

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES ASSOCIATED WITH ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE FOR THIRD GRADE STUDENTS IN
NORTH FOREST AND ALDINE INDEPENDENT
SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN TEXAS**

A Record of Study

by

STEVEN DARRYLL SLAUGHTER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2007

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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ABSTRACT

Demographic Profiles Associated with Academic Performance for
Third Grade Students in North Forest and Aldine Independent
School Districts in Texas. (May 2007)

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The study examined the demographic profiles associated with academic performance for third grade students in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts (ISDs) in Texas. Specifically, the study showed the impact that gender, ethnicity, and whether students receive free or reduced lunch (parent income level), had on third grade reading Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores.

The population for this study was 368 of the 9,007 third grade students from both the North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts. Students in this study were of the predominant ethnicities at the schools: Black, Hispanic, and White. Utilizing this sample size allowed the study results to be generalized as trend data for all third grade students in the two districts. Data were collected during the spring semester of the 2002-2003 school year. Information for the study was provided through the Public Education Information Management

System (PEIMS) and Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports of both school districts.

Results showed that gender does not relate to the TAAS score in North Forest, but the income level is related to third grade reading TAAS performance. Income showed a significant relationship in that North Forest had a higher percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. This impacted the third grade TAAS reading scores. Gender was significantly related to third grade TAAS performances at Aldine ISD in that Aldine had 66 more girls to take the test than boys. There were only 54 boys who took the test. Gender had no significance in North Forest ISD because there was an even number of girls and boys who took the test. Ethnicity would not be analyzed at North Forest ISD due to the small percentage of non-Black students in the third grade. At Aldine ISD, no relationship was found between ethnicity and third grade TAAS performers. The success rate on third grade TAAS was significantly higher at Aldine ISD (percent passed 85.1) than at North Forest ISD (percent passed 39.6).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All of my accomplishments in life were made possible by a team of individuals. Just as every recipe calls for individual ingredients, such is the case for the successful completion of this research. I know this research is important to the furtherance of our children's education. I know that our State Representatives in Texas have used my research to justify Texas funding, or the lack thereof, in their passionate pleas on the House floor during debate.

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Thank you Mama, Daddy, and Sis for giving me all that is required to be successful in life. It's a wonderful life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Federal legislation's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) stated that gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents can affect a student's academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The Texas State Board of Education (1994) noted in *Quality, Equity, and Accountability: Long-Range Plan for Public Education (1991-1995)*, that boys usually perform better in math than girls and that girls usually read better than boys. The report also noted that White students perform better academically than Black and Hispanic students. According to the National Institute for Literacy (2001), other factors that dramatically affect a student's academic performance include: (a) income level of the household, (b) whether or not there are both parents in the home, (c) and the number of siblings within a household.

The report also stated that many times if there are several children in a household with limited income, the older children take care of the younger ones, in lieu of daycare. As a result, the older students' school attendance is low and they may experience diminished academic performance. Often these absences will cause the school's average daily attendance (ADA) to go down.

The style and format of this study follow that of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

Conversely, a high household income level can also affect a student's academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). That demographic factor alone can provide the parent with the option to hire a babysitter for younger siblings, thus allowing older students to maintain a near perfect school attendance record. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), better school attendance often translates to better academic performance.

Prior to the 2002-2003 school year, the TAAS test was the instrument used to assess student's reading ability. Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, the academic assessment instrument was the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). According to Chapter 110, Subchapter A of the Texas Access Code for English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 3, third grade students read grade-level material fluently and with comprehension (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2003b).

The accountability movement has focused renewed attention on longstanding achievement gaps related to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2005). How districts, schools, and teachers successfully close gaps is the main subject. Student engagement, rigorous curriculum, social/emotional support, preparation programs, disaggregated data analysis, and extra help for struggling students are some solutions to closing the gaps (McTighe & Wiggins, 1999).

McTighe and Wiggins (1999) state that students use root words, prefixes, suffixes, and derivational endings to recognize words. Students demonstrate knowledge of synonyms, antonyms, and multi-meaning words. Students are beginning to distinguish fact from opinion in texts. During class discussions, third grade students support their ideas and inferences by citing portions of the text being discussed. McTighe and Wiggins (1999) further note that students read in a variety of genres, including realistic and imaginative fiction, nonfiction, and poetry from classic and contemporary works; it is the goal of the state that all children read on grade level by the end of grade 3 and continue to read on grade level or higher throughout their schooling. Texas school districts have more strenuous ties with accountability. There are about 16 different areas under the accountability umbrella for Texas Public Schools (TEA, 2003b).

The District and Campus Planning and Decision-Making Resource Guide (TEA, 2003a) is a resource to school districts that seek ways to implement and maintain effective district-campus-level planning and decision-making and to provide technical support by outlining current state and federal requirements pertaining to many areas of district and campus responsibilities. For the former instrument (TAAS), the Texas Education Agency has collected and examined comprehensive data, including, but not limited to, gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents of the student taking the test.

The study of that data has heightened already existing concerns surrounding inequities in school financing as related to student achievement. The aim of any school funding system must be to support student achievement. Strategies to achieve that aim must be tailored to the changing demographic and economic characteristics of each district (TEA, 1999). Based on a 1999 report from the Texas Education Agency, low-income families and limited-English proficient families, which include Hispanics, will grow at a 7% rate each. There is a corresponding increase in students labeled “disadvantaged” or at risk. For the Black and Hispanic student populations described as at risk, the number has doubled (TEA, 2002b). According to current public school finance information, Senate Bill 7 was created in 1993 and is known as “Robin Hood,” which required wealthier school districts to share monies with the poorer districts. This was due to several legislative sessions’ dealings with the “separate but equal” clause in the Edgewood v. Kirby court case (L. Serna, personal communication, August 12, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Within the past three decades, the home environment has been identified as being a contributing factor in a child’s educational and cognitive development. Bloom (1986) hypothesized that the home environment had significant effects on the level of student learning. The home environment exerts direct (Gyles, 1990; Song & Hattie, 1984) and indirect effects on the

child's achievement (Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Potterbaum, & Aubrey, 1986). Iverson and Walberg (1982) found that the socio-psychological environment and intellectual stimulation in the home are prominent in influencing academic ability and achievement. Children's academic achievement was found to be effected by varying family processes (Campbell & Wu, 1994). The home environment and family processes provide a network of physical, social, and intellectual forces and factors that affect the student's learning. The family's level of encouragement, expectations, and educational activities in the home is related to socio-economic status (Song & Hattie, 1984). Families from different socio-economic groups create different learning environments that affect the child's academic achievement (Bloom, 1986). Schneider and Coleman (1993) hypothesized that parental involvement can counteract the negative effects low socio-economic background and significantly improve students' performance. Parental involvement concerns the utilization of numerous family processes which, in turn, create opportunities for learning (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). In an effort to better explain the effect of the demographics of gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents on student achievement, this study focused on two independent school districts in Texas. Specifically, this study compared the effect of demographics on the scores on the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) Test. Third grade students in the Aldine Independent School District and North Forest Independent School District were

studied. This research examined the relationship between gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents and the third grade TAAS reading score.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate demographic profiles associated with academic performance between third grade students in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts in Texas. Gender, ethnicity, income level of parents, and TAAS reading scores of third grade students in the North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts, in Texas were studied.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

1. Is there a difference in TAAS reading scores (2003), when compared to gender, ethnicity, and/or income level of parents, as reported in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) database for selected third grade students in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts, in Texas?
2. Do differences exist on academic performances of TAAS reading scores between third grade students when compared to gender, ethnicity, and/or income level of parents in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts in Texas?

Operational Definitions

Academic Performance: Individual student, campus, and grade level performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS): The state-level database of information recorded about all independent school districts and public school campuses in Texas. These data include, but are not limited to, student performance on the TAAS, attendance, dropouts, etc.

Aldine Independent School District (ISD): According to the 2001 Aldine Independent School District Profile, Aldine was the 11th largest school district in Texas. The tax rate is \$1.618 per \$100 assessed market value. Its ethnic composition is 54.7% Hispanic, 33.7% Black, 8.7% Anglo, 2.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and .1% Native-American. The district has about 68 schools, ranging from an Even Start center to 7 high school campuses. Aldine has 54,465 students. The district covers 111 square miles in North Harris County.

Ethnicity: Of or relating to a community of physical and mental traits possessed by the members of a group as a product of their common heredity and cultural tradition (Merriam-Webster, 2000).

Gender: A distinguishable characteristic such as masculine or feminine, or sex.

Income Level: A gain or recurrent benefit that is usually measured in money an for a given period of time, derived from capital, labor, or a combination of both (Tomlinson, 1999). This data came from the AEIS report and PEIMS data reported from the two Texas school districts.

North Forest Independent School District (ISD): A predominately Black lower to middleclass school district located in Northeast Houston. This district was organized in 1946 when two common school districts on the Northeast fringe of Houston, which is 77% Black, 22% Hispanic, and about .6% Anglo, .09% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0% Native-American. The district has 17 schools ranging from a Pre-kindergarten center to two high school campuses. North Forest has approximately 11,000 students.

Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Another database used by Texas school districts to retrieve student information that is made available to the public and also includes student identification number, name, birth dates, social security number, parental information, transportation information, previous school attended, and whether or not student receives free or reduced lunch (parent income level).

Selected Demographic Variables: Statistics dealing with human populations: gender, ethnicity, and income level of third grade students in the North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts in Texas.

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) Reading: Assesses students in several objectives in this subject area: context clues, main idea, fact/non-fact, summary, sequential order, and word meaning.

Third Grade Student: A student who is usually 7-8 years old, who has successfully completed first and second grade curriculum. The third grade student is required to take a TAAS reading and TAAS math test.

Assumptions

1. The Texas Education Agency accurately recorded PEIMS and AEIS data the school districts reported.
2. The researcher was accurate in interpreting PEIMS and AEIS data.
3. The methodology proposed and described here offers a logical and appropriate design for this particular research project.

Limitations

1. The study was limited to selected third grade students from the two districts.
2. The study was limited to data provided from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) database reported by the Texas Education Agency.

Significance Statement

This research provided insights into the effects of the demographics of gender ethnicity and income level of parents on passing rates on the reading portion of the third grade TAAS test (TEA, 2003b). According to the Texas Education Agency's Chapter 110 of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading, Subchapter A, Third Grade states that

The student reads with fluency and understanding in texts at appropriate difficulty levels. The student is expected to read regularly in instructional-level materials that are challenging but manageable (texts in which no more than approximately 1 in 10 words is difficult for the reader; the "typical" third grader reads 80 wpm). (TEA, 2003b, p. 14).

Fluency and comprehension are the two areas of reading where third grade students struggle (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). More research on student reading test performance can and will impact the current No Child Left Behind Act. This bans social promotion: if a child cannot successfully pass his/her grade level reading assessment, he/she will not be promoted to the next grade.

This study also showed school administrators that there is a need for reading intervention programs, after-school programs, and mentoring programs to assist third grade students in reading. Finally, identified factors from this study provided school officials with research that will assist third grade students in the area of reading.

Contents of the Record of Study

The record of study is organized into five major divisions or chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction, a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and a research significance statement. Chapter II contains a review of the literature. The methodology and procedures implemented in the data collection are found in Chapter III. Chapter IV reports the analysis and comparisons of the data collected in this study. Chapter V, the final chapter, presents researcher's summary, conclusions, and implications in addition to recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The investigative focus of the study was the community demographic profiles associated with the differences in academic performance between students in third grade in the North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts. Specific emphasis was placed on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading scores of each school district. With this being the case, there is a need to refine our knowledge about what makes for truly successful education and student motivation (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton & Kucan, 1998). Are third grade students in Aldine more motivated and exposed to more academic experiences than third grade students in North Forest? The classroom should be a space where we are all in power in different ways (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996).

This study included 2002-2003 TAAS data on 467 third grade students from both North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts and assumed that since Aldine is a larger district, the students in Aldine are exposed to more academic resources than those students in North Forest. It is hypothesized that by researching the demographic data of these two communities, educators may better understand the impact that demographics have on student performance. In a follow-up study of children from low-income families, Campbell and Ramey

(1994) showed how early intervention on the intellectual and academic achievement of students can cause great effectiveness.

The definition of TAAS Reading and Accountability Data was used (TEA, 2002b) for purposes of this study. As part of a five-question instrument, a demographic profile of the community included topics such as gender, ethnicity, and parent income levels. Proctor and Dalker (2003) showed the poverty level in the U.S. from 1959 to 2003 in a report on poverty. The report showed how the number of people in families was below poverty level and how this number compares a family's income with its poverty threshold and expresses that as a fraction. This is significant because literacy and economic status go hand in hand.

Purposes of Education

The primary purpose of education should be to enable individual humans to fulfill their proper role in their larger pattern of meaning (Means & Knapp, 1991). According to the Society for Research in Child Development (1996), an article about race, ethnicity, and culture in child development states that there are certain developmental processes that occur for children from racial/ethnic minority groups in specific ecological contexts, such as urban/rural neighborhoods, segregated/integrated settings, and low income/middle class.

von Zastrow and Janc (2004) state that:

Problems learning to read come from a combination of factors. In general, children who are most at-risk for reading failure are those who

enter school with limited exposure to language and who have little prior understanding of concepts related to phonemic sensitivity, letter knowledge, print awareness, the purposes of reading, and general verbal skills, including vocabulary. (pp. 29-30)

Illiteracy Factors

Children raised in poverty, and with limited proficiency in English and children from homes where the parents' reading levels are low are relatively predisposed to reading failure (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This is so because learning to read is based in large part on developing language and literacy-related skills very early in life (Moats & Lyon, 1996). This means reading out loud to children has proven to be a way for vocabulary and language to expand. Many times, parents do not take the time to read out loud to their children, and some parents cannot read themselves. This impacts student achievement (Evers & Peters, 1996). The Texas school funding system also impacts student achievement according to a September 2004 article by David J. Hoff entitled, "Texas Judge Rules Funds Not Enough" in *Education Week*. The article explained that a Texas judge declared the state's beleaguered school funding system unconstitutional because the system failed to close the achievement gap between White and minority students. The article further noted that the Texas education system has attempted to close this gap by offering more academic programs for students who are categorized "at-risk." These at-risk students are offered after school tutorials in math and reading (L. C. Moats, personal communication, 1999). "The success of these programs

have been tracked and proven to be high” (Katims, 2000, pp. 46). These programs will remain in place to assist students to raise state achievement test scores.

Reading Assessments

Texas’ achievement test for third grade students was the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, which the student will eventually have to pass in order to move to the next grade level. A related article entitled “An Essential Component of Successful Schools,” discusses how New York City school leaders are withstanding intense criticism for holding back their third grade students who failed their city reading assessment (Peixotto & Fager 1998). The school leaders have announced that the program is so successful that they plan to extend it to fifth grade.

In an article entitled, “Helping Children Master the Tricks and Avoid the Traps of Standardized Tests,” Calkins, Montgomery, and Santman (1998) explains that children can improve and change their test-taking habits if they are taught about their misleading work patterns. Teaching children about the traps they tend to fall into may well be the most powerful, specific preparation teachers can give them for the day of the test (Calkins et al., 1998). These hints will be helpful to third-grade students in Texas school districts similar to North Forest and Aldine. Another study that was beneficial to this study was *Forging Partnerships Between Mexican American Parents and the Schools* (Texas

Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning, 1995). This digest expounded on how parental involvement impacts student achievement. According to Chavkin (1993) and Henderson and Berla (1994), research has shown that one of the most promising ways to increase students' achievement is to involve their families.

Family Impacts on Education

Walberg (1984) found that family participation in education was twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status. Mexican American parents do care about their children's education. They see the school's role as instilling knowledge, and they see their own roles as meeting and providing basic needs as well as instilling respect and proper behavior (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). The Mexican American parents believe that one job should not interfere with the other. In an article entitled "Bridges to Literacy," Rosenkoetter and Barton (2001) state that:

Reading emerges after instruction, in children who are well nourished and thriving in safe homes and neighborhoods, in children who are nurtured by strong families who receive the services they need from living in caring communities. (p. 4)

Learning to read is affected by "the foundation skills of phonological processing, print awareness, and oral language" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001, p. 12). Where these components are lacking, children may be "unready" to begin some of the activities in the kindergarten's literacy curriculum, and they are more likely than other children to be poor readers in the long term

(Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). The new three-word aim of the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Division in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement underscores the priority of building an adequate foundation for later reading success: relationships, resiliency, and readiness (Karp, 1996).

Literacy Development

Literacy problems in the primary grades and beyond cross racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic lines, but the children at greatest risk for reading problems in elementary school are those who start kindergarten with weak language skills, poor abilities to attend to the sounds of language as opposed to its specific meanings, deficient letter recognition, and unfamiliarity with the basic purposes and strategies of reading. Failure at literacy is much more common among children in poverty, children of color, children whose primary language is not English, those with preschool language impairments, and students whose parents had difficulty learning to read (Snow et al., 1998). Because school failure is "catastrophic" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001, p.12) in today's society, it is especially important that young children in these risk groups have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate emergent literacy experiences prior to effective formal reading programs in the primary grades. It is also important for caregivers to screen young children for delays or disabilities and to refer their families to special services for additional assessment and, perhaps, early childhood intervention (Sandall, McLean, &

Smith, 2000). Learning to read is one task about which the nation is truly saying, "It matters." Now families, communities, and legislators need to work together to build the bridges.

Public Education Court Cases

Kritsonis (2002) addressed the significance of certain court cases on student achievement. The educational system has changed since the 1950's in part because of major court decisions related to the issue of desegregation. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) established that the doctrine of separate but equal in education is a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Another case, *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), determined that local school boards should immediately take whatever steps are necessary to achieve a unitary system. *The Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) case decided that the transportation of students to opposite-race school is permissible to achieve desegregation. In the *Keyes v. School District No. 1 (Denver)* (1973) case, the proof of intent to segregate in one part of a district was determined to be sufficient to find the entire district to be segregated and to warrant a district-wide remedy. For purposes of defining a segregated school, Blacks and Hispanics may be considered together. *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) was devised for desegregation, but the court determined that the scope of the desegregation remedy cannot exceed the scope of the violation.

The Dayton Board of Education v. Brickman (1977) case decision mandated that desegregation plans cannot exceed the impact of the segregatory practices. The *Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell* (1991) decision was that desegregation decrees are not intended to operate in perpetuity and can be dissolved when a district has made a good faith effort to comply and, to the extent practical, has eliminated the vestiges of past discrimination. As a result of *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), the lower courts can relinquish supervision of a school district under a desegregation decree in incremental stages before full compliance has been achieved in every area of school operations. *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995) resulted in the following: "Once the effects of legally imposed segregation have been eliminated, the goal of desegregation plans need not be to maintain racial balance but to return control to state and local authorities" (Kritsonis, 2002, p. 224). Each of these United States Supreme Court desegregation cases relate to public schools and they have impacted the way community demographics influence student achievement.

Media on Demographics

In a 1995 video entitled *Cultural Baggage*, emphasis is placed on a variety of stereotypes to draw attention to cultural diversity; this presentation shows some of the misconceptions people have regarding culture and focuses on cultural biases and roadblocks to the advancement of Hispanic and Black

students (Pyramid Films, 1995). In a 2000 video entitled, *Culture and Ethnicity*, the focus is students learning to appreciate other cultures and the meaning of culture (Zimmerman & Marchetti, 2000). Social skills are dealt with regarding prejudice behaviors (*Diversity Elementary Series*, 2001).

Another film entitled, *Culture: What is it?* defines culture as the sum total of the human experience, a people's whole way of life (Newman, 1993). The film divides culture into material and non-material types and examples are explained from around the world. Differences between cultures and traits are passed down from generation-to-generation (Newman, 1993).

Harness the Rainbow Series adopted a program in 2000, called *Diversity and the Bottom Line*. This program showed how a climate can be created at the public school and how students can learn from administrators and teachers, to embrace diversity and change occurring in our heterogeneous society. The Processes for Success Series (Nelson, 1994) created a curriculum that was named *Diversity in the Classroom/Multicultural Education*. This 1994 series presented curriculum from different ethnic and cultural points of view. It also trained students to live in a multi-cultural society. *Diversity Elementary Series* (2001) was a lesson that tied in many aspects to the identity and diversity to feature the fact that all families are normal and come in all shapes and sizes. Family backgrounds, how and where they live, are points of focus in this series. In a community search program called Epodunk, the power of place,

community demographics are broken down by population, race, and ethnicity, income and education levels (*Diversity Elementary Series*, 2001).

Improvement for All Children

The Rural and Low-Income Program, administered through the U.S. Department and Office of Elementary/Secondary Education (2002), is one of the programs designed to address the needs of rural, low-income schools. This program attempts to help ensure equal access to services leading to such improvement for all children, particularly children who are educationally disadvantaged, Native American, children of migrant workers, or homeless. A direct quote from U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Page, in a speech regarding education states:

The program gives tools for student success to parents. Well-informed parents and teachers are essential to an America where every child will be educated and no child left behind. There is no more powerful advocate for children than a parent armed with information and options. (R. Page, personal communication, March 23, 2001)

The law recognizes that parents are their children's first and most important teachers, and for children to be successful in school, parents and families need to be actively involved in their children's learning. They need to become involved early and stay involved throughout the school year. At the heart of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, is a promise to raise standards for all children and to help all children to meet those standards. Promoting educational excellence for all Americans is the U.S. Department of Education's

motto. Within that motto, is the attempt to close the achievement gaps in America's public schools. Scores on statewide tests are helpful for parents to keep up with how their children are doing.

Testing and Federal Grant Role

Scores are also used for parents and the community to evaluate how well their schools are performing (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment in Reading, 2003).

Scores on statewide tests are very useful for schools to evaluate how well their students are performing. Another reason we test is to see whether or not children are falling behind. If students aren't tested every year, a student can lose a year or more precious time that can't be replaced. (Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1995, p. 1)

The U.S. Department of Education's No Child Left Behind Act holds schools accountable for academic achievement. It encourages parental confidence and community involvement in education. In an article entitled "Literacy Before Schooling," Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) note that the more parents and taxpayers know about the academic achievement of their children and overall condition of schools, including safety and teacher quality, the more likely they are to be involved in the schools and the public school system.

Student Achievement

Equipped with information on academic results, parents and community members can make better choices and decisions. Student academic achievement disaggregated by subgroups and comparisons of students at basic, proficient, and advanced levels of academic achievement are two of the indicators that must be met by each school (Texas Education Agency, 2002a). This information is released on state report cards and distributed among Texas school districts. There are currently 17 states that test third through eighth grade students in math and reading. Within these 17 states, parents and teachers show strong support for higher academic standards. Results of the test, not money, are the focus. The educational commitment is to provide every boy and girl with a quality education, regardless of ethnicity, income, or background. President Bush states:

Educating every child is the greatest moral challenge of our time. We must test all groups of students, so we can measure the achievement gap, define it and attack it with the full knowledge and support of our communities. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

The president is committed to eliminating the achievement gap, not hiding it within school or statewide averages. That is why he wants each school to examine achievement every year in third through eighth grades by race, ethnicity, economic background, and disabilities. That way we will not leave any child behind. The challenge is to close the achievement gap differences in the academic performance between different ethnic groups. The solution is to

attack the soft bigotry of low expectations and demand that schools close the achievement gap between Blacks and White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

When does a child learn to read? The U.S. Department of Education (2002) believes that children learn to read the day they are born and continue to learn through the end of third grade. Richgels (2001) states that a child learns to read in kindergarten or first grade. Hart and Risley (1995) say that a child learns reading and writing at home, long before they go to school. Reading is the basis for learning and school success. Reading is learned primarily in the classroom, but many students need extra time and extra help. Research shows that tutoring is a great way for individuals and groups outside school to support learning. Every child has the power to succeed in school and in life and every parent, family member, and caregiver can help (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2003).

National Reading Programs

The U.S. Department of Education (2002) created a national effort to make every child a proficient reader, and the program entitled *Reading First* has three basic premises: (a) all but a very small number of children can be taught to be successful readers, (b) prevention of reading problems is far more cost effective and efficient than remediation, and (c) reading failure can be prevented by relying on the extensive scientific research base in reading. This

scientifically based program states that it is not subject to fads and fashions. It makes teaching more effective, productive, and efficient; and it is less subject to political correctness.

In a National Center for Education Statistics (2003) report entitled, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading Highlights 2003*, several assessment reports for the nation were given in reading. These reports presented results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2003 fourth and eighth grade reading assessment for the nation, for participating states and other jurisdictions, and for participating urban districts. Assessment results are described in terms of students' average reading score on a 0-500 scale and in terms of the percentage of students attaining each of three achievement levels: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. National and district level scores at different percentiles on the scale (indicating the percentage of students whose scores fell below a particular point) are also discussed.

This report also provides results for subgroups of students defined by various background characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, and students' eligibility for free/reduced lunch). Comparisons are made to results from previous years in which the assessment was administered. In addition to the 2003 results, national results are reported from the 1992, 1994, 1998, 2000, and 2002 assessments. Results for participating urban districts are reported for 2002 and 2003. The national results from the assessment showed no measurable difference between the average fourth-grade reading score in 2003

and the score in 1992. Of the 42 states and jurisdictions that participated in the 1998 and 2003 fourth grade reading assessments, 13 showed increases in average scores and 5 showed declines.

The report also includes sample assessment questions and examples of student responses. Appendices include information on national, state, and district samples, school and student participation rates, participation and accommodation of students with disabilities and or limited English proficient students, subgroup percentages, state/level contextual variables, and sample texts from the NAEP 2003 reading assessment (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003).

Another program called *Teaching Children to Read* that works in reading instruction was derived from an April 2000 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This evidence based assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction, gives five essential components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This program is aimed at teaching schools and teachers to produce successful readers by focusing on high quality, comprehensive K-3 reading instruction for all children; by basing instructional decisions on a “what works” basis; and by putting the solid research base on reading into the hands of teachers. In an article called *The Teachability Index: Can Disadvantaged Students Learn*, Greene and Forster (2004) state the personal advantages and disadvantages that students bring to

school with them plays an important role in public discussion of education policy.

Defenders of the status quo claim the reason is that students are less teachable than they used to be; problems like poverty and social dysfunction have made schools' job harder. The article explains that student disadvantages that pose challenges to learning have declined 8.7% since 1970. Children's physical health and economic security have substantially improved, and preschool enrollment has grown dramatically. Broken homes and students whose native language isn't English are more common, but these changes have been more than offset by ongoing improvements in children's well-being.

According to Greene and Forster (2004) of The Teachability Index:

The states with the highest scores on the School Performance Index were Montana, Colorado, Kansas, Texas, and North Carolina. Students in these states had the highest levels of academic achievement relative to their teachability; that is, these states had actual achievement levels that were the furthest above the levels we would expect to see, given the disadvantages that students faced. (p. 2)

This index expresses the level of student achievement in each state expressed as a percentage of the level that would be predicted by the teachability of its students and its level of education spending. That particular study indicated that teachability cannot serve as an excuse for the education system's failure to perform, and it provides evidence that student disadvantages are not destiny: some schools do much better than others at educating students with low levels of teachability. Teachability is defined as "the various kinds of advantages and

disadvantages that children bring with them when they walk in the schoolhouse door (Greene & Forster, 2004, pp. 1-16).

The Teachability Index

The Teachability Index is made up of six component indexes. These are the Readiness Index, the Economics Index, the Community Index, the Community Index, the Health Index, the Race Index, and the Family Index. Each of these indices is made up of a number of factors such as family incomes, single parenthood rates, and preschool attendance rates affecting the student teachability. The factors are tracked from 1970 to 2001 in order to measure teachability over the period during which inflation-adjusted education spending has doubled.

The Readiness Index includes preschool enrollment, language other than English, and parents' education. This index measured the amount of academic preparation and support that students receive before or outside of school. The Community Index included crime victimization, drug use, religious observance, and residential mobility. This index measured the presence of helpful and harmful social influences in children's lives (Greene & Forster, 2004).

The crime victimization factor was the number of children ages 12 to 19 per 1,000 in the population victimized by violent crime based on 2001 U.S. Department of Justice data. The 2001 data also stated that students who

suffered the trauma of victimization were likely to have more difficulty learning. Health and Human Services provided data on the measurement of drug use.

This data showed that the percentage of twelfth graders who ever used illicit drugs were more difficult to teach because of the harmful effects of drug use (Song & Hattie, 1984). Greene and Forster (2004) further state that the religious observance factor showed that students who attended religious services every week or almost every week, were more exposed to social influences that would make them more teachable. The National Science Foundation data showed that supportive communities and positive behavioral norms were more prevalent with these students. The residential mobility factor measured the percentage of people in the population that had changed residences in the previous year, based on U.S. Census data. When families moved, the children were separated from their social networks and familiar surroundings, an emotional strain that reduced teachability.

The Economics Index (Greene & Forster, 2004), included income and poverty. This index measured the material well-being of students. Greater family wealth leads to higher levels of student teachability because students from wealthier families will have fewer material challenges in their lives to hinder their learning and will receive more material support to aid their learning (in the form of academic supplies, tutoring, etc.). The measurement of income is the median family income in constant 2001 dollars, based on U.S. Census data. The measurement of poverty was the mean family income for families in

the lowest quintile of income, based on U.S. Census data. That allowed specific tracking of the material well-being of poor families. The measurement of poverty provides information on the changing state of material well-being among those who have the least amount of wealth. Berlinder and Biddle (as cited in Greene & Forster, 2004) speak in terms of material well-being:

It is very difficult to provide good schooling from impoverished students who may come to school hungry or in cast-off and torn clothing, who suffer from untreated medical problems who live in neighborhoods that are rife with crime violence, or who come from homes that lack even basic amenities-let alone books and other supports for education. (pp. 12-13)

The Health Index included disabilities, mortality, low birth-weight survival, and suicide (Greene & Forster, 2004). The measurement of disabilities is the percentage of student placed in special education programs with disability diagnoses other than specific learning disabilities, based on U.S. Department of Education data. Disabled students face a variety of learning challenges. Mortality was measured by using the number of children aged 14 and under per 100,000 in the population who died, based on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data. According to this data, when children's mortality rates go up, the child's health has worsened, and children, thus, will have more difficulty learning. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data indicates that the measurement of low birth weight survival is the percentage of all babies born with weights below 2,500 grams multiplied by the percentage of babies in that category who do not suffer infant death. Babies with low birth weights are more likely to develop health problems that interfere with learning.

Suicide rates provide an indicator of children's level of mental health; when suicides rates go up, this indicates that mental health has worsened, and students thus will have more difficulty learning (Greene & Forster, 2004).

The Race Index (Greene & Forster, 2004), which includes Non-Hispanic Whites, measured the changing racial composition of the student population. Research has shown that minority students face greater disadvantages that pose special challenges for educating them. The Family Index, which is a part of Greene and Forster's (2004) indices, measured the percentage of all live births in which the mother is under age 18. Teenage births reduce the teachability of the student population because children raised by teenage parents face greater difficulties in a number of ways and because teenage students who are mothers themselves will be carrying the enormous burden of motherhood while also pursuing their studies (Greene & Forster, 2004). DiCaelers (2004) wrote in "Disadvantaged Pupils Lack Literacy Skills," that there is a direct link between poverty and lack of literacy. In an article published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2003) entitled, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading Highlights 2003*, student performance is reported in terms of average scaled scores on the national assessment of education performance reading scale and the percentages of students who attained the achievement levels set by the National Assessment Governing Board. Student performance is reported by gender, race/ethnicity, and eligibility for

free/reduced-price school lunch, and parents' highest level of education, and for students with disabilities and limited-English-proficient students.

Reading Readiness Studies

Another article published by the National Center for Education Statistics (Rathbun & West, 2004), *From Kindergarten Through Third Grade: Children's Beginning School Experiences*, highlights children's gains in both reading and math over their first four years of school. Comparisons are made in relation to children's sex, race/ethnicity, and number of family risk factors. Two studies of education reform in Texas have deepened the educational inequity between Whites and minorities and widened the educational gap between rich and poor students.

Texas is frequently cited in *Education Week*, (a national publication), as a national leader in efforts to raise academic performance and hold schools accountable for student performance. At the center of these efforts is the statewide standardized test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), administered to public school children in grades 3 through 10. Students had to achieve a minimum score in order to proceed to the next grade and to graduate from high school. In addition, TAAS scores were broken down by dropout figures, attendance rates, and by racial, ethnic, and economic groups. This data were used to rate schools and accredit districts. The state requires minimum passing rates for each student group on the TAAS test in reading, writing, and

math; a 94% attendance rate; and a maximum dropout rate of 6%. Top scoring schools receive cash bonuses, while low-performing schools are subject to public hearings and ultimately, to state takeover. This information is still pertinent today, but now the TAAS tests are replaced by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests.

In one study, Linda McNeil of Rice University and Angela Valenzuela of The University of Texas examined the impact of TAAS on the quality of instruction, curriculum, and classroom practices in Texas schools, focusing on those that serve large numbers of minority and economically disadvantaged populations (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000). The authors' overall conclusion was that TAAS masks the real problems of inequity that underlie the failure to adequately educate children. By shifting funds, public attention, and scarce organizational and budgetary resources away from schools and into the coffers of the testing industry vendors, the futures of poor and minority children and the schools they attend get compromised. Key findings from the study indicated that an achievement gap remains. The achievement gaps stated the following information:

- Between 1996 and 1998, almost twice as many Black and Hispanic students as White students had not completed the TAAS exit-level tests required to obtain a Texas high school diploma.
- Pressure to raise TAAS scores led teachers to spend class time, often several hours each week, drilling students on practice exam

materials. Much of this time was spent learning how to bubble-in answers, how to weed out obviously wrong answers, and how to become accustomed to multiple-choice, computer-scored formats.

- Although practice tests and classroom drills have raised the pass rate for the reading section of the TAAS in high schools, few students are able to use those same skills to complete actual reading assignments outside of class, to make meaning of literature, or to connect reading assignments to other parts of the course such as discussion and writing.
- Teachers are encouraged or required to suspend or interrupt science, social studies, and other core subjects not tested by TAAS for TAAS preparation in other disciplines. In addition, library research, independent projects, science experiments, oral histories, and long-term writing assignments different from those being tested in a particular year are all being eliminated or reduced in those schools where TAAS scores have been low.
- In low-performing schools, the TAAS system of testing encourages the diversion of scarce school resources (including dollars for instructional materials) into TAAS-prep materials rather than into the kinds of instructional resources available to teachers and children in middleclass and wealthy schools (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000).

Orfield (1999), states:

What we're finding out from Texas is truly frightening: when high stakes tests drive education reform, they can reduce the curriculum in high poverty schools to little more than test preparation. Assessment is, of course, a vital part of education, but the stakes attached to these tests are way out of balance when such a limited and imperfect measure of achievement counts for more than all the assessments of all the students' teachers. (p. 67)

The National Academy of Sciences' (1999) report entitled, *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*, recommends that single tests never be used as the sole determiner or grade promotion. He believes that high quality curriculum and instruction supported by assessment and timely intervention when students fall behind is a much more effective approach.

The legality of linking high school graduation to test scores in Texas has been challenged by the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF). In a suit filed in a federal district court against the Texas Education Agency in October 1997, Simpson (2000) stated that

Approximately 7,500 students each year do not pass the TAAS test and are denied a diploma...Over half of Texas' minority students in the sophomore year do not pass one or more parts of the TAAS test, and approximately 85% of the students who do not pass the TAAS in May before graduation are Mexican American or African American. (p. 4).

Universal Reading Problems

The reading problem exists in Texas, in other states and in other countries, as well. In Oosterwyk's (2004) article, *Sixty Percent of W. Cape Third Graders Can't Read or Write*, many of their students have failed provincial

education department literacy and number tests. The article states that the reasons vary from poor teacher training to student poverty. Not only does Texas or the United States have a problem with demographic profiles impacting student achievement, but so does South Africa-Cape Cod. Rachel Balie (as cited in Oosterwyk, 2004), a literacy teacher working among farm workers, said the importance of mother-tongue literacy at the foundation phase could not be underestimated and that children's reading programs should be linked to their experiences. Balie (as cited in Oosterwyk, 2004) said, "Children not only need good social skills, they also need to be able to read and write" (p. 17). The problem with a multiracial society worldwide, still exists when it comes to student achievement.

In an article entitled "A Multiracial Society With Segregated Schools: Study Asks: Are We Losing the Dream?" Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield (2003) point out that our nation's public schools are becoming steadily more non-White, as the minority student enrollment approaches 40% of all U.S. public school students, almost twice the share of minority school students during the 1960s. Almost half of all public school students in the East and the South are minority students. The desegregation of Black students, which increased continuously from the 1950s to the late 1980s, has now receded to levels not seen in three decades, according to a study from the Civil Rights Project at Harvard, "A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?" (Frankenberg et al., 2003) Black students are experiencing the most

rapid re segregation in the South, triggered by Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s and have now lost all progress recorded since the 1960s.

“Martin Luther King’s dream is being honored in theory and dishonored in the decisions and practices that are turning our schools back to segregation” said Orfield (as cited in the National Academy of Sciences, 1999, p. 10). Orfield is a professor of education and social policy and co-director of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard.

Even though this study focuses on third grade reading achievement, Ogle, Sen, and Pahlke, (2003) wrote a report called *International Comparisons in Fourth-Grade Reading Literacy: Findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2001*. This report describes the reading literacy of fourth graders in 35 countries, including the United States. Comparisons of average reading scores are exhibited, and there are two reading subscales and a combined reading scale, as well as achievement broken out by sex, internationally. The United States comparisons are by race/ethnicity, by both public and private schools, and by the poverty level of the school. Within this report, reading literacy is addressed and the performance and distribution is highlighted. The report was published in April of 2003 (NCES, 2003), and it even focused on international benchmarking. Benchmarking is important to reading literacy because it allows students to learn certain reading skills one step at a time. At the beginning of the school year, third grade students in particular, have to know how to decode words and

read on grade level. The benchmark assessments allow teachers to find out where deficits are in student reading skills. It allows the teacher to find gaps and work towards closing them in time for the student to be successful on the state standardized tests. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2003) presented results from a fourth grade reading assessment that divided students into different subgroups. The subgroups examined were gender, race/ethnicity, region of the country, type of location, eligibility for the free/reduced lunch program, and type of school. The assessment was tracked in 1992, 1994, 1998, and again in 2000.

The assessments were for reading, and they showed that female students outperformed male students (NCES, 2003). It also showed that in 2000, female students outperformed male students. The gap in average scores between males and females was larger in 2000 than in 1998 in both sets of results. The percentages of the reading scores ranged from basic, to proficient, to advanced. Results by race/ethnicity showed significant differences in score comparisons.

In the 2000 assessment, Hispanic students who received accommodations had an average scale score that was seven points lower than the results for the Hispanic students that did not include those who received accommodations. The other subgroup categories were: White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian (including Alaskan native). Out of a

possible 250 points on the reading assessment, the following table (Table 2.1) shows the scores from the 2000 assessment:

Looking over the scores showed that there were some significant differences in the reading scores between ethnic groups. The most noticeable differences were between the Black students and the Asian students each year. In 1992, the Asian student score was 214, while the Black student score was 193. In 1994, the Asian student score was 229, while the Black student scores were 187. In 1998, the Asian student scores were 225, while the Black student scores were 194. In 2000, the Asian student scores 232, while the Black student scores were 193. Those scores showed the most differences within a six- to eight-year period.

Table 2.1. NCES Report Card for the Nation and States from 1992 to 2000
Divided into Subgroups

Ethnicity	1992	1994	1998	2000
White	225	224	227	226
Black	193	187	194	193
Hispanic	201	191	196	197
Asian	214	229	225	232
American Indian	197	201	202	196

Note. A maximum score was 250.

The eligibility for the free/reduced lunch program was determined through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2000) Income Eligibility Guidelines, whereby students from families near or below the poverty line can be assured of having a wholesome meal at school. As the only federally mandated ongoing assessment of student reading achievement on a national scale, it is imperative that the NAEP assessment reflects the framework and expert perspectives and opinions about reading comprehension and its measurement.

All components of the assessment are evaluated for curricular relevance, developmental appropriateness, and fairness concerns (NAEP, 2003). The framework specifies four types of reading processes referred to as “reading stances,” that characterize ways readers respond to text. The four stances are: (a) initial understanding, (b) developing and interpretation, (c) personal reflection and response, and (d) critical stance. The reading stances represent the changing ways readers position themselves in relation to a text, with each way contributing to the comprehension of it. Readers are asked to consider the whole text in demonstrating an overall understanding of its meaning and function, which is a preliminary consideration of the text as a whole (NAEP, 2003). This is in alignment with the stance of initial understanding.

The next stance, developing an interpretation call for readers to build upon their impressions to develop a more thorough understanding of the text and the interrelationship of its parts. This means that readers have to discern

connections and relationships among ideas within the text. The third stance requires readers to describe how ideas in the text confirm, contradict, or compare with prior knowledge and experiences. This is relating personal knowledge to text ideas. The last stance is called the critical stance. This one requires readers to stand apart from the text and consider it objectively. Readers are asked to consider how the author conveys information, expresses ideas or feelings, and communicates a message (NAEP, 2003).

Ethnicity with Academic Achievement

Barton (2001) presumes that states have not generally reduced the achievement gap between White and minority students or between the top and bottom quartile of student performance. Kober (2001) states that it takes more than testing to close achievement gaps between minority students and White and Asian students. Suggestions include: (a) ensuring an adequate supply of qualified teachers in high poverty and high minority school districts, (b) expanding the amount of advanced level courses provided in high minority school districts, and (c) equalizing resources between poor and affluent schools. This report warns policymakers to be cautious in attaching penalties to test results, and that when tests are improperly used for high stakes decisions, the result can reinforce racial and ethnic inequalities.

Paik and Lewis (2001), Poverty and Race Research Action Council, explain how low-performing schools can become high-performing ones. Their

research indicates that schools can be successful by accepting change and continually improving their efforts. The American Youth Policy Forum (Walker, Walker, Jurich, & Estes, 2001) held two forums to release *Raising Minority Academic Achievement: A Compendium of Education Programs and Practices*, a new American Youth Policy Forum report, supported by the William T. Grant Foundation.

This detailed a two-year effort to identify, summarize and analyze evaluations of school and youth programs that show gains for minority youth across a broad range of academic achievement indicators (Robinson, 2001). At the October 26th forum, Stephanie Robinson (2001), Principal Partner of The Education Trust, set the stage for discussion of the report by emphasizing the importance of collecting and making public disaggregated data on academic achievement by race, ethnicity, poverty level and locality. In part, Robinson (2001) said that data can be used to dispel myths about the “negative effects” of race and poverty, to show that low achievement is caused by a combination of factors particularly prevalent in high poverty schools that many Black and Hispanic children attend. These factors include low academic standards and expectations for students, inadequate resources and under qualified teachers. Robinson (2001) cited examples such as “excruciatingly low level assignments at the third or fourth grade level given to students in high school and how ‘A’ students in high poverty schools may be at the same level as ‘C’ and ‘D’ students at more affluent schools” (p. 17). Extensive data provide evidence of

academic success for low income minority students in schools and youth programs that have raised expectations, teacher quality, and resources (Robinson, 2001). Academic achievement gains varied by educational level as follows:

- When compared to control groups, low income minority students who attended early childhood development programs were more likely to remain in school, complete more years of education, and require less special education.
- Elementary through middle school evaluations were almost exclusively focused on test scores, which generally showed incremental improvement, but continued evidence of achievement gaps.
- The high school/transition programs that were studied showed increased high school graduation, more high school credits earned, higher GPAs earned, or increased enrolment in higher level courses.
- The postsecondary programs demonstrated the importance of generating and sustaining achievement across the academic spectrum.

The combination of strategies used by the effective compendia programs were quality implementation, leadership, accountability, academically demanding curriculum, family involvement, community involvement, professional development for teachers and staff, extended learning time,

individualized supports for students, scholarships and other financial supports, reduced student to teacher ratios, and long-term (multiple-year) programs.

Jeffery T. Fouts (2003), Executive Director of the Washington School Research Center in Lynwood Washington, reports that there are different achievement levels among various ethnic groups. Fouts also states that these differences are a source of great concern among community groups, and rightfully so. Yet, those of us who use data and statistics on a regular basis are acutely aware of the dangers inherent in reporting group achievement results that consider only one characteristic for creating those groups.

Fouts' (2003) report says that factors affecting student achievement are varied and complex, and failure to consider multiple factors may lead to erroneous or simplistic answers to very complicated questions. In this report, professors Abbott and Joiremen address the question of differences in school level achievement depending on the ethnic composition of the student population, so often reported in the media, while at the same time considering the income levels of the students' families (Fouts, 2003). They begin this effort with a brief review of research conducted elsewhere on this topic and conclude that previous research has shown that "income is generally a better predictor of student achievement than ethnicity" (Fouts, 2003, p. 12).

Using aggregate school third and sixth grade ITBS scores for 1999 and 2000, fourth grade WASL (a Washington State standardized test), scores for 1999 and 2000, and seventh grade WASL scores for 1999 for all schools in the

state, Abbott and Joireman (as cited in Fouts, 2003) examine the relationships among these scores and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch at the school and various percentages of students comprising a variety of ethnic groups. Using a statistical procedure called multiple regression, they are able to determine the relative importance of these latter two variables in determining the school's achievement levels. Abbott and Joireman's (as cited in Fouts, 2003) findings are: "Across a variety of grades and tests, our results support the conclusion that low income explains a much larger percentage of the variance in academic achievement than ethnicity" (p. 14).

Abbott and Joireman (as cited in Fouts, 2003) do not say that ethnicity is unimportant or unrelated to achievement, but low income appears to be a much more influential factor. They conclude that the relationship between ethnicity academic achievements is mostly indirect: ethnicity relates to low income and low income relates to academic achievement. In other words, low income is the stronger predictor of school achievement, and non-White families are over-represented among the low incomes. Conversely, the achievement levels of schools with high-income student populations more closely resemble other schools with high-income student bodies irrespective of their ethnic composition. Educators throughout the state, indeed throughout the country, are striving to raise the achievement levels of all students. A student's ethnicity is often an observable student characteristic that is frequently viewed as a determinant of that student's achievement level. However, these and other

results suggest that it is the effects of poverty that play a much larger role in a student's chance for success in school, and it is those effects that educators and policymakers should consider first as prevention, intervention, and remedial programs and designed (Fouts, 2003).

Socio-Economics with Academic Achievement

Bronfenbrenner (1979) has developed an ecological framework system theory that argues that human development is influenced by the interactions an individual has within various micro-systems, such as the family and school. In addition, events in larger systems, such as parents' workplace and governmental agencies, have an impact on development even though their influence is indirect. Further, interactions are often bidirectional, with individuals having goals, making plans, and initiating behaviors that can have an impact on the resources and challenges the setting offers. Bronfenbrenner (1979), further notes that economic conditions, the nature of the neighborhood, family and extended family relationships, and the school environment all influence a child's academic motivation and achievement. For example, the stresses of poverty have a variety of effects on Black families (McLloyd, 1990), impacting parental warmth, psychological availability, and control, all of which influence the well-being and academic achievement of children (Jenkins, 1989). Poverty also has a direct impact on the health and nutrition of adolescents, affecting school

attendance, energy level, and concentration (National Commission on Children, 1993).

Low-income minority parents are typically employed in work settings that provide few opportunities for autonomous decision-making. This kind of work environment influences parents' values and socialization practices by emphasizing compliance with authority and discouraging initiative and creative thought (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1991; Kohn, 1977).

Family kinship (particularly extended family) is extremely important for the well-being of Blacks, providing emotional support and stability, and buffering the effects of crises (Jayakody, Chatters, & Taylor, 1993). In addition, family values regarding religiosity and ethnic identity substantially contribute to how children define and cope with stress and the demands of daily life (Taylor, Casten, Flickinger, Roberts, & Fulmore, 1994).

In a 1993 article by Geoffrey F. Schultz from the *Journal of Urban Review* entitled, "Socioeconomic Advantage and Achievement Motivation: An Important Mediator of Academic Performance in Minority Children in Urban Schools," examined relationships between socioeconomics and student achievement motivation. This correlational study examined relationships between socioeconomic advantage, achievement motivation, and academic performance in an urban elementary school population of 130 minority students (Black, Hispanic). Level of socioeconomic advantage more/less was determined by school records and eligibility for participation in a compensatory

school lunch program for low-income children. A self-report measure of students' self-efficacy, intrinsic value, and self-regulatory learning orientation was used to determine levels of achievement motivation (high/low). Performance data in reading and mathematics were obtained from an individually administered achievement test. Multivariate analyses revealed that socioeconomic advantage and achievement motivation are significant mediators of academic performance in minority children, independent of intellectual ability. The classroom implications of socioeconomic advantage and achievement motivation on individual differences in academic performance of minority children in urban elementary schools are discussed.

In the article, "Income Level, Gender, Ethnicity, and Household Composition as Predictors of Children's School-Based Competence," by Patterson, Kupersmidt, and Vaden (1990) risk factors are identified and interpreted as impacting student academic achievement. In the United States, being Black, male, or growing up in a low-income and/or single-parent household have all been identified as risk factors for maladjustment during childhood. Interpretation of these findings is, however, often difficult because of the well-known associations among these variables. In the present study, we compared predictions of three different forms of children's competence from each of these four variables. In a sample of 868 Black and White elementary school children from two-parent and mother-headed one-parent homes, we studied three aspects of school-based competence: (a) conduct, (b) peer

relations, and (c) academic achievement. Results showed that although the independent variables accounted for different amounts of variance in each domain of competence, income level and gender were better overall predictors of children's competence in conduct and peer relations than were ethnicity or household composition. Income level and ethnicity were better overall predictors of academic achievement than were gender or household composition, although each of the four variables made a significant contribution. Overall, income level and gender were, thus, the strongest predictors of children's competence. Black children were, however, more likely than White children to live in low-income homes. Our results thus highlighted some correlates of the unequal distribution of economic resources among Black and White children growing up in the United States today.

Gender with Academic Achievement

The relationship between age and a child's ability to handle the demands of school is an important educational issue (Gullo & Burton, 1992). Debates exist concerning whether it is in the children's best interest to delay their entry into school or expedite it (Jones & Mandeville, 1990). These debates existed for decades around the globe despite educators' and psychologists' attempt to study this factor and related implications for school policy. For example, some argue for regulations regarding age cut-offs for entry into kindergarten (Jones & Mandeville, 1990).

Australia is one country in which the debate concerning age of school entry has existed for some time (deLemos, 1981). For example, in the early 1980's, Australian educators advocated for increasing the age of school entry. This decision resulted in delaying the admittance of children under five years of age into elementary schools across the country (deLemos, 1981).

In recent years, the issue concerning age of entry has taken on increasingly greater importance in the United States. This is due to the current educational zeitgeist of school accountability and increased educational goals (Stipek & Byler, 2001).

In most districts, children are no longer allowed to move up a grade simply for trying to do their work. Children must meet elevated educational standards because social promotion is becoming a thing of the past. Increasingly, children are required to master a pre-defined number of skills before being promoted to the next grade. These basis skills are regularly measured by standardized achievement tests (Stipek & Byler, 2001). As a result, within the last ten years, the practice of using standardized testing to assess academic achievement has flourished (Meisels, 1992).

The expectation that all children must pass these standardized achievement tests, as an indication they have mastered elevated educational standards, does not take into account that younger children may be less prepared to engage in these tasks than older children (Stipek & Byler, 2001). This is an important issue as tests which may not be developmentally

appropriate for young children are being used to measure the amount of material that children retain during the school year. These tests may, therefore, be biased against younger children. Using standardized tests to measure the achievement of younger children may, therefore, result in an underestimate of the academic material that younger children have mastered during the school year.

Since standardized testing is widespread, however, researchers who attempt to examine the possible relationship between age and academic achievement often use standardized tests when evaluating the magnitude and durations of the relationship between age and academic success (Jones & Mandeville, 1990). For example, using data from standardized achievement tests, Davis, Trimble, and Vincent (1980) found older students' achievement scores were higher than younger students' achievement scores in the first grade. Stipek and Byler (2001) also found older children have an academic advantage compared to younger children in kindergarten through second grade.

School policy varies from district-to-district concerning the age of school entry. The ideal age to begin school is a subject of debate, with current research both supporting and refuting the relationship between age and academic achievement (Wilgosh, Meyer, & Mueller, 1995). A common question concerning this topic is whether children who are older in a classroom are better able to gain from the classroom environment than those who are younger

(Gullo & Burton, 1992). For example, professionals wonder if older children will have greater academic achievement gains than younger children.

Policies concerning age of school entry are likely affected if research reveals that younger children are less equipped to hand the academic standards of a grade level than older children (Stipek & Byler, 2001). More specifically, there is a continuing debate, in the educational and psychological literature, concerning the relationship of school entry age to academic achievement (Jones & Mandeville, 1990). Much of this literature focuses on the effect of age on achievement in kindergarten samples (Cosden, Zimmer, & Tuss, 1993; Gullo & Burton, 1992; Wilgosh et al., 1995).

The relationship of gender to academic achievement is also a topic in the literature. If gender is an important factor to consider when examining the relationship between age and academic achievement, then educators and school psychologists should take this information into account when determining who is likely to be at risk for academic failure under the current educational standards. The relationship among age, gender, and academic achievement is relatively a neglected topic in the literature as few studies examine these variables concurrently.

In summary, although academic achievement is considered an important topic by parents, psychologists, and educators, the existing literature is mixed concerning the variables that influence academic achievement. Specifically, the

research is contradictory regarding the long-term relationship of age and gender to academic achievement.

Lummis and Stevenson (1990) examined possible gender differences in reading and mathematical achievement of students in elementary schools in the United States, Taiwan, and Japan. The researchers were interested in discovering whether possible gender differences in mathematical and reading achievement exist in kindergarten. They were also interested in discovering whether gender differences in reading and mathematical achievement last throughout the elementary school years. For their studies, the researchers developed achievement tests that they deemed “reliable, appropriate, and culturally unbiased” (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990, p. 256).

In their first study, Lummis and Stevenson (1990) administered mathematical and reading achievement tests that they developed to 1,975 kindergarteners in Minneapolis, Taiwan, and Japan. The researchers found no gender differences on the mathematical achievement tests in all countries studied. When examining reading achievement, however, kindergarten females achieved significantly higher reading scores than kindergarten males across the Minneapolis, Taiwan, and Japan samples (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990). The tests showed that females tend to score higher than males on tests that measure reading, writing, and perceptual speed.

In an August 1994 article by Fuller, Hua, and Snyder entitled, “When Girls Learn More Than Boys: The Influence of Time in School and Pedagogy in

Botswana,” the authors take a look at comparing girls’ and boys’ performance in language and reading. Girls often outperform boys in language and reading achievement. The recent study of reading skills by the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement found female students at the junior-secondary level to have comparatively higher proficiencies in 28 of 31 countries. The authors explored in the context of Botswana's junior-secondary schools how school and family factors influence young females' widespread advantage in acquiring literacy and reading skills. Research on female school attainment was reviewed; the Botswana Teacher, Classroom, and Achievement Study described; and empirical findings were presented on how time in school, teacher characteristics, and their pedagogical practices influence female and male achievement. The study assessed how much English and math was learned over one academic year among 4948 form 1 and form 2 students from 31 junior-secondary schools. For one week, 214 teachers were observed during at least two class periods. It is noted in closing that (a) time in school can be a very influential factor, (b) Botswana's junior-secondary schools seem to be reducing differences in educational attainment across different local communities, and (c) specific school and classroom features that are raising achievement remain a mystery. Study findings have implications for how learning gains for girls may be raised.

In another article entitled, “Gender, Academic Achievement, and Preferences for Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Learning Among

African-American Adolescents,” Johnson and Engelhard (1992) from the Division of Educational Studies, Emory University, investigated relationships among gender and academic achievement. In this study, relationships among gender, academic achievement, and student preferences for cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning in a sample of 136 Black adolescents enrolled in sixth and seventh grades in a school in Georgia were investigated.

The Learning Preference Scale for Students (LPSS) (Owens, & Straton, 1980) was used to measure cooperative, competitive, and individualistic preferences. Three two-way ANOVAs (gender x academic achievement) were conducted, in which the three learning preferences were the dependent variables. Gender had a significant effect on the preference for cooperative learning, with girls reporting a higher preference for this method than boys did. For the other two learning preferences, no significant gender differences were found. Academic achievement did not correlate significantly with any of the three learning preferences. A two-way interaction between gender and academic achievement was observed for competitive learning preferences. Girls' preferences for competition increased as academic achievement increased; boys' preferences for competition decreased as academic achievement increased.

In another article entitled, “Developmental Cascades: Linking Academic Achievement and Externalizing and Internalizing Symptoms over 20 years,” Masten et al. (2004) tested links between gender and academic achievement.

A developmental cascade model linking competence and symptoms was tested in a study of a normative, urban school sample of 205 children (initially 8 to 12 years old). Internalizing and externalizing symptoms and academic competence were assessed by multiple methods at the study outset and after 7, 10, and 20 years. A series of nested cascade models was tested through structural equation modeling. The final model indicated two hypothesized cascade effects: Externalizing problems evident in childhood appeared to undermine academic competence by adolescence that subsequently showed a negative effect on internalizing problems in young adulthood. A significant exploratory effect was consistent with internalizing symptoms containing or lowering the net risk for externalizing problems under some conditions. These three cascade effects did not differ by gender and were not attributable to effects of IQ, parenting quality, or socioeconomic differences. Implications are discussed for developmental models of cascades, progressions, and preventive interventions.

In an Australian project called, *Project: Gender Differentiation: Gender Differences in Academic Achievement and Self-concept in Coeducational and Single-Sex Schools*, Smith (1991) from the School of Educational Psychology, Measurement and Technology, University of Sydney, notes the following study. The public debate in Australia over the relative advantages and disadvantages of coeducational and single-sex schooling shows no signs of abating. Regular articles appear in the popular press and in academic journals on the merits of

both types of classes and schools. A similar debate is occurring in England where some of the most prestigious "public" schools have become coeducational in the past decade. This debate, however, is virtually non-existent in continental Europe or in the United States, where coeducation continues to be the norm.

A recent history of coeducation in American public schools (Tyack & Hansot, 1990), for example, found that sex-segregation of school classes occurred on the periphery rather than at the centre of the curriculum in the nineteenth century. By "periphery" these authors mean such subjects as home economics and physical education. They argued that the value of supporting local community schools and the widespread distribution of the population across the country rendered single-sex schools uneconomic. In Australia, on the other hand, the early church influence on education and the concentration of the population in relatively few large cities allowed the development of single-sex schools.

During the recent recession of the 1980's and early 1990's, there has occurred the amalgamation of many single-sex schools, but there has simultaneously been pressure to establish single-sex classes in coeducational schools. In New South Wales, this policy was implemented with the support of the then Minister for Education, Mrs. Virginia Chadwick. What is the research evidence in support of such changes in educational policy and practice? Why does the coeducational/single-sex schooling debate continue to generate such

heat in Australia, whereas in the U.S. one reviewer summed up the situation in the following way: "The average high school was just too small to accommodate separate academic classes for boys and girls, and coeducation was too deeply entrenched in America's public schools to be abandoned" (Kaufman, 1991, p. 23).

This paper reviewed the research evidence on the coeducational/single-sex schooling debate before outlining a five-year-long empirical study of the impact of the transition from single-sex to coeducation in two Sydney state high schools on student achievement and self-concept, as well as upon teacher perceptions of the coeducation process. With this background of mixed research evidence in mind, Marsh, Smith, Marsh, and Owens (1988) outline the five-year-long research project that was conducted at two Sydney high schools. Both schools were comprehensive government high schools that became coeducational in 1983. Prior to 1983, one was an all-boys' school, while the other was an all-girls' school. They are located in the same geographical area, being separated by park land in a Northern Beaches suburb. The initiative for the transition to coeducational status in both schools came from the parents who believed that a coeducational school would provide a better social and academic environment for their children.

Because it was state government policy at the time for new government high schools to be coeducational, the Minister for Education, Mr. Paul Landa, agreed to the proposed change. He became involved in the transition when he

was invited by the principal of the former girls' high school to spend a day at her school speaking to staff and senior girls about the implications of the change for teachers and students. One of the educational implications of the transition was the allocation of students into classes in the various subjects. For instance, the mathematics staff had decided to stream the students on the basis of past mathematics achievement. They were concerned about placing girls into the top math class in Year 11 if only a few merited it. As it turned out, the top math classes in the year co-education commenced were almost equally composed of girls and boys. Towards the end of the in-service day, Landa suggested to the principal of the former girls' high school that this transition provided a unique opportunity to study a social experiment in action. Approval was given to administer self-concept questionnaires and collect achievement data before, during, and after the transition to coeducational status in both schools (Marsh et al., 1988).

In an article, "What Do We Know About Raising Minority Academic Achievement?," James, Jurich, and Estes (2001) collaborated on a report regarding minority youth. A new American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) report, supported by the William T. Grant Foundation, details a two-year effort to find, summarize, and analyze evaluations of school and youth programs that show gains for minority youth across a broad range of academic achievement indicators. In *Raising Minority Academic Achievement: A Compendium of Education Programs and Practices*, Robinson (2001) provides an accessible

resource for policymakers and practitioners interested in promoting the academic success of racial and ethnic minorities from early childhood through advanced postsecondary study. Evaluations of early childhood programs were particularly strong and positive. When compared to control groups, minority children who attended early childhood development programs were more likely to remain in school, complete more years of education, and require less special education. Elementary through middle school evaluations were almost exclusively focused on test scores, which generally showed incremental improvement, but continued achievement gaps. The high school/transition programs that were studied showed increased high school graduation, more high school credits earned, higher GPAs earned, or increased enrollment in higher-level courses. All programs used a combination of strategies to improve student performance, not a single intervention. The ten most frequent strategies identified in those programs showing gains for minority youth are:

- Quality implementation, leadership, and accountability.
- Academically demanding curriculum.
- Family involvement.
- Individualized support for students.
- Community involvement.
- Scholarships and other financial support.
- Professional development for teachers and staff.
- Reduced student-to-teacher ratios.

- Extended learning time.
- Long-term (multiple year) programs.

Since many of these young people continue to be under-represented among academic achievement gains and over-represented in poor and poorly performing schools, the *Compendium's* findings underscore the rich potential of investing in all our young people through concrete strategies to help them succeed academically (Robinson, 2001). As with the earlier *Compendium*, the new volume provides a handy source of *empirical* findings—beyond anecdotal evidence—for policymakers, and program practitioners as they craft and implement strategies to improve services and supports for minority youth (James et al., 2001). Chapter III provides more specific information about the instruments used to compare and measure compiled data on each school community. Gender, ethnicity, income level and TAAS reading scores from each school district will be analyzed. Chapter III also gives an explanation of both the research design and the data analysis procedure.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the demographic profiles associated with the differences in academic performance between students in third grade in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts in Texas. Specific emphasis was placed on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading scores of each school district.

The author obtained information concerning the demographic profiles of gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents (whether students receive free or reduced lunch) and the TAAS reading score from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) report and through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report from each school district. The data collection guidelines were used to obtain standardized information from the subjects in a given population (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). This chapter describes the procedures used to identify the research population and the procedures used to collect and analyze the data.

Population

The population for this study was 368 of the 9,007 third grade students from both the North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts. Students in this study were of the predominant ethnicities at the schools: Black, Hispanic,

and White. Utilizing this sample size allowed the study results to be generalized as trend data for all third grade students in the two districts. Data were collected during the spring semester of the 2002-2003 school year.

North Forest Independent School District

The district serves Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade students. North Forest has 14 schools in all: 2 high schools, 2 middle schools, 2 intermediate schools, 6 elementary schools, and 1 guidance center. The district also has a career and technology school. There are 660 teachers and 842 support staff members. North Forest covers about 33 square miles of the Northeast Houston area. It ranked 72 in size among some 1040 Texas school districts. It began operation under the name North Forest in 1971. The largest percentage of the district budget comes from state sources. School board meetings are held the third Monday of the month in the administration building. The district offers an array of programs such as: SAT/ACT preparation classes, advanced placement classes, and an American Airlines Travel Academy that is only offered selectively throughout the United States. The district also offers extended day, Title I, ESL (English as a Second Language), a G/T (Gifted and Talented), a health, science, and engineering program, and Saturday classes (Combs, 1999). The district's mission is to improve the quality of learning and to increase student achievement in all schools through collaboration so that they

exhibit positive self-images and are prepared to assume economic, social, civic and cultural responsibilities in a complex and changing society.

North Forest has a business partner-which contributes greatly to student success in reading. That business partner is Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. The program is entitled "Southwestern Bell Telephone Pioneers," and this group donates books to elementary schools in the district. This is essential to the students in that it helps to raise their reading ability level (National Academy of Sciences, 1999). This program also exposes students to different books and allows them to see that outside community members contribute to their education. North Forest ISD is continuously working toward achieving excellence by focusing on the needs of students, especially in the area of reading (Texas State Board of Education, 1994).

The North Forest ISD Public Relations Department provided the following test result information about the district: North Forest ISD tested 1009 third grade students, and 992 of these students took the TAAS exam in English, while 17 students took the test in Spanish with 68.9% of the students passing the test. This district had 79.5% economically disadvantaged students. Minority students comprise 95% of this district and 62.3% of the economically disadvantaged students passed the test. North Forest has a student enrollment of 11,683: 79.2% of the students are Blacks, 20.1% are Hispanic, .01% is White, and .6% is Asian.

Aldine Independent School District

The 2000 population of the Aldine community was 13,979, composed of 7,249 males and 6,730 females. Of that number, 3,898 were under 15 years old. There were 8,289 White students, 816 Blacks, 97 American Indians, 477 Native Hawaiians, 7,875 Hispanics, and 3,856 students from other races. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that the median household income in 1999 was \$28,688.00 for families under 25 years old. The median household income in the state of Texas was \$21,570.00, while the median in the United States as a whole was \$22,679. The educational attainment was 7,684 in all. That was the total number of students enrolled in the Aldine. Approximately 2,145 were high school graduates, while 1,351 had some college or associate degrees. Only 143 had masters' or doctoral level degrees. Several programs have been created to assist with student achievement. In the Aldine school district, about 189 Black males and about 266 Black females received their high school diplomas. About 25 Hispanic males and 23 Hispanic females received their high school diplomas. Only one White male student and no White female students received their diploma. In all, 455 Black students, 48 Hispanic students, and 1 White student received high school diplomas. The high school computer data were from 2001-2002. The Current Population Survey (NCES, 1999) reported that 1,915 were White, while 12,335 were Black, 53 were American Indian, 31 were Asian, and the total population count was 292. The

data were important to compare to the Aldine community in the area of community demographics.

This school district covers 111 square miles in North Harris County, Houston, Texas. The district has 1 Even Start center, 3 Head Start centers, 4 EC/PK centers, 29 elementary schools, 8 intermediate schools, 8 middle schools, 4 ninth grade campuses, and 6 high school campuses. One of the high schools is a magnet high school, and its theme focuses on technology and engineering. There is also 1 night school, which is nontraditional. There are 2 alternative campuses for students unsuccessful in traditional classroom settings. There is a Lane School, which meets a variety of special needs for students in grades K-12. Aldine pupil/teacher ratio averages are: grades PK-4, 22:1; grades 5-6, 27:1; grades 7-8, 27:1; grade 9, 25:1, and grades 10-12, 29:1. The district had earned a Recognized rating from 1998 to 2004, the fifth consecutive year and was the largest school district in the state to earn this high performance rating in two of the last six years. Aldine's governing body is comprised of seven elected community members, serving three-year terms on a voluntary basis. Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month. Aldine's ethnic composition is 54.7% Hispanic, 33.7% Black, 8.7% Anglo, 2.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and .1% Native American. Aldine has established partnerships with local businesses and colleges to develop programs that help ensure success for high school graduates entering college, technical school, or the 21st century work place. Aldine's Magnet School program has 14

academies. Thirteen of those magnet schools include intermediate, middle, and one high school. Each school has its own magnet themes. Aldine's child nutrition program has earned the state's Standards of Excellence Award for an exemplary child nutrition program (Aldine Independent School District Profile, 2001).

Table 3.1 reports the demographic variables of the 174 third grade students tested in the North Forest Independent School District. Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1 report that there were 86 third grade males and 88 third grade females in the North Forest Independent School District who were tested. Out of that group, there was 1 White student, 163 Black students, 9 Hispanic students, and 1 Asian student (Figure 3.2). Table 3.1 and Figure 3.3 also report that out of the 174 students that were tested, 134 received free lunch, 39 received reduced lunch, and only 1 student paid full price for the lunch.

Table 3.1. Selected Demographic Variables of Gender, Ethnicity, and Socio-Economic Status That Impact Third Grade TAAS Reading Scores of North Forest

Gender	Ethnicity	Socio-Economic Status
Males=86	White=1	Free Lunch=134
Females=88	Black=163	Reduced Lunch=39
	Hispanic=9	Paid=1
	Asian=1	

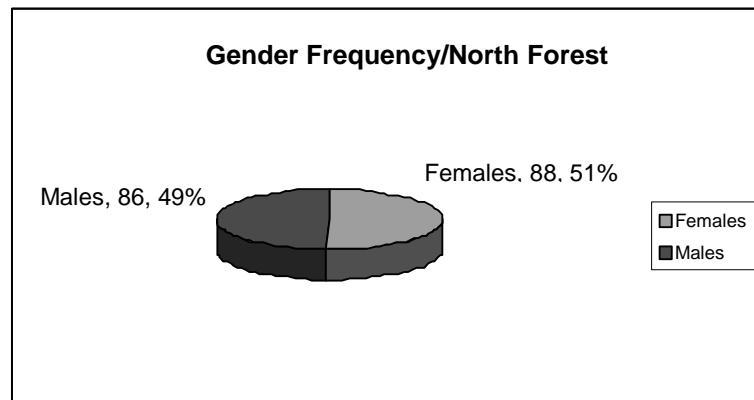


Figure 3.1. Gender frequency for North Forest.

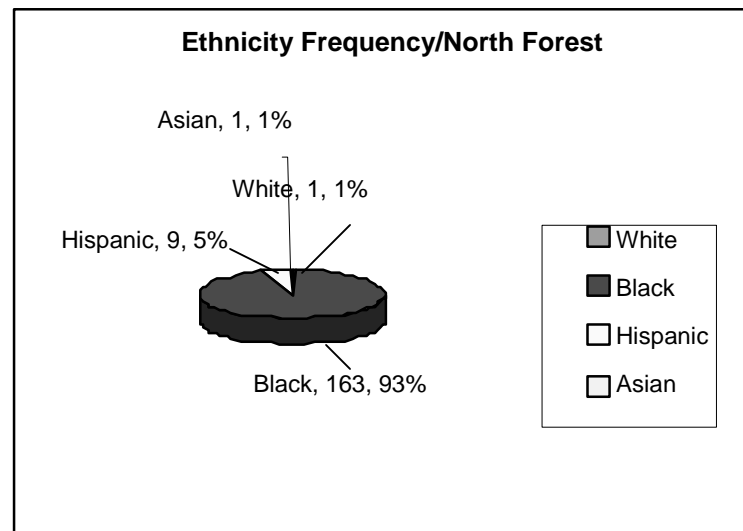


Figure 3.2. Ethnicity frequency for North Forest.

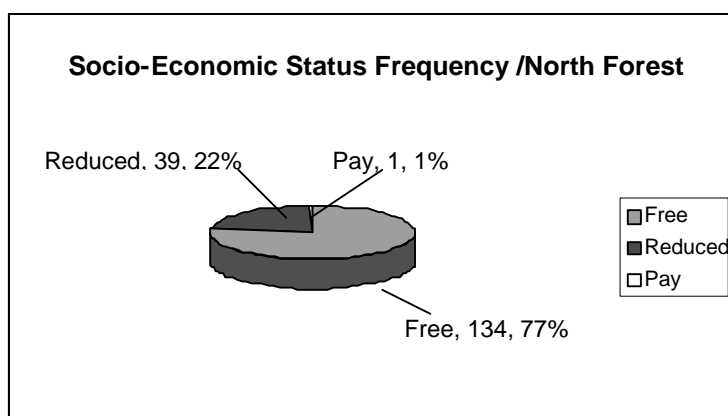


Figure 3.3. Socio-economic status frequency for North Forest.

Table 3.2 reports the demographic variables of the 174 third grade students tested in the Aldine Independent School District. Out of the 174 third grade students tested, 50 four were males, while 120 were females. The ethnicity of the students reported 13 White, 70 Black students, 79 Hispanic students, and 10 Asian students. The socio-economic status report was 33 students received free lunch, 75 students received reduced lunch, and 66 students paid for their lunch.

Table 3.2. Selected Demographic Variables of Gender, Ethnicity, and Socio-Economic Status That Impact Third Grade TAAS Reading Scores of Aldine

Gender	Ethnicity	Socio-Economic Status
Males=54	White=13	Free Lunch=33
Females=120	Black=70	Reduced Lunch=75
	Hispanic=79	Paid=66
	Asian=10	

Figure 3.4 shows that Aldine ISD tested 54 male students and 120 female students. The male students represented 31%, while the female students represented 69%. Figure 3.5 shows that 10 Asian students were tested, which represented 6%; 13 White students were tested, which represented 8%; 70 Black students were tested, which represented 41%; and 79 Hispanic students were tested, which represented 45%. Figure 3.6 shows that 66 students out of the 174 who were tested, paid for their lunches. This represented 38%; 33 students received free lunch, which was 19%, and 75 students received free lunch, which was 43%.

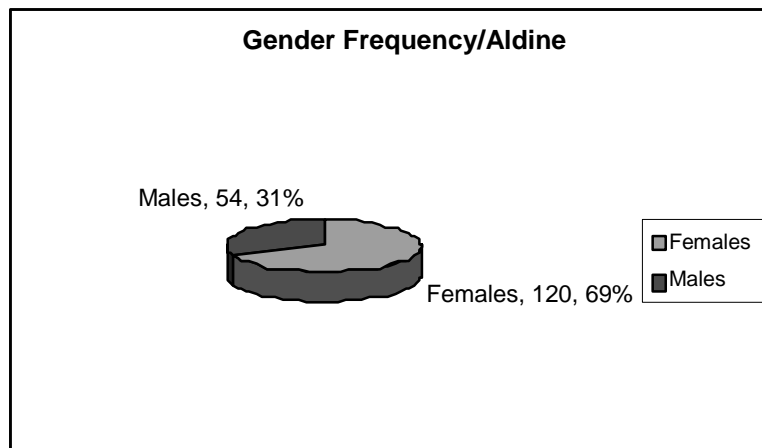


Figure 3.4. Gender frequency for Aldine.

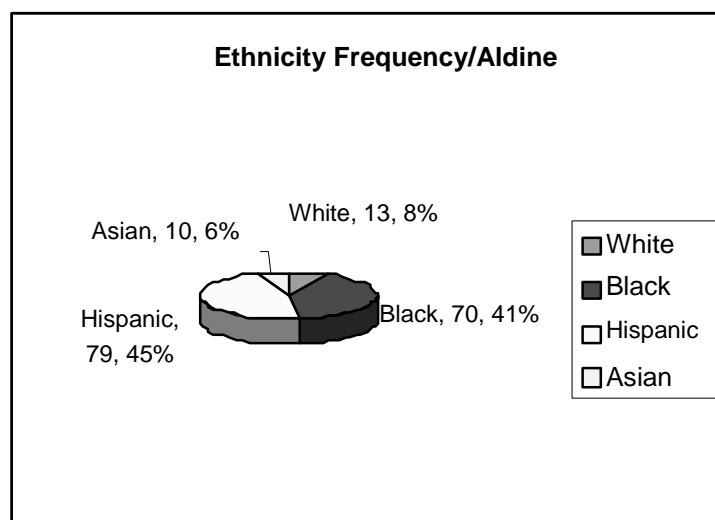


Figure 3.5. Ethnicity frequency for Aldine.

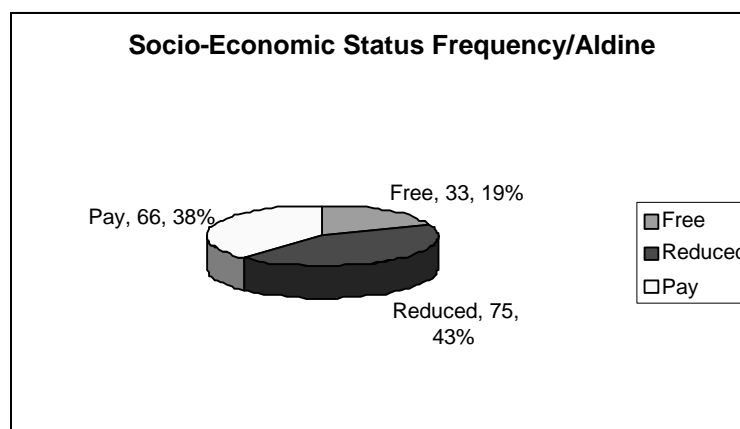


Figure 3.6. Socio-economic status frequency for Aldine.

Instrumentation

Data were downloaded from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). This system is a database that is pulled together by the Texas

Education Agency that includes the following student information: gender, ethnicity, whether or not student receives free or reduced lunch (parent income level), and standardized test scores. The Public Education Information System (PEIMS) is a report that is compiled of the following data: a student number that is used with the student's social security number for additional identification purposes and selected demographic information that includes ethnicity, gender, parent contact information, emergency phone numbers, and student sibling information. The PEIMS is sent in to the state by the school district and is included as a part of the AEIS report. The researcher retrieved the demographic data about the two school districts from the PEIMS and AEIS reports. Data consisted of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and selected third grade student TAAS reading scores from the 2002-2003 school year. The researcher's review of literature supported the content of the report data. The results were tabulated through standard descriptive statistics procedures. The results were situational because the population was restricted by North Forest and Aldine Independent School District third grade TAAS reading data.

Procedures

The research process began in the late spring of 2003 with the demographic data on the two school districts. North Forest third grade population consisted of 154 students, while Aldine's third grade population

consisted of 354 students. The researcher contacted the director of research and evaluations as well as the superintendent from both Aldine and North Forest to receive permission to conduct research in the spring of 2003. Since the data were in place, no further follow-up procedures were used. The researcher sent letters of appreciation to both districts for allowing their information to be compared and studied.

The researcher obtained information concerning the demographic variables of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status of North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts that impact third grade TAAS reading scores. The data collection guidelines were used to obtain standardized information from the subjects in a given population (Gall et al., 1996). This contained an analysis of the data obtained through charts and tables. Information for the study was provided through the PEIMS and AEIS reports of both school districts.

Data Analysis

Data were presented for the complete sample. Results were reported using tables, charts, and graphs, frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations. Analysis followed the principles prescribed in *Educational Research: An Introduction* by Gall et al. (1996), including descriptive and inferential statistical tests. Data collected were entered and disaggregated by

demographic characteristics of gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents. Separate analyses were conducted for district reading scores.

Statistical analysis tools used to analyze data were descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and multiple regressions. Descriptive statistic techniques were used to tabulate the frequency counts, percentage, means, and standard deviations for individual items, and groups of items were defined by a factor analysis. The one-way ANOVA was conducted to test for significant differences between the gender, ethnicity, free/reduced lunch status, and whether the students passed the third grade reading TAAS test.

Summary of Methodology

The author of this research obtained information concerning the demographic data from North Forest and Aldine School Districts in Texas. The author placed the obtained data into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software. This software analyzed the data and several tables were classified. The first table incorporated six variables from each school district. There were 174 students from each district analyzed. The researcher separated each variable and used a correlation table and a one-sample t-test. Each of these tests showed some expected frequencies with ranks and grouping variables. There was also an ANOVA test run, which showed some significant differences within each district, as well as between the two school districts.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to investigate effects of the demographics of gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents on passing rates on the reading portion of the third grade TAAS test between third grade students in the North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts in Texas. Chapter IV provides the results of the comparisons of third grade TAAS reading scores from both school districts from the spring semester of the 2003 school year.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher received permission from both North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts to retrieve the third grade student TAAS reading test data. The various data elements collected were analyzed using the statistical program SPSS 12.0 Version II for Windows. The first section of this chapter presents demographic data from both North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts. Statistical significance was established based on an alpha level of .05.

Analysis of Demographic Data

The results were looked at for the differences and similarities of how gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents (free and reduced lunch) impact

the passing or failing of the third grade TAAS reading test at each of the two school districts. One hundred seventy-four students from each district were analyzed. North Forest Independent School District tested 88 females and 86 males. Table 4.1 gives a breakdown of gender numerically and with percentage within the North Forest Independent School District.

Table 4.1. Gender of Students in the Third Grade in Frequency and Percent for North Forest Independent School District

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	88	50.6
Male	86	49.4
Total	174	100.0

The number of females in this sample is 88 and the number of males is 86. The combined total or frequency of females and males depicted in Table 4.1 representing North Forest is 174. Therefore, N represents a valid sample of 174.

The percentage of females representing North Forest Independent School District in the sample was 50.6. The percentage of males representing North Forest Independent School District was 49.4. The combined total of gender (female and males) percentages in the sample for North Forest Independent School District made an even percent of 100.

Table 4.2 gives frequency (numerical) and percentage breakdown of gender (female and male students) in the third grade in the Aldine Independent School District.

Table 4.2. Gender of Students in the Third Grade in Frequency and Percent for Aldine Independent School District

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	120	69.0
Male	54	31.0
Total	174	100.0

The frequency or number of females used in the third grade in the Aldine Independent School District was 120. The frequency, or number of males in third grade in the Aldine Independent School District was 54. N equals the total sample of 174 females and males.

The percentage of females and males representing gender in the Aldine Independent School District is as follows. Table 4.2 shows that females represent 69% of students in third grade at Aldine Independent School District. Table 4.2 also shows that males represent 31% of students in this sample in third grade at Aldine Independent School District.

Table 4.3 details the ethnicity of students in third grade in frequency and percent for the North Forest Independent School District. Asian and White student frequencies were less than 2. This resulted in a 1.1% difference in the total notated under ethnicity as missing. Table 4.3 gives a breakdown of ethnicity in frequency for North Forest Independent School District. The table shows that Blacks have a frequency or number of 163 students. Hispanics represent a frequency of 9 students. Hispanic students have a frequency or number of 9 students in the North Forest Independent School District for a frequency total of 174.

Table 4.3. Ethnicity of Students in the Third Grade in Frequency and Percent for North Forest Independent School District

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Black	163	93.7
Hispanic	9	5.2
Missing	2	1.1
Total	172	100.0

Note. Two students were not listed with ethnicity.

Table 4.3 also gives a breakdown of ethnicity in percent for the North Forest Independent School District. The table shows that Blacks represent 93.7% of the ethnicity of students in the third grade for the North Forest

Independent School District, while Hispanics represented 5.2% of third grade students in North Forest Independent School District.

Table 4.3 shows that missing represents a percentage of 1.1 of the ethnicity of third grade students in the North Forest Independent School District. The combined percentages of Blacks, Hispanics, and missing made a total of 100%.

This frequency table reports the ethnicity breakdown of third grade students in Aldine Independent School District who took the third grade TAAS reading test. Table 4.4 is a frequency table that reports ethnicity breakdowns of third grade students in Aldine Independent School District who took the third grade TAAS reading test. The sample population, represented as N, totals 174 students in the Aldine Independent School District.

Table 4.4. Ethnicity of Students in the Third Grade in Frequency and Percent for Aldine Independent School District

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Hispanic	79	45.5
Black	70	40.2
White	13	7.5
Asian	10	5.7
American Indian	2	1.1
Total	174	100.0

Table 4.4 shows that American Indians have a frequency or number of 2. This means that 2 students in the Aldine Independent School District took the third grade TAAS reading test. Table 4.4 shows that 2 students in the Aldine Independent School District took the third grade TAAS reading test. Table 4.4 shows that Asian students have a frequency or number of 10 students who took the third grade TAAS reading test in the Aldine Independent School District. Blacks are the next ethnicity group represented in Table 4.4. They represent a frequency of 70 for Aldine students taking the TAAS third grade reading test. Hispanic third grade students who took the TAAS reading test in Table 4.4 represent a frequency of 79. White third grade students who took the TAAS reading test in Table 4.4 represent a frequency of 13 students in Aldine Independent School District.

Table 4.4 also reports the percent of the ethnicity of students in the Aldine Independent School District who took the third grade TAAS reading test. The percent of American Indians who took third grade TAAS reading was 1.1. Asians comprised 5.7% of the students in Aldine Independent School District who took the third grade TAAS reading test. Blacks represented 40.2% of third grade students in Aldine who took the TAAS third grade reading test. Hispanics represented 45.5% of the students in Aldine Independent School District that took the TAAS third grade reading test. Whites account for 7.5% of students in this ethnic group who took the third grade TAAS reading test in the Aldine

Independent School District. The total of all percentages in Table 4.4 equals 100%.

Table 4.5 represents the frequency and percent of third grade students who were on free or reduced lunch payment at the North Forest Independent School District. The frequency or number of third grade students who qualified for free lunch payment was 134 at the North Forest Independent School District. Table 4.3 also reports that the frequency or number of third grade students in North Forest Independent School District who qualified for full pay lunch payment was 1. The total frequency accounted for a total sample size of 174, or N equals 174.

Table 4.5. Frequency and Percent of Third Grade Students Who Were on Free or Reduced Lunch Payment at the North Forest Independent School District

Socio-Economic Status	Frequency	Percent
Free	134	77.0
Reduced	39	22.4
Full Pay	1	.6
Total	174	100.0

Table 4.5 also represents the percentage of students at the North Forest Independent School District that qualified for free, reduced, or full pay lunch. The percentage of students in North Forest that qualified for free lunch was

77%. The percent of third grade students who qualified for reduced lunch at the North Forest Independent School District was 22.4%. The percent of third grade students who qualified for full pay lunch at North Forest Independent School District was .6%. All that qualified for free, reduced, and full pay represented 100% of third grade students at the North Forest Independent School District.

Table 4.6 represents the frequency and percent of third grade students who were on free or reduced lunch payment at the Aldine Independent School District. The frequency or number of third grade students that qualified for free lunch payment was 33 students at the Aldine Independent School District.

Table 4.6. Frequency and Percent of Third Grade Students Who Were on Free or Reduced Lunch Payment at the Aldine Independent School District

Socio-Economic Status	Frequency	Percent
Free	33	19.0
Reduced	75	43.1
Full Pay	66	37.9
Total	174	100.0

Table 4.6 also reports that the frequency or number of third grade students at Aldine Independent School District who qualified for the reduced lunch payment was 75. The table reports that 66 third grade students at the

Aldine Independent School District qualified for full pay lunch. The combined frequency of students representing free, reduced and full pay lunches at Aldine Independent School District made a valid sample population of 174 students.

Table 4.7 reports a comparison of the pass and failure percentages of third grade students' reading TAAS test in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts. North Forest had 53.4% of their third grade students who passed the reading TAAS test and 46.6% who failed. Aldine had 85.1% who passed and 14.9% who failed.

Table 4.7. Frequency and Percent of Third Grade Students in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts Who Passed or Failed TAAS Reading Test

School District	Pass	Fail	Percent Pass	Percent Fail
North Forest	69	105	39.6	60.3
Aldine	148	26	85.1	14.9

Note. $\chi^2=131.5$, $df=1$, $p=.0001$.

A Chi-Square Test of Significance indicated a highly significant difference in the two schools' pass rate for third grade reading.

Relationship of Demographic Variables

Research Question One

Is there a relationship in TAAS reading scores when compared to gender, ethnicity, and/or income level of parents, as reported in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) database for selected third grade students in North Forest?

Table 4.8 reports that gender does not relate to the TAAS score in North Forest, but the income level is related to third grade reading TAAS performance ($r=.249$). Table 4.8 also has a correlation between gender and income level of parents. These findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter V. No analysis of ethnicity was conducted with the North Forest data because of the low frequency of non-Black students in the third grade.

Table 4.8. Correlations of Selected Demographic Variables to TAAS at North Forest Independent School District (N=174)

Variables		Socio-Economic Status	TAAS
Gender	Correlation	.150*	.073
	Significance	.048	.339
	Correlation		.249
Income Level	Significance		.001**

Note: Due to low frequency of non-Blacks students, no correlations were calculated for ethnicity.

* $p=.05$. ** $p=.01$.

Research Question Two

Is there a relationship in third grade TAAS reading scores when compared to gender, ethnicity, and/or income level or parents, as reported in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) database for selected third grade students in the Aldine Independent School District?

Table 4.9 reports the correlations of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic in the Aldine Independent School District on the third grade TAAS reading test. There's no significant difference in ethnicity and gender.

Table 4.9. Correlations of Selected Demographic Variables to TAAS at Aldine Independent School District

Variables		Gender	Socio-Economic Status	TAAS
Ethnicity 1	Correlation	.078	-.037	-.015
	Significance	.841	.632	.843
Gender	Correlation		.489*	.211**
	Significance		.001	.005
Income Level of Parents	Correlation			.396**
	Significance			.001

Note: Ethnicity is divided into Blacks and Non-Blacks.

*p=.05. **p=.01.

Table 4.9 contains the following findings that were found in Aldine Independent School District:

1. There is a significant interaction of gender and income level of parents ($r=.489$). This finding implies that females are from a higher income level than males.
2. There is a significant interaction of gender with TAAS third grade reading scores ($r=.211$).
3. There is a significant interaction of income with third grade reading TAAS scores at Aldine ISD ($r=.396$). The ramifications of the Aldine findings will be discussed in Chapter V.

Summary of Results

Both school districts, North Forest ISD and Aldine ISD, were found to have significant relationships of incomes to TAAS third grade reading scores. Further, gender was significantly related to third grade TAAS performances at Aldine ISD but not at North Forest ISD. Ethnicity would not be analyzed at North Forest ISD due to the small percentage of non-Black students in the third grade. At Aldine ISD, no relationship was found between ethnicity and Third Grade TAAS performers. The success rate on Third Grade TAAS was significantly higher at Aldine ISD (percent passed 85.1) than at North Forest ISD (percent passed 39.6). A detailed discussion of these findings will be presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first presents a summary of the study, procedures, and the author's findings based upon the research questions that were posed. The second section presents the conclusions that were derived from the data as well as the review of the literature. Section three is comprised of the recommendations for educational leaders and recommendations for future study.

Summary

The primary goal of the study was to investigate demographic profiles associated with academic performance between third grade students in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts in Texas. Gender, ethnicity, income level, and TAAS reading scores of third grade students were examined by use of data recovered from the database of Public Education Information Management Systems, standardized test scores. The Public Education Information System is a report that is compiled of the following data: a student number is used with the social security number for additional identification purposes, and selected demographic information. The PEIMS is sent into the state by the school district and is included as part of the AEIS reports. Data

consisted of the gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and selected third grade TAAS reading scores from the 2002-2003 school year.

The population for this study consisted of 368 of the 9,007 third grade students from both the North Forest Independent School Districts. Students in this study were of the predominant ethnicities at the schools: Black, Hispanic, and White. Utilizing this sample size allowed the study results to be generalized as trend data for all third grade students in the two districts. Data were collected during the spring semester of the 2002-2003 school year. All students in this study took the third grade reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

Instrumentation consisted of data being downloaded from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). This system is a database that is pulled together by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), that included the following student information: gender, ethnicity, whether or not student received free or reduced lunch (based on parent income level), and standardized test scores. The Public Education Information System is a report that is compiled of the following data: a student number is used with the social security number for additional identification purposes, selected demographic information, which includes ethnicity, gender, parent contact information and student sibling information. The PEIMS is sent into the state by the school district and is included as part of the AEIS reports. Data consisted of the gender, ethnicity,

socio-economic status, and selected third grade TAAS reading scores from the 2002-2003 school year.

The demographic findings from North Forest Gender Comparison charts showed that the sample majority were females at 64%, while males from the same district were 36%. The North Forest Ethnicity Comparison charts showed the ethnicity for Blacks were 78%, while Hispanics accounted for 20%. Whites accounted for 2% in the North Forest Gender Comparison chart. This chart showed that the level of parents affect a student's academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The North Forest Independent School District Socio-Economic Status Comparisons showed that 90% of the students were on Free Lunch status while 7% were on Reduced Lunch pay.

In the Aldine Independent School District, the Gender Comparison charts showed that the sample majority were females. They were 56% compared to the males that were 44%. The Aldine ISD Ethnicity Comparison chart showed that Hispanics were 53%, Blacks were 35%, Asians were 8%, and Whites were 4%.

The Aldine ISD Socio-Economic Comparison chart showed that 48% of the students were on Reduced Pay lunch while 36% were on Free Pay lunch. Only 16% of students in Aldine ISD paid full price for lunch.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) stated that gender, ethnicity, and income level of parents affect a student's academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Students from affluent families tend to perform better academically than students from poor families. One example of this could be that an affluent family with multiple siblings could afford to hire a babysitter for younger siblings, thus allowing older students to focus on attendance and academic performance at school. The babysitter option is virtually non-existent for a lower socioeconomic family with multiple siblings. Therefore, it would seem that students from this family may not perform as well academically due to fewer options.

Before the 2002-2003 school year, the TAAS test was the state assessment tool used to assess a student's reading ability. At the start of the 2003-2004 school year, the state assessment tool became the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

This major focus on accountability has jump started explanations regarding achievement gaps related to ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. How educators successfully close academic gaps is the topic of discussion for all. Therefore, this research will contribute to the larger body of knowledge of ensuring that no child is left behind.

Conclusions

Research Question One

Research Question One asked, “Is there a relationship in TAAS reading scores when compared to gender, ethnicity and/or income level of parents, as reported in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System database for selected third grade students in North Forest Independent School District?”

The study was conducted during the spring semester of 2003. The population for the study was 358 third grade students from Aldine and North Forest Independent School Districts in Texas.

Following a review of the literature, this researcher analyzed the third grade TAAS scores from Aldine and North Forest Independent School Districts in Texas. The researcher compared the scores in correlation to ethnicity, gender, and parent income level. The researcher wrote letters of appreciation to both district superintendents for their participation in the study. The researcher entered the data obtained into the statistical analyses conducted using SPSS, version 12.0.1.

The data revealed that there was a correlation between income and academic performance in the North Forest Independent School District. With this significance level from the Analysis of Variance, one can determine that the income level of parents is directly associated with the reading scores of the

North Forest Independent School District third grade student on the TAAS reading test.

In other words, low income is negatively impacting on TAAS scores ($R = .249$). With the goal of education in Texas to provide quality instruction to all students, this negative income requires that additional resources be placed in schools to aid the reading ability of all students.

There could be several reasons for this correlation between income and academic performance. "Many times, parents do not take the time to read out loud to their children, and some parents cannot read themselves. This impacts student achievement" (Evers & Peter, 1996, p. 2). If parents were not successful in school themselves, chances are that their children will not be successful either. Those parents will not be as actively involved with their children's academic future. According to Chavkin (1993) and Henderson and Berla (1994), "research has shown that one of the most promising ways to increase students' achievement is to involve their families" (p. 21).

Unacceptable school performance in third grade is not only contrary to the federal mandate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), but an embarrassment to Americans everywhere. Recommendations to carry this out will be stated. Children must have the very basics met before they can be on a level academic playing field.

It is very difficult to provide good schooling from impoverished students who may come to school hungry or in cast-off and torn clothing, who may suffer from untreated medical problems who live in neighborhoods that are rife with crime violence, or who come from homes that lack even

basic amenities – let alone books and other education. (Greene & Forster, 2004, pp. 12-13)

“The stresses of poverty have a variety of effects on African American families impacting parental warmth, psychological availability, and control, all of which influence the well-being and academic achievement of children” (Jenkins, 1989, p. 15).

The very same stresses of poverty tend to keep poverty-stricken parents in low-paying jobs that have no insurance benefits and no possibility of advancement. Therefore, opportunities to escape this cycle seldom happen. The parents are relegated to working 12-hour days on minimum wage jobs in which they are powerless to control. After completing work, the parent has no energy or desire to help their child do homework. In essence, “low-income minority parents are typically employed in work settings that provide few opportunities for autonomous decision-making. This kind of work environment influences parents’ values and socialization practices by emphasizing compliance with authority and discouraging initiative and creative thought” (Greenberger & O’Neil, 1991, p. 7). Although low income is negatively impacting TAAS scores in this study, it is not impossible to change this outcome. One way is to increase family participation despite the obvious setbacks that people of poverty have. According to Chavkin (1993), “recent identifies increased parent involvement in education as a promising method to bolster student achievement” (p. 270). The family impact factor on education is

obvious. Walberg (1984) found that family participation in education was twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status.

Research Question Two

Is there a relationship in third grade TAAS reading scores when compared to gender, ethnicity and/or income level of parents as reported in the Public Education Information System (PEIMS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) database for selected third grade students in the Aldine Independent School District in Texas?

The data revealed that ethnicity is not impacting the academic performances of TAAS reading scores of third grade students in Aldine Independent School District. Secondly, the research reported that gender and socioeconomic status is negatively impacting on TAAS third grade reading scores in the Aldine Independent School District. The Economics Index (Greene & Forster, 2004), included income and poverty. This measured the material well-being of students. Greater family wealth leads to higher levels of student teachability because students from wealthier families will have fewer material challenges in their lives to hinder their learning and will receive more material support to aid their learning (in the form of academic supplies, tutoring, etc.). The research showed there is a large disproportionate number of girls who passed (this is good) the TAAS third grade reading test, while a large number of boys failed it (this is bad). Therefore, a finding was a significant

relationship between gender and TAAS because females performed at a higher level than males. The assessments were for reading, and they showed that female students outperformed male students (NAEP, 2003).

It is also interesting to note that when examining reading achievement, however, kindergarten females achieved significantly higher reading scores than kindergarten males across Minneapolis, Taiwan, and Japan samples (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990). It seems that in the case of Aldine Independent School District, “gender had a significant effect on the preference for the cooperative learning, with girls reporting a higher preference for this method than boys did” (Owens, & Straton, 1980, p. 148). This finding leads to questions of alternative approaches. These will be included.

Overall, both school districts, North Forest ISD and Aldine ISD, were found to have significant relationships of income to TAAS third grade reading scores. Further, gender was significantly related to third grade TAAS performance at Aldine ISD, but not at North Forest ISD. Ethnicity could not be analyzed at North Forest ISD due to the small percentage of non-Black students in third grade. At Aldine ISD, no relationship was found between ethnicity and third grade TAAS performance. The success rate on third grade TAAS was significantly higher at Aldine ISD (percent passed 85.1) than at North Forest ISD (percent passed 39.6).

Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of demographic profiles of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status on third grade TAAS reading scores of students in Aldine and North Forest Independent School Districts in Texas. The study sought to (a) determine whether there were significant differences in third grade TAAS reading scores between the two districts and (b) if a relationship exists between selected variables – gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (whether students receive free or reduced lunch).

Based upon the review of the literature, the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn from the research, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Both school districts (North Forest ISD and Aldine ISD) should have Pre-Kindergarten schools that focus on diagnostic and prescriptive reading programs. As of this writing, Aldine ISD has just begun implementation of this recommendation.
2. Both districts must implement a comprehensive parent training program and make it available when parents need it.
3. There must be an increase in non-reading classes with an emphasis on reading skills.
4. Consider of additional in-service training (and funding to accompany that training) on methods to increase reading performance.

5. Consider tying instructional staff evaluations to student reading performance.
6. Develop a parent reading program to assist parents in learning how to teach their children how to read and have fun doing it.
7. Further, North Forest ISD third grade performance with 60.3% failing indicates that the above recommendation should be applied in all classrooms in the North Forest Independent School District.
8. It is further recommended that a careful analysis be conducted at Aldine ISD to determine why there is a significant gender difference on TAAS. The following could be a possible approach in the area of gender: (a) conduct single gender classes throughout the school day, (b) provide after-school gender based reading program, and (c) review textbooks for gender bias.

Literacy problems in the primary grades and beyond cross racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic lines, but the children at greatest risk for reading problems in elementary school are those who start kindergarten with weak language skills, poor abilities to attend to the sounds of language as opposed to its specific meanings, deficient letter recognition, and unfamiliarity with the basic purposes and strategies of reading. Failure at literacy is much more common among children in poverty, children of color, children whose primary language is not English, those with preschool language impairments, and students whose parents had difficulty learning to read (Snow et al., 1998).

Bernal and Valencia (2000) discuss some legal decisions regarding the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills and the effects the test has on poor and minority students. The authors suggest much has been learned from positions and proposals such as the Wellstone/Scott Bill. The authors also suggest that outcomes from this bill could curtail some of the problems associated with high-stakes testing. They offer concrete suggestions for creating fair testing and assessment practices, and question policymakers' agendas in using the TAAS for maintaining the value of a high school diploma but at the expense of poor and minority students. This information came from an article written in the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* (Bernal & Valencia, 2000). In a parallel article entitled, "The myth of the Texas miracle in education," Haney (2000) outlines some issues dealing with student achievement.

Haney (2000) gives evidence to show that the reported "miracle" of educational reform in Texas along with the implementation of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) testing system is in actuality a myth and illusion. Haney gives negative impacts of the TAAS test on minority students. He discussed Judge Prado's ruling in a Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) lawsuit, *GI Forum v. Texas Education Agency*. Haney (2000) served as an expert witness for MALDEF. He served to prove that the high school graduation test in Texas, the TAAS "exit level" test, had illegal discriminatory impacts on Blacks and Hispanic students. Judge Prado ruled that while TAAS does have discriminatory impact on Blacks and

Hispanic students, the use of TAAS to withhold diplomas is not illegal because it was educationally necessary.

In a 1993 study by Herman and Golan, effects of standardized testing on teaching learning processes in elementary classrooms in 11 districts in 9 states were studied. Survey responses received from 341 teachers on such items as the pressure teachers feel to improve test scores and the amount of times teachers spend on test preparation were collected. The authors concluded that the presence of standardized testing has a substantial effect on the kinds of teaching and learning that goes on in schools, especially those schools that serve low socio-economic students.

Heubert (2001) also writes about high-stakes testing. He examines both the opportunities and risks inherent within the standards movement and high-stakes testing for students within specific populations. The extent of graduation and promotion testing in the U.S. and of sound testing policies are described. The article concludes with recommendations regarding the use of tests for high-stakes purposes including: refrain from using that the high-stakes test is valid for its intended purpose and avoid "either-or" decisions through effective early intervention.

Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, and Stecher (2000) ask the question about Texas test scores. Their article was written about the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The authors examined the extent of accuracy of scores that were reported. They also examined whether or not these reports

provided an accurate picture of student achievement in Texas. The authors even assessed the validity of Texas students' achievement gains by comparing them with gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). They concluded by raising questions about the validity of the gains, as they contacted the test development and administration department in Texas. Klein et al. (2000) had concerns that the inflated or biased gains reflecting real improvement in student achievement or something else. They wanted to know what Texas public school students were doing in comparison with students nationwide. This RAND study was conducted to provide lessons to help policymakers understand some of the challenges that arise in the context of high-stakes accountability systems.

The campus leader and the superintendent are ultimately responsible to children, parents, and community stakeholders. Steps should be taken to ensure that our children have an education that is second to none. The research has shown that this IS NOT the case in North Forest and Aldine Independent School Districts.

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