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PUTTING FRANCIS HOWELL ON THE MAP

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate
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Abstract

One of the main responsibilities of a school system is to train citizens to be productive members of society. To that end, educators are charged with the responsibility of helping students learn knowledge and skills that will be beneficial to their existence beyond high school. In recent years, growing criticism has emerged from business leaders and parents that schools are not doing a good enough job preparing students for life after high school. As a result, educators have worked to implement accountability systems that would raise the stakes for its students. As a result, the development and implementation of exit exams has become more prevalent in the U.S. over the last few years.

Currently, Francis Howell High School does not have an exit exam policy on the books. However, the demands to increase student achievement have become a primary focus of the district due to recent federal legislation and state accreditation criteria. The following thesis investigates current research on exit testing as well as identifying the opinions of the students, teachers and parents of Francis Howell High School on this topic. This information was analyzed to determine how the community of Francis Howell High School would support a decision to implement any type of exit exam policy. Based on the views of the stakeholders, a recommendation was also introduced. This proposal could be reviewed by the Francis Howell School District's Strategic Planning Committee to determine if the topic should be investigated any further.

Chapter One-Introduction

Introduction

When high school students graduate with a diploma, there is a level of knowledge and skill that is presumed to have been developed in order to be successful at either work or postsecondary education. Across the nation, state and district leaders are putting more emphasis on testing and using those test results to determine the proficiency of their students and schools. Nearly all states have established standards that describe what students should know and be able to do. Two logical questions to ask are, "How do we know if students have met those standards?" and "How will we measure what they know and what they are able to do?" In an attempt to answer those questions, twenty-seven states now rate students primarily or solely on the basis of student test scores (Voke, 2002).

It seems likely that if you were to pick up a newspaper you would find an article about state assessments that carry big consequences. Using assessment tests for such "high-stakes" purposes is gaining public support as a way to determine how good a job public schools are doing. As policymakers began to hear complaints from colleges and employers that high school graduates were lacking the basic skills to be successful, they lobbied to implement "exit exams" which would raise standards and achievement and hold students and educators accountable. School accountability for educational results is a dominant theme in education reform today. Like most educational jargon,

“accountability” means different things to different people, ranging from 'back to basics' objective testing to equalization of school financing. Yet at the core of the accountability movement lies a common concern: “the need for agreed-upon, easily understandable, readily adaptable measures of how well our schools are doing, and how student achievement in the U.S. today, from district to district and state to state, compares with foreign competitors and our own historical record” (Allen, p.1).

In Missouri, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education implemented a performance-based assessment system for use by all public schools in the state, as required by the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. The assessment system is designed to measure student progress toward meeting the Show-Me Standards, 73 rigorous academic standards that were adopted by the State Board of Education in January 1996 (MO DESE, 1996). The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is the tool designed to measure the competency of its schools. However, there is a statute on the books in Missouri that prohibits the state from enforcing an exit exam on its public school system. Section 160.570 states that, “in no case shall the state board of education or any other state agency establish any single test or group of tests as a condition or requirement for high school graduation or as a requirement for a state-approved diploma” (MO DESE, 1996). The message sent through this statute implies that if districts want to raise levels of accountability for their students and educators, they must do so locally within their own board policy.

No one disputes that too many American students are not getting the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and the workforce. Only about one-third are

proficient in reading and fewer still in math, according to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. Also, public opinion shows Americans increasingly critical of public schools overall (Walker, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to twofold. First, the report will examine the use of high-stakes testing within high schools nationwide to raise the level of accountability for its students and educators. Second, the study will identify the opinions of teachers, students and parents of Francis Howell High School to determine their viewpoints on whether the Francis Howell School District should consider taking a closer look at investigating the issue of exit testing.

Rationale for the Study

If the ultimate goal of education is student achievement, then the implementation of a high school exit exam embodies the spirit of that charge. By bringing legitimacy to the MAP test and raising the bar for students and educators, the high school diploma will be represented by a new definition. No longer just a social promotion, the student will have earned an ability to compete with other students across the country and/or world in a competitive marketplace.

Hypothesis

Based upon the opinions of teachers, students and parents, the consensus will be to investigate an exit exam policy further through the efforts of the Francis Howell School District Strategic Planning Committee.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to the number of teachers, students and parents at Francis Howell High School who were given a survey and returned the survey.
2. Of those surveys returned, some may not be completed and consequently skew the results.
3. The sample of students, teachers and community members was limited to those at Francis Howell High School during the 2002-2003 school year.
4. The interpretations of the survey caused some varying responses and estimates.
5. Measurement of the opinions of teachers, students and parents of Francis Howell High School was delimited to one survey for this research.

Definition of Terms

High-stakes test-an assessment used to help make a decision regarding the graduation status of a student.

Exit exam-a test that a student, who wishes to graduate from high school, must pass in order to demonstrate proficient knowledge and skills in that content area.

Accountability system-a set of education goals that identify roles and responsibilities, measure student progress, and inform and involve all stakeholders in analyzing results and suggesting strategies for change.

Likert scale-a scoring system used to rank opinions to a set of items. The term is derived from the industrial psychologist Rensis Likert (1932) who first used such scales.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which staff, students, and parents of Francis Howell High School are prepared to support a high-stakes testing system. In addition, a proposed accountability system has been developed, based on the responses of staff, student and parent surveys, for the Francis Howell School District that makes graduation contingent on MAP test scores.

CHAPTER II-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Growing criticism of the public education system led politicians and educators to turn toward testing to measure knowledge and skills. Throughout the past quarter-century, national, state and local education leaders focused on raising education standards and establishing strategies to promote accountability in schools. The implementation of these accountability systems served as the cornerstone of the education policy of the federal government as well as many states (Heubert and Hauser, 1999).

Case Law History

The courts have traditionally given school officials and teachers wide latitude in deciding appropriate academic requirements. The state has the authority to establish standards for promotion and graduation. In recent years, states have begun to rely more and more on the standardized test as a criterion to determine students' competencies. So long as such measures of academic attainment are reasonable and nondiscriminatory, the courts will not intervene (Freedman, 2001). Case law has created a precedent regarding the laissez-faire approach by the courts. In *Gasper v. Burton* (1975), the Supreme Court noted that it did not have "the resources to view academic records based upon academic standards within the particular knowledge, experience and expertise of academicians" (Reutter, p. 308). Also, in *Board of Curators of University of Missouri v. Horowitz*

(1978), the opinion of the court stated that they felt they “were not equipped to evaluate academic performance” (Reutter, p. 180).

According to Miriam Freedman, there are six things that a school district must do to implement an accountability system that includes the use of an exit exam. First, the test must be fair. In order to provide equity for each student who takes the exam, the test that is administered must be able to accurately measure what the students have been taught. That is what makes the establishment of the Show-Me Standards such a critical component of the high-stakes accountability system. Educators are given 73 specific standards (40 knowledge and 33 skill-based) to try and achieve with students by the time they complete high school. These are what teachers use to determine what students need to know and be able to do to ensure not only success on the MAP test but for post-secondary career pathways. In *Debra P. v. Turlington* (1981), the Supreme Court ruled that a test that covers material not taught in the schools of the state would be deemed as “fundamentally unfair”(Reutter, p.180). Therefore, the test should be aligned with the curriculum and vice-versa. In Missouri, the MAP test is developed from a list of Assessment Annotations that, in accordance with the Annotated Frameworks, correspond with the curriculum of each tested area. This guarantees that students are being tested over what they should be taught during the school year. However, it is up to individual school districts to align the scope and sequence of the curriculum to provide adequate opportunity to learn the material before the test is administered. Another court case that

addressed the issue of test fairness is *GI Forum v. Texan Education Agency* (2000). In *GI Forum*, the court identified a valid test to determine fairness would be to examine the test's history to see if the number of students passing was growing, and/or the gap between higher and lower performing students was narrowing (Freedman, 2001).

The second step, in implementing a high-stakes test policy, is that students are given the opportunity to learn the material. Any policy should guarantee that the students would have the chance to become familiar with the information they will be tested on. However, it does not guarantee that students will pass the test. In *Northport v. Ambach* (1982), a New York Appellate Court ruled that since a vast majority of students answered the questions correctly, that they had the opportunity to learn the material. On high school exit exams, if students do not receive the opportunity to learn, the test does not have "curricular validity" and they can argue they were deprived of due process—a violation of the 14th Amendment (Freedman, 2001). Next, the school district must provide adequate prior notice that the test is going to be administered and to what degree of accountability will the students be held. For high-stakes graduation/diploma tests, courts have stated that two to five years is adequate notice (Freedman, 2001).

The fourth step in implementing an accountability system through the use of an exit exam is to ensure that the test is valid. To confirm that a test has validity, the test must measure what its producer intends for it to measure; tests should be administered by the directions provided by the test producer; the test should only be used for their stated

purpose (Freedman, 2001). According to Messick, there is no such thing as a generically valid test. Validity must be considered in terms of the correctness of a particular inference about test takers. There are three types of validity evidence that are commonly referred to as Content, Construct and Criterion-related evidence. Content-related validity assures that the sample of questions in a test are representative of the content and skills that are intended for the learner to possess. Construct-related validity allows educators to make inferences about students and whether or not they possess the skills to validate a proficient score. Finally, Criterion-related validity is needed to make inferences about a person's current or future performance (Messick, 1989). If a test can fulfill these criteria, it is valid and educators may make decisions of consequence by using the test scores.

The final criterion that must be used in implementing an accountability system through an exit exam is that the test alone cannot determine a student's graduation status. According to Freedman, the courts would probably not support a school district granting/not granting a diploma based solely on the basis of one test alone. Most states that use an exit exam, approach it as a three-legged table. There are at least three requirements-not just one. Typically, a student has to pass a test, pass all required courses, and meet attendance requirements. Many states permit students to take the test many times. These cumulative requirements are called "multiple measures."(Freedman, pg. 22) Passing courses, passing the test, meeting attendance or other requirements are

necessary, but none is sufficient in and of itself to earn a diploma. Each is a separate and necessary criterion.

Accountability System Historical Continuum

The accountability debate of the 1980s was driven in large part by the public's dissatisfaction with business as usual, and focused on measuring how well schools did by the amount of money and resources they had. On the federal level, the push for the development of accountability systems commenced formally in 1989 as a result of the Education Summit, when then President George Bush met with the nation's governors and developed national education goals. A byproduct of that event was the establishment of the National Educational Goals Panel, which began to compile anecdotal reports on progress toward six national education goals (Allen, 1994). During the Clinton administration, Allen reported that a major reauthorization of the federal elementary and secondary education (ESEA) law was implemented to seek a new focus on educational outcomes, increasing the federal aid tied to school improvements intended to enhance performance and encouraging the use of standards for workplace skills.

The momentum created during the previous administrations resulted in the culmination of landmark legislation in 2001. The implications of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) are that accountability is the centerpiece of the education agenda. NCLB amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. High-stakes accountability is a core element of the ESEA. Under ESEA, states

must establish a single statewide accountability system that aligns with state content standards. Beginning in 2005-2006, they must administer tests in math, language arts and science. Those tests must be publicly reported, and schools that fail to produce adequate improvements in student achievement will be subject to sanctions (Voke, p.6). Another key element of this education agenda was the establishment of National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC), which would oversee existing efforts to develop content and performance standards by subject area. This group was designed to provide the administrative support needed to enforce the regulations established in the ESEA. NCLB established testing and accountability precedents that required changes in the practices of many states (Linn et al, 2002). Notable among these changes were those concerned with the identification of Average Yearly Progress (AYP) objectives. This information will be paramount in the communication to policymakers and the community as to how well schools are performing.

Standardized tests are now being designed as the common administrative mechanism to drive educational reform. Proponents of high-stakes testing argue that it leads to achievement and other gains. Not only do students know what is expected, but the test counts, so they work harder. Also, schools are able to use data to identify and can address student weaknesses early to focus instruction. Finally, the community is able to see gains from year to year and is given the chance to regain its confidence in public schools (Chudowsky et al, 2002).

Student Accountability

In any high-stakes testing situation, it is only fair to provide clearly defined levels of performance for sake of comparison. Establishing descriptors such as “proficient” or “advanced” to scoring guides has enabled states/districts to defend their decisions to award or deny diplomas. Also, there should be programs designed to reward students for their efforts. In addition to impacting graduation status, scores which fall within “proficient” and/or “advanced” categories can render more tangible benefits like parking permits or activity passes. By establishing an accountability system for students, Metts (1998) contended that social promotion for reading deficient students or those who lack adequate math, science and social studies skills would end. Not only would it require districts to undertake academic improvement activities for deficient assessment performance but it would also place an ownership component on the student to improve his/her score or else he/she would not graduate.

Focused Instruction

According to a survey reported by Public Agenda, testing is the number one accountability tool, adopted in 48 of 50 states (Public Agenda, 2002). If test results are intended to focus attention on raising student achievement, many argue that instruction should be focused on improving those test scores. In *Debra v. Turlington (1981)*, the courts established that a test must consist of “curricular validity” in order meet legal standards of qualifying as a high-stakes exam. According to Linn (1998), curricular

validity had come to mean the consistency between the test content and both what is found in the curricular materials and what is being taught in classrooms.

Although critics of high-stakes testing claim that this approach is problematic in that it promotes “teaching to the test”. Proponents would counter that instruction should be directed towards a set of standards of knowledge and skills and that the test used to determine graduation should be representative of the knowledge and skills identified in the standards. In Missouri, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) established 73 standards (40 knowledge and 33 skill-based) to identify exactly what students should know and be able to do at the completion of their studies (MO DESE, 1996). In the Francis Howell School District, teachers use curricula that are aligned with the Show-Me Standards. This has allowed instruction to be focused towards the knowledge and skills that students are going to need to be prepared for the MAP test. However, currently there are no accountability components that have been implemented through district policy to encourage students to do their best on the test.

Public Opinion

The first question that a parent usually asks in a parent conference is, “How is my child doing?” A teacher uses a variety of information sources to provide appropriate feedback. These resources include reviewing grades, the results of nationally normed standardized tests and classroom observations. The problems surface when their child

doesn't get into the college of their choice or is denied a job. Parents have not known where to turn to find out who was to blame. Should the blame be placed on the child, the school, the district or the system? As policymakers felt the heat from their constituents, politicians ratcheted up their efforts to increase accountability in schools for educators and students (Voke, 2002). As a result, reforms have been instituted to build more successful learning experiences. According to Metts (1998), there have been some common goals established by education systems that promote positive community interaction. These include establishing open lines of communication with parents, creating partnerships with local businesses and encouraging parent participation through volunteer efforts. The more that parents and community members can become involved and take ownership in the daily activities of the school, the more support the district and/or building will receive from the public.

When determining the effectiveness of a public relations program, Bagin and Gallagher (2001) asserted that school systems should be measured by their ability to develop planned relationships with their community to ensure a correct perception of the "organization." By establishing a philosophy centered on building citizen knowledge and understanding, the community can become more involved in the daily processes of the school. This not only enhances the school's chances of getting better public support but it minimizes criticism, allows educators to "learn the values and priorities of a

community and it allows schools to receive many functional ideas that will help them educate students better” (Bagin and Gallagher, p.125).

Exit Exam Opponents

Critics of exit exams believe that these types of exams will increase the dropout rate by exasperating struggling students who will initially fail the exam, or anticipate that they will fail (Chudowsky et al, 2002). Also, critics point out that socio-economic factors can attribute to the success or failure of students. Since research suggests that minorities, poor and disabled historically have performed poorly on these types of tests, school districts are setting up these groups to fail. Opponents of exit exams also feel that it affects high-achieving students in a negative way as well. Detractors contend that the tests will serve as a “deterrent for those who pass the test and figure they don’t have to continue to work hard in the rest of their classes” (Chudowsky et al, p. 6).

In addition, opponents also point to the research that shows that when teachers are under pressure to teach to high-stakes tests, they may focus their instruction on a narrow subset of knowledge and skills, neglecting other important topics that may be neglected. Also, some parents and many teachers “feel that pressure from high-stakes tests are causing schools to move away from enrichment activities or other engaging student learning activities to focus on a limited set of knowledge and skills” (Chudowsky et al, p.15)

Finally, as test expert's stress, a student's score can be expected to vary due to many hidden curriculum factors, such as the test's margin of error, the specific version of the test given, the particular sample of questions asked, the student's health on testing day, and the presence of distractions in the classroom or outside the window. Also, critics are quite concerned about whether or not students are being provided with an adequate opportunity to learn the material tested (Chudowsky et al, 2002).

Current Accountability Systems

There are three different types of exit exams utilized by states across the nation.

These types include the following:

1. Minimum Competency Exam
 - Used to assess the essential competencies of employment, further education and functioning in society
2. Standards-Based Exam
 - Intended to measure fundamental knowledge and skills generally at the 11th grade level.
3. End-of-course Exit Exam
 - Exams taken in core subjects (English, Math, Science and Social Studies) to measure basic skills and functional knowledge of the subject area tested (Chudowsky et al, p. 16).

The following table articulates the 27 states that have implemented a high-stakes test with a minimum score to graduate (Education Commission of the States, 2000).

STATE	DESCRIPTION
Alabama	Each student must pass the reading and language sections of the graduation exam; the class of 2002 must also pass the math and science sections; the class of 2003 must also pass social studies.
Alaska	Effective January 2002, students must pass a competency exam in reading, English and math.
Arizona	The competency tests cover reading, writing, and math.
California	Starting in 2003-2004, each student must pass the exit exam to graduate. Students may take the exam in grade 9 starting 2000-2001.
Florida	All 11 th grade students must pass a high school competency test.
Georgia Georgia (cont.)	A curriculum-based test is administered in 11 th grade "for graduation purposes." The graduation test will be replaced with end-of-course assessments when they are developed.
Indiana	Each student must pass a graduation exam to graduate, unless the principal certifies that the student will complete the Core 40 curriculum, or meet several other, fairly stringent requirements (grades, attendance, teacher recommendations, etc.).
Louisiana	Language arts, writing and mathematics tests are administered in 10 th grade, science and social studies in the 11 th grade.
Maryland	Exit exam covers math, reading, writing, citizenship arts and physical education, the "World of Work" and "Survival Skills", but only at basic levels. They will be replaced with end-of-course exams in English, government, algebra, geometry and biology. Students entering 9 th grade in 2003 will be required to pass those end-of-course exams to graduate.
Massachusetts	All 10 th grade students must take tests in math, science and technology, history and social science and English. Starting with the class of 2003, all students must pass the math and English tests to graduate. In coming years, passing the other tests will also become requirements for graduation.
Minnesota	Students must pass the Basic Skills test in reading, writing and math. The class of 2002 must also meet "High Standards" in 24 of 48 content standards from 10 learning areas.
Michigan	Students must score above a certain level in mandatory state assessments to gain state endorsement in that area.
Mississippi	Requires mastery of "minimum academic skills as measured by assessments developed and administered by the State Board of Education."
Nevada	Test covers reading, writing, math and science.
New Jersey	Requirements include passing an assessment and demonstrating skills in areas identified by the state board of education other than those covered in the assessment tests.

New Mexico	Test includes reading, English, math, science and social science. Students leaving high school may take the exam within five years and still receive a diploma.
New York	New York Board of Regents is phasing in a schedule under which all students will have to pass the Regents exams to graduate.
North Carolina	All students must pass a computer skills test, to be administered in the 8 th grade. All high school students must pass basic competency exit exams, to be administered in the 11 th grade.
Ohio	Includes math, reading, writing, science and citizenship.
Oklahoma	To graduate, students must take end-of-instruction tests in English, U.S. History, biology, and algebra
South Carolina	Exam covers reading, writing and math.
Tennessee	Currently have exit exams but end-of-course tests being phased in with English II, Algebra I and Biology instead of a single exam.
Texas	Exit-level assessments include English, math, social studies and science.
Utah	Exit exam includes language arts, reading and math.
Virginia	All students must pass a literacy test to graduate. Also, students must pass 6 end-of-course exams, 2 in English and 4 student-selected.
Washington	Students must pass test before being issued "certificate of mastery," which is required for graduation.
Wisconsin	Local school boards must develop policies specifying criteria for awarding high school diplomas. As one of the criteria, districts must administer a "graduation exam" in language arts, math, science and social studies.

Chapter III-Method

Introduction

In October 2000, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group named Public Agenda conducted a series of public opinion surveys designed to track what impact the drive to improve education standards was having on teachers, parents and students. One of the hot-button issues discussed was the implementation of high-stakes testing and the implications rendered if a student did not show proficiency in these exams (Gottlieb and Darden, 2000). In order to determine the opinions of staff, students and parents of Francis Howell High School regarding the use of a high-stakes test, a cross-sectional survey was conducted that mirrored surveys distributed to teachers, parents and students in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York.

Subjects

The subjects used in the survey were teachers, a cross-section of students, and parents of Francis Howell High School.

Sampling Procedure

The type of sampling procedure varied for each group in this study. For teachers, the most accessible and convenient population utilized was the 90 faculty members at Francis Howell High School. They completed a five question, closed form survey that asked them to rate their opinions on questions regarding implementation of accountability systems and high-stakes exit exams for purposes of grade promotion and/or graduation from high school.

For student surveys, a cluster random sampling procedure was used. All students at Francis Howell are enrolled in language arts classes. After obtaining a list of all language arts sections offered, two classes per grade level were randomly selected to be survey participants. Students were asked to complete surveys during class time.

Parent surveys were given to students who completed the student survey. Those students were asked to take the surveys home for parents to complete. The surveys were collected and compiled to represent the parent sample population for purposes of this study.

Research Setting

The surveys that were disseminated for the purposes of this study were completed in various places. Both the teacher and student surveys were completed at Francis Howell High School. Parent surveys were completed outside of school.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey was utilized to determine the opinions of teachers, students and parents of Francis Howell High School regarding the use of standardized tests as exit exams as part of promotion and/or graduation requirements for the district. From the information collected and researched, a recommendation will be formed and presented to Francis Howell School District concerning the topic of high-stakes testing and whether or not it should be considered as an option to investigate in greater detail.

Research Method

The major purpose of using surveys is to describe the characteristics of a population (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). In survey research however, entire populations are rarely studied. As an alternative, a selected sample of participants is surveyed and from the results of that survey there are conclusions drawn about the entire population. According to Fraenkel and Wallen, survey research represents one of the easiest ways to get a lot of information. Also, by using a self-administered questionnaire, the anonymity of the survey would allow for an honest response. The use of closed form or fixed alternative types of questions also assists in the accuracy of the data (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). A Likert Scale was used to determine the attitudes and opinions of the teachers, students and parents of Francis Howell High School. This system mirrored the ratings used in the Public Agenda surveys. The categories offered to differentiate participant opinions ranged from strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose and don't know.

Instrumentation

Student and teachers surveys were completed at Francis Howell High School. After a faculty meeting, the entire staff of Francis Howell High School was asked to complete a seven-item, closed form questionnaire. Students completed their surveys in their respective language arts classes, which were chosen at random. These surveys consisted of five, closed form questions. Parent surveys were distributed to students. The students were to give the survey, along with an attached cover letter, to their parent(s) and have them complete it at their leisure. Students returned the completed surveys to the C-Office. The surveys were administered one time to all participants and the researcher was responsible for overseeing the distribution, completion and collection of the surveys.

Validity of Instrumentation

“Determining validity allows researchers to use data to draw warranted conclusions about the people (and others like them) on whom the data were collected.” (Fraenkel and Wallen, p.23) For the purposes of this study, the survey administered by the researcher was designed to tabulate the opinions of teachers, students and parents of Francis Howell High School. Using these opinions and the current research available, a recommendation will be made on whether or not Francis Howell High School should study the possibility of implementing a high stakes testing system.

Reliability of Instrumentation

Since the surveys are only administered once to each group and the groups are not scored on correct/incorrect answers, the role of reliability is minimal. Any answer that is recorded is an answer that can be used to help determine what type of recommendation will be moved forward. Therefore, the determination of reliability does not apply.

Validity of Study

This study demonstrates validity by basing its recommendations on the data collected from the surveys administered and the research provided in Chapter Two.

Reliability of Study

Due to the nature of this qualitative study, determining reliability is not necessary. As identified earlier, there are limitations to the study. The researcher will base his recommendation to the school district on the surveys of the sample populations and the published data on the topic.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

Results from the surveys will be tabulated into percentages for reporting purposes. The categorical data will be illustrated in tables and figures. These percentages will be compared to responses from similar questions that were posed to teachers, students and parents in other cities around the U.S. through Public Agenda surveys completed in 2000.

Rationale for Selected Statistical Treatment of Data

When using a survey method to gather data, it is advisable to use percentages to report on the opinions of those who responded to the questionnaire.

Summary

The drive to set higher educational standards has begun to take hold of America's schools. Nearly every state has established academic benchmarks and mandated standardized testing to attempt and improve student achievement. In an effort to identify the opinions of those with a vested interest regarding this endeavor, surveys were distributed to students, parents and teachers of Francis Howell High School in March 2003. The questions posed in this questionnaire mirrored questions asked of students, parents and teachers in major cities across the U.S. through Public Agenda telephone surveys conducted in 2000 and 2001. The intent of this survey is to gather data to identify a public consensus that would provide some insight into whether or not patrons of the district feel that the use of an exit exam or high-stakes test would be an issue worth investigating further through the Strategic Planning Committee.

Chapter IV-Results

Introduction

In March 2003, teachers, students and parents of Francis Howell High School participated in a survey to measure their opinions on issues surrounding exit exams.

Statements posed to the three groups included the following:

- Should Francis Howell use the results of a standardized test to determine whether a student gets promoted or graduates?
- Rate your effort if FHHS adopted a policy that would require you to pass a standardized test to get promoted to the next grade or to graduate.
- In terms of academic achievement, rate the expectations placed on your child/student.
- Before students are awarded a high school diploma, what type of test would you want students to be able to pass?

All teachers at Francis Howell High School were given the opportunity to participate in the survey. Of 85 teachers on staff at FHHS, 74 completed and turned in a questionnaire. Students who were chosen to participate were selected randomly through their language arts classes. Surveys were distributed to eight classes, two per grade level. Of 213 student surveys disseminated, 70 were completed and returned. With regards to parent participation, when students were given their surveys, they were also asked to take a survey home for their parents to fill out. 213 parent surveys were distributed, 64 were

completed and returned. The results from these surveys will be used to be part of a recommendation to the Francis Howell School District on whether or not the use of exit exams should be explored further through the Strategic Planning Committee.

Analysis of Data

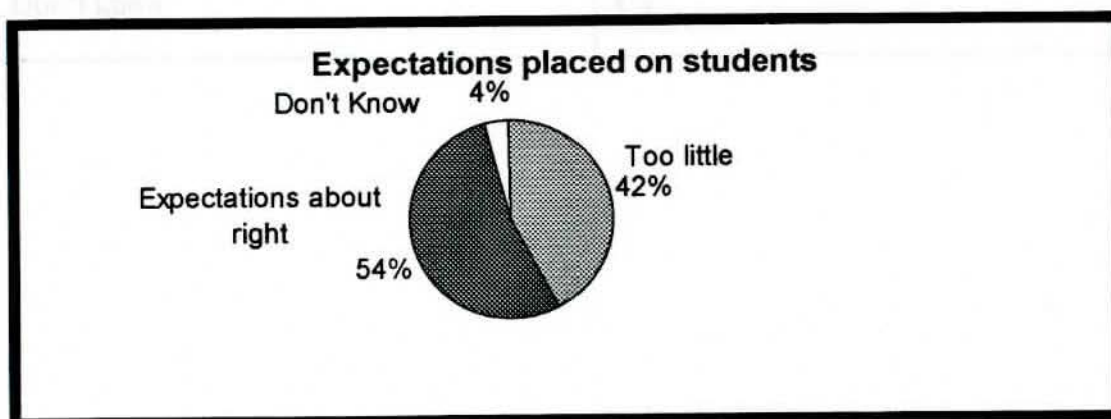
The analysis of the data collected from the three surveys is displayed through the following tables and figures. They are explained in the following order: teacher, parent and student.

Teacher Survey Findings

Finding One: A majority of teachers believe that, in terms of academic achievement, Francis Howell currently places the right amount of expectations upon students.

STATEMENT POSED: IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, PLEASE RATE THE EXPECTATIONS YOU FEEL FRANCIS HOWELL PLACES ON YOUR CHILD/STUDENT?

Figure One



Finding Two: Seventy percent of teachers at Francis Howell either strongly or somewhat approve that students receive mandatory remediation if they can't meet higher academic standards.

STATEMENT POSED: SOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS NOW REQUIRE STUDENTS TO MEET HIGHER ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN ORDER TO GRADUATE. IF THEY CAN'T MEET HIGHER STANDARDS, THEY ARE REQUIRED TO RECEIVE CORRECTIVE INSTRUCTION IN SUMMER SCHOOL. PLEASE RATE YOUR OPINION ON WHETHER OR NOT FRANCIS HOWELL SHOULD ADOPT THIS POLICY?

Table One

Strongly approve	24%
Somewhat approve	46%
Somewhat oppose	18%
Strongly oppose	8%
Don't know	4%

Finding Three: Seventy-five percent of teachers at Francis Howell either strongly or somewhat approve of students not being allowed to graduate if they still did not meet academic standards after remediation.

STATEMENT POSED: SUPPOSE THAT STUDENTS FINISHED SUMMER SCHOOL BUT STILL FAILED TO MEET THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS. RATE YOUR OPINION ON NOT ALLOWING THOSE STUDENTS TO GRADUATE.

Table Two

Strongly approve	30%
Somewhat approve	45%
Somewhat oppose	12%
Strongly oppose	7%
Don't know	4%

Finding Four: Ninety-four percent of parents at Francis Howell believe that the district should either continue an effort toward high academic standards or continue the effort while making some adjustments.

STATEMENT POSED: WHEN IT COMES TO THIS EFFORT TOWARD HIGHER ACADEMIC STANDARDS, DO YOU THINK THAT FRANCIS HOWELL SHOULD:

Table Three

Continue the effort	41%
Continue the effort with some adjustments	53%
Stop the effort and go back to the way things were	3%
Don't know enough to say	3%

Finding Five: Seventy percent of teachers at Francis Howell believe that students should pass some sort of exit exam before being awarded a high school diploma.

STATEMENT POSED: BEFORE STUDENTS ARE AWARDED A DIPLOMA, WOULD YOU WANT TO REQUIRE FRANCIS HOWELL STUDENTS TO:

Table Four

Pass a basic skills test in reading, writing and math	47%
Pass a more challenging test showing they have learned at higher levels	23%
Requiring a student to pass a test is a bad idea	22%
Don't know	8%

Finding Six: Forty-six percent of teachers at Francis Howell believe that spending significant time to prepare students for a test presents a problem because it takes away from time to promote real learning.

STATEMENT POSED: WHEN SCHOOLS REQUIRE STUDENTS TO PASS A STANDARDIZED TEST TO GRADUATE, TEACHERS OFTEN TAKE SIGNIFICANT TIME TO PREPARE THEIR STUDENTS FOR THE TEST. PLEASE RATE YOUR OPINION FROM THE FOLLOWING CHOICES.

Table Five

There is nothing wrong with this because the tests measure important skills and knowledge	32%
This is a problem because when teachers teach to the test, real learning suffers.	46%
Don't know	20%

Finding Seven: Ninety-one percent of teachers at Francis Howell either strongly or somewhat agree that students will pay more attention and study harder if they know they must pass a test to graduate.

STATEMENT POSED: STUDENTS WILL PAY MORE ATTENTION AND STUDY HARDER IF THEY KNOW THEY MUST PASS A TEST TO GRADUATE.

Table Six

Strongly agree	61%
Somewhat agree	30%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	4%
Don't know	0%

Sample: 74 teachers at Francis Howell High School

Methodology: Written questionnaire conducted March 12, 2003

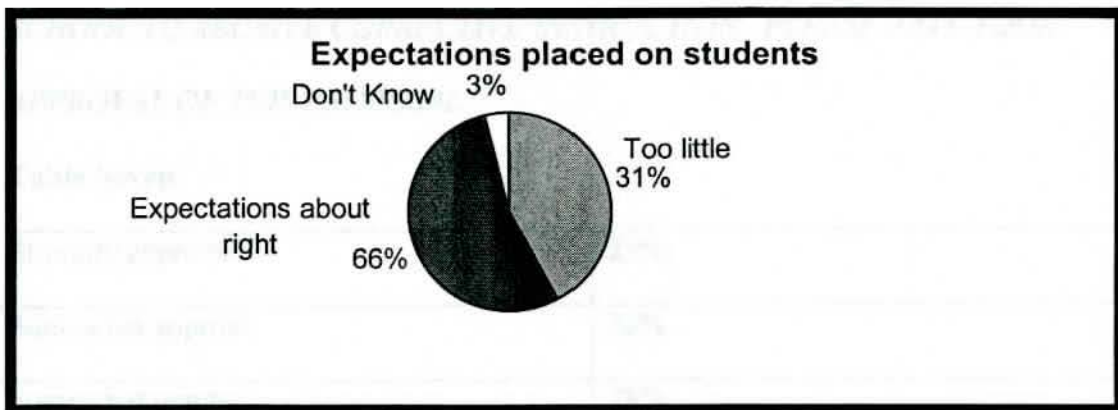
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding

Parent Survey Findings

Finding One: Sixty-six percent of parents of Francis Howell students believe that the expectations placed on their students are about right.

STATEMENT POSED: IN TERMS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, PLEASE RATE THE EXPECTATIONS YOU FEEL FRANCIS HOWELL PLACES ON YOUR CHILD.

Figure Two



Finding Two: Sixty-three percent of parents either strongly or somewhat approve of requiring students, who have not met academic standards, to receive corrective instruction during the summer in order to graduate.

STATEMENT POSED: SOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS NOW REQUIRE STUDENTS TO MEET HIGHER ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN ORDER TO GRADUATE. IF THEY CAN'T MEET THE HIGHER STANDARDS, THEY HAVE TO GO TO SUMMER SCHOOL TO RECEIVE CORRECTIVE INSTRUCTION. PLEASE RATE YOUR APPROVAL OF THIS PROPOSAL.

Table Seven

Strongly approve	25%
Somewhat approve	38%
Somewhat oppose	28%
Strongly oppose	9%
Don't know	0%

Finding Three: Fifty-three percent of parents at Francis Howell either strongly or somewhat approve of the school district not allowing students to graduate if, after finishing summer school, they could not meet the academic standards.

STATEMENT POSED: SUPPOSE THAT YOUR CHILD FINISHED SUMMER SCHOOL BUT STILL FAILED TO MEET THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS. PLEASE RATE YOUR OPINION ON WHETHER OR NOT YOUR CHILD SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO GRADUATE.

Table Eight

Strongly approve	22%
Somewhat approve	31%
Somewhat oppose	22%
Strongly oppose	9%
Don't know	3%

Finding Four: Eighty-four percent of agree either that Francis Howell should continue its effort toward higher academic standards or continue its effort with adjustments.

STATEMENT POSED: WHEN IT COMES TO THIS EFFORT TOWARD HIGHER ACADEMIC STANDARDS, DO YOU THINK THAT FRANCIS HOWELL SHOULD:

Table Nine

Continue the effort	28%
Continue the effort with adjustments	56%
Stop the effort and go back to the way things were	6%
Don't know	13%

Finding Five: Fifty percent of parents of Francis Howell students believe that their child should have to pass some sort of exit exam in order to be awarded a high school diploma.

QUESTION: BEFORE STUDENTS ARE AWARDED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, WOULD YOU WANT FRANCIS HOWELL TO REQUIRE STUDENTS TO:

Table Ten

Pass a basic skills test in reading, writing and math	34%
Pass a more challenging test showing they have learned at higher levels	16%
Requiring a kid to pass a test is a bad idea	44%
Don't know	13%

Sample: 64 parents of Francis Howell students

Methodology: Written questionnaire disseminated to students to take home to parents on March 12, 2003. Students returned parent surveys when they brought back student surveys. Collected from C-Office ballot box on March 19, 2003.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Student Survey Findings

Finding One: Seventy percent of students at Francis Howell report that they experience nervousness during standardized testing but deal with it appropriately.

STATEMENT POSED: WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES HOW NERVOUS YOU GET WHEN YOU TAKE STANDARDIZED TESTS?

Table Eleven

I get so nervous that it effects my ability to take the test	17%
I get nervous but I deal with it	70%
I don't get nervous at all	13%
I don't care	0%
Don't know	0%

Finding Two: Seventy-six percent of Francis Howell students believed that teachers do not prepare them enough to take standardized tests.

STATEMENT POSED: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUR TEACHERS FOCUS ON PREPARING FOR THOSE STANDARDIZED TESTS?

Table Twelve

Too much	24%
Just about enough	0%
Somewhat but not enough	53%
None at all	23%
Don't know	0%

Finding Three: Sixty-four percent of the students at Francis Howell believed that the school puts too much emphasis on standardized test scores.

STATEMENT POSED: RATE THE EMPHASIS THAT FRANCIS HOWELL PUTS ON STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES.

Table Thirteen

Too much	64%
Just about enough	26%
Somewhat but not enough	0%
None at all	0%
Don't know	10%

Finding Four: Fifty-eight percent of students at Francis Howell either strongly or somewhat disagree that the school district should require students to pass an exit exam as part of the provisions to receive a diploma.

QUESTION: SHOULD THE FRANCIS HOWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT USE THE RESULTS OF A STANDARDIZED TEST TO HELP DETERMINE IF A STUDENT GRADUATES?

Table Fourteen

Strongly agree	11%
Somewhat agree	21%
Somewhat disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	42%
Don't know	0%

Finding Five: Seventy-six percent of students at Francis Howell would try either much or somewhat harder to do well on the test if the district adopted a policy that would require students to pass a standardized test to graduate.

STATEMENT POSED: RATE YOUR EFFORT IF THE FRANCIS HOWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPLEMENTED POLICY THAT REQUIRED STUDENTS TO PASS A STANDARDIZED TEST IN ORDER TO GRADUATE.

Table Fifteen

Try much harder to do well on the test	34%
Somewhat harder to do well on the test	42%
No change in my effort regarding the test	13%
Try less on the test	0%
Don't know	11%

Sample: 70 students at Francis Howell High School

Methodology: Written questionnaire disseminated to students on March 12, 2003.

Students returned surveys to C-Office to ballot box at various times between March 12 and March 19, 2003. Surveys were collected from C-Office ballot box on March 19, 2003.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Data Comparison

When comparing data between the Public Agenda survey and those questionnaires completed by parents and students of Francis Howell High School, some interesting comparisons are worth noting. For example:

- In the Public Agenda survey, 87% percent of parents wanted to continue the effort or continue the effort with adjustments toward higher academic standards. With regards to the Francis Howell survey, 70% of FHHS parents echoed that sentiment.
- In the Public Agenda survey, 80% of parents polled believed that their students should have to pass either a basic skills test or an exam that measures higher-level thinking (53% basic and 27% higher learning). Concerning the Francis Howell questionnaire, only 50% percent felt the need for such tests (34% basic and 16% higher learning).
- In the Public Agenda survey, 73% of students stated they were nervous during standardized tests but deal with it. Similarly, 70% of FHHS students identified nervousness during the completion of standardized tests but found an appropriate way to complete the test.
- In the Public Agenda survey, 62% of polled students identified that it was wrong to use the results of a standardized test to determine graduation. Meanwhile, 58% percent of students at FHHS concur with their fellow students.

Summary

Based on the research and the surveys of vested members of the Francis Howell community, some definite trends are evident. Among these are the following:

- Generally, teachers and parents support a school district's decision to raise the academic standards of its schools.
- A majority of parents and teacher would support a school district's decision to implement some sort of exit testing, but feel it is not the only factor that should be used to determine whether or not a student graduates. Also, if implemented, parents and teachers would support corrective instruction through mandatory summer remediation.
- A majority of students do not support a school district's decision to implement any type of exit testing that will determine, on its own merit, whether or not a student can graduate

Based on the research and data that has been accumulated, a recommendation will be provided in Chapter Five that will take into account the concerns of all stakeholders throughout the district.

Chapter Five-Discussion

Introduction

States have begun adopting exit exams primarily to ensure that students are graduating from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful at post-secondary work, either through college, trade school or the job force. Exit exams are not a new idea. During the 1970's and 80's, numerous states adopted minimum competency tests to determine if students could read, write and compute basic math before they graduated (Chudowsky et al, 2000). A more comprehensive movement of standards-based education has taken shape within the last decade. This educational reform effort rejuvenated the concept of high-stakes tests and raised the bar past basic skills. State imposed academic benchmarks (i.e., Show-Me Standards) have provided a more solid foundation for exit exams by clarifying what students should know and be able to do as they proceed through schooling toward graduation. This movement has also elevated the significance of standardized testing at all grade levels to monitor knowledge and skills as children progress through the public school system.

Drawing upon the information provided by other states which are currently involved in implementing exit exams; looking at current research on what supporters and opponents are saying about high-stakes tests; and taking into account the opinions of the stakeholders of the Francis Howell School District (teachers, students and parents), a recommendation has been developed. This recommendation also considers what courts

have determined to be legal and fair through case history. Ultimately, this plan is designed to raise the level of accountability for students, teachers and parents. It is a plan that will need the support of the community, as well as established open lines of communication between all parties and a commitment to developing a more prepared graduate for the real world. This commitment will also require focused instruction and remediation to prepare students to perform at the highest level.

Implication for Effective Schools

By adopting an exit exam policy, policymakers and educators are trying to ensure that a diploma means more than the paper on which it was printed. Specifically, the diploma should mean that the student has gained the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the workplace, college or other aspects of daily life. This is in response to the theory that in recent years the high school diploma has depreciated. At the root of this decrease in the quality of graduates is the idea of social promotion of poorly prepared students. Business leaders, college faculty and others have complained that too many young people come to them unprepared for the rigors of the real world or academia. In 2002 by Public Agenda, more than 7 in 10 employers and professors said that young people have just fair or poor skills in grammar, spelling, writing and basic mathematics (Public Agenda, 2002).

Rigorous secondary school tests are part of many European and East Asian countries, including several that consistently outperform their American neighbors on international assessments. The use of high-stakes tests motivates students and teachers to

work harder and focus their attention on important learning goals. As Chudowsky points out, “students will learn more and be better prepared in life” (Chudowsky et al, pg. 5).

Those who support exit exams hope to improve the overall quality of public education. By using high-stakes tests as a quality assurance, it will legitimize the standards effort throughout the nation, as states continue to identify what students should know and be able to do once they leave high school.

Recommendation

Case law has supported the use of high-stakes testing to help determine graduation as long as the test, by itself, does not determine graduation. The following proposal includes the use of a standardized test used in Missouri called the MAP (Missouri Assessment Program). This test measures what students should know and be able to do through the Show-Me Standards. If the student does not meet scoring requirements on the MAP in tested area, there are two alternate ways of earning diploma authorization. Students will also have had to meet district attendance and credit requirements in order to be eligible for graduation.

Table Fourteen

<u>Francis Howell Graduation Accountability System</u>
<p>All students from Francis Howell School District must achieve the following criteria in order to be eligible for graduation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet district requirements for compulsory attendance 2. Earn a total of at least 24 credits according to the scope and sequence of district policy <p style="text-align: center;">AND one of the following scenarios:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Score at least a proficient rating in each tested area of the MAP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Math and Science (10th grade) • Communication Arts and Social Studies (11th grade) <p style="text-align: center;">Or</p> 4. Earn a 2.0 cumulative grade point average in all core area classes during their high school career. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Math, Science, Social Studies and Communication Arts <p style="text-align: center;">Or</p> 5. Obtain a cumulative "C" average on all final exams taken in core area classes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These final exams are 100% common throughout departments to ensure that students are tested on the same material. • The content of the exams is consistent with the knowledge skills that are identified through the Show-Me Standards. <p>NOTE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a student earns at least a proficient rating in one tested area but not in others, he/she is eligible to satisfy graduation requirements for those deficient areas through the other two options. • If a student earns less than a proficient rating in any tested area, he/she must participate in a nine-week remediation program, where individual concerns are addressed through an individual plan, the following school year. The course they take would occur during the following school year and students will be pulled from an elective course to participate. Upon completion of the program, students would earn a .25 elective credit (pass/fail) on their transcript. • Students who need to earn at least a 2.0 G.P.A. in core areas, may utilize summer remediation courses to improve knowledge, skills and consequently the student's G.P.A.

Summary

As high-stakes testing becomes a growing trend in America's high schools, it is important to understand that no one is quite sure whether exit exams will increase student learning or have unintended negative effects. However, as legislators and school boards face increasing pressure to take actions to improve the quality of education, new educational paradigms intent on escalating standards and graduation requirements are being implemented across the nation to more than half of the states. Research shows that this type of increased accountability has found favor among parents, teachers and even students.

Clearly the recommendation proposed does not implement a true "exit exam" format. For example, due to the testing sequence that is currently followed by the state of Missouri, students are not allowed to re-take portions of the MAP test. As a result, corrective instruction and any type of formal remediation is not an option at this time. The proposed policy allows students to demonstrate proficiency through a single test, but also allows those students who do not exhibit skill and content competence to graduate by satisfying other graduation criteria.

If Francis Howell, or any other school district, is to consider investigating this topic any further, it must do so with the full knowledge of what the research says, what is most important to address, and what other districts across the nation are doing. Certainly the goal of exit exams is to increase student learning and not to increase student drop-out rates or other negative consequences. What all high-stakes testing programs hope to accomplish is the assurance that all students who graduate from high school will do so

with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in a job, college and all other aspects of life. The implementation of any accountability system will require close monitoring so that any problems can be addressed and policies can be adjusted to help ensure the achievement of all students.

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