

**State-Mandated Student Assessment Systems: Describing the Impacts of  
Change on High School Teachers**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to describe the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers. In the spring of 2012, high school teachers in the core subjects of English, math, science and history will administer a new assessment system. It is essential to understand how this transition period will impact high school teachers. This research uses existing literature to develop a conceptual framework based on three categories: *morale*, *turnover*, and *commitment to assessment*.

**Methods:** This study utilizes a survey composed of open-ended and close-ended questions distributed to 52 teachers at a single high school in Leander, Texas. The responses of 11 teachers were attained. The results were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics.

**Findings:** A majority of respondents, eight, agree that teacher morale will be impacted as a result of the new assessment system. Likewise, seven respondents agree that their workload will be significantly increased, and they will not receive adequate support in anticipation of the transition. Overall, respondents describe more positive rather than negative consequences. A total of eight out of respondents also think that the STAAR test will be more aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) than the TAKS test. The most articulated finding is that nine out of eleven respondents believe that the switch to the new STAAR test will significantly impact the amount of pressure they experience as teachers.

## **About the Author**

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

Grand ideas of education reform have been part of Texas' educational conversation for over sixty years. Since 1979, the Texas' public education system has required that students satisfactorily complete state-mandated student assessment systems. The current state assessment system can be traced, in part, to the Gilmer-Aikin Committee formed by the Texas Legislature in 1947.

#### **Evolution of Assessments**

The Gilmer-Aikin Committee was formed with the goal of scrutinizing Texas public schools and recommending major education reforms, particularly in the areas of public school finance and efficiency of school districts (Kuehlem 2004). The result of the committee was the 1949 Gilmer-Aikin law that, among other reforms, transformed the State Department of Education into what is currently known as the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Immediately following the transformation, TEA hired numerous expert administrators with the specific intent of providing leadership and regulation to Texas schools and to immediately start efforts to improve public schools and student achievement. While the Gilmer-Aikin Committee focused many efforts on improving schools as a whole and improving the quality of teachers through increasing degree requirements, it was the Legislature of 1979 that implemented the first testing program that would eventually become Texas' first mandated student assessment system, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS).

On the federal side, policymakers in Washington also had their sights on education reform. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" and was the most far-reaching federal legislation affecting education ever passed by Congress. The act was an extensive statute that funded primary and secondary education, while explicitly forbidding the establishment of a national curriculum (Evers 2000). It also emphasized equal access to education and established high standards and accountability (Guthrie 2002).

Then, in 1983, a twelve-member commission was formed under the Reagan Administration, charged with identifying factors of why public schools were failing. The National Commission of Excellence in Education released a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. The report became one of the landmark publications in educational history. Four important elements of the educational process were identified: content, expectation, time, and teaching. In the report, the committee highlighted the presence or absence of rigorous student examinations as an important method of expressing and achieving expectations (Department of Education 1983).

In 2002, Congress amended the ESEA of 1965 and reauthorized it as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Like ESEA, NCLB is regarded as a landmark event in educational history. The NCLB was symbolic of a major shift in American education. Until the latter part of the twentieth century, it was generally sufficient simply to offer schooling and to ensure that all children had equal access. By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, Americans were expecting more of their

education systems. Simple access was no longer sufficient. Learning was expected of all children, and performance was expected of all schools. NCLB was filled with accountability provisions to ensure that states and participating schools understood the new expectations (Guthrie 2002).

This act was approved under the Bush Administration with a pretext of standards-based education reform. Supporters of the Act believed that setting high standards and establishing measureable goals would improve individual outcomes in education (Guthrie 2002). Although NCLB shifted the focus to standardized testing, these types of tests have been around for decades.

Public schools are required to use state tests to evaluate student progress. The purpose of these tests is to ensure that all students are competent in basic skills. Under NCLB, each state has authority to set its own standards for basic skills, although this trend is now changing with the recent adoption of the Common Core state standards. Throughout the years, there have been several testing regimes in Texas, each presenting new concerns, resulting in frequent changes to mandated assessment tests. For example, Texas adopted the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) test in 1980, the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test in 1986, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test in 1990, and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test in 2003. Another change in state assessments, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test, will take place during the 2011-2012 school year, to be fully phased-in by the 2015-2016 school year (see Table 1.1 for phase-in timelines). With

each new system, there are concerns and fear of change on the part of school teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.

**Table 1.1: Timeline for TAKS phase-out and EOC phase-in**

	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015
GR 9	TAKS	TAKS	EOC	EOC	EOC	EOC
GR 10	TAKS	TAKS	TAKS	EOC	EOC	EOC
GR 11	TAKS	TAKS	TAKS	TAKS	EOC	EOC
GR 12	TAKS*	TAKS*	TAKS*	TAKS*	TAKS*	EOC or TAKS*

\*Out-of-school testers and 12<sup>th</sup> grade re-testers

Source: Guthrie, J. (Dec., 2009). *What's coming ahead?: TEA update on the end-of course program*. Presented at the Texas Association of School Administrators Assessment Conference, Austin, TX.

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Differing opinions exist with regard to mandated student assessment systems. Advocates declare that standardized tests provide purposeful and explicit curriculum that creates a better understanding of what exactly should be taught in the classroom (Haertel and Herman 2005). Others feel that the explicit curriculum requires teachers to teach solely to the test and that no test is good enough to serve as the sole or primary basis for important educational decisions.

The STAAR test is a hybrid of past assessments and new approaches. Educators of grades three through eight will continue traditional assessments using

the STAAR Grades 3-8 Program. This program introduces the element of rigor, but essentially follows the same format of past assessments. The most profound transition will take place on educators of grades nine through twelve. This version of the STAAR introduces a paradigm shift in what high school teachers classically expect from a state assessment. For decades, educators have grown accustomed to administering one pass/fail assessment to their students at the end of the school year. With the STAAR EOC Program comes the introduction of twelve end-of-course (EOC) exams that will place greater emphasis on college and career readiness, rather than a customary, grade-specific test that covers four subject areas.

Since its adoption in 2003, teachers have made their criticisms of the TAKS test known. However, there is limited research on how the introduction of the EOC examination method of the STAAR test will affect high school teachers. For this reason, this study intends to describe how a change in state-mandated assessment systems affects teacher morale, turnover, and commitment to assessments.

From the early Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) to the current State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), "Texas has steadily increased the rigor, expanded the scope, and raised the performance standards measured on state assessments" (TEA 2010). The STAAR test is said to encompass all of the above.

### **Assessment Transition and Change**

Starting with operational testing in the 2011–2012 school year, the STAAR is said to raise the bar for Texas education by adding the element of rigor. Aside from

assessing students on curriculum required to be covered by the TEKS, they will also be asked a series of questions designed to go above the standards. This is what lawmakers are referring to when they mention rigor. According to TEA administrators, the STAAR will represent a more unified, comprehensive assessment program that will incorporate more rigorous college and career readiness standards. With the creation of the STAAR assessment program, the Texas Legislature continued its efforts to improve the state's education system using statewide assessments. One of the most aggressive and important education goals for the state was set forth by House Bill 3, adopted by the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature in 2009. By the 2019–2020 school year, Texas is to become one of the top 10 states for graduating college-ready students (TEA 2010). Toward this end, TEA set broad goals for the new STAAR assessment program, as shown in the House Bill 3 Executive Summary (TEA 2010). The performance expectations on the STAAR have been established in a manner that raises the bar on student performance to a level where graduating students are postsecondary ready. At the high school level, focus of student performance has shifted to twelve end-of-course assessments which will be linked to college and career readiness.

The transition from the TAKS to the STAAR entails specific changes. First, the assessment program for grades three through eight will change from TAKS to the new, more rigorous STAAR Grades 3-8 Program. For high school, grade-based testing represented by TAKS will be replaced by the course-based STAAR EOC assessments in Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, world geography, world history, U.S. history, biology, chemistry, physics, and English I, II, and III under the STAAR EOC

Program. The element of rigor has been added to the new STAAR assessments. Simply put, content standards for the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the source for the state's K–12 instructional curricula, as well as the basis for the state assessment program, have been strengthened to include college- and career-readiness content standards. New test blueprints will emphasize the assessment of the content standards that best prepare students for the next grade or course. Assessments will increase in length at most grades and subjects, and overall test difficulty will be increased by including more rigorous items. The rigor of items will be increased by assessing skills at a greater depth and level of cognitive complexity. According to TEA, the tests will be better able to measure the growth of higher-achieving students. For example, in science and mathematics, the number of open-ended items on most tests will increase to allow students more opportunity to derive an answer independently without being influenced by answer choices provided with the questions. Likewise, performance standards will be set so that they require a higher level of student performance than is required on the current TAKS assessments.

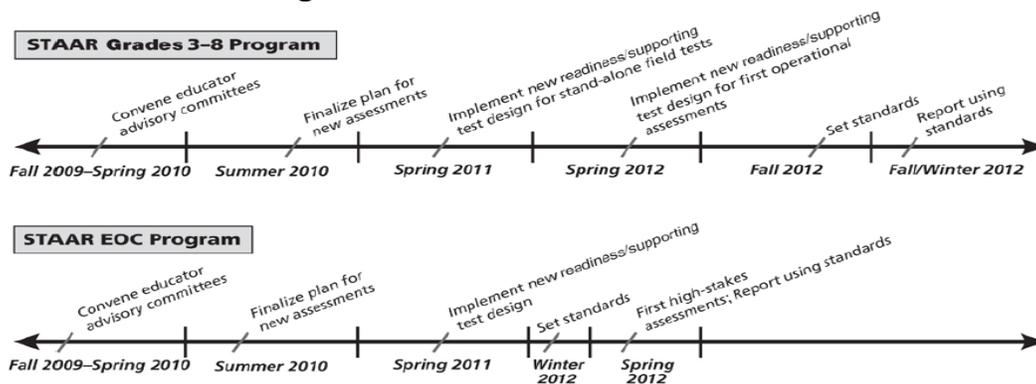
To validate the level of rigor, student performance on STAAR assessments will be compared with results on standardized national and international assessments. Finally, In order to graduate, a student must achieve a cumulative score that is at least equal to the product of the number of STAAR EOC assessments taken in each foundation content area and a scale score that indicates satisfactory performance.

## Research Purpose

With the changes between the TAKS and the STAAR focusing on rigor, student performance, and postsecondary readiness, there is a valid concern that the transition may impact teacher *morale*, *turnover*, and *commitment to assessment*. Specifically, because standards are being raised, teachers may see their level of confidence shift, their workloads increase, and the amount of pressure associated with teaching rise. It is important to cut through the rhetoric that drove the implementation of this new assessment in order to understand the true impacts of this transition.

This study will focus on high school teachers primarily because the end-of-course exams will be present in grades 9 through 12 only. Because the new assessment requirements will need systemic changes and the high school teachers will be the primary implementers, it is important to learn how the assessment requirements will impact their daily instruction. Also, the first administration of the STAAR test will take place during the spring of 2012. Conducting this research in the fall of 2011 will provide results in direct anticipation of the new testing regime.

**Table 1.2: Timeline for the Development and Implementation of the STAAR Assessment Programs**



The purpose of this study is to describe the impacts of switching state mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers. This research will utilize a survey to obtain teachers' perspective on the issue. The responses will be analyzed and described, using literature available on the subject. This research will add to and illuminate the current discourse on the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers.

### **Chapter Preview**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provided an introduction and historical perspective of assessments from the national and state levels as well as an overview of the new STAAR test. Chapter Two will provide a review of relevant literature that describes morale, turnover, and commitment to assessment. Chapter Three provides details about the methodology and setting used in this study and an operationalization of the conceptual framework. Chapter Four will provide a summary of the findings of the study. Chapter Five will present recommendations and potential implications of the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conceptual framework of this study by identifying descriptive categories of effects that switching state-mandated assessment systems has on high school teachers. The descriptive categories found in existing literature pertaining to this subject are: *teacher morale*, *teacher turnover*, and *teacher commitment to assessment*. A summary of these categories and literature sources are presented in *Table 2.1*.

**Table 2.1: Conceptual Framework**

Category	Literature
<p><b>MORALE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working relationships</li> <li>• Confidence in teaching</li> <li>• Belief in mission</li> <li>• School/Work environment</li> </ul>	<p>Bentley and Rempel 1980            Blum 1956            Briggs 1986            Coughlan 1970            Durant 1941            Foret 2006            Leighton 1949            Maehr et al. 1993            McMahan 2007            Rao 2011            Robbins and Judge 2007            Viteles 1953            Washington &amp; Watson 1976            Wesbrook 1980</p>
<p><b>TURNOVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of support</li> <li>• Work load</li> <li>• Pressure</li> </ul>	<p>Abbassi and Hollman 2000            Chapman 1986            Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005            Eisenberger et al. 1986            Eisenberger et al. 1997            Gellis and Kim 2004            Glance et al. 1997            Glaser et al. 1999            Ingersoll 2001</p>

	Jex et al. 1992 Johnson and Birkeland 2003 Kossek 2011 LeBar 1984 MacDonald 2003 Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002 Smith and Bourke 1992 Smith and Ingersoll 2004 Wefald et al. 2008
<b>COMMITMENT TO ASSESSMENT</b>	Gold 2002 Hobbs 2011 Johnson & Birkeland 2003 Kauffman et al. 2002 Linn and Gronlund 2000 Louis et al. 2005 McNeil 2000 Niss 1993 Popham 2001 Tosti and Jackson 2001 Watt 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment</li> <li>• Teaching to a test</li> <li>• Insufficient time and resources</li> </ul>	

## Morale

Morale can be defined as the individual or collective psychological state resulting in a strong, positive mobilization and enthusiasm to achieve a task (Foret 2006). It is also said to be an intangible term used for the capacity of people to maintain belief in an institution, goal, or even in oneself and others (Leighton 1949).

Morale can also be defined as the relationship of a group to a given end. Some factors of morale, in terms of a general practitioner, include motivation, job satisfaction, and ownership of the decisions being made. High morale is usually present when the leaders and the team members are homogenous and share similar values. The more heterogeneous the group and the greater the social distance separating the leaders from the team members, the more likely it is that low morale will exist (Durant 1941).

For example, because the new STAAR assessments are mandated from the state level, teachers may feel a disconnect between what they feel should occur and what is mandated to occur. For organizations in general, factors that influence employee morale include a person's alignment with the organization's goals, relationships with leaders of the organization, and the nature of the work. Factors of impact specific to teacher morale include the teacher's *working relationships*, *confidence* in their ability to teach, *belief in their organization's mission*, and the teacher's *work and school environment* (Coughlan 1970).

### ***Working Relationships***

Morale is directly impacted by an individual's working relationships. Morale is regarded as the "we-feeling" or cohesiveness of a group (Viteles 1953). A teacher's working relationships—specifically with their principal, colleagues, and community—are essential dimensions of teacher morale (Coughlan 1970). The same stands true for general practitioners. The actions of managers and coworkers strongly influence the morale of the workplace. Workers feel comfortable when they work under a sympathetic, caring leader in place of one who is authoritarian (Rao 2011). This is important to note because this factor is present for both general practitioners and educators. Changes in the workplace have an impact on working relationships because each individual assesses their own concern for change at a different level. The Concerns Based Assessment Model for Change in Individuals (Christou et. al 2004) shows seven different stages of concern for change, as shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: CBAM Model for Change in Individuals**

<b>Stage of Concern</b>	<b>Expression of Concern</b>
6. Refocusing	I have some ideas about something that would work even better.
5. Collaboration	How can I relate what I am doing to what others are doing?
4. Consequence	How is my use affecting learners? How can I refine it to have more impact?
3. Management	I seem to be spending all my time getting materials ready.
2. Personal	How will using it affect me?
1. Informational	I would like to know more about it.
0. Awareness	I am not concerned about it.

Teachers' working relationships are potentially impacted by changes in assessment systems because many perceive that there is an unclear or undefined plan of action for how educators will collaborate with one another in anticipation of the new assessments. When uncertainty is present, working relationships suffer because teachers do not know what to expect from the new assessments. Although the state, and perhaps their own district, has provided a framework of what is to come, teachers still want to know how the new assessments will impact their daily instruction and collaboration with coworkers.

***Confidence***

Morale is also directly impacted by an individual's level of confidence. Teacher morale is defined as a feeling of general well-being and psychological

comfort relative to attitudes about one's self (Blum 1956). Like working relationships, teacher confidence is an ongoing factor of impact on morale. When a teacher's sense of self-determination and purpose are supported, they relate to students in a qualitatively different manner (Maehr et al. 1993). How teachers feel about themselves and how they perceive their own personal levels of success has an impact on the success or failure of educational programs (Briggs 1986).

A new assessment test will impact teacher confidence because teachers are not familiar with the new test. The STAAR test is the first of its kind, thus unknown changes in teachers' expectations may result in diminished teacher confidence. Individuals who lack confidence tend to play it safe, avoid taking risks, and shy away from new challenges and new situations. In addition, people who lack confidence tend to take longer to perform everyday interpersonal tasks than those who do not. According to McMahon (2007), diminished confidence decreases an individual's chances of reaching their full potential, leaving both the organization and the individual poorer as a consequence.

Resistance of teachers to assessment change stems from a lack of confidence, which results from the new, unfamiliar assessment system. Dr. Anita Givens, Associate Commissioner for Standards and Programs with the Texas Education Agency, testified in front of the Senate Education Committee of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature, that this pushback is not new and that changes in assessment regimes have almost always been met with opposition. One of the most well-documented findings from studies of individual and organizational behavior is that organizations and their members resist change (Robbins and Judge 2007).

### ***Belief in Mission***

Belief in an organization's mission also influences a person's morale. Morale is higher if the organization is viewed as meeting the worker's own needs and expectations (Washington and Watson 1976). All employees, not only educators, are more likely to become personally invested in their work if the functions they are performing have actual meaning and significance in contributing to a higher purpose or goal (Maehr 1993). Attempting to conceptualize morale in general, Bentley and Rempel (1980) described it as the professional interest and enthusiasm that a person displays towards the achievement of individual and group goals in a given job situation.

The frequent, and sometimes politically charged, changes in assessment systems undermine the sense of clear meaning. Some teachers are left wondering if the changes are motivated by the need for improvement or if the changes are fueled by change for the sake of change. Teachers across the state have already voiced concern in anticipation of the transition. This directly exemplifies that employees must believe in an organization's mission. Teachers must believe in the new assessment systems and they must be clearly connected to the core mission for successful and meaningful changes to take place, for teacher morale to remain steady, and for the assessment systems to be successful. As explained by Maehr (1993), people are more personally invested in their work with an organization when:

1. They have a voice in what happens to them, and
2. their work has meaning and significance in contributing to a higher purpose or goal.

In this case, teachers must believe that the new assessments will ultimately have a positive impact on the students and their futures. They must be given the opportunity have input in the test development, give feedback on the implementation, and make recommendations for improvement. Without these elements, confidence in administering the new assessments may be severely impacted, as will teacher moral in the Texas education system.

### ***Work Environment***

Morale is also heavily influenced by individuals' work environments. Blum (1956) defines morale as a feeling of comfort relative to one's work environment. Another more recent study, conducted by Wesbrook in 1980, indicates that morale, as measured by satisfaction with one's work environment, is significantly related to proficiency and discipline.

An organization's environment is composed of institutions of forces outside the organization that could potentially affect the organization's performance. As noted by Robbins and Judge (2007), these institutions can include suppliers, customers, competitors, government regulatory agencies, public pressure groups, and the like. The education system of Texas, as influenced by state legislation and mandates, is particularly susceptible to experiencing undermined work environments as a result of external institutional force. Consequently, if implementation of the new assessment system is mandated by the state without consideration of the impact on a teacher's work environment, morale will suffer as a result. If teachers are not supportive of the change, work environments will be impacted and resistance to change will follow.

### ***Morale Summarized***

Teacher morale is multidimensional and encompasses working relationships, level of confidence in teaching ability, belief in their mission as teachers, and teachers' work/school environment. High morale is shown to affect any organization's ability to achieve a given end. The imminent change in the state-mandated assessment system will impact teachers' working relationships, their confidence in teaching, their belief in their mission, and their work/school environment. In order to fully understand this impact, inquiry into teachers' perceptions about how the new tests will impact them is needed. This research study aims to investigate how high school teachers feel the new tests will impact their working relationships and work environment, their confidence in their ability to teach, or their level of attachment to their organization's mission. The next section examines key indicators of turnover as they relate specifically to teachers.

### **Turnover**

Employee turnover is defined as the number of permanent employees leaving the company within the reported period versus the number of actual active permanent employees on the last day of the previous reported period (Biz-Development 2010). In terms of human resources, turnover is defined as the rate at which an employer gains and loses employees (eNotes 2004). Turnover is present in every type, size, and level of organization, and as noted by researchers Abbassi and Hollman (2000), is one of the most significant causes of declining productivity and sagging morale in both the public and private sectors.

Key factors of teacher turnover include *lack of support*, *workload*, and *pressure*. An organization's decision whether or not to train its workers affects the overall economy, even if the firm does not factor the economy into its decision. If all firms within an industry failed to train their workers, the whole economy would suffer (Glance et al. 1997); therefore, it is imperative that employees are provided with an efficient amount of support, especially during periods of transition. Likewise, an employee's workload plays a significant role in influencing turnover. Reduced-load work arrangements reap several key benefits for organizations, including greater productivity, less turnover, cost savings, and co-worker development (Kossek 2011).

### ***Lack of Support***

Lack of support is a key factor that influences turnover. The concept of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) was used to survey employees regarding an organization's value and care for individuals (Eisenberger et al. 1986). POS is grounded in exchange theory, which assumes that both the organization and employees have specific, informal workplace expectations (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Scholars specify voluntary enticements such as organizational rewards and benefits as well as the legal, moral, and financial obligations of organizational policies, norms, and culture as important determinants of whether the organization is viewed as supportive (Eisenberger et al. 1997). When these expectations are honored by the organization, it is more likely that the members of the organization will have positive attitudes, regard the organization as supportive,

and respond with higher levels of emotional-relational and/or tangible resources (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway 2005).

In terms of educator turnover, teachers are highly influenced by the amount of support provided. Teacher attrition studies find that the amount of attention administrators give to teachers has long-term effects on teacher success and retention (Chapman 1986). Among other factors, inadequate support from school administration is associated with higher rates of turnover (Ingersoll 2001).

Teacher support can be provided in a number of ways. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that teachers who go through an induction or mentoring process during their first year of teaching are less likely to result in turnover than their counterparts who do not go through the same types of programs. Teachers not only need training and in-service days to prepare for assessment change; it will also be essential for teachers to feel supported during the transition from the TAKS to the STAAR. A testing regime change will require support programs. Such programs may be able to reduce turnover during this major transition. It is imperative that adequate support is provided during the assessment transition in order to ease the propensity of teacher turnover. If teachers do not perceive that they have support from administrators, teacher turnover will increase.

### ***Workload***

Workload refers to the amount of work allocated to an individual employee. Researchers have presented evidence supporting a positive relationship between workload and stress (Jex et al. 1992), another factor of turnover. The role of

workload is significantly related to levels of stress and fatigue experienced by employees (MacDonald 2003). Smith & Bourke (1992) also identified a significant positive relationship between workload and perceived work-related stress. Another important finding by Glaser, et al. (1999) was that stress serves an intermediate role between workload and important organizational outcomes such as performance.

As is true of all employees, teacher turnover rates are affected by the workload for which teachers are responsible. Teachers' workloads are easily influenced. For example, when student enrollment increases, teacher shortages develop and subsequently lead to higher workloads (Ingersoll 2001). Likewise, changes in assessment systems influence teacher workloads. The implementation of a new system can essentially double a teacher's workload. Not only is a teacher responsible for their students' learning the general curriculum, they themselves are responsible for learning the new system as well as preparing their students for assessment expectations. Any type of program implementation comes with additional teacher responsibilities in order to ensure that execution is achieved properly. Added to these general responsibilities, the new assessment system will require a transition to end-of-course exams by subject, rather than around one, grade-encompassing test to which teachers are currently accustomed.

### ***Pressure***

Like lack of support and workload, the pressures associated with one's occupation directly affect turnover. The most common expression of occupational pressure is *stress*. Stress has become a major staple of behavioral research in the

workplace (Gellis and Kim 2004). Workplace stress has generally been studied in three ways—as a stimulus, as a response, or through a stimulus-response interaction (Jex et al. 1992). As a stimulus, stress relates to the work environment and its effect on an employee; using the stimulus approach, the work environment is considered to be the actual object causing stress. A second approach to defining stress in organizational research is the response approach; this approach evaluates stress as an employee’s affective reaction to elements of the workplace and work environment. The final approach to assessing stress within the organization is through the stimulus-response approach; this approach assumes that stress results from the dynamic interaction between the work environment and workplace effects (Wefald et al. 2008).

Teachers are expected to perform monumental tasks. They are responsible for teaching human beings, a task that has life-long consequences. Reducing the achievement gap between Whites students and students of color, pressures associated with student achievement on standardized tests, pressure to dramatically improve student performance, and the pressure to connect with students all coalesce under the pressures associated with teaching (Johnson and Birkeland 2003). Using any assessment system, teachers feel pressure to prepare their students to perform well.

Because the STAAR test is a new concept for Texas teachers that focuses on end-of-course exams by subject area, high school teachers in particular will feel the greatest pressure, which is a cause for teacher propensity toward turnover. When students fail to meet expectations, teachers internalize that failure as a direct

reflection of their teaching ability. Pressure on teachers may increase throughout this period of transition because the teachers have no authority over the format of the assessments, the questions, or the timeframe in which they are expected to successfully administer these tests. When asked why competent teachers quit, one lifelong educator suggests the main problem is that “teachers are more and more in charge of nothing, yet are held responsible for everything” (LeBar 1984). During this assessment change, teachers will be responsible for implementation, student preparation for the assessments, and student success—on top of their normal responsibilities.

### ***Turnover Summarized***

Teacher turnover is associated with a lack of support, teacher workloads, and the pressures of teaching. The new STAAR assessment will impact these three areas, and, in turn, may affect the propensity of teacher turnover. This research study intends to determine if high school teachers think the new tests will impact the level of support they receive, if it will significantly increase their workload, and if it will increase the pressures of teaching. The next section will explore existing literature to examine how teacher attitudes toward assessments will be impacted.

### **Commitment to Assessment**

Standardized tests are “designed by test specialists and administered, scored, and interpreted under standard conditions” (Linn and Gronlund 2000). Because of this, teacher attitudes reflect the fact that assessments are developed by outsiders.

Teacher attitudes toward assessments are impacted most by *alignment issues*, feelings of *teaching to the test*, and feelings of being provided with *insufficient resources* to successfully implement a new assessment system. Because assessments are imposed by external mandates, with limited teacher input, most attitudes are potentially negative. For general practitioners, commitment to assessment is described as commitment to an organization's overall goal.

### ***Alignment***

Organizations are dynamic systems and, like all other systems, they function best when their components are designed to work together smoothly and efficiently. Any change introduced to an organization must be aligned to fit the existing system or the existing system must be modified (Tosti and Jackson 2001). For organizations in general, alignment is described as two interdependent paths for moving from a broad statement of organizational mission and vision to specific organizational results: Strategic Alignment and Cultural Alignment.

Strategic Alignment emphasizes what needs to be done; the strategic goals the organization will work toward; the objectives that groups and individuals must accomplish to carry out those strategies; and the activities that must be performed to meet goals and objectives

Cultural Alignment emphasizes how things should be done; the values that will guide people in carrying out the mission and vision; the practices which reflect those values; the specific, day-to-day behaviors which will represent the values and practices to others as people go about their work

Within the organization of education, teachers must have a positive perception of the degree of alignment between curriculum and assessments. A low-degree of perceived alignment will negatively affect teacher attitudes toward assessments. Assessment techniques are often not aligned with goals because a district's curriculum requirements may not align with state requirements (Niss 1993). A high degree of alignment makes it more likely for standards to be reached in the manner intended by the state (Louis et al. 2005).

Alignment increases teacher engagement in the process of meeting standards. High levels of alignment occur when what is being taught in the classroom mirrors what is being tested by the assessments. Because the tests have not been released yet, it is difficult to project whether the assessments will align with current curriculum, although that is the intent of lawmakers. The alignment, or lack thereof, between the upcoming STAAR assessment and current curricula requirements will dictate the amount of impact on teacher attitudes toward assessments.

In 2011-2012, Texas student assessments will change from the TAKS to the STAAR. The name change reflects a shift in focus from current achievement to assessment of academic readiness for future success. This shift brings a tighter alignment between the taught and tested curriculum by testing current grade level TEKS and by aligning the rigor of the test item with the rigor of the TEKS (TEA, 2011). While greater alignment has been noted as a goal of the STAAR test, it is important to have knowledge of Texas' adoption of a statewide curriculum. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, are the state standards for what

students should know and be able to achieve. By setting a state curriculum and subsequently developing tests that follow the TEKS, issues of alignment have not been as prevalent in Texas as they are in many other states.

### ***Teaching to the Test***

One main concern teachers have with assessments is the perception of having to *teach to a test* in order to be a successful educator. Teaching to the test is a factor unique to educators. Because of the nature of this component, I will focus on teaching to the test, exclusively from the perceptions of educators.

Although the phrase “teaching to the test” is known by many, it is important to understand what the term really means. Educational tests typically represent a particular set of knowledge or skills. For example, a 20-item spelling test might represent a much larger collection of 200 spelling words. Therefore, the teacher can distinguish between test items and the knowledge or skills represented by those items (Popham 2001).

Instruction that focuses on a body of knowledge or skills is known as curricular teaching. Teaching that uses actual test items in classroom activities or items similar to test items is known as item-teaching. This type of teaching became prevalent when standardized tests began to be used for the purpose of ranking districts. Teachers are feeling enormous pressure to raise their students' scores on high-stakes tests. As a consequence, some teachers are providing classroom instruction that incorporates, as practice activities, the actual items on the high-stakes tests. Other teachers are giving practice exercises featuring "clone items"—items so similar

to the test's actual items that it's difficult to distinguish one from the other. In either case, these teachers are teaching to a test (Popham 2001).

Before the age of standardized testing, schools and districts were able to keep their successes and failures out of the public eye, but now that states publish standardized test scores (Johnson and Birkeland 2003), it is understandable why teachers often feel that they are teaching to a test. The perception of needing to teach to a test creates a high-stakes testing environment because the results and rankings of tests are made public. They are then used to categorize teachers and their students (McNeil 2000). With research on how the new end-of-course exams will impact high school teachers not being conducted in Texas yet, it is unknown if the new system will alleviate or exacerbate the need to teach to a test.

### ***Insufficient Resources***

Teachers have assessment concerns because of their perceived lack of time and resources for successful implementation. Teachers are expected to dramatically improve student performance on standardized tests, but many times schools fail to provide the resources necessary for teachers to make the improvements they demand (Kauffman et al. 2002). This past legislative session in Texas highlighted teacher concerns of having insufficient resources to implement the new assessments. Lawmakers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> legislative session passed a budget that cut public education by \$4 billion. In the fall of 2011, the consequences of cutting public education by such a drastic amount will begin to become apparent (Texas Tribune 2011). The Leander Independent School District alone was forced to cut \$37.3

million from their budget over the next biennium because of the reduction passed by lawmakers.

The argument of having insufficient resources permeated the legislative session. Educators were concerned about a budget that did not provide for the instructional materials needed to implement a revamped testing program (Dallas Morning News 2011). Because of current budget constraints, vital resources for the implementation were projected to remain underfunded. Although the required instructional materials ultimately partially funded, it remains necessary to inquire into how a \$4 billion reduction to public education may impact the administration of these tests. With teachers themselves being the most important resource for implementation, the teacher layoffs seen around the state may impact the educators left to administer the new assessments.

### ***Commitment to Assessment Summarized***

Teacher commitment to assessment is impacted by possible alignment issues, the notion of teaching to a test, and the perception of lacking resources to successfully implement new assessment systems. When teachers are presented with new policies, their interpretations of it will determine whether they will engage in significant change, incremental change, or resistance (Gold 2002). In order to fully understand the potential impacts of switching state assessment, we must measure if teachers think the new tests will align with current standards, if the new tests will impact feelings of teaching to a test, and if teachers think they will be provided with sufficient time and resources to effectively implement the new tests.

## **Conclusions**

There is a need to understand how switching from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test will impact teacher morale, teacher turnover, and teacher commitment to assessment. Teacher morale is most impacted by working relationships, teacher confidence in teaching, teachers' belief in their mission, and teachers' work/school environment. Key factors impacting teacher turnover include lack of support, teacher workload, and the pressures of teaching. Teachers' attitudes toward assessments are impacted by alignment issues, feelings of teaching to a test, and insufficient time and resources. The upcoming 2011 state assessment change is the foundation for this research study. The continuous evolution of state assessments ensure that this study will hold contemporary relevance in the future.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored existing literature for the descriptive categories of morale, turnover, and commitment to assessment for both general practitioners and educators where appropriate. These categories make up the conceptual framework for this study and provide the foundation survey development. Chapter Three details the methodology employed in this study.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Methodology and Setting**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used in this study, provide an operationalization of the conceptual framework, and offer a description of the setting. Three descriptive categories to explain the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers were identified:

- Morale
- Turnover
- Commitment to Assessment

#### **Research Methodology**

This study uses survey research to obtain information in order to describe the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers (see *Appendix A: Survey Instrument*). A descriptive approach was chosen as the research purpose in order to provide information that is missing from current literature (Shields 2006). Each survey question addresses a specific element pulled from the descriptive categories described in the previous chapter. For example, the question “Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers?” was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact working relationships specifically with educators who are also dealing with the transition. If the teacher responds “yes,” they were then asked to elaborate in an open-ended format in order to identify emerging themes.

For purposes of this study, survey research proved to be the most useful research technique, as it is the most effective way of measuring the attitudes of large populations (Babbie 2010). Survey research allows researchers to ask a variety of questions in multiple formats and on more than one topic. Furthermore, survey research reduces the amount of measurement ambiguity because the questionnaires are standardized (Babbie 2010). Furthermore, participants were asked to elaborate in an open-ended format. This allowed the researcher analyze responses more deeply for both positive and negative responses.

The operational relationship between each survey question and the appropriate descriptive category is illustrated in *Table 3.1*. The combination of close-ended and open-ended survey questions provided an opportunity for high school teachers to answer whether or not they believe they will be impacted by the assessment change and also provided an opportunity for teachers to elaborate on their thoughts. The existing literature is categorized into a conceptual framework below. Categories as an explicit conceptual tool have considerable applicability because they give questionnaires a conceptual framework (Shields 1998).

**Table 3.1: Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework**

Descriptive Category	Operationalization
<b>MORALE</b>	
Working relationships	Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers?  1. Yes 2. No  (Please explain.)

	<p>Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with your school's administrators?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
Confidence in teaching	<p>Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your confidence to teach effectively?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
Belief in mission	<p>Do you think the new STAAR tests will be in line with the mission of public schools?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
School/Work environment	<p>Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your teacher morale?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>

<b>TURNOVER</b>	
Pressure	<p>Do you think the new STAAR tests will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
Lack of support	<p>Have you received adequate support in anticipation of the transition to the new STAAR test?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>

Workload	<p>Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly increase your workload?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
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<b>COMMITMENT TO ASSESSMENT</b>	
Alignment	<p>Do you think the new STAAR test will be better aligned with state standards (TEKS) than the TAKS test?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
Teaching to a test	<p>Do you think the new STAAR test will impact teacher feelings of needing to teach to the test?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>
Insufficient resources	<p>Do you think you will be provided with sufficient resources to effectively implement the new STAAR test?</p> <p>1. Yes 2. No</p> <p>(Please explain.)</p>

### **Morale**

Morale is affected by change. In the case of educators, morale is specifically affected by teachers' working relationships, their confidence in teaching, their belief in

their school's mission, and the work environment of the school. Morale has been measured by examining these factors.

### ***Working Relationships***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, "Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers?" This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact working relationships. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. A similar question was asked in order to determine if high school teachers believe that switching assessments will impact working relationships with their school's administrators. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### ***Confidence in Teaching***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, "Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your confidence to teach effectively?" This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact the confidence they hold in their ability to teach. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### ***Belief in Mission***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, “Do you think the new STAAR test will be in line with the mission of public schools?” This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact the belief they hold in their school’s mission. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses.

### ***Work Environment***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, “Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your teacher morale?” This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact their school’s work environment. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### **Turnover**

Turnover is also affected by change. In the case of educators, turnover is specifically affected by a the amount of support, or lack thereof, that a teacher receives, teacher workload, and the pressures of teaching. Turnover has been measured by examining these factors.

### ***Lack of Support***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, “Have you received adequate support in anticipation of the transition to the new STAAR test?” This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact the level of support they receive from their colleagues, administrators, etc. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### ***Workload***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, “Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly increase your workload?” This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact their workload. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### ***Pressure***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, “Do you think the new STAAR tests will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching?” This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact the pressures associated with teaching. Teachers were then asked to explain their

responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### **Commitment to Assessment**

Commitment to Assessment may also be affected by change. In the case of educators, commitment to assessment is specifically affected by the level of alignment standards, teachers' feelings of teaching to the test, and the amount of resources provided to implement the test. Commitment to Assessment has been measured by examining these factors.

#### ***Alignment***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, "Do you think the new STAAR test will be better aligned with state standards (TEKS) than the TAKS test?" This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-mandated student assessment systems will impact past concerns of assessments lacking alignment with state curriculum standards. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

#### ***Teaching to the Test***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, "Do you think the new STAAR test will impact teacher feelings of needing to teach to a test?" This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that switching state-

mandated student assessment systems will impact past teacher concerns about needing to teach to the test in order to be considered as a successful teacher. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

### ***Insufficient Resources***

Respondents were asked the yes or no question, “Do you think you will be provided with sufficient resources to effectively implement the new STAAR test?” This question was designed to assess whether high school teachers believe that they will be provided with the necessary resources to transition to a new, state-mandated student assessment. Teachers were then asked to explain their responses. Responses from the open-ended questions were then used to identify emerging themes.

While survey research proved to be the most appropriate method for collecting data, there are weaknesses to survey research that must be mentioned. According to Babbie (2010), factors that have proven to be significant concerns in conducting survey research include: poor participation, a low response rate, and failing to fully capture the respondent’s attitude through survey questions alone. Despite limitations, survey research was an effective tool for the purposes of this study.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study is the Leander Independent School District (ISD). Leander is a suburb located directly north of Austin, Texas. Leander ISD is a TEA Recognized school district with over 33,000 students at 37 campuses. The Leander

ISD student demographic makeup of 2009-2010 was composed of 5.2 percent African American, 20.8 percent Hispanic, 67.9 percent white, 5.5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.6 percent Native American, 22.6 percent Economically Disadvantaged, and 5 percent Limited English Proficiency (TEA 2011).

**Table 3.2: Leander ISD Staff Information**

<b>LISD Teachers by Years of Experience</b>		
	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Beginning Teachers	86.2	4.1%
1-5 Years Experience	679.5	32.6%
6-10 Years Experience	485.9	23.3%
11-20 Years Experience	564.1	27%
Over 20 Years Experience	270.4	13%
<b>LISD Staffing Data</b>		
	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Teachers	2086.1	52.4%
Professional Support	561	14.1%
Campus Administration	99.2	2.5%
Central Administration	56.9	1.4%
Educational Aides	313.3	7.9%
Auxiliary/Support Staff	867.6	21.1%
Total District Staff	3984	100%
Total Minority Staff	742.7	18.6%
Number of Students per Teacher	14.5	

(TEA, 2011)

**Sample**

The researcher contacted and received approval from Monta Akin, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services in the Leander ISD, to survey teachers. In order to receive approval, the researcher e-mailed a request to conduct research in

the school district along with a copy of the survey and an Internal Review Board confidentiality assurance document (see *Appendix B: Confidentiality and Assurances*). Although the researcher initially requested to contact all five high schools in Leander ISD, approval was only given to contact Rouse High School. As a result, the population was reduced from 269 to 52 high school teachers. Surveying teachers in other school districts would have created the confounding effect of district-specific factors such as budget projections, designation as a Recognized school district, number of teachers, number of students, student-to-teacher ratio, and student makeup.

After receiving approval, e-mails were sent to 52 teachers at Rouse High School (see *Appendix C: Initial E-mail to Teachers*). The teachers were chosen based on the subject they taught. All teachers of the following subjects were contacted:

- English I, English II, or English III
- Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II
- Biology, Chemistry, or Physics
- World Geography, World History, or U.S. History

The survey was distributed to participants via e-mail utilizing an online data collection service, [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). E-mail addresses were compiled from Rouse High School's public website. Of the 52 teachers contacted, 11 responses were received. This response rate is in line with similar surveys, but is notably below the threshold to be considered statistically significant. While the final response rate was lower than desired, useful information has been drawn from the open-ended questions utilized in the survey instrument. The survey design allowed teachers to

elaborate ideas and themes that may have otherwise gone unnoticed with an instrument composed of only close-ended questions. These responses allowed for qualitative and quantitative assessment of the impact changing assessment systems will have on high school teachers.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the methodology used in this study, provided an operationalization of the conceptual framework, and presented a description of the setting of this study. Chapter Four will offer a description of the findings of the study and an analysis of the data gathered.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the research survey. This chapter gives simple descriptive statistics for each of the close-ended questions. In addition, content analysis is conducted on the open-ended questions. Simple descriptive statistics are ideal for this research because the process allows the researcher to summarize the main features of a collection of data. The open-ended questions enhanced this research by allowing teachers to divulge specific pieces of information they deemed relevant to this study. The researcher then identified frequently noted themes.

### **Findings**

Of the 11 respondents, 10 completed the entire survey. Demographic questions reflected that four respondents were male and seven respondents were female. Of the 11 respondents, two have been teaching for 0-5 years, two have been teaching for 5-10 years, two have been teaching for 10-15 years, four have been teaching for 15-20 years, zero have been teaching for 20-25 years, and one has been teaching for 25-30 years.

Demographic responses also showed that four respondents teach English I, English II, or English III, two teach Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II and five teach World Geography, World History, or U.S. History. No teachers of Biology, Chemistry or Physics responded.

## **Morale**

### ***Working Relationships***

Morale is directly impacted by a person's working relationships. Morale is regarded as the "we-feeling" or cohesiveness of a group (Viteles 1953). A teacher's working relationships—specifically with their school principal, colleagues, and community—are essential dimensions of teacher morale (Coughlan 1970).

When teachers were asked, "Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers," four respondents indicated "Yes." Possible changes mentioned focused on the need to *collaborate* more with each other in order to better prepare the students for the new test. Open-ended responses resulted in three out of those four respondents indicating that an increase in collaboration will occur as an impact on working relationships.

Responses included, "We will have to be more collaborative so that our tests are more like the STAAR," and "Only from the standpoint of increase collaboration." Although these respondents did indicate an impending impact, the impact they anticipate suggests the change in working relationships will be positive. Increased collaboration amongst fellow teachers will improve working relationships, which will improve morale.

When teachers were asked, "Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with your school's administrators," the participants were evenly divided with five negative and five positive responses. Respondents who indicated that working relationships with administrators will be impacted, elaborated in the open-ended responses: "More pressure will be put on

teachers because the STAAR is new. There is no data to show weak areas at this time,” and “I just assume the stress levels will increase. I think it will produce a more negative environment.” Respondents of the opposite opinion noted, “No. Education tends to change every 5 to 10 years,” and “I hope not, although higher accountability certainly puts more pressure on us all.” Teachers of both opinions indicated anticipation of an *increase in stress* levels and assumption that *more pressure* will be placed on teachers.

On balance, the findings suggest that increased pressure from administration is a concern, but teachers using collaboration with colleagues to cope with increased pressure may, in fact, generate stronger morale.

### ***Confidence in Teaching***

Like working relationships, teacher confidence is an ongoing factor of morale. How teachers feel about themselves and how they perceive their own personal levels of success has an impact on the success or failure of educational programs (Briggs 1986). When teachers were asked “Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your confidence to teach effectively,” three responded “Yes,” while seven responded, “No.”

The respondents who indicated their confidence in teaching will be impacted, elaborated with negative comments including, “I feel like I’m blindfolded... the new test makes teaching more challenging.” Some that indicated that their confidence in teaching would not be impacted simply stated that they were confident in their approach to teaching and noted that both tests are skills tests. The majority of those

indicating that no impact would be made on their confidence in teaching may be reflective of the number of years they have been teaching. Responses indicate that seven of the 11 participants have been teaching for more than 10 years. These results indicate that these teachers may have already gone through multiple assessment changes in their careers.

### ***Belief in Mission***

Belief in an organization's mission also influences a person's morale. All employees, not only educators, are more likely to become personally invested in their work if the functions they are performing have actual meaning and significance in contributing to a higher purpose or goal (Maehr 1993). When teachers were asked, "Do you think that the new STAAR tests will be in line with the mission of public schools," the respondents were evenly split with five thinking the new tests will be in line with the mission and five thinking the new tests will not be in line with the mission of public schools. The themes that emerged from this question were generally negative. One teacher commented that "the high-stakes testing system is a joke and is not at all in line with the mission of public schools." Other comments were that "more students are going to drop out because of the crazy pressure," and "No test can really reflect the entire mission of education." The fact that half of the respondents do not feel that the new STAAR test will be in line with the mission of public schools and the fact that these teachers are all educators in the same public school may indicate that mission and goals of the school are unclear. While respondents of both opinions respond that students need to be prepared for this type

of testing and rigor, there is a lack of consensus on what that preparation should look like.

### ***School/Work environment***

A person's work environment heavily influences morale. Morale is defined as a feeling of comfort relative to one's work environment (Blum 1956). Similarly, more recent studies indicate that when morale is measured in terms of satisfaction with one's work environment, it is significantly related to proficiency and discipline (Wesbrook 1980). With teacher morale as the main element affecting a school work environment, teachers were asked "Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your teacher morale."

A total of eight respondents indicated that their teacher morale will be negatively impacted by switching to the new STAAR test. Respondents indicated that they, "think morale will continue to decline as more and more pressure is applied to teachers." Other responses included, "Definitely! There are so many unknowns about this test, yet the stakes are incredibly high," and "It has already caused a great deal of concern among teachers. We feel the responsibility to adequately prepare our students but have been given little to no opportunity to actually understand what is on the test."

With eight out of 10 respondents indicating that their work environment, specifically their teacher morale, will be negatively impacted by this transition, administrators and policymakers should be keenly aware of negative teacher perceptions. Respondents' indication that morale will decline as "more pressure is

applied to teachers to affect things out of their control,” and that morale will be impacted “depending on how the test is developed,” demonstrate teacher frustration with their lack of inclusion during the creation of the new assessment and their lack of inclusion during the process of setting new the requirements. Unless teachers are granted increased collaboration in the development of the assessment and expectations, this lack of inclusion will impact teacher morale and working environments.

While declining morale is a concern, there are positive overtones of anticipated increase of collaboration among teachers. Likewise, an overwhelming majority do not anticipate that their confidence in teaching will be negatively impacted, but there is major concern with lack of inclusion that has translated to an anticipated negative impact on working environments. The next area that has historically proven to be of major concern during transition periods is turnover. This theme is examined in the next section.

## **Turnover**

### ***Lack of Support***

Teacher attrition studies show that the amount of attention administrators give to teachers has long-term effects on teacher success and retention (Chapman 1986). Inadequate support from school administration, among other factors, is associated with higher rates of turnover (Ingersoll 2001). When asked “Do you think you have received adequate support in anticipation of the transition to the new STAAR test,” seven out of eleven respondents believe that they have not received adequate

support. Some comments included, “Absolutely not!” and “TEA has not been as forthcoming with information regarding these new tests as they were about TAKS, yet stakes are much, much higher!”

Respondents were then asked to specify the types of support they would like to receive. Those responses included the need for concrete test examples for students to read and analyze, ancillary materials, teaching materials that are current and *well-aligned* with the STAAR, practice tests, and more preparatory materials. It is noteworthy that teachers did not volunteer the need for emotional support or training, but rather specific materials. This supports the notion that teacher confidence will not be impacted by this transition and that the number one concern for teachers is the lack of specific information. The lack of support that teachers are feeling during this transition to the new STAAR test will have an impact on teacher turnover, but judging by the specificity of materials requested for support, this can easily be addressed by providing teachers with the necessary materials.

### ***Workload***

Workload refers to the amount of work that is allocated to an employee. A number of researchers have demonstrated a positive relationship between workload and stress (Jex et al. 1992), another factor of turnover. The role of workload on stress and fatigue are significantly related (MacDonald 2003). When teachers were asked, “Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly increase your workload,” six out of nine indicated, “Yes.” Comments included, “Most definitely! I’m considering another career after this year,” and “Maybe not in the first year (trial by fire), but

definitely in years to come.” Another teacher said, “Currently, everything I have is TAKS aligned, so I have nothing to work with and have to figure out what is valuable and what to use.”

These responses are yet another example of teachers simply not being provided with enough information to know what to expect of the new assessment. Teacher perceptions of this transition being a “trial by fire” should indicate to administrators that their teachers need more explicit details of what will be required of the STAAR test in order to avoid wasting valuable time and resources.

### ***Pressure***

Like lack of support and workload, the pressures associated with one’s occupation take direct effect on turnover. Stress has become a major staple of behavioral research in the workplace (Gellis and Kim 2004). This may be the most salient theme that emerged from this research study because respondents alluded to stress and pressure more than any other indicator in all three descriptive categories. When asked, “Do you think that the new STAAR test will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching,” nine out of ten respondents indicated that pressure will be impacted. Responses included, “Yes. I’m considering another career,” and “Yes, there will be additional pressure associated with ensuring students meet the standard.” If, in switching to the new STAAR test, stress and pressure are impacted, then according to the responses, each descriptive category will be impacted. That means that if this transition increases pressure on teachers, teacher morale, turnover, and commitment to assessment will all be negatively impacted.

Respondents have indicated an anticipated impact on pressures associated with teaching with regard to working relationships with fellow teachers, working relationships with their school's administrators, the possibility of an increase in drop outs due to pressure, the decline of teacher morale as pressure is increased, additional pressures associated with ensuring students meet standards, and the possible need for teachers to change how they teach as a result of pressure. *Stress* and *pressure* were mentioned several times across the descriptive categories; it is imperative that administrators take note of the increase in pressure teachers are feeling.

## **Commitment To Assessment**

### ***Alignment***

Teachers need a positive perception of the degree of alignment between curriculum and assessments. A low-degree of perceived alignment will negatively affect teacher commitment to assessments. Assessment techniques are often not aligned with goals because district curriculum requirements do not always align with state requirements (Niss 1993). A high degree of alignment makes it more likely for standards to be reached in the manner intended by the state (Louis et al. 2005). When asked, "Do you think that the new STAAR test will be better aligned with the state standards (TEKS) than the TAKS test?" eight teachers responded, "Yes."

Comments included, "It is more reflective of the depth of the curriculum," and "It is a more difficult exam and should be a stronger indicator of if a student has successfully mastered the needed skills." Another response was, "I think it is the

intention that it will be better aligned to also encompass the common-core reading standards.” This set of responses is contrary to what the literature indicates. The research says that the most common complaint about state-mandated assessments is the lack of alignment between curriculum and assessment. These responses indicate otherwise, but it is important to note that Texas has had a state-mandated curriculum since the mid-nineties, and the research may have been conducted in states that do not have state-mandated curricula. According to the responses, the transition to the new STAAR test will yield a positive effect on testing alignment.

### ***Teaching to the Test***

Another significant element that impacts attitudes toward assessment is the feeling of needing to teach to the test. Before the age of standardized testing, teachers were able to keep their successes and failures out of the public eye, but now that states publish standardized test scores (Johnson and Birkeland 2003), it is understandable why teachers often feel that they are teaching to the test. The perception of needing to teach to a test is created by the high-stakes testing environment because the results and rankings of tests are made public and are then used to categorize teachers and their students (McNeil 2000). This literature was directly supported by the responses to this measure. When asked, “Do you think the new STAAR test will impact teaching to the test,” seven out of ten respondents indicated that teaching to the test will be impacted by switching to the new STAAR test. Responses included, “Yes. As always, when using testing to judge teaching and learning, there will be emphasis placed on the tested elements,” and “Of course!

Test taking strategies will become a major component of teaching a course;” also noted was, “Pressure is put on teachers and some teachers will change how they teach, focus on the test, and ignore other needed material for their classes.”

Those indicating that teaching to the test will not be impacted explained that teachers should already be covering the material that will be on the test in the first place. In the words of one respondent indicating that no impact will be seen, “That is what you must do to be successful!” These responses indicate that teachers are indeed teaching to the test and that the STAAR test, although it is anticipated by eight out of 10 respondents to be more aligned with the TAKS, will still result in educators teaching to the test. Although responses indicate that teaching to the test will be impacted, analysis indicates that teaching to the test will likely not be impacted, it will merely remain a steady factor.

### ***Insufficient Resources***

Teachers have assessment concerns because of the perceived lack of time and resources for successful implementation. Teachers are expected to dramatically improve student performance on standardized tests, but schools often fail to provide the necessary resources to make the improvements they demand (Kauffman et al. 2002). Implementation of this test has been foreshadowed by doubt that adequate resources will be provided to teachers in order to administer the new STAAR test. With the legislature making cuts of \$4 billion to public education, these doubts are reflected in the responses to the following measure. When asked, “Do you think you will be provided with sufficient resources to effectively implement the new STAAR

test,” six out of 10 responded “No.” One respondent simply elaborated, “Budget cuts.” Others stated, “We certainly haven’t been given anything so far,” and “Right now, we’re being told that nothing or little has been released. So, no. I don’t have much faith that we will be given adequate resources until it is already impacting our students.”

Respondents of the opposite opinion noted that, “Yes. Leander ISD will give us the resources we need to be successful,” and “Yes. Our school wants its teachers to be successful.” While four respondents indicated belief that they will be provided with adequate resources, half of those respondents gave feedback with negative connotations stating that, “We will see!” and “I’m sure that I will be given resources, I just don’t know if they will align with the exam.” This equates to only two participants believing that adequate resources will be provided in order for teachers to be successful during the transition to the STAAR test. If teachers are required to implement the new STAAR test but are not given adequate resources to do so, negative attitudes toward assessments will persist and execution of large, mandated transitions will continue to face challenges and doubts.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a description of the findings of the survey administered to 52 teachers at Rouse High School in Leander ISD. The survey instrument measured what respondents foresee as a result of the new STAAR test implementation. Respondents were asked open-ended questions reflective of the descriptive categories that make up the conceptual framework. The data analyzed

were obtained from 11 respondents who completed the survey. While the literature provided clear descriptive categories, the results of this study indicated crossover of the descriptive categories and their subcategories. Stress and pressure emerged as the consistent theme across each category. An increase of collaboration emerged as the element most desired by respondents to successfully implement the new STAAR test while maintaining working relationships with fellow teachers.

The theme that emerged from the responses but was not included in a subcategory was fear of the unknown. Numerous responses across the descriptive categories indicated that teachers simply do not know what will be on the new STAAR test. They do not know what the standards will require, and they do not know what the passing criteria be. Multiple respondents stated that the unknowns of this test are plenty, the stakes are too high, or that teachers have little prior knowledge of what to expect from the STAAR test. The following response is indicative of many of the elements that participants included in their open-ended responses:

“It has already caused a great deal of concern among teachers. We feel the responsibility to adequately prepare our students but have been given little to no opportunity to actually understand what is on the test or what it looks like. It is absolutely frustrating to be issued new mandates with an ever-changing standard of acceptability and no way to know the changes it will bring to our system as a whole. However, if I weren't used to dealing with the vagaries of our state education agency, I would have left teaching long ago.”

Similar responses indicate frustrations with the Texas Education Agency more than with being required to implement a new assessment system. One conclusion that can be drawn from the open-ended responses is that teachers are resilient. Teachers are not asking for emotional support or indicating that they do not possess the ability to complete these tasks. They are succinctly stating that they can successfully implement the new STAAR test as long as they are given the proper resources.

Along those lines, it must be noted that although teachers, administrators, and other onlookers of education policies have generally regarded teaching to the test as a negative consequence of standardized testing, responses indicate that teachers know this is occurring, they anticipate teaching to the test to continue to occur, and when asked what resources they would like to be provided, they asked for specific items that would easily allow them to continue teaching to the test. In asking for the release of preparatory materials, practice tests, similar questions, and new materials that are aligned to the STAAR, teachers have inadvertently implied that teaching to the test will likely continue regardless of the assessment that is administered. This is likely caused by the manner in which schools are publicly ranked, which is based on the results of assessments. It is likely that teaching to the test will continue to be prevalent as long as school rankings are formed based solely on assessment results.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Recommendations and Implications**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide recommendations based on study findings, implications of the data analysis, and recommendations for future studies. The research findings are based on a review of relevant literature and analysis of responses to a survey administered to a select group of teachers of Rouse High School in Leander ISD. The survey instrument was used to describe the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers.

#### **Summary of Research**

The purpose of this research was to describe the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers. An overview of the evolution of state-mandated assessment systems in Texas was provided as well as a review of literature describing how change impacts morale, turnover, and commitment to assessment. Literature was reviewed to reflect the impacts of change on general practitioners as well as impacts specific to educators. An online survey instrument was used to gather data from teachers of the following subjects: English I, English II, or English III, Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II, and World Geography, World History, or U.S. History. Although surveys were sent to teachers of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, no responses were gathered.

The survey instrument provided the researcher with responses to evaluations of three descriptive categories: morale, turnover, and commitment to assessment.

Morale was assessed based on four elements: working relationships, confidence in teaching, belief in mission, and school/work environment. Turnover was assessed based on three elements: lack of support, workload, and pressure. Commitment to assessment was assessed based on three elements: alignment, teaching to a test, and insufficient resources.

For the most part, the survey results reflect what was found in existing literature, however, an additional element emerged from the responses; fear of the unknown. Furthermore, nine out of 10 participants provided an overpoweringly negative response when asked if the new STAAR test will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching. This is one of the most striking results of the survey because of the number of times that either *stress* or *pressure* was included in the open-ended responses. Teachers also think that the new STAAR test will negatively impact teacher morale, as shown by eight of 11 respondents. While four respondents think that their working relationships with fellow teachers will be impacted, three out of those four commented that an increase of collaboration will be needed to successfully implement the STAAR test.

A surprising seven out of ten respondents stated that their confidence in teaching will not be impacted by the new STAAR test, while five respondents indicated that they believe the new tests will be in line with the mission of public schools. A total of eight participants indicated that they have not received adequate support in anticipation of the transition. Respondents went on to elaborate that they know nothing about the new test but would like to be provided with preparatory materials, practice tests, essay requirements, teaching materials that are currently

aligned with the STAAR, and other examples for students to read in anticipation of the new test. Of a total of nine respondents, six believe that the new test will significantly increase their work load.

A total of eight out of 10 respondents think that the new STAAR test will be better aligned with state standards, but seven respondents think that teaching to the test will still occur. An interesting finding of the survey that is reflective of the current climate of public education in Texas is that six out of 10 respondents do not think they will be given adequate resources to implement this test. Some feel that they will be provided with the resources, but they will not be aligned with the exam and they will not be given enough time to make use of the resources. With the 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislature of Texas cutting \$4 billion in public education, teacher responses reflected current budgetary concerns.

The final question of the survey instrument allowed teachers to share general comments with regard to switching state-mandated student assessment systems. Three respondents provided comments.

- 1 “The tests should begin in the 1st grade. Students without mastery of the previous level should not be sent to the next. Failures should be addressed from multiple angles, not just what the teacher can do differently/better.”
- 2 “I repeat, that all the State of Texas had to do to make the TAKS more rigorous was increase the passing score instead of scrapping the entire test. Just another way we waste more money in public education. I can't wait to see the results of this test and new reports that the students in the State of Texas are having major problems passing state mandated tests!”

- 3 “The pressure this new test is placing on 9th graders and teachers is seriously making me re-consider teaching as a career. I don't feel that teachers have been fully informed. I don't think students should now have a longer, more rigorous test in a shorter window of time to test when it counts toward their graduation requirements.”

Overall, results of the study were reflective of the current literature, but the open-ended format provided the researcher with additional information to analyze. The first round of STAAR end-of-course exams is expected to be administered in the spring of 2012. With the implementation date just months away, many recommendations can be made as a result of this research.

## **Recommendations**

### **Morale**

To improve morale, the number one recommendation that should be heeded is to provide teachers with more information. The participants of this study overwhelmingly responded that they simply do not know enough about this test to feel comfortable with the implementation. They feel that the Texas Education Agency has not been as forthcoming with information as they were in anticipation of past assessment transitions. Teachers need to be provided with example questions, example essays, and workbooks that follow the same format that will be used on the STAAR test.

Administrators may also need to spend some time allowing teachers to vent their frustrations and articulate their fears. In addition, school districts and

administrators can provide professional development and training that includes a comprehensive program focusing on specific strategies that teachers will need in order to implement the new assessments.

### ***Working Relationships***

School administrators should provide opportunities for teachers to feel more confident about their teaching skills, focus on the general curricular framework, and enhance their confidence. An additional strategy school administrators can use to improve teacher working relationships is to provide a platform for teachers to share their knowledge and expertise and build a cohesive, school-wide method of tackling the new test. Respondents are craving increased collaboration in anticipation of the new tests. Providing teachers with a clearinghouse of best practices identified by their fellow educators will increase collaboration.

### ***Confidence in Teaching***

Confidence seems to be linked to knowledge of expectations. Teachers should be provided with the passing criteria of the STAAR test. If teachers are well-versed in the expectations, they will not feel “blindfolded,” as one participant responded, while trying to prepare students for the new tests. Providing teachers with concrete examples of the types of test questions that can be expected will dramatically ease the concerns that are causing negative impacts on teacher confidence.

### ***Belief in Mission***

Because secondary teachers are very subject driven, school administrators may need to be provided with professional development opportunities for teachers to remember why they chose teaching as a career—because they believe they can student learning. Belief in the mission of the school can have a positive impact on teachers if they have the necessary information and can see a direct correlation between what is being done a daily basis and their success in teaching.

Belief in mission can also be positively impacted by giving teachers the opportunity to help develop the mission. If teachers are simply asked what they want to get out of teaching and what they want their students to take away from their class, they *will* respond. Their inclusion will ultimately result in an increased feeling of attachment to the goals of the school and of the implementation of the new assessment.

### ***School/Work Environment***

Teachers' school/work environment, specifically teacher morale, can be addressed by creating an atmosphere of collegiality where teachers are treated like professional educators. Administrators can conduct book studies and create Professional Learning Communities where teachers feel empowered and more confident to address the unknowns of the new STAAR test. Again, this increase collaboration will decrease the stress and pressure that teachers are feeling, increase communication, and ultimately increase teacher morale.

## **Turnover**

The following three subcategories are interdependent. Lack of support for teachers, workload, and pressure can augment teachers fears not only about switching to a new test, but about teaching in general. A recommendation to address these three indicators would be to have administrators ask teachers to develop a comprehensive staff development program where teachers are the drivers. If teachers are the creators of their own staff development, they will feel like their voice was heard, and they will be less apprehensive and resistant to change.

## ***Lack of Support***

Lack of support received varying responses, but one element stood out the more than any other – teachers need more information. Teachers want and should be provided with preparatory materials, practice tests, information on essay requirements, and teaching materials that are current and aligned with what the STAAR test is going to demand. Teachers feel that they are not getting this information and blame their lack of knowledge on the Texas Education Agency.

## ***Workload***

The same recommendations apply to workload. Because teachers are not confident in what will be assessed by the STAAR, teacher workload has increased as educators struggle to cover as much material as possible, some of which may or may not be on the test or be required by the state-mandated curriculum. Providing

teachers with clear expectations will reduce negative feelings and ease concerns during this transition period.

### ***Pressure***

Stress and pressure were mentioned several times across the descriptive categories. As is typically the case with high-stakes testing, teachers feel pressure for their students to perform well. The Texas Education Agency should consider basing the school ratings system of Unacceptable, Acceptable, Recognized and Exemplary, on multiple factors, rather than solely on assessment results. By giving teachers credit for their efforts in other areas of teaching, pressure will be alleviated because teachers will no longer feel that their reputation is on the line with these tests.

### **Commitment to Assessment**

#### ***Alignment***

Texas is one of few states that operates with a state-mandated curriculum. Because the curriculum and assessment tests are intended to reflect one another, lack of alignment wasn't an issue for many respondents. A majority, eight of 10, responded that alignment would likely be better between the STAAR and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The two dissenting respondents simply stated that no test can ever entirely cover content. Alignment issues in Texas are not a concern, as expressed by survey responses.

### ***Teaching to a Test***

Much like issues with stress and pressure, the Texas Education Agency should consider permanently ending the school ratings system. While proponents of testing will argue that the assessments only cover what should be taught in the classroom, others argue that what they are teaching in the classroom is based on what will be tested by the assessments. Much like previous recommendations, the Texas Education Agency should consider basing the school ratings system on multiple factors, rather than solely on assessment results in order to alleviate teaching to a test.

### ***Insufficient Resources***

With the Texas' public education budget being \$4 billion underfunded and with educators across the state being laid off, teachers are acutely aware that resources are in jeopardy. Recommendations to solve the problem of supplying insufficient resources in anticipation of this test would be to simply provide adequate resources. With the first round of assessments approaching, administrators and the Texas Education Agency should assess the results of the first administration of the test and find the deficiencies. Supplemental resources should then be provided in subsequent years in order to avoid four years of transition without adequate resources.

## **Discussion**

In order for teachers to have ownership of the numerous unknowns of switching to the new STAAR test, administrators must allow teachers to voice their concerns, provide opportunities for teachers to increase their confidence and teaching skills, and offer additional professional development opportunities.

All of the recommendations based on this research study are interrelated. A well-balanced approach to professional development for teachers will provide teachers with the skills they will need and the psychological transformation required to meet the challenges of the new STAAR test.

## **Future Research**

While the results of this research have provided the intended results of describing the impacts of switching state-mandated student assessment systems on high school teachers, there remains room for further research. The biggest weakness of this research is the small sample size that was attained. This study could be improved by gathering data from a larger population and analyzing the results from a sample that is statistically significant.

The research can also be expanded by administering additional surveys that include a study after the first round of STAAR tests are administered, allowing comparative analysis to show if teachers still feel the same about switching to the STAAR test. Because the transition from the TAKS to the STAAR will take place over the next four years, this survey instrument could be used to assess teachers in

anticipation of each round of assessments over the next four years. Results could then be analyzed to determine if significant impacts remain throughout the entire transition period or if the impacts subside by the fourth year. Also, different questions could be included on the survey instrument to allow inclusion of the factor of the unknown.

Additional studies could also be conducted to include surveying middle school teachers and elementary school teachers to find out if their responses are parallel to the responses of secondary teachers. Finally, future research could include an analysis of how school administrators describe the impacts of switching to the new state mandated student assessment system.

For future research purposes, it should be noted that gaining school district approval to contact teachers proved to be especially challenging. Future researchers should be aware of the bureaucratic nature of the approval process and should approach school districts accordingly.

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## Appendix A: Survey Instrument

You are being invited to participate in a research survey describing the impacts of change on high school teachers. This survey is being conducted by Val Aguirre with supervision from Dr. Thomas Longoria from the Political Science Department at Texas State University. This study is being conducted as part of a graduate research project to fulfill requirements for a Masters in Public Administration degree. The survey has been approved and exempted by the University's Institutional Review Board.

You were selected as a possible participant for this survey because you are currently a high school teacher of one of the following subjects:

English I, English II or English III  
Algebra I, Geometry or Algebra II  
Biology, Chemistry or Physics  
World Geography, World History or U.S. History

This survey is completely anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers. A summary of the findings can be provided to you upon completion of the study, if requested. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at va1031@txstate.edu or my supervisor, tl28@txstate.edu.

1. Please indicate that you fully understand the consent form before participating in this survey.
2. Gender
3. Number of years teaching
4. Subject you teach

### **Morale**

5. Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers? Please explain.
6. Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with your school's administrators? Please explain.
7. Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your confidence to teach effectively? Why or why not?
8. Do you think the new STAAR tests will be in line with the mission of public schools? Why or why not?
9. Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your teacher morale? Please explain.

### **Turnover**

10. Have you received adequate support in anticipation of the transition to the new STAAR test?
11. Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly increase your workload? Please explain.
12. Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching? Please explain.

### **Commitment to Assessment**

13. Do you think the new STAAR test will be better aligned with state standards (TEKS) than the TAKS test? Please explain.
14. Do you think the new STAAR test will impact teaching to the test? Please explain.
15. Do you think you will be provided with sufficient resources to effectively implement the new STAAR test? Please explain.

### **Additional Comments**

16. If you have any additional comments with regard to how switching to the new STAAR test may impact you as a teacher, please provide them below.

## Appendix B: Confidentiality and Assurances

### Assurances to Leander ISD

A. I understand that I am requesting assistance in a research and evaluation project and I am not requesting information pursuant to the Texas Open Records Act. If my request to conduct research and evaluation assistance is granted, I agree to abide by all policies, rules, and regulations of the district including securing written parental permission prior to implementation of my project, and maintaining the confidential nature of records, and the privacy and rights of the individual and school.

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Main Project Contact Person/Student  
Name Printed: Valeria Aguirre

B. I have read the Procedures for Research and Evaluation in the Leander Independent School District by Outside Agencies or Individuals and understand that supervision of this project and responsibility for a report on its outcome rests with me. I also understand that the privilege of conducting future studies in the Leander Independent School District is conditioned upon the fulfillment of such obligations.

Main Project Contact or Student: Valeria Aguirre

Title of Project: State Mandated Student Assessment Systems:  
Describing the Impacts of Change on High School  
Teachers

Address: 2509 Quarry Rd., Unit B  
Austin, TX 78703

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## **Access to Confidential Data**

### **LISD Staff/Non-LISD Partner Agreement**

#### **Justification: Educational Research and Evaluation**

I understand that any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is illegal as provided in the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232 *eg. seq.* and in the implementing federal regulations found in 34 CFR Part 99. FERPA is specifically incorporated into the Texas Public Information Act (formerly known as the Open Records Act). It is listed as an exception to records that are subject to disclosures to the public.

In addition, I understand that any data, datasets or output reports that I, or any authorized representative, may generate are confidential and the data are to be protected. I will not distribute to any unauthorized person any data or reports that I have access to or may generate using confidential data.

I hereby agree that failure to abide by the requirements of this client agreement may lead to the immediate revocation of any contract (or research project) that I may be performing for AISD. I understand that any intentional, knowing, or negligent release of confidential student information to unauthorized persons may also subject me to a legal cause of action for violation of an individual's civil rights in addition to state or federal criminal penalties.

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Main Project Contact Person's/Student's Signature

Date

## Appendix C: Initial E-mail to Teachers

Dear LISD Educator,

My name is Val Aguirre and I am a graduate student in the Masters in Public Administration program at Texas State University. At the present time, I am seeking to complete my Applied Research Project describing the impacts of change on high school teachers, specifically, transitioning from the TAKS test to the new STAAR test.

I am conducting a survey that has been approved and exempted by Texas State's Institutional Review Board and has received proper approval from Leander ISD. The survey is completely anonymous and voluntary. No one will have the ability to identify you or your answers. The survey can be accessed here:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MandatedAssessments>

A summary of the findings can be provided to you upon completion of the study, if you wish. I know your time is valuable, so the survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Your input is truly appreciated!

Thank you,

Val Aguirre  
[va1031@txstate.edu](mailto:va1031@txstate.edu)  
512-370-2932

## Appendix D: Open-ended Responses

### MORALE—Working Relationships

***Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. We will need to make sure each class is covering the more detailed knowledge base covered on the STAAR test.
2. More collaboration and preparation for STAAR formatted test.
3. Only from the standpoint of increased collaboration.
4. We will have to be more collaborative so that our tests are more like the STAAR to reflect CCRSSs.

#### **NO**

1. I would like to think we would work more vertically. The districts will not provide that time to teachers
2. No not at all
3. If we, as teachers, are teaching according to the TEKS, then students should be prepared for the STARR test. The only difference for English, is the essay portion which really isn't an essay portion -- students are only given 26 lines to write a story.
4. we are doing the same thing we always do, but it is stressful
5. No not really education tends to change about every 5 to 10 years.
6. Not really. I don't think a single test will alter the way we work.

***Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with your school's administrators? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. I just assume the stress levels will increase. I think it will produce a more negative environment
2. Depending on what the State of Texas decides is passing. The STAAR social studies tests are much harder than the TAKS.
3. Our student interventions are more critical so there will definitely be more involvement.
4. More pressure will be put on teachers because the STARR is new. There is no data to show weak areas at this time.
5. Administrators are as concerned about the STAAR test and its rigor and unknown passing criteria as teachers; however, student scores will be associated with their respective administrators.

#### **NO**

1. No
2. we know that they know as much as us
3. No.
4. No education tends to change every 5 to 10 years.
5. I hope not, although the higher accountability certainly puts more pressure on us all.

## **MORALE—Confidence**

***Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your confidence to teach effectively?  
Why or why not?***

### **YES**

1. By the time they get to Algebra II, it is mandatory they have retention of the previous courses. This is seldom the case.
2. I have no idea what to do, or what is expected of me, I feel like I'm blindfolded
3. With unknown passing criteria and sufficient knowledge of the types of test questions and their rigor makes teaching more challenging. Ninth graders don't understand the impact the test has on their graduation requirements and their report card grades. Effectively communicating this and covering required material in a rigid time frame will be challenging, at best.

### **NO**

1. Nope. I teach primarily AP US History, but the STAAR is just another idea to waste money in education. Instead of raising the passing score on the TAKS (about 58% to pass SS TAKS) they created a completely different test...brilliant!!!
2. No I am confident in my approach and Leander ISD gives the resources and time necessary to be successful.
3. It will challenge me definitely but not in a negative way.
4. Again, I don't teach to the test. I teach my students the skills they need. It should all go hand-in-hand. The only thing is the essay portion. I've had to create new lessons to teach students how to write "flash fiction."
5. No. Both tests are skills tests.
6. No I do not. Just some different standards that we have. We have always had to get the information out to students.
7. Tests are tests. I teach the curriculum that we have approved in the state of Texas. I teach it as well as I can, regardless of how it will be tested. It will not affect my confidence.

## **MORALE—Belief in Mission**

***Do you think the new STAAR tests will be in line with the mission of public schools?  
Why or why not?***

### **YES**

1. But they need to prepare the students starting from the 1st grade for this type of testing.
2. Yes
3. I think the TAKS was too easy; a student could score below average and still pass. The STARR should hold students and school districts more accountable to make sure students can read and write. My fear is that, as always, there will be loopholes that allow students to advance even when they fail a STARR exam.
4. our goal is to provide quality education
5. I think eventually it will be.

### **NO**

1. By the Algebra II level, I am not sure it is reasonable that each child can learn/retain math at this level.
2. No, because students are not coming to high school prepared for the rigor of high school.

3. No test can really reflect the entire mission of education.
4. I think the intentions were good, but I think the results are going to be out of line with the mission of public schools. More students are going to drop-out because of the crazy pressure.
5. I do not believe that any one test, especially one that we have little to no prior knowledge of, should just whether or not a student is able to progress to the next grade. I think our high stakes testing system is a joke and is not at all in line with the mission of public schools.

### **MORALE—School/Work environment**

***Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your teacher morale? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. I think morale will continue to decline as more and more pressure is applied to teachers to affect things out of their control.
2. Could depending on what the State of TX decides is passing.
3. Yes it could go either up or down depending on how the test is developed.
4. Teachers are used to students getting high scores on the test.
5. morale is definitely impacted when teachers feel as if they aren't receiving support but there are high expectations
6. It will increase stress.
7. Definitely! There are so many unknowns about this test, yet the stakes are incredibly high. I have seriously considered another profession, something that isn't connected to this high stakes test.
8. It has already caused a great deal of concern among teachers. We feel the responsibility to adequately prepare our students but have been given little to no opportunity to actually understand what is on the test or what it looks like. It is absolutely frustrating to be issued new mandates with an ever-changing standard of acceptability and no way to know the changes it will bring to our system as a whole. However, if I weren't used to dealing with the vagaries of our state education agency, I would have left teaching long ago.

#### **NO**

1. Good teachers teach - not to the test, but they teach their students to be critical, creative, independent thinkers. This is my goal.
2. Not at all. If a test impacted my morale then it would have been affected long ago.

### **TURNOVER—Lack of Support**

***Have you received adequate support in anticipation of the transition to the new STAAR test?***

#### **YES**

1. Through resources taught to us in teacher in-service.
2. Curriculum development in anticipation of STARR.
3. Principals and AP's have kept us up to date on information regarding the new test.

#### **NO**

1. This should be implemented from the lower levels up! We should be provided preparatory materials, practice tests, etc.

2. Need to see released questions or similar questions.
3. We received some books.
4. NO. More information on the essay requirements, examples for the students to read and analyze.
5. ancillaries, something to guide us in the right direction, teaching materials that are current and aligned with the STAAR
6. TEA has not been as forthcoming with information regarding this new test as they were about TAKS, yet the stakes are much, much higher. Why is that??!!
7. Absolutely not. No one seems to know how the grade will really affect students in terms of credits and there's little information released on the test itself.
8. NO! We don't know hardly anything about this monster.

### **TURNOVER—Workload**

***Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly increase your workload? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. Many of the math students simply do not retain well enough to succeed at this level. But, we will continue working harder and harder anyway.
2. If it ends up being similar to a AP US History test with a lot of detail it could.
3. Maybe not the first year (trial by fire) but definitely in years to come.
4. currently, everything I have is TAKS aligned, so I have nothing to work with and have to figure out what is valuable and what to use
5. Most definitely! (explained in previous question) I'm considering another career after this year.
6. It will increase some as we learn what is being tested and how it is being tested. However, that will even out over time.

#### **NO**

1. No it is still basically the same information.
2. We will teach the same skills regardless of testing.
3. Not really. Still must get the information out to the kids even if there was not a STAAR test.

### **TURNOVER—Pressure**

***Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. My success will be based on the attitudes, abilities, and results of my students. There is not enough responsibilities placed on students and parents.
2. Of course, just like coaching...kids must pass this test or not graduate.
3. Yes it will due to the fact that it is not a group of people training a student but an individual teacher each year.
4. Yes because it is directly related to student averages.
5. Yes, there will be additional pressure associated with ensuring students meet the standard.

6. The stakes for students are higher, and ultimately, the success rate of students will come back on the school, which will come back on the teachers. Then, facilitators, who are no longer in the classroom, will make changes that don't work with more students and less time.
7. I think it will make teacher be more efficient but once things are figured out in regards of what to expect, I think there won't be too much added pressure
8. Yes! (explained in previous question) I'm considering another career.
9. It might. If a student passes our class but is not able to pass the test, it may increase the pressure placed on us by administrators and parents to increase the rigor of our class. Of course, we get pressured now to decrease the rigor to keep failing rates low. Who knows how it will really change things.

#### **NO**

1. No. Expectations have always been to have well rounded students when they leave my classroom.

#### **COMMITMENT TO ASSESSMENT—Alignment**

***Do you think the new STAAR test will be better aligned with state standards (TEKS) than the TAKS test? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. I don't have any way of knowing that. As long as we continue to give multiple choice tests where students can work backwards, it will never be a true achievement test.
2. Yes I think it will due to the fact it will be more specific to your class.
3. It is more reflective of the depth of the curriculum.
4. It is a more difficult exam and should be a stronger indicator of if a student has successfully mastered the needed skills.
5. the are testing over the current TEKS
6. Not sure believe this is still yet to be seen.
7. I think it is the intention that it will be better aligned to also encompass the CCRSSs.
8. It will require students to know more of the curriculum and will require students to write in different modes, which they are not required to do currently.

#### **NO**

1. No, to much detail in the Social Studies test.
2. No test can cover the entirety of the ELA TEKS.

#### **COMMITMENT TO ASSESSMENT—Teaching to the test**

***Do you think the new STAAR test will impact teaching to the test? Please explain.***

#### **YES**

1. Of course! Test taking strategies will become a major component of teaching a course.
2. Definitely people will try to teach to the test.
3. Teachers will need to be more efficient and intentional.
4. Yes. As always, when using testing to judge teaching and learning, there will be emphasis placed on the tested elements.

5. It won't for me, but I think it will for a lot of teachers. Pressure is put on teachers and some teachers will change how they teach, focus on the test, and ignore other needed material for their classes.
6. Absolutely! Unfortunately, not all details have been released to teachers yet about what is considered passing and have only divulged a very small sample of questions.
7. We are told that as long as we teach our curriculum, the students will do well. However, it will definitely cause a ripple of anxiety as we feel responsibility for helping students feel prepared for this new test.

**NO**

1. Nope, that is what you must do to be successful!!!
2. teachers should be covering the material on the test during the school year anyway
3. No more than it already does in some cases.

**COMMITMENT TO ASSESSMENT—Insufficient Resources**

***Do you think you will be provided with sufficient resources to effectively implement the new STAAR test? Please explain.***

**YES**

1. We will see!
2. Yes Leander ISD will give us the resources we need to be successful.
3. I'm sure that I will be given resources, I just don't know if they will align with the exam.
4. Yes. Our school wants its teachers to be successful.

**NO**

1. We certainly haven't been given anything so far.
2. Budget cuts.
3. There is not much information out there - it's the state's fault that we're unprepared for this year. It's a guessing game for us.
4. haven't been yet
5. Not in sufficient time. TEA is not releasing passing criteria until Feb 2012, and the test is in early May 2012. We should be better prepared for the STAAR in 2013.
6. Right now, we're being told that nothing or little has been released. So, no. I don't have much faith that we will be give adequate resources until it is already impacting our students.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

***If you have any additional comments with regard to how switching to the new STAAR test may impact you as a teacher, please provide them below.***

1. The tests should begin in the 1st grade. Students without mastery of the previous level should not be sent to the next. Failures should be addressed from multiple angles, not just what the teacher can do differently/better.
2. I repeat, that all the State of Texas had to do to make the TAKS more rigorous was increase the passing score instead of scrapping the entire test. Just another way we waste more money in public education. I can't wait to see the results of this test and new reports that the students in the State of Texas are having major problems passing state mandated tests!
3. The pressure this new test is placing on 9th graders and teachers is seriously making me re-consider teaching as a career. I don't feel that teachers have been fully informed. I don't think students should now have a longer, more rigorous test in a shorter window of time to test when it counts toward their graduation requirements.

## Appendix E: Summary of Responses

<b>1. Please indicate that you full understand the consent form before participating in this survey.</b>		
Yes	100%	10
No	0%	0
<b>2. Gender</b>		
Male	36.4%	4
Female	63.6%	7
<b>3. Number of years teaching</b>		
0 to 5	18.2%	2
5 to 10	18.2%	2
10 to 15	18.2%	2
15 to 20	36.4%	4
20 to 25	0%	0
25 to 30	9.1%	1
30 to 35	0%	0
35 to 40	0%	0
40 to 45	0%	0
45 or more	0%	0
<b>4. Subject you teach</b>		
English I, English II or English III	36.4%	4
Algebra I, Geometry or Algebra II	18.2%	2
Biology, Chemistry or Physics	0%	0
World Geography, World History or U.S. History	45.5%	5
<b>5. Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with fellow teachers?</b>		
Yes	40%	4
No	60%	6
<b>6. Do you think that switching to the new STAAR test will impact your working relationships with your school's administrators?</b>		
Yes	50%	5
No	50%	5
<b>7. Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your confidence to teach effectively?</b>		
Yes	30%	3
No	70%	7

<b>8. Do you think the new STAAR test will be in line with the mission of public schools?</b>		
Yes	50%	5
No	50%	5
<b>9. Do you think the new STAAR test will impact your teacher morale?</b>		
Yes	80%	8
No	20%	2
<b>10. Have you received adequate support in anticipation of the transition to the new STAAR test?</b>		
Yes	30%	3
No	70%	7
<b>11. Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly increase your workload?</b>		
Yes	66.70%	6
No	33.30%	3
<b>12. Do you think the new STAAR test will significantly change the amount of pressure associated with teaching?</b>		
Yes	90%	9
No	10%	1
<b>13. Do you think the new STAAR test will be better aligned with state standards (TEKS) than the TAKS test?</b>		
Yes	80%	8
No	20%	2
<b>14. Do you think the new STAAR test will impact teaching to the test?</b>		
Yes	70%	7
No	30%	3
<b>15. Do you think you will be provided with sufficient resources to effectively implement the new STAAR test?</b>		
Yes	40%	4
No	60%	6