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Parents' Reasons for Opting-Out Students from High-Stakes Tests

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Rachael McLoud

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Parents' Reasons for Opting-Out Students from High-Stakes Tests

by

Rachael McLoud

MS, Keuka College, 2005

BA, Keuka College, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

PhD in Education-Self Design Specialization

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

An increasing number of parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes. Accountability systems in education have used students' test scores to measure student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. Students who are opted-out of high-stakes tests are not being evaluated by the state tests, making their level of achievement or proficiency unknown by the state government. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the various reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their children from at least one 3rd through 8th grade high-stakes test. Data were collected using a researcher-designed semi-structured interview protocol developed using ecological approaches to systems theories and critical pedagogy theories. The study was set in New York and 10 participants were interviewed, all from different rural or small suburban school districts throughout the state. Five themes and 12 subthemes emerged from first and second cycle coding. Key findings indicated that parents decided to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests because they felt high-stakes were inappropriate and unfair. Further, parents were dissatisfied with current high-stakes testing practices. Previous 3rd through 8th grade testing procedures that allowed teachers to make and grade the state tests were seen as acceptable. Parents indicated no issue with testing. However, from a social change perspective they felt the current system of high stakes testing was used improperly to rate students, teachers, programs, and school districts, and that testing should be used to drive instruction and help struggling students. This study is beneficial for school personnel and policy makers because it provides different ways to assess student achievement.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my students. Watching your frustrated faces over the last 17 years has prompted me to want to know more about high-stakes testing. While this dissertation may not bring an end to high-stakes testing, it is my hope my research will start a ripple effect that will lead to better testing practices and continue the conversation about why grassroots movements such as opting-out are an integral part of society.

Acknowledgments

This journey has lasted almost a decade. There was a myriad of times I wanted to quit. Quitting is not an option in my household; instead, perseverance is valued even when the end seems impossible. The person who deserves the most acknowledgement is my husband, Jason McLoud. You read hundreds if not thousands of pages of my work. You let me bounce ideas off of you and were always my sounding board. You reminded me anything I put my mind to I can achieve and you always believed in me. Now it is your turn. I would to thank my son, Liam McLoud. I hope you learned from me nothing is impossible and to follow your dreams. To my mom and dad thank you for instilling in me a good work ethic and for teaching me to believe in myself. To my in-laws thank you for listening to my crazy ideas, spending time with Liam when I was busy, and for being patient when I had work to do. Numerous friends were there for me, responded to my many Facebook posts and rants, provided me with words of encouragement—all of which propelled me to move forward. My first mentor, Aaron Deris, in July of 2010, wrote he was impressed with my abilities as a student. I hung that comment on the wall in my office and looked at it every time I felt stuck or defeated over the next 8 years. Although he moved on from Walden University I would like to thank him for inspiring me. To my chair, Alice Eichholz, your guidance, support, knowledge, keen ability to set obtainable goals, and words of wisdom guided me to become a better writer and helped me to finish. To my methodologist, Janet Strickland I appreciate the feedback, which aided in the clarity of my research design and study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Over the last century, education systems in the United States have seen much progress and educational reforms (Every Child Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; Gardner et al., 1983; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Councils of Chief State Officers [NGAC], 2010; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). While improving education is and will continue to be the goal, it is debatable whether the education system is continuing to grow and meet the demands of a global society (Hursh, 2013; Hursh & Henderson, 2011; Neill & Guisbond, 2014; NGAC, 2010) or whether the nation's education system is declining and student's educational needs are at risk (Au & Hollar, 2016; Bennett, 2016; Gardner et al., 1983). Determining how well students are learning has fueled much debate and has led to educational reforms. Some of the more prominent educational reforms can be attributed to the report *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR; Gardner et al., 1983), educational policies from NCLB (2001), the Common Core State Standards initiatives (CCSS; NGAC, 2010), and the ESSA (2015), which have all left their mark on the education system in the United States. These have impacted instruction and curricula and have lead to an increase in accountability practices such as high-stakes testing (Au & Hollar, 2016).

The high-stakes testing movement is causing many waves in education systems (Bennett, 2016; Giroux, 2011, 2012; Kohn, 2000; Mitra, Mann, & Hlavacik, 2016; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015). Opponents of high-stakes testing believe focusing on test scores has caused classrooms to evolve into environments where rote learning and memorization have become the focus of education and where passing the test is the end goal (Au, 2011;

Berliner, 2009; Giroux, 2011, 2012; Kohn, 2000). Researchers have investigated parental involvement in education systems, working to identify (a) the main reason why parents become involved in their children's education (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007), (b) the various degrees and roles of parental involvement (Johnson, Gupta, Hagelskamp, & Hess, 2013), (c) the barriers to parent involvement (Bracke & Corts, 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), and (c) the various relationships that can exist between parents and schools (Brauckmann, Geisler, & Weishaupt, 2013).

Many researchers have investigated how policies have affected instruction (Au, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), curricula (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Musoleno & White, 2010; Simon, 2010), and ways teachers and best teaching practices have been affected by educational reforms (Au, 2009; Giroux, 2011, 2012; Hursh, 2008; Kohn, 2000, 2004; Misco, Patterson, & Doppen, 2011). Researchers have also investigated parents' opting-out of provisions, including parts of curricula or high-stakes tests (Mitra et al., 2016; Rogers & Fossey, 2011), and ways grassroots movements can influence parents to become more actively involved in education systems in the United States (Evans, 2014; Winton & Evans, 2014). Advocates of high-stakes testing believe parents opting-out students from high-stakes tests distorts high-stakes test results, making it harder to determine if school districts and teachers are effectively educating children (Bennett, 2016).

In my review of scholarly literature, I found a gap in knowledge of why parents were opting-out children from high-stakes testing. Specifically, I found that researchers had yet to determine what factors and reasons led parents in rural and small suburban

school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements were on the rise to decide to opt-out their child from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test.

I conducted this study to produce finding that may be beneficial for school administrators, politicians, policy makers, and state and federal government educational officials. This study's findings regarding parents' reasons for opting out have implications for positive social change because they provide parents' perspectives on high-stakes testing that could assist administrators and teachers in developing appropriate assessments of learning outcomes.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to this study and begins with a background summary, the problem statement, and a discussion of the study's purpose related to the concept of opting-out. I then present the research question before discussing the conceptual framework of Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which I used to address the gap in knowledge regarding the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents in rural and small suburban school districts in New York to decide to opt-out their child/children from high-stakes testing. Further, I provide definitions and discuss assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. Chapter 1 ends with a summary while providing context for Chapter 2.

Background

High-stakes testing in the United States is often used to measure achievement and student growth, but inadvertently is being used to rank students, teachers, and educational

programs (Kell & Kell, 2010; Kohn, 2000). Internationally, students' test scores on the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a, 2017c) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b) are used to determine student progress by nations. Students in the United States are not among the top of the educational rankings in science and mathematics, which has increased public concern over (a) the status of the U.S. education systems (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Giroux, 2012), (b) a decline in teaching and learning (Hursh, 2008; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), and (c) how passing tests has become one of the main focuses of education (Kohn, 2000). NCLB (2001) policymakers required all students in third through eighth grade to be tested yearly in reading and mathematics.

For instance, since 2006 all third- through eighth-grade students in New York have been required to take yearly English language arts (ELA) and mathematics exams (New York State Office of State Assessment, 2017). Prior to 2006, only students in fourth and eighth grade were required to take ELA and mathematics exams for assessment purposes in the United States. In 2013, New York's ELA and mathematics tests were aligned to the Common Core State Standards (New York State Office of State Assessment, 2017). These examinations are given in April or May of the school year, and scores are not returned until after the end of the school year. With the alignment of the test to the Common Core standards, the ELA and mathematics tests in New York also became secure tests (New York State Education Department, 2017), meaning that the test questions were not released and all materials were collected and safeguarded. Secured

tests made it so teachers were not allowed to have copies of the test questions, thus making it difficult for teachers to give students specific feedback on how they did, what they did right, and what they needed to work on. In the summer of 2013, New York State released 25% of the high-stakes test questions to the public (New York State Education Department, 2017a). Since 2013, New York has increased the number of test questions released; however, the education department deems it essential to keep secure questions to keep the test fair (New York State Education Department, 2017a).

Some of the public including students, teachers, parents, and administrators have started to question the validity and purpose of third- through eighth-grade ELA and mathematics high-stakes tests, which has led to an uprising against high-stakes testing (Hagopian, 2014). A rising number of parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes examinations across the United States (Bennett, 2016; Mitra et al., 2016). In 2015, 20% of eligible students in New York, which equates to approximately 200,000 students, opted-out of the third- through eighth-grade high-stakes tests (Bennett, 2016). The New York State Allies for Public Education (2017) reported that in 2016 and 2017, over 225,000 students opted-out of the third- through eighth-grade ELA and mathematics high-stakes assessments, with reported opt-out numbers around 20% for 3 years in a row.

Since ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), students' test scores have become an essential part of the education system, measuring student learning and accountability in school across the United States (Au & Hollar, 2016). Using high-stakes testing to hold students, teachers, parents, educators, and school administrators accountable has become a fad in education (Kohn, 2000). Standardized testing, student performance, and

educational accountability policies have taken over and now dominate United States' educational systems (Kohn, 2004). Proponents of high-stakes testing accountability policies believe raising test scores equates to a better education (Diamond, 2012). Opponents of high-stakes assessments do not believe high-stakes tests assess what is valued in education; nonetheless, student performance on high-stakes tests can be used to provide feedback on standards, and education systems continue to use them (Kohn, 2004). For many people, testing makes sense because it provides clear data and can be used to hold people and schools accountable (Au & Hollar, 2016). On the other hand, opponents of high-stakes testing are frustrated with how educational systems seem to have lost sight of what the purpose of an education is (Berliner, 2009) and how the majority of high-stakes assessments do not offer a true picture of what students know (Kohn, 2000). ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), NCLB (2001), CCSS (NGAC, 2010), and ESSA (2015) are examples of accountability systems created by the federal government that have impacted education in the United States. As accountability systems come and go, what has not changed is how accountability in education has become synonymous with raising student performance on high-stakes tests. Three educational polices that have impacted accountability in school systems in the United States are ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), the NCLB, and Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015.

A Nation at Risk

Educational historians often credit ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983) as the point in which politicians and policymakers started focusing on accountability in educational systems in the United States (Good, 2010). ANAR, a report written by the members of

the National Commission on Excellence in Education, identified problems impacting education in the United States and provided recommendations for educational improvement (Gardner et al., 1983). At the time of ANAR, many people considered the United States to be a dominating global leader, and with that came the notion the United States had one of the best educational systems in the world, thus producing the top thoughts, creations, ideas, and learning (Johanningmeier, 2010). Concerns about the education of students, especially in science and mathematics, arose after the Soviet Union launched a satellite, Sputnik I, into space before the United States (Johanningmeier, 2010), which drew attention to the need to improve education in the United States.

In ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education established five recommendation areas in education that the United States needed to improve both immediately and long-term. Gardner et al. recommended setting higher standards, expectations, and raising levels of rigor, as well as standardized testing for students. ANAR was considered a turning point in education systems in the United States because it acknowledged a decline in education, addressed the need for change, and prompted reform and accountability in schools (Good, 2010). The idea for politicians to take action in the educational arena in regards to testing derived from ANAR (Johanningmeier, 2010) in the 1980s and has since resulted in numerous educational efforts where politicians address issues with accountability such as NCLB (2001) policies and standardization practices for curricula such as the CCSS initiatives.

No Child Left Behind

In 2001, policymakers aspired to tackle accountability and deal with inferiority in in the U.S. education system by setting specific regulations and policies aimed at raising student achievement. NCLB (2001) was a federal law that required annual testing of all public school children in specific grade levels across the United States in order to determine adequate yearly progress (Duncan & Stevens, 2011). Under NCLB, standardized testing was transformed into *high-stakes testing* because of the high (Duncan & Stevens, 2011) significance placed on the scores. According to the Great Schools Partnership (2016), in order for a test to be considered a standardized test it must meet must meet two criteria: (a) the questions for the test must be the same or come from a question bank, and (b) the test has to be administered and scored in a standard manner. Standard manner means it must be given to with the same conditions or rules and scored the same way across the board to allow for the comparison of performance by the individuals who took the test. Standardized tests can come in different formats, which include multi-choice questions, true-false questions, short-answer questions, essay questions, or a mixture of the question types. Achievement tests, aptitude tests, college-admission tests, international comparison tests, and psychological tests are all considered to be standardized tests.

In order to be a high-stakes test, three criteria must be present: (a) single test is used as the sole indicator for what is a stake for the test; (b) there is a cut score that indicates what is considered to be passing and failing; (c) there is a success or consequence associated with passing or failing the test, which may be imposed on

students, educators, or schools (Great Schools Partnership, 2016). Under NCLB (2001) high-stakes test scores were used for punishments (such as sanctions on schools or programs, reduced funding, and negative school publicity), accolades (awards including blue ribbon and school achievement awards, honors, and positive publicity), and sometimes were used for monetary purposes (school funding, salary increases, and bonuses; Great Schools Partnership, 2016). All high-stakes tests are considered to be standardized tests; however, not all standardized tests are high-stakes.

Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015, the ESSA was signed into law, replacing NCLB (2001) and reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, continuing the United States educational law on equal opportunity for all students. The goal remains for the United States to continue to improve student achievement and success for all students by providing “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps" (ESSA, 2015, Section 1001, p.1). Under ESSA (2015), the requirements from NCLB for annual standardized testing remain intact; however, state educational officials are now are in charge of accountability regarding standardized testing requirements instead of the United States federal government (ESSA, 2015).

ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), NCLB (2001), and ESSA (2015) are three accountability systems in education that have used students’ test scores to measure student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. Over the last few years, the number of parents who have opted-out their children from high-stakes testing

has increased (Hagopian, 2014; Neill & Guisbond, 2014; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015). As the number of parents opting-out continues to, rise it is important to understand why parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. If all students are not taking high-stakes tests, then using students' high stakes tests scores as the main measure of student achievement and proficiency is erroneous. There is a gap in scholarly knowledge of the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that lead parents to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade high-stakes test. This research study marks a significant contribution to the current literature on the impact of high-stakes testing by (a) addressing the impact of parents' perspectives on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifying the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) providing further recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory.

Problem Statement

Student scores on high-stakes tests have become a dominating factor in accountability in educational systems and are influencing reforms in curricula, school systems, and teaching methodologies and approaches (Kell & Kell, 2010). Prior research on high-stakes testing indicated some of the effects associated with high-stakes tests included a narrowing of curricula (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Simon,

2010), a decrease in the amount of instructional time during the school year (Misco et al., 2011; Simon, 2010), a loss of best teaching practices (Au, 2009, 2011; Misco et al., 2011), a loss of teaching critical thinking skills needed for employment in the real world (Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), and the industrialization of education systems into businesses (Hursh & Henderson, 2011; Kohn, 2000). Policies, regulations, and laws over the last 50 years such as ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), NCLB (2001), CCSS (NGAC, 2010), and ESSA (2015) were various attempts by the federal government aimed at raising student achievement in America. Along the way, some parents have opposed the use of these high-stakes tests (Hagopian, 2014).

Phi Delta Kappa (2015) found 64% of participants surveyed affirmed testing was being over emphasized in public schools and high-stakes testing lacked public support in the United States. Opt-out activists and parents have created “contested spaces” (Mitra et al., 2016, p. 5) from differences and ambiguity in state interpretations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2015, which allowed states to incorporate opt-out procedures if the state desired to do so. Mitra et al. (2016) credited policy ambiguity and creation of contested spaces with empowering grassroots activists to use opting-out as a platform in response to systemic problems in the education. Over the last few years, the number of parents who have opted-out their children from high-stakes testing has increased and is starting to draw local, state, and national attention (Hagopian, 2014; Neill & Guisbond, 2014; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015).

As the number of parents opting-out continues to rise, it is important to understand why parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. Research is

limited on what parents, especially those who live in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise, have to say about what led them to decide to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test. State and federal governments use students' high-stakes test scores to measure student achievement and student proficiency (NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015). Since ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), accountability systems in education have used students' test scores, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. If all students are not taking high-stakes tests, then using students' high stakes tests scores as the main measure of student achievement and proficiency is erroneous. Parents' voices and stories add another dimension to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement.

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach to systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory, I analyzed the experiences of parents in rural and small suburban school districts in New York who are deciding to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test. Specifically, I conducted this study to understand the factors that influence parents in their decisions. This study may be beneficial for school administrators, politicians, policy makers, and state and federal government educational officials because it allowed for participants to voice their ideas on different ways the state and federal governments could assess student achievement and proficiency. In so doing, this study may lead to positive social change in regards to high-stakes testing practices.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to examine the various reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their child from high-stakes testing. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) micro, meso, and macro levels of subsystems to examine the various levels of the education system impacted by parents' opting-out their child from high-stakes testing. During interviews, parents shared the processes they went through when deciding to opt-out and explained the messages they were trying to send to the different levels of the education system including school, state, and federal levels. Using Rubin and Rubin's (2012) qualitative research interview protocols and Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) design and implementation guide to basic interpretive qualitative research allowed me to collect and analyze data in order to understand what reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events caused parents to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. This research study (a) adds the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifies the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) further provides recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory.

Research Question

I developed the following research question to guide this study: What reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced parents when deciding to opt-out

their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study on parents opting-out their children from high-stakes tests is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories. Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological approach to systems theory holds that a system is comprised of a person, the environment, and all of the interactions and relationships between a person and the environment, which make up subsystems. There are multiple subsystems that form a system and include the microsystem, mesosystem, and macro system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One of the key principles, interconnectedness, is the ideas that a person's actions in one subsystem can affect other subsystems either directly or indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In any given system there is a multitude of relationships and interconnections of personal events within the system that affect each other and make up the total environment of the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). Bronfenbrenner (1975) noted that one of the most important features of the ecological aspect of systems is the circular relationship between scientists' research findings and social policy; scientists' research finding affect social policy and vice versa. The goal of this study was to use to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to examine the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to decide to opt-out students from high-stakes tests and to identify the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out.

Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory is based on the notion that knowledge is power, and people should use knowledge when acting as involved citizens in society. Giroux theorized that students had become byproducts of education systems and have been turned into their test scores, which has led them to become comparative numbers instead of people. These numbers have become the focus of data-driven market economies and education systems. The best interest of students has been lost, and education systems are limiting students' ability to think critically while limiting teaches autonomy as they are forced to abandon best teaching strategies and instead focus on teaching towards a test (Giroux, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's (1975) systems theory recognizes the importance of going beyond just looking at the effects and interactions between "first-order effect" (p. 11) such as the influence of A on B and B on A, which in this study might be the effects of high-stakes testing on students. Bronfenbrenner noted that it is equally important to look at "second-order effect" (p.11) of a third component C, which in this study is the parents and how their interactions, specifically their decisions to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing, is impacting levels of ecological system: the microsystem, mesosystem, and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). I used Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's system theory to further examine the role of the parent, in regards to high-stakes testing practices, at a time when data-driven policies have turned students into byproducts of education (Giroux, 2012) and the focus of education has become student's high-stakes test scores.

I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory when developing interview questions for the interview protocol (see Appendix). I used Bronfenbrenner's levels of system during coding and analysis to examine the messages parents were trying to send to the school, state, and federal governments regarding opting-out. I used Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory as a framework to address the factors and experiences of parents' opting-out, and during data analysis when assessing how parents use knowledge to make changes in society. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) system theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Nature of Study

This qualitative basic interpretive study involved interviewing parents from rural and small suburban school districts in New York about their experiences with opting-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, high-stakes test. I chose the basic interpretative study design because it allowed me to study a phenomenon while including more participants than a typical case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The instrumentation for the study was a self-designed interview protocol based on Rubin and Rubin's (2012) qualitative research interview protocol. It involved a semi-structured format with questions developed on the frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach to systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory. I coded and analyzed data collected from interviews to identify what reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced led parents to the decision to have their students opt-out.

Definitions

Grassroots: The common, ordinary, or everyday people who are specifically contrasted as being inferior to individuals considered to be in an elite group or to have elite ranks such as those involved in political and social organizations ("Grassroots," 2018). Grassroots movements are movements that start at a local level with the common people who are fighting something they do not agree with. In the context of this dissertation, the term *grassroots movement* is used to reference the rising number of common people whose movement against high-stakes testing led them to opt-out their children from taking third- through eighth-grade ELA and mathematics high-stakes tests. Winton and Evans (2014) noted the importance of grassroots advocacy groups in providing parents with information and clarity regarding education issues and how, through civic engagement, grassroots groups can have an effect on policy.

High-stakes test: In order to be a high-stakes test, the test must meet three criteria: (a) a single test is used as the sole indicator for what is a stake for the test; (b) there is a cut score that indicates what is considered to be passing and failing; (c) there is a success or consequence associated with passing or failing the test, which may be imposed on students, educators, or schools (Great Schools Partnership, 2016). In the U.S. education system under NCLB (2001), high-stakes test scores were used for punishments (such as sanctions on schools or programs, reduced funding, and negative school publicity), accolades (awards including blue ribbon and school achievement awards, honors, and positive publicity), and sometimes were used for monetary purposes (school funding, salary increases, and bonuses) (Great Schools Partnership, 2016). All high-stakes tests

are considered to be standardized tests; however, not all standardized tests are high-stakes. For this study, high-stakes tests will specifically refer to third- through eighth-grade ELA and/or mathematics tests given in April and May in New York.

Standardized test: The Great Schools Partnership (2016) in the glossary of education reform maintained in order for a test to be considered a standardized test, it must meet two criteria: (a) the questions for the test must be the same or come from a question bank, and (b) the it has to be administered and scored in a standard manner. When giving a test in a standard manner, it is given and scored the same way to allow for the comparison of performance by the individuals who took the test. Standardized tests can come in different formats, which include multi-choice questions, true-false questions, short-answer questions, essay questions, or can include a mixture of the question types. Achievement tests, aptitude tests, college-admission tests, international comparison tests, and psychological tests are all considered to be standardized tests.

Opt-out (or Opting-out): The process of someone making a choice to not participate in something ("Opt-out," 2018). For this study, opting-out was defined as the phenomenon when a student does not partake in the administration of the high-stakes third- through eighth-grade ELA and/or mathematics high-stakes tests given in April and May in New York. In some school districts, students who opt-out of the high-stakes tests are not present in the testing room at all. In other school districts, students who opt-out are required to stay in the testing room and during the administration of the examination they opt-out by not answering any questions on any part of the high-stakes test. Either way, the students who have opted-out of the test did not answer any questions on the test

and their tests can neither be used to measure student achievement, nor can they be used to measure teachers or school districts effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

Assumptions

This study was based on the principle assumption that participation in the study was voluntary and that all of the participants met the criteria of opting-out their child from at least one third- through eighth-grade high-stakes ELA or mathematics test at rural or small suburban school districts in New York. I also assumed that the participants would give truthful responses during data collection and that their participation in the study was not for an ulterior motive, such as trying to get back at a school district or teacher for their child's grade on a previous exam or their child's grade in an English or mathematics class with a high-stakes test. Further, I assumed that the participants would offer detailed responses, experiences, and reflections on opting-out their child from high-stakes tests. These assumptions were necessary to the trustworthiness of the research data, findings, and results of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

Since there has been limited research on parents' perspectives on opting-out, the purpose of my research was to gain an understanding of why parents were opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. The study was limited to participants who had opted-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test in New York from small suburban or rural school districts. The study did not include parents who lived in other states, who had opted-out their child from other exams such as field tests, or had homeschooled their children. The conceptual

constraints of the study included viewing parents' opting-out experiences in the context of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories. Delimitations included time, location, and resources. I was the sole researcher collecting and analyzing data. Given the parameters of the research design and time constraints associated with promptly collecting research data promptly for a dissertation, I determined that eight to 12 participants would be an appropriate sample. In terms of transferability, generalizations in qualitative research are not encouraged (Patton, 2002), though the findings of this study could be compared with findings in studies of comparable sized school districts where the researchers asked questions similar to those in my interview protocol (Appendix).

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this research study related to the research design and included the number of participants, length of the study, use of purposeful sampling, use of phone interviews, and my role as the sole researcher. Since the research was for a dissertation, data collection and analysis needed to be completed in a timely fashion. I projected eight to12 participants for the study sample in hopes that enough data would be collected to allow for data saturation regarding the opting-out movement in the geographic area. One of the limitations was that this sample size may not have provided full saturation on the topic of opting-out. Another limitation was that since I used phone interviews, I could not observe body language and non-verbal cues observed.

Since I was the sole researcher, I needed to keep my sample size manageable to the geographic area and the rural and small suburban school districts in New York. For

any study with one researcher, there is always the possibility for bias. My biases came from being a mathematics teacher whose curricula contained high-stakes tests in the state where the research took place and from being a parent whose child was required to take the ELA and mathematics high-stakes tests. To address these biases, I made sure when interviewing to ask questions while keeping my personal opinions and feelings out of the conversation. Although I have considered opting-out my child from high-stakes exams, I had not opted-out my child and therefore lack the personal experiences I was trying to understand. In order to address bias, I added a third criterion into the research study that did not allow for parents of students whose children have had me as a teacher to participate in this research study.

Transferability of my findings is limited. Instead of offering generalizations, I used modest extrapolations that allow for my research to be compared with other research on parents in small suburban and rural school districts. Strategies for dependability in this study included using triangulation and transcript verification, spending adequate time when collecting data and during data analysis, and using self-reelection in research logs (see Merriam, 2009).

Significance of Study

This study will contribute to positive social change by providing reasons, factors, experiences that led parents in rural and small suburban school districts in New York to decide to opted-out their children from high-stakes testing. Since ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), accountability systems in education have used students' test scores to measure student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. Since the

number of parents opting-out continues to rise across the United States (Hagopian, 2014; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015), it is important to examine why parents choose to opt-out their child from high-stakes testing. The experiences parents shared with the researcher provide specific details, reasons, and factors on what caused them to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. This study (a) adds the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifies the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) includes recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory.

A qualitative study provided an opportunity for parents to explain their concerns and share their experiences with high-stakes testing. There is a cost to the United States educational system associated with parents opting-out their children from high-stakes testing; this cost involves not having a true picture of all students' achievement and proficiency because of the rise in the number of students opting-out of high-stakes tests (Hagopian, 2014). This study will be beneficial for school administrators, politicians, policy makers, and state and federal government educational officials because it allowed for participants to voice their ideas on different ways the state and federal governments could assess student achievement and proficiency and in doing so may lead to positive social change in regards to high-stakes testing practices.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I provided an introduction and discussed this study's background, conceptual framework, and significance. In the current research literature there is a extensive information on high-stakes testing and the impact of high-stakes testing on curricula (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Musoleno & White, 2010; Simon, 2010), instruction (Au, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), students (Au & Hollar, 2016; Deming, Cohodes, Jennings, & Jencks, 2016), teachers (Giroux, 2011, 2012; Kohn, 2004), and school districts (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Kohn, 2000); however, a gap in research exists regarding what led parents, in rural and small suburban school districts in New York to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests.

In New York, what started as small grassroots movements by handfuls of people had gained momentum over the last few years, with 200,000 students opting-out of high-stakes tests in 2015 (Bennett, 2016), and over 225,000 students opting-out in 2016 and 2017, which is over 20% of eligible students opting-out of third- through eighth-grade ELA and mathematics high-stakes tests for 3 consecutive years (New York State Allies for Public Education, 2017). This study (a) adds the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifies the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) includes recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory. Parents were able to explain their concerns,

share their experiences, and voice their ideas on different ways for the state and federal government to assess student achievement and proficiency and could lead to positive changes in regards to high-stakes testing practices. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory as the conceptual framework for this study.

In Chapter 2, I discuss my literature search strategies and rationale for the conceptual framework and then review the literature. The literature review covers the impact of high-stakes testing, parental involvement in education, and opting-out. The impact of high-stakes testing on test anxiety, narrowing of curricula, the CCSS, and international testing are addressed. I also discus parental involvement in the educational realm, focusing on the various roles and degrees of parent involvement, barriers of parental involvement, parent dissent and trigger laws, and grassroots organizations. In the section on opting-out, I provide specific court cases dealing with opting-out provisions in educational systems and discuss conscience in education and arguments against opting-out.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

High-stakes testing has become the center of debate in the U.S. educational system (Hagopian, 2014). High-stakes assessments have impacted instruction, curricula, and students learning throughout the United States and around the world (Kell & Kell, 2010). High-stakes tests are used as one of the sole indicators in determining the success, or the lack of success, of students, teachers, and school districts, and they are causing significant changes in many education practices (Au, 2011). Proponents of high-stakes testing affirm that high-stakes examinations are responsible for aligning curricula and shaping instruction, and they contend that the tests lead to increases in student's achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). Rationales for high-stakes testing includes higher teacher and student accountability, motivation for students to perform better and increase their learning efforts, and that student's test results can provide a gauge to help remediate or reteach material (Nichols, 2007). Opponents of high-stakes testing maintain that high-stakes tests are doing a major disservice to educational systems by narrowing the curricula, disempowering teachers, and impeding instruction (Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011).

Narrowing of curricula results from the elimination of concepts due to decreases in the amount of available instructional time during the school year (Simon, 2010; Misco et al., 2011). Numerous hours of instructional time are pushed aside to prepare students to take high-stakes assessments, and even more hours of instructional time are spent administrating the high-stakes assessments (Simon, 2010). The amount of time spent on high-stakes examinations is taking away from instructional time needed to explore topics

and curricula. Many teachers are giving up instructional time to teach to the tests because high-stakes assessments are being used to measure student, teacher, and school districts performance (Mora, 2011). Instead of allowing students to further explore topics and allowing teachers to choose materials to teach, instruction in the classroom is now focused around testing and "carefully scripted programs—ones that prepare students to perform well on tests" (Musoleno & White, 2010, p. 3).

Further, opponents of high-stakes testing believe high-stakes testing is harming the quality of education, the equality of students, and the viability of public education (Sahlberg, 2010). Another way high-stakes assessments are affecting curricula and instruction is through the "abandonment of student-centered strategies" (Misco et al., p. 10). One of the best practices in education is a student-centered curriculum; however, many teachers are shifting their instruction back to teacher-centered instruction to get through the entire curricula mandated for the high-stakes assessments (Au, 2009).

High-stakes examinations have become so powerful that they dominate learning in the majority of American classrooms across the nation and have made it so students no longer seem to have the time to have the genuine experiences many educators such as Dewey stressed were so important for student development and learning. Dewey (1938/1997) affirmed that experiences people tend to find worthwhile are experiences that are democratic because they allow for people to exercise their individual freedoms instead of learning by coercion or force. Dewey noted genuine experiences are important because these experiences are where students learn social and interactive processes, critical thinking skills, how to solve problems in the real-world setting, and they learn

these skills while participating in experiences in the community they are a part of. Giroux's (1988, 2011, 2012) critical pedagogy theory builds on Dewey's theories on education and experience and holds that schools moved away from genuine experiences and student-centered learning. Giroux (2012) asserted that schools across the United States have become market-driven entities focused on test scores and molding students into byproducts who are trained to think like machines and regurgitate information rather than find meaning in what they are learning.

Giroux (2012) is not alone in his belief that the United States has become too focused on high-stakes testing and has lost sight of the purpose of education. Ravitch (2010) examined how testing and choice are undermining education, and Kozol (2005) contended that apartheid education is occurring in the United States. Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) discussed how high-stakes tests are having unintended consequences on curricula and classes including science, social studies, and the arts. Berliner and Biddle (1995) described how high-stakes test scores became a manufactured crisis. Hursh (2008) declared high-stakes testing was causing a crisis in education systems, which has led to a decline of teaching and learning. Kohn (2000) disputed the efficacy of standardized tests, claiming that while test scores appear to raising scores, what they are doing is ruining school curricula, instruction, and learning.

Hagopian (2014) contended that people need to be more than a test score and noted the myriad ways high-stakes tests are negatively impacting students, teachers, instruction, and curricula throughout U.S. education systems. Hagopian and others have observed that over the last few years, the number of parents who have opted-out their

children from high-stakes testing has increased, and the phenomenon is starting to draw local, state, and national attention (Hagopian, 2014; Neill & Guisbond, 2014; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015). As these numbers continue to rise, it is important to understand why parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. Students who are opted-out of high-stakes tests are not getting evaluated on the state tests, making their level of achievement or proficiency unknown by the state government. Since ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), accountability systems in education have used students' test scores to measure student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. If all students are not taking high-stakes tests, then using students' high stakes tests scores as the main measure of student achievement and proficiency is erroneous.

Much of the focus on the opting-out movement has been on cities and larger public school districts. In a recent dissertation, O'Rourke (2015) analyzed factors related to parents' opting-out of New York Common Core high-stakes assessments in Suffolk County, down by Long Island in New York. Research is limited on what parents in rural and small suburban school districts in New York have to say about why they decided to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing. There is a gap in scholarly knowledge of the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade high-stakes test. This study (a) adds the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems

regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifies the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) includes recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory.

In this chapter, I discuss my literature search strategies and rationale for the conceptual framework before reviewing the literature. In the literature review, I examine the impact of high-stakes testing on various pieces of education systems, discuss parental involvement in education, and provide information regarding opting-out in education systems.

Literature Search Strategies

I initiated the literature search using the Walden University Library's Thoreau multi-database search for the subject area of education. A search for the phrase *high-stakes assessments* yielded 3000 articles. Combining that phrase with other keywords such as *opting-out* or *opt-out,* provided no articles. Opting-out proved to be a phrase hard to find in the field of educational research. Searches for *opting-out* tended to provide articles on people opting-out of medical procedures. When I used *high-stakes assessments* and *implications* and selected the limiters of *full text*, *peer-reviewed*, and then a date limiter from 2011-2016, the number of articles changed to 172. Additional sets of keywords included *high-stakes test*, *standardized testing, parents and testing, students and testing, teachers and testing, grassroots organizations, student motivation,*

student-efficacy, self-efficacy, testing resistance, school reforms, student learning, anxiety, and *test anxiety.*

I also searched the ProQuest Central or Academic Search complete multi-disciplinary databases using the same keywords and limiters. After completing these searches, I searched in disciplinary areas other than education including business and management, psychology, and social work. Searches in these areas provided additional articles, especially with material related to how high-stakes testing was affecting the market economy in the field of business, and its impact on motivation, efficacy, and anxiety in psychology and social work.

I then searched Google Scholar, which linked directly to the Walden Library and numerous other libraries, online databases, and journals and gave me access to many articles. With Google Scholar it was important to check that the articles obtained were peer-reviewed. Google Scholar provided both peer-reviewed works and newspaper articles, blog posts, and other types of work that are not peer-reviewed. Although some of this was interesting and relevant to read, many of the items were not appropriate for use in a dissertation. In all the various databases, I would check the first weekend of every month to see if any new research relevant to my topic had come out. I also worked with a librarian at Walden University to get automatic notifications emailed to me when new articles that met my criteria had come out. Finally, I found articles and books by reviewing the references listed in the articles I was currently reading. If the article referenced something I had not read yet, I would add it to my list of items for further research. By using references, I was able to find more articles and books that were

relevant to my specific topic and yielded different journal articles I may not have found on my own.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study on parents opting-out their children from high-stakes tests was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theory offers a framework for understanding any system, including the U.S. educational system. The theory holds that a system is made up of four subsystems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The interactions, experiences, and effects between these systems happen both directly and indirectly. I used Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory to look critically at the way curricula, instruction, and learning has been affected by high-stakes testing; further, I used it to examine the various ways educational policies are affecting parents and their decisions to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. For the purpose of this study, I looked at the role of the parent and their experiences and decision to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing in terms of the effects on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) subsystems and then used Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory to examine the various ways the education system is being affected by parents' opting-out their children from high-stakes tests.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory holds that a system is comprised of the person, the environment, and the interconnectedness of interactions and relationships between a person and the environment, which is composed of four

subsystems: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, and (d) macrosystem. The microsystem is the fundamental subsystem that is made up of common day-to-day places where a person circulates and participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These places include settings may include home, school, the neighborhood, workplace, daycare, or other typical social places the person frequents. There are multiple microsystems in a system. The mesosystem is composed of two or more microsystems. In the mesosystem, the individual's actions or decisions in one microsystem begins to affect other subsystems that the person is a part of through the principle of interconnectedness. Interconnectedness is the idea that a person's actions in one subsystem affect other subsystems either directly or indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The exosystem is a system containing the setting that does not involve the person as an active participant but is a setting in which personal events occur that effect, or are affected by, the person or object in the microsystem and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted the decisions and actions the person made in a microsystem may impact other subsystems that the person is not directly a part of; the exosystem is the indirect environment. The exosystem could include but are not limited to textbook companies, the board of education, high-stakes test makers, educational policymakers, and state departments of education. The macrosystem is the entire encompassing system and for each person is different as is based on "blueprints" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26) or the makeup of the environment in which a person lives. The blueprints include how the society is set up and the impact of other factors or attributes such as socioeconomic status, sex, ethnicity, religion, etc. in the various

systems. The macrosystem encompasses the total environment—meaning the society along with the various cultures and makeup of the environment that the person is both indirectly and directly a part of (Bronfenbrenner, 1968).

Bronfenbrenner (1975) noted that one of the most important features of the ecological aspect of systems is the circular relationship between scientists' research findings and social policy; scientists' research findings affect social policy and vice versa, social policy affects scientific research. The current research on high-stakes testing and social policy regarding school reform will be the circular relationship examined in the literature review. A gap in research exists on parents' experiences and reasons for opting-out. The research study will examine parents' experiences with opting-out their children from third- through eighth-grade ELA and/or mathematics high-stakes tests in rural and small suburban school districts in New York and contribute to the gap in research regarding parents' perspectives on opting-out of high-stakes tests. The purpose of this study will be to use Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to look at the interconnectedness of parents opting-out their children from high-stakes testing and the parents' perspectives on the various ways opting-out is affecting the United States education system including students, parents, teachers, learning, curricula, and reform.

Giroux's Critical Pedagogy Theory

In systems of education, critical pedagogy theory is when people learn to connect their knowledge to power and can use this knowledge to consciously making critical decisions, which affect society (Giroux, 1988). Giroux (1988) theorized the United States school systems have moved toward a market-driven model of education where

students have become byproducts and are being turned into machines where they do not think like people, rather students are trained to spit out a process or concept with no meaning. In school systems where business tactics overpower teaching students' critical thinking skills, Giroux provided the results are domination and oppression of students and their ability to learn. Giroux (2012) observed laws promoting high-stakes tests have led to limiting teachers' autonomy and ability to teach their student's critical thinking, which is undermining education systems by changing the outcomes, concepts, and curricula students learn. In his critical pedagogy theories, Giroux examined the role of high-stakes assessments and the how they have impacted and continued to impact students' learning, school curricula, and school reform.

Rationale for Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences that led parents to opting-out their children from ELA and/or mathematics high-stakes tests in rural and small suburban school districts in New York. Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy is a framework dealing with conflict in education systems from standards-based education reform that focuses on accountability and high-stakes tests. The essence of critical pedagogy is a student-centered approach to learning where knowledge, decision-making, and being actively involved citizens whose actions are a key component of the society and culture. Giroux's (1988, 2011, 2012) theories can be used to look at the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of critical pedagogy and accountability policies in public schools. Giroux's (1988, 2011, 2012) critical pedagogy theories paired with Bronfenbrenner's (1968, 1975, 1979) ecological systems theories will allow for the

conceptual framework to examine the various subsystems involved in education system and how the subsystems are being affected by high-stakes testing and parents decisions to opt-out their children from ELA and/or mathematics high-stakes tests in rural and small suburban school districts in New York.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three main areas of research: the impact of high-stakes testing in the educational system, parental involvement in the educational process, and opting-out in the United States educational system. Each of the topics is discussed within the context of how education systems were impacted. A gap in research related to the research question is presented and is further discussed in research methods presented in Chapter 3.

Impact of High-Stakes Testing

Proponents of high-stakes assessments affirm that high-stakes examinations are responsible for aligning curricula, shaping instruction, and have led to increases in student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). The rationale for high-stakes testing includes holding teachers accountable, holding students accountable, motivation tool for students to do better and increase their efforts to learn, and test results give teachers a better gauge to help remediate or reteach them material (Nichols, 2007). Whereas, adversaries of high-stakes assessments maintain high-stakes tests are doing a major disservice to educational systems by narrowing curricula, disempowering teachers, and impeding instruction (Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). Crowder and Konle (2015) maintained the initial idea of testing students started with good intentions, but now

has “driven focus away from teaching and learning and has become a force which now operates of its own volition, an automated beast come to life, limited in scope but acting as though its perspective defines the entirety of educational goals” (p. 285).

Opponents of the high-stakes testing movement question the validity of high-stakes examinations and whether student achievement actually changed, if cheating has occurred (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, & Rideau, 2010), or whether students have learned how to pass examinations that may lead one to falsely conclude students’ achievement has risen when in actuality student achievement has not changed (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner, and Rideau (2010) researched the various degrees of cheating on high-stakes tests and found 50% of the participants indicated they knew colleagues who have cheated and more than 50% of the participants omitted to cheating themselves on high-stakes tests.

Adversaries of high-stakes tests believe instruction and curricula shifted to emphasize teaching students how to pass high-stakes examinations and believe high-stakes testing in the long-term is harming the quality of education, equity of students, and viability of public education (Sahlberg, 2010). Over the last decade, one of the most noticeable impacts of high-stakes testing is the narrowing of curricula (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Simon, 2010). The narrowing of curricula has to do with elimination of concepts or concept lessening in the curricula being taught. Opponents of high-stakes testing maintain that curricula are being narrowed due to decreases in the amount of available instructional time during the school year (Simon, 2010; Misco et al., 2011). High-stakes assessments are time-consuming. Numerous

hours of instructional time are pushed aside to prepare students to take high-stakes assessments and even more hours of instructional time are spent administering the high-stakes assessments (Simon, 2010). In a recent study, O'Rourke (2015) found 160 of 207 parents (77 %) felt unfavorable about the amount of time their children spent taking standardized tests, 183 of 207 (87%) believed their child spent too much time preparing for standardized tests, and only 48 of 207 (23%) parents felt standardized tests were needed to assess students' abilities (p. 54).

The amount of time spent on high-stakes testing is taking away from instructional time needed to explore topics and curricula (Au, 2009; Berliner, 2009; Mora, 2011). Classes with high-stakes examinations have little wiggle room for change regarding what has to be covered in the scope and sequence, especially if the class has standardized curricula. With curricula already being tight, one of the concerns about high-stakes testing is the amount of instructional time being spent on teaching to the test and practicing tests (Mora, 2011). Many teachers are having to give up instructional time to teach to the tests because the tests are driving accountability and are being used in measuring the students, teachers, and school's level of performance (Mora, 2011). Adversaries of high-stakes testing question whether the purpose of education has shifted to one where the goal of education to teach students to memorize facts in to pass high-stakes examinations (Berliner, 2009).

With the loss in the amount of instructional time during the school year, there is a fear that the best practices in teaching are being lost with the rise of high-stakes testing (Au, 2009; Misco et al., 2011). One of the best teaching practices is for student-centered

curricula and teaching students how to be critical agents (Giroux, 2011, 2012); however, best teaching practices are being put on hold as many teachers are shifting their instruction back to teacher-centered instruction in order to get through all of the curricula mandated for the high-stakes assessments (Au, 2009). Shifts in instruction can be evidenced by how many teachers are teaching only content on the test, sticking towards teaching students how to answer multiple-choice questions, and by teaching less critical thinking skills and activities in the classroom (Berliner, 2009).

High-stakes tests take away from students being ale to critically think, set goals, explore items they would like to learn, and have been replaced by scripted programs that prepare students for predetermined curricula and tests (Musoleno & White, 2010). Some teachers have changed instruction by eliminating projects, simulations, and in-depth learning out of their curricula (Misco et al., 2011). With the increased emphasis on high-stakes assessments, instructional time is being spent teaching students how to follow a format or how to pass a test instead of teaching students how to think critically (Au, 2011; Giroux, 2011). Teachers do not have the time to teach some of the critical thinking skills they used to because they are so focused on teaching students how to pass high-stakes tests filled with multiple-choice questions. Multiple-choice questions have a tendency of being lower order questions that require students to pull tidbits of information out of their head and often do not truly test students on how to apply what they have learned to real-world applications (Au, 2009).

High-stakes tests emphasize lower order thinking skills instead of critical thinking skills needed for the real world (Berliner, 2009). Multiple-choice tests are often used as

assessments because they are easier to grade, cheaper to make, and less time consuming to score (Au, 2009). Although it is possible to test a student's ability to answer questions containing higher-level thinking through multiple-choice, it is rare (Berliner, 2009). One of the negative implications associated with multiple-choice questions is they often do not assess whether higher levels of understanding of the content has taken place (Berliner, 2009) or whether the students guessed well. Tests scores at best provide an estimation of what students know, so using them to classify students can lead to misclassification (Feuer, 2011). The purpose of standardized testing used to be the test results could be used to provide a benchmark for student learning, identify gaps in learning, and be used as system of accountability—now they are used to make comprehensive judgments on programs or schools (Kohn, 2000).

One of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing may be that it can both overstate and understate what learning is occurring (Feuer, 2011). When looking at the impact of testing, and how test anxiety and guessing may lead to misclassification regarding students who understand something and get marked, as they do not understand. It is equally as important to look at how multiple-choice format tests allow for false positives. An example of the false positive is that the test results will indicate the student has understanding of a topic when in actuality they do not understand it. "Tests-like most if not all technologies—are imperfect, which means that some results will overstate and other results will understate the "true" state of a child's learning or potential" (Feuer, 2011, p. 26).

One of the problems with multiple choice tests is they allow for students to guess and get credit for answers and understanding of concepts they do not know. Zerpa, Hachey, van Verneveld, & Simon (2011) pointed out that there is a general assumption that exists out there that when students take high-stakes tests or large-scale assessments, the student's scores accurately measure what they know and are the and that the students did their best on the test. Not all students take the high-stakes assessments seriously. Student's test scores can be inflated or deflated and may not be accurate measures of their knowledge and understanding of the content (Zerpa et al., 2011). On high-stakes assessments, there is no immediate consequence attached to student's scores, which may be adding to the problem of low student motivation because the students truly do not see an immediate value in what they are currently doing. Low motivation can be seen in behaviors such as guessing, omitting questions, quitting, or not completing tests and can affect student performance by not accurately measuring what they do and do not know (Zerpa et al., 2011). Low motivation behaviors can affect student's results by inflating their scores for guessing and receiving credit for answers they do not know; student's scores can also be deflated by low motivation when students are marked off as not knowing or being proficient in topics they are proficient in.

Opponents of high-stakes testing believe high-stakes tests are impacting educator's ability to teach students to think critically and further argue that multiple choice questions are not essential skills needed for the real world. With the shift in learning, education systems are focused on "producing productive, rather than critical employees" (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 181). The problem with focusing on

producing productive students is that they might be well versed in memorizing and following procedures; however, students are not learning to think critically (Giroux, 2012). This generation of students is used to being told what to do and how to do it, which in the long-term it is going to create a generation of people who cannot think on their own (Hursh & Henderson, 2011). Regarding the global economy and productivity, being successful requires people to continually come up with new and better products, systems, and solutions. If students do not learn to think for themselves, how is this generation going to maintain success in the global world (Hursh & Henderson, 2011; Giroux, 2012)? It is important for all teachers, to promote teaching students subject material and to apply critical thinking skills to what they are learning (Au, 2009). Test scores do not predict how well people are going to do later in life, such as in the workforce, and placing too much value on test scores may lead to problems in the future politically, economically, and socially (Berliner, 2009).

High-stakes tests measure the constructs that politician's value; however, high-stakes tests do not predict how well students are going to do in life, nor do they indicate how well the nation is going to do in the future (Berliner, 2009). Employers do not look for students who can pass high-stakes tests—employers look for people with skills needed for the workforce. Adversaries of high-stakes testing content education systems are becoming standardized and are comparable to school districts around the time of industrialization in the United States (Au, 2011). During industrialization, the idea of social efficiency was prominent and as school districts where being created it was important that they run efficiently and effectively. Schools should be focused on the

demands need for the 21st century (Berliner, 2009) including how to think critically and be critical agents in order to compete and strive in a global economy (Berliner, 2009; Giroux, 2011).

Au (2011) compared school districts to an assembly line where the roles are all predetermined in order produce the most effective results. In the assembly line, students are considered to be the raw materials and educators are responsible for teaching students according to pre-determined standards and objectives. Administrators are in charge of deciding what methods and materials teachers will use to get students to meet the standards. The school is the assembly line where all of the all of the elements come together to work efficiently (Au, 2011). Under the assembly line model, teachers are not responsible for determining what it is they are going to teach or what methods they will use—the administration has already decided what is best for them. Teachers are not the leaders and should not be in charge of figuring out what they need because it is the administrator's job, not their job, to determine and map out instruction. The high-stakes testing movement has caused teachers to lose their voices in the classroom (Giroux, 1988, 2012) and has enabled test scores to become the driving force in educational processes (Kohn, 2004).

When decisions about education are made regarding what is best for the economy, such as what is happening with the high-stakes testing movement, education loses its meaning. Education under neoliberalism and industrialization is no longer about what is best for the students; rather, education is about what is best for businesses and the economy (Hursh & Henderson, 2011). When education is run like a business, students

lose out because students become outputs rather than people (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 179). As an output, students become a number based on how they perform on high-stakes assessments. High-stakes test scores have decontextualized and objectified the education system, turning students, teachers, and school districts into numbers and scores instead of people (Au, 2011).

Opponents of high-stakes testing argue that test scores have become the object of comparison—students and teachers have become a number, and that number becomes their identity (Au, 2011). If the number is good, the person is fine, but if the number is below the target number, it becomes negative and condescending. The number is a snapshot of how a particular student performs on one test, on a certain day, at a certain time. One of the ways, under NCLB (2001) student success was determined was by a pass/fail cut score (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). With a pass/fail cut score it does not matter how well as student did as long as they met the minimum score needed to pass. If the student missed the cut score by one point or twenty points, they have still failed. With a pass/fail cut score student growth is not taken into consideration. A student may have raised their knowledge of a subject by thirty points, but still may not meet the minimum cut score. Although the student showed huge amounts of growth, all of their hard work goes unrecognized, and the student still failed to meet the minimum score needed to pass the examination. This leads to the question, what is the purpose of schooling? Is the purpose of schooling to teach students how to pass high-stakes examinations or is the purpose to learn material and curricula at a pace that is appropriate for their interests, needs, and abilities (Gasoi, 2009)?

Although the purpose of the high-stakes assessments is supposed to be to assess student learning the unintended consequences of these tests is they often create a label for students, especially students who are considered “at risk,” and may make them feel inferior (Kearns, 2011). Just as in a picture, a high-stakes test shows how a particular student does on a particular day on certain exam questions. Summative assessments are a snapshot of student learning; a better way to assess would be to use multiple ways of testing, including oral and written tests, and multiple days of testing to better show an authentic assessment of learning in students (Kearns, 2011).

Research shows that high-stakes testing can create intense pressure, create student anxiety, and may have negative results that can have destructive effects on learners (Duncan & Stevens, 2011). In a 2011 study, focused on student’s feelings about high-stakes testing, findings indicated students admitted when they performed poorly, “they felt degraded, humiliated, stressed, and shamed by the test results” (Kearns, 2011, p.118). One of the problems with high-stakes testing is that student’s performance may not change from year to year. Students who perform well often continually perform well, and many students who perform poorly continue to perform poorly. For students who perform poorly from year to year and on test-to-test they are constantly being reminded they are not performing to the level of their peers, which in the long term is taking a toll on their self-esteem and their self-worth. Kearns (2011) observed many of the youth were struggling to become somebody and high-stakes tests made him or her feel inferior to others and made them question their self-worth.

Test anxiety. Test anxiety is a phenomenon that many people question the validity of especially when it is used as a way to pass the blame when students fail or do poorly on an examination; however, Datta (2013) noted there is a negative correlation between intelligence and test anxiety—meaning students with lower intelligence quotients (IQs) are expected to have higher amount of anxiety on tests (Datta, 2013, p. 123). Datta's findings indicated 60% of adolescent females and males with mild intellectual disabilities had high levels of test anxiety on the test anxiety indicator (p. 127), and the other 40% of adolescent females and males had test anxiety scores in the moderate range. Further, adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities who experience high-levels of anxiety may not be able to show their true capabilities because their test anxiety is inhibiting their actual performance. Datta noted people who have high levels of test anxiety could be "nervous, fearful, worried, and emotionally aroused" (p. 127) and are often not able to show their true performance levels in evaluative situations such as high-stakes tests. Datta found students with moderate amounts of test anxiety experience stress and strain before and during the test but can show their true levels of achievement.

Test anxiety is apprehension or uneasiness people have on tests and are generally broken down into two types, worry and emotionality. "Worry is defined as the psychological or cognitive concern and distress about the consequences of failure in a testing situation. It consists of negative performance expectations or worry about the testing situation" (Datta, 2013, p. 128). People who experience worry often have negative thoughts about the test or testing experiences and this worry or fear can get in the way of them being able to test well. The fear of failing can affect their overall test

performance and is believed to get in the way of the person from being able to answer questions and show their accurate level of ability or understanding. Worrying is not something you can see; instead, it embodies how the person is feeling. Some people argue the worry component of test anxiety does not exist because you cannot see it happening (Datta, 2013). Datta (2013) found 80% of adolescent females with mild intellectual disabilities and 100% of adolescent males with mild intellectual disabilities obtained high worry scores and the other 20% of adolescent females had moderate worry scores (p. 128).

Emotionality is the "reactions of the autonomic nervous system that are evoked by evaluative stress" (Datta, 2013, pp. 128-129). Emotionality is more about the physical component of test anxiety and can be seen through reactions such as "nervousness, fear, physical discomfort, sweating, constantly looking at the clock, pencil tapping, and so on" (Datta, 2013, p. 129). Emotionality reactions are ones that can be seen and are the ones that teachers and students tend to be more aware of are occurring. Datta (2013) found 80% of adolescent males and females with mild intellectual disabilities had high emotionality scores (p. 129). The other 20% of adolescent females had a moderate range of emotionality, and the other 20% of adolescent males were found to have scored in the lower ranger of emotionality (Datta, 2013).

Narrowing of curricula. Another impact of high-stakes testing on curricula is the overall trend towards increasing student achievement in mathematics and English has pushed other subject areas aside. Consequences from the federal government associated with the rules and regulations of NCLB (2001) labeled schools as in need of

improvement and put many schools on academic probation when students did not meet adequate yearly progress (Hursh, 2008). One of the problems with putting school districts on academic probation, under NCLB, was that the schools were more likely to focus on the students who needed the most help instead of focusing on helping all students succeed (Diamond, 2012). The most resources and funding went to mathematics and English teachers, programs, and curricula with high-stakes tests (Diamond, 2012; Kohn, 2004).

In the era of accountability, ELA and mathematics have become the most important subject areas in school districts because they are the subject areas with high-stakes test scores used to determine proficiency and achievement in the United States (Kohn, 2004). Less time is being spent on curricula in social studies, art, physical education, Spanish, science, music, and other electives to devote more time during the school day on student achievement in ELA and mathematics (Duncan & Stevens, 2011). The emphasis on ELA and mathematics has become so prominent that some school districts have eliminated or reduced other curricula to raise student achievement on high-stakes examinations (Au, 2009).

Social studies curricula are one of the curricula that has been reduced or eliminated by some school districts, particularly in the elementary and middle school levels (Au, 2009). Less time is being devoted to learning social studies curricula, which may be causing social studies curricula to be rushed and narrowed (Au, 2009). High-stakes assessments may also be impacting how social studies curricula are taught. Due to time constraints, many social studies teachers are focusing on lecture type activities that

are teacher-centered and use weekly "fast-recall quizzes" aimed at answering multiple-choice questions—none of which are considered to be best practices in teaching (Au, 2009).

Many social studies teachers feel as though the high-stakes testing movement is turning social studies curricula into a fact-based tidbit aimed at teaching students to memorize facts so they could answer Jeopardy-like questions instead of understanding the meat of the concept (Misco et al., 2011). Rote memorization of facts and focusing on teaching students how to answer multiple-choice questions is negatively affecting the social studies curricula because it will "promote a vision of social studies education as the collection of historical facts" (Au, 2009, p. 48). Understanding history, why personal events happen and how to avoid them are concepts embedded into an enhanced social studies curricula, which many students may no longer be getting. Students need to have an understanding of all the economic, political, and social aspects as well as an understanding of how their actions impact future generations if they are going to maintain power, competition, and status in the global economy (Hursh & Henderson, 2011).

Common Core State Standards. One of the current educational reforms occurring across the majority of United States is the standardized curriculum called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; NGAC, 2010) initiative. Standardized or "corporate curricula" is the term used to define the curricula created by external organizations and businesses for learning (Au, 2011). The National Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers [NGAC] maintain one of the goals of the CCSS is to establish educational standards for kindergarten through

12th grade in English Language Arts and mathematics to establish uniformity in curricula in education systems throughout the United States.

Proponents of the CCSS (NGAC, 2010) initiative believe, if the majority of the states across the United States have a common curricula with clear learning standards, the states' education systems will be able to better prepare students for the global society (NGAC, 2010). Currently, the high-stakes test scores come in a variety of shapes and sizes, vary from state to state, and vary across the various curricula—thus, making it difficult to determine what the test results mean. One of the possible benefits of the aligned curricula is the possibility of aligning high-states assessments across the United States. The idea is that with common learning standards, a scope and sequence can be created across the United States, which will allow the same curricula to be taught at the same time throughout the United States (NGAC, 2010).

The idea of standardizing curricula across the United States and making it so that the same curricula are taught at the same time has some valid components. Regarding student mobility as a factor on educational performance, having common learning standards and curricula should help prevent students from missing material just because they changed school districts. There are numerous instances where students move from a school district to a neighboring school district or even from another state and because the teachers already covered the material they end up missing items they should have been taught. Having a timeline of what should be covered and when would hypothetically get rid of students of problems with students moving and missing material.

One of the biggest challenges facing the CCSS (NGAC, 2010) is that many people feel that is a singular framework and want to know how these standards are going to meet the needs of all the students across the diverse population of students in America (Halladay & Moses, 2013, p. 33). Opponents of the CCSS argue that creating common curricula and a timeline is disempowering teachers and hurting the teaching profession. One of the problems currently happening in the United States is that teachers are not in control of assessment or curricula (Sahlberg, 2010). Assessments and curricula are being determined by businesses and others external factors—which is lowering morale and professionalism of teachers, and ultimately lowering the moral, autonomy, and choice of students (Sahlberg, 2010).

One of the concerns about the CCSS (NGAC, 2010) is that some states are going even further, such as New York, in creating scripted lessons in English Language Arts and mathematics. The scripted daily lesson plans that have been created by businesses and are part of corporate curricula. Corporate curricula are disempowering and deskilling teachers (Au, 2011). Opponents of scripted curricula fear that taking away a teacher's freedom to plan how they are going to teach is going to take some of the magic out of the teaching profession. There are always going to be amazing teachers and teachers who are not so amazing. Making the curricula the same and scripting what teachers can say is not going to level the playing field. The good teachers will rise and accept the challenge and continue to shine; vice-versa the poor teachers will continue to be poor teachers who will now have a scripted curricula to blame for why their students did poorly.

In a 2011 study, Peabody tested to see if instructional practices had an impact on student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Findings indicated that higher-performing schools had instruction that focused on student-centered learning and low-performing schools tended to have instruction that was teacher-centered (Peabody, 2011). The high-performing schools focused learning around student-choice, positive environment, rapport with students, and finding indicated students seemed to be more engaged in the learning process (Peabody, 2011). Peabody (2011) observed that the high-performing schools used student-directed activities and learning. In the same study, Peabody (2011) also found that the low-performing schools did not spend any time on student-direct activities; instead, the low-performing school districts focused their curricula around the FCAT. The high-performing school used the standards and curricula as an outline—the teachers taught based off of what they felt their students needed to excel, not off of what material should be taught for the FCAT.

Many educators express concern because scripted curricula does not support the best practices of student-centered learning and student-driven curricula (Au, 2011). The high-stakes testing movement has caused many teachers to switch back to teacher-centered activities where they control and set the learning activities for the unit (Au, 2011; Giroux, 2011, 2012). In states where the curricula is scripted learning is neither teacher-driven nor student-driven; learning is going to be laid out in advance by the businesses that wrote the scripted curricula. With standardized curricula, there is going to be less freedom for teachers to make decisions and change curricula, which in turns

means there do students make going to be even fewer decisions about curricula and learning.

Opponents of the CCSS (NGAC, 2010) believe social change is occurring with teaching practices and pedagogies because teachers are going to be told what they are supposed to teach and when they are supposed to teach it (Au, 2011). What is going to happen when students do not understand a topic, and now as a teacher, you have to move on to the next lesson because your entire school year has already been planned for you with a scripted, corporate curricula that does not take into account the individual needs of students (Au, 2011)? How many students with disabilities or students who are not classified but are at risk are going to fall through the cracks because they need a few more days to figure out the concept being taught? (Hagopian, 2014)? How many children are going to be left behind (Giroux, 2011, 2012; Hagopian, 2014)? How is a scripted curricula going to promote individual growth and development (Au, 2011)? To what extent should school systems allow external controls to be force controlling instruction and curricula that does not allow for learning in stages based on a student's individual needs (Sahlberg, 2010)? Finally, are the CCSS (NGAC, 2010) in the best interest of all students, including students with disabilities (Hagopian, 2014)?

There are many other factors that may affect tests scores including socio-economic status, attendance, classroom environment, student mobility, anxiety, and family life and circumstances (Au, 2011). A test score is just a number and should not define a person (Au, 2011). A test score does not identify a person's passions, how they do as a student, or if they contribute to society. Opponents of high-stakes testing

question whether high-stakes tests provide an adequate portrayal of what students are learning in school (Gasoi, 2009). Standardized tests started off as a tool for providing information and were not meant to give people consequences.

High-stakes assessments have become an ethical issue affecting educational social systems and educational thinking (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). The moral purpose of schooling is changing because of the high-stakes testing movement (Sahlberg, 2010). There is a thin line that exists between deciding what is ethical and unethical. When does an ethical action go too far and become unethical? The idea behind using a high-stakes test to measure student proficiency in order to raise standards and accountability seems valid and ethical; however, having inconsistent tests or high-stakes tests that are unfair, changing cut scores, and using high-stakes testing as the only measure to determine student proficiency is verging on unethical (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). There are so many factors and issues that determine success on a high-stakes examination, and it seems as though it is unethical to use only high-stakes tests as the sole indicator in measuring proficiency and success.

International testing. High-stakes assessments are not just rooted in the United States—they have become a global phenomenon. Countries around the world have started to participate in having their students take international tests in literacy, mathematics, and science to measure their countries education systems. Three of the main international tests are PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS. The three international tests vary in what they measure and the ages of students who take the test.

The PISA is a literacy, mathematics, and science test is given every three years, beginning in 2000, to students who are 15-year olds. Each testing cycle the major domain rotates. The PISA focuses on literacy skills tests students' analysis, reasoning, and communication skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). In 2015, PISA also included optional components of problems solving and financial literacy. The TIMSS is given every four years, starting in 1995, to students in fourth and eighth-grades and focuses on mathematics and science benchmarks and curricula. The TIMSS student scores are measured according to three cognitive domains, which include knowing, applying, and reasoning (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017c). PIRLS is a reading achievement test given every five years, starting in 2001, and is given to fourth-grade students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b).

The international tests are being used to create "league tables" (Kell & Kell, 2010), which are being used by politicians, education officials, and various others to rank nations and their school curricula's effectiveness or ineffectiveness globally. The league tables have the same effect internationally that high-stakes tests have on educational systems in the Unites States. High-stakes tests and league tables cause many nations to govern by numbers to improve the performance of students on international tests (Kell & Kell, 2010). League tables have been credited with causing "controversies and debates within national systems and has led to new energies for reforms, particularly standardized curriculum" (Kell & Kell, 2010, p. 493).

Countries have been looking for the answer to how to increase student achievement. One of the countries on the top of the league tables is Finland. Students in

Finland have continually done well on the PISA international achievement test (Onosko, 2011). Many researchers pondered over what was Finland's "recipe for success" (Kell & Kell, 2010, p. 493) to use see if what Finland was doing could help increase student achievement in other countries. Finland's recipe for success focused on having an education system with highly qualified teachers and lessons focused on student-centered concepts of learning (Kell & Kell, 2010). Finland has not changed its approach to learning since the 1970s and continues to use four strategic principles for learning (Sahlberg, 2010).

According to Sahlberg (2010), in Finland teachers are given the responsibility to determine curricula taught and what assessments should be given to their students. Teachers work together to create a mixture of assessments including tests and self-reflective evaluations to measure student progress and learning. Assessments are made directly from teachers and are not imposed on them by their school districts or government. There are no annual external high-stakes assessments given in Finland—it is the teachers who make the tests and determine student achievement, not an external high-stakes assessment. In Finland, it is considered prestigious to be a teacher and teachers are trusted to make decisions and assessments relating to student learning.

There is a plethora of ways high-stakes testing movement has impacted curriculum, instruction, and teaching practices in education systems throughout the world (Hagopian, 2014). Accountability regarding using student test scores on high-stakes testing is occurring globally; however, that is only one piece of the puzzle. One of the controversial topics surrounding high-stakes testing is the idea that test scores are

numbers and should not be used to define a person (Au, 2011). The issue at hand is if test scores should be used to measure student achievement, teacher achievement, school achievement, and the achievement of a nation (Au, 2011; Hagopian, 2014)? Currently, in the United States, high-stakes test scores have become one of the sole indicators in determining the success or lack of success in the field of education (Kohn, 2000). The purpose of standardized testing used to be the test results could be used to provide a benchmark for student learning, identify gaps in learning, and be used as a system of accountability—now they are used to make comprehensive judgments on programs or schools (Kohn, 2000). Opponents of high-stakes testing are starting to impact education systems, and one of the ways is with parents' opting-out their child/children from high-stakes tests. In the next part of this literature review, accountability regarding parent's involvement and their roles in United States education system is presented.

Parental Involvement in Education

When parents are involved in schools, students are more likely to be successful, learning problems are identified earlier, schools and communities keep better care of physical facilities, better recruitment and retention of staff occurs, and more funding is available for after-school programs and other new initiatives (Bracke & Corts, 2012, p. 189). Previous studies have found parents believe they need to be involved in their child's education, but that involvement often relates to their academic successes, economic status, and ethnic background (Bjork, Lewis, Browne-Ferrigno, & Donkor, A, 2012, p. 242). Although the prevailing benefits associated with parental involvement in school systems are known and understood by most, the lack of parental involvement

seems to be a theme identified as needing improvement by many schools (Bracke & Corts, 2012; Chrispeels, 1993; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Johnson, et al., 2013).

Federal educational policies each include sections on the importance of parent involvement in education; however, there is a discrepancy between the idea of parental involvement and actual parental involvement in school systems (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parents, teachers, and administrators all have different expectations and ideas surrounding what parental involvement means including the various degrees and roles in which parents can hold in schools (Brauckmann et al., 2013; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Johnson et al., 2013; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013).

Johnson et al. (2013) categorized four main types of parental involvement in the Kansas City schools as follows: (a) 31% potential transformers, (b) 27% school helpers, (c) 19% help seekers, (d) 23% other. Potential transformers were parents who were willing to serve on committees and help make decisions (such as hiring, student courses and curriculum, and discipline), advocate for school reform, and were willing to act as active citizens who represent the school district (pp.12-16). Parents who were considered to be in traditional roles included "school helpers," which consisted of parents who were involved in the school by volunteering at school activities, helping the parent-teacher organization, and showed up to school personal events; however, these parents did not play a role in activities based on changing or impacting school policies (p. 16). Parents who were "help seekers" (p. 18) were mainly concerned with helping their children be successful at school and do so by attending parent-teacher conferences and assisting children with homework. They were also the group of parents who were more critical of

the school district, had less trust in teachers, and believed it was the role of the teachers and administrators to do more to help their children be more successful in school (p. 18).

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) created a model for parental involvement where they divided the themes of parental involvement into four categories which include (a) individual parent and family factors, (b) parent-teacher factors, (c) child factors, and (d) societal factors (p 39). Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) reported on parental involvement affirming there are five main reasons why parents become involved in their child's education. The five reasons are: (a) parental involvement is based on active role construction, (b) strong sense of efficiency for helping their child succeed at school, (c) parental attraction towards school, (d) previous negative experiences with public school system, and (e) personal beliefs and values such as religious, ideological, pedagogical and special needs (pp. 265-6).

In a different study, Brauckmann et al. (2013) described six types of parental and school collaborations. Type 1: Parents role is to give supervision, guidance, and provide needed materials for school to students. Type 2: The school provides communication to parents about their children's progress and informs the parent about various school programs. Type 3: Parents begin to be involved with schools and will serve as volunteers in the classroom or to special personal events they are invited to. Type 4: Parents assist with learning at home by helping their children with schoolwork while encouraging success at school. Type 5: Parents can be involved in the decision-making process such as being on a school commission, school board, or school council. Type 6: Parents are involved with other parents in the community.

In Young et al. (2013) study school administrators identified four main categories of parental involvement which included: (a) parents actively engaged, (b) parental support (c) parents as advocates, and (d) parent's communication. Parents who are actively engaged included parents participating in various activities directly at school such as conferences, volunteering opportunities, knowing what happens during the school day, and understanding the curriculum. Parental support, which encompasses home-based activities, included helping children with their homework, promoting the importance of an education, supporting children and helping them to be successful by motivating them through encouraging student achievement and success.

Parents' as advocates encompassed parents' need to be able to help their children develop emotionally, socially, spiritually, psychologically, and develop their children's overall well-being (Young et al., 2013). Young et al., found parental advocacy usually deals with their child's academic standing, but should include advocacy on behalf of the school's curricula, analysis of data, and other ways to improve student learning by advocating for all children in the school district. Communication should be seen as a two-way street between the parents and the school and should allow for parents feeling welcome to be involved and to effectively open lines of communication to discuss needs of the child. Instead of just saying parental involvement needs to improve, Young et al. pointed out administrators should start by establishing and improving communication to get parents engaged and motivated, then they should work with them to make a school-wide definition of what parental involvement includes.

Barriers to parental involvement. Barriers to parental involvement include

parent's beliefs, perceptions, current life contexts, class, ethnicity, and gender (Hornby & Lafaele (2011). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) acknowledged the lack of connection between parental involvement and school sometimes has to do with views that parents may feel as though they lack confidence or the ability to help their children, language barriers, and feelings of inadequacy including that they would not be able to assist in helping to bring about positive change (p. 40). When parents do not feel welcome or are not invited to be involved, they are less likely to be involved, which tends to be the case in secondary education (p. 40).

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) included family circumstances involving parents' level of education, family situations such as being a solo parent, having multiple children to care for, work situations, physical health limitations, or not having the resources to get into school to help because of transportation issues or not having flexibility in their job to take time off as barriers to parental involvement. In Chrispeels' (1993) study, the concept of culture as a barrier to parental involvement was discussed because for students whose parents were not raised in the culture their parents may not understand how to best support their children and what their role could entail (p.50). Another set of barriers to parental involvement included child factors such the age of children, learning difficulties, students with disabilities, students who are gifted and talented, or children who have behavior problems (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, pp. 42-44).

Bracke and Corts (2012) concluded barriers to parental involvement were (a) an unwelcome school atmosphere or environment, (b) teachers not feeling as though family were able to help educate their children, (c) teachers focus on academics and in doing so

lack the time to have a family-school relationship, (d) parents past negative experiences, (e) lack of trust in the school, schedule conflicts, financial restrictions, and (f) parents having feelings of low self-esteem coupled with the belief that they are not able to make a difference. Regarding barriers between parents and teachers, some of the barriers noted by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) included different goals, agendas, attitudes, and language used. Parents and teachers often have different vested interests. The parents' main goal of parental involvement, according to Hornby and Lafaele is for improving the child's performance at school; whereas, teachers, interested is on getting parents to help in areas of homework and getting them to attend school event such as parent-teacher conferences. Also, the schools had a different vested interest, which involves using parental involvement as a way of "increasing school accountability to their communities and for increasing children's achievement" (p. 44).

Parents' attitude towards schooling may have changed with recent changes in curricula (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). One of the problems to be concerned with, as mentioned by Hornby and Lafaele is that many parents feel helpless with the new curricula and processes students are being taught in school. They noted, "many teachers make assumptions that some parents are not interested or do not really care about their children's education" (p. 45) when in fact that may not be the case at all. The parents may understand how to do the homework in the way it is being taught at school. Teachers are being held more accountable for children's achievements (p. 46), and this may be causing issues not previously seen before because it may be causing teachers to

blame parents for the student's lack of success. This may be causing negative relationships between teachers and parents.

Many teachers have not received any training or workshops on how to foster and improve parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 46). Teachers may benefit from learning how to work with parents especially in the secondary grades. Teachers "believed parents to be good resources of skills, talents, and funds, but also often saw them as questioning their professionalism" (p. 46). In learning about parental involvement, one of the key terms used is "partnership" (p. 46). Parents and teachers will do better when they can come together and understand what the other party sees their roles as and how they would like to see parental involvement in the partnership relationship.

Parent dissent and trigger laws. Numerous studies have been conducted concerning the positive impact of parental involvement on academic performance; however, Stitzlein (2015) remarked on the lack of research on the ways that parent dissent can impact school systems. Stitzlein attributed parent dissent in public schools to parental frustrations with high-stakes examinations, concerns about ways in which corporate education reforms are affecting public schools, and concerns about various pieces of curricula that parents are opposed to (p. 57). Parent dissent can be in the form of "good dissent" (Stitzlein, p. 58) or it can be dissent that focuses on negatives and may ultimately be hurting children and the public schools.

Stitzlein (2015) described good dissent as something that parents do that helps to improve schools and is meant to make changes that in the end will positively impact all

students. Good dissent was related to how people actively work together for the good of the public. There is a notable difference between acting as a parent whose main interest is their child and acting as a citizen whose main interest is to make something better for all students, not just their own. Stitzlein credited good dissenters as parents who contributed new ideas or alternatives to what currently was happening, and as people who focus on the possibility of changing something that will impact future generations.

Not all dissent is as effective and purposeful (Stitzlein, 2015). Some dissents such as parent trigger laws, opting-out students from high-stakes tests or curricula, or completely removing students from public education does not always have a positive impact on students. Stitzlein (2015) noted when you remove a student from a test, or a course or public education dissent is being done that limits the public conversation and instead of addressing the overall concern it only impacts those students who are removed. By removing one student or even a group of students, the problem is not addressed for all students, and further it does not allow for "systemic change" (p. 66). When opting-out a student, Stitzlein maintained the parent "may not only be engaging in dissent poorly themselves but may also be preventing their children's progress as autonomous dissenters with their own well-developed conscience" (p. 65).

One of the more recent forms of dissent include parent trigger laws (Stitzlein, 2015). Parent trigger laws exist in seven states in the United States. Stitzlein (2015) noted parent trigger laws are laws that allow parents to petition for changes at their children's public schools. Typically, parent trigger laws have been enacted when parents are frustrated with the public school their children attend, and the school has been

continually labeled as a low performing public school. Parent trigger laws enable parents to call for some action such as calling for a new administration, new staff or teachers, changes to curricula, reforms to the school system, and even for the school to turn into a charter school or for the school to close. Parent trigger laws take the form of a petition, and the petition is required to state what it is specifically trying to be changed. For the petition to pass 51% or more of the signatures of district parents are required (Stitzlein, 2015, p. 65).

The upside for many parent trigger laws is the petition is aimed to make changes in their school district that are going to affect all students and tend to come about because of problems with achievement (Stitzlein, 2015). Opponents of trigger laws argue trigger laws may be more damaging than good. In some trigger laws a third party, usually a for-profit entity, takes over the school system. The concern with for-profit organizations is their purpose is to make financial gains. In the end, the fear is that the for-profit organization is going to lead to cause a further problem because parents and students voices are going to be even less heard (Stitzlein, 2015). When schools are controlled by corporations, parents' influence and the future of parental involvement can become even more limited, which leads to the idea of making sure public schools stay public and continue to "balance individual freedoms with community goods" (Stitzlein, 2015, p. 68).

Other alternatives to parent trigger laws have started to emerge such as school governance councils (Stitzlein, 2015). A school governance council, similar to the councils set up in German schools, allows for the parents to make decisions and shape the school in ways they believe is best for all the children in the school district. When

parents are involved, Stitzlein (2015) affirms there is a vested interest in the education of students and is one of the best ways to show good dissent when trying to make changes on behalf of all students at a public school.

Many times parent involvement in schools is limited to helping students with their homework, but if changes in education and society are going to continue to improve, parent engagement has extended beyond the micro-level roles of helping with homework and parent-teacher conferences to include macro-level items such as involving them in decision making aspects of the school and community (Bjork, et al., 2012, p. 248-25). Johnson et al. (2013) pointed out although many parents felt it is important to be involved in their children's education, and believed with the creation of a parental advocacy group more changes could be made, less than 1/3 of parents would be willing to take on the role of a "potential transformer" (p. 4) and would rather stay in more traditional roles in terms of parental involvement. Although parental involvement is considered to be one of the key factors to student's success, there is room for improvement and more that could be done regarding bettering parental involvement in many school districts (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Johnson et al.'s (2013) study found 31% of their parents were willing to advocate for school reform and called these parents potential transformers; it is the potential transformers are getting involved in grassroots organizations and movements.

Grassroots movements/organizations. The term grassroots, as noted by Dictonary.com (2018) is a label used to describe ordinary, common, or everyday people. Grassroots movements are movements that typically start at a local level with the common people who are raising concerns or fighting against something they do not agree

with. Grassroots organizations are typically organizations that start at a local level. Grassroots organizations are usually community organizations that serve as advocacy groups aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of topics in political or social platforms.

With the help of community-based organizations, Evans observed parents could become involved in the macro-level and impact educational systems at district, state, and national levels. Evans found parents who become involved with Stand for Children (SFC) gained personal empowerment and advocacy skills by gaining skills and knowledge on how to deal with school reform and further pointed out that grassroots organizations, such as SFC, tends to increase public participation in educational policy reform. Evans (2014) noted that although parents wanted to be involved, they often were only mainly at the micro-level where they were dealing with teachers and administrators.

Evans (2014) noted affluent parents are often uncomfortable with addressing needs at the state level because they felt “they had little to contribute and they lacked the sophistication or intellectual pedigree to fully participate in civic activities” (p.107). In a similar study, Winton and Evans (2014) examined three grassroots advocacy groups—People for Education’s (P4E), an online community; United Interfaith Action (UIA), a faith-based group out of Massachusetts; and Stand for Children (SFC) from the Lexington Massachusetts—and looked at what outcomes participants in these groups obtained as being part of a community-based organization. Winton and Evans found that participants of the three grassroots groups gained new knowledge, confidence, and relationships that provided support for making changes and were more likely to take

action in the educational realm. They also noted that when people participated in policy dialogues, it often led to other kinds of public involvement and parents stepping up and taking action to better the educational system. Being involved in the various grassroots organizations both online and in person gave people clarity and new knowledge about issues, which caused empowerment and "enhanced participants efficacy" (p. 22).

In the Winton and Evans (2014) study, each of the organizations had participants who shared stories of personal growth. P4E participants were able to gain new knowledge about "strategies, created web pages, attracted new members, and mobilized to protest school closing in communities" (p. 20). The goals of P4E were not focused on policy changes rather they were to overcome feelings of intimidation through learning about issues, understanding the various sides of the issues, and moving forward to open up a dialogue about issues. Winton and Evans pointed out how UIA and SFC goals included enhancing and increasing knowledge and using that knowledge as action through civic engagement, thus showing ways grassroots organizations can have on policy. When people first joined the group, according to Winton and Evans, they were doing so to gain knowledge. Then after joining, they were part of the group and felt more empowered and ready to work towards making policy changes and being actively involved in making these changes.

The first part of the literature review focused on the various impacts of high-stakes testing on the United States educational system. The role of the parents in education systems was presented. Parents have a unique role in educational systems. The role of the parent and involvement of parents may vary; however, parent dissent and

trigger laws are starting to impact educational systems in different ways. One of the ways parent dissent can be seen in recent news is the rise of parents opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. There is a myriad of questions regarding opting-out such as whether opting-out is legal and whether opting-out is impacting educational systems. The following section of the literature review identifies various components of education systems parents have tried to opt-out their children out of, identifies specific court cases, and gives a detailed explanation of what the court says regarding opting-out of education in the United States.

Opting-Out

Some parents do not agree with the idea that the school has the right to control their child's education and that they are the supreme authority on what will be taught to their children. Brough (2008) pointed out the court found a parent's rights "does not extend beyond the threshold of the school door" (p.410) meaning parents have no constitutional rights for opting their children out of programs, surveys, or classes in public schools. Although there is not a constitutional right, some state legislatures have given parents the opportunity to opt-out their children from sex education requirements in their state because of reasons about religious beliefs, moral beliefs, or value-based objections. The following court cases are examples of parents wanting to opt-out their children from certain aspects of public education.

Yoder v. Wisconsin. In the 1972 case of *Yoder*, as reported by Reich (2002), the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of Yoder resulting in the precedent allowing students of the Amish religion not to have to complete school past the eighth grade (p.

445). Yoder was a member of the Old Order Amish religion was objecting to attendance policies requiring Amish students to attend secondary school because of religious beliefs. The Yoder court case dealt with whether or not this was a violation of the First Amendment specifically regarding whether or not forcing attendance in secondary education would violate their freedom to exercise religion.

Yoder's argument was attendance laws caused Amish children to be exposed to "influence of the modern world and thereby constituted a violation of the First Amendment" (Reich, 2002, p. 446). One of the main purposes of sending students to secondary education is the notion that they will become "effective citizens and self-sufficient individuals" (p. 446). However, in the case of Yoder, it was decided that there was potential for harm and long-term effects to the faith as a whole by making the students learn and become part of the modern world's secondary school system. The Yoder case is the one of the only United States Supreme Court cases where the decision regarding opting-out was in favor of the parents.

Mozert v. Hawkins Board of Education. In the case of Mozert, as reported by Reich (2002), the U.S. Court of Appeals, 6th Court Division, ruled against Mozert's objections in 1987 to his children having to read the basal reading series (p. 445). In the *Mozert* case, the parents found there to be objectionable curricula in the reading series including "secular humanism, supernaturalism, pacifism, and false views of death" (Rogers & Fossey, 2011, p. 428). The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals 1987 decision did not allow for Mozert to opt-out his children from the reading series and in doing so set a precedent that parents did not have the right to opt-out their children from specific

reading series the school has chosen. Further, it was noted that although parents did not have the right to opt-out from school-specific materials, parents do have the right to choose where to send their children to school (Rogers & Fossey, 2011, p. 445). It is the parents right to choose not to send their children to a school they do not feel will educate their children in a manner they feel is acceptable. Schools can teach various beliefs; however, students do not have to affirm that beliefs taught.

Brown v. Hot, Sexy and Safer Productions, Inc. In the case of *Brown*, a group of Massachusetts's parents sued because they did not want their children exposed to AIDS and sex education program that "allegedly resorted to sexually explicit and ribald language" (p. 429). The First Circuit Court of Appeals in 1995, as reported by Rogers and Fossey (2011), upheld that "parents do not have the right to control what public schools taught their children" (p. 430). Further, it was noted by the First Circuit Court of Appeals that if all parent's fundamental rights could include them having a say in what exactly was taught to their children, then each child would have to have their own specific curricula to meet the rights of a parent.

Parents United for Better Schools v. School District of Philadelphia. In the case of *Parents United for Better Schools, Inc.* of 1998, a group of parents did not agree with a Philadelphia school distributing condoms to students and sought to prevent this program from occurring. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals, as reported by Rogers and Fossey (2011), ruled in favor of the school district and allowed them to distribute condoms to schools in the district. It was also noted that participation in the condom

program was not mandatory and since student's participation was voluntary, it did not infringe on parent's rights to refuse to let their children participate.

Leebaert v. Harrington. In the Leebaert case, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, as reported by Rogers and Fossey (2011), rejected Mr. Leebaert from opting his son out of health class because of his religious beliefs. It was found that school curricula have to be written to "respond to the overall educational needs of community and its children" (p. 434).

Fields v. Palmdale School District. In the case of *Fields*, students were given a psychological assessment questionnaire in elementary schools asking which included some questions about sexual nature. These questions, as reported by Rogers and Fossey (2011) included phrases such as "touching my private parts too much, thinking about touching other people's private parts, and thinking about sex" (p. 434). The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals 2005 found no constitutional rights had been broken and that the school district did not interfere with "their right to direct the upbringing of their children" (p. 434). The court ruled parents do not have a constitutional right to control the sexual education curricula in public schools.

C.N. v. Ridgewood Board of Education. In the *C.N.* case, as reported by Rogers and Fossey (2011), the New Jersey legislature had passed a law requiring written informed consent when administering surveys to students. The parents brought suit when students were given a mandatory survey without parental consent. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals in 2001 ruled in favor of the school district that although this may undermine parental authority, the survey was not a constitutional violation.

Parker v. Hurley. In the *Parker* case, as reported by Rogers and Fossey (2011), the parents did not want their children reading materials that "portrayed same-sex marriage in a positive light" (p. 436). The parents affirmed that as Christians homosexual behavior and gave marriage is immoral and against God's teachings. The First Circuit Court of Appeals in 2005 ruled against the parents and affirmed public schools do not have to avoid material and content that is religiously offensive. Learning about such material as gay marriage and homosexuality does not mean the student has to agree with those ideas; however, schools are allowed to teach different worldviews.

Implications of opting-out court cases, and arguments against opting-out. One of the main distinctions between the Yoder case and the Mozert case was the quantity of exposure (Reich, 2002). In the Mozert case, it was found that just the reading series was against the Fundamentalist beliefs; however, since the Fundamentalists live in the modern society their children were going to be exposed to those beliefs on a regular basis, and they were not granted the right to opt-out of the reading series. The Yoder case had implications that it would affect their entire Amish religion, which was separate from the modern society.

The Yoder case allowed Amish children to completely opt-out of secondary public education based off of the reasoning that the modern society could impact and ruin their entire religion. The Mozert case set a precedent because it was established by the Supreme Court that parents do not have the right to opt-out their children from pieces of public education that they do not agree with. In each of these cases the court ruled against the parents and in favor of the school district based on two principles, parents do

not have a fundamental right to control the curricula and content taught in public schools (Reich, 2002; Rogers & Fossey, 2011) and that teaching children different worldviews does not mean they have to affirm that worldview or belief (Reich, 2002).

In some states in the United States, parents are starting to make decisions about curricula through parent trigger laws (Stitzlein, 2015) and by states allowing parents to opt-out their children from various pieces of the curricula (Rogers & Fossey, 2011). This is important because except for the *Yoder* case, the court cases presented in the previous section have found against allowing parents to opt-out of the curricula (Rogers & Fossey, 2011). Opting-out children from testing and curricula are one of the current challenges in education (Bennett, 2016; Hagopian, 2014; Mitra et al., 2016). There are states that are allowing parents to opt-out their children from various curricula components which include sexual education or family life content, health education content, AIDS and sexual transmission content, physical education, and animal dissection (Rogers & Fossey, 2011). This may change in the future as the parents continue to pursue their rights to opt-children out.

Stitzlein (2014) accounted for some cases where states have allowed parents to opt-out their children from material or teaching pedagogies that they find to be objectionable (p. 74). Some of these states include New Hampshire, Kentucky, Missouri, and Texas. Although these states allowed parents to control how their children are brought up and what they can opt out of, parents do not have a fundamental right to tell a school what or how to teach children (p. 74). While opting-out may not be a fundamental right, the number of parents opting-out their children is on the rise (Hagopian, 2014; Neill

& Guisbond, 2014; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015). In a recent study, O'Rourke (2015) analyzed the various factors that influenced parents' decision making when parents refused to allow their children to take New York Common Core State Assessments in Suffolk County. This mixed-methods study examined whether parents' understanding and perception of the Common Core State Standards influenced their decision to opt-out or have their child refuse to take assessments. O'Rourke (2015) found "as parents' perceptions of the Common Core come to be more negative, the more likely they will have their child refuse to take the Common Core Assessment" (p. 65); however, the more trust parents had in their school district, the less likely there were to opt-out their child.

When parents decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests, their conscience may come into play. According to Stitzlein (2014), conscience is a "personal conviction" (p. 75), or an "internal construct" (p. 76) and is shaped by the person's environment including all the people they interact with, family, friends, teachers, and peers as well as through social norms, history, beliefs, and practices. A person's conscience helps them to make judgments and decisions (p.77).

One of the purposes of public education is to bring together different viewpoints and teach children how beliefs can be "exchanged, enhanced, and challenged" (Stitzlein, 2014, p. 79) when someone does not agree with them. Stitzlein (2014) maintained if parents are allowed to opt-out their children from classrooms, certain lessons, or subject matter it undermines the education their student is receiving and is ultimately "jeopardizing" (p. 78) the development of student now and in the future when they need these skills to be successful in society. One of the arguments against opting-out, is

students need to be able to learn about controversial topics that may go against their beliefs or worldviews to allow children to gain their viewpoint and conscience in what they believe, not what their parents want them to believe (Stitzlein, 2014). For students to understand and make meaning, students need to experience it, find meaning in it, and then apply it as an active citizen in society (Dewey, 1938/1997). Opponents of opting-out believe not allowing children to partake in and learn about different viewpoints and worldviews limit the child and may have a negative impact on the future of how that child can make sense of the world later on in life (Stitzlein, 2014).

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided a literature review based on the current research related to high-stakes testing and accountability in the United States educational system. The three areas of focus on accountability included the impact of high-stakes testing in the United States educational systems, parental involvement in educational systems, and opting-out provisions, laws, and court cases related to United States educational systems. At the beginning of the chapter, literature search strategies were presented. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provided the basis for the conceptual framework, which incorporates the idea that systems are made up of smaller systems and that interactions and experiences in the various smaller systems, directly and indirectly, could affect larger systems, such as the United States educational system. Giroux's (1988, 2011, 2012) critical pedagogy theories were used as the conceptual framework to provide a lens for the bigger picture of the background of assessments in education, high-stakes tests, and opting-out in educational systems.

Several themes emerged from this review of the literature regarding the impact of high-stakes testing on the United States education system. Regarding accountability, on the one hand, proponents credit high-stakes tests with aligning curricula, shaping instruction, and increases in student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). On the other hand, opponents of high-stakes tests urge curricula have been narrowed (Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), student-centered practices eliminated (Au, 2009; Misco et al., 2011), and learning has shifted away from the genuine experiences (Giroux, 2012, 2011). Opponents of high-stakes test scores argue test scores have turned students into objects of comparison (Au, 2011). Datta (2013) found there is a negative correlation between intelligence and test anxiety. These themes indicate using high-stakes tests as a measure of accountability has impacted curricula, instruction, and learning across the United States.

Bracke and Corts (2012) noted when parents are involved in school their students are more likely to be successful. Parental involvement in education is areas discussed in federal policies including ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983) and NCLB (2001). Parental involvement is known to a benefit to students; however, the lack of parental involvement is a common theme identified as needing improvement by school districts (Bracke & Corts, 2012; Chrispeels, 1993; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Johnson, et al., 2013). Bracke and Corts (2012) identified barriers to parent involvement in schools include parent’s beliefs, perceptions, current life contexts, class, ethnicity, and gender. Other problems with parent involvement as found by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) is that parents and teachers often have different ideas of what parent involvement is, and parents attitude

towards schooling has changed with the recent changes to the curricula because they no longer feel as though they are capable of helping their children with schoolwork. Parent dissent and trigger laws have led to parents choosing to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests (Stitzlein, 2015).

Previous researchers examined parents' rights in regards to opting-out of provisions such AIDS, transgender education, sexual education, health education content, reading series, and dissection in biology classes (Rogers & Fossey, 2011) and found parents do not have the right to opt-out their children from the pieces of public education they do not agree with (Reich, 2002; Rogers & Fossey, 2011). Other researchers have identified ways grassroots movements and organizations such as Stand for Children, United Interfaith Action, and People for Education through providing knowledge and understanding on issues can influence parents to become more actively involved in education and educational policy (Evans, 2014; Winton & Evans, 2014). O'Rourke (2015) examined whether parents understanding and perception specifically of the Common Core State Standards influenced their decision to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. O'Rourke found the parents who had negative feelings about the Common Core curricula where more likely to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests.

While there are many opinions on why people think parents are opting-out of high-stakes tests, O'Rourke's (2015) examined whether the Common Core State Standards were a factor in parents opting-out. O'Rourke did not research what parents identified as reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events led them to decide to opt-

out their children from high-stakes testing, suggesting a gap in research concerning reasons influencing parents when deciding to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. O'Rourke's (2015) study consisted of school districts in Suffolk County, Long Island just outside of New York City; whereas, this research study focused on rural and small suburban school districts There is a gap in current research that explores the reason, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to decide to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes test in New York. Chapter 3 contains the basic interpretative qualitative research study plan including the design of the study, methodology, recruitment, and participation. Data collection, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures are discussed in detail.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The number of parents' opting-out children from high-stakes tests is on the rise (Hagopian, 2014; Neill & Guisbond, 2014; Phi Delta Kappa, 2015). Students who are opted-out of high-stakes tests are not getting evaluated on the state tests, making their level of achievement or proficiency unknown by the state government. Since ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), accountability systems in education have used students' test scores to measure student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. If all students are not taking high-stakes tests, then using students' high stakes tests scores, as the main measure of student achievement and proficiency is erroneous. There was a gap in scholarly knowledge of the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade high-stakes test. The significance of this research study was to add the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement, identify the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out, and further provided recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories.

The basic interpretive qualitative design was based on Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) approach to qualitative research. I analyzed data collected from interviews using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approaches to system theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory as frameworks. In this chapter, I describe the research design and rationale for the study, the methodology, issues with trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In the methodology section, I describe participant selection and recruitment, instrumentation, data collection, and plans for data analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this study was: What reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced parents when deciding to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise? The central focus of this study was to gain a better understanding of what reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events led parents to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. When deciding whether to do a qualitative or quantitative study, it is important that researchers understand what types of data they are looking to collect and to align their research questions with the research design (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Quantitative studies involve close-ended questions, whereas qualitative studies tend to involve open-ended questions (Creswell, 2009). When looking at the previous research on high-stakes testing and opting-out, I could not find studies specific to the factors that led parents to opt-out their children. Since the reasons for parents' opting-out are unknown, I decided to use open-ended questions as a way to explore the topic. The

research question and the central focus of this research study did not fit the criteria for a quantitative research design.

The sample for this study consisted of a small group of people who could provide in-depth information regarding rich experiences. The research question lent itself to a qualitative method, so I considered using a narrative study, case study, or basic interpretative qualitative study design. Narrative studies are often very detailed accounts of the lives or actions of one or two people (Creswell, 2013). Case studies are used to explore a program, event, activity, or process (Creswell, 2009) and can vary in size but typically contain a smaller number of participants (Creswell, 2013). Case studies involve a bounded system where the unit of analysis is a case or a person or an event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic interpretative qualitative research study allows one to "understand the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (Merriam, 2009) and may include more people than in a typical case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the purpose of the research study was to explore the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing, using a larger sample than a typical case study allowed for more experiences to be shared, which factored into my decision to use a basic interpretive study involving 8-12 participants as the research design.

Another component essential to the research design was the conceptual framework. Conceptual frameworks are the "underlying structures" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 85) that use concepts, thoughts, ideas, and theories as the lens to shape the

research study. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory served as the framework for the study.

I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a conceptual framework to understand how opting-out relates to systems thinking and to examine the messages parents were trying to send to the school and state and federal governments regarding opting-out. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) principle of interconnectedness is the idea that a person's actions in one subsystem may affect other systems directly or indirectly. Sometimes the effects of people's actions carry from one subsystem into another subsystem either directly or indirectly. I sought to understand what parents hoped to accomplish from opting-out their children. Was the purpose to opt-out their child from the testing and be done with it, or was the purpose more encompassing and oriented to a bigger goal?

One of the pieces of this study involved using participants from New York where grassroots movements are on the rise. Grassroots movements start at a local level with common people who are fighting something they do not agree with ("Grassroots," 2018). It is unknown if parents who opted-out their children did so because they were part of a grassroots movement and ultimately did so for a bigger purpose that would affect more than just micro-level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and instead was intended to affect the macro-level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of the United States educational system. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory as a conceptual framework for the self-designed interview protocol questions, when coding, and during data analysis.

Giroux's (2012) critical pedagogy theory holds that students have become byproducts of education in a market-driven economy. Giroux examined various ways the U.S. education system has become overly focused on test scores and in doing so has hindered students' learning and abilities to think critically. Giroux's critical pedagogy theory stresses the importance of using knowledge as power, and Giroux credited active involvement in society and real-world experiences as the key to learning. I used Giroux's theory in conjunction with ecological systems theory when designing the interview protocol questions, coding, and analyzing data.

A basic interpretative qualitative research study design allowed me to interview parents to gain a deeper understanding of their decisions to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. From their responses, I was able to construct meaning from the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events participants cited that influenced their decision to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. For a basic interpretative qualitative study, Merriam (2009) noted it is important for the researcher to look at the ways in which people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and attach meanings to the experiences. This study (a) adds the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifies the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) includes recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory.

Role of the Researcher

In this basic interpretative qualitative research study, I was the sole researcher who created the interview protocol questions, conducted interviews, and coded and analyzed data. For any study with a single researcher, there is always the possibility for bias. My biases come from being a seventh- and eighth-grade mathematics teacher whose curricula has high-stakes tests and from being a parent whose child is currently required to take ELA and mathematics high-stakes tests. To address these biases, I made sure when interviewing to keep my personal opinions and feelings out of the conversation. Although I have considered opting-out my child from high-stakes exams, I have not opted-out my child and therefore am lacking the personal experiences I was looking to understand.

My role as a teacher whose students take seventh- and eighth-grade high-stakes test in mathematics allowed me to have direct contact and knowledge of people who would fit the criteria for the research study. However, I excluded parents of my students to keep any bias or personal feelings out of the research study. When introducing myself to my potential participants, I discussed my roles as a researcher, a parent, and a teacher. For all research studies it is important for the researcher to make sure the participants understand (a) the purpose of the study, (b) that their identities will remain confidential, (c) that they provide informed consent, (d) any ethical considerations associated with the study, and (e) that they have the right to pull out of the study at any time (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002).

Methodology

This section includes the rationale for the sample size and a description of my plan for obtaining potential participants for the basic interpretive qualitative research study. Other topics discussed in depth are instrumentation, data collection, and my data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

The first step in participation selection was to identify the population to be studied and align it with my research question (Patton, 2002). The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of the reasons and factors that led parents to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test. The sample population included participants who met the following criteria: (a) was a parent who opted-out their child/children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, (b) had a child attending a small suburban or rural school district in New York and (c) had opted-out children who were not current or previous students of mine.

One of the important decisions researchers make when conducting study is determining the appropriate sample size. Patton (2002) discussed the importance of understanding whether the focus is a specific set of experiences for a large number of people or whether it is more important to study a smaller number of people with more in-depth information. The most important way to figure out sample size is to align the sample size with your research question and with the type of study (Patton, 2002).

For a dissertation with one researcher, it is important to pick a manageable number of participants that aligns with the research design and allows for the research to be completed in a reasonable time period (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). For beginning researchers, it is important to keep the study "concise and straightforward" (Creswell, 2013, p. 53) and manageable (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). When interpreting what a manageable number of participants was, I was required to align the sample with the purpose, the research design, and the research question.

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of parents' reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led them to opt-out their child from high-stakes testing. Keeping the sample size manageable was a factor; however, gaining an understanding of parents' reasons for opting-out required interviewing more parents than in a normal case study in order to gain a more well-rounded picture of the reasons and factors for opting-out. By using 8-12 parents for the study, I was able to keep the study manageable while nonetheless allowing for more experiences to be shared and potentially for more information on the factors and reasons for opting-out students from high-stakes tests. During the study, participants had the right to drop out at any time. Because of this the number of participants for the research study was set as a range in case participants withdrew from the study.

When deciding to do a basic interpretative qualitative research study, purposeful sampling aligned with the research design, question, and purpose of the study. Patton (2002) gave 16 types of purposeful sampling, and of those 16 types, criterion sampling fit the research design the best. In criterion sampling if you do not meet the criteria you

cannot be included in the study (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling requires the person meet criteria for your study. In this research study there are three criteria that must be met: (a) have to be a parent who has opted-out their child/children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, (b) the school district their children attend must be a small suburban or rural school district in New York, and (c) the children who were opted-out cannot be students who have had the researcher as a teacher. The other type of sampling used in this research study was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is when you are interviewing people, and they give you additional people to interview that they know are also a good fit for the research you are completing (Patton, 2002). During participant recruitment, purposeful criterion and snowball sampling were used. Eight of the ten participants were gained from purposeful criterion sampling from a social media site and two participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

Participants were recruited from a posting on a social media group. The initial posting asked for volunteers who meet the three criteria and are interested in participating in the study to send the researcher a message indicating they would like to participate. The first 8-12 participants, who indicated they are interested and met the criteria, were to be provided with an informed consent form. The informed consent form included the nature of the study and gives a detailed explanation of the participant’s role in the research study, how data collection for the study works, and understands they can leave the study at any time. Participants were required to sign the consent form acknowledging they meet the criteria for the study and are interested in participating in the study. Upon

signing the consent form, the first 8-12 participants would be included in the study and were emailed verification of participation in the research study. A posting was then put on the social media site thanking people for volunteering and closing recruitment.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for data collection in this basic interpretive research study was a researcher-designed interview protocol (Appendix). The interview protocol was a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions to allow participants to tell share the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led them to decide to opt-out their children from third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing. The questions in the interview protocol are based on the conceptual frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories. The semi-structured approach ensured each of the participants in the study was asked the same research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which allowed for the researcher to code similar sets of data. Also, using a semi-structured approach meant in addition to the questions asked of all participants, the researcher was able to emerge with the design and go where the interviewee's answers went (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the interview protocol, there is an open-ended question regarding if the participants have any other thoughts they would like to share with the researcher related to opting-out and high-stakes testing. This allowed for the participants to share any other relevant data and may include items the researcher did not realize was relevant to the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All interviews were recorded by two devices, a Sony Digital Voice Recorder and on an Apple iPad. Each interview ended with the researcher

asking if there are any questions regarding the interview process, transcription, data analysis, or anything specific to this research study to answer any questions or ease any concerns the participants may have before ending the interview.

The basis for instrument development of the interview protocol question (Appendix) came from the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories. Content validity was established through transcript verification. The interview protocol (Appendix) was a semi-structured interview protocol (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) that allowed for the participants to be asked similar questions for coding purposes, but also allowed for the researcher to ask additional questions that emerge with the interview process.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Regarding recruitment, the participants for this basic interpretative qualitative research study consisted of parents who have opted-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes test in New York. In the geographic area of study, numerous grassroots groups have formed to meet on with issues about opting-out and parents against the Common Core. I conducted all the interviews for the study and collected all the data. Recruitment for participants of the research study started on a social media site. Once Walden University IRB approval #04-10-18-0634225 was granted a letter of invitation was posted as the initial starting point asking for volunteers to private message indicating they are interested in participating in the research study.

The participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) opted-out their child/children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, and (b) the school district their children attend must be a small suburban rural school district in New York, and (c) their child cannot have had me as a teacher. The initial posting asked for volunteers who meet the three criteria and are interested in participating in the study to send me a message indicating they would like to participate. The first 8-12 participants, who indicated they are interested and met the criteria, would be provided with an informed consent form. The informed consent form included the nature of the study and gives a detailed explanation of the participant's role in the research study, how data collection for the study works, and understands they can leave the study at any time. Participants were required to sign the consent form acknowledging they meet the criteria for the study and are interested in participating in the study. After the signed consent form was received, a time and place for the interview was to be arranged either in person or by telephone. From the initial posting on the social media site, the hope was to get initial participants and then use snowball sampling as an additional way to get the total 10- 12 participants anticipated for the research study.

Data collection occurred through qualitative interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix). Interviewees had the option of completing the interview in person or over the phone. Interviews were anticipated to last from 30 minutes to an hour in length. For interviews in person, the plan was to meet at a neutral site, such as a local library, where there is some privacy and to avoid interruptions. Each participant will participate in one interview. Once IRB proposal was granted, the plan was to collect

the data in a period of 4-6 weeks. During participant recruitment, purposeful criterion and snowball sampling were used. In the end, eight of the 10 participants were gained from purposeful criterion sampling from a social media site and two participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

All of the participants chose to complete interviews over the phone. At the beginning of each interview the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, the rights of the participants to withdraw from the study at any time including after the interview is completed, the right to abstain from answering any question they are uncomfortable with answering, confidentiality, and assured their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in the research study. At the end of the interview the last question on the interview protocol (Appendix) asked participants if they have any questions regarding the interview process transcription, data analysis, or anything specific to this research study in order to clear up any questions before the interview ended. No follow up interviews were done. During transcript review participants were able to amend any part of the conversation. All interviews were recorded by two devices, a Sony Digital Voice Recorder and on an Apple iPad. Triangulation was present and accounted for as the researcher recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, then sent each participant a copy of their transcript for verification which allowed the participants to review, correct, or amend their responses. In addition, during data collection and data analysis, I used a research log for notes of responses, patterns, observations, reflections, and as a way to watch for researcher bias.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were coded using Microsoft Word and Excel. Saldana (2013) noted coding is a process, which involves "comparing data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, category back to data" (p. 58). After each interview, the interviewed was transcribed using Word. After all interviews were transcribed, all first cycle coding was done. First cycle coding involved taking chunks of data and assigning a keyword or phrases to represent the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The keywords were then used to compare codes, which turned into categories of data. After all the interviews were coded a first time, second cycle coding was done. Second cycle coding is where the researcher adjusted codes, created subcodes, and made categorizes for themes of data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Pre-codes were not used as a way to keep unintended bias out of the study (Miles et al., 2014). Data analysis used transcript verification to make sure my interpretations of what they said were reflective of the participants 'experiences.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study is described in this section regarding credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility in a research study is two-fold. The first part of credibility comes from checking to make sure participants in the study are telling the truth and accurately portraying the experiences and personal events as they happened from their experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). When something seems inconsistent during an interview, it is

important to ask the interviewee the same question or ask similar questions to compare the answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). If there still are inconsistencies, it is up to the researcher to politely discuss the inconsistency and see if they can get an explanation from the interviewee. Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted, sometimes people hold two "contradictory views simultaneously, and both may be true" (p. 67). Contradictory viewpoints are further in discrepant cases theme in Chapter 4. In this study, when contradictory viewpoints became present, participants were asked more questions in order to get a full explanation and to best understand their reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events on high-stakes testing.

The second component of credibility comes from making sure to show how carefully you recruited participants, collected data, and completed your research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). One of these ways to insure credibility involved completing transcript review with my participants. Triangulation was another form of accountability present in this research study. Triangulation was present and accounted for as the researcher recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, then sent each participant a copy of their transcript for verification which allowed the participants to review, correct, or amend their responses.

Transferability

Transferability, also referred to as external validity, is the degree in which the findings of one study can be applied or generalized to another study or situation (Merriam, 2009). Generalizations, especially in qualitative research, are not looked highly upon; instead, using modest extrapolations are encouraged over using

generalizations (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, it is more practical that the findings of my research study can compare with other research findings in a particular situation (Merriam, 2009). In order to ensure transferability a semi-structured interview question protocol (Appendix) was used so the same 15 questions could be used in another research study to compare participant answers and findings.

Dependability

Dependability, also referred to as reliability, in a research study is when the findings line up with the data (Merriam, 2009). Strategies for employing dependability in my research study included using triangulation, transcript review, spending adequate time when collecting data, and using self-reflection in research logs (Merriam, 2009).

Confirmability

Confirmability is when you confirm with the participants of the study what they said (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). One of the ways confirmability occurred was through the is transcript verification, where participants were given the transcript were able to make changes and amend what they said, then they signed off on the transcript in order to validate the content of the interview. The other way to show confirmability was during the interview the researcher checked for credibility when inconsistencies appeared with contradictory viewpoints during the interview.

Ethical Procedures

The research study began after receiving approval from Walden University's IRB. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to make sure all participants understand their role in the study. The consent form was where participants

acknowledged they understand the purpose of the study, that the study participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any given time, the data collection techniques used, study benefits and any risks associated. The participants were informed any information obtained during the interview would be specifically for my Ph.D. dissertation, but may also be published elsewhere.

During the study, all participants were given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Threats to quality involved making sure to capture the true voices, experiences, and contexts of the participants of the study through transcript reviews. All interview transcripts were maintained in an electronic file on a flash drive and stored in a safe location for five years and then destroyed.

Summary

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the various factors, reasons, personal events, and experiences that led parents to decide to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade high-stakes test. Parents' voices and stories have the potential to add another dimension and perspective to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, student achievement, and whether alternatives to high-stakes assessments need to be addressed. This study (a) adds the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement; (b) identifies the messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out; and (c) includes recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade

high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory.

Chapter 3 included a description of the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, and methodology of the basic interpretative study. Issues of trustworthiness including ethical procedures were described and the plan for recruitment of participants, data collection and analysis were identified regarding Walden University's IRB guidelines. Chapter 4 includes the results of the research study and Chapter 5 includes discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain an understanding of why parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. My intent was to examine the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents in rural and small suburban school districts in New York to decide to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test. The use of a semi-structured set of interview questions allowed me to develop an understanding of parents' perspectives on opting-out. Parents defined opting-out, shared their thoughts and feelings, described the decision-making process including influences and personal events, and identified alternate opt-out activities. I used the conceptual frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory to examine parents' satisfaction levels with education, messages about opting-out, feelings about school child attends, perspectives on what tests should evaluate, and ideas for alternatives regarding opting-out and high-stakes testing. In this chapter, I explore the results of the study and discuss the setting, demographics, data collection and analysis procedures including discrepant cases, evidence of trustworthiness, and results. The chapter closes with a summary of answers to the research question.

Research Question

The following question guided my research: What reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced parents when deciding to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test in rural and

small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise?

Setting

This study was set in New York and included 10 participants all from different rural or small suburban school districts throughout the state. Participants were given the option of interviewing via telephone or in person. All of the participants interviewed over the phone at a time of their choosing. I obtained Walden University IRB approval #04-10-18-0634225 or the study was obtained after the districts had administered the ELA high-stakes test and before the administration of the mathematics high-stakes test. This meant that meaning parent participants had opted their children out of the 2018 ELA test already and were about to opt out their children from the 2018 mathematics high-stakes test, which may have influenced participants to volunteer for the research study. I posted a letter of invitation on a social media site specific to opting-out in New York. Eight of the 10 participants in the research study were obtained from the social media site, while the other two participants were obtained through snowball sampling.

Demographics

When designing the study, I sought to recruit 8-12 participants. After posting the letter of invitation on a social media site, 26 people replied to the post on social media they were interested in participating. Each potential participant was then emailed more information about the study and sent a letter of consent. From the initial 26 potential candidates, only eight of the 26 participants met the criteria, had time to complete the study, and signed a letter a consent form. Eight participants included in the study were

obtained from the posting on social media. Two participants were obtained through snowball sampling. The last interview question asked participants if they knew anyone who would be a good fit for the research study. One participant identified two people, and both people ended up as participants in the research study. The study included 10 of the 12 participants who consented to the research study. The participants were given pseudonyms for the research study. Laura, consented to the research study, rescheduled the interview three times, and then formally withdrew from the study. Kendall, consented to the research study, completed the interview, but never completed transcript verification so I had to discard her data.

Table 1 contains the demographics for the participants including the pseudonyms, children opted-out, parent perception of student performance, tests opted-out of, number of years they have opted-out their children, and the type of school district. In Table 1, the children opted-out are not necessarily the parents' total number of children. Since the focus of the study was on reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that influenced parents to decide to opt-out their children from third- through eighth-grade high-stakes tests, the children in third through eighth grade were only listed instead of all the children the parent had. The number of actual children varied for four of the participants because the children were outside of the third- through eighth-grade testing window. One participant, Jade, was a discrepant case. Both of her sons were in the third- through eighth-grade range; however, only one son was opted-out. Jade had her younger son take the high-stakes test. I describe this case further in the discrepant cases section of the data analysis.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants (pseudonyms used)	Children opted-out	Parent perception of student performance	Tests opted-out of	Number of years opting-out	Type of school district
Ava	1 son	Does well	ELA, Math	3 Years	Rural
Betsy	2 sons	Both good students	ELA, Math	4 Years	Small-suburban
Chloe	1 son, 3 daughters	1 average student; 3 with IEPs, struggling	ELA, Math	5 Years	Small-suburban
Delilah	1 son, 1 daughter	Honor student; average student	ELA, Math	3 Years	Small-suburban
Ellie	1 son	Does well	ELA, Math	2 Years	Rural
Fiona	1 son, 1 daughter	Both do well	ELA, Math	3 Years	Rural
Greta	1 daughter	High honor	ELA, Math Science Survey Tests Field Tests	3 Years	Small-suburban
Harriet	1 daughter	Advanced	Math	1 Year	Small-suburban
Izabel	2 sons	Oldest, Mid-70s; youngest, does well	ELA, Math *First year just math	2 Years	Rural
Jade	2 sons **Oldest son opted-out; youngest took tests	Oldest amazing; youngest drowning, has IEP	**Oldest ELA, Math	2 Years	Small-suburban

Note. *The first year oldest son took the ELA test, then opted-out of the math test. The youngest child the first year was in second grade and was not in the testing range. The next year both children were opted-out of ELA and math tests. **The oldest child was opted-out of ELA and math tests. The youngest child took the tests for reasons described in the discrepant section of data analysis.

Data Collection

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval #04-10-18-0634225 on April 10, 2018, I began recruitment for 8-12 study participants. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of parents' reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led them to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests.

I assigned participants a letter of the alphabet in alphabetical order upon receiving a confirmation of date and time to participate in the research study. I put the letter of the alphabet into a name generator and assigned the name generated as the participant's pseudonym. Before interviews began, each participant was required to complete the consent form. I interviewed participants once and gave them the option of completing the interview in person or over the telephone. All participants completed the interviews over the telephone. At the beginning of each interview, I discussed the purpose of the study, the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time, the participant's right to abstain from answering any questions, my confidentiality procedures, and how I would maintain their anonymity by using of pseudonyms.

All interviews were recorded using two devices, a Sony digital voice recorder and an Apple iPad. I began interviews on April 13, 2018, and conducted them over the next 3 weeks through May 1, 2018. Each interview was designed to last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. All of the interviews fell in this allotted time frame except one, Greta, whose interview lasted about 90 minutes. After the interview, I sent each participant a thank you email for participating in the study. I transcribed each of the interviews within 2 weeks and sent the transcripts to the participant for transcript verification. Transcript

verification allowed each of the participants to review, make changes, amend, or correct any changes to their interview transcript. Transcription verifications were received back from 10 of the participants by May 20, 2018. Two of the participants made minor changes in the wording of a couple of answers. The other eight participants accepted their transcripts as is. As transcript verifications were received, I sent an additional thank you email for completing the study. There was no payment involved with participation as indicated on the consent form.

Two additional participants did not complete the study, and I did not use their data. One officially withdrew from the study on April 29, 2018, after rescheduling three times. A second completed her interview on May 1, 2018, and was sent her transcript for review on May 12, 2018. After attempting to reach her numerous times, one month later on June 12, 2018, I sent her a final message indicating she had been withdrawn from the study. Data collection was closed after two months on June 12, 2018. On May 1, 2018, after the last interview was completed, I posted on the social media site thanking participants and closing recruitment for the study.

There were a few variations from the data collection plan. I altered the research plan to recruit members from two social media groups on opting-out. After following both social media groups, I found that one group was noticeably against high-stakes testing and volatile posts appeared that were attacking other members and their thoughts. I decided to only post the letter of invitation on one social media, excluding the site with volatile posts.

The second variation from the original research plan dealt with how participants were selected. In the original plan, the first 8-12 participants who indicated they were interested and met the criteria were to be provided with an informed participant consent form. Upon signing the informed consent form, the 8-12 participants were to be included in the study and emailed verification of participation in the research study. I sent out informed participant consent letters to the first 12 participants as indicated, only to hear back from five people who agreed to be participants. Needing more participants, letters of informed participant consent were then sent out to the remaining 14 people who expressed interest in the research study and met the criteria. From the second round of 14 people who expressed interest, another five agreed to participate. The final two participants were obtained through snowball sampling, which matched the original research plan of using the social media post first and then snowball sampling to obtain the remaining participants.

The third variation from the research plans was in a research journal I kept. I originally thought I would use a journal just for self-reflection about biases. During data collection, I used a research log to record thoughts, questions, potential biases, and specific personal events as they occurred. A log specific to the timeline of data collection occurred. It was important to make sure all participants signed a letter of consent, set up interviews, were sent their transcripts, and transcript review was completed for each participant. Keeping a journal helped me identify discrepant data during the research process.

Data Analysis

Saldana (2013) described the process of coding in which data is compared with data; data turns into categories, and then categories are compared to form themes. To start the coding process, I began with Miles et al. (2014) first cycling coding, which involves taking chunks of data and assigning keywords or phrases. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) similarly described this process as open coding. In my first round of coding, I started with creating a table for each the 15 pre-determined semi-structured interview questions (Appendix) asked. Sticky notes were used to assign keywords and phrases to the data answers for each question. If the answers repeated, check marks were placed on the sticky notes as a way of making sure to account for and code all participants' answers. During the first cycle of coding, I initially started with about 80 keywords and phrases.

The next step of the coding process involved the second cycle of coding. The second cycle of coding involved breaking 80 keywords and phrases into categories (Miles et al., 2014). Each question, from the 15 semi-structured interview questions, was designed to target different aspects of parents' perceptions of their factors and reasons for opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. The categories for the coding process emerged directly from the questions and each question started as its own category. The 80 keywords and phrases were coded initially into 19 categories. The next part of coding involved taking the 19 categories, looking for similarities and further breaking them into subthemes and themes. The 19 categories turned into five themes with 12 subthemes.

The first two themes came directly from the research questions. The research question for this basic interpretative qualitative study was, “What reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced parents when deciding to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise?” Since there was only one research question for this study, all the themes aligned with the research question that included reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events. The first two themes were coded as *Theme 1: factors influencing parents to opt-out* and *Theme 2: experiences influencing parents to opt-out*. The next themes related to the conceptual frameworks used for the research study. The next two themes to emerge were *Theme 3: systems perspectives on opting-out related to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theories* and *Theme 4: critical pedagogy and opting-out* related to Giroux’s (1988) critical pedagogy theories.

An important part of qualitative research studies is the ability to recognize when data does not fit because it is an outlier (Patton, 2002). After matching all the categories to themes, discrepant cases did not seem to fit with any of the themes. Discrepant cases and issues with opting-out were given their own theme, *Theme 5: discrepancies*. The discrepant cases are further discussed in the results section of Chapter 4. Table 2 shows the relationships between the themes and subthemes.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Factors influencing parents to opt-out	Participants' definition of opting-out Thoughts and feelings Decision-making process and influences
Theme 2: Experiences influencing parents to opt-out	Personal events Influence of others Alternate opt-out activities
Theme 3: Systems perspectives on opting-out	Satisfaction with education Parents' messages in opting-out
Theme 4: Critical Pedagogy and opting-out	Opting-out and feelings about school child attends Parents' perspectives on what tests should evaluate assessment alternatives
Theme 5: Discrepant cases	Other issues and concerns with opting-out

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In research, it is important to make sure that the research study has been conducted in such a way that there is evidence of trustworthiness. Some ways to ensure evidence of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility was checked in two different ways in this research study. The first-way credibility was checked during interviews when participants were portraying the experiences and personal events that happened if something seemed inconsistent they were asked the same question again, something was explained or clarified, and then a similar question was asked (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By re-asking a question or providing clarification, this allowed for the research to check the credibility of their statements.

During interviews, there were a couple times the participants who held a contradictory viewpoint that was not clear at first but became clear later. These are discussed in the results section in Chapter 4.

There was another problem of credibility when a second participant seemed to hold two different views. Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted how sometimes people hold two contradictory views simultaneously and that both the views may, in fact, be true. This is a perfect explanation of how someone could hold two contradictory views. In asking further questions and re-asking questions, I was able to capture the true meaning of what the participants were saying which added to the credibility of the research study.

The second way credibility was evident in this research study was through triangulation. In this research study, triangulation was done in the form of interviewing multiple participants and having them verify their transcripts. Data was collected during the interview process. I then typed a transcript of the interview, and the transcripts were sent to the participants for them to verify. During verification, the participants reviewed the transcript, made any changes or added any additional information to the transcript for verification. Transcription verifications were received back 10 of the participants by May 20, 2018. Two of the participants made minor changes in the wording of a couple of questions. The other eight participants accepted the transcript as is. One of the participants completed the interview and never verified her transcript, excluded that data from the research study.

Transferability

Merriam (2009) noted transferability is the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied to another study or situation. To ensure transferability a semi-structured interview question protocol (Appendix) was used. The same 15 questions with related probe questions were asked of all participants. Transferability could occur by having the same 15 questions and probes used in another research study to compare participant answers and findings. In the setting thick, rich descriptions were used to capture the essence of the research study and could be replicated.

Dependability

Dependability is when the findings in a study lime up with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). In this research study, dependability can be seen in the form of triangulation, transcript review, and through self-reflection in research journal I kept. During data collection, a research log was used to put thoughts, questions, and record any potential biases. A log specific to the timeline of data collection occurred. It was important to make sure all participants signed a letter of consent, set up interviews, were sent their transcripts, and transcript review was completed for each participant. Keeping a journal helped to identify discrepant data during the research process.

Confirmability

Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that confirmability is when you confirm with participants what they said. In this research study, confirmability is present through the use of a transcript review. The participants were able to read over their transcripts and make amendments or changes to what they said and then validated the content of the

interview by signing off on the transcript. Eleven interviews were completed for this research study; however, only 10 participants completed transcript review. Data from the participant who did not complete the transcript review was not used for this research study. The other way confirmability was evident occurred during interviews when I re-asked questions and verified meanings during the interviews to make sure the participants' viewpoints were captured correctly.

Results

The results were obtained from the interviews with 10 participants for the research study on the factors and reasons parents opted-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes tests, in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise. There were five themes related to the research question. The findings are presented according to each theme.

Theme 1: Factors Influencing Parents to Opt-Out

Theme 1 pertains to the factors that influenced parents to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade high stakes test. Theme 1 included parents' definition of opting-out, thoughts and feelings, and the decision-making process and influences.

Participants' definition of opting-out. Participants were asked, what is your definition of opting-out in regards to high-stakes testing? The responses from the 10 participants were very similar and had to do with deciding not to participate by choice or refusing to take high-stakes tests. In addition, the majority of responses included how the

high-stakes tests were seen as unfair, inappropriate, or had a lack of meaning or importance. Ava responded that opting-out is,

> Refusing to allow my children to take tests that I will never get information on. The tests are not an accurate representation of how my children are doing, and they do not help their current teachers understand where they really are.

For many of the participants when asked what their definition of opting-out of high-stakes testing was, their immediate answer was not a definition; rather, it was their thoughts and feelings about high-stakes tests.

Thoughts and feelings. Many of the thoughts and feelings were varied and included the underlying factors for why parents opted-out their children from the high-stakes testing. Greta explained her thoughts on why opting-out of high-stakes testing was important:

> High-stakes tests are data-driven, and the bulk of the test is age-inappropriate, corporate-funded, convoluted, and confusing. The current high-stakes tests are of no consequence to the child, and their grades, their promotion, their GPA, and they should be eliminated entirely.

Other participants voiced similar concerns which included how the high-stakes tests bear no weight on a child’s grade, the tests do not count for anything, too much stock is put into high-stakes tests, they are written unfairly, and the high-stakes tests are often written above the grade level of the child.

One participant, Chloe expressed that opting-out was one of the best forms of civil protest. Chloe noted,

> Opting-out has shown the most change in the state's education system. Every year after the opt-out they have made changes. The hope is that someday it will become a less offensive test, which provides feedback and assistance to the school district and the teacher.

Four participants expressed concerns over whether opting-out their children from high-stakes testing was the right action. Izabel was initially of the mindset her kids should take the test. Izabel took the tests as a child and believed it would be good for her children to take them too; she believed taking tests was a rite of passage and was potentially a good life experience. The factor that influenced Izabel to ultimately opt-out her children from high-stakes testing was how anxious and "stressed out" her oldest son was about taking the state tests. Izabel explained how her oldest son was "super stressed out" about the high-stakes tests, "He would say, 'mom, I am going to fail seventh grade all because of the state tests.'" Even though Izabel assured him that was not how it worked, she decided the best way to alleviate his stress was to opt him out of the tests. Izabel commented,

> I was never anxious, and I didn't fail tests. I have always been a good test taker. I have watched other people fail tests, even after they have studied and it is super stressful.

Izabel felt that she had to do what was best for her children, so she opted them out of the high-stakes test.

Izabel was not the only participant who questioned if taking the high-stakes tests might be beneficial for their children. Betsy, Ellie, and Harriet all expressed how they

considered the possibility that having their children take the high-stakes tests would give them practice for the mandatory state Regents exams they take in high school that affect their grades. Ellie articulated that opting-out her children from high-stakes tests in third- through eighth-grade might prove to be detrimental in the future because she worried it might make them more nervous and not prepared for the state tests they have to take once they are in ninth grade.

Betsy, who teaches in a different school district than her children attend, noted how this year, her school district was giving the third- through eighth-grade tests on the computer. Betsy encouraged all the children she taught to take the high-stakes tests on the computer for practice. Betsy insisted,

> The goal of the state is to eventually move the high school state Regents exams to computerized tests. The high-stakes tests do not count in third- through eighth-grade so having them use the high-stakes tests to practice how to take a test on the computer will give them an advantage for when the tests really count on their transcripts.

Betsy was torn about encouraging her students to take the high-stakes tests on the computer. Betsy felt like a hypocrite because she was opting-out her children from the same tests she was encouraging her students to take. However, the district where Betsy's children attend was still utilizing pencil and paper tests, so she felt justified opting them out because she did not see value in that version of the high-stakes tests. Harriet's thoughts were along the same line as Betsy, Ellie, and Izabel. Harriet noted,

> My husband and I are both academics, so we kind of felt like she [their daughter] should take the test. You are going to have to take lots of tests in your life, but if it does not really count for anything—what is the point? There may come a time when we feel differently.

Parents were also asked to examine whether they thought opting-out would impact the long-term educational plans for their children. Six of the 10 participants believed opting-out would not impact their children's long-term educational plans at all. Two parents wondered if opting-out their children would have a negative impact on the mandatory state tests the children would have to take in high school. Two other participants were unsure if opting-out would affect their children's long-term goals. As parents were deciding whether to have their children take the tests or to opt-them out another set of factors, process and influences, also contributed to the decision to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests.

Decision-making process and influences. Parents were asked to describe the decision-making process that they went through, regarding thoughts and actions, they experienced when choosing to opt-out their children. This process for many of the participants appeared to be a very personal one. Influences included a union president, peers, other parents, news coverage, and Facebook. Eight of the 10 participants for the study were part of an opt-out group on Facebook. Two of the 10 participants went to a rally sponsored by local grassroots organizations to learn more about the opt-out movement. One of the participants became an opt-out parent advocate who spoke at rallies throughout the state. Betsy commented,

> I talked to other educators who were also parents. I tried to look at both sides. I talked to educators about why they were not opting their children out to know why. I also talked to educators and people who were opting-out to better understand their reasons.

Ava was concerned she was going to be labeled "one of those parents" who would be opting-out and in the beginning was therefore hesitant. Ava eventually decided to opt-out her children because "she could not take the level of frustration her child was having with school."

Ellie and Fiona expressed similar concerns about the level of anxiety and stress their children was feeling from the pressures associated with high-stakes testing. Ellie voiced the concern,

> I feel as though there has got to be a better mechanism to gauge where these kids are at, then doing it this way. There has to be a method that is not so stressful and that people's [teachers] livelihoods are not depending on it. These tests are on information the kids have not had a chance to learn. The students are stressed because they are just expected to know stuff that is over their heads.

Fiona's son had a panic attack on the very first day of testing. Fiona remarked, "my son literally had a complete meltdown to the point where he had to be moved to another room." For Izabel, she decided to opt-out her two sons because they were anxious about the tests and she did not want their score on the test to become their identity.

For Delilah, there seemed to be a disconnect between the grades her son received in class and on the high-stakes tests. Delilah commented on the decision-making process,

> It was a hard decision. I figured it just did not line up with the curriculum they were currently working on in school. I based my decision mostly off my son, because he is my high-level student. So if my son could not get a good grade on the high-stakes tests, I figured there was not a correct match somewhere along in the curriculum. It was best not to stress him or my daughter out, even more than school already does. It really was a personal decision about what was best for my children.

For Chloe, the decision to opt-out her children came from news coverage and the media. Chloe remarked, "Everything that you see and hear about high-stakes testing and opting-out makes more people question it. After finding out the high-stakes tests are developmentally not appropriate, I opted-out my children." For Harriet, she claimed the decision was a "no-brainer." At the beginning of the school year, her daughter's math teacher told parents "the tests did not really count for anything." Theme 1 consisted of factors influencing parents to opt-out and included participants' definitions of opting-out, thoughts and feelings, influences, and the decision-making process they went through when choosing to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests.

Theme 2: Experiences Influencing Parents to Opt-Out

Theme 2 in this research study pertained to experiences that influenced parents' decisions to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade high-stakes tests and including personal events, the influence of others, and alternate opt-out activities provided to testing.

Personal events. Each of the participants discussed different personal events that influenced them to opt-out their children. Some of the personal events had to do with anxiety, feelings of stress, and panic attacks. Other personal events included using test scores to rate teachers and changes in their child's attitude towards school. Ava's son would beg her to print out math sheets. He reached a level of frustration with the weekly worksheets and wanted to practice more. Ava would try to help him and claimed she did not even understand what the worksheets were asking him to do and started to have doubts about the curricula and high-stakes tests. Delilah's son was an honor student who excelled in math but failed his math high-stakes test. Delilah urged, "there has to be something wrong if my son had an average for that year of a 97% in math and then scores in the failing range on the state high-stakes math test." After that Delilah stopped having her children take the high-stakes tests. Fiona, Izabel, and Jade felt the event that caused them to opt-out of high-stakes testing was the amount of stress it put on their children. Fiona's son had a specific event that caused her to immediately opt-out in the middle of high-stakes testing. Fiona commented,

> The first day of testing my son was twitching and tapping. It was almost like he developed a Tourettic attack. There was a lot of stuff he did not understand. There were things on the test that they had never gone over. The school called me and told me that he had shut down. I opted him out from the rest of the high-stakes tests that afternoon.

Betsy stated the event that influenced her decision to opt-out was "when they started connecting them [students' high-stakes test scores] to teachers' evaluations." Betsy commented,

> As a teacher, we were not getting scores in time to use them for anything valuable. The scores are not valuable to teachers or parents. The scores no longer let me know what skills and material I needed to help my children with as a teacher or a parent.

For Chloe, it was a series of personal events starting with what was being said in the media that led her to opt-out. Chloe remarked,

> I went online and read the test booklet and instructions. It stated that it was testing the child for what they possibly knew, and I felt that was fundamentally wrong. The teachers were being rated effective or ineffective. It was a combination of things. The results from the high-stakes tests came back, and it was awful. I did not agree with what was going on.

Unlike the rest of the participants, Harriet opted-out because her daughter's math teacher told the parents it did not count for anything, so there was no point in taking the test.

Influence of others. Once the participants decided to opt-out, they had to let the school district know that they were opting-out their children from the state high-stakes tests. The next question was whether anyone tried to sway them in any way regarding opting-out. Seven of the 10 participants said the school or principal, at first, directly tried to sway them to not opt-out. After parents had turned in the opt-out letter, some districts required parents to come in a meet with the principal to discuss why they were choosing

to opt-out in what participants described as an effort to try and change the parents' mind. Two of the participants said that no one tried to sway them in either direction—they turned in the opt-out letters to the school, and there was no further discussion. One of the 10 participants said that a teacher directly encouraged them to opt-out of high-stakes testing.

Alternate opt-out activities. Over the years, the options to activities in which the students may participant when they are opted-out of high-stakes testing had changed. Participants were asked to identify specifically how their children stayed occupied while others were taking the tests. Four of the participants said their children had to "sit and stare" in the same room as the other children who were taking the test. Three of the participants' children were allowed to read quietly in a room other than the testing location. Another three of the participants' children were allowed to be in a room other than the testing location, and they could work on schoolwork or something educational of their choosing.

Participants were asked if the alternate opt-out activities influenced their decision to opt-out their children. None of them indicated that the alternate activities influenced their decision to opt-out. On the other hand, Betsy commented if her students attended a "sit and stare" district, she would not have opted them out; rather, she would have kept them home from school. Another participant, Ava, whose child was supposed to sit in a different location and read, did keep her child at home. Ava explained,

I kept him out of school for the testing time and dropped him off after the tests

> were complete. I feel as though it is ridiculous to make a child sit and read for 2-3 hours. I could not possibly sit and read that long, and I am an adult. I would need to get up and stretch. I cannot believe having an eleven-year-old child sit for that long is even allowed. It is what is wrong with our education system and is partially why I am thinking about homeschooling my children.

Theme 2 consisted of experiences that influenced parents to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests and includes personal events, the influence of others, and alternate opt-out activities.

Theme 3: Systems Perspectives on Opting-Out

Systems perspectives emerged as Theme 3 related to the micro level (school district), the meso level (state department of education), and at the macro level (federal department of education in the United States).

Satisfaction with education. Participants were asked to share their feelings about their level of satisfaction with education in their school district and with education in the United States. Four of the 10 participants were satisfied with the classes and education their children were receiving. Izabel remarked, “I’m incredibly satisfied. I think they do a great job. They work very hard to give our kids the best.”

Six of the 10 participants questioned some aspects of education in their home school district. Ava’s replied, “I feel like every child learns differently. To see my son sit here and cry and to be brought to tears almost every night after school—to me it doesn’t feel right.” Jade commented, “The school district is supposed to be a well-

regarded district, and it's not." Ellie felt dissatisfied with certain aspects of her child's education. Ellie remarked,

> It is a real struggle for me. My son comes home and is doing a lot of stuff. When I look at his work, I feel like it is stuff that when I was that age, I did not know. I also feel like things are covered so quickly. He still cannot spell. I do not think he knows how to put coherent sentences together. He comes home with 90s and I am not even sure how that is possible after looking at what he just wrote. I feel like he does not get pushed hard enough to be putting forth his best effort. I think if he was pushed harder he could do better. It is frustrating because school is not fun for him and I do not understand what they are learning.

Ava voiced similar concerns about her child not understanding what he was learning. Ava expressed other concerns including schools not teaching life skills, how history and science have been put on the backburner, and that anything that encourages creativity in learning has vanished from education as well.

When moving from the micro level (school district) to the macro level (education in the United States), five out of the 10 participants were dissatisfied with education systems in the United States. Chloe explained, "I think this one-size-fits-all education is not necessarily the answer. I don't agree with the political aspects of education." Greta noted that she felt as the education in the United States was being "decimated" by corporations and the federal government.

Three of the 10 participants felt as though education on the macro level in the United States was satisfactory. Jade observed, "I do not think it [education in the United

States] was that bad to begin with;" however, she noted that the current trend of "teaching to the test" is not good for students. Betsy pointed out that not every state in the United States has equal education. She acknowledged that the goal of the Common Core State Standards initiative was to make education equal; however, Betsy commented, "some states are a mess. I feel lucky to live in the state I live in. We have high standards for our children and our teachers. The bigger problem is that teachers are not valued."

Ellie was one of the participants not satisfied with education in the United States and commented,

> I feel like we're just focusing on teaching inside of a box, instead of really stretching and learning. I think we should be focused more on how to teach our children to be kind, empathetic, and how to be good little humans. I want education to focus on items they are curious about, because they are going to learn the rest of the sills in life they need anyways. Yes, you need to know math, but some of the stuff they learn is not anything they need. Basic skills are not there. Everything is done on the computer now. My son doesn't know the meaning of what he is spelling or writing.

In addition to disapproval about various aspects of the curricula being taught, one participant, Ava described how her son's attitude towards school changed from high-stakes testing. Ava's son would come home and beg her to print out extra practice math sheets so that he could figure out the format of the questions being asked. For Ava, high-stakes testing was causing daily stress with learning math. Ava noted, "I feel that he has reached a level of frustration with worksheets and how they want him to answer the

question." For Ava, it became less about learning and more about filling in boxes. Her son struggled to complete homework and often could not figure out what the question was asking so she would help him. Another participant, Delilah noted, "There is something wrong with the testing if my kid has a 97 average in math and then scores in the failing range on the state test." Nine of the 10 participants felt the test scores were not an accurate representation of their children's level of understanding and did not believe they should be used to evaluate school programs, curricula, teachers, or school districts. Greta commented, "Common Core high-stakes testing should not be used to measure anything. They should not even be administered."

Izabel noted that she had not always lived in the state of the research study. She lived in another state and in Germany when her family was stationed there through the military. She moved into the current school district and chose it purposely. She felt as the though school district, particularly the teachers, knew her children and had their best interests in mind. Two of the participants were unsure about the education in the United States and did not feel as though they could answer the question.

Parents' messages in opting-out. Participants were asked what they hoped to gain from opting-out their children from high-stakes testing – what message would that send to the educational system. Their messages were divided into those they were trying to send to the school district (micro level), the state (meso level), and the federal government (macro level). Four participants' messages regarded dissatisfaction with high-stakes tests. Ava's message was the same for all the levels of the system. Ava commented, "parents and teachers care about their children's education and will stand up

for them. Things need to change. This type of testing is not working. It's that simple." Fiona's message to the entire system was, "These high-stakes tests are wrong." At the micro level, Harriet commented, "We would like it to be better—we would like the system to work well and have these tests actually mean something."

Jade's message to the school district (micro level) was, "These tests are not ok with me. It's a big game and my kids are not playing." Jade noted the school districts are worried about too many kids opting-out and how it is going to affect their school ratings." Betsy and Chloe's messages for the school district involved dissatisfaction with how data is currently used and want the data to be used to help teachers assist students in areas they were struggling in. Betsy's noted, "As an educator, I don't value this high-stakes testing. The data is not used to drive our instruction. As a parent, the data is not used to help my child." Further, at the state (meso) and federal (macro) levels, Betsy commented, "We need results in a timely manner. We need to be able to use the test scores to help drive instruction, and to help our students succeed." Chloe, in her message to the school district commented,

> The test is not inappropriate. The tests do not provide any assistance into teaching the child or specifics on what the child knows and what they do not know. The data is not specific enough to be beneficial.

Another message parents felt opting-out sent involved students' tests scores should not be used to rate or evaluate teachers. Delilah's message was the same throughout the various levels of the system. Delilah provided,

> The high-stakes tests are unfair because they don't coincide with the curricula. Teachers should not be tied to testing scores for their evaluations, because not all kids test well.

Chloe and Greta's messages were similar to Delilah's. Chloe noted,

> At the state (meso) level it becomes the more political message, which widens to include rating teachers as effective or not effective is not acceptable! Education should not be part of passing a state budget. I feel by opting-out it sends the message to change it. We will continue to send that message to keep improving the education our children are receiving.

At the micro level, Greta remarked

> I am opting-out to support my school and my teachers. We do not need outside interference. The tests are flawed and age-inappropriate. My priority was to have the discussion with my child for her to understand that you can't opt-out in life, but when something is wrong, you stand up against it.

The next set of messages from parented included not wanting the state government being involved in the creation of tests, pressures from the federal government, and not wanting students to be considered data. At the state (meso) level, Greta noted,

> My message to the state was, you need to back off. You need to get out of what we already are doing very, very well. We know exactly what we are doing here. We have a local school board. We have a local teachers union and teachers all working together in our community. My message to the state is to leave us alone.

Greta discussed how the teachers used to make the tests and were able to use the data to

At federal (macro) level, Chloe remarked,

> The financial aspect is more in play then at the state level. Any district can be effective and have high scores if they just teach to the test. Money should not be controlled and disbursed according to the number of students taking a test. The federal government says 95% of the students must take the test. This 95% starts at the federal level, it is written on ESSA (2015). A school district would be penalized from the federal standpoint, if they don't have 95% test. There is this message the federal government is sending that if you do not do what I say, there is consequence and fear—that is not what the government should be. From there then the message goes back to the original, the test is not appropriate.

At the school district (micro) level, Ellie remarked, "Our children are not numbers." When moving from the school district to the state (meso) and federal (macro) levels Ellie felt,

> It's the same message but larger. It comes from the top down. If the bottom were not being pushed to do other things by the top, then people would really start to care about things other than money and numbers. Our kids are not a budget—they are humans. Stop thinking about our kids as numbers.

Izabel's message to the various levels in the system was similar to Ellie. Izabel noted,

> I do not want the state or anybody else to define my child based on a test score. I do not want my child to feel as though a test score defines him. There is more to learning and knowledge than tests.

Theme 3 consisted of systems perspectives on opting-out regarding satisfaction with education and parents messages about opting-out at the school district (micro) level, state (meso) level, and federal (macro) level.

Theme 4: Opting-Out and Critical Pedagogy

Theme 4 emerged in response to interview questions regarding critical pedagogy to gain parents perspectives about the satisfaction level of the school districts, what tests should evaluate, assessment alternatives, and their thoughts on whether opting-out would have an impact on their children's educational goals.

Opting-out and feelings about school child attends. Parents were asked their perspectives regarding whether or not opting-out influenced their feelings and satisfaction level with the school district their child attends. The perspectives were varied. Four of the 10 participants were satisfied with the way their school handled opting-out. Izabel remarked, "I already love the school district. It [opting-out] was handled very well. They gave us all the information we needed. They were totally supportive no matter what." Harriet expressed,

> I think it is great that they are so transparent about it and that they make it easy for us to do. I heard from one of my friends, in another part of the state, that she had a heck of a time trying to opt her daughter out. She said she had to go to the school. She had to write letters. She thought that was horrible. It took quite a bit of time to get her daughter opted-out.

Five participants indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the school district. Ellie stated,

> At first, I was very frustrated. I felt the school did not have the children's best interest at heart and cared more about how families are feeling; instead, it felt as though the school was more worried about numbers and meeting goals. Other school districts were not acting the same way.

Two of the five participants who opted-out their children from high-stakes tests felt frustrated with the school district, ended up taking their children out of public education and homeschooled their children. One participant did not feel the experience of opting-out changed her satisfaction level.

Parents' perspectives on what tests should evaluate. Participants were asked to give their perspective on whether students' achievement and proficiency scores on high-stakes tests should be used to evaluate school programs, curricula, teachers, and school districts. The tone of the participants changed as they were asked this series of questions to one of disapproval and disgust. Almost every answer was an immediate no. Ava noted in dismay,

> No! The test does not reflect a student's true knowledge. Nor does it reflect on how well the teacher is presenting the curriculum. A teacher could be the best teacher on Earth, and there will still be children who do not grasp what he or she is teaching at the same time and rate as others.

Chloe responded, "No, this goes back to the basic fundamental problem of what is wrong with the tests. How do you judge or evaluate anything on just one score?" Izabel pointed out, "I do not think high-stakes tests give a good picture of where students really are. We

should not place judgment on any of these things based off of one test that is known to cause anxiety in students."

There were a few instances where participants felt students' test scores should be used to evaluate pieces. Fiona noted that sometimes students' test scores can be beneficial and can show where there is a problem. If an entire class has low tests scores, it may show problems in the curricula, with the teacher, or with a school program. Test scores in this instance are used as an accountability piece. Jade felt that students' test scores should be used to hold the school accountable. Jade's situation is further discussed in the discrepancies section in Theme 5.

Assessment alternatives. Parents were asked what alternatives they would like to see as a way for the school district, state, and the federal government to assess their child's achievement ad proficiency levels. Eight of the 10 participants said they would like to see assessments put back into the hands of teachers. They were not against testing students; however, they were against corporations creating tests. Ava noted, "I think tests should be between the teacher and the child. Start by assessing where the children are academically and track their progress from there." Chloe urged,

> Corporations cannot and should not create tests. Teachers that teach in the classroom should be creating the tests. Corporations are looking to make money. Corporations do not have the children's best interests in mind. Teachers and educators across the state should make the tests. High-stakes testing creates teaching to a test. A teacher should never have to teach to a test. When this generation of kids, the high-stakes testing generation, goes to college they are

> going to flounder. All that high-stakes tests are teaching them is to do it one way or to think one way. This generation of kids cannot think outside the box. High-stakes tests are missing the critical thinking skills are supposed to make them effective adults and are missing the mark.

Chloe further expressed that opting-out was one of the best forms of civil protest and hopefully as the number of students opting-out increases will lead to a change in testing practices in the state. Greta suggested similar idea and pointed out,

> We actually had state standards before the Common Core Standards and the Common Core high-stakes testing that were squashed in 2013. Our assessments used to be teacher written. Teachers would meet, collaborate as a group, and write the assessments for their curricula area. How about going back to what we already knew how to do? We used to be one the leading states for education in the United States. I am not opposed to testing, but I am opposed to testing how we test right now. I am not opposed to testing at all. In fact, how else do you understand proficiency and growth in the child? I trust my professional teachers who are trained in the subject to collaborate with other teachers to design the test in their subject area.

Other alternatives to high-stakes tests from participants included using standards-based reports where skills are assessed, evaluating concepts and skills directly through practice, and using common sense to identify what children actually need. Ellie said,

> I think we can give them tasks and before they go to the next level, we take the time to figure out if they get it. Do they have concept x and do they know why it

> works? Then we assess what they didn't understand and make a plan of action. Here is what we need to work on next. After they master the concept, we move to the next concept they need. We use common sense and look at the natural progression of what they are learning. Teachers do that every single day. This is an ongoing concept that we don't need some test to figure out.

Izabel's perspective was similar to Ellie's. Izabel noted,

> When I was training adults, the boss who was looking to hire them would come to me and ask how did they do? Are they ready for this job? I was knowledgeable about them from having worked with them. I think we that we should ask the teachers for their input. How are these kids doing? The goal of education in the United States needs to change, in my opinion. It is prep for this test and that test and whatever they are doing. We are supposed to be raising capable human beings here. I honestly, I have no idea how to figure out if that is happening other than talk to the people who were doing it. Let the teachers assess how their students are doing. Maybe if we took away all the test prep and high-stakes tests, teachers would have more time to actually teach students the skills and concepts they need.

For Harriet, she felt anything else would be a better option than using high-stakes testing. Harriet suggested,

> Look at their career interests, how they perform in school, and what their teachers are saying about them. I know it gets hard when you have 25 students to be so individualized with feedback on specifics. I have to wonder how can you

> accurately assess thousands of students correctly with just one test. They might have a bad day one day and then it is too bad.

Much like Harriet, Jade questioned why not take the data they already have and use it to assess what children are learning. Jade remarked,

> All these computer programs that they make students use like IXL and I-ready. They keep track of your child's progress. I do not understand why they cannot just look at this programs that they're already using as a learning tool instead of the test. I think that's a pretty good indicator on how they're doing. Anything that they do on the computers in the classroom, why can't they just use that data?

Theme 4 consisted of critical pedagogy and opting-out and consisted of opting-out and feelings about school child attends, parents' perspectives on what tests should evaluate, and assessment alternatives.

Theme 5: Discrepant Cases

Two discrepant responses were evident in relationship to parents' thoughts and feeling about opting-out of high-stakes testing (Theme 1). Greta's answer was "opting-out is no longer an effective action because opting-out changed nothing." Greta shared that she had opted-out her child since the opting-out movement started in 2013 and had since become frustrated with the opting-out movement. Greta was one of the first people to get on board the opt-out movement in her school district. Over the years Greta had become involved with the opt-out movement and joined a grassroots organization and encouraged other parents to opt-out, headed up rallies in her hometown and then throughout the state, and worked with others towards making changes to education at the

federal level in in Washington D.C. Greta's story was a discrepancy that needed to be noted and further explained. Greta commented,

> …[opting-out is] no longer an effective action because opting-out changed nothing. Statistically speaking, if you reach 11 or 12 percent of children who opt-out, you skew the data. We exceeded 20 percent in 2015. Although the data was invalidated, technically they continued to amass the data. They did not apply that to the teachers APPRs because there was a moratorium put in place. The children were not saved from data collection; they were not given any reprieve from the common core, which was taught for the other 174 days of the school year. The data collection continued. The surveys continued. Common core continued. So opting-out did not do anything in the beginning that it was promised to do if parents got onboard and opted-out. So, I found that to become an ineffective action.

After numerous years of being part of the opt-out movement, Greta pulled her daughter out of public education, which she referred to as opting out of public education.

The second discrepant response occurred with Jade when she was asked about her thoughts and feelings about opting-out. Jade commented, "I wish I could opt both of my children out." At first, I assumed she could not opt-out her second child because he was too young. To keep the interview flowing, I continued and made a note in my journal to ask her why she did not opt-out her younger son. Later in the interview, when Jade was asked if students' achievement and proficiency scores should be used to evaluate school programs, curricula, teachers, and school districts, her answers did not make sense. She

said yes. All the rest of the participants had answered no with much passion and a tone of disapproval of scores being used to evaluate such items.

This was not the case for Jade. I explained what the question was asking and restated the question. Jade responded,

> Yes, I believe students' high-stakes test scores should be used to evaluate school programs, curricula, teacher, and school districts because schools need to be held accountable. They, the teachers, are not teaching my son. They are not teaching him in a way that is helpful. They ignore him in class. He is just like wallpaper. I know this is mean-hearted, but I want those scores to hurt the school. Those scores put him finally in response-to-intervention (RTI).

She did understand the question; she had a true problem and felt the only way it could be resolved was to have her son struggle through the test to receive a bad score so that he could receive the services he needed. Jade felt opting-out was a valuable choice and she did opt-out her oldest child; however, she felt she could not opt-out her youngest son because then he would not get the services he needed to be successful in school. After fighting with the school district to get more services for her youngest son, she went against her viewpoint that opting-out was best for her children and had her youngest son struggle through the test to get services he needed. Jade continued,

> I am doing it strictly to help him. I tell him to do his best and not to purposely fail. I am putting him through that stress hoping that the state is going to do their job. Their [the state education department] whole purpose of giving the test they say is to make sure that the kids are receiving equal education throughout the

state. My kid is not receiving the education he needs. I want the state to see what's going on here. Let's help this kid.

Theme 5 consisted of discrepancies, other issues, and concerns with opting-out.

Summary

Chapter 4 included the setting, demographics, data collection, and data analysis for this research study. Evidence of trustworthiness was described regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The last part of Chapter 4 included the results section, where I addressed the research question: What reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced parents when deciding to opt-out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade, ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise? The results of the research study were broken into five themes: Theme 1: factors influencing parents to opt-out, Theme 2: experiences influencing parents to opt-out, Theme 3: impact of opting-out using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories, Theme 4: impact of using Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories, and Theme 5: discrepancies.

Theme 1 included parents' definitions of opting-out feelings, and the decision-making process and influences used when deciding to opt-out. Theme 2 covered personal events, the influence of others, and alternate opt-out activities. In theme 3, parents' satisfaction with education and parents' messages about opting-out were identified using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) micro, meso, and macro levels. In theme 4, Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories were applied as parents discussed opting-out and feelings

about school child attends, parents' perspective on what tests should evaluate, and assessment alternatives. Two discrepant cases constituted the fifth theme and included issues and concerns parents had with opting-out regarding high-stakes testing.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of these findings related to the conceptual frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories and Giroux (1988) critical pedagogy theories and further current literature regarding parents' perspectives on the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing. In Chapter 5 the results are further examined and including interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and recommendations for action.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative basic interpretative study was to examine the various factors, reasons, personal events, and experiences that led parents to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing. The key findings of this study emerged from the perspectives of 10 participants regarding their purposes for opting-out and what, if any, message they were trying to send to the education system. During data coding and analysis, I used the levels from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to examine the messages parents were trying to send to the school and state and federal governments by opting-out. Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory, which stressed using knowledge as power, served as a framework to address parents' experiences and the factors that compelled them to opt-out. I also used Giroux's theory during data analysis to assess how participants used knowledge as power to make changes in society.

The research question I developed to guide this study was: What reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events influenced parents when deciding to opt-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, in rural and small suburban school districts in New York where opting-out grassroots movements are on the rise? The key findings related to the study were split into five themes. The five themes included *factors influencing parents to opt-out, experiences influencing parents to opt-out, systems perspectives on opting out, critical pedagogy and opting-out,* and *discrepant cases.*

For Theme 1, *factors influencing parents to opt-out* was divided into three subthemes which included *parents' definition of opting-out, thoughts and feelings,* and

the decision-making process and influences. The key finding from this theme was that parents believe high-stakes tests are not an accurate representation of student knowledge and understanding, and that parents considered the current high-stakes testing to be unfair, inappropriate, and lacking in meaning or importance.

Theme 2, *experiences influencing parents to opt-out*, was divided into three subcategories including *personal events, the influence of others,* and *alternate opt-out activities.* Participants reported myriad personal events that led them to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests. Some of the personal events had to do with anxiety, feelings of stress, and panic attacks during testing. Other personal events included using test scores to rate teachers and changes in their child's attitude towards school. The key finding for Theme 2 was that parents' decisions to opt-out were based on personal events that came from wanting to do what was best for their children.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory led me to Theme 3, which involved the micro, meso, and macro levels of the education system. Participants described their level of satisfaction in their school districts and with the U.S. education system in general. Six of the 10 participants questioned some aspect of education in their home school district. Five of the 10 participants were dissatisfied with education in the United States. Key findings that emerged from Theme 3 were that the majority of parents' participants were dissatisfied with various aspects of education. They reported not understanding what their children were learning and that they were concerned schools were (a) not teaching life skills, (b) putting history and science on the backburner, (c) eliminating anything involving creativity, and (d) using a one-size-fits-all approach.

They were also concerned that corporations and the federal government were decimating education. The other key finding associated with this theme was that the parents were trying to send messages about how their children are not numbers or data points, and that the majority of parents do not value high-stakes tests because they do not feel as the thought high-stakes tests mean anything. One parent disagreed with this conclusion: I discuss this discrepancy when presenting Theme 5.

For Theme 4 emerged as I used Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory to explore the impact of opting-out. The basis of Giroux's theory is that people should use knowledge as active citizens to make changes in society. Theme 4 was divided into three subthemes, *opting-out and feelings about school child attends*, *parents' perspective on what tests should evaluate*, and *assessment alternatives.* The key finding associated with this theme was that parents were not against testing students; however, they were against the current system were corporations make tests. Parents would like to see tests used to evaluate their children that are created directly by teachers, not corporations or third parties. Further, they would like the teachers, parents, and school districts to be able to use the information in a timely manner to identify what skills and concepts students need help with.

Theme 5 involved discrepancies in the study and included the subtheme of *issues and concerns with opting-out* with two key findings. The first key finding was that one parent felt the opt-out movement was no longer an effective action. The second key finding was that one parent held contradictory views regarding whether opting-out was in the best interest of her children. She opted-out her oldest son but felt she could not opt-

out her youngest son because if he took the high-stakes test, it would hold the school accountable and was the only way she believed he would get the services he needed to be successful in school.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study are based on my analysis of the data using the conceptual frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory as well as the current literature discussed in Chapter 2. The findings are based on data from interviews with 10 parents in rural and small suburban school districts in New York who opted-out their children from at least one third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes tests.

Factors, Thoughts, and Feelings

Over the last decade, high-stakes testing has been a controversial topic in the United States educational system (Hagopian, 2014). Proponents of high-stakes tests contend that standardized tests are responsible for aligning curricula, shaping instruction, and increasing student-achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). Opponents of high-stakes testing believe high-stakes tests are doing a major disservice to educational systems and have led to a narrowing of the curricula (Simon, 2010; Misco et al., 2011), have disempowered teachers (Giroux, 2011, 2012; Hursh & Henderson, 2011), and are harmful to instruction (Berliner, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). From this research study, the key finding associated with Theme 1 was that parents believe high-stakes tests are not accurate representations of student knowledge and understanding, and parents considered the current high-stakes testing to be unfair, inappropriate, and lacking of

meaning or importance These findings align with what other opponents of high-stakes testing have reported and extend knowledge in the discipline by adding in rural and small-suburban parents' perspectives on high-stakes testing to a conversation that has generally focused on urban school districts.

The key finding associated with Theme 2 was that parents' decisions to opt-out were based on personal events that came from wanting to do what was best for their children. When listening to the 10 participants, it was clear their decisions to opt-out did not come lightly. More than half of participants were dissatisfied with various aspects of education which included not understanding what their children were learning, not teaching life skills, history and science being put on the backburner, anything involving creativity, that education has become one-size-fits-all, and that education was being decimated by corporations and the federal government. Musoleno and White (2010) found that high-stakes tests take away from students' abilities to think critically, set goals, and explore items they would like to learn. These researcher contended that scripted programs that prepare students for predetermined curricula and tests have replaced dynamic education. Students follow a format and learn how to pass tests instead of how to think critically (Au, 2011; Giroux, 2011, 2012). Three of the 10 participants reported disapproval regarding schools no longer teaching life skills.

During all 10 interviews, I observed a significant level of frustration from the parent participants with high-stakes. There was an underlying tone of disappointment from all participants that students' high-stakes test scores are used to measure achievement and proficiency, and inadvertently teachers, curricula, and the school

district. All participants except for one indicated they did not value high-stakes tests because they do not feel as though high-stakes test scores mean anything.

Nichols (2007) reported that common rationales for high-stakes testing include higher teacher and student accountability, motivation tool for students to do better in school, and students' test results provide schools and teachers with feedback allowing for students to be remediated or retaught material. My findings from participants' perspectives contradicted these rationales; parents did not believe test results provide schools and teachers with the feedback needed to help their children. Before this version of high-stakes testing under the Common Core, teachers used to create and grade the tests. Teachers used to be able to grade the tests and see immediately how their students did. Participants discussed how teachers used to be able to use the data and go back to the classroom to reteach material students struggled with and could further use the data to remediate students.

Two participants pointed out how teachers did not even grade the high-stakes tests that their students take, that the tests were sent to the state, and that the scores were received after the school year had already ended. The test results were not received in a timely manner. Parents were concerned the data from the tests were not even used to help assist students anymore, which used to be the point of why standardized tests were administered. One of the parents voiced frustration because she felt her school district was doing great before the state came in and changed the process of standardized testing to one of high-stakes testing under the Common Core where teachers have not control over how the tests are created and graded.

The key finding in Theme 3 was that parents' were trying to send messages about how their children were not numbers or data points. The majority did not value high-stakes tests because they did not feel as the though high-stakes tests meant anything. Giroux (2012) pointed out that schools across the United States have become market-driven and focused on test scores, have turned students into byproducts of education, and have lost focus on the purpose of education. Giroux maintained that students are trained to think like machines and regurgitate information rather than find meaning in what they are learning. Berliner and Biddle (1995) noted how test scores had become a manufactured crisis in the education system. Hagopian (2014) urged that students need to be more than a test score. My finding that parents do not want their children to be data points confirms what opponents of high-stakes testing such as Giroux, Berliner and Bindle, and Hagopian have previously found.

Testing is Beneficial

The other key findings that emerged from Theme 3 indicated the majority of parents from the research study were dissatisfied with various aspects of education, which included not understanding what their children were learning, not teaching life skills, history and science being put on the backburner, anything involving creativity, that education has become one-size-fits-all, and that education was being decimated by corporations and the federal government.

Although some of the parents were dissatisfied with certain aspects of education, one of the key findings that emerged from this research study was that parents were not against testing students; however, they were against the current system where

corporations make tests. Accountability in testing was not the problem, according to this study's participants. Instead, the problem was the issue of timeliness of when tests results were received. Parents pointed out they would like tests results and data used to evaluate their children that were created directly by teachers, not corporations or third parties. Further, parents provided that the teachers, parents, and school districts need to be able to use the information/data, in a timely manner, to identify what skills and concepts students need help with. These findings for Theme 4 go with the key findings from Theme 3 in which parents were not against testing students; however, they were against the current system were corporations make tests. Parents would like to see tests used to evaluate their children that are created directly by teachers, not corporations or third parties, and further would like the teachers, parents, and school districts are able to use the information, in a timely manner, to identify what skills and concepts students need help with.

Crowder and Konle (2015) maintained the idea of testing students started with good intentions but now has changed the focus of education as test scores have become the main indicator in determining success in education. If test scores are going to be used as an indicator for determining success, parents wanted to see the test results mean something towards their children education, not just as a way to grade the effectiveness of teachers, school districts, or programs. Au and Hollar (2016) noted for many people testing makes sense because it provides clear data can be used to hold people and schools accountable. The key finding that parents were not against tests confirmed previous findings from Crowder and Konle (2015), and Au and Hollar (2016). However, the

parents from this research study did not agree with using test scores to measure schools' curricula and program; instead the parents would like to see the data from high-stakes used by teachers to drive instruction and would like the tests to go back to being made and graded by teachers as it did prior to 2013.

During interviews, parents discussed what alternatives they would like to see as a way for the school district, state, and the federal government to assess their children achievement and proficiency levels. Ideas for alternative types of assessments included standards-based report cards and having teachers evaluate students' skills and concepts. The tone during this part of the conversation was different as many parents were puzzled as to what would be an alternative to measure proficiency and growth, which led to further discussion from many of the participants on how tests can be a good form of assessment if done correctly. Overall, parents wanted to be able to see that their children were improving on skills throughout the school year and wanted assessments that allowed for teachers to work with students on skills they were struggling with.

Is Opting-Out Effective?

The 10 participants from this research study defined opting-out as deciding not to participate by choice or refusing to take high-stakes tests because they felt high-stakes tests were unfair, inappropriate, or had a lack of meaning or importance. Opting-out started out as a grassroots movement and has continued to gain momentum (Hagopian, 2014). Hagopian (2014), Neill and Guisbond (2014) and Phi Delta Kappa (2015) identified that the opting-out movement has drawing local, state, and national attention as the opting-out number continue to rise across the United States. During the interviews in

this study, the ten parents shared the messages they hoped would be sent to the system. These messages were considered related to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) various levels of system, which included the school district (micro level), state level (meso level), and the federal level (macro level). The parents' messages had to do with how there was more to learning and knowledge then tests, how money for school districts budgets should not be controlled but a test, that the tests were unfair, and that results are needed in a timely manner to drive instruction.

For many of the parents, the messages they wanted the school district to know were that they did not want their child defined as a test score. This finding was similar to Hagopian's (2014) work about the uprising against standardized testing and how important the opt-out movement may be if testing practices are to change. One parent in this research study discussed the importance of standing up when something is wrong. Ravitch (2010) stated that testing was undermining education and that tests do not capture all that matters and important in learning and education. As the messages shifted to the federal and state levels, the messages where the same but also included more about how budgets and money should not be attached to test scores and the number of children testing. Previous researchers have looked at various aspects of parent involvement in education. Johnson et al. (2013) categorized parents as potential transformers, school helpers, help seekers, and other. The roles established for Johnson et al. were all traditional roles that had to do with the ways parents helped the school and their children. Opting-out is not a traditional role that parents have previously taken towards school districts. In Johnson et al.'s study, the potential transformers advocated for school

reform, which is similar to what some of the parents in this research study hoped to gain from when they opted-out their children from high-stakes tests. One of the participants discussed in great detail how she became involved in a grassroots organization and went around the state talking at rallies and working towards getting other parents educated on opting-out and all the information surrounding high-stakes testing and the Common Core. This participant provided in-depth stories of how she went to great lengths to help the opt-out movement gain momentum and even discussed how she was part of an organization that called school districts to help tally opt-out numbers throughout New York.

For many of the participants the opt-out movement was an effective action because it allowed for them to take a stance against high-stakes testing and to protect their children from the tests they considered to be unfair and inappropriate. Not all of the participants felt that opting-out was still an effective action. Two key findings came from Theme 5. The first key finding was that one parent felt the opt-out movement was no longer an effective action. The second key finding was one parent held contradictory views regarding whether opting-out was in the best interest of her children.

One parent felt the opt-out movement was no longer an effective action because over the last five year the number of students opting-out continued to rise and the number of school districts having more than 5% of their population opt-out continued to rise. Under NCLB (2001), if more than 5% of the population opted-out, school districts were supposed to lose funding. This is where the concern about whether budgets should be

tied to test administration came from and the message sent by parents they did not want their kids to be a budget.

Young et al. (2013) study found parents as advocates encompassed how parents need to be able to help their children develop emotionally, socially, spiritually, psychotically, and develop their children's overall well-being. The majority of parents in this research study opted-out because they believed it were in the best interest and well-being of their children. When looking parents' perspectives regarding whether opting-out was effective, it is important to note that some of the ten parents who participated were questioning whether opting-out of high-stakes tests was in the best interest of their children. Testing was something the parents were familiar with because they had to take tests when they were younger and were students. During the interviews, parents voiced concerns over whether opting-out was the right action and even believed that having students take the tests could be beneficial and a good life experience. In New York, third- through eighth-grade high-stakes tests were considered mandatory, but there were not repercussions if the students opt-out. When students get to the ninth grade, there are state exams that are considered mandatory, and if students do not take them and pass them, they do not receive a high school diploma. Some of the parents in this research study pondered whether having their children take the third- through eighth-grade high-stakes tests would better prepare them for the mandatory examinations.

One of the interview questions the 10 participants were asked related to their perspectives on whether they thought opting-out had a long-term impact on education plans for their children. Six of the 10 participants did not believe opting-out would

impact their children's long-term educational goals at all. Two parents felt opting-out might have a negative impact on other mandatory state exams, and two parents were unsure if opting-out would affect their children's long-term education goals. There is a gap in research regarding whether opting-out of third- through eighth-grade high-stakes tests impacts children later on in high school on the exams or later on with their educational goals. Some of the parents who are opting-out are not sure if opting-out is in the best interest of their child. Further research is needed to see if other parents have similar feelings on the impact of opting-out on children's long-term education goals and further studies could determine if opting-out does have an impact children's long-term educational goals.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of this research study come from the research design. To be considered for this basic interpretative qualitative research study participants had to meet specific criteria. The criteria for this research study included: (a) had to be a parent who opted-out their child/children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade ELA or mathematics high-stakes test, (b) the school district their children attend must be a small suburban or rural school district in New York, and (c) the children who were opted-out cannot be students who had the researcher as a teacher. The sample size for this research study was 10 participants to keep the sample size manageable and to give a better-rounded picture of the reasons and factors for parents' opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. With only 10 participants it is unclear whether the level of saturation was reached. There may be more reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that

led parents to decide to opt-out their children from high-stakes testing than were uncovered in these 10 participants. More research is needed to confirm whether saturation was reached. The research design also used purposeful sampling, which is a limitation. Eight of the 10 participants for this research study were recruited from a Facebook group on opting-out. The other two participants were done through snowball sampling. These limitations may present challenges with transferability to other parents who opted out their children from high-stakes tests.

Another limitation to the research study was that with the interviews conducted over the telephone. I provided participants with the option of conducting the interview over the telephone or in person. Since the interviews were conducted over the telephone, I was unable to observe the body language and non-verbal cues I would have gotten through in-person interviews. To address the limitation of conducting interviews over the phone, I listened for voice inflection and changes in emotions, feelings, and tone. When a person hesitated or asked to repeat a question, it was noted.

The last limitation involved the potential of researcher bias. In all research studies where only one researcher is present, there is always the potential for bias to occur. My biases included being a seventh and eighth-grade mathematics teacher New York whose curricula has high-stakes tests that parents are opting their children out of. I also hold biases from being a parent of a child whose child is currently required to take the high-stakes tests. To address these biases, I make sure to keep my personal opinions and feelings out of the conversation. The criteria set up in the research study excluded

parents of students whom I have taught to keep myself in a single role as only the researcher for the study.

Recommendations

After completing the literature review for Chapter 2 and analyzing the data from my research study, I have several recommendations for future research. This research study included ten parents from small suburban or rural school districts in New York who opted out their children from at least one, third- through eighth-grade high-stakes ELA or mathematics test. This research study contained a small sample. I would recommend another study to be done with a larger population of parents. A larger study could add more factors, experiences, or reasons to why parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. A larger study could provide more information on whether saturation was reached. A different study could involve using the same questions and asking parents who were in large suburban school district or city schools to see if parents' perspectives were similar.

One of the findings of this study included that some of the parent's opting-out are not sure if opting-out is in the best interest of their child. Further research is needed to see if other parents have similar feelings on the impact of opting-out on children's long-term education goals. Another research study could test to see if opting-out does have an impact on children's long-term educational goals.

Implications

The significance of this research study was to add the dimension of parents' perspectives to the current literature on the impact high-stakes testing is having on

education systems regarding curricula, instruction, learning, and student achievement. This researcher study identified messages parents were trying to send regarding opting-out. Further, this research study provided recommendations for changes to third- through eighth-grade high-stakes testing practices based on data analysis using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theories and Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theories.

This basic interpretative qualitative research study provided an opportunity for parents to explain their concerns, share their experiences, and express their parental perspective on the education system on high-stakes testing. There is a cost to the United States educational system associated with parents' opting-out their children from high-stakes testing; the cost involves not having a true picture of all students' achievement and proficiency with the rise in the number of students opting-out of high-stakes tests. This study may be beneficial for school administrators, politicians, policy makers, and state and federal educational government officials because it allowed for participants to voice their ideas on different ways for the state and federal governments could assess student achievement and proficiency and in doing so may lead to positive social change in high-stakes testing practices.

Recommendations for Action

This study may be important for students, parents, teachers, and even more for school administrators, politicians, policy makers, and state and federal educational government officials because it adds to the current research parents' perspectives on opting-out and identifies the reasons, factors, experiences, and personal events that led parents to opt-out their children from high-stakes tests in New York. Parents' voiced

their concerns with the current system of high-stakes testing. The following are recommendations for others to consider and come from the review of literature and the research study:

- Stop having market-driven corporations make the high-stakes tests students in third- through eighth-grade take.
- Allow teachers to work together to create the state tests and align the tests with the curriculum taught.
- Either allow teachers to grade tests or have the state grade tests in a timely manner so that the teachers can use the test results and data to drive instruction.

Conclusion

Since ANAR (Gardner et al., 1983), accountability systems in education have used students' test scores to measure student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school district performance. State and federal governments use student's high-stakes test scores to measure student achievement and student proficiency (NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015). With the number of parents opting-out across the United States rising each year, it is important to understand why parents are opting-out their children from high-stakes tests. This research study examined parents' perspectives on the factors, reasons, and experiences that led them to opting-out their children from high-stakes testing.

The results of this research study indicated parents perceived high-stakes tests as not an accurate representation of student knowledge and understanding; further, parents considered the current high-stakes testing to be unfair, inappropriate, and lack meaning. Giroux's (1988) critical pedagogy theory is that people should use knowledge as active

citizens in society to make changes. The parents in this research study were doing just that—they opted out their children from high-stakes testing to send a message about how they do not support the current system of high-stakes testing. One of the key findings of this study was that parents are not against tests; however, they are against the current system were corporations create tests and the results are not given in a timely manner or used in the best interest of their child. Further research is needed to see if other parents have similar feelings on the impact of opting-out on children's long–term education goals. This research study confirmed what other research studies found and extends knowledge in the field of education by identifying the specific reasons, personal events, and experiences that led parents to join the opt-out movement.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Demographic Information:

1. Tell me about your child/children: ages, gender, grade level, and how they do in school.

Interview Questions:

2. What high-stakes tests have you opted your children out of?
3. What is your definition of opting-out in regards to high-stakes testing?
4. What are your thoughts/feelings about opting-out of high-stakes testing?
5. Describe the personal events that lead to decide to opt-out your child/children from high-stakes tests.
6. Tell me about the process that you went through (thinking and actions) when choosing to opt-out?
   a. What factors influenced you to opt-out your child from high-stakes tests?
   b. What was the most important factor?
   c. Where there any people who influenced you?
7. Did the school or anyone else try to sway you in any way regarding opting-out? If so, how?

   a. When opted-out what did the student have to do?
8. Did you attend any support groups or informational meetings on opting-out (in person, online, or over the phone)?
   a. Did you get information from people, organizations, websites, pamphlet, or through other sources on opting-out prior to opting-out of high-stakes tests?

9. From your experience how has opting-out your child influenced your feelings and satisfaction level with the school your child attends?
    a. What is your level of satisfaction with education with your school district?
    b. What is your overall level of satisfaction with education in the United States?
10. What did you hope to gain from opting-out your children from high-stakes tests?
    a. Local level?
    b. State Level?
    c. Federal Level?
    d. What are the long-term educational plans for your child and how does opting-out impact those educational plans?
11. Instead of using high-stakes tests, what alternatives would you like to see as a way for the school district, state, and federal government to assess your child's achievement and proficiency levels?
    a. How would that way be beneficial to assessing learning, achievement, and proficiency?
12. In your opinion, should students' achievement and proficiency scores be used to evaluate: Why or why not? Please explain.
    a. School programs?
    b. Curriculum?
    c. Teachers?
    d. School districts?

13. Based on your experience what advice you would offer to other parents who are considering opting-out their children?
14. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share with me in regards to opting-out and high-stakes testing?

Exit Questions:

15. Do you have any questions regarding the interview process, transcription, data analysis, or anything specific to this research study?
    a. Is there anyone you know of that would be a good fit as a potential participant?