must include a process for setting statewide student performance standards, and, importantly, for assessing achievement on those standards" (O'Neill, 2001, p. 193).

The focus of Goals 2000 was on state and local reform (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). State governments implemented standards designed to change and improve public education. Under Goals 2000, students needed to show competency with these new standards in order to graduate. After enacting Goals 2000, governors from every state met with 44 CEOs from the country's top corporations for a national education summit. During this summit, the group developed strategies to start a national examination (Suchak, n.d.).

### 2.2.5 Presidents G.W. Bush and Obama

In 2000, Louisiana mandated all fourth and eighth grade students pass both the math and language arts sections of the state assessment to move to the next grade level; becoming the first state to mandate students pass a test for grade promotion (Horn, J., 2003). In 2001, President George W. Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind Act, which was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act focused on closing the achievement gap between whites and minorities and affluent and economically disadvantaged students by requiring all students meet proficiency standards by 2014 and all schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Katsiyannis, et al., 2007). When discussing the NCLB Act President George W. Bush once said,

> When we raise academic standards, children raise their academic sights. When children are regularly tested, teachers know where and how to improve. When parents know scores, parents are empowered to push for change. When accountability for our schools is real, the results for our children are real (Isaacs, 2003, p. 288).

The No Child Left Behind Act holds schools accountable for student learning by requiring states to establish standards in math and reading, having students in grades three through eight tested yearly, and students in grades nine through twelve, tested once. Schools are then issued a report on whether or not they made AYP based on state standards (Jones, 2007). Federal funding for states is contingent on schools meeting AYP, as determined by school-wide performance on high-stakes tests (U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights, 2000). Schools are held accountable through corrective measures when they fail to make adequate yearly progress toward state developed proficiency goals. States use punishments three times more often than rewards (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). A majority of states have state-mandated

tests in place as the sole or significant criteria for promotion to the next grade level and/ or graduation (Horn, C., 2003). Based on the results of the tests, consequences can include cuts in funding, mandates for increased academic support services, grade promotion, graduation contingent on exam performance, replacing staff, restructuring, and/or state takeover (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Braun, 2004; Langenfield, Thurlow & Scott, 1997). NCLB's goals are simplistic and grand. The goals aim to improve performance by holding schools accountable by having students complete assessments on a yearly basis in an attempt to leave no child behind or run the risk of facing severe sanctions; however, improving test scores are the focal point of the reform movement instead of the content that is taught (Ravitch, 2010; Tyre, 2006).

When running for office, President Barack Obama wanted to reform NCLB because of what he thought were fundamental flaws in the act. He planned to improve the accountability system so that schools needing improvement would receive the most support, instead of receiving the harshest punishments (Shear, 2011) In early 2010, President Obama called for an overhaul of NCLB, by ending the naming of schools as failing, instead focusing on the lowest ranking schools and developing a new system to evaluate teachers and principals. His goal is for states to set new and higher academic standards, which prepare students for post-secondary options, instead of the current goal of having every student meet proficiency guidelines by 2014. Instead of following the current policy, which measures student and school proficiency on math and reading, he wants the focus to move to academic growth from one year to the next and control given to local and state governments (Shear, 2011).

## 2.3 SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

School Counseling began from the social reform efforts occurring during the late 1800s, initially focusing solely on career services. Counseling programs have changed throughout the years based on the social and political issues facing schools and the children taught within those schools (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). The needs of the school and/ or district administrators will often change the counselor's role. Borders (2002) asks, "has any other profession had such an ongoing difficulty defining who they are and what they do" (p. 181)? The confusion over the role of the school counselor is not new, it has caused confusion since as early as the 1950s, possibly due to responsibilities that are not clearly defined, disagreement between key stakeholders, and differing student needs from school to school (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006). The following section will describe the changing role, and detail how high-stakes testing has impacted the professional school counselor's role.

Robert Myrick was instrumental in developing the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. The ASCA National Model is a standardized framework followed by counseling programs across the country. Dr. Myrick described the counselor's changing role by describing how school district's guidance programs evolved differently, with counselors assigned many different job functions, often based on what administrators think the counselor should do. The challenges and demands of the school counselor's role change based on the political and economic conditions of the school, community, and era in which the counselor works.

The role of the counselor has changed over the last one hundred years. The school counselor was originally tasked to prepare children for the world of work. During the 1920s and 1930s, school counseling was primarily focused on vocational guidance (Sink & MacDonald,

1998). The National Defense Education Act of 1958 provided funds to help train counselors, with the main purpose of these counselors to identify and counsel talented, college bound students (American School Counselor Association, 2005; Gysbers, 2001). In 1965, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided grant money for the establishment or expansion of counseling programs in elementary schools and played a significant part in increasing the importance of the school counselor's role (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). In the 1960's, school principals saw the counselor's primary responsibilities as providing counseling to students in need of services and to school administrators. This view leads to many in the school counseling field with a role that is hard to define and too broad in nature that, many times, went against the standards set by national counseling organizations (Zalaquett, 2005).

Herman et al. (1971) found the role of the school counselor is dependent on the administrator's view of that function, stemming from the counselors inability to define their role. In the 1970s, counselors were expected to help students schedule for classes, determine personal interests and aptitudes to help students make appropriate post-secondary choices, resolve conflicts between students and teachers, and work with students to help them cope with personal issues (Walen, 1977).

In an effort to unify the profession, comprehensive guidance programs emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. A comprehensive school counseling program focuses on meeting the needs of all students in the areas of academic, career, and personal and social development. Counselors should develop a program that is proactive and preventative in nature and meets the needs of all students. The program should support the school's academic mission and be comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, and developmental in nature. School counseling programs are designed to ensure that every student receives the program benefits (American School Counselor

Association, 2005, p. 13). By the mid to late 1990s, over half of the states had a comprehensive guidance and counseling model developed (Sink and MacDonald, 1998). A comprehensive model should be an independent education program that is purposeful and guided by outcomes, integral to the educational mission of the school and designed to serve all students in an unbiased way. The goal of most comprehensive counseling programs is to take a proactive approach to counseling, running classroom and small group guidance lessons, and individual counseling sessions to equip students with the necessary tools to handle difficult situations as they arise, instead of a reactive approach of waiting in the counseling office for a crisis to occur. Creating comprehensive counseling programs attempts to eliminate the counselor's old thought process; "if things are worked out satisfactorily the counselor retreats into grateful anonymity and leaves people wandering what a counselor does" (Walen, 1977, p. 95).

In an effort to participate in the national reform occurring in education, ASCA published national standards for counselors to follow in 1997. ASCA set standards for academic, career, and personal and social development in an effort to develop counseling guidelines to help create a more efficient role (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Creating a standardized role for counselors across the country is critical, since a "fully integrated, implemented, and functioning school counseling program may help to enhance student performance and preparation for the future, promote a more positive and safe learning environment, and better student-parent-teacher understanding" (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006, p. 248).

Building level principals have a positive perception of their counselor(s) and indicate the counselor(s) have a positive influence on student behavior, academic performance, and mental health, as well as work effectively with other staff, families, and administrators to maintain a positive school environment (Zalaquett, 2005). Current research shows counselors believe they

have too many duties that are administrative in nature (i.e. handling discipline issues and scheduling students) (Zalaquett, 2005). This may stem from school counselors allowing school administrators to have too much power when deciding the role the counselor takes in a school (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). One quarter of principals considered the primary role of the school counselor is as an administrative team member (i.e. building level principal); asking counselors to complete any and all administrative duties they were asked to complete (Amatea & Clark, 2005). As stated throughout this section, the counselor's position is evolving. "As the internal and external demands of their position increased significantly over time, school counselors became primarily crisis-oriented, reactive, focused on remediation over prevention, and overburdened with non-guidance-related clerical and administrative tasks" (Sink & MacDonald, 1998, p. 88). Currently, the demands placed on the position are increasing with students encountering such issues as cyber bullying and Internet safety; concerns that did not exist ten or fifteen years ago, along with new issues arising from divorce, new academic standards, and testing.

Norman Gysbers was another instrumental member in forming the ASCA National Model. His counseling goals were for comprehensive guidance and counseling programs to exist in every district, serving all students with counselors who are capable of working effectively with teachers, administrators, and parents. Having a fully implemented guidance program "places school counselors conceptually and structurally in the center of education, making it possible for them to contribute directly, and substantially, to their local school districts' educational goals" (American School Counselor Association, 2005, p. 4). The goal should be for the program to act as an integral part of the school and not a supplemental activity. This approach ensures all students and parents receive the benefits from the services provided by an

accountable program (American School Counselor Association, 2005). An effective comprehensive school counseling program takes the needs of the school and community into consideration when implementing the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2005).

### 2.3.1 Impact of High-Stakes Testing on the School Counselor's Role

The school counselor's role changed after the implementation of the NCLB Act. Many counselors are given the responsibility of coordinating and administering tests, which left less time for performing roles for which counselors are trained (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Gysbers (2001) indicates throughout the history of guidance, the role of the counselor depends on the nation. It is appropriate to pay attention to the impact of high-stakes testing; however, it is important for counselors to "not lose sight of the full role, unique skills, and varied contributions that school counselors bring to the schools" (Borders, 2002, p. 182), especially since, 78% of counselors think testing is the sole reason for unwanted changes occurring in their job responsibilities (Ruff, 2011).

Through a personal journal written about her return to the role of school counselor, after spending six years teaching at the collegiate level, the biggest change that occurred to the role is due to high-stakes testing (Davis, 2006). Davis (2006) noticed teachers are not willing to give-up class time for guidance lessons or allow students out of class for small group or individual counseling. She thinks counselors should work with students when it will not disrupt the test preparation process and provide lessons to help contribute to increased test scores.

If the counselor's role is forever changing, and high-stakes testing is here to stay, what can a counselor do? Since counselors are involved in testing, from test administration to

interpretation of data, they can share their knowledge of the validity and reliability of the assessments used and ensure students are the teacher's top priority when approaching testing (Gentry, 2006). They can also work with parents to interpret data and explain the intentions of exams (Ruff, 2011).

Increasingly, school counselors are asked to show how their work is contributing to student academic achievement and how what they do is making a difference with students. This accountability among school counselors is not a new phenomenon, even though it is more intense under No Child Left Behind. Evidence in research studies shows discussion of accountability as early as the 1920s. When counselors were required to show how their work with students, teachers, parents, and administrators led to lower dropout rates, better all-around school life, fewer student failures, fewer disciplinary cases, and less absences (Gysbers, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act requires a quantitative measure of such things as academic achievement, attendance rates, graduation rates, and school safety and contains implications for school counselors. This reliance on quantitative data, and focus on accountability and academic performance, requires counselors to show what they do is helping the school meet the mandates established by the act, all while performing additional duties outside the scope of school counseling. This may come at the expense of students' emotional and social needs (Sabens & Zyromski, 2009). Based on these requirements, it seems necessary for counselors to show they impact student achievement, help to close the achievement gap, improve attendance and graduation rates, and decrease disciplinary issues. The ASCA National Model helps counselors make this possible. The ASCA National Model states that school counseling programs should focus on academic achievement, operate from a position connected to the district's mission, use a

formal set of objectives that are based on measurable student learning outcomes, and are data-driven (McGannon, Carey, & Dimmitt, n.d.).

School counselors may play a significant role in the school system, especially in the scheme of high-stakes testing. School counselors are an essential part of the school system capable of improving the psychological and emotional well-being of students, helping them succeed academically (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). Many counselors act as the test coordinator, by preparing tests prior to and after testing, and creating testing schedules. Eighty percent of school counselors spent time organizing high-stakes tests (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). Many help with administration, by testing small groups of students with special needs and/ or completing the make-up tests for students that missed part of the test. Counselors may be responsible for scoring tests and interpreting the meaning of the test scores to teachers, parents, and students (Zalaquett, 2005). Principals in Florida schools were asked about their perceptions of the school counselors' role, especially in state testing. The principals said 41% of the counselors in their schools act as test coordinators and 75% were involved in test administration. The principals in this study reported testing hindered a counselor's ability to respond to school needs, with approximately one quarter saying it abundantly affected a counselor's performance (Zalaquett, 2005).

School counselors work with students individually, in small groups, and in the classroom setting to help eliminate barriers to learning and academically prepare students for post-secondary success. Counselors are also available to counsel students who may struggle with stress or test anxiety, which may help students attending schools with a comprehensive school counseling program to close the achievement gap at a higher rate than schools that do not have a comprehensive school counseling program (Sink & Stroh, 2003). In their study, they identified

150 elementary schools and examined the impact a comprehensive school counseling program had on student academic achievement. They found students attending schools that did not have a comprehensive program have significantly lower academic achievement, and believe counselors working in an established comprehensive program can contribute to positive academic development (Sink & Stroh, 2003). Vail (2005) found similar results; students with counseling programs academically outperform those who do not have access to counseling programs. Moreover, the more the counselor knows and understands about standardized testing, the better they can address the psychological impact of high-stakes testing; however, results show many counselors do not integrate this into practice (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). Ultimately, counselors can meet the challenges facing schools today by aligning their role and program goals with the goals of the accountability system currently in place to help improve students emotionally, socially, and academically (Sabens & Zyromski, 2009).

Several articles discussed research conducted with school counselors. The researchers assessed the counselor's opinions on how high-stakes testing impacts students, counselors and/or the schools in which the counselors work. Three articles found the counselors studied had positive opinions regarding high-stakes testing's impact on the school system (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006; Mulvenon et al., 2005; Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). Six of the studies examined found counselors to have a negative view of high-stakes testing's impact on the school setting (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brown et al., 2004; Mertler, 2011; Ruff, 2011; Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002; Vail, 2005). The following two sections will delve deeper into the findings of this research.

#### 2.3.1.1 Positive Impact of High-Stakes Testing According to School Counselors

Mulvenon, et al. (2005) allege a lack of research exists on parents, teachers, principals, and counselors' perceptions of high-stakes testing, so they designed a survey to measure counselor's impressions on how testing impacted students, teachers, parents, and counselors. The counselors in the study reported high-stakes testing is stressful on the teachers involved. Even with increased stress, the counselors thought high-stakes testing is important to the education of the students (Mulvenon et al., 2005). Little support exists to suggest school counselors think high-stakes testing is a negative experience. Although 26% of the counselors surveyed support standardized testing, they believe more accurate measures are needed to assess student knowledge (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002).

According to school counselors, high-stakes testing has created more, and better, awareness among key stakeholders of the school. Counselors believe more information is available to school personnel that may be used to help improve the school (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006). This information can help educators develop appropriate interventions, drive instruction in the right direction, and raise awareness of the specific needs of the student; helping school counselors identify who needs the most help and in what areas. Parent awareness about what was occurring in school, and how their child was doing in school also increased after the implementation of high-stakes testing. Finally, by examining the results of the high-stakes assessments students took, counselors were more aware of the weaknesses of students and were able to take a more proactive approach to identify and work with these students (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006). To help improve study and test taking skills counselors can use the results of high-stakes tests to identify students that may benefit from academic interventions, such as small group or individual counseling. Counselors can also use the results of the exams to work with

teachers to develop classroom lessons that target areas of weakness in an attempt to increase student performance.

#### 2.3.1.2 Negative Impact of High-Stakes Testing According to School Counselors

Testing detracts from the school counselor's professional effectiveness by negatively impacting how they interact with students and teachers. Moreover, additional counseling services are needed because of the impact of high-stakes testing; however, counselors have less time to work with students because of changing job responsibilities due to high-stakes testing (Ruff, 2011). With the emphasis put on testing, counselors think too much time is dedicated to testing, and students and teachers are now under a greater amount of stress with increased pressure to do well on the exams. With high-stakes testing, counselors take large amounts of time, up to a month, out of their schedule to act as test administrators and coordinators, which includes filling in bubble sheets with student data, and counting tests and pencils (Vail, 2005). In *School Counselors' Perceptions of the Impact of High-Stakes Testing* **(**2004) researchers found counselors feel involvement in testing negatively influenced their ability to deliver counseling services and interferes with their ability to implement a comprehensive guidance program, which may impact student development negatively since these services have a positive impact on student behavior and improve academic achievement (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Ruff, 2011). This is significant since 82% of the counselors in the study reported they function as the test coordinator (Brown et al., 2004).

Acting as a test coordinator can alienate the counselor from teachers and students, who may think the counselor is in favor of the amount of testing that occurs, or is one of the reasons for the amount of testing. School counselors report high-stakes testing has strained their relationships with students and teachers and has placed them in a role others view negatively

(Brown et al., 2004). Another possible reason for this strain in relationships exists because school counselors stated teachers are not using the results of the assessments to help improve student learning (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002). Finally, the counselors studied feel stronger than teachers do "in their ability to affect the motivation and attitudes of students" (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002, p. 203). This can have adverse effects on the relationship between teachers and counselors, since poor test scores and school performance is a reflection on everyone in the school system. The negative relationships that may develop from the increased use in testing may lead to negatively impacting the work environment for school counselors. Sixty percent of teachers surveyed believe NCLB negatively impacts the work setting by negatively impacting teacher morale and performance and by taking time away from important classroom issues that may improve teaching (Mertler, 2011). However, even though testing has negatively impacted school counselors, a positive school environment is still possible when a school is dedicated to excellence, which may minimize these negative effects (Ruff, 2011).

### 2.3.2 Impact of High-Stakes Testing on the School Counselor's Work Environment

The ASCA National Model states that 80% of a counselor's day should involve direct student services. This may lead to school counselors having higher job satisfaction rates and a stronger commitment to their job when the duties they complete align with the duties established by the ASCA National Model (Ruff, 2011). These counselors attend colleges and universities preparing them for counseling duties and responsibilities that are aligned with the model; however, when they begin working in a school and have duties that are different then expected, due to high-stakes testing demands on counselors, it can cause lower job satisfaction rates.

Few studies examined the impact testing has on the school counselor's work environment; however, studies did examine the impact on the teachers work environment. Since teachers and counselors work so closely together, the results of these studies are discussed. High-stakes testing may cause teachers to feel stressed, disempowered, frustrated, and overwhelmed by the pressures associated with high-stakes testing (Wright, 2002). Teachers studied noticed they formed better relationships with their administrators due to high-stakes testing and are displaying a desire to use teamwork to help improve test scores. All of the participants noted an increase in stress, but also noted an increase in the sharing of ideas (Horn, J., 2003). Teachers had negative responses towards high-stakes testing; stating they are feeling pressure from the test, which drives instruction (Faulkner & Cook, 2006). Vallie and Buese (2007) found similar results. In their study, teachers thought any new initiative, policy, or procedure used in the school was only in response to meeting AYP standards. These constant changes impacted the teachers' pedagogies, relationships with students, and in some instances, their love of teaching.

High-stakes testing is negatively impacting pre-service teachers experience as well (Flores & Clark, 2003). Pre-service teachers are in the process of earning a teaching degree. Several themes emerged in interviews with pre-service teachers and teachers. Participants were not against being held accountable for their performance. If designed well, they are proponents for assessments to help inform instructional practices, but they are seeing an unbalanced curriculum, with inappropriate instructional decisions occurring due to testing, with added pressure in tested grade levels. It is causing them to change the way they teach, and in their opinion, they are now using test and instructional practices that are not developmentally appropriate. All of these factors are causing pre-service teachers to think twice before entering the education field (Flores & Clark, 2003).

Other researchers found negative effects on teachers' perceptions about their jobs and how high-stakes testing influences their profession (Fielding, 2004; Horn, J., 2003; Wright, 2002). Inner city teachers working in Chicago are not upset by testing but are upset by the amount of emphasis placed on testing. These teachers feel the pressure associated with testing is changing the relationship they have with students (Wright, 2002). Similarly, principals feel their teachers are edgier, with other teachers, administrators, and students (Horn, J., 2003). Fielding (2004) found the effects of testing put a strain on the relationship between teachers and other staff members.

## 2.4 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PERSISTENCE

An important factor to consider when discussing high-stakes testing is the impact such policies have on students. Student engagement and persistence entails how testing has impacted student learning and psychological and emotional well-being – specifically motivation, stress and test-anxiety, and the effect testing has on students based on their socio-economic and racial and ethnic status.

## 2.5 LEARNING AND SCORES

When discussing the impact high-stakes testing has on students, it is important to consider the effects testing has on learning. Improvements in student learning should contain more variables

than results on high-stakes exams. The following sections provide evidence, both positive and negative, found in the literature on the impact testing has on student learning and test scores.

"As a result of the pressures of educational reform and high-stakes assessment, some schools run the risk of foregoing active, student-centered learning activities for building test-taking skills and the memorization of discrete facts" (Faulkner & Cook, 2006, p 1). The pressure to do well on the test may cause teachers to neglect subjects that are not part of the testing program; this is known as narrowing of the curriculum. Teachers may spend more time on tested subject areas then non-tested subject areas. Since test content defines curriculum, and only easily testable standards are included on high-stakes tests, valuable information needed for the post-secondary careers and education is not taught (Horn, C., 2003). Some teachers neglect untested areas, like solving higher-order problems, creative thinking projects, and authentic writing. This idea of only teaching tested subjects is negatively referred to as teaching to the test (Nichols & Berliner, 2005; Westchester Institute for Human Services Research, 2003), which can lead to a lack of creativity in the classroom both from the teachers and students (Brown et al, 2004). Mathison and Freeman (2003) confirmed teaching to the test did occur, which can be perceived as a double edged sword; in one sense it is positive, because teachers taught more writing and focused more attention on problem solving, conversely, the writing lacked creativity and discussion. If the assessments were designed well, teaching to the test would not necessarily be negative, since the content taught for the test would be developmentally appropriate and designed to engage students.

Studies should analyze existing data, known as secondary data, to take advantage of information already collected (Rea & Parker, 2005). The secondary data gathered for this study utilizes a dataset of SAT and PSSA test results from school districts located within Allegheny

County of the Southwestern region of Pennsylvania to explore the impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement. The dataset used covers a ten year period, from 2001, when NCLB was enacted, to 2012.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) compiles and analyzes a wide variety of data on individual schools and school districts. Included in the information that PDE collects are data on SAT and PSSA scores on all of the districts in the Commonwealth. PDE currently has a database of SAT and PSSA test scores for the schools in Allegheny County dating back to 2001. PDE takes this information and creates a spreadsheet listing all of the districts in the state. This information is then posted on their website for use by the general population. The PSSA and SAT scores are shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

**Table 1.** PSSA Math Results

| | Advanced Math | Proficient Math | Basic Math | Below Basic Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000-2001 | 20.74 | 30.80 | 22.74 | 25.73 |
| 2001-2002 | 24.11 | 30.80 | 20.99 | 24.10 |
| 2002-2003 | 25.11 | 30.49 | 21.41 | 22.99 |
| 2003-2004 | 32.04 | 28.39 | 18.44 | 21.13 |
| 2004-2005 | 42.30 | 27.48 | 15.54 | 14.68 |
| 2005-2006 | 43.08 | 28.48 | 14.18 | 14.26 |
| 2006-2007 | 41.19 | 30.96 | 14.28 | 13.57 |
| 2007-2008 | 46.33 | 29.32 | 12.26 | 12.10 |
| 2008-2009 | 46.54 | 29.42 | 13.06 | 10.98 |
| 2009-2010 | 50.35 | 27.65 | 11.57 | 10.42 |
| 2010-2011 | 50.00 | 28.40 | 11.44 | 10.14 |
| 2011-2012 | 49.27 | 28.18 | 12.39 | 10.17 |

**Table 2.** PSSA Reading Results

| | Advanced Reading | Proficient Reading | Basic Reading | Below Basic Reading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000-2001 | 18.18 | 41.67 | 19.44 | 20.70 |
| 2001-2002 | 20.47 | 41.89 | 20.46 | 17.18 |
| 2002-2003 | 26.66 | 37.43 | 18.63 | 17.29 |
| 2003-2004 | 34.81 | 33.74 | 16.22 | 15.22 |
| 2004-2005 | 35.09 | 35.01 | 13.83 | 16.09 |
| 2005-2006 | 35.93 | 34.85 | 14.99 | 14.24 |
| 2006-2007 | 33.77 | 36.99 | 14.94 | 14.29 |
| 2007-2008 | 37.27 | 36.56 | 13.64 | 12.54 |
| 2008-2009 | 39.09 | 34.66 | 13.48 | 12.78 |
| 2009-2010 | 38.82 | 35.32 | 13.12 | 12.74 |
| 2010-2011 | 40.09 | 35.04 | 13.29 | 11.58 |
| 2011-2012 | 39.09 | 35.03 | 13.77 | 12.12 |

**Table 3.** SAT Results

| | Number of Students Tested | Verbal Average Score | Math Average Score | Writing Average Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000-2001 | 8,203 | 465 | 461 | Not Tested |
| 2001-2002 | 8,449 | 478 | 478 | Not Tested |
| 2002-2003 | 8,846 | 483 | 483 | Not Tested |
| 2003-2004 | 8,863 | 486 | 488 | Not Tested |
| 2004-2005 | 8,550 | 487 | 492 | Not Tested |
| 2005-2006 | 8,312 | 480 | 488 | 467 |
| 2006-2007 | 8,816 | 476 | 484 | 464 |
| 2007-2008 | 8,416 | 480 | 490 | 469 |
| 2008-2009 | 7,582 | 478 | 489 | 470 |
| 2009-2010 | 7,785 | 468 | 477 | 459 |
| 2010-2011 | 8,012 | 476 | 486 | 459 |
| 2011-2012 | 7,863 | 479 | 488 | 466 |

Results from the PSSAs show an increase in student performance, based on improved scores. The percent of students scoring advanced has consistently increased each year, while the percent of students scoring basic or below basic has consistently decreased each year in both the math and reading sections of the PSSAs. The SAT scores, on the other hand, have stayed

relatively stagnate during the same time period in the verbal, math, and writing portions of the test.

### 2.5.1 Negative Impact on Learning

Opponents of testing are concerned with the negative effects testing has on students, believing the negative effects outweigh any gains made because of testing. Due to the pressure placed on students, teachers, and administrators the focus of school seems to have shifted, with an increased value placed on scores (Gunzenhauser, 2003). Expanding on this thought, the current system may eliminate student learning discussed in terms of cognitive, intellectual, social and emotional development, and discovering a student's critical thinking and higher-order reasoning skills (Causey-Bush, 2005; McNeil, 2000).

Student's test scores are increasing without a corresponding increase in their knowledge of the subject, possibly due to repeated testing, using the same test format, and teachers' knowledge of the test. Therefore, students are better prepared, and more aware, of how to take the test without a real transfer of knowledge occurring (Westchester Institute for Human Services Research, 2003). The repeated use of similar tests forms may impact the validity of the tests, "reliance on a single test for repeated testing can distort instruction and lead to inflated and non-generalizable estimates of student gains in achievement" (Linn, 2000, p. 6). Florida was one of the first states to implement a testing program, and had success early on in increasing achievement of low performing students. The success of this program was short lived though. Results for all students increased rapidly during the first three years of implementation, but scores leveled off and even dropped in the following twelve years. A quick rise in performance during the initial years, with a leveling off or decline in the remaining years of the program is

common in other testing programs as well. Another phenomenon seen with testing is an increase in scores during the use of old test forms and then a significant drop when a new test form is published. A new assessment should be used each year; otherwise, results can be distorted (Linn, 2000**).**

When discussing the effects of testing on education, three social principles apply (Madaus & Clarke, 2001). First, when such high-stakes are placed on tests the teachers will teach to the test, because of the value placed on the rewards or sanctions used that are based on test performance. Second, previous tests will define the curriculum because teachers will see the intellectual activity needed for success on the test and prepare students for that activity. Finally, teachers will focus on the form of the test, not just the content, and focus their instruction to that form in spite of other skills that should be taught. The design of the exam limits the amount of content and knowledge that is tested, "and they place test takers in a passive, reactive role, rather than engage their capacities to structure tasks, generate ideas, and solve problems" (Darling-Hammond, 1991, p. 220).

The higher number of students that are identified as needing special education services, which may make them exempt from testing, allow them to take a modified test, or allow their scores to count differently may account for some of the rising high-stakes test scores (Fielding, 2004). Schools scoring the highest on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have a higher than average population of special education students (Fielding, 2004). Using the results of the ACT, SAT, NAEP, and AP tests of 18 states that administer exit exams; a transfer of learning is not evident, even when scores on state assessments increased. In fact, in all but one state, student learning remained at the same level or decreased after implementing high-stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; 2003). Since the implementation of exit exams in these 18

states, participation on the ACT and SAT tests decreased. The scores on both the ACT and SAT also decreased in all 18 states (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

A lack of evidence exists showing a transfer of knowledge and skills occurs, because of this, high-stakes tests may not be valid indicators of genuine learning. If scores on high-stakes tests increase, without similar increases seen on low-stakes tests, factors other than increased knowledge are causing the increase (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Low-stakes tests are standardized tests not used for accountability reasons. These factors could include teacher, student, and/or administrator cheating (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). The focus and attention high-stakes testing receives may cause an increase in scores. Any number of factors may cause such increases, but the results of the high-stakes tests should come into question unless similar increases occur on low-stakes tests.

Tyre (2006) considered the effect testing has on children of a young age. Due to the amount of testing, and the pressure associated with testing, students are not able to develop at their own pace. Teachers must force students to learn the prescribed material at the prescribed time. If students are not able to comprehend the information at that time, teachers may refer them to learning support, place them in remedial classes, or make them repeat the grade (Tyre, 2006). Because of this, Tyre (2006) wonders if we are eliminating the creativity and potential from slower paced learners. Since other countries are outperforming the United States on international exams, the United States implemented accountability standards; however, some high performing countries have banned high-stakes testing or cut back on originally implemented testing. Andrew Hargreaves, an expert on international education reform, says some countries realized too much testing, early in a student's school career, was sucking the soul and spirit out of the experience (Tyre, 2006). Some early-childhood developmental experts are questioning the amount of testing

that occurs. They believe social and emotional development of five and seven year olds is just as important as learning how to read and write (Tyre, 2006).

Students seem to focus on the competencies measured on the test (Horn, C., 2003), therefore, focus less effort on other subject areas not tested. The un-tested areas still have a significant impact on what students need to know to successfully transition into post-secondary education. However, students and teachers are not as concerned with these areas since they do not directly affect promotion to the next grade level, graduation from high school, and/ or a teacher's pay raise for the following year, among other possible consequences. "NCLB is, in effect, creating a climate of controlled learning and sending a message" that the school's job is done when students meet the standards (Gentry, 2006, p. 73).

### 2.5.2 Positive Impact on Learning

Braun (2004) examined the results from Amrein and Berliner's (2002) research, and disagrees with their findings. According to Braun, Amrein and Berliner skewed their analysis, and using a different method of analysis shows increases on both high and low-stakes tests in all 18 states. "If one accepts cross-sectional analyses as the coin of the realm, then it appears that high-stakes testing is strongly associated with larger gains over the period 1992 to 2000" (Braun, 2004, p. 35). Both high and low-stakes standardized test scores are increasing, which possibly means students are learning more. In Massachusetts, policy makers believe increases in student learning occur because high-stakes tests have students use critical thinking skills (Wheelock, Bebell, & Haney, 2000).

Braun (2004) is not the only researcher to find high-stakes testing has helped improve student learning. In a global study conducted by the International Association for Evaluation of

Educational Achievement, over a four-year time frame math and reading scores increased for fourth graders in the United States. They are also performing better than average in comparison to other countries (Lederman, 2012). Greene, Winters and Forster (2003) conducted a study in two states and numerous school districts across the country, comparing results on high-stakes tests to low-stakes tests. They believe, since there are only low-stakes attached to the tests, schools have very little reason to manipulate the results of the test. When low-stakes scores closely match high-stakes scores the similarity in improvement represents a real improvement in student learning (Braun, 2004; Green et al., 2003). Basing teaching off of the materials covered in high-stakes tests, students gain a useful general knowledge, demonstrated by increases on low-stakes test scores (Greene et al., 2003). The researchers suggest that based on Florida's test results, the states test, and testing program, is an accurate measure of the effects schools have on student learning. Florida made impressive gains between 1998 and 2007, going from below the national average to well above the national average (Simon, 2012). Florida's reading scores are second only to Hong Kong when compared globally (Lederman, 2012). The researchers believe this shows a properly designed testing program can improve student learning and the consequences attached to high-stakes tests are not distorting outcomes and scores reflect positive student achievement (Greene et al., 2003).

Researchers found legitimate reasons why test scores are increasing. Brown et al. (2004) found that some school counselors feel students benefited from testing, because of greater teacher consistency, with more of an emphasis on helping at-risk students. NCLB has possibly risen awareness of English Language Learners' (ELL) that may help improve academic performance (Coltrane, 2002). This attention helped ELL programs secure more funding for better programs, with which they can implement interventions to help these students perform

better academically. Other positive results from the implementation of high-stakes testing include schools having a common goal, parents contacted more frequently, and curriculums are standardized. (Brown et al., 2004).

Yeh (2005) interviewed 61 teachers and administrators in four Minnesota school districts. Of those interviewed, 67% feel the state designed the Minnesota mandated tests well, aligned them with the curriculum, met teachers' goals, and emphasized critical thinking skills. Based on Yeh's (2005) findings, a well-designed test may lead to higher teacher and administrator satisfaction and less unwanted consequences of high-stakes testing, such as a narrowing of the curriculum. Yeh (2005) also found one third of respondents feel the Minnesota state tests have a positive impact on student learning, by improving the quality of the curriculum, prompting more collaboration between teachers and administrators, and helping to recognize students who are below grade level. In addition, the teachers are more accountable, which leads to better instruction through the implementation of enhanced professional development and a more focused and goal oriented faculty. Respondents saw an improvement in student attitudes and effort and saw students more engaged in the education process as well (Yeh, 2005).

### 2.5.3 Minority and Socio-Economic Status

Dissatisfaction with academic achievement, particularly within the minority populations, is a major reason for an accountability push. An important area for exploration is the educational achievement gap that exists among white and minority students, as well as affluent and impoverished. An educational gap exists between white and minority students; seen in graduation rates, academic performance, and enrollment numbers entering higher education (Isaacs, 2003). Amrein and Berliner (2002), Ananda and Rabinowitz (2000), and Faulkner and

Cook (2006) have shown high-stakes testing widens the educational gap between whites and minorities, and affluent and impoverished. Amrein and Berliner (2002) found states with a higher percentage of minority students and rates of poverty are more likely to implement the use of a graduation exam and have a more pressured accountability system in place.

Frase-Blunt (n.d.) noticed an increase in dropout rates among all minority groups, and a major urban school district in Texas had 60% of minority students drop out between 1995 and 2002 (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez-Heilig, 2008). Paulson and Marchant (2009) observed differences in test results directly corresponded with demographic information. Even at a state level, predicting test results is possible when the demographic information of the state is known (Paulson, & Marchant, 2009). Considering this statistic, holding the teachers accountable for a single test score may not be fair, since a student's prior knowledge, family background, and experiences greatly impact the test scores. Since test results may affect the money available for schools, and data show schools with higher percentages of minorities have lower test scores, minority students may be disproportionately negatively impacted. Giving more money to higher performing schools may start a never-ending cycle that negatively impacts minority students.

The Florida Department of Education recently passed legislation attempting to adjust the states standards based on a student's race. By 2018, it expects 90% of Asian students, 86% of white students, 80% of Hispanic students, and 74% of black students to meet proficiency standards. Changing these standards is an attempt to comply with a waiver Florida received from NCLB, and acknowledges different racial groups are achieving at different rates. Testing data from the 2011 - 2012 school year show 69% of white students scored proficient on reading, while less than 40% of black students scored proficient (Lawrence, n.d.).

Ananda and Rabinowitz (2000) found a relationship exists between high-stakes testing and increases in dropout rates, especially for students already at-risk. In North Carolina and Massachusetts non-white, non-Asian students are most affected by high-stakes testing; half of all minority students may not graduate in these two states (Horn, C., 2003). Since there is a noticeable difference in test results, and a disproportionately high failure rate among underserved populations tying grade promotion to test scores could increase racial disparities in retention rates (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Westchester Institute for Human Services Research, 2003).

Many states rely on test results to decide grade promotion. Horn, C. (2003) found minorities are retained four times more often than non-minority students. Texas measures quality education by scores on standardized tests. In low-performing schools, predominantly low-income schools with a majority of the students identifying as non-white, teachers use test-prep techniques, which can reduce the valuable learning experiences students experience (McNeil, 2000). This may be partly to blame for the fact that fewer then 60% of minorities in Texas who begin ninth grade ever graduate (McNeill, 2000). Howard (2003) found 50% of black students failed to reach proficiency in core subjects (history, math, reading, and science) on the National Assessment for Educational Progress each year from 1992 to 2002. Similarly bleak statistics exist for those scoring in the advanced range on the NAEP. Less than five percent of black students scored advanced in these core subjects over that same time period (Howard, 2003).

Fewer than 33% of students in most states score proficient on the NAEP assessment, with only 12% of black students scoring proficient on the reading portion of the 2000 NAEP assessment. In 2001, The Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) showed white students in the U.S. scoring 13$^{th}$ in math and sixth in science out of 39 and scored 38 and 59 points higher in math and science, respectively, then the international average. In the same

study, black students in the U.S. scored 43 and 50 points lower in math and science, respectively, then the international average and ranked 32nd in each category out of 39 (Bracey, 2001). The disparities seen in test scores may mean NCLB is not having the intended effects it strived to achieve by leaving no child left behind. It seems as though more minority students and students in a lower socio-economic class are falling behind and suffering more severe consequences than white students and/or those in a higher socio-economic class.

## 2.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

When studying the impact of high-stakes testing on students, some researchers examined the psychological and emotional toll testing takes on some students. Ruff (2011) wondered if the emphasis on accountability is exacerbating the socio-emotional issues students face. For the purpose of this study, psychological and emotional well-being refers to student motivation, stress, and test-anxiety.

### 2.6.1 Stress and Test Anxiety

In recent years, few areas of psychology received more attention than stress and anxiety (Burchfield, 1979). Even with the amount of attention stress receives in recent years in the field of psychology, it is still poorly defined, with definitions focusing on either the stimulus or a person's response to a stimulus (Burchfield, 1979). One definition for stress defines it as the relationship between a person, and their surroundings that the person finds taxing. When looking at stress from the person's response, stress is determined after the outcome. Another way is to

look at the stimulus and not the response. For example, a bee buzzing around is a stressor even though some people would not pay any attention to the bee and not be stressed in the least by the bee's presence (Burchfield, 1979; Hobfoll, 1989). The fact that people respond differently to similar stressors makes defining, and studying, stress difficult.

Some psychologists believe student anxiety is higher than ever before (Zeidner, 1998). This fact is significant since test anxiety can impair performance on assessments, increase stress, and decrease motivation (Segool, Carlson, Goforth, Von Der Embse, & Barterian, 2013). The model to define and understand test anxiety has changed throughout the years. Test anxiety is a "unique construct comprised of worry and emotionality associated specifically with testing" The expression of test anxiety is seen through behavioral, cognitive, and physiological symptoms. Prior experiences can affect test anxiety with negative experiences possibly leading to test anxiety (Segool et al., 2013). "Test anxiety, broadly speaking, refers to the set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions that accompany concern over possible negative consequences contingent upon performance in a test or evaluative situation" (Zeidner, 1998, p. 25). In addition to tests currently in place for students (i.e. mid-term and final exams, weekly quizzes, and chapter tests), students must also take these high-stakes tests (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000). For example, fourth graders, in one Pennsylvania district, take 13 standardized tests per year (some of which take a week to complete). This is in addition to the math, reading, spelling, social studies, and science tests they currently take. Zeidner (1998) feels it should not come as a surprise that based on the amount of testing that occurs in school that testing causes anxiety in many people. Feelings of stress and anxiety are understandable considering the profound impact these tests can have on determining the path people take in life.

For the purpose of this study, stress is defined as a person's response to a change, or stimulus, in the environment. This change can be physical and/ or emotional (Burchfield, 1979; Hobfoll, 1989). A bee sting may cause swelling and pain and future sightings of bees could lead to fear. Test anxiety is defined as an emotion, or the cognitive and behavioral reactions of fear, apprehension, and nervousness to the outcomes of a test (Zeidner, 1998).

Frase-Blunt (n.d.) claim the psychological toll of testing on students is causing increased levels of anxiety, some of which are higher than ever before. Brown et al. (2004) and Fleege, Charlesworth, Burts and Hart (n.d.) agree that tests cause increased levels of anxiety in students, even students as young as kindergarten. Teachers described a highly stressful testing environment for teachers and students. This was especially apparent when the test was too hard for a student, with some witnessing students crying from the stress related to high-stakes tests, which these teachers feel are not developmentally appropriate (Mabry, Poole, Redmond, & Schultz, 2003). Former Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, has said states must review their testing programs to ensure students are not under excessive stress, so students are challenged and not traumatized (O'Neill, 2001). Interviews conducted with school counselors showed they see more students with anxiety-related problems after the implementation of testing. Anxiety related problems include sleep issues, drug and alcohol use, misbehavior, and avoidance problems. Students suffering from test anxiety may be easily distracted during a test, have difficulty recalling relevant information, express concern of embarrassment at their likely failure, and may suffer from poor mental health (Zeidner, 1998).

The impact test anxiety has on students is important to consider, because elementary students that experience test anxiety are, on average, a full academic year behind other students on nationally standardized tests, while the least anxious students in the class are a full academic

year ahead of the national average on standardized tests (Zeidner, 1998). Malpass, O'Neil and Hocevar (1996) and Segool et al. (2013) claim a correlation exists between high levels of anxiety and low cognitive performance. Segool et al. (2013) found Caucasians exhibited lower anxiety levels than African Americans prior to testing. Rates of test anxiety may range from 10 to 30% and as high as 40% for minority students expressing anxiety (Segool et al., 2013). A relationship also seems to exist between socio-economic status and test anxiety. Students with higher levels of SES had lower rates of test anxiety (Segool et al., 2013). These findings are significant, since the higher the anxiety levels, the worse the students performed on the test.

Segool et al. (2013) conducted a study examining the differences between students' test anxiety between classroom tests and NCLB mandated tests. The researchers had students take an anxiety assessment after taking classroom tests and NCLB tests. Students in the study experienced significantly higher rates of anxiety on NCLB tests in comparison to classroom tests, which may lower test performance, reduce motivation, and increase stress levels (Segool et al., 2013).

Mulvenon et al. (2005) found conflicting data with other research previously discussed, in which students reported feeling anxious and stressed during testing. In their study, they found 75% of students report liking test week. The question in their study asked students if they enjoyed test week because they received less homework and less instructional time (Mulvenon et al., 2005). What is unclear regarding this study is whether students truly enjoy testing week or simply enjoy testing week because they did not receive homework during the week. Forty-two percent of students reported feeling pressure from their teachers and 43% report feeling pressure from their parents. Mulvenon et al. (2005) did not find an increase in anxiety among students, even with feeling pressure from teachers and parents. When increases in anxiety did occur, there

was a greater increase among high performing students than low-performing students. The results showed test anxiety did not affect the test results, and most students value the test (Mulvenon, et al., 2005).

Horn, J. (2003) found testing alters motivation and induces higher levels of stress, finding students are more stressed since testing began, with some students getting physically ill from the stress. Texas was one of the first states to require students take a minimum basic skills test and has expanded their accountability system to one of the strictest in the country. Teachers reported many students experience headaches and stomachaches while taking the state assessment and report students are irritable and aggressive during testing (Hoffman et al, 2001).

As stated earlier, researchers report other psychological and emotional tolls when they study the impact testing has on students. Some educators allege the results of testing are part of a self-fulfilling prophecy, where students may receive a label, based on test scores that can negatively impact their confidence, motivation, and future school performance (Sloane & Kelly, 2003). Horn, C. (2003) found the effects of testing lead to more incidents of students acting out in negative and inappropriate ways.

### 2.6.2 Motivation

A component in determining an individual's success in school is motivation, although other factors may affect performance such as lack of knowledge or outside sources. Poor academic performance does not always indicate a lack of motivation, because motivation does not always "influence performance in a direct and simple manner" (Maehr & Archer, 1985, p. 8). Original theories on motivation identify two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic is motivation felt from the inside. Outside factors, such as pay raises or grades, drive extrinsic

motivation. Newer theories on motivation identify many more factors that play a role in determining motivation levels than just stating whether or not a person is intrinsically and/ or extrinsically motivated, making motivation a difficult concept to study, "motivation is a complex concept, embracing several aspects that relate to learning, such as self-esteem, self-regulation, interest, effort, self-efficacy, and a person's sense of themselves as a learner" (Harlen, 2005, p 210). Wheelock et al., (2000, p. 2) add, "student motivation depends on a complex mix of beliefs, attitudes, and feelings that students develop in the context of classroom experiences, personal relationships, and school routines".

Newer theorists identify three types of motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is doing something simply for the pleasure of doing it. Extrinsic motivation is doing something as a means to an end, to gain an external reward, for example, studying for a test to get an A. Amotivation is "the absence of intent or drive to pursue an activity due to one's failure to establish contingencies between their behavior and the activity" (Fairchild, Horst, Finney, & Barron, 2005, p. 335). Theorists believe intrinsic motivation has three subscales: motivation to know, gaining enjoyment from the process of learning, motivation to accomplish, gaining satisfaction by accomplishing something, and motivation to experience stimulation, gaining satisfaction from the sensory stimulation experienced while performing that activity (Fairchild et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study motivation is defined as the forces (internal and/ or external) "that lead to the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior" (Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p 428).

Tuan, Chin and Shieh (2005) conducted a study to develop a questionnaire to determine student motivation levels. In their research, they discovered a variety of factors play a role in determining motivation. The factors emerging in the research include perception of ability,

performance and achievement goals, level of effort, learning values, self-efficacy, goal and task orientation, active learning strategies, and test anxiety. Many of these factors play a part in a student's willingness to try to understand new and difficult concepts. The researchers believe that if a student finds value in the task, and assumes they are capable of learning the task, they will be more willing to make a sustained effort to learn the material.

Testing policies are created with the belief that students may take schoolwork more seriously, may understand the importance of academics, and may motivate the individual into achieving academically when consequences are attached to test scores (Wheelock et al., 2000). Policymakers may assume placing rewards and sanctions on tests can help increase student motivation levels pertaining to learning, believing students may try harder to gain rewards or avoid sanctions (Gunzenhauser, 2007; Madaus & Clarke, 2001). This belief may be flawed since Vallerand and Losier (1999) found multiple studies that show intrinsic motivation decreases when rewards are used for participation in an activity. These findings may hurt NCLB's focus, which "contradicts empirically supported motivation theory, in which students need to feel empowered, efficacious, and able to self-regulate to be able to learn effectively and with confidence and motivation," (Gentry, 2006, p. 76).

Harlen (2005) takes a much more cynical approach when discussing the effects of high-stakes testing on student motivation, believing testing has a detrimental effect on students' enjoyment of school and learning, and their willingness to become lifelong learners. This is especially important, considering the policy makers that believe motivation would increase due to the implementation of high-stakes testing, probably did not consider the complexity of motivation, the cultural and social networks that exist within the school, and the individual

differences that exist among students (e.g. grade level, family circumstances, and expectations) (Madaus & Clarke, 2001).

In order for students to strive for rewards, students should see the attainment of the reward as realistic. Some students may dismiss the award because they feel it is unobtainable, others may dismiss the award because they do not see the importance of the exam or award. If they do not connect the passing of the exam resulting directly in getting into college, finding a job, or moving to the next grade level, they may dismiss its importance (Madaus & Clarke, 2001). When students do not perform as well as expected stakeholders often attribute the poor performance to a lack of motivation, which can threaten the meaning of the scores (Sundre, 2000). External rewards do not translate into better effort or improved student learning (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Jones, 2007; Wheelock et al., 2000). Intrinsic motivation decrease in students when rewards and sanctions are attached, especially when they are perceived as controlling (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Jones, 2007). In fact, long term enjoyment decreases, even though short term motivation increases (Jones, 2007). Wheelock et al. (2000) studied student drawings to determine the effects of high-stakes testing, observing patterns related to motivation and effort. They observed a range of responses that question whether a single test can motivate a student to learn and try harder (Wheelock et al., 2000).

In an Ohio school district, 83% of elementary students and 45% of secondary students said testing motivated them to study (Jones, 2007). Flores and Clark's (2003) findings support Jones (2007) and some policy makers' claims that testing would increase student motivation, finding students are concerned about their test performance and motivated to demonstrate their knowledge. Ruff (2011) interviewed 20 counselors and school psychologists and found accountability has students better focused on learning and school performance. It is important to

realize student motivation is not independent of other factors, including the relationship they have with teachers and families, involvement in school, and social activities in and out of school (Sloane & Kelly, 2003).

# 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The review of literature discussed in chapter two addresses the positive and negative effects of the high-stakes tests used to ensure schools are meeting the accountability standards established by the state and federal government. In the review of literature, the studies that focused on the impact testing has on students were examined, specifically; the effects testing has on learning as measured by state and national assessments, motivation, stress, and test anxiety, and testing's impact based on socio-economic and racial classifications of students. Along with the impact on students, the review examined the impact of high-stakes testing on the school counselors' role and work environment. As school districts continue to try to meet the accountability standards established by the state and federal governments, determining the impact high-stakes tests have on students and school counselors is an important factor to consider. Of particular interest is testing's impact on students and school counselors as perceived by professional school counselors working in southwestern Pennsylvania. This chapter addresses the method used to explore the perceived changes that occurred in students and school counselors working and attending schools in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania since the implementation of NCLB in 2001.

Data in this study were collected using a survey that included open and closed-ended questions. The survey, developed from a review of the literature, was given to current professional school counselors. The survey was designed to measure counselor perceptions of

changes in student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress, and test anxiety), changes in the counselor's work environment, and possible changes in the counselor's role in the school since the inception of high-stakes testing.

## 3.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 brought about a change in the way schools and students are held accountable for their academic performance. High-stakes tests are now used more frequently to make important decisions directly impacting students. This may mean students today are facing more pressure to perform well on tests than ever before. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act the use of assessments increased (Amrein & Berliner 2003; Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Gunzenhauser, 2006). As was discussed in more detail in the review of literature, stakeholders involved in schools (e.g. researchers, educators, parents, and students) have varying opinions on the impact of this legislation, more specifically, the high-stakes tests that are used to ensure schools are held accountable. Some believe test scores have improved, showing students are improving academically and learning more; others say scores have not increased. Some have acknowledged an improvement in scores, but have noted a commonly held belief that testing is creating an environment in which students are experiencing increased levels of stress and test anxiety and decreased levels of motivation "all attributed to the administration of these examinations" (Mulvenon et al., 2005, p. 37). An issue that exists with the current accountability system in place is the heightened concern of the effect testing has on students, teachers, and school counselors.

There were multiple purposes to this study. The first was to explore if professional school counselors perceived any changes in student psychological and emotional well-being; second, to explore if school counselors perceive changes occurred in their work environment; third, to examine if school counselors perceive the role of the counselor changed with the use of high-stakes testing. Each of the three purposes were analyzed to determine if any differences exist in school counselor perceptions based on a school's socio-economic status and ethnic diversity of the school (*Education-Challenge*), and the 2012-2013 AYP status for the school for which the counselor worked, as well as the number of years the participant worked as a school counselor in the school.

## 3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions used in this study focused on counselor perception data. The questions explored counselor perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being, the counselor's work environment, and the counselor's role with the use of high-stakes testing.

1. How do school counselors perceive the impact of high-stakes testing on their role?
2. How has school counselors' perceptions about their work environment changed since the inception of high-stakes testing?
3. What are school counselors' perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress, and test-anxiety) in school since the inception of high-stakes testing?

The exploration of these research questions aim to bring a better understanding of the impact high-stakes testing has on students and counselors based on the perceptions of

professional school counselors. The questions were also explored by separating the participants into subgroups based on *Education-Challenge, AYP-Status,* and *Years-Working*.

## 3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Counselor perception data were collected using a survey from a sample determined by non-probability sampling. In non-probability sampling, participants are selected deliberately based on the knowledge of a certain group with some units of the target population having no chance of being selected; it is commonly used when collecting qualitative data, and is typically used for exploratory work (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Setzia, 2003).

The non-probability sample consisted of members of the Allegheny County Counselors Association (ACCA) working with students in Allegheny County Schools. Membership to the organization is voluntary and although this organization consists of a large portion of school counselors working in the county, not all school counselors working in the county join this organization. All school counselors who work in any of the county schools, including public, private, and charter have the option to join this organization by registering and paying a small yearly fee. Counselors working in Allegheny County who are not members of this organization or counselors who work outside of the county had no chance of selection for this study.

Even though ACCA members were the only counselors selected for participation, using this sample still provided rich data from the information collected. One hundred seventy-six counselors were sent a link to an online survey because of the valuable role they play within a school and the knowledge they possess. This sample was also selected because it represents a

fairly large and diverse geographic region of Pennsylvania and ACCA members work in schools that represent a good cross-section of sizes, ethnic diversity, and socio-economic areas.

One hundred seventy-six ACCA members were contacted via the e-mail addresses they provided to the organization at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. After members provide the organization with an updated e-mail address the organization sends out a directory providing the work contact information for all members. The e-mail address provided by the ACCA members was used to contact them about participating in the online survey using Survey Monkey, an online survey software tool.

### 3.3.1 Survey Development

The original survey was created through discussions with four other school counselors, which led to a lengthy survey that could have taken over an hour to complete. To narrow the focus of the survey and create one that could be completed in a reasonable amount of time, a new survey was developed. This survey was developed using questions from several different surveys used in previous studies and by extracting themes found in the literature when a specific question was not available. The survey was intended to determine if counselors perceived changes in student psychological and emotional well-being with the use of high-stakes testing. The survey also intended to determine if the counselors perceived any changes in their work environment and their role as a counselor. Several demographic questions in the survey were used to provide data based on the socio-economic status, ethnic diversity, and *AYP-Status* of the school for which the counselor worked.

The survey asked school counselors their opinions and perceptions regarding high-stakes testing and the potential impacts on students and school counselors. The survey asked counselors

questions regarding their opinions on student motivation, stress, and test anxiety. In order to develop a survey that measured these three constructs, it was necessary to define them. A definition of the constructs was also necessary so the participants had the same understanding of the meaning of a question as the researcher, and this definition was provided at the beginning of the survey.

Based on the review of the literature the following definitions were used for the purpose of this study. Stress was defined as a person's response to a change or stimulus in the environment. This change can be physical and/ or emotional (Burchfield, 1979; Hobfoll, 1989). Test anxiety was defined as an emotion, or the cognitive and behavioral reactions of fear, apprehension, and nervousness to the outcomes of a test (Zeidner, 1998). Since stress and test anxiety were so similar, both being a person experiencing a change due to a stressor, the two constructs were combined in the survey. For the purpose of this study, motivation was defined as the forces (internal and/ or external) "that lead to the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior" (Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p 428).

Based on the literature reviewed, surveys developed to measure motivation are rare and many surveys developed are designed for a first person account of his or her beliefs. One of the surveys researched and modified for use in this study is *The Motivation Scale, Student Opinion Scale (SOS).* SOS is a questionnaire that measures student perception of total motivation, importance, and effort (Sundre, 2000). Questions regarding student motivation also came from surveys generated by Brown et al. (2004), Fitzgerald (2008), Jones and Egley (2004), Mertler (2011), Pintrich and DeGroot (1990), Sabol (2010), and Sundre (2000), Tuan, et al. (2005). Questions for the stress and test-anxiety construct were generated by using information gathered from research completed by Brown, et al. (2004), Hoffman et al. (2001), Jones (2007), Mertler

(2011), Thorn and Mulvenon (2002), and Zeidner (1998). Questions regarding the counselor's work environment and role came from Fitzgerald (2008), Hamilton, Stecher, Marsh, McCombs, et al. (2007), Mertler (2011), and Sabol (2010). Information from studies conducted by these researchers is described in more detail in chapter two. Questions in the survey not specifically pulled from surveys previously used by other researchers were generated by the review of the literature and personal experience working as a school counselor.

According to Tuan et al. (2005), researchers should address construct, content, and criterion validity when developing surveys. According to Tuan et al. (2005), using surveys used in previous studies, along with piloting the survey helps to ensure these three types of validity are met. Many of the questions in the survey were taken from survey questions used by previous researchers, helping to ensure the survey's validity. Piloting the survey with professional school counselors and doctoral study group members minimized the risk of poor survey design to help avoid participants speeding through the survey, randomly responding to questions, and/ or not completing the survey due to survey length. The survey was originally piloted with eight school counselors. The counselors provided feedback regarding question construction to ensure the appropriateness for the constructs studied, as well as to ensure the validity of the survey. From the feedback on the piloted surveys, several questions were eliminated or reworded. A new survey was created and sent to members of a doctoral study group for further evaluation and critique. Approximately ten members of the group provided feedback through several rewrites of the survey. These members provided feedback regarding the wording of questions, trying to eliminate any biased wording used in the question or answer choices. They also helped identify questions that were difficult to understand or were interpreted differently than intended (Krosnick, 1999). To ensure the survey met content, construct, and criterion validity, and to

ensure the survey worked properly on the website, eight professional school counselors and ten members of a doctoral study group pilot tested the final survey available on Survey Monkey. Pilot testing the survey on Survey Monkey showed the need to make three changes for the final survey. First, two questions were eliminated. Three questions were separated from one large question and answer choice to two separate question and answer choices each, turning these three questions into six questions. Finally, page breaks were inserted in the online format to eliminate participants needing to scroll down the page to read the next question.

Downes-LeGuin, Baker, Mechling and Ruyle (2012) found that the length of the survey is important to consider because surveys that are too lengthy can cause participants to be less motivated to respond, skip questions, and/ or put less effort into answering questions honestly. They refer to this as "respondent burden" which is a combination of four factors, survey length, effort required to complete the survey, the emotional stress a respondent may feel from the questions in the survey, and the frequency in which they are asked to participate in research studies (Downes-Le Guin et al., 2012). How frequently counselors are asked to participate in research studies cannot be controlled; however, the other three factors were considered to minimize the amount of burden felt by the participants in this study.

### 3.3.2 Survey

The survey consisted of two sections. The first section consisted of general demographic information questions, the second section contained questions intended to identify the perceptions of counselors. Section one of the survey was the general information section and consisted of eight questions. Four of these questions solicited demographic information about the counselors, such as the number of years working as a counselor, the grade level(s) in which they

work, and the number of students on the counselor's caseload. In addition, the survey consisted of two demographic questions about the school in which they work, which were the school's socio-economic make-up and racial and ethnic diversity. The socio-economic make-up was determined by using the percentage of students in the district who were enrolled in the National School Lunch Program as reported by the respondent. One question pertained to the school's AYP status from the 2012-2013 school year. Two questions asked counselors about the testing process at their school, and their involvement in the process.

The second section of the survey was designed to determine how testing impacted student psychological and emotional well-being, the counselors work environment, and how testing impacted their role as a school counselor in the school. The second section consisted of 34 closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. The six open-ended questions asked respondents to explain how they felt testing impacted student motivation, stress and test anxiety, why they thought changes occurred in their role, and to provide examples of these changes.

Of the 34 closed-ended questions, five were on a five or six point Likert Scale asking to rate their level of agreement with the question. Eleven questions asked respondents to answer if an item has changed for the worse, changed for the better, or did not change. Examples, of these eleven closed-ended questions included their relationship with parents, teachers, students, and principals, as well as student morale, student motivation, and focus on student achievement.

Eighteen questions asked respondents to choose the amount of time they spent on certain activities and whether the amount of time was less time, more time, or about the same amount of time as when they began working as a school counselor. Of these 18 questions, six asked about tasks related to high-stakes testing, such as acting as test coordinator, reviewing student assessment results, or meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement. The

other 12 from this 18 asked respondents about the amount of time they spent on classroom lessons, small group lessons, or individual counseling sessions involving: test preparation skills, college and career readiness, personal and social skills, and academic goals that were not test preparation based. Each of these questions asked counselors the amount of time they spent in a typical week on the activities and whether that was less time, more time, or about the same amount of time than at the beginning of their career as a school counselor.

The survey was uploaded to Survey Monkey and participants were e-mailed a link that connected participants to the survey. A web-based survey was used for several reasons. Strengths of web-based surveys include the efficiency in data collection, convenience – for both the researcher and the participant, low administration cost, ease of follow-up, and respondents often provide longer, more candid responses in web-based surveys than other types of surveys (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003; Sheehan, 2001). The two major colloquies of web-based surveys are the possibility of the participation e-mail request being viewed as junk mail and deleted before it is read and low response rates (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Response rates with any type of survey is lower than in any previous year, with one study examining response rates for various survey methods to be as low as 20% (Sax et al., 2003). In Sheehan's 2001 study, a review of 31 different studies using web-based surveys showed an average response rate of 37%.

### 3.3.3 Participants

ACCA is a professional organization serving professional school counselors working for the 43 school districts, 196 private schools, and 26 charter schools located in Allegheny County. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education 154,276 students are enrolled in public

schools, including charter schools, and 24,130 students are enrolled in private schools serving Allegheny County. This student population equals approximately nine percent of the state's total school enrollment. The target population for the study represented a fairly diverse geographic region and included semi-rural, suburban, and urban schools that consisted of an array of socio-economic areas.

Members of ACCA attending a quarterly conference were made aware of an e-mail being sent asking for their participation in the online survey. One hundred seventy-six members were sent an introductory e-mail asking them to participate in the research study. Along with the link to the survey, participants were e-mailed an information form containing a short description of the purpose and importance of the study. In addition, the form described any risks and benefits of participating in the study, the value of their responses, how they were selected for participation, and how the information they provide would be confidential. Since the surveys were collected anonymously, participants gave implied consent by completing the survey. See Appendix B for the e-mail sent to potential participants. Since the counselors' anonymity was ensured, there were no inherent risks to participants of the study.

The initial e-mail was sent with a link to the survey to 176 active members of ACCA on Monday, November 25, 2013. With the initial delivery, a response stating that eleven of the e-mails were undeliverable was received, giving a total of 165 possible participants. A follow-up e-mail was sent on Thursday, December 5, 2013 to the 165 valid e-mail addresses. This e-mail thanked those who already participated in the survey, and encouraged those who had not yet participated to complete the survey. On Friday, December 13, 2013, ACCA held another quarterly conference with approximately 100 members in attendance. Those in attendance were made aware that the survey was still available on Survey Monkey and asked any one who had

not participated to please consider participating. On Monday, December 16, 2013 a third e-mail was sent.

The survey was closed on January 12, 2014. A total of 68 professional school counselors completed the survey, giving a final response rate of 41.2%, based on the 165 valid e-mail addresses used. Twenty-eight other ACCA members began the survey but for various reasons chose not to complete the survey. A final e-mail was sent asking those who submitted an incomplete survey their reasoning for stopping the survey. Thirteen participants responded to this request giving their reason for not completing the survey.

Of the thirteen participants who responded, three stated they work in buildings that do not give tests and stopped the survey when they realized the survey did not pertain to them, six did not complete the survey when an issue arose that they needed to attend to, one experienced technical difficulties, and three said it was due to survey length. Survey Monkey keeps track of the amount of time each person takes to complete the survey. By analyzing the individual time kept for each of the 96 participants, the following information was gathered. Of the 68 participants who completed the survey the average amount of time taken to complete the survey was 19 minutes 50 seconds, with 15 minutes being the most commonly occurring time length. Of the 28 participants who began, but did not complete the survey, the average amount of time spent on the survey was six minutes 40 seconds, with 1 minute being the most commonly occurring time length.

## 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Information from the 68 completed surveys were input into an Excel spreadsheet giving a number code for responses to each question. This information was then uploaded into, and examined by, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Using SPSS software for the statistical analysis generated descriptive statistics based on the answers from the survey. Descriptive statistics generated included frequency distributions and cross-tabulated contingency tables. Gathered data are presented in the following chapter using tables and descriptive narratives to help describe frequency distribution data of respondents' perceptions on high-stakes testing's impact on students and school counselors based on the data gathered from the surveys. Analysis of the data also included separating respondents into three unique categories based on the demographic information provided by the respondent. Respondents were grouped into a *low-education-challenge-group* and a *high-education-challenge-group* based on the percentage of students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program and the percentage of students identified as an ethnic or racial minority in the school. The second category respondents were grouped into was *made-AYP-group* or *did-not-make-AYP-group* based on their school's performance on the state assessment and the school's AYP status for the 2012-2013 school year. The third category grouped respondents into two categories based on the number of years spent working as a school counselor, *prior-to-NCLB* or *after-NCLB.*

Using the open-ended questions in the survey allowed participants to provide answers with more personal meaning with a more in-depth description of their experiences. Using conventional qualitative content analysis, open-ended questions were collected, examined, categorized, and coded to identify common themes based on the data gathered (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The open-ended questions were analyzed from data emerging from counselors'

perceptions on testing's impact on students and school counselors. The themes that emerged were coded and examined with the SPSS software using frequency distributions and cross-tabulated contingency tables to report the data. Descriptive narratives of the open-ended questions, including direct quotations if appropriate, are used in the following chapters to provide readers with a more personal feeling for the impact of testing on student motivation, stress, and test anxiety, the work environment, and the school counselor's role through the perceptions of individual professional school counselor responses.

## 3.5 LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations inherent in this study. The first is that many of the effects, particularly motivation, are hard to measure, and those that can be measured, are not measured using a common metric (Stecher, 2002). The survey is also based on school counselor perception data, and findings are solely based on survey results asking school counselors their perspectives on the impact of high-stakes testing. A second limitation that exists includes making generalizations based on the findings. The number of school counselors responding to the survey was relatively small, with an even smaller number actually completing the entire survey. The people who chose to participate, and especially those that completed the entire survey, may not reflect the views of all school counselors. The sample size was chosen from school counselors who are members of the Allegheny County Counselors Association. Because of their affiliation in this association, these members may have different perspectives and different attitudes towards their career, their district, and students, than counselors that have chosen to not be members of this association. The sample was taken from one county in Pennsylvania. To

facilitate generalization, future studies could examine how counselors from across the country perceive testing's impact on students (Zalaquett, 2005).

The respondents in this study may have an extreme view (either negative or positive) on this topic. People that have a more neutral stance on high-stakes testing may have chosen not to participate. There are several limitations to using a self-report instrument for research, one of which is participants may answer the questions in line with how they think the researcher wants them to answer the question (Zalaquett, 2005). A frequently reported concern that may affect the reliability of the results is known as social desirability responding. Socially desirable responses cause participants to respond in ways that make them look good based on cultural norms. Counselors may have responded in less than truthful ways because they did not want to run the risk of being unfavorably viewed by others (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010). Ensuring participants the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey, by coding and storing results on a password protected device may have minimized this effect. Self-reported counselors' perceptions are subjective, relying on the judgment of counselors. The survey was designed to gauge the counselors' feelings toward high-stakes testing's impact on students. It is possible that the school counselors surveyed misjudged the impact testing has on students. For example, the counselor may think students feel stressed, when in reality the students were not feeling any stress. The judgment of the counselors may be skewed because of their own personal beliefs. If a counselor disagrees with testing, and is stressed out during testing, the school counselor may believe others are feeling stress about testing as well. Although the survey was designed with questions attempting to minimize these limitations, completely eliminating these limitations is not possible. Despite the limitations that may exist, valuable information was obtained from surveying the school counselors who were asked to participate in the study.

## 3.6 CONCLUSION OF METHODS SECTION

Sixty-eight school counselors completed an online survey available through Survey Monkey, giving a response rate of 42.1%. The survey was developed through a review of the literature and was pilot tested by professional school counselors and members of a doctoral study group. The survey consisted of six open-ended questions and 42 closed-ended questions designed to explore ACCA members' perceptions on how high-stakes testing has affected students and school counselors. Once all of the surveys were collected, the data were examined using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics that included frequency distributions and cross-tabulated contingency tables were used to analyze the data emerging from the closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions were explored using conventional qualitative content analysis examining, and coding themes that emerged from the participant's responses. The questions were also explored by separating the participants into subgroups based on *Education-Challenge*, *AYP-Status*, and *Years-Working*. The exploration of these research questions aim to bring a better understanding of the impact high-stakes testing has on students and counselors based on the perceptions of professional school counselors.

## 4.0 DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTION RESULTS

This chapter includes an analysis of the data collected from surveying professional school counselors who are currently members of Allegheny County Counselors Association. The first section of this chapter contains information explaining the data collected on the demographic information of the participants. Subsequent sections contain information addressing the three research questions:

1. How do school counselors perceive the impact of high-stakes testing on their role?
2. How has school counselors' perceptions about their work environment changed since the inception of high-stakes testing?
3. What are school counselors' perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress, and test-anxiety) in school since the inception of high-stakes testing?

Information for each of these questions is provided for the entire sample, as well as separated into categories based on the racial and ethnic minority population of the school and socio-economic status, identified as *Education-Challenge*, the school's academic performance identified as *AYP-Status*, *Years-Working* (the number of years spent working as a school counselor).

## 4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The first section of this chapter contains the analysis of the demographic information provided by participants. A total of 96 school counselors began the survey. Of these 96, 28 did not complete the survey. Sixty-eight participants completed the survey for a response rate of 41.2%. The information from these 68 completed surveys was used to complete the analysis. Of the 68 participants, one half (50.0%, n=34) worked at the high school level, which included grades nine through twelve, one quarter (25.0%, n=17) worked at a middle school level that included grades five through eight, and the remainder (25.0%, n=17) worked at the elementary level that included prekindergarten through fourth grade.

Approximately forty-one percent (41.2%, n=28) of the participants had between six and ten years of counseling experience in their current district. Approximately one-third of the participants (35.3%, n=24) had 11 or more years of experience in their current district. The remainder of the participants (23.5%, n=16) had between one and five years of experience working as a counselor in their current district. A majority of the participants (61.8%, n=42) did not work in any other district prior to their current district. Most of the counselors (91.2%, n=62) only had experience working as a school counselor, while six (8.8%) of the participants worked as a teacher prior to starting work as a school counselor. Twenty-three (33.8%) participants started working as a counselor prior to the implementation of NCLB. Forty-five (66.2%) participants started working as a counselor after NCLB.

A large range existed in the number of students assigned to the individual counselors. One counselor had only 15 students that he or she was responsible for, while another counselor had 1,200 students. The average number of students each counselor was responsible for was just

over 400 students. The 68 participants were responsible for a total of approximately 27,400 students attending school in Allegheny County.

The participants were asked if their school had a dedicated test coordinator for the state assessments. A majority of the participants (69.1%, n=47) answered that their school had a dedicated test coordinator. Eighteen participants (26.5%) responded that they did not have a dedicated test coordinator in their school. Three participants (4.4%) did not respond to this question.

The participants then answered a question asking what percent of students in their school are considered a racial or ethnic minority. They were given the following options, *0-10%, 11-20%, 21-30%, 31-40%, 41-50%, 51-60%, 61-70%, 71-80%, 81-90%, 91-100%*. Approximately two thirds (61.8%, n=42) of the participants work in a school that has less than 30% of the population identified as a racial or ethnic minority. Twelve (17.6%) respondents work in schools that have 31 to 60% of the student population identified as a racial or ethnic minority. Ten (14.6%) participants responded that 61 to 100% of students were a racial or ethnic minority. Four (5.9%) participants did not respond to this question.

The participants were then asked approximately what percent of students in their school are enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. They were given the following options, *0-10%, 11-20%, 21-30%, 31-40%, 41-50%, 51-60%, 61-70%, 71-80%, 81-90%, 91-100%*. The majority (54.4%, n=37) of participants responded that less than 40% of their school was enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. Fifteen (22.1%) respondents answered that 41 to 70% of the student population of the school is enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. Just over 16% of participants (16.2%, n=11) stated 71 to 100% of the students are enrolled in the program. Five (7.4%) participants did not respond to this question.

For the purpose of this study, the preceding two questions were combined to create a new construct, *Education-Challenge*, for analysis. *Education-Challenge* includes the percent of students identified as a racial or ethnic minority, along with the percent of students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. Due to the sample size, the participants were separated into two categories of either *low-education-challenge-group* or *high-education-challenge-group*. *Low-education-challenge-group* includes counselors working in schools that have less than 30% of their population identified as ethnic or racial minority AND enrolled in the National School Lunch Program. A *high-education-challenge-group* includes school counselors working in schools with over 30% identified in these two categories. With the participants separated into these two categories, approximately one half of the participants fell into each category, with 45.6% (n=31) in the *low-education-challenge-group* and the rest (48.5%, n=33) in the *high-education-challenge-group*. Four (5.9%) participants did not respond to this question.

A second construct used for analysis in this chapter is based on the school's academic performance. Participants were asked to identify whether or not their school made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 2012-2013 school year. This construct was separated into two categories as well, *made-AYP-group* or *did-not-make-AYP-group*. Eleven participants (16.2%) did not answer this question. Of those who did answer 32 (47.1%) answered that their school made AYP for the 2012-2013 school year, while the rest (36.8%, n=25) said their school did not make AYP.

## 4.2 OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions to end the survey in an attempt to allow participants a chance to provide further insight into their perceptions. Open-ended questions were designed in a way to hopefully provide participants with the opportunity to share their feelings and personal experiences regarding high-stakes testing. This would give them the opportunity to expand on information asked in close-ended questions, or provide responses that were unique based on perceptions counselors have on the effects of high-stakes testing. Respondents were asked to consider the areas of principal, teacher, student, and parent relationships; focus on student achievement, motivation, available time to meet with students, morale, discipline referrals, attendance, and counseling time spent on students dealing with stress and test anxiety. The table in Appendix M shows the frequency of the responses, after the responses were coded. Responses were coded to identify common themes based on the data gathered using conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Almost one-third (32.4%, n=22) of the participants did not answer this question. Six negative themes emerged in the open-ended responses. Twenty-two percent (n=15) of participants stated testing time makes it harder to counsel students when there is an issue. Four (5.9%) respondents reported more students experience stress and test anxiety, seven (10.3%) stated personal relationships and building morale declined, two (2.9%) stated focus on student achievement negatively impacts the school environment, two (2.9%) stated teachers are more stressed because of high-stakes testing. Finally, two (2.9%) reported teachers are reluctant to allow students to leave their classroom to receive counseling services due to the pressure on the teacher to prepare their students for high-stakes testing. Three positive themes emerged in the written responses to this question. Two participants (2.9%) reported student attendance

improves during testing time, two (2.9%) reported student achievement is easier to monitor because of the high-stakes tests administered, and one (1.5%) respondent wrote that focus on student achievement positively impacts student knowledge and performance.

Several counselor responses either did not fit into a theme, or wrote a response that warrants further exploration. Two positive responses given by counselors focused on making improvements for the school. One counselor perceived spending more time working with minority students and trying to improve their test scores in an effort to improve academic performance. Another counselor felt the relationship with the principal improved drastically because of the amount of time spent together as a team to try and improve test results. Even though the question asked to provide how testing had made positive changes, one counselor used the open space of this question to provide a negative view of testing. The counselor stated, "we've seen a drastic increase in social and emotional needs over the last five years; increased anxiety, depression, drug, and alcohol concerns. All of which impact high-stakes exams and post-secondary opportunities."

One of the final questions on the survey was an open-ended question asking participants what was the most positive change that occurred because of high-stakes testing. Responses were coded with several themes emerging; a table containing the information is located in Appendix N. Thirty-five (51.5%) participants did not respond to the question. The three most common responses for positive changes that occurred, provided by a total of 16 (23.5%) counselors taking the survey, was student motivation increased (8.8%, n=6), testing helps put the focus on student achievement (8.8%, n=6), and attendance and student effort increased due to high-stakes testing (5.9%, n=4). Although the question asked for positive changes from high-stakes testing 7 (10.3%) participants gave a way to try to improve testing, indicating they think testing is

negative in nature. Two (2.9%) wrote students should get more information about the impact one single test has on their future, two (2.9%) answered the government should eliminate the importance the tests carry, and two (2.9%) others answered that teachers and administrators should have more input when developing the tests used.

Although all responses were coded and put into a category based on a theme, several responses were unique enough they were not categorized. One counselor remarked "progress and improvement needs to be recognized more than just numbers and benchmarks." Another answered, "teachers and administrators should have more input in testing decisions. And, counselors should work on changing the counseling curriculum to promote skills needed for testing, specifically at the high school level."

The final survey question was an open-ended question that asked participants if there was anything they wanted to add that was not covered in the survey. Several participants responded with insightful information. One respondent thought it was important to conduct assessments to assess knowledge acquisition; however, putting a premium on one time exams created unrealistic expectations and projections for the future of the test-taker. "Research has shown that one test on any given day is not a definitive indicator of success but, rather, one source of data to consider. In addition to the information gathered in this survey, it might be interesting to determine how much teaching time and tax money is consumed when administering these exams."

A second respondent concurred with this thought believing that testing is important, but wished there was a way to test all of the different types of learning, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. "The tests used are only one form of assessment and I wish there were other ways students can show what they have learned." Two other counselors took a much more cynical look at testing. One of the counselors wrote the focus on this one type of assessment is hurting

education because “education is not educating the whole child due to the emphasis on teaching to the test.” Another stated the tests used are biased and not a good indicator of future performance and the only thing they are good for is telling school administrators if a student can obtain a diploma, and make money “for the companies who write, print, and score the tests.” A final respondent was concerned about the impact testing has on counselors, stating that caseloads are much too large and contact and rapport with students suffers because of the demands testing puts on non-counseling activities.

## 5.0 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following data represent questions in the survey designed to address research question one, **how do school counselors perceive the impact of high-stakes testing on their role?**

In an open-ended question on the survey, only seven (10.2%) of the 68 participants said they were not involved in the testing process. Several survey questions asked respondents to estimate the amount of time they spend on certain counseling activities and if this time is a change from when they began working as a counselor. Almost half of the participants said they spend more time working with school administrators now than when they began working as a counselor to plan for school improvement. They estimate spending between one and five hours per week in these meetings. A difference occurred between the *high-education-challenge-group* and *low-education-challenge-group* in this question, with more *high-education-challenge-group* participants stating they do not meet with school administrators to plan for school improvement. A difference existed between the *low-education-challenge-group* and *high-education-challenge-group* with the number of respondents who do not spend any time talking with parents about high-stakes tests; more respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* said they do not talk to parents about testing than those in the *low-education-challenge-group*. Two-thirds (64.7%) of the respondents reported the time available to meet with students changed for the worse, and their responsibilities as a counselor have changed, due to testing during their career.

Survey questions asked counselors to estimate the amount of time spent on classroom and small group lessons and individual counseling sessions that focus on test preparation skills, college and career readiness goals, personal and social skills, or academic goals. A difference existed in the *AYP-Status* groups for small group lessons focusing on either academic goals, or test preparation skills. One quarter of the respondents in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* said they do not conduct small group lessons focusing on test preparation skills, as well as small group lessons focusing on academic goals that are not test preparation based. In comparison, the majority of respondents in the *made-AYP-group* stated they spend more time.

Participants were asked to describe their role in the testing process at their school. This was an open-ended question. Responses were coded into three general categories. More than half (52.9%, n=36) of the participants identified themselves as the testing coordinator for their school. Approximately one-third (36.8%, n=25) identified himself or herself as someone who assists the test coordinator and proctors the assessments. Only seven of the 68 participants said they had no involvement in the testing process.

## 5.1 INVOLVEMENT IN COUNSELING ACTIVITIES: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants were asked about their involvement in a variety of different counseling activities. The questions were broken into two parts. The first part asked the participants the amount of time spent on each activity during a typical week. The options were: *I don't engage in this activity, 1 hour or less, 1 to 5 hours, 6 to 20 hours, and 21 hours or more*. The second part of the question asked participants to indicate whether the amount of time spent on the activity

changed from when they began working as a school counselor to now. The options were: *I don't engage in this activity, less time now, about the same amount of time, and more time now*.

**Table 4.** Involvement in counseling related activities

| | I don't engage in this activity | | 1 hour or less | | 1 to 5 hours | | 6 to 20 hours | | 21 hours or more | | Less time now | | About the same amount of time | | More time now | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Reviewing student assessment results | 7 | 10.3 | 41 | 60.3 | 16 | 23.5 | 2 | 2.9 | 1 | 1.5 | 4 | 6.7 | 27 | 45.0 | 29 | 48.3 |
| Talking with parents about high-stakes tests | 12 | 17.6 | 41 | 60.3 | 12 | 17.6 | 2 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7.3 | 25 | 45.5 | 26 | 47.2 |
| Meeting with adminstrators to plan for school improvement | 12 | 17.6 | 25 | 36.8 | 28 | 41.2 | 1 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7.4 | 22 | 40.7 | 28 | 51.9 |
| Acting as test coordinator/proctor | 12 | 17.6 | 20 | 29.4 | 18 | 26.5 | 8 | 11.8 | 8 | 11.8 | 8 | 14.8 | 20 | 37.0 | 26 | 48.1 |
| Offering assistance outside of school hours | 53 | 77.9 | 8 | 11.9 | 4 | 5.9 | 1 | 1.5 | 1 | 1.5 | 3 | 21.4 | 8 | 57.1 | 3 | 21.4 |
| Revising the counseling curriculum due to high-stakes testing | 28 | 41.2 | 26 | 38.2 | 12 | 17.6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7.7 | 20 | 51.3 | 16 | 41.0 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

The most participants indicated they spent one hour or less during a typical week reviewing student assessment results (60.3%, n=41), talking with parents about high-stakes tests (60.3%, n=41), and acting as a test coordinator/proctor (29.4%, n=20). Almost half (41.2%, n=28) of the participants said they meet with school administrators to plan for school improvement between one and five hours each week, while the majority (77.9%, n=53) said they do not offer assistance outside of school hours for students who are not proficient on state assessments. Just under half (41.2%, n=28) of the participants said they do not spend any time revising the counseling curriculum due to high-stakes testing (See Table 4).

The most participants responded that they are spending more time now than when they started working as a school counselor reviewing assessment results with students (48.3%, n=29), talking with parents about high-stakes testing (47.2%, n=26), meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement (51.9%, n=28), and acting as test coordinator or proctor (48.1%, n=26). Just over one half of the participants who offered assistance outside of school hours (57.1%, n=8) and revised the counseling curriculum (51.3%, n=20) said they spent the same amount of time on these activities now as when they started working as a counselor.

Cross-tabulations were conducted on the general counseling activities that counselors complete. The data were cross-tabulated based on the three created constructs of *Education-Challenge* (the racial and ethnic minority population of the school with the percent of students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program), academic performance based on whether the school made AYP or not, and the number of years working as a school counselor. The data were cross-tabulated to represent *low-education-challenge-group* and *high-education-challenge-group*, for the *made-AYP-group* and the *did-not-make-AYP-group*, and for *prior-to-NCLB-group* and *after-NCLB-group.* Answer choices for the activities asking how the amount of time spent completing each activity has changed since the beginning of the respondents career as a school counselor were: *do not engage, spend less time now, about the same amount of time, and more time now*.

**Table 5.** Reviewing student assessment results

| | Reviewing Student Assessment Results | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 1 | 3.2 | 2 | 6.4 | 10 | 32.3 | 18 | 58.1 |
| High Education Challenge | 4 | 12.1 | 2 | 6.1 | 16 | 48.5 | 11 | 33.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 1 | 3.1 | 2 | 6.3 | 14 | 43.4 | 15 | 46.9 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 1 | 4.0 | 2 | 8.0 | 10 | 40.0 | 12 | 48.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 9.1 | 5 | 2.3 | 15 | 68.2 |
| After NCLB | 2 | 4.4 | 4 | 8.9 | 23 | 51.1 | 15 | 33.3 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

In table 5, Cross-tabulation results show that over one half (58.1%, n=18) of the respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* spent more time reviewing student assessment results now than when respondents began their career, while a similar number of participants (48.5%, n=16) in the *high-education-challenge-group* spent about the same amount of time as before on this activity. Both the respondents from the *made-AYP-group* (46.9%, n=15) and those from the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (48.0%, n=12) said they spent more time reviewing student assessment results now than when they began their career. A majority of respondents in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (68.2%, n=15) stated they are spending more time now than at the beginning of their career, whereas only 33.3% (n=15) of the respondents in the *after-NCLB-group* stated they are spending more time now. A majority of the respondents (51.1%, n=23) stated they are spending about the same amount of time reviewing student assessment results. Of those in the prior-to-NCLB-group, only 10% of the respondents are spending less time or about the same time reviewing student assessment results. This change may indicate a shifting in duties

for school counselors, with more emphasis placed on the assessment results. An exploration into how the school counselors are using these results once they review them could be worth exploring. Since more time is spent reviewing results, hopefully the counselors are able to use the results to implement programs that are beneficial for students.

**Table 6.** Talking with parents about high-stakes testing

| | Talking with Parents About High-Stakes Testing | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 1 | 3.3 | 2 | 6.7 | 13 | 43.3 | 14 | 46.7 |
| High Education Challenge | 6 | 18.8 | 2 | 6.3 | 12 | 37.5 | 12 | 37.5 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 3 | 9.7 | 2 | 6.4 | 13 | 41.9 | 13 | 41.9 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 1 | 4.0 | 2 | 8.0 | 11 | 44.0 | 11 | 44.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 9.1 | 9 | 40.9 | 11 | 50.0 |
| After NCLB | 7 | 15.6 | 4 | 8.9 | 18 | 40.0 | 16 | 35.6 |

Gray scale shading denotes significant information found within the table.

In table 6 a difference was observed in the amount of time counselors in the *low-education-challenge-group* spent talking with parents about high-stakes testing compared to those in the *high-education-challenge-group*. There was only one respondent (3.3%) in the *low-education-challenge-group* who said he or she did not engage in this activity, whereas almost 20% (18.8%, n=6) of respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* said they do not participate in this activity. Almost half (46.7%, n=14) of the respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* stated they are spending more time now talking with parents about high-stakes testing. The most respondents in both categories of *AYP-Status* stated they spent either the same amount of time or more time now talking with parents about testing than at the beginning of their school counseling career. The *made-AYP-group* had 13 (41.9%) respondents and the *did-not-*

*make-AYP-group* had 11 (44.0%) participants state they spent about the same amount of time or more time now. Exactly half of the participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (50.0%, n=11) said they spent more time talking with parents about high-stakes testing than when they began their career. This change can be expected in this group since they began their career prior to NCLB being enacted, when there was not as much importance placed on the results of testing. Most groups, especially the *prior-to-NCLB-group*, experiencing an increase in time spent talking with parents coincides with previous research that showed one way school counselors may help benefit students is by working with parents to interpret data and explain the intentions of the high-stakes exams (Ruff, 2011).

An interesting difference to note existed between the *Education-Challenge* and *Years-Working* groups. Of the respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* only 3.3% did not talk with parents regarding high-stakes testing; whereas, 18.8% of respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* said they do not talk to parents regarding high-stakes testing. All of the participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* state they do not engage in talking to parents about high-stakes testing, whereas almost 16% of the *after-NCLB-group* do not engage in this activity. It may be interesting to explore the reasons behind this difference in the *Education-Challenge* group. Some possibilities for exploration could be whether these counselors in the *high-education-challenge-group* do not engage in this activity because they are unwilling to talk to the parents or because the parents are unwilling to talk to the counselors. Do the counselors attempt to contact the parents, but do not have a reliable way (changing phone numbers, phones disconnected, blocked numbers) or are parents avoiding attempts from the school counselors? Are the counselors at these schools busy working in other areas so they do not have time to contact the parents? If they do make contact, do they discuss high-stakes tests results or do they

discuss other concerns. Due to the differences observed between the *education-challenge* groups further exploration could taking a deeper look into these differences.

**Table 7.** Meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement

| | Meeting with Administration to Plan for School Improvement | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 2 | 6.7 | 2 | 6.7 | 12 | 40.0 | 14 | 46.7 |
| High Education Challenge | 7 | 22.1 | 3 | 9.4 | 9 | 28.1 | 13 | 40.6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 2 | 6.3 | 2 | 6.3 | 16 | 50.0 | 12 | 37.5 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.8 | 2 | 6.3 | 3 | 12.5 | 14 | 58.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 2 | 9.1 | 3 | 13.6 | 6 | 27.3 | 11 | 50.0 |
| After NCLB | 7 | 16.3 | 2 | 4.4 | 17 | 39.5 | 17 | 39.5 |

Gray scale shading denotes significant information found within the table.

The most respondents for both *Education-Challenge* groups, at almost one half (46.7%, n=14: 40.6%, n=13) of the responses, say they spent more time meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement now then at the beginning of their career. However, only two respondents (6.7%) in the *low-education-challenge-group* said they did not engage in this activity in comparison to seven (22.1%) respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group*. Exactly one half of the total respondents (50.0%, n=16) in the *made-AYP-group* said they spent the same amount of time meeting with school administrators; whereas, over half (58.3%, n=14) of the respondents in the *did-not-make-AYP-group*, said they spent more time meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement now (See Table 7). Half (n=11) of the respondents who began working prior to NCLB stated they spend more time now meeting with school administrators than at the beginning of their career. The highest number of

respondents (39.5%, n-17) in the *After-NCLB-group* stated they spend more time now, or spend the same amount of time now.

Differences existed in the subgroups of *Education-Challenge* and *AYP-Status* for the amount of time spent meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement. Although a similar number of respondents in both *Education-Challenge* groups spend more time meeting with administrators now than at the beginning of their career, a difference existed between the *low-education-challenge-group* and the *high-education-challenge-group* in the number of counselors who do not meet with administrators to plan for school improvement. Only 6.7% of respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* said they do not meet with administrators, but 22.1% of the respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* stated they do not meet with administrators to plan for school improvement. A similar difference exists between the *AYP-Status* groups as well, with more counselors stating they do not engage in meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement. To what extent do these meetings factor into differences into high-stakes test results?

**Table 8.** Acting as test coordinator

| | Acting as Test Coordinator | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 3 | 10.3 | 3 | 10.3 | 10 | 34.5 | 13 | 40.6 |
| High Education Challenge | 4 | 12.5 | 5 | 15.6 | 10 | 31.3 | 13 | 40.6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 2 | 6.3 | 4 | 12.5 | 14 | 43.8 | 12 | 37.5 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 2 | 8.3 | 3 | 12.5 | 6 | 25.0 | 13 | 54.2 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 18.2 | 6 | 27.3 | 12 | 54.5 |
| After NCLB | 8 | 18.6 | 5 | 11.6 | 15 | 34.9 | 15 | 34.9 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

In table 8, a cross-tabulation was conducted on those acting as the test coordinator in their school with the *Education-Challenge, AYP-Status,* and *Years-Working* groups. Exactly the same number of respondents in both the *low-education-challenge-group* and *high-education-challenge-group*, at approximately two fifths (40.6%, n=13), responded they spent more time acting as a test coordinator now than when they began working as a school counselor. Thirteen respondents (54.2%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* answered they spent more time acting as a test coordinator now than when they began working as a school counselor. A similar percentage (43.8%, n=14) in the *made-AYP-group* stated they spend the same amount of time acting as test coordinator as at the beginning of their career. Over half (54.5%, n=12) of the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated they are spending more time now. Fifteen (34.9%) of participants in the *after-NCLB-group* stated they are spending about the same amount of time, or more time acting as test coordinator.

The increase in time spent acting, as test coordinator should not be surprising, since the reliance on high-stakes testing has increased (Amrein & Berliner 2003; Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Hoffman, et al., 2001; Katsiyannis, et al., 2007). The role of the test coordinator may become the counselor's responsibility because of the difficulty the counselors have defining their role (Border, 2002; Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006). Since school counselors are not responsible for overseeing students at all times, like a classroom teacher, new responsibilities, or responsibilities that do not have a specific person assigned to be in charge, often fall to the counselor. That is why ASCA created the national model, in an attempt to define the school counselor's role, so they do not get random responsibilities added to their day (American School Counselor Association, 2005). An interesting difference to note existed in the *Years-Working* group, with zero participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stating they act as test coordinator,

whereas 18.6% of the *after-NCLB-group* does not engage. This may signal the importance administrators place on the role of test coordinator. When a school counselor has been in the position for an extended amount of time they are trusted with the responsibilities of test coordinator. When the counselor is newer to the position they are not given the responsibility; the responsibility may be given to a longer tenured counselor or the administrator may decide to assume the responsibility.

**Table 9.** Offering after school assistance

| | Offering Assistance After School for Low Achieving Students | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 23 | 74.2 | 1 | 3.2 | 5 | 16.1 | 2 | 6.5 |
| High Education Challenge | 26 | 81.2 | 2 | 6.3 | 3 | 9.4 | 1 | 3.1 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 25 | 78.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 15.6 | 2 | 6.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 18 | 72.0 | 3 | 12.0 | 3 | 12.0 | 1 | 7.8 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 14 | 63.6 | 2 | 9.1 | 5 | 22.7 | 1 | 4.5 |
| After NCLB | 31 | 68.9 | 1 | 2.2 | 11 | 24.4 | 2 | 4.4 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Table 9 reports the cross-tabulation data for the change in the amount of time counselors spent offering assistance outside of school for low achieving students. A majority of the respondents in all six groups (74.2%, n=23) in the low-e*ducation-challenge-group,* (81.2%, n=26) in *the high-education-challenge-group,* (78.1%, n=25) in the *made-AYP-group,* (72.0%, n=18) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group,* (63.6%, n=14) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group,* and (68.9%, n=31) in the *after-NCLB-group* did not engage in this activity.

The results of the cross-tabulation analysis for the question asking counselors how revising the counseling curriculum due to high-stakes testing has changed from when they began

working as a counselor are reported in table 10. The largest number of participants in the *Education-Challenge* groups, the *made-AYP-group,* and the *after-NCLB-group* responded that they spent about the same amount of time now as when they began their career. Ten respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* (35.7%) and *high-education-challenge-group* (34.5%) responded that the time spent is the same. Fourteen (46.7%) respondents in the *made-AYP-group* and 17 (38.6%) in the *after-NCLB-group* stated they spent the same amount of time revising the counseling curriculum now as when they began their career. The *did-not-make-AYP-group* (33.3%, n=8) and the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (42.9%, n=9) stated they spent more time now revising the curriculum due to high-stakes testing than when they began their career.

**Table 10. Revising the counseling curriculum**

| | Revising Curriculum due to High-Stakes Testing | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 9 | 32.1 | 1 | 35.7 | 10 | 35.7 | 8 | 28.6 |
| High Education Challenge | 9 | 31.0 | 2 | 10.5 | 10 | 34.5 | 8 | 27.6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 8 | 26.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 14 | 46.7 | 8 | 26.7 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 6 | 25.0 | 2 | 82.8 | 6 | 25.0 | 8 | 33.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 4 | 19.0 | 1 | 4.8 | 7 | 33.3 | 9 | 42.9 |
| After NCLB | 14 | 31.8 | 2 | 4.5 | 17 | 38.6 | 11 | 25.0 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

In appendix E is a table, which contains information on frequency results of two survey questions asking participants about changes seen in their role with the use of high-stakes testing. Both questions asked respondents to rate if the item *changed for the worse, did not change, or changed for the better*. Results for how the focus on student achievement changed since the beginning of their career, shows that just over one half (52.9%, n=36) of the respondents

reported a change did not occur in the amount of focus given to student achievement in their school, almost one-third (29.4%, n= 20) stated it changed for the better, and twelve (17.6%) stated it changed for the worse. A majority (64.7%, n=44) of respondents stated the time available to meet with students changed for the worse since they began working as a school counselor, while one-third (33.8%, n=23) stated it did not change, and one (1.5%) stated it changed for the better.

**Table 11.** Counselor's role involving students

| | Focus on Student Achievement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Changed for the Worse | | Did Not Change | | Changed for the Better | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 5 | 16.1 | 18 | 58.1 | 8 | 25.8 |
| High Education Challenge | 5 | 15.2 | 16 | 48.5 | 12 | 36.4 |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 16 | 50.0 | 10 | 31.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 4 | 16.0 | 13 | 52.0 | 8 | 32.0 |
| Prior to NCLB | 1 | 4.3 | 15 | 65.2 | 7 | 28.9 |
| After NCLB | 11 | 24.4 | 21 | 46.7 | 13 | 30.4 |
| | Time Available to Counsel Students | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 22 | 71.0 | 8 | 25.8 | 1 | 3.2 |
| High Education Challenge | 19 | 57.6 | 14 | 42.4 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Made AYP | 23 | 71.9 | 9 | 28.1 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 17 | 68.0 | 8 | 32.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Prior to NCLB | 18 | 78.3 | 4 | 17.4 | 1 | 4.3 |
| After NCLB | 26 | 57.8 | 19 | 42.2 | 0 | 0.0 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Completing a cross-tabulation on the variables of focus on student achievement and time available to counsel students, and comparing both to the three groups in *Education-Challenge, AYP-Status*, and *Years-Working* revealed similar findings for the groups (See Table 11). All six groups had the most respondents answer that the focus on student achievement did not change. The majority of respondents stated there was no change in the focus on student achievement in

the *low-education-challenge-group* (58.1%, n=18), the *made-AYP-group* (50.0%, n=16), the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (52.0%, n=13), and the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (65.2%, n=15), while almost one half of the respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* (48.5%, n=16) and *after-NCLB-group* (46.7%, n=21) stated the focus on student achievement did not change. The majority of respondents in all six groups perceived the time available to counsel students changed for the worse since the beginning of their career. The *low-education-challenge-group* (71.0%, n=22), the *high-education-challenge-group* (57.6%, n=19), the *made-AYP-group* (71.9%, n=23), the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (68.0%, n=17), the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (78.3%, n=18), and *after-NCLB-group* (57.8%, n=26) stated they have less time to counsel students.

None of the participants in the *high-education-challenge-group, made-AYP-group, did-not-make-AYP-group,* and *after-NCLB-group*, and only one participant in the l*ow-education-challenge-group* and *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated the time available to counsel students changed for the better. It may be of interest to explore the reasons behind why counselors stated time available to counsel students has changed for the worse. What impact did high-stakes testing play on the time available to counsel students? Has this lack of time to counsel students affected the personal and emotional development of students in a negative way? This change may indicate an erosion in the school counselor's role, and possibly the value placed in the position. If a counselor's primary responsibility is to work with students, and the available time to meet with students is changing for the worse, this may bring about a change in how the counselor's role and responsibilities are defined, especially if there are no plans to change NCLB or the high-stakes tests used to measure accountability. School counseling training programs, the ASCA National Model, and current school counselors may need to shift what they define as their primary purpose.

## 5.2 CLASSROOM LESSONS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.2.1 Classroom Lessons: Results

The following section describes the analysis of four research questions asking respondents the amount of time spent (*I don't engage, 1 hour or less, 1 to 5 hours, 6 to 20 hours, and 21 hours or more*), along with the change experienced (*less time now, about the same amount of time, more time now*) in four different areas of classroom guidance lessons school counselors may normally conduct. The four lesson areas involved: test preparation skills, college and career readiness goals, personal/social skills, and academic goals that are not test preparation based.

**Table 12.** Time engaged and change experienced in classroom guidance lessons

| | I don't engage in this activity | | 1 hour or less | | 1 to 5 hours | | 6 to 20 hours | | 21 hours or more | | Less time now | | About the same amount of time | | More time now | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Classroom lessons involving test preparation skills | 27 | 39.7 | 26 | 38.2 | 12 | 17.6 | 1 | 1.5 | 1 | 1.5 | 4 | 10.0 | 26 | 65.0 | 10 | 25.0 |
| Classroom lessons involving college and career readiness goals | 16 | 23.5 | 21 | 30.9 | 26 | 38.2 | 3 | 4.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 13.5 | 25 | 48.1 | 20 | 38.5 |
| Classroom lessons involving personal/social skills | 10 | 14.7 | 19 | 27.9 | 26 | 38.2 | 10 | 14.7 | 1 | 1.5 | 7 | 12.5 | 35 | 62.5 | 14 | 25.0 |
| Classroom lessons involving academic goals that are not test preparation based | 16 | 23.5 | 19 | 27.9 | 25 | 36.7 | 6 | 8.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 10.0 | 30 | 60.0 | 15 | 30.0 |

Gray scale shading denotes significant information found within the table.

Table 12 contains frequency distribution data for the four lesson types. The most counselors reported spending between 1 to 5 hours in a typical week conducting: classroom lessons involving college and career readiness goals (38.2%, n=26), classroom lessons involving personal and social skills (38.2%, n=26), and classroom lessons involving academic goals that

are not test preparation based (36.7%, n=25). For classroom lessons involving test preparation skills 26 (38.2%) counselors responded that they spent one hour or less in a typical week on this activity. Respondents stated they spend the same amount of time on all four-classroom guidance lessons (65.0%, n=26 – test preparation skills; 48.1%, n=25 – college and career readiness; 62.5%, n=35 – personal/social skills; 60.0%, n=30 – academic goals that are not test preparation based) throughout their career.

Cross-tabulation analysis was conducted for the four classroom lessons with the two *Education-Challenge* groups, two *AYP-Status* groups, and two *Years-Working* groups. The cross-tabulated table (See Table 13) shows similar trends for all four groups. Each group, the *low-education-challenge-group, high-education-challenge-group, made-AYP-group, did-not-make-AYP-group, prior-to-NCLB-group,* and *after-NCLB-group* reported the amount of time spent on all four classroom guidance lessons is about the same amount of time now as when they began their career.

**Table 13.** Cross-tabulations of time engaged and change experienced in classroom guidance lessons

| | Classroom Lessons Involving Test Preparation | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 9 | 30.0 | 2 | 6.7 | 13 | 43.3 | 6 | 20.0 |
| High Education Challenge | 11 | 36.7 | 2 | 6.7 | 13 | 43.3 | 4 | 13.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 9 | 28.1 | 1 | 3.1 | 16 | 50.0 | 6 | 18.8 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 8 | 32.0 | 3 | 12.0 | 10 | 40.0 | 4 | 16.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 7 | 31.8 | 1 | 4.5 | 9 | 40.9 | 5 | 22.7 |
| After NCLB | 14 | 31.8 | 4 | 9.1 | 19 | 43.2 | 7 | 15.9 |

| | Classroom Lessons Involving Career and College Preparedness | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 9 | 29.0 | 3 | 9.7 | 12 | 38.7 | 7 | 22.6 |
| High Education Challenge | 5 | 15.2 | 3 | 9.1 | 13 | 39.4 | 12 | 36.4 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 5 | 16.7 | 2 | 6.7 | 13 | 43.3 | 10 | 33.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.0 | 3 | 12.0 | 10 | 40.0 | 7 | 28.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 3 | 13.6 | 1 | 4.5 | 11 | 50.0 | 7 | 31.8 |
| After NCLB | 8 | 17.8 | 3 | 6.7 | 19 | 42.2 | 15 | 33.3 |

| | Classroom Lessons Involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 5 | 16.1 | 2 | 6.5 | 17 | 54.8 | 7 | 22.6 |
| High Education Challenge | 3 | 9.3 | 5 | 15.6 | 17 | 53.1 | 7 | 21.9 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 4 | 12.5 | 3 | 9.4 | 18 | 56.3 | 7 | 21.9 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 3 | 12.0 | 4 | 16.0 | 14 | 56.0 | 4 | 16.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 2 | 9.1 | 3 | 13.6 | 12 | 54.4 | 5 | 22.7 |
| After NCLB | 7 | 15.9 | 5 | 11.4 | 23 | 52.3 | 9 | 20.5 |

| | Classroom Lessons Involving Academic Goals | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 7 | 22.6 | 1 | 3.2 | 17 | 54.8 | 6 | 19.4 |
| High Education Challenge | 7 | 22.6 | 4 | 12.9 | 13 | 41.9 | 7 | 22.6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 2 | 6.3 | 17 | 53.1 | 7 | 21.9 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 7 | 29.2 | 3 | 12.5 | 10 | 41.7 | 4 | 16.7 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 5 | 22.7 | 1 | 4.5 | 10 | 45.5 | 6 | 24.2 |
| After NCLB | 10 | 23.3 | 4 | 9.3 | 20 | 46.5 | 9 | 20.9 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

### 5.2.2 Classroom Lessons: Discussion

The goal of most comprehensive school counseling programs that follow ASCA standards is to take a proactive approach to counseling, running classroom guidance lessons, small group lessons, and individual counseling sessions to equip students with the necessary skills to help eliminate barriers to learning and socially, emotionally, and academically prepare students for post-secondary success (American School Counselor Association, 2005). As stated earlier in the chapter, school counselors in this study stated the biggest change they noticed with the use of high-stakes testing was the amount of time available to meet with students. With two-thirds (64.7%) of the counselors stating time available to meet with students has changed for the worse since the beginning of their career, there may be a noticeable difference in the time counselors spend conducting classroom lessons, small group lessons, or individual counseling sessions; however, this was not the case in most areas studied. School counselors in this study spend about the same amount of time now as at the beginning of their career to conduct classroom and small group lessons and individual counseling sessions in the four areas explored (test preparation skills, college and career readiness goals, personal and social skills, and academic goals). If the counselors surveyed have less time to meet with students, the lost time does not appear to have come from any of these areas.

Previous research found there were fewer opportunities to conduct classroom and small group lessons and individual counseling sessions because teachers were not willing to give up class time for guidance lessons or allow students out of class for small group or individual counseling (Davis, 2006). Other studies found counselors believe high-stakes testing negatively influences their ability to implement a comprehensive guidance program and deliver appropriate counseling services to students (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Ruff, 2011). This is an important

area to consider since these services provided by counselors have a positive impact on student behavior and academic performance (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Ruff, 2011).

The survey was designed to explore the amount of time the counselors spend conducting lessons on test preparation skills, college and career readiness goals, personal and social skills, and academic goals that are not test preparation based, as well as if the time spent is different than when they began working as a counselor. Based on the literature, a complaint by detractors of high-stakes testing is a narrowing of the curriculum that occurs with the use of high-stakes testing; basically, believing that teachers focus their lessons on tested subjects, specifically on the content in the assessments (Nichols & Berliner, 2005; Yeh, 2005). Teachers may spend more time on tested subject areas than non-tested subject areas. If testing has narrowed the focus for counselors, as Nichols and Berliner (2005), and Yeh (2005) show that it does for teachers, the school counselors in this study might consider focusing most of their counseling lessons on test preparation skills, and spend less time in the other areas of general academic goals, personal and social skills, and college and career readiness goals. However, this was not the case. Results from this study suggest high-stakes testing does not change the way counselors conduct classroom lessons. In fact, counselors actually spend less time during a typical week conducting classroom lessons centered on test preparation skills than in the other three areas. Over one-third of the counselors spend between 1 to 5 hours in a typical week conducting classroom lessons involving college and career readiness goals (38.2%), personal and social skills (38.2%), and academic goals that are not test preparation based (36.7%). Whereas, over one-third stated they spend one hour or less conducting classroom lessons involving test preparation skills (38.2%). This difference shows the school counselors surveyed are not spending as much time on lessons involving test preparation skills; instead they focus the time spent in the classroom in other areas.

It may be interesting to explore why this difference exists. Since high-stakes testing has been in place for so long, the use of tests, and the use of test taking strategies may be the new normal for the education system. The school counselor may not need to conduct a special classroom lesson to teach students the best way to take a standardized (normally multiple choice with bubbled in choices) test. Classroom teachers may now use test preparation skills as part of their daily lessons, therefore they do not need the school counselor to teach a special lesson on test preparation skills. Another consideration may be the length of time that high-stakes testing has been in place. With the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act all current school students have spent their entire schooling having to take high-stakes tests. Are the counselors not focusing on these lessons because the students they counsel are so versed in taking the high-stakes tests that they feel the students do not need test preparation skills taught to them? At the very least, students are now proficient at taking multiple-choice tests, and are highly skilled at bubbling in answer choices.

When separated into the different subgroups, the time spent on all four-classroom guidance lessons is similar to when they began working as a school counselor. There were no noticeable differences observed in the subgroups of *Education-Challenge, AYP-Status, or Years-Working*; the most participants in each group stated they spend the same amount of time on all four areas of counseling now as to when they began working as a counselor.

## 5.3 SMALL GROUP LESSONS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.3.1 Small Group Lessons: Results

The following section describes the analysis of four research questions asking respondents the amount of time spent (*I don't engage, 1 hour or less, 1 to 5 hours, 6 to 20 hours, and 21 hours or more*), along with the change experienced (*less time now*, *about the same amount of time*, *more time now*), in four different areas of small group counseling lessons school counselors may normally conduct. The four lesson areas involve: test preparation skills, college and career readiness goals, personal and social skills, and academic goals that are not test preparation based.

**Table 14.** Time engaged and change experienced in small group lessons

| | I don't engage in this activity | | 1 hour or less | | 1 to 5 hours | | 6 to 20 hours | | 21 hours or more | | Less time now | | About the same amount of time | | More time now | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Small group lessons involving test preparation skills | 38 | 55.9 | 14 | 20.6 | 12 | 17.6 | 3 | 4.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 6.9 | 21 | 72.4 | 6 | 20.7 |
| Small group lessons involving college and career readiness goals | 34 | 50.0 | 19 | 27.9 | 8 | 11.8 | 6 | 8.8 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6.1 | 21 | 63.6 | 10 | 30.3 |
| Small group lessons involving personal/social skills | 17 | 25.0 | 18 | 26.5 | 12 | 17.6 | 19 | 27.9 | 1 | 1.5 | 10 | 20.0 | 23 | 46.0 | 17 | 34.0 |
| Small group lessons involving academic goals that are not test preparation based | 26 | 38.2 | 19 | 27.9 | 12 | 17.6 | 9 | 13.2 | 1 | 1.5 | 5 | 12.2 | 29 | 70.7 | 7 | 17.1 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

At least one half of all respondents stated they do not engage in small group lessons involving test preparation skills (55.9%, n=38) or college and career readiness goals (50.0%,

n=34) as reported in table 14. Of the respondents who did complete these two different small group lessons, most answered they spend about the same amount of time on the activities as when they began working as a counselor. Twenty one respondents stated the time spent is similar for test preparation lessons (72.4%) and college and career readiness goals (63.6%). Although not as high of a percentage as the previous two examples, the largest number of respondents (38.2%, n=26) stated they do not engage in small group lessons involving academic goals that are not test preparation based. Of the respondents who did conduct this small group lesson, a large majority (70.7%, n=29) perceive they spend the same amount of time now as when they began working as a counselor. Small group lessons pertaining to personal and social skills is the only small group lesson of the four different lessons participants responded to that did not have the largest group of respondents fall in the *do not engage* category. Nineteen (27.9%) counselors responded they conducted between six to 20 hours of small group lessons focusing on personal and social skills during a typical work week, with 23 respondents (46.0%) believing they spent about the same amount of time in this area as when they began working as a school counselor.

Table 15 contains information from the cross-tabulation analysis conducted on the four different small group activities that counselors may conduct, separated by *Education-Challenge* and *AYP-Status*.

**Table 15.** Cross-tabulations of time engaged and change experienced in small group lessons

| | Group Lessons Involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 15 | 48.4 | 1 | 3.2 | 11 | 35.5 | 4 | 12.9 |
| High Education Challenge | 19 | 59.4 | 1 | 3.1 | 10 | 31.3 | 2 | 6.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 14 | 43.8 | 1 | 3.1 | 12 | 37.5 | 5 | 15.6 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 14 | 56.0 | 1 | 4.0 | 9 | 36.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 10 | 45.5 | 1 | 4.5 | 7 | 31.8 | 4 | 18.2 |
| After NCLB | 22 | 50.0 | 2 | 4.5 | 16 | 36.4 | 4 | 9.1 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Group Lessons Involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | | | | |
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 15 | 48.4 | 1 | 3.2 | 10 | 32.3 | 5 | 16.1 |
| High Education Challenge | 15 | 46.9 | 1 | 3.1 | 11 | 34.3 | 5 | 15.6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 12 | 37.5 | 1 | 3.1 | 14 | 43.8 | 5 | 15.6 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 15 | 60.0 | 1 | 4.0 | 5 | 20.0 | 4 | 16.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 9 | 40.9 | 2 | 9.1 | 8 | 36.4 | 3 | 13.6 |
| After NCLB | 18 | 40.9 | 2 | 4.5 | 15 | 34.1 | 9 | 20.1 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Group Lessons Involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | | | | |
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 7 | 22.6 | 3 | 9.7 | 10 | 32.2 | 11 | 35.5 |
| High Education Challenge | 7 | 21.2 | 7 | 21.2 | 13 | 39.4 | 6 | 18.2 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 2 | 6.3 | 14 | 43.8 | 10 | 31.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.0 | 8 | 32.0 | 8 | 32.0 | 4 | 16.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 4 | 18.2 | 3 | 17.8 | 8 | 36.4 | 7 | 31.8 |
| After NCLB | 10 | 22.2 | 8 | 13.6 | 16 | 35.6 | 11 | 24.4 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Group Lessons Involving Academic Goals | | | | | | | |
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 11 | 35.5 | 2 | 6.5 | 14 | 45.2 | 4 | 12.9 |
| High Education Challenge | 11 | 34.4 | 3 | 9.4 | 15 | 46.9 | 3 | 9.4 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 7 | 21.9 | 2 | 6.3 | 19 | 59.4 | 4 | 12.5 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 11 | 44.0 | 3 | 12.0 | 10 | 40.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 9 | 40.9 | 2 | 9.1 | 9 | 40.9 | 2 | 9.1 |
| After NCLB | 12 | 27.3 | 4 | 9.1 | 22 | 50.0 | 6 | 13.6 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Few differences exist between the groups in several of the different small group lessons conducted by counselors; however, a difference did not exist in the largest number of respondents in the *Education-Challenge* groups, the *AYP-Status* groups, or *Years-Working* groups for small group lessons focusing on test preparation skills. Both the *low-education-challenge-group* (48.4%, n=15) and the *high-education-challenge-group* (59.4%, n=19) had the highest number of respondents state they do not engage in groups involving test preparation skills. Both the *made-AYP-group* (43.8%, n=14) and *did-not-make-AYP-group* (56.0%, n=14) had the highest number of respondents state they do not engage in groups involving test preparation skills. Both the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (45.5%, n=10) and the *after-NCLB-group* (50.0%, n=22) had the highest number of respondents state that they do not engage in groups involving test preparation skills.

A difference did not exist in the highest number of responses given for college and career readiness goals between the *low-education-challenge-group* (48.4%, n=15), *high-education-challenge-group* (46.9%, n=15), *prior-to-NCLB-group* (40.9%, n=9), and *after-NCLB-group* (40.9%, n=18) who said they did not engage in this activity. A difference existed for the *AYP-Status* groups, where the *made-AYP-group* had the highest number (43.8%, n=14) of respondents state they spend about the same amount of time now as at the beginning of their career, in comparison to 15 (60.0%) of those in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* who stated they do not engage in the counseling activity.

When respondents were asked about the change in the time spent on small group counseling activities pertaining to personal and social skills the *high-education-challenge-group* (39.4%, n=13), *made-AYP-group* (43.8%, n=14), *prior-to-NCLB-group* (36.4%,n = 9), and *after-NCLB-group* (50.0%, n=22) had the most respondents state they spend about the same amount of

time now as at the beginning of their career. Only one group, the *low-education-challenge-group* had the most respondents, with eleven (35.5%), state they spent more time conducting these lessons now than when they began their career as a school counselor. The *did-not-make-AYP-group's* results were more evenly spread across the four options than any of the other categories. Sixteen (64.0%) respondents were evenly split on either having less time now or about the same amount of time now.

When respondents were asked about the change in the time spent on small group counseling activities pertaining to academic goals that are not test preparation based, four of the six groups: *low-education-challenge-group* (45.2%, n=15), *high-education-challenge-group* (46.9%, n=15), *made-AYP-group* (59.4%, n=19), and *after-NCLB-group* (50.0%, n=22) had the most respondents state they spent about the same amount of time now as at the beginning of their career. Only one group, the *did-not-make-AYP-group* had the most respondents, with eleven (44.0%), state they did not engage in small group lessons pertaining to teaching academic goals that are not test preparation based. The *prior-to-NCLB-group's* results were more evenly spread across the four options than any of the other categories. Eighteen (81.8%) respondents were evenly split on either having less time now or about the same amount of time now.

### 5.3.2 Small Group Lessons: Discussion

Similar results were seen for the small group lessons that counselors conduct with their students when compared to the classroom lessons previously reported. In fact, more than half (55.9%) of the counselors surveyed stated they do not engage in small group lessons focusing on test preparation skills. On the other hand, the largest number of respondents, at almost one-third (27.9%), stated they spend between six and 20 hours per week conducting small group lessons

focusing on personal and social skills. This focus on personal and social skills, in comparison to what seems to be a lack of focus on test preparation skills, contradicts some of the research that found high-stakes testing is occurring to the detriment of the emotional and psychological development of the students since these lessons may focus on developing personal and social skills (Brown et al., 2004; Harlen, 2005; Zeidner, 1998). At the very least, these counseling activities may offset some of the negative effects high-stakes testing has, based on research that found students are negatively impacted emotionally by high-stakes testing (Brown et al., 2004; Frase-Blunt, n.d.; Fleege et al., n.d.; Zeidner, 1998). Most of the counselors that did conduct small group lessons focusing on test preparation skills (72.4%) and personal and social skills (46.0%) stated they spend about the same amount of time on the activities now as when they began working as a counselor.

Few differences exists between the subgroups when exploring the change in time spent conducting small group lessons when looking at the largest number of respondents in each category; however some differences exists between the groups when looking at other areas. Although the largest number of respondents stated they do not engage in small group lessons focusing on test preparation skills in the subgroups, a difference does exists in the number of respondents stating they are spending more time now than when they began their career. More respondents are spending an increased amount of time conducting test preparation, personal and social skills, and academic goals lessons in the *low-education-challenge-group* and *made-AYP-group* than the *high-education-challenge-group* and *did-not-make-AYP-group*. It may be interesting to explore why these differences exists between the subgroups and if the differences in the *AYP-Status* groups played a factor in the test scores for these schools.

## 5.4 INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.4.1 Individual Counseling: Results

The following section describes the analysis of four research questions asking respondents the amount of time they spend (*I don't engage, 1 hour or less, 1 to 5 hours, 6 to 20 hours, and 21 hours or more*), along with the change experienced (*less time now*, *about the same amount of time, more time now*) in four different areas of individual counseling activities school counselors may normally conduct. The four individual counseling areas involve: test preparation skills, college and career readiness goals, personal and social skills, and academic goals that are not test preparation based.

Table 16 shows the frequency distribution of the four counseling areas along with the change experienced by the respondents.

**Table 16.** Time engaged and change experienced in individual counseling

| | I don't engage in this activity | | 1 hour or less | | 1 to 5 hours | | 6 to 20 hours | | 21 hours or more | | Less time now | | About the same amount of time | | More time now | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Individual counseling involving test preparation skills | 11 | 16.2 | 32 | 47.1 | 16 | 23.5 | 5 | 7.4 | 1 | 1.5 | 2 | 3.7 | 37 | 69.8 | 15 | 28.3 |
| Individual counseling involving college and career readiness goals | 14 | 20.6 | 12 | 17.6 | 20 | 29.4 | 18 | 26.5 | 1 | 1.5 | 4 | 7.8 | 32 | 62.7 | 15 | 29.4 |
| Individual counseling involving personal/social skills | 1 | 1.5 | 7 | 10.3 | 18 | 26.5 | 34 | 50.0 | 5 | 7.4 | 8 | 12.5 | 40 | 62.5 | 16 | 25.0 |
| Individual counseling involving academic goals that are not test preparation based | 6 | 8.8 | 14 | 20.6 | 23 | 33.8 | 21 | 30.9 | 1 | 1.5 | 5 | 8.5 | 39 | 66.1 | 15 | 25.4 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Nearly half of all respondents (47.1%, n=32) stated they spend approximately one hour or less during a typical week conducting individual counseling sessions involving test preparation skills. Of the respondents who completed test preparation skill individual counseling, most (69.8%, n=37) stated they spend about the same amount of time on the activity as when they began working as a counselor. A majority of all respondents said they spent between one to 20 hours during a typical week conducting individual counseling sessions pertaining to college and career readiness goals (55.9%, n=38), personal and social skills (76.5%, n=52), and academic

goals that are not test perparation based (64.7%, n=44). Over 60% of the respondents who conducted these counseling sessions said the time spent on the session was about the same amount of time now as it was when they began working as a counselor.

Table 17 contains information from the cross-tabulation analysis conducted on the four different individual counseling activities that counselors may conduct, separated by *Education-Challenge* and *AYP-Status*.

**Table 17.** Cross-tabulations of time engaged and change experienced in individual counseling

| | Individual Counseling Involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 4 | 13.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 60.0 | 8 | 26.7 |
| High Education Challenge | 6 | 19.4 | 2 | 6.5 | 16 | 51.6 | 7 | 22.6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 3 | 9.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 21 | 65.6 | 8 | 25.0 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.8 | 2 | 8.3 | 13 | 54.2 | 4 | 16.7 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 3 | 13.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 12 | 54.5 | 7 | 31.8 |
| After NCLB | 6 | 14.3 | 3 | 7.1 | 25 | 59.5 | 8 | 19.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Individual Counseling Involving College and Career Preparedness Goals | | | | | | | |
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 8 | 27.6 | 1 | 3.4 | 13 | 44.8 | 7 | 24.1 |
| High Education Challenge | 5 | 16.1 | 1 | 3.2 | 17 | 54.9 | 8 | 25.8 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 7 | 22.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 18 | 58.1 | 6 | 19.4 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.8 | 2 | 8.3 | 12 | 50.0 | 5 | 20.8 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 4 | 18.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 12 | 54.5 | 6 | 27.3 |
| After NCLB | 10 | 24.4 | 2 | 4.9 | 20 | 48.8 | 9 | 22.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Individual Counseling Involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | | | | |
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 10.0 | 15 | 50.0 | 12 | 40.0 |
| High Education Challenge | 1 | 3.3 | 4 | 13.3 | 23 | 76.7 | 3 | 10.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 12.5 | 16 | 50.0 | 12 | 37.5 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 1 | 4.2 | 2 | 8.3 | 19 | 79.2 | 2 | 8.3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 9.1 | 11 | 50.0 | 9 | 40.9 |
| After NCLB | 1 | 2.3 | 5 | 11.9 | 29 | 69.0 | 7 | 16.7 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | Individual Counseling Involving Academic Goals | | | | | | | |
| | Do Not Engage | | Less Time Now | | About the Same Amount of Time | | More Time Now | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 3 | 10.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 19 | 63.3 | 8 | 26.7 |
| High Education Challenge | 1 | 3.3 | 5 | 16.7 | 18 | 60.0 | 6 | 20.0 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 2 | 6.3 | 1 | 3.1 | 21 | 65.6 | 8 | 25.0 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 2 | 8.7 | 3 | 13.0 | 13 | 56.5 | 5 | 21.7 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 1 | 4.5 | 1 | 4.5 | 13 | 59.1 | 7 | 31.8 |
| After NCLB | 3 | 7.3 | 4 | 9.8 | 26 | 63.4 | 8 | 19.5 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Few differences existed between the *Education-Challenge* group, the *AYP-Status* group, and the *Years-Working* group in any of the four different types of individual counseling sessions. Of the respondents who conducted individual counseling sessions in the four areas, which most counselors did, each of the groups had the highest number of respondents state the time spent on the individual counseling activities is about the same amount of time now as when they began working as a school counselor. The *Low-education-challenge-group* had 18 respondents (60.0%), and the *high-education-challenge-group* had 16 respondents (51.6%); while the *prior-to-NCLB-group* had 12 respondents (55.40%), and the *after-NCLB-group* had 20 respondents (48.8%), say the time spent on test preparation individual counseling is about the same amount of time as when they began working as a counselor. A larger percentage of counselors in the *made-AYP-group* (65.6%, n=21) stated the time spent is the same in comparison to the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (54.2%, n=13), but this category had the largest number of respondents for both groups.

Similar trends were observed in the other three individual counseling activities as well. Thirteen respondents (44.8%) in the *low-education-challenge-group*, 17 respondents (54.9%) in the *high-education-challenge-group*, 18 respondents (58.1%) in the *made-AYP-group*, 12 respondents (50.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group*, 12 respondents (54.5%) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group*, and 20 respondents (48.8%) in the *after-NCLB-group* stated they spend about the same amount of time conducting individual counseling on college and career preparedness goals as to when they began working as a counselor. The majority of respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* (50.0%, n=15), in the *high-education-challenge-group* (76.7%, n=23), in the *made-AYP-group* (50.0%, n=16), in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (79.2%, n=19), in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (50.0%, n=11), and in the *after-NCLB-group* (69.0%, n=29) stated they spend

about the same amount of time conducting individual counseling on personal and social skills as to when they began working as a counselor. Finally, for individual counseling sessions focusing on academic goals that are not test preparation based, a majority of respondents stated the amount of time spent on this activity is about the same regardless of the group: *low-education-challenge-group* (63.3%, n=19), *high-education-challenge-group* (60.0%, n=18), *made-AYP-group* (65.6%, n=21), *did-not-make-AYP-group* (56.5%, n=13), *prior-to-NCLB-group* (59.1%, n=13), and *after-NCLB-group* (63.4%, n=26).

### 5.4.2 Individual Counseling: Discussion

A trend similar to the previous two types of counseling lessons (classroom and small group lessons) was observed in individual counseling activities, with a difference seen in the amount of time spent on individual counseling with students on test preparation skills. Nearly half (47.1%) of all respondents spent approximately one hour or less during a typical week conducting individual counseling sessions involving test preparation skills, which is similar to when they started working as a school counselor. In comparison, the majority of respondents typically spent between one to 20 hours per week conducting individual counseling sessions on lessons pertaining to college and career readiness goals (55.9%), personal and social skills (76.5%), and academic goals that are not test perparation based (64.7%). Counselors stated this is the same amount of time now as to when they began their career working as a school counselor. No diffference existed between the subgroups in any of the four different types of individual counseling sessions when looking at the category with the most respondents, each group stated they spent about the same amount of time now as when they began their career. A difference existed in all three groups in individual counseling sessions pertaining to personal and social

skills. More respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group*, *made-AYP-group*, and *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated they were spending more time now than when they began their career in comparison to the *high-education-challenge-group, did-not-make-AYP-group, and after-NCLB-group*. It would be interesting to further explore why these differences exists between the groups.

## 5.5 OPEN-ENDED QUESTION REGARDING COUNSELORS ROLE

One open-ended question in the survey asked the respondents to explain if changes had occurred in one of the following activities: *reviewing student assessment results, talking with parents about high-stakes tests, meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement, acting as test coordinator, offering assistance outside of school hours for students who are not proficient on the state tests, or revising the counseling curriculum due to high-stakes testing* and to please explain why they believe a change occurred.

Almost one half of the respondents (42.6%, n=29) chose not to respond to this open-ended question. Of those who did respond, a total of 12 respondents (17.6%) wrote about increased pressure or expectations for stakeholders. Of those twelve respondents, seven participants (10.3%) reported that there are higher expectations for all key stakeholders of success for all students, three (4.4%) stated there is more pressure on everyone to meet state standards, and two (2.9%) reported the pressure from parents increased significantly since they began their career as a school counselor. Fourteen respondents commented on the direct impact high-stakes testing has on school counselors. Eight (11.8%) of these 14 respondents stated the responsibilities of the school counselor changed the most due to high-stakes testing, five (7.4%)

stated there is less time to complete counseling related activities during testing time, and one (1.5%) believes testing is now driving the guidance curriculum.

Three of the counselor responses were insightful enough to include a more in depth discussion in this analysis. One counselor indicated the focus on student achievement is a "top-down directive". Changes occur in the district "if the superintendent is not happy with test results, he initiates ways to improve them." When changes are needed the counselor believes it is part of their responsibility to "work closely with the principal to try to help make the changes happen." The other two responses given by counselors provided insight from two different sides of the high-stakes testing spectrum. One counselor perceives high-stakes testing has a positive impact and the other perceives testing has a negative impact. The counselor who thought high-stakes testing has a positive impact on some area of school, felt the data collected from the high-stakes tests helped to improve schools and stated "at the secondary level, having access to more data provides an opportunity for more review time and more discussion with parents about that data. The data itself does help me feel more informed about a student's performance." From the negative viewpoint, the counselor thought testing was negatively impacting schools and stated

> The increased time on the areas above is due to the state's demands on school districts - the philosophy that these high-stakes tests are a valid tool for determining if our students are ready for life after high school. Sadly, our students are just test scores for the state. Time that could be spent advising students for post-secondary options, planning and delivering guidance curriculum, and meeting the personal and social needs of our students is negatively impacted due to the large amount of time devoted to high-stakes testing.

So, this counselor thought testing not only negatively impacts the schools, but also specifically negatively impacts students and counselors. Based on the answer to the open-ended question, it appears counselors believe the two biggest changes occurring in the school are increased pressure and expectations for all stakeholders and changes to their responsibilities as a school counselor.

## 5.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: CONCLUSION

Results from the study showed several noticeable changes occurred to the counselor's role. The most notable change is in the amount of time counselors have available for students, due to changes in their responsibilities. It appears school counselors have less time available to meet with students. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of participants stated the time available to meet with students decreased since the beginning of their careers, with only one (1.5%) responding the time available improved during his or her career. Even with less time available to meet with students, the counselors perceived the focus on student achievement changed for the better. Another factor to consider is that over one-fifth (22.1%) of respondents said in an open-ended question that there is more pressure to perform for all stakeholders in the school with the use of high-stakes testing. The respondents did not indicate whether this pressure was negative (students and teachers being more anxious and stressed), or positive (an increased focus on academic performance with all stakeholders giving their best effort to help increase academic performance).

Seeing a change in the amount of time school counselors have available to meet with students is not surprising, since the role of the counselor changes based on what administrators

think a counselor should do, or on the political forces impacting the school, centered on meeting the accountability standards established by the federal government with the creation of NCLB in 2001 (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Similar to the results seen in this study, testing impacted the role the counselor played in the school (Ruff, 2011; & Davis, 2006).

Similar to other research reviewed (Brown et al., 2004; Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002; Zalaquett, 2005), a large portion (52.9%) of the school counselors act as test coordinators, or spend time involved in high-stakes testing by proctoring tests or counting tests for distribution (36.8%). Only seven (10.3%) of the participants stated they have no involvement in any aspect of the testing process. These results are similar to other researchers who found 75% to 80% of school counselors had some involvement in the testing process (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002; Zalaquett, 2005). In Brown et al.'s (2004) research, they found as many as 82% of school counselors studied functioned as the test coordinator for their school.

Sixty-four percent of the participants stated they have less time available to meet with students, spending more time reviewing assessment results, talking to parents about high-stakes tests, acting as test coordinator, and meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement. With two-thirds of the respondents stating they have less time to meet with students, it may be expected that counselors would state they have less time available to conduct classroom, small group, and/or individual counseling sessions; however, this was not the case. Results from the survey showed that counselors do not perceive high-stakes testing as impacting the way they conduct classroom lessons, small group lessons, and individual counseling sessions or the amount of time available to conduct these activities. Counselors stated they are spending about the same amount of time in these areas as when they began their career. So, if the counselors have less time to meet with students, the time lost is not coming from any of the areas explored

in this study. With the participants of this study, it may be worth exploring in more detail how they are spending their time.

# 6.0 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 6.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: RESULTS

The following analysis of data represents questions in the survey designed to address research question two, which is **how has school counselors' perceptions about their work environment changed since the inception of high-stakes testing?**

The major results for research question two include; one third of participants reported they are under an appropriate amount of pressure when they interact with school administrators regarding high-stakes tests. Also, a majority of respondents reported the relationship with the principal (77.9%, n=53), relationship with the teachers (72.1%, n=49), relationship with the students (85.3%, n=58), relationship with the parents (83.8%, n=57), the number of discipline referrals during testing time (76.5%, n=52), and student attendance during testing time (66.2%, n=45) did not change from when they began working as a school counselor to now.

Almost two thirds of the participants (64.7%, n=44) stated when they interact with school administrators, such as the building principal; they feel an appropriate level of pressure. Seven respondents (10.3%) feel either highly pressured (2.9%, n=2) or enough pressure to experience a level of discomfort (7.4%, n=5); conversely, 14 (20.6%) respondents did not feel any pressure from building level administrators when interacting with school administrators regarding student improvement. One respondent (1.5%) did not respond. A table of this information is available in

Appendix F. Two counselors (2.9%) responded other to the question and provided a written response to the question. The one school counselor believed the administrators feel the same amount of pressure as the counselors do. The other stated "I don't think they feel I can help improve student performance, I only feel pressured from them to maintain test security."

**Table 18.** Cross-tabulation of interactions with school administrators

| | Interactions with School Administration | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Do Not Feel Pressure | | Feel an Appropriate Amount of Pressure | | Feel Pressured to Point of Discomfort | | Feel Highly Pressured | | Other | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 7 | 22.6 | 20 | 64.5 | 3 | 9.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 3.2 |
| High Education Challenge | 7 | 21.2 | 21 | 63.6 | 2 | 6.1 | 2 | 6.1 | 1 | 3.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 22 | 68.8 | 3 | 9.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.0 | 16 | 64.0 | 2 | 8.0 | 1 | 4.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 6 | 27.3 | 13 | 59.1 | 1 | 4.5 | 1 | 4.5 | 1 | 4.5 |
| After NCLB | 8 | 17.8 | 31 | 68.9 | 4 | 8.9 | 1 | 2.2 | 1 | 2.2 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

A cross-tabulation analysis was conducted for the pressure counselors feel from school administrators regarding student achievement with the *Education-Challenge* group, *AYP-Status* group, and *Years-Working* group. All subgroups had the majority of respondents, in the *feel an appropriate amount of pressure* category. The *low-education-challenge-group* (64.5%, n=20) and the *high-education-challenge-group* (63.6%, n=21) had nearly the same number of respondents state the pressure they feel is appropriate. Twenty-two (68.8%) respondents in the *made-AYP-group* and 16 in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (64.0%) reported they feel an appropriate amount of pressure. The *prior-to-NCLB-group* (59/1%) and the *after-NCLB-group* (68.9%) also had the majority of respondents state they feel an appropriate amount of pressure when interacting with school administrators (See Table 18).

The next set of survey questions designed to address the second research question asked the respondents to mark how a list of items has changed (*changed for the worse, did not change, changed for the better*) since they started working as a school counselor. Questions asked counselors to mark how their *relationship with the principal, relationship with teachers, relationship with students, relationship with parents, discipline referrals during testing time, and student attendance during testing time* has changed.

**Table 19.** Change in work environment

| | Changed for the worse | | Did not change | | Changed for the better | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Relationship with principals | 8 | 11.8 | 53 | 77.9 | 6 | 8.8 |
| Relationship with teachers | 12 | 17.6 | 49 | 72.1 | 6 | 8.8 |
| Relationship with students | 5 | 7.4 | 58 | 85.3 | 4 | 5.9 |
| Relationship with parents | 5 | 7.4 | 57 | 83.8 | 6 | 8.8 |
| Discipline referrals during testing time | 14 | 20.6 | 52 | 76.5 | 2 | 2.9 |
| Student attendance during testing time | 8 | 11.8 | 45 | 66.2 | 15 | 22.1 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

A frequency distribution analysis was conducted on the various questions with data presented in table 19. The vast majority for each question had the most respondents answer that things have not changed for each item since beginning work as a school counselor. Over three quarters of all participants (77.9%, n=53) and (76.5%, n=52) said their relationship with the

building principal and discipline referrals during testing time, respectively did not change. An even higher percentage (85.3%, n=58) and (83.8%, n=57) said their relationship with students, and parents, respectively did not change. Forty-nine participants (72.1%) stated their relationship with teachers did not change, while 45 respondents (66.2%) said student attendance during testing time did not change.

**Table 20.** Cross-tabulation of work environment: relationships

| | Relationship with Principal | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Changed for the Worse | | Did Not Change | | Changed for the Better | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 4 | 12.9 | 22 | 71.0 | 5 | 16.1 |
| High Education Challenge | 4 | 12.1 | 28 | 84.8 | 1 | 3.0 |
| Made AYP | 3 | 9.4 | 27 | 84.4 | 2 | 6.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 4 | 16.0 | 18 | 72.0 | 3 | 12.0 |
| Prior to NCLB | 6 | 27.3 | 12 | 54.5 | 4 | 18.2 |
| After NCLB | 2 | 4.4 | 41 | 91.1 | 2 | 4.4 |
| | Relationship with Teachers | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 8 | 25.8 | 19 | 61.3 | 4 | 12.9 |
| High Education Challenge | 4 | 12.1 | 27 | 81.2 | 2 | 6.1 |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 23 | 71.9 | 3 | 9.4 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 25.0 | 19 | 76.0 | 1 | 1.8 |
| Prior to NCLB | 3 | 13.6 | 16 | 72.7 | 3 | 13.6 |
| After NCLB | 9 | 20.0 | 33 | 73.3 | 3 | 6.7 |
| | Relationship with Students | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 3 | 9.7 | 25 | 80.6 | 3 | 9.7 |
| High Education Challenge | 2 | 6.1 | 30 | 90.9 | 1 | 3.0 |
| Made AYP | 2 | 6.3 | 29 | 90.6 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 3 | 12.0 | 20 | 80.0 | 2 | 8.0 |
| Prior to NCLB | 1 | 4.5 | 19 | 86.4 | 2 | 9.1 |
| After NCLB | 4 | 8.9 | 39 | 86.7 | 2 | 4.4 |
| | Relationship with Parents | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 1 | 3.2 | 26 | 83.9 | 4 | 12.9 |
| High Education Challenge | 4 | 12.1 | 28 | 84.8 | 1 | 3.0 |
| Made AYP | 1 | 3.1 | 29 | 90.6 | 2 | 6.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 4 | 16.0 | 20 | 80.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| Prior to NCLB | 1 | 4.3 | 18 | 78.3 | 4 | 17.4 |
| After NCLB | 4 | 8.9 | 39 | 86.7 | 2 | 4.4 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Table 20 contains information from the cross-tabulation analysis conducted on the six items listed in the chart, and discussed previously, separated by *Education-Challenge*, *AYP-Status,* and *Years-Working*. Few differences existed between the *Education-Challenge* group, the *AYP-Status* group, and the *Years-Working* group on any of the items listed. Each of the items had a majority of respondents state their relationship with principals, teachers, students, and parents did not change. The *Low-education-challenge-group* had 22 respondents (71.0%); while the *high-education-challenge-group* had 28 respondents (84.8%) state their relationship with the principal did not change. A larger percentage of counselors in the *made-AYP-group* (84.4%, n=27) stated the relationship did not change in comparison to the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (72.0%, n=18), but this category had the largest number of respondents for both groups.

Similar trends were observed in the other four items reported. Nineteen respondents (61.3%) in the *low-education-challenge-group,* 27 respondents (81.2%) in the *high-education-challenge-group*, 23 respondents (71.9%) in the *made-AYP-group,* 19 respondents (76.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group,* 16 respondents (72.7%) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group,* and 33 respondents (73.3%) in the *after-NCLB-group* stated their relationship with teachers did not change since they began working as a counselor to now. A majority of respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* (80.6%, n=25), in the *high-education-challenge-group* (90.9%, n=30), in the *made-AYP-group* (90.6%, n=29), in the *did-not-make-AYP-group (*80.0%, n=20), in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (86.4%, n=19), and in the *after-NCLB-group* (86.7%, n=39) stated their relationship with students did not change since they began working as a counselor. Again, similar trends were seen when responding to the question about the relationship with parents, as the other questions about relationships with the highest number of respondents stating their relationship did not change. A large majority of respondents reported the relationship did not

change in the *low-education-challenge-group* (83.9%, n=26), in the *high-education-challenge-group* (84.8%, n=28), in the *made-AYP-group* (90.6%, n=29), in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (80.0%, n=20), in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (78.3%, n=18), and in the *after-NCLB-group* (86.7%, n=39).

Even though the majority of respondents in the *Years-Working* group stated their relationship with their principal did not change, the percentage of respondents varied widely between the two groups. Slightly more than one half (54.5%, n=12) of the participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated their relationship did not change in comparison to almost every participant (91.1%, n=41) in the *after-NCLB-group*. Differences also existed with more than one quarter (27.3%, n=6) of the *prior-to-NCLB-group* participants stating their relationship with their principal changed for the worse compared to only 4.4% of the *after-NCLB-group*. Although a majority of the participants in all subgroups stated their relationship with the teachers did not change, nearly one quarter of the participants stated their relationship with the teachers changed for the worse in the *low-education-challenge-group* (25.8%, n=8), the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (25.0%, n=5), and the *after-NCLB-group* (20.0%, n=9).

**Table 21.** Cross-tabulation of work environment: discipline and attendance

| | Discipline Referrals During High-Stakes Testing | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low Education Challenge | 6 | 19.4 | 25 | 80.6 | 0 | 0.0 |
| High Education Challenge | 6 | 19.4 | 25 | 80.6 | 2 | 6.5 |
| | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 25 | 78.1 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.0 | 20 | 80.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 6 | 26.1 | 16 | 69.6 | 1 | 4.3 |
| After NCLB | 8 | 17.8 | 36 | 80.0 | 1 | 2.2 |
| | | | | | | |
| | Attendance During High-Stakes Testing | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 6 | 19.4 | 25 | 80.6 | 0 | 0.0 |
| High Education Challenge | 6 | 19.4 | 25 | 80.6 | 2 | 6.5 |
| | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 6 | 18.8 | 25 | 78.1 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.0 | 20 | 80.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 3 | 13.0 | 12 | 52.2 | 8 | 34.8 |
| After NCLB | 5 | 11.1 | 33 | 73.3 | 7 | 15.6 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Twenty-five respondents (80.6%) in both the *low-education-challenge-group* and *high-education-challenge-group,* 20 respondents (80.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group,* 25 respondents (78.1%) in the *made-AYP-group,* 16 respondents (69.6%) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group,* and 36 respondents (80.0%) in the *after-NCLB-group* stated the number of discipline referrals did not change since they began working as a counselor to now. Finally, the question asking about student attendance during high-stakes testing time had the highest number of respondents state student attendance was about the same regardless of the group: *low-education-challenge-group* (80.6%, n=25), *high-education-challenge-group* (80.6%, n=25), *made-AYP-group* (78.1%, n=25), *did-not-make-AYP-group* (80.0%, n=20), *prior-to-NCLB-group* (52.2%, n=12), or *after-NCLB-group* (73.3%, n=33).

## 6.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: DISCUSSION

The survey asked respondents questions specifically looking at the relationships counselors have with building principals, students, parents, and teachers, as well as student attendance and discipline referrals during high-stakes testing time. Changes did not occur in any of these areas during the school counselors' careers. The results from this study support the findings by Thorn and Mulvenon (2002), who found little support that suggests the school counselors believe testing is a negative experience. Results from the current study show that although the school counselor's role has changed slightly from responsibilities related to high-stakes testing, such as working as a test coordinator, which provides less time for interacting with students, most school counselors studied have not experienced a change in their work environment since the beginning of their career. Although a limited number of studies exist that explore the impact of high-stakes testing on the school counselor's role, several studies explored the impact testing has on teachers. Many of the previous research results are different than the results in the current study. Sixty percent of the teachers surveyed stated NCLB negatively impacts the work setting by negatively impacting teacher morale and taking valuable time away from important classroom issues (Mertler, 2011). Other studies showed testing negatively affect the relationships of stakeholders in the school (Brown et al., 2004; Fielding, 2004; Ruff, 2011; Wright, 2002).

The amount of pressure school counselors feel from school administrators was explored. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of the participants stated their interactions with school administrators, such as the building principal, have an appropriate level of pressure. Differences did not exist between the subgroups in this area. All subgroups studied feel an appropriate amount of pressure when interacting with administrators. The school counselors also stated there was no change in their relationship with school administrators with the use of high-stakes testing. Results from the

current study support findings from other research that surveyed teachers. Teachers said they form better relationships with their administrators since the implementation of high-stakes testing and are working better together to help improve student performance (Horn, J., 2003). It may be interesting to explore the feelings of teachers and school counselors working in the same building to see if differences exist in the perceived pressure when teachers and school counselors have the same building administrators.

School counselors in the current study did not report any changes in their relationship with students, teachers, or parents. Over three quarters of all respondents stated their relationship with students (85.3%) and parents (83.8%) did not change since they began working as a school counselor. More than two-thirds of the school counselors participating in the study did not notice a change in their relationship with teachers (72.1%), which contradicts Brown et al. (2004) and Ruff (2011). These researchers found testing negatively impacted the way school counselors interacted with students and teachers, along with the relationships they had with students and teachers. Teachers in other studies reported the pressure associated with high-stakes testing is straining their relationships with students and other staff members (Fielding, 2004; Wright, 2002). Results in this study may show different results from these studies because of the amount of time that has passed since Brown et al. (2004), Fielding (2004), and Wright (2002). This may indicate all involved parties are more comfortable with the high-stakes testing process. As time has passed since these studies were completed the use of high-stakes testing may have become the new normal for all stakeholders.

Changes in student attendance and discipline referrals during high-stakes testing time did not change. Over two-thirds (66.2%) of the school counselors stated student attendance during testing time did not change in comparison to other times of the school year. This may show

students are not missing school to avoid having to take the high-stakes exams. In part, this could stem from the fact that students may realize that even if they miss school on a day a high-stakes exam is given, they will be required to take the test when they return to school. Over three quarters (76.5%) of the counselors stated discipline referrals during testing time are similar to other points during the year, which contradicts previous research that found the effects of testing led to principals reporting more incidents of students acting out in negative and inappropriate ways during testing time (Horn, C., 2003). So, even though findings in the current study show student morale has decreased and students are feeling more stress and test anxiety from the high-stakes tests in place, the school counselors did not observe students acting out in negative ways during testing time.

Only a few differences exist in the subgroups for changes in relationships with principals, teachers, students, or parents, as well as discipline referrals and student attendance. Even though the majority of respondents in the *Years-Working* group stated their relationship with their principal did not change, the percentage of respondents varied widely between the two groups. Fifty-four percent of the participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated their relationship did not change in comparison to 91.1% of the participants in the *after-NCLB-group*. Differences also existed with the percentage stating their relationship changed for the worse with their principal. One quarter (27.3%) of the *prior-to-NCLB-group* participants stated their relationship with their principal changed for the worse compared to only 4.4% of the *after-NCLB-group*. There may be many factors that play a part in this difference that are not related to testing. One prominent factor may be a change in administrators during the *prior-to-NCLB-group* tenure. All of the participants in this group have worked for 13 years or more as a school counselor. Most of these participants are probably working for new/different administrators than when they started

working, which may lead to changes occurring in the relationship they have with administrators. A second factor, which may lead to further exploration may be the role high-stakes testing played in the change in relationship. Are the counselors or administrators experiencing pressure from high-stakes testing that has caused a change in the way they interact? Have the dynamics between the two positions changed because of the new role the school counselors have since the implementation of high-stakes testing? This difference may be an area that is worth exploring in more detail in future research.

Based on the results from the survey questions designed to address research question two, it does not appear high-stakes testing is impacting the work environment for school counselors. Since differences were not observed in relationships, attendance, or discipline referrals, this may suggest high-stakes testing has become the new normal for all stakeholders involved in the school. Teachers, students, administrators, and counselors may realize high-stakes testing is here to stay, so instead of letting the test negatively impact the school environment they have made the best of what previous research has shown was a bad situation (Brown, et al., 2004; Fielding, 2004; Horn, C., 2003; Wright, 2002). This may also explain why differences exist between previous research conducted by Brown et al. (2004), Fielding (2004), Horn, C. (2003), and Wright (2002) and the current study. At least ten years has passed from the previous research to this study, during that time, students, administrators, teachers, and school counselors may have come to accept the role high-stakes testing has in the school. If a level of acceptance exists among stakeholders, than they should not experience a change in the relationship they have with each other, there also should not be changes in discipline referrals or student attendance during high-stakes testing.

# 7.0 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 7.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: RESULTS

The following analysis of data represents questions in the survey designed to address research question three, which states **what are school counselor's perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress and test-anxiety) in school since the inception of high-stakes testing?**

Question three specifically addressed student motivation, stress, and test anxiety. Some of the major findings in this section included, one third of respondents reported students are engaged in the test; however, differences existed between the various groups. The *low-education-challenge-group* had almost one quarter more participants state students are engaged to do their best work. A similar difference existed between the *made-AYP-group* and the *did-not-make-AYP-group* as well; with 21% more respondents in the *made-AYP-group* answering students are engaged to do their best work. A difference appears to exist between *low-education-challenge-group* and *high-education-challenge-group,* where twice as many respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* (15.6%, n=10) stated students are indifferent about their results when they discuss high-stakes test results with their counselor.

School counselors were asked to give their perception on how students feel regarding high-stakes testing, the majority of counselors perceived students feel testing is either very

important or somewhat important. Four respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* reported students feel testing is a complete waste of time in comparison to zero respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group*. Approximately one half of the respondents reported student morale and motivation changed for the worse and testing is either causing enough stress to impact student performance or cause physical distress.

The frequency distribution results for the question asking counselors about student engagement during high-stakes testing are reported in a table in Appendix G. Forty-four respondents (64.8%) out of 68 stated students are either engaged to do their best work or somewhat engaged during high-stakes testing time. More than 19% (19.1%, n=13) of respondents reported students are somewhat disengaged, while three respondents (4.4%) reported students are either totally disengaged and apathetic or disengaged to the point of impacting performance. Two (2.9%) respondents did not respond. Six of the respondents (8.8%) chose other for their answer choice and provided a written response to the question. The one counselor believed a majority of students are fully engaged, but a small minority existed who are totally disengaged. One counselor shared that "the students I have are high risk and testing is definitely not a top priority." Finally, several counselors shared similar feelings, stating that engagement levels really depend on the student.

**Table 22.** Cross-tabulation of student engagement

| | Student Engagement with High-Stakes Testing | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Engaged to do Their Best | | Somewhat Engaged | | Somewhat Disengaged | | Disengaged to the Point of Impacting Performance | | Totally Disengaged | | Other | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 17 | 54.8 | 9 | 29.0 | 3 | 9.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 6.5 |
| High Education Challenge | 4 | 12.5 | 12 | 37.5 | 10 | 31.3 | 2 | 6.3 | 1 | 3.1 | 3 | 9.4 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 17 | 53.1 | 5 | 15.6 | 5 | 15.6 | 1 | 3.1 | 1 | 3.1 | 3 | 9.4 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 5 | 20.0 | 11 | 44.0 | 7 | 28.0 | 1 | 4.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 9 | 40.9 | 9 | 40.9 | 3 | 13.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 4.5 |
| After NCLB | 13 | 29.5 | 13 | 29.5 | 10 | 22.7 | 2 | 4.5 | 1 | 2.3 | 5 | 11.4 |

Gray scale shading denotes significant information found within the table.

A cross-tabulation analysis was conducted for student engagement during high-stakes testing with the *Education-Challenge* group, *AYP-Status* group, and *Years-Working* group (See Table 21). All subgroups had the highest number of respondents state that students where either engaged to do their best work or somewhat engaged. The *low-education-challenge-group* (54.8%, n=17), the *high-education-challenge-group* (12.5%, n=4), the *made-AYP-group* (53.1%, n=17), the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (20.0%, n=5), the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (40.9%, n=9), and the *after-NCLB-group* (29.5%, n=13) reported students are engaged to do their best work. The *low-education-challenge-group* (29.0%, n=9), the *high-education-challenge-group* (37.5%, n=12), the *made-AYP-group* (15.6%, n=5), the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (44.0%, n=11), the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (40.9%, n=9), and the *after-NCLB-group* (29.5%, n=13) reported students are somewhat engaged. Differences existed in the number of respondents who reported students are engaged to do their best work. The *low-education-challenge-group* had almost one half more participants (54.8% compared to 12.5%) state students are engaged to do their best work. A similar difference existed between the *made-AYP-group* and the *did-not-make-AYP-group* as

well; with 33.1% more respondents (53.1% compared to 20.0%) state students are engaged to do their best work in the *made-AYP-group*.

School counselors were asked to give their perception on how students feel regarding high-stakes testing, which is reported in a table located in Appendix H. Respondents selected choices on a five point Likert scale regarding student feelings. Choices included that students feel high-stakes testing is *very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, considerably unimportant, or a total waste of time.* The majority of counselors (58.8%, n=40) stated students feel testing is either very important (19.1%, n=13) or somewhat important (39.7%, n=27). Twenty-one respondents (30.9%) reported students feel testing is somewhat unimportant (13.2%, n=9), considerably unimportant (10.3%, n=7), or a total waste of time (7.4%, n=5). One (1.5%) participant did not respond to this question. Six counselors (8.8%) chose other and provided a written response to this question. The one counselor provided the same response to this question as in the previous question, testing in not a priority for high-risk students. Several counselors responded similarly as the previous question, stating that it depends on the student and that some students feel the tests are important but a majority of students do not. One counselor wrote, with the implementation of the Keystone Exams, with graduation implications attached, students think the tests are now very important.

**Table 23.** Cross-tabulation of feelings regarding high-stakes tests

| | Students Feel High-Stakes Tests Are | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important | | Somewhat Important | | Somewhat Unimportant | | Considerably Unimportant | | A Total Waste of Time | | Other | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 8 | 25.8 | 14 | 45.2 | 4 | 12.9 | 3 | 9.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 6.5 |
| High Education Challenge | 5 | 15.2 | 12 | 36.4 | 5 | 15.2 | 4 | 12.1 | 4 | 12.1 | 3 | 9.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 9 | 28.1 | 10 | 31.3 | 4 | 12.5 | 4 | 12.5 | 2 | 6.3 | 3 | 9.4 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 3 | 12.0 | 12 | 48.0 | 5 | 20.0 | 2 | 8.0 | 2 | 8.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 6 | 27.3 | 9 | 40.9 | 3 | 13.6 | 1 | 4.5 | 2 | 9.1 | 1 | 4.5 |
| After NCLB | 7 | 15.6 | 18 | 40.0 | 6 | 13.3 | 6 | 13.3 | 3 | 6.7 | 5 | 1.1 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

In the cross-tabulation conducted on student feelings with *Education-Challenge, AYP-Status,* and *Years-Working* differences were not observed between subgroups (See Table 22). The highest number of respondents in all categories answered students feel testing is somewhat important. Fourteen (45.2%) of those in the *low-education-challenge-group,* compared to twelve (36.4%) in the *high-education-challenge-group,* reported students feel testing is somewhat important. Respondents in the *AYP-Status* group stated students feel testing is somewhat important, with ten (31.3%) respondents in the *made-AYP-group* compared to twelve (48.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group,* answered students feel testing is somewhat important. Almost exactly the same percentage of participants stated testing is somewhat important in the Years-Working group with 40.9% (n=9) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stating students' believe testing is somewhat important compared to 40.0% (n=18) in the *after-NCLB-group*.

A difference existed in the number of participants who said students thought testing was a total waste of time and those who believed students thought testing was very important. Four respondents (12.1%) in the *high-education-challenge-group* reported students feel testing is a

complete waste of time in comparison to zero respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group*. Eight (25.8%) of participants in the low-education-challenge-group stated students' believe testing is very important compared to five (15.2%) in the high-education-challenge group. Respondents in the *AYP-Status* group stated students feel testing is very important, with nine (28.1%) respondents in the *made-AYP-group* compared to three (12.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group*, answered students feel testing is very important. A difference also existed in the percentage of participants stating testing is very important in the Years-Working group with 27.3% (n=6) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stating students' believe testing is very important compared to 15.6% (n=7) in the *after-NCLB-group*.

School counselors were then asked to rate the amount of stress students experienced related to high-stakes testing. Choices for respondents were: *no stress, a bit of stress, enough stress to impact performance, and enough stress to experience physical distress*. Information is located in a table in Appendix I. None of the participants reported students experience *no stress* related to high-stakes tests. Just over half of the participants (53.0%, n=36) reported high-stakes testing is either causing enough stress to impact performance or students are experiencing physical distress. Thirty-two (47.1%) respondents reported students experience enough stress to impact performance and four (5.9%) stated testing causes physical distress. The remainder of the counselors (41.2%, n=28) reported testing causes a bit of stress for students or did not respond (1.5%, n=1). Three participants chose other and provided a written response. The written responses for this question were similar to the previous two, with respondents writing the amount of stress depends on the student and students experience more stress now that Keystone Exams are used.

**Table 24.** Cross-tabulation of stress of high-stakes tests

| | High-Stakes Tests Cause | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No Stress | | A Bit of Stress | | Enough Stress to Impact Performance | | Enough Stress to Cause Physical Distress | | Other | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 0 | 0.0 | 11 | 35.5 | 16 | 51.6 | 2 | 6.5 | 2 | 6.5 |
| High Education Challenge | 0 | 0.0 | 15 | 45.5 | 15 | 45.5 | 2 | 6.1 | 1 | 3.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 0 | 0.0 | 12 | 37.5 | 16 | 50.0 | 2 | 6.3 | 2 | 6.3 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 0 | 0.0 | 10 | 40.0 | 12 | 48.0 | 2 | 8.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 11 | 50.0 | 11 | 50.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| After NCLB | 17 | 37.8 | 21 | 46.7 | 4 | 8.9 | 3 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

The cross-tabulation conducted on student stress levels with *Education-Challenge, AYP-Status,* and *Years-Working* is reported in table 23. The highest number of respondents in three of the categories (*low-education-challenge-group, made-AYP-group,* and *did-not-make-AYP-group*) reported students experience enough stress to impact performance. Sixteen (51.6%) of those in the *low-education-challenge-group* compared to 15 (45.5%) in the *high-education-challenge-group* reported testing is stressful enough to impact performance. *High-education-challenge-group* also had 15 respondents (45.5%) state testing causes a bit of stress. The highest number of respondents in the *AYP-Status* groups stated testing causes enough stress to impact performance. Sixteen respondents (50.0%) in the *made-AYP-group,* and twelve respondents (48.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group,* stated stress from high-stakes testing impacts student performance. Those in the *Years-Working* group had far fewer participants state testing was causing enough stress to impact performance. The *prior-to-NCLB-group* had half of the respondents state testing did not cause students stress (50.0%, n=11) and the other half stated testing cause students a bit

of stress (50.0%, n=11). The highest number of respondents in the *after-NCLB-group* (46.7%, n=21) stated students felt a bit of stress due to high-stakes testing.

Frequency distribution analysis was conducted for a survey question asking participants about how concerned students were when they talked with the school counselor regarding high-stakes test results. The information is presented in a table located in Appendix J. Just over one half of the participants (55.8%, n=38) answered that students are either substantially concerned (17.6%, n=12) or mildly concerned (38.2%, n=26) about their results. Only five respondents (7.4%) answered that students are satisfied with their results. Fifteen respondents (22.1%) reported that students are indifferent about their results when discussing test results. Eight participants (11.8%) provided written responses for this question and included similar responses as the previous questions. Counselors believed stress levels really depend on the student. Other counselors stated students are too young to care, or too young to understand the results of the test.

**Table 25.** Cross-tabulation of student discussions

| | After Receiving High-Stakes Results Students Are | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Substantially Concerned | | Mildy Concerned | | Satisfied | | Indifferent | | Other | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 8 | 25.8 | 12 | 38.7 | 3 | 9.7 | 5 | 16.1 | 3 | 9.7 |
| High Education Challenge | 3 | 9.1 | 13 | 39.4 | 2 | 6.1 | 10 | 30.3 | 5 | 15.2 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 5 | 15.6 | 12 | 37.5 | 4 | 12.5 | 6 | 18.8 | 5 | 15.6 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 4 | 16.0 | 11 | 44.0 | 1 | 4.0 | 7 | 28.0 | 2 | 8.0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 4 | 18.2 | 9 | 40.9 | 4 | 18.2 | 2 | 9.1 | 3 | 13.6 |
| After NCLB | 8 | 18.2 | 17 | 38.6 | 1 | 2.2 | 13 | 28.9 | 5 | 11.4 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Cross-tabulation calculations were similar to the previous questions (See Table 24). The highest number of respondents in each group reported students are mildly concerned when discussing results. Twelve respondents in both the *low-education-challenge-group* (38.7%) and the *made-AYP-group* (37.5%) stated students are mildly concerned, while 13 (39.4%) respondents in *high-education-challenge-group* and eleven (44.0%) respondents in the *did-not-make-AYP-group* reported students are mildly concerned. A similar percentage existed in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* (40.9%, n=9) and the *after-NCLB-group* (38.6%, n=17) as well. Although, a difference appears to exist between the *Education-Challenge* groups and the *Years-Working* groups, where almost twice as many respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* (30.3%, n=10) answered students are indifferent about their results when discussing high-stakes test results with their school counselor, in comparison to the *low-education-challenge-group* (16.1%, n=5). The respondents in the *after-NCLB-group* had 28.9% (n=13) respondents state students are indifferent to about their results compared to only 9.1% (n=2) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group*.

Table 25 shows the results of the frequency distribution analysis that was conducted on three different items asking respondents if changes occurred with student morale, student motivation, and the number of students they counseled during testing time due to stress and test anxiety.

**Table 26.** Counselor perception of the change in student morale, motivation, and stress and test anxiety

| | Changed for the worse | | Did not change | | Changed for the better | | Missing Data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Student morale | 32 | 47.1 | 33 | 48.5 | 3 | 4.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Student motivation | 24 | 35.3 | 39 | 57.4 | 5 | 7.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Students counseled during testing time due to stress/anxiety | 31 | 45.6 | 36 | 52.9 | 1 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Nearly all of the participants (95.6%) answered student morale changed for the worse (47.1%, n=32), or did not change (48.5%, n=33). A similarly high percentage (92.7%) stated student motivation changed for the worse (35.3%, n=24), or did not change (57.4%, n=39). Almost every participant (98.5%) indicated the number of students they counseled during testing time, due to stress and test anxiety changed for the worse (45.6%, n=31), or did not change (52.9%, n=36).

Cross-tabulation analysis was completed on the three variables described in the previous paragraph with *Education-Challenge*, *AYP-Status,* and *Years-Working*.

**Table 27.** Morale, motivation, and stress and test anxiety

| | Student Morale | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Changed for the Worse | | Did Not Change | | Changed for the Better | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Low Education Challenge | 13 | 41.9 | 16 | 51.6 | 2 | 6.5 |
| High Education Challenge | 16 | 48.5 | 16 | 48.5 | 1 | 3.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 16 | 50.0 | 15 | 46.9 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 14 | 56.0 | 10 | 40.0 | 1 | 4.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 9 | 39.1 | 13 | 56.5 | 1 | 4.3 |
| After NCLB | 23 | 51.1 | 20 | 44.4 | 2 | 4.4 |
| | | | | | | |
| | Student Motivation | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 8 | 25.8 | 19 | 61.3 | 4 | 12.9 |
| High Education Challenge | 13 | 39.4 | 19 | 57.6 | 1 | 3.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 10 | 31.3 | 17 | 53.1 | 5 | 15.6 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 12 | 48.0 | 13 | 52.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 9 | 39.1 | 11 | 47.8 | 3 | 13.0 |
| After NCLB | 15 | 33.3 | 28 | 62.2 | 2 | 4.4 |
| | | | | | | |
| | Students Counseled due to Stress/Test Anxiety | | | | | |
| Low Education Challenge | 12 | 38.7 | 19 | 61.3 | 0 | 0.0 |
| High Education Challenge | 16 | 48.5 | 16 | 48.5 | 1 | 3.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Made AYP | 16 | 50.0 | 16 | 50.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Did Not Make AYP | 10 | 40.0 | 15 | 60.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| Prior to NCLB | 10 | 43.5 | 13 | 56.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| After NCLB | 21 | 46.7 | 23 | 51.1 | 1 | 2.2 |

Gray scale shading in table denotes the greatest frequency of respondents for a particular category.

Similar results were seen between groups in all three categories looking at student morale, motivation, and students counseled due to stress and test anxiety (See table 26). The most participants in all four groups reported student morale changed for the worse or did not change. Approximately One half of the participants in the *low-education-challenge-group* (51.6%, n=16), *high-education-challenge-groups* (48.5%, n=16), and prior-to-NCLB-group (56.5%, n=13) stated student morale did not change. One half of the participants in the *made-*

*AYP-group* (50.0%, n=16), the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (56.0%, n=14), and *after-NCLB-group* (51.1%, n=23) stated student morale changed for the worse. Nineteen respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* (61.3%) and *high-education-challenge-group* (57.6%) reported student motivation did not change with high-stakes testing. Similarly, the highest number of respondents in the *AYP-Status* and *Years-Working* groups reported student motivation did not change with 17 (53.1%) in the *made-AYP-group,* 13 (52.0%) in the *did-not-make-AYP-group,* 11 (47.8%) in the *prior-to-NCLB-group,* and 28 (62.2%) in the *after-NCLB-group*. The most respondents in the *low-education-challenge-group* (61.3%, n=19), *did-not-make-AYP-group* (50.0%, n=15), *prior-to-NCLB-group* (56.5%, n=13), and *after-NCLB-group* (51.1%, n=23) reported the number of students they counsel during testing time, due to stress and test anxiety, did not change. Sixteen respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* (48.5%) and *made-AYP-group* (50.0%) indicated counseling time either changed for the worse or did not change.

Appendix K contains information provided from another open-ended question in the survey. This question asked counselors to provide an explanation of how high-stakes testing impacted student stress and test anxiety. The answers were coded and different themes emerged based on the responses given by the school counselors. Many different answers were given for this open-ended question. Just over one quarter (26.5%, n=18) of the participants did not respond to this question. Of the respondents who did complete the open-ended question, eleven (16.2%) responded that students did not experience stress and test anxiety because of high-stakes testing. Twenty-nine percent of the participants (n=20) stated stress levels increased significantly in all students (16.2%, n=11) with high-stakes testing or stress levels rose significantly specifically for high achieving students (13.2%, n=9). The remaining 16.6% (n=12) indicated testing impacts stress and test anxiety in various ways. Of these twelve respondents, seven (10.3%) thought if the

student was not proficient to meet graduation requirements the student experiences higher levels of stress, one (1.5%) answered students avoid school during testing, two (2.9%) reported teacher anxiety causes an increase in student test anxiety, and two (2.9%) stated testing is stressful for low performing students due to repeated testing.

Three counselors provided more detail about the stress and test anxiety students experienced, and how it impacted students in negative ways. One counselor reported students dread high-stakes tests and "low performing students often act out because tests are too difficult." One respondent wrote testing sent the wrong message to students who "are already dealing with enough stress in their daily academic and personal lives." Instead of teaching a balanced curriculum "high-stakes tests communicate to students that their performance on that one test is more important than most of their learning, and is just an extra source of stress." Another counselor stated students understand the importance of high-stakes tests at a young age, as early as fourth grade, and they "understand that their performance impacts the programs they will take in the future" This counselor believed this level of understanding leads to more stress for students who already deal with a lot of stress and says "I see many more students in my office suffering from anxiety (on meds, in therapy, etc.) and think it is directly related to testing."

Appendix L contains information provided from another open-ended question on the survey. This question asked counselors in what ways (positive and negative) had testing impacted student motivation. The answers were coded and different themes emerged based on the responses given by the school counselors. A total of nine different themes emerged from the responses, with a total of 37 (54.4%) school counselors providing a response that fit into one of these nine coded themes. Sixteen (23.5%) participants did not respond to this question. Of the coded responses, 15 (22.1%) respondents stated students are less motivated now than when they

began their career, with seven (10.3%) stating that students are tested so frequently they are less motivated, because it is "just another day, just another test", another seven (10.3%) reported low performing students are less motivated, and one (1.5%) reported motivation decreased in all students. Six (8.8%) respondents reported that motivation levels did not change. The remainder (23.5%, n=16) stated students are more motivated for one reason or another due to high-stakes testing. Six (8.8%) respondents reported students are more motivated to show what they know, maintain a successful school, and do their best. The remaining respondents identified high achieving students as being more motivated (2.9%, n=2), that students are more engaged in the material (4.4%, n=3), and more motivated to make sure they passed the test (7.4%, n=5). Two of the responses stated motivation in students increased, but felt it increased in a negative way, or because of a negative reason. The one counselor stated "I saw a lot of tears when a higher level 7th grader did not pass the Algebra Keystone exam and had to take Algebra again in 8th grade. I imagine if that story gets around, students should be motivated to do their best on all high-stakes testing." Another counselor wrote students need to make a connection between high-stakes test results and future success, but they are not and "high-stakes testing has motivated students to do well, but in the wrong ways. Students now think their entire education matriculation is governed by a single test."

## 7.2 STRESS AND TEST ANXIETY: DISCUSSION

Previous research shows students are experiencing higher levels of stress and test anxiety than ever before, possibly from the toll of high-stakes testing (Brown et al. 2004; Fleege et al., n.d.; Frase-Blunt, n.d.; Segool et al., 2013; Zeidner, 1998). Results from the current study support the

results of previous research that testing may play a role in observed increases in student stress and test-anxiety levels. These findings may be significant since previous research shows test anxiety can impair performance on assessments (Segool et al., 2013). Unfortunately, the highest percent of participants stated student morale (47.1%) and the number of students counseled during testing time due to stress and test anxiety (52.9%) changed for the worse since the beginning of their career.

Participants perceived high-stakes testing to cause some students to experience at least some levels of stress with 53% stating testing causes enough stress to impact performance (47.1%) or causes students to experience physical distress (5.9%). The open-ended question asked counselors to provide an explanation of how high-stakes testing affected student stress and test anxiety; participants stated stress levels increased significantly in all students with high-stakes testing. A similar number of respondents stated that both low and high achieving students experience significant increases in stress and test anxiety, which is different than what Mulvenon et al. (2005) found in their study, where a greater increase in anxiety occurs in high-performing students than in low-performing students. In the current study, school counselors observed that high-stakes testing seems to impact students in a similar fashion regardless of their level of academic performance.

## 7.3 MOTIVATION: DISCUSSION

As discussed in other research, motivation is a difficult construct to study because of the many factors that play a role in determining motivation (Harlen, 2005; Wheelock et al., 2000). The results of this study appear to be no different. Unlike previously discussed results of the open-

ended question asking school counselors about student stress and test anxiety levels the data from the open-ended question addressing motivation contradicts the closed-ended question asking about motivation. When specifically asked in a closed-ended question about student motivation, the school counselors perceived their students' motivation levels to have changed for the worse; however, when specifically asked about motivation levels in the open-ended question, there were more positive responses about how motivation changed in students than negative responses. The open-ended question matched the results of the other closed-ended questions that pertained to motivation, but did not specifically ask about student motivation (i.e. student engagement during testing, feelings about the high-stakes tests, and student concern over test results). It appears counselors perceive an increase in student motivation levels since the implementation of high-stakes tests. Based on the different subgroups studied, differences appeared to exist in changes in student motivation for the questions not specifically asking about student motivation.

The closed-ended question asking school counselors about motivation, found motivation levels either changed for the worse (35.3%), or did not change (57.4%) during their career. Over one-third of the counselors perceived motivation changed for the worse in students from the beginning of their career. However, when asked to provide a written response to how testing has impacted motivation, both negatively and positively, more respondents stated positive examples of how testing impacted student motivation, explanations include students wanting to prove what they know, do their best, maintain a successful school, or to make sure they pass the test. Several counselors stated high achieving students are more motivated to perform since the implementation of testing. These results support the beliefs of some policymakers, who assume placing rewards and sanctions on tests may increase student motivation levels pertaining to

learning, believing students may try harder to gain rewards or avoid sanctions (Gunzenhauser, 2007; Madaus & Clarke, 2001). The school counselors who answered students are less motivated; feel students are less motivated because of the frequency they are tested. One counselor even stated, "just another day, just another test." Of those respondents believing motivation levels decreased, a majority reported testing negatively impacts low performing students in particular and felt low performing students are less motivated because of the use of high-stakes tests.

Several questions in the survey were designed to determine how high-stakes testing impacts student motivation without specifically asking about motivation. These questions included questions asking about student engagement, student's feelings regarding the importance of high-stakes testing, and the level of concern students have regarding their results. According to responses two-thirds of students are either engaged to do their best work (32.4%) or somewhat engaged (32.4%) during high-stakes testing time. These results are similar to Yeh (2005) who observed an improvement in student attitudes and effort, and found students are more engaged in the educational process, as well as Ruff (2011), who found counselors believe students are more focused on learning and school performance because of accountability standards in place. For the most part, school counselors reported that students are engaged during testing time, several counselors (8.8%) reported student engagement levels really depended on the student.

School counselors in all four subgroups stated students are either engaged to do their best work or somewhat engaged; however, differences did exist between the subgroups in the number of students who were engaged to do their best work. The *low-education-challenge-group* (27.0%) and the *made-AYP-group* (29.8%) had almost one quarter more participants state students are engaged to do their best work compared to the *high-education-challenge-group*

(6.3%) and the *did-not-make-AYP-group* (8.8%), respectively. It may be interesting to explore these differences further. Why did a difference exist in student engagement between these subgroups? What caused the counselors to rate the students as being more engaged in the *low-education-challenge-group* and the *made-AYP-group*, and did the engagement level play a factor in determining the results of the high-stakes tests?

When asked about their perceptions on how students viewed the high-stakes tests, school counselors reported students found high-stakes tests to be either very important (19.1%) or somewhat important (39.7%). Respondents in all four categories reported students feel testing is somewhat important. A difference existed in the number of participants who stated students thought testing is a total waste of time. None of the school counselors identified in the *low-education-challenge-group* stated their students thought testing is a complete waste of time, whereas 6.3% of the school counselors identified in the *high-education-challenge-group* reported students feeling testing is a complete waste of time.

Finally, another closed-ended question, designed to explore the impact of student motivation, was how concerned students were regarding their results on high-stakes testing when discussing the results with their school counselor. Over one half of the school counselors reported students are either substantially concerned (17.6%) or mildly concerned (38.2%) about their results. As was observed in the other questions addressing motivation, a difference appears to exist between the *low-education-challenge-group* and *high-education-challenge-group*; twice as many respondents in the *high-education-challenge-group* (15.6%) reported students are indifferent about their results when discussing results with their counselor compared to 7.8% of counselors in the *low-education-challenge-group*. As stated earlier, it may be interesting to explore this idea further to determine why this difference existed between the two *Education-*

*Challenge* groups, and if the difference in the *high-education-challenge-group* was negatively impacting the results of the high-stakes exams.

The results from these questions show school counselors perceive an increase in student motivation due to the use of high-stakes exams, based on the level of engagement during testing, the importance students place on the exams, and the level of concern they experience when discussing their results. Even though respondents stated motivation changed for the worse when specifically asked in the closed-ended question, the three other closed-ended questions addressing motivation, along with the results of the open-ended question, seems to show school counselors perceive an increase in student motivation due to high-stakes testing. These findings contradict most of the research reviewed (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Jones, 2007; Wheelock et al., 2000) that found external rewards do not translate into better effort, and that intrinsic motivation decreased in students when rewards or sanctions are attached to the high-stakes test. If this is the case, it supports the belief held by some policymakers that implementing high-stakes tests could improve student's interest in learning and school performance.

## 7.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: CONCLUSION

Research question three addressed the perceived changes in students' psychological and emotional well-being in school since the inception of high-stakes testing. It appears school counselors in this study perceive their students are experiencing higher levels of stress and test anxiety with the use of high-stakes testing, which is similar to other research, which may show the emphasis on accountability and high-stakes testing is intensifying the socio-emotional issues students face (Ruff, 2011). School counselor's awareness of student motivation, stress, and test

anxiety levels is important since school counselors may be capable of improving the psychological and emotional well-being of students that may help them succeed academically, which may not be possible if the counselors are unaware of the impact testing has on stress and test anxiety levels of their students (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002).

# 8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

## 8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND PLANNERS

Although the results from this study show the impact on the school counselor's role and work environment have not changed dramatically, it appears that students are experiencing some negative consequences associated with the use of high-stakes tests, mainly higher levels of stress and test-anxiety. Moving forward, if considering changes to the current accountability system in place, policy makers may ask themselves one main question before making changes to the current system that relies heavily on high-stakes tests. What is the long-term effect of high-stakes testing on student achievement and student psychological and emotional well-being (Sloane & Kelly, 2003)? Results from the current study show that students are experiencing higher levels of stress and test-anxiety, with 47.1% of respondents stating students are experiencing enough stress to impact test performance. Previous studies show relationships between principals, teachers, and students changed for the worse, which may impact student achievement negatively (Horn, J., 2003; Wright, 2002).

Policy makers should understand that early education is about turning kids into life-long learners not into machines whose sole focus is on test scores; and, those who know students the best should create the tests that are used (Tyre, 2006). The teachers, school counselors, and building level principals, who work with these children on a daily basis, should have input into

creating what content is tested. Especially since 89.7% of school counselors who participated in this study have a role in the testing process, their experience may be useful to create new high-stakes tests. These groups can work with policy makers to create tests that attempt to have students use higher level thinking skill, and are developmentally appropriate, but still measure academic performance, so schools are held accountable for what they are teaching their students without putting undo stress and anxiety on students. Finally, policymakers should not put too much emphasis on a single test that may create increased levels of stress and test anxiety in students, but instead realize that the goal of an accountability system should improve the delivery of curricula to increase student learning and use multiple indicators and assessments to measure student growth (Ananda and Rabinowitz, 2000).

Researchers suggest the idea of using multiple measures to make any high-stakes decision, such as graduation, grade promotion, and school funding. Testing may be used as one of several measures used to judge and measure student, teacher, and school performance and the effectiveness of instruction (Gunzenhauser, 2006). These multiple measures can include using results from tests, as well as grades and teacher recommendations, using portfolios or authentic assessment that include rubrics to ensure consistency (Horn, C., 2003, Langenfield et al., 1997, Margheim, 2001). The use of multiple measures may decrease the amount of importance placed on tests, which may help reduce the levels of stress and test anxiety students are experiencing, as well as the amount of time school counselors spend coordinating such tests.

## 8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

In case high-stakes testing continues as the measure used for decision-making in schools, school counselors may want to use these suggestions to help students, teachers, administrators, and parents improve the way testing is perceived in the school and possibly how students perform on the exams. Harlen (2005) gives suggestions for reducing the negative impact of testing on students. School counselors may use these when working with students. School counselors may explain the purpose of testing to students, use the tests to show progress in their learning, allow student involvement in some of the decisions involving testing, and have teachers provide feedback to the students from the test results to help improve learning. School counselors could try to focus the results of the tests to individual student gains, instead of student weaknesses (Gentry, 2006).

Although counselors may have less time available to meet with students because of their new responsibilities with high-stakes testing, mainly working as test coordinators, these changes might not necessarily be negative. The counselors may spend their time in different ways that could potentially benefit students. One way school counselors may help benefit students is by working with parents to interpret data and explain the intentions of the high-stakes exams (Ruff, 2011). Results from the current study show school counselors spend more time talking with parents about high-stakes testing now than when they began their career. The school counselors also spend more time reviewing assessment results with students and meeting with school administrators to plan for school improvement. These results are similar to previous research conducted that found high-stakes testing led to a better awareness of student academic concerns among, which may improve school performance by making parents more aware of their child's

performance and by addressing student weaknesses identified by the high-stakes assessments (Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2006).

School counselors may get involved in their state and local organizations to advocate for student and professional school counselor needs and proactively advocate for change. Counselors can provide professional development activities for their district to define the counselors' role and how a counselor can work with teachers and students to help improve the school, by helping to improve test scores, working with students to improve motivation, and or reduce stress and test anxiety, and improve the work environment. It may be beneficial for school counselors if "state and national legislatures need to be educated about school counselors' roles and the evidence backing up their effectiveness, leading to (a) more funding to hire school counselors, and (b) bills drafted to legally define the professional duties of a school counselor" (Monteiro-Leitner, 2006, p 251).

Differences seen among the subgroups in most areas studied may have significant consequences since high-stakes testing widens the educational gap between whites and minorities, and affluent and impoverished (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Faulkner & Cook, 2006). Further exploration may find the differences that exist between the subgroups may negatively affect student performance and play a role in widening the educational gap that exists. Using the results of this study, other ACCA members can raise awareness levels of the differences that exist between the subgroups and try to provide ways to eliminate these differences by providing professional development during our quarterly meetings.

By realizing that students experience more stress and test anxiety since the inception of high-stakes testing, school counselors can work with teachers, students, and parents to more

effectively prepare students to cope adaptively with these tests (Segool et al., 2013). School counselors can create lessons aimed at equipping students with the coping skills needed to handle the stress and test anxiety appropriately, minimizing the negative effects associated with high-stakes testing. School counselors should act as a building leader to minimize the negative impact testing has on building morale by helping students feel in control during testing time, and work to change the culture surrounding testing.

## 8.3 FUTURE RESEARCH

Extending this research could be useful. An extended study might include a larger population for the sample size, instead of just including members of the Allegheny County Counselors Association; participants could be selected from all of Allegheny County, the entire state, or the entire country. This would provide a larger sample size, which could generate more generalizable data to the entire population of school counselors. Similar survey questions could be presented to teachers and administrators working in Allegheny County to show any alignment or discrepancy between those two viewpoints and the school counselors' viewpoint who participated in this study.

Based on the data collected within, differences exist between the subgroups of *Education-Challenge*, *AYP-Status*, and *Years-Working* and a deeper exploration into these areas may be warranted. Since comprehensive counseling programs are shown to improve student academic performance, future research may want to examine the impact specific counseling activities have on students (Gysbers, 2004; Sink & Stroh, 2003; Vail, 2005). How much of an impact did these small group lessons focusing on test preparation skills and academic goals have

on helping their students score high enough on the state assessments to have their school make AYP? Since differences exist in the number of counselors conducting these small group lessons for the AYP groups, with more counselors engaging in these activities from the *made-AYP-group* then the *did-not-make-AYP-group*, did the school counselors play a role in helping their students meet the AYP goals established by the state?

Even though the majority of respondents in the *Years-Working* groups stated their relationship with their principal did not change, the percentage of respondents varied widely between the two groups with differences in the percentage of respondents stating their relationship changed for the worse with their principal. More participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated their relationship with their principal changed for the worse compared to those in the *after-NCLB-group*. There may be many factors that play a part in this difference that are not related to testing. One prominent factor may be a change in administrators during the *prior-to-NCLB-group* tenure. All of the participants in this group have worked for 13 years or more as a school counselor. Most of these participants are probably working for new or different administrators than when they started working, which may lead to changes occurring in their relationship with administrators. A second factor, which may lead to further exploration, may be to consider the role high-stakes testing played in the changed relationship. Are the counselors or administrators experiencing pressure from high-stakes testing that has caused a change in the way they interact? Have the dynamics between the two positions changed because of the new role the school counselors have since the implementation of high-stakes testing?

Another interesting difference to note, that could lead to future research, was seen between the *Education-Challenge* groups, with more counselors seeing an increase in time spent conducting small group lessons focusing on personal and social skills in the *low-education-*

*challenge-group* compared to no change in time for the *high-education-challenge-group*. Again, it would be interesting to examine why this change occurred. If the school counselors in the *low-education-challenge-group* conducted need assessments in their school and found students were in more need for personal and social skill lessons they would provide students with lessons focusing on this need. This need may stem from the negative impact some research, including results from the current study, that show students are experiencing higher levels of stress and test-anxiety, and the counselors are conducting lessons in an attempt to counteract these negative experiences (Brown et al. 2004; Fleege et al., n.d.; Frase-Blunt, n.d.; Segool et al., 2013; Zeidner, 1998)? If a needs assessment was conducted, and counselors are conducting the lessons in response to a specific need that has arisen, why is there a difference between the participants in the *low-education-challenge-group* and the *high-education-challenge-group*?

Finally, participants indicated they are spending more time reviewing assessment results. An exploration into how the school counselors are using these results could be worth exploring. Since more time is spent reviewing results, hopefully the counselors are able to use the results to implement programs that are beneficial for students.

Some of the results in the study may indicate two things are occurring. First, some of the results, such as taking on more responsibilities focused on testing and having less time available to meet with students may indicate an erosion in the role of the school counselor. It may be interesting to explore if school counselors believe that an erosion to their role is actually occurring. The second is the idea that high-stakes testing has become the new normal. It may be interesting to explore this idea in further detail to see if school counselors believe that high-stakes testing has been in place for a long enough time frame that stakeholders are accustomed to the impact high-stakes testing has on the school system. Since it seems that a limited number of

studies exist that explore the impact of high-stakes testing on students and school counselors based on the school counselors perspective, future research in this area could benefit students, school counselors, and the school system in general.

## 8.4 CONCLUSION

With the increased emphasis on accountability from the implementation of No Child Left Behind, and the subsequent increase in the use of high-stakes tests used to hold schools, teachers, and students accountable, an understanding of the impact of these high-stakes tests on students and school counselors is necessary (Amrein & Berliner 2003; Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; Gunzenhauser, 2006). This study explored the impact testing has on the psychological and emotional well-being of students based on the perceptions of Allegheny County Counselors Association members, as well as their perception on how testing has impacted the role and work environment of a school counselor. Although the sample is relatively small, and the findings cannot be generalized, results from this study may provide insight to other researchers, educators, and policymakers. Results show high-stakes testing has an influence on the school counselor's role. It also appears that students are experiencing some negative consequences associated with the use of these high-stakes tests.

The changes experienced by the school counselors involved in this study may signal an erosion of the position. The responsibilities that the counselor is accustomed to performing or trained to complete are evolving. The school counselor has less time to focus on the student, or focus on the standards established by the ASCA national model and the three domains of academic, career, and personal/social development. Most counselors are now involved in the

testing process, working as the test coordinator; they may also be responsible for interpreting, distributing, and analyzing high-stakes test data for teachers, students, and parents. Many of these roles revolve around high-stakes testing and are a direct result of the changes that occurred in the school system with the establishment of NCLB. If high-stakes testing is here to stay counselors should be trained and educated on the process and potential impact high-stakes testing has on students.

At this point, high-stakes testing that was implemented with the establishment of the NCLB act is now thirteen years old. The school counselors in this study may not have noticed a change in their role, work environment; student's motivation, stress, or test anxiety levels because high-stakes testing has become the new normal. Testing may not have a tremendous impact on motivation, stress, or test anxiety because all of the students currently in primary or secondary school have completed their entire schooling under the rules established by the No Child Left Behind Act. These students do not know what it is like to go to school without having to take a high-stakes test; they have never been in a building that the teachers, school counselors, or administrators are not under the pressure associated with trying to meet adequate yearly progress. The changes that occurred to the school counselor's role and work environment, and the stress and test anxiety experienced by students when NCLB was originally implemented, may be so ingrained at this point, it is now just a normal part of the school. High-stakes testing, and all of the positive and negative aspects that go along with it, have become common place for students, school counselors, teachers, parents, and administrators.

The "melt-down" that the 4$^{th}$ grade student experienced in the vignette shared at the beginning of this paper may be an experience that less students have and less counselors witness. Whether this is a good or bad thing remains to be seen. No one wants to see a student experience

the stress and test anxiety that this student experienced during that week of testing; however, the fact that less students are experiencing this level of difficulty with testing may show how ingrained high-stakes testing has become in our culture. If stakeholders have become numb to the impact high-stakes testing has on the school system, this may lead to complacency to accept the negative effects of testing. This may mean stakeholders stop working to improve, or change, the system. All of this may signal that testing has become the new normal.

Counselors in the study stated they have less time available to spend with students due to changes to their responsibilities from high-stakes testing, such as acting as the test coordinator or proctoring high-stakes tests. School counselors believe their work environment has remained the same since the beginning of their career, even with the increased use of high-stakes tests. The accountability system in place also seems to have improved student motivation. Unfortunately, the accountability system currently in place may have negatively impacted the amount of stress and test anxiety student's experience, along with negatively impacting student morale. Another result found in the study, was school counselors are counseling more students due to stress and test anxiety during testing time than they did at the beginning of their career.

In the current study, participant information was separated into three different subgroups based on school demographic information provided in the survey. Participants were separated into a group labeled *Education-Challenge* based on the percentage of their school's enrollment in the National School Lunch Program and the percentage of students identified as a racial or ethnic minority. The second subgroup participants were separated into was based on the *AYP-Status* of the school. The third subgroups separated participants by the number of years they worked as a school counselor. Interesting differences emerged from the results of the survey when participant information was separated into the different subgroups.

Participants in the *low-education-challenge-group* had fewer respondents who reported they: talk to parents regarding testing, work with administrators to plan for school improvement, and conduct small group lessons focusing on personal and social skills. The *low-education-challenge-group* had more participants respond that their students were engaged to do their best work during testing. Participants in the *AYP-Status* groups answered survey questions differently based on their AYP group. More participants in the group that did not make AYP are meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement. They also state they do not engage in small group counseling focusing on test preparation skills and academic goals that are not test preparation based. The *made-AYP-group* had more participants respond that their students were engaged to do their best work during testing.

Overall, results for this study were mixed. Counselors stated they have less time to meet with students now, but have not experienced changes in the amount of time available to conduct classroom lessons, small group lessons, or individual counseling sessions. The counselors did not experience a noticeable change in their work environment with the inception of high-stakes testing. Finally, questions regarding the psychological and emotional well-being of students also have mixed results. Students seem to have increased levels of motivation and engagement, but are experiencing more stress and test anxiety now than when the counselors began their career.

The survey asked respondents questions specifically looking at the relationships counselors have with building principals, students, parents, and teachers, as well as student attendance and discipline referrals during high-stakes testing time. Changes did not occur in any of these areas during the school counselors' careers. The results from this study support the findings by Thorn and Mulvenon (2002), who found little support that suggests the school counselors believe testing is a negative experience. Results from the current study show that although the school

counselor's role has changed to include responsibilities related to high-stakes testing, such as working as a test coordinator, which provides less time for interacting with students, most school counselors studied have not experienced a change in their work environment since the beginning of their career. Although a limited number of studies exist that explore the impact of high-stakes testing on the school counselor's role, several studies explored the impact testing has on teachers. Many of the previous research results are different than the results in the current study. Sixty percent of the teachers surveyed stated NCLB negatively impacts the work setting, by negatively impacting teacher morale and taking valuable time away from important classroom issues (Mertler, 2011). Other studies showed testing negatively affect the relationships of stakeholders in the school (Brown et al., 2004; Fielding, 2004; Ruff, 2011; Wright, 2002).

Results from the study addressing research question one showed several noticeable changes occurred to the counselor's role. The most notable change occurred in the amount of time counselors have available for students, due to changes in their responsibilities. It appears school counselors have less time available to meet with students. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of participants stated the time available to meet with students decreased since the beginning of their career, with only 1.5% responding the time available improved during his or her career. Even with less time available to meet with students, the counselors perceived the focus on student achievement changed for the better. Another factor to consider is that 22.1% of respondents said, in an open-ended question, that there is more pressure to perform for all stakeholders in the school with the use of high-stakes testing.

Seeing a change in the amount of time available to meet with students is not surprising, since the role of the school counselor changes based on what administrators think a counselor should do, or on the political forces impacting the school, centered on meeting the accountability

standards established by the federal government with the creation of NCLB in 2001 (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Similar to the results seen in this study, testing impacted the role the counselor played in the school (Ruff, 2011; & Davis, 2006).

Similar to other research reviewed (Brown et al., 2004; Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002; Zalaquett, 2005), a large portion (52.9%) of the school counselors act as test coordinators, or spend time involved in high-stakes testing by proctoring tests or counting tests for distribution (36.8%). Only 10.3% of the participants stated they have no involvement in any aspect of the testing process. These results are similar to other research that shows 75% to 80% of school counselors have some involvement in the testing process (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002; Zalaquett, 2005). In Brown et al. (2004) as many as 82% of school counselors studied functioned as the test coordinator for their school.

Sixty-four percent of the participants stated they have less time available to meet with students, spending more time reviewing assessment results, talking to parents about high-stakes tests, acting as test coordinator, and meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement. With two-thirds of the respondents believing they have less time available to meet with students, differences may exist in the amount of time spent on classroom lessons, small group lessons, and on individual counseling sessions; however, this was not the case for the areas explored. Results from the survey showed that counselors do not perceive high-stakes testing as impacting the way they conduct classroom lessons, small group lessons, and individual counseling sessions or the amount of time available to conduct these activities. In fact, counselors actually stated they spend less time during a typical week conducting classroom lessons, small group lessons, and individual counseling sessions focusing on test preparation skills than in the other three areas

studied (college and career preparedness, personal and social skills, and academic goals that are not test preparation based).

Based on the results from the survey questions designed to address research question two, it does not appear high-stakes testing is impacting the work environment for school counselors. Since differences were not observed in relationships, attendance, or discipline referrals this may suggest high-stakes testing has become the new normal for all stakeholders involved in the school. Teachers, students, administrators, and counselors may realize high-stakes testing is here to stay, so instead of letting the test negatively impact the school environment they have made the best of what previous research has shown was a bad situation (Brown, et al., 2004; Fielding, 2004; Horn, C., 2003; Wright, 2002). This may also explain why differences exist between these researchers and the current study. At least ten years passed from the previous research to this study, during that time students, administrators, teachers, and school counselors may have come to accept the role high-stakes testing has in the school. If a level of acceptance exists among stakeholders, than they should not experience a change in the relationship they have with each other. There also should not be changes in discipline referrals or student attendance during high-stakes testing.

The amount of pressure school counselors feel from school administrators was explored. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of the participants stated their interactions with school administrators, such as the building principal, have an appropriate level of pressure. Differences did not exist between the subgroups in this area. All subgroups studied feel an appropriate amount of pressure when interacting with administrators. The school counselors also stated there was no change in their relationship with school administrators with the use of high-stakes testing. Results from the current study support findings from other research that surveyed teachers. Teachers said they

form better relationships with their administrators since the implementation of high-stakes testing and are working better together to help improve student performance (Horn, J., 2003). It may be interesting to explore the feelings of teachers and school counselors working in the same building to see if differences exist in the perceived pressure when teachers and school counselors have the same building administrators.

School counselors in the current study did not report any changes in their relationship with students, teachers, or parents. Over three quarters of all respondents stated their relationship with students (85.3%) and parents (83.8%) did not change since they began working as a school counselor. More than two-thirds of the school counselors participating in the study did not notice a change in their relationship with teachers (72.1%), which contradicts Brown et al. (2004) and Ruff (2011). These researchers found testing negatively impacted the way school counselors interacted with students and teachers, along with the relationships they had with students and teachers. Teachers in other studies reported the pressure associated with high-stakes testing is straining their relationships with students and other staff members (Fielding, 2004; Wright, 2002). Results in this study may show different results from these studies because of the amount of time that has passed since Brown et al. (2004), Fielding (2004), and Wright (2002).

Only a few differences exist in the subgroups for changes in relationships with principals, teachers, students, or parents, as well as discipline referrals and student attendance. Even though the majority of respondents in the *Years-Working* group stated their relationship with their principal did not change, the percentage of respondents varied widely between the two groups. Fifty-four percent of the participants in the *prior-to-NCLB-group* stated their relationship did not change in comparison to 91.1% of the participants in the *after-NCLB-group*. Differences also existed with the percentage stating their relationship changed for the worse with their principal.

One quarter (27.3%) of the *prior-to-NCLB-group* participants stated their relationship with their principal changed for the worse compared to only 4.4% of the *after-NCLB-group*. Many variables may factor into this difference that are unrelated to testing. One prominent factor may be a change in administrators during the *prior-to-NCLB-group* tenure. All of the participants in this group have worked for 13 years or more as a school counselor. Most of these participants are probably working for new or different administrators than when they started working, which may lead to changes occurring in the relationship they have with administrators.

Changes in student attendance and discipline referrals during high-stakes testing time did not change. Over two-thirds (66.2%) of the school counselors stated student attendance during testing time did not change in comparison to other times of the school year. This may show students are not missing school to avoid having to take the high-stakes exams. In part, this could stem from the fact that students may realize that even if they miss school on a day a high-stakes exam is given, they will be required to take the test when they return to school. Over three quarters (76.5%) of the counselors stated discipline referrals during testing time are similar to other points during the year, which contradicts previous research that found the effects of testing led to principals reporting more incidents of students acting out in negative and inappropriate ways during testing time (Horn, C., 2003). So, even though findings in the current study show student morale has decreased and students are feeling more stress and test anxiety from the high-stakes tests in place, the school counselors did not observe students acting out in negative ways during testing time.

Research question three addressed the perceived changes in students' psychological and emotional well-being in school since the inception of high-stakes testing. It appears school counselors in this study perceive their students are experiencing higher levels of stress and test

anxiety with the use of high-stakes testing, which is similar to other research, which may show the emphasis on accountability and high-stakes testing is intensifying the socio-emotional issues students face (Ruff, 2011). School counselor's awareness of student motivation, stress, and test anxiety levels is important since school counselors may be capable of improving the psychological and emotional well-being of students, helping them succeed academically. This may not be possible if the counselors are unaware of the impact testing has on stress and test anxiety levels of their students (Thorn & Mulvenon, 2002).

# APPENDIX A

## MATRIX OF METHODOLOGY

| Question | Evidence | Data Source | How were data collected? | How are results collected and reported? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How do school counselors perceive the impact of high-stakes testing on their role? | • Personal research conducted on counselor's perception of the impact of testing on their role | • Primary source –data directly gathered for the purpose of this study<br>• Use non-probability sampling of members of Allegheny County Counselors Association (ACCA)<br>• Use a questionnaire surveying members of ACCA using Survey Monkey | • Data were collected using a survey consisting of closed and open-ended questions<br>• Questions use a Likert type scale: (i.e.) When interacting with my school administrator regarding improving student performance on high-stakes tests, I: (A) Do not feel any pressure (B) Feel a level of pressure that is appropriate (C) Feel pressured to the point of discomfort (D) Feel highly pressured (E) Other (please specify).<br>• Open-ended questions ask counselors to expand upon answers given on Likert questions or for an explanation that couldn't be captured in a closed-ended questions | • Data were examined through descriptive statistics<br>• Likert scale question data is reported through frequency distribution and cross-tabulated contingency tables<br>• Open-ended questions were examined and coded for common themes<br>• Use frequency distribution and cross-tabulated contingency tables<br>• Data were reported through descriptive narratives. |
| 2. How has school counselors' perceptions about their work environment changed since the inception of high-stakes testing? | • Personal research conducted on counselor's perception of the relationship students have with their counselors | • Primary source – data directly gathered for the purpose of this study<br>• Use non-probability sampling of members of Allegheny County Counselors Association (ACCA)<br>• Use a questionnaire surveying members of ACCA using Survey Monkey | • Data were collected using closed and open-ended questions<br>• Questions use a Likert type scale: (i.e.) When interacting with my school administrator regarding improving student performance on high-stakes tests, I: (A) Do not feel any pressure (B) Feel a level of pressure that is appropriate (C) Feel pressured to the point of discomfort (D) Feel highly pressured (E) Other (please specify).<br>• Open-ended questions ask counselors to expand upon answers given on Likert questions or for an explanation that couldn't be captured in a closed-ended question | • Data were examined through descriptive statistics<br>• Likert scale question data is reported through frequency distribution and cross-tabulated contingency tables<br>• Open-ended questions were examined and coded for common themes<br>• Use frequency distribution and cross-tabulated contingency tables<br>• Data were reported through descriptive narratives. |
| 3. What are school | • Personal research | • Primary source – data directly gathered for the purpose of this study | • Data were collected using closed and open-ended questions | • Data were examined through descriptive statistics |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| counselors' perceptions of student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress, and test-anxiety) in school since the inception of high-stakes testing? | conducted on counselor's perception of student psychological and emotional well-being (i.e. motivation, stress and test anxiety). | • Use non-probability sampling of members of Allegheny County Counselors Association (ACCA)<br>• Use a questionnaire surveying members of ACCA using Survey Monkey | • Questions use a Likert type scale: (i.e.) When interacting with my school administrator regarding improving student performance on high-stakes tests, I: (A) Do not feel any pressure (B) Feel a level of pressure that is appropriate (C) Feel pressured to the point of discomfort (D) Feel highly pressured (E) Other (please specify).<br>• Open-ended questions ask counselors to expand upon answers given on Likert questions or for an explanation that couldn't be captured in a closed-ended question | • Likert scale question data is reported through frequency distribution and cross-tabulated contingency tables<br>• Open-ended questions were examined and coded for common themes<br>• Use frequency distribution and cross-tabulated contingency tables<br>• Data were reported through descriptive narratives. |

## APPENDIX B

## PARTICIPATION LETTER

Dear Professional School Counselor,

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the School of Education's Administrative and Policy Studies program at the University of Pittsburgh. I am conducting research under the supervision of Professor Dr. Tananis to explore the impact of high-stakes testing on students and the counselor's role based on the perceptions of school counselors working in Western Pennsylvania. Results from the study may help educators and policymakers when making future decisions regarding high-stakes testing. I would appreciate your participation in the study.

I plan to conduct this research by having participants complete a survey on Survey Monkey. Your involvement in this survey is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. If you agree to participate, the survey should take no longer than twenty minutes. You may decline answering any questions you feel you do not wish to answer. All information you provide will be considered confidential and will be grouped with responses from other participants. Further, you will not be identified by name in any thesis, report, or publication resulting from this study.

I would like to assure you that the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pittsburgh has reviewed this study. However, the final decision about participating is yours. If, after reading this, you have any questions about this study, would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, or have questions after participation, please feel free to contact any of the members of the research team listed below.

The survey is located at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YKQH8HK.

Thank you in advance for your interest in this project.

## APPENDIX C

## MATRIX OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

| Construct Measured | Total Number of Questions for Construct | Researchers | Question Number(s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Demographic Information | 8 | Hamilton, Stecher, Marsh, McCombs, et al., (2007) | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Motivation | 7 | Brown, Galassi and Akos (2004); Fitzgerald (2008); Jones and Egley (2004); Mertler (2011); Pintrich and DeGroot (1990); Sabol (2010); Sundre (2000); Tuan, Chin, and Shieh (2005) | 10, 11, 15 (open-ended), 58, 61, 62, 64 (open-ended) |
| Stress and Test Anxiety | 7 | Brown, et al., (2004); Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001); Jones (2007); Mertler (2011); Thorn and Mulvenon (2002); Zeidner (1998) | 12, 13, 14 (open-ended), 58, 60, 63, 64 (open-ended) |
| Counselor's Role | 24 | Fitzgerald (2008); Hamilton et al., (2007); Mertler (2011); Sabol (2010) | 5, 9, 16-27, 28 (open-ended), 29-52, 57, 59, 64 (open-ended) |
| Work Environment | 9 | Hamilton et al., (2007); Mertler (2011) | 53, 54, 55, 56, 60, 61, 63, 64 (open-ended), 65 (open-ended) |

## APPENDIX D

## SURVEY

### IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING SURVEY

MEANING OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY: A test is considered high-stakes when results are used as criteria to determine important factors impacting students, staff, schools and school districts. Factors affecting individual students may include high school graduation, promotion to the next grade level, entrance into college, placement into gifted programs and scholarship opportunities.

### SECTION I: General Information

What grade(s) are you responsible for? (mark all that apply)

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12+ |

Please indicate the number of years you have worked in education in your current district as a:

| | |
|---|---|
| School Counselor | |
| Teacher | |
| Other | |

Please indicate the number of years you have worked in education in a different district as a:

| | |
|---|---|
| School Counselor | |
| Teacher | |
| Other | |

Approximately how many students are assigned to you? _____

Does your school have a dedicated test coordinator for PSSA/Keystone exams? Yes No

How would you describe your role in the testing process in your school(s)? _____

Approximately what percent of students in your school(s) are considered ethnic or racial minorities? If you work in more than one school that have different percentages choose all that apply.

(A) 0-10% (B) 11-20% (C) 21-30% (D) 31-40% (E) 41-50% (F) 51-60% (G) 61-70% (H) 71-80% (I) 81-90% (J) 91-100%

Approximately what percent of students are enrolled in the National School Lunch Program in your school(s)? If you work in more than one school that have different percentages choose all that apply.

(A) 0-10% (B) 11-20% (C) 21-30% (D) 31-40% (E) 41-50% (F) 51-60% (G) 61-70% (H) 71-80% (I) 81-90% (J) 91-100%

What was your school's AYP status for the 2012-2013 school year?

(A) Made AYP (B) Making Progress (C) Warning (D) School Improvement I or II (E) Corrective Action I or II

## SECTION II: Counselor's Role and Psychological and Emotional Impact

The use of psychological and emotional well-being in this study refers to student motivation, stress and test anxiety. Stress is defined as a person's physical and/or emotional response to a stimulus in the environment (Burchfield, 1979; Hobfoll, 1989). Test anxiety is defined as an emotion, or the cognitive and behavioral reactions of fear, apprehension, and nervousness to the outcomes of a test (Zeidner, 1998). Motivation is defined as the forces "that lead to the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of behavior" (Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p. 428).

*For the following questions please indicate your level of agreement for each statement by choosing one option.*

When interacting with my school administrator regarding improving student performance on high-stakes tests, I:

(A) Do not feel any pressure (B) Feel a level of pressure that is appropriate

(C) Feel pressured to the point of discomfort (D) Feel highly pressured

Other (please specify) _____

I would describe student engagement with high-stakes testing as:

(A) Engaged to do their best (B) Somewhat engaged (C) Somewhat disengaged
(D) Disengaged to the point of negatively impacting performance (E) Totally disengaged and apathetic
Other (please specify)_____

In general, students feel high-stakes tests are:
(A) Very important (B) Somewhat important (C) Somewhat unimportant
(D) Considerably unimportant (E) A total waste of time
Other (please specify)_____

I believe high-stakes tests cause my students:
(A) No stress (B) A bit of stress (C) Enough stress to impact performance (D) Enough stress to experience physical distress
Other (please specify)_____

Of the students who approach me after receiving their high-stakes test results, the majority are:
(A) Substantially concerned about their results (B) Mildly concerned about their results
(C) Satisfied with their results (D) Indifferent about their results
Other (please specify)_____

Please provide an explanation of how you feel high-stakes testing has impacted student stress and test anxiety.

_____

In what ways (positive or negative) has testing impacted student motivation?

_____

On average, how much time do you spend on the following counseling activities during a typical week?

| | I don't engage in this activity | 1 hour or less | 1 to 5 hours | 6-20 hours | 21 hours or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reviewing student assessment results | | | | | |
| Talking with parents about high-stakes tests | | | | | |
| Meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement | | | | | |
| Acting as test coordinator/proctor (testing students, boxing tests, placing stickers on tests, preparing exam | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| schedules) | | | | | |
| Offering assistance outside of school hours for students who are not proficient on the state tests | | | | | |
| Revising the counseling curriculum due to high-stakes testing | | | | | |

For each of these items please indicate whether the amount of time has changed from when you began working as a counselor to now.

| | I don't engage in this activity | Less time now | About the same amount of time | More time now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reviewing student assessment results | | | | |
| Talking with parents about high-stakes tests | | | | |
| Meeting with administrators to plan for school improvement | | | | |
| Acting as test coordinator/proctor (testing students, boxing tests, placing stickers on tests, preparing exam schedules) | | | | |
| Offering assistance outside of school hours for students who are not proficient on the state tests | | | | |
| Revising the counseling curriculum due to high-stakes testing | | | | |

During a typical week, if you have experienced a change in any of the areas listed above, why do you think a change has occurred?

_____

On average, how much time do you spend on the following **CLASSROOM** guidance activities during a typical week?

| | I don't engage in this activity | 1 hour or less | 1 to 5 hours | 6-20 hours | 21 hours or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom Lessons involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | | |
| Classroom Lessons involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | | |
| Classroom Lessons involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | | |
| Classroom Lessons involving Academic Goals that are not Test Preparation Based | | | | | |

For each of these items please indicate whether the amount of time has changed from when you began working as a counselor to now.

| | I don't engage in this activity | Less time now | About the same amount of time | More time now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom Lessons involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | |
| Classroom Lessons involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | |
| Classroom Lessons involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | |
| Classroom Lessons involving Academic Goals that are not Test Preparation Based | | | | |

On average, how much time do you spend on the following **SMALL-GROUP** counseling activities during a typical week?

| | I don't engage in this activity | 1 hour or less | 1 to 5 hours | 6-20 hours | 21 hours or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small group Lessons involving Test | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preparation Skills | | | | | |
| Small group Lessons involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | | |
| Small group Lessons involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | | |
| Small group Lessons involving Academic Goals that are not Test Preparation Based | | | | | |

For each of these items please indicate whether the amount of time has changed from when you began working as a counselor to now.

| | I don't engage in this activity | Less time now | About the same amount of time | More time now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small group Lessons involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | |
| Small group Lessons involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | |
| Small group Lessons involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | |
| Small group Lessons involving Academic Goals that are not Test Preparation Based | | | | |

On average, how much time do you spend on the following **INDIVIDUAL** counseling activities during a typical week?

| | I don't engage in this activity | 1 hour or less | 1 to 5 hours | 6-20 hours | 21 hours or more |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual counseling involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | | |
| Individual counseling involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | | |
| Individual counseling involving | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal/Social Skills | | | | | |
| Individual counseling involving Academic Goals that are not Test Preparation Based | | | | | |

For each of these items please indicate whether the amount of time has changed from when you began working as a counselor to now.

| | I don't engage in this activity | Less time now | About the same amount of time | More time now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual counseling involving Test Preparation Skills | | | | |
| Individual counseling involving College and Career Readiness Goals | | | | |
| Individual counseling involving Personal/Social Skills | | | | |
| Individual counseling involving Academic Goals that are not Test Preparation Based | | | | |

Please indicate how, if at all, the following have changed since the inception of high-stakes testing.

| | Changed for the worse | Did not change | Changed for the better |
|---|---|---|---|
| My relationship with principals | | | |
| My relationship with teachers | | | |
| My relationship with students | | | |
| My relationship with parents | | | |
| Focus on student achievement | | | |
| Student morale | | | |
| The time available to meet with students | | | |
| Discipline referrals during high-stakes testing time | | | |
| Student attendance during high-stakes testing time | | | |
| Student motivation | | | |
| The number of students seen during high-stakes testing time due to stress and/or anxiety | | | |

Consider the areas indicated above, if you indicated that any of these have changed, please choose the area that you feel has changed the MOST (whether positively or negatively) and provide some examples of how you see these changes occurring in your school.

_____

What aspects of high-stakes testing in your school do you think might encourage more POSITIVE changes in any of the areas indicated above?

_____

Is there anything you would like to add regarding high-stakes testing that was not covered in this survey?

_____

## APPENDIX E

**Table 27.** Change in counselor's role directly involving students

| | Changed for the worse | | Did not change | | Changed for the better | | Missing Data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Focus on student achievement | 12 | 17.6 | 36 | 52.9 | 20 | 29.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Time available to meet with students | 44 | 64.7 | 23 | 33.8 | 1 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 |

## APPENDIX F

**Table 28.** Interacting with school administrators regarding student improvement

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Do not feel any pressure | 14 | 20.6 |
| Feel an appropriate level of pressure | 44 | 64.7 |
| Feel pressured to the point of discomfort | 5 | 7.4 |
| Feel Highly Pressured | 2 | 2.9 |
| Other | 2 | 2.9 |
| Did not respond | 1 | 1.5 |

## APPENDIX G

**Table 29.** Student engagement during high-stakes testing

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Engaged to do their best | 22 | 32.4 |
| Somewhat engaged | 22 | 32.4 |
| Somewhat disengaged | 13 | 19.1 |
| Disengaged to the point of impacting performance | 2 | 2.9 |
| Totally disengaged and apathetic | 1 | 1.5 |
| Other | 6 | 8.8 |
| Did not respond | 2 | 2.9 |

## APPENDIX H

**Table 30.** Students' feelings regarding high-stakes tests

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very important | 13 | 19.1 |
| Somewhat important | 27 | 39.7 |
| Somewhat unimportant | 9 | 13.2 |
| Considerably unimportant | 7 | 10.3 |
| A total waste of time | 5 | 7.4 |
| Other | 6 | 8.8 |
| Did not respond | 1 | 1.5 |

## APPENDIX I

**Table 31.** Stress related to high-stakes tests

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| No stress | 0 | 0 |
| A bit of stress | 28 | 41.2 |
| Enough stress to impact performance | 32 | 47.1 |
| Enough stress to experience physical distress | 4 | 5.9 |
| Other | 3 | 4.4 |
| Did not respond | 1 | 1.5 |

## APPENDIX J

**Table 32.** Student discussions with counselors regarding high-stakes test results

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Substantially concerned about their results | 12 | 17.6 |
| Mildly concerned about their results | 26 | 38.2 |
| Satisfied with their results | 5 | 7.4 |
| Indifferent about their results | 15 | 22.1 |
| Other | 8 | 11.8 |
| Did not respond | 2 | 16.2 |

## APPENDIX K

**Table 33.** Open-ended question: Counselor perceptions of stress levels in students

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Stress levels have increased significantly | 11 | 16.2 |
| Stress levels have increased significantly in high achieving students | 9 | 13.2 |
| Students experience stress if they are not proficient due to graduation requirements | 7 | 10.3 |
| Testing has not increased test anxiety | 6 | 8.8 |
| Students are indifferent to testing | 5 | 7.4 |
| Students avoid school during testing | 1 | 1.5 |
| Teacher anxiety has caused an increase in student anxiety | 2 | 2.9 |
| Stressful for low performing students due to failure and repeated testing | 2 | 2.9 |
| Did not respond | 18 | 26.5 |

## APPENDIX L

**Table 34.** Open-ended question: Counselor perceptions of motivation

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Testing has no impact on motivation | 6 | 8.8 |
| High achieving students are more motivated | 2 | 2.9 |
| Students are more engaged in the material | 3 | 4.4 |
| More motivated to make sure they pass the test | 4 | 5.9 |
| Students are more motivated to: show what they know, maintain a successful school, do their best | 6 | 8.8 |
| Tested so frequently they lose motivation, "just another day, just another test" | 7 | 10.3 |
| Low performing students are less motivated | 7 | 10.3 |
| Motivation in all students has declined | 1 | 1.5 |
| Not motivated to learn, just motivated to pass | 1 | 1.5 |
| Did not respond | 16 | 23.5 |

## APPENDIX M

**Table 35.** Open-ended question: Areas of the most change

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| More students experiencing stress and test anxiety | 4 | 5.9 |
| Testing time makes it harder to counsel students if there is an issue | 15 | 22.1 |
| Student attendance improves during testing time | 2 | 2.9 |
| Student achievement is easier to monitor | 2 | 2.9 |
| Personal relationships and building morale have declined | 7 | 10.3 |
| Focus on student achievement is negatively impacting the school environment | 2 | 2.9 |
| Focus on student achievement is positively impacting student knowledge | 1 | 1.5 |
| Teachers are reluctant to allow students to leave their classroom to receive counseling services | 2 | 2.9 |
| Teacher are more stressed | 2 | 2.9 |
| Did not respond | 22 | 32.4 |

## APPENDIX N

**Table 36.** Open-ended question: High-stakes testing encouraging positive changes

| | n | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| More information to students about how it can impact their future | 2 | 2.9 |
| Curriculum changes to promote testing skills | 1 | 1.5 |
| Progress and improvement are just as important as scores | 1 | 1.5 |
| Give teachers and administrators more input in testing | 1 | 1.5 |
| Eliminate the importance tests carry | 2 | 2.9 |
| Student motivation has increased | 6 | 8.8 |
| Focus on student achievement and strengthening the curriculum | 6 | 8.8 |
| Attendance and student effort has increased | 4 | 5.9 |
| Did not respond | 35 | 51.5 |

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