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Does the PARCC Exam Alter the Landscape of a School in Grades 3-6 in the Areas of Evaluation, Curriculum, Staffing and Technology?

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Does the PARCC Exam Alter the Landscape of a School in Grades 3-6 in the Areas of
Evaluation, Curriculum, Staffing and Technology?

by
Michael Stefanelli

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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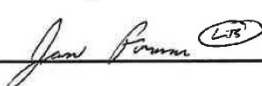
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Michael Stefanelli has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Summer Semester 2019**.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored whether the New Jersey PARCC exam altered evaluation, curriculum, staffing, and technology in Grades 3 to 6 of the state's public schools.

Semistructured interviews were implemented to determine whether administrators and teachers believed that the PARCC test changed the landscape of public schools. Fifteen administrators and teachers were recruited to participate in this study from a consortium of schools in northern New Jersey. The interview instrument for this study was based on existing literature.

Four major themes emerged from the interview data. The first related to PARCC's influence on staff morale due to the tests direct tie to teacher evaluations. The second theme involved the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (now known as the New Jersey Student Learning Standards). Does the PARCC test reflect and test the information presented in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content in math and language arts, or did schools rewrite their curriculum to align with the test? The third theme discussed involved staffing in public schools. Did the administrators and teachers think that, since PARCC's inception, staffing rearrangements have occurred? The last theme that emerged related to the implementation of and access to technology that is needed to complete the PARCC test. This dissertation discusses the interviewees' perspectives on the PARCC's impact on these four areas in Grades 3 to 6 of New Jersey public schools.

Keywords: PARCC, curriculum, technology, staffing, evaluation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Design and Methodology.....	7
Significance of the Study.....	8
Delimitations of the Study	8
Limitations of the Study.....	9
Definitions of Terms	9
Summary	9
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Literature Search Procedures	11
Criteria for Inclusion of Literature.....	11
Staff Evaluation	12
Curriculum	17
Staffing.....	22
Technology	26
III. METHOD	29
Background.....	29
Design	31
Sampling	32
Profiles of Participants and Sites	33
Data Collection	35
Data Analysis.....	37
IV. RESULTS	38
Curriculum	39
Evaluations.....	42
Technology	45
Staffing.....	47

V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	52
Interview Questions	52
Discussion	53
Recommendations for Future Research.....	57
Recommendations for Policy.....	58
Recommendations for Practice	59
REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX	
A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	64
B. PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH	66
C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	70
D. INFORMED CONSENT LETTER	71

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	Alternate Proficiency Assessment
DFG	district factor grouping
ESPA	Elementary School Proficiency Assessment
GEPA	Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment
IRB	institutional review board
MBS	minimum basic skills
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NJ ASK	New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge
NJDOE	New Jersey Department of Education
NJSLA	New Jersey Student Learning Assessment
NJSLS	New Jersey Student Learning Standards
PARCC	Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers
PSEA	Public School Education Act
SGP	student growth percentile

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

New Jersey has been committed to standards-based assessment for over forty years. In 1975, the New Jersey Legislature passed the Public School Education Act (PSEA) to provide to all children of New Jersey, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location, the educational opportunity which will prepare them to function politically, economically and socially in a democratic society. (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2016)

Since the inception of the PSEA, many tests given to the students of New Jersey, including the Minimum Basic Skills (MBS), the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA), the Grade Eight Proficiency assessment (GEPA), the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA), and the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK). The current high-stakes test given in New Jersey is the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). In the 1990s tests were administered to fourth-, eighth- and 11th-grade students. With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, the tests were expanded and now cover Grades 3 to 11.

Before 2001, the lowest grade tested was Grade 4. That changed in 2001. “In response to NCLB requirements and New Jersey’s own expectations that students would be reading at grade level by the end of third grade, New Jersey revised its elementary assessment to include the third grade assessment program” (NJDOE, 2016).

In the beginning of my career, the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) was introduced as the new statewide test. In the early 1990s, this test assessed math, language arts, science, art appreciation, and public speaking and took a total of 12 days to administer. A panel of teachers assessed the public speaking section, and several materials were required for

the science section, such as sand and liquids. After a few years, the art appreciation and public speaking sections were eliminated, and only math, language arts and science were tested. The state eventually renamed the test NJ ASK.

In June 2010, The New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in mathematics and language arts literacy. The new standards would change the testing landscape New Jersey students once again.

In 2011, the New Jersey Department of Education submitted a waiver application to the US Department of Education for relief from certain provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The comprehensive waiver allowed the Department to develop a new accountability system to replace the provisions of the NCLB, centered on providing support and intervention to the state's lowest performing schools and those with the largest in-school gaps between sub groups of students. (NJ DOE, 2016)

With the inception of the new accountability system came the implementation of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test.

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a consortium of states that collaboratively developed a common set of assessments to measure student achievement of the Common Core State Standards (now the New Jersey Student Learning Standards) and preparedness for college and careers. (NJ DOE, 2016)

PARCC testing became mandatory in 2014 for New Jersey students in grades 3 through 11, as a way to align with the Common Core standards, a set of learning goals established to ensure students were being adequately prepared for college. The standards were adopted across the country starting in 2010, encouraged by funding by the Obama administration. (LaGorce, 2016)

With NCLB losing credibility, the PARCC test was initiated.

PARCC can trace its origins to the No Child Left Behind Act, the hallmark legislation of the George W. Bush presidency that was intended to ensure that all U.S. schoolchildren were proficient in math and reading at their grade level by 2014. Originally, the plan was to penalize any schools that didn't meet an escalating series of standards by forcing them to shape up or shut down. When it became obvious that this would lead to massive school closings, Barack Obama moved the goalposts. Under his Race to the Top program, which in 2009 effectively replaced No Child Left Behind, states are rewarded with extra federal money for instituting such reforms as tying teacher evaluations to test scores. (deMause, 2014)

In May 2016, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted a revised English language arts and mathematics standards and changed the name of all the state's CCSSs to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. The PARCC assessment was aligned to these new standards.

The PARCC assessments are aligned to high level thinking skills and were created to measure students' ability to apply their knowledge of concepts rather than repeat memorized facts. The PARCC assessments require students to solve problems using mathematical reasoning and to be able to model mathematical principles. In English language arts (ELA), students are required to closely read multiple passages and to write essay responses in literary analysis, research tasks and narrative tasks. The assessments also provide teachers and parents with information on student progress to inform instruction and provide targeted student support. (NJDOE, 2016)

At this point, the state of New Jersey has implemented PARCC in Grades 3 through 11.

The state feels that this is the most valid test to date. “

PARCC provides the most accurate reflection of student progress toward our academic standards that we have ever had. When combined with other measures of student success, it is an assessment that will provide a true gauge of a student's academic needs. (Informing Teaching and Learning, 2015).

It does not look like the PARCC test is going anywhere; in 2016 “one recommendation [called] for the test to become mandatory by 2020, with no opportunity for parents to let their children opt out. Also, beginning in 2021, students would have to pass PARCC in order to graduate high school” (Matthau, 2016).

In 2016 the New Jersey Board of Education stated that

the PARCC test was one of two main assessments designed to align with the Common Core Standards (NJSLS), a group of learning goals for students devised to ensure they were being adequately prepared for college. The standards were adopted across the country starting in 2010, encouraged by money from the Obama administration, but they have faced a strong backlash. Many states have stepped away from the tests or standards altogether. New Jersey is moving in the opposite direction. We believe that the PARCC test is the best test out there and that it is aligned in the best way to the New Jersey Learning standards in math and language arts. It gives you a great measure of college and career readiness.

Students in New Jersey have taken some form of standardized test in order to graduate for more than 30 years, according to the State Education Department. Students can currently use a passing grade on close to a dozen tests in math and English to get a diploma; PARCC would replace them all. (Harris, 2016).

There are still those who think that too much testing is not beneficial for the students and that no test will ever really give an appropriate assessment of their ability. “Nothing about these ‘next generation’ of tests suggests they will be more effective than state-based accountability systems introduced almost 30 years ago, since the format and grading of these tests remain essentially the same” (Harris, 2016).

Problem Statement

As high-stakes tests have become more prevalent in the landscape of public education, it is understandable to question if the test has any effect on teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions in public schools in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing, and technology. The PARCC test is important, as many districts are judged based on student PARCC scores, which are published in the local and state newspapers. Much pressure has been put on school administrations to ensure that the schools, staff members, and students are prepared for the PARCC test. Still, administrators have rearranged or changed the school environment to better prepare for the test.

High stake testing is so named because the test outcomes are used to make important, often life altering decisions. Such decisions may include the denial of a high school diploma, the repetition of a grade, the labeling of students and schools in pejorative ways, the withholding of funding, and even the closing of schools. Students who may do well in school all year but fail a high stake test may be required to attend summer school and take the test again or spend another year in the same grade. Local newspapers routinely publish the results of high stake tests, which can cause a range of reactions from pride to shame among students, school staffs and parents. (Johnson, 2009)

In New Jersey, the scores of the students also reflect on a teacher's evaluation for the year. Student growth percentiles (SGPs) are calculated using the PARCC scores and are reflected on a teacher's summative evaluation.

An SGP describes a student's growth compared to other students with similar prior test scores and shows a child's learning over time compared with his or her peers. A child's peers, for SGP purposes, are students who had similar scores on the previous PARCC tests. An SGP is a number between 1 (least growth) and 99 (most growth). If, for example, an SGP of 80 indicates that a child showed more growth than 80% of his or her academic peers. An SGP allows the PARCC to measure the progress a child is making in language arts and mathematics. Along with other indicators, such as test scores and course grades, SGPs provide additional information about your child's most recent academic performance—where your child is now in relation to grade-level learning expectations—as well as the progress your child is making over time (<http://www.RIDE.RI.gov/>).

With so many factors depending on high-stakes testing, do these tests initiate change in schools from evaluation to curriculum to staffing to technology?

Measurement issues have been another concern about high-stakes testing. Group standardized tests inaccurately assess individual strengths and weaknesses, and the results are unreliable. Flaws in test design and scoring have created serious problems and have led to the recall of tests. (Johnson, 2009)

Unreliable results can have an impact on the morale of a school as well as the day-to-day routine.

Do these tests accurately assess the students' taking them, and, in turn, do their scores impact the schools?

High stakes tests generally do not assess higher order thinking or reasoning. Computerized grading is often used to score the exams. Children with special needs or children with different styles of learning are not adequately assessed using these styles of tests, or simply not tested at all. (Pearson, 2017)

Few studies have examined the impact of PARCC score results on teachers' and administrators' perceptions of evaluation curriculum, staffing, and technology because the assessment has only been implemented for the past 3 years. A semistructured interview methodology was used to determine whether the PARCC exam has influenced one school's landscape in the areas of curriculum, staffing, evaluation and technology.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore administrators' and teachers' perspectives on the influence that PARCC testing has had on the landscape and culture of the school. Currently, scant literature or information can be found on the topic because the test is relatively new. Therefore, this study provided data on the impact of PARCC on the landscape and culture within a school and, specifically, on teachers' and administrators' perspectives on how PARCC has impacted evaluation, curriculum, staffing, and technology.

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, has PARCC testing influenced/alterd administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the school in the areas of technology and staffing?
2. How, if at all, has PARCC testing influenced and informed teaching approaches, strategies, or professional development as related to the curriculum?
3. What are the principle concerns about how accurately PARCC testing reflects the perceptions of staff evaluation?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided my research is grounded theory. The basic structure for this study was to read and reread textual data, interviews, and notes and to discover and label concepts and categories. I identified potential variables and relationships in the data

gathered and categorized them using axial coding. “A grounded theory design would use methods of analysis that involve open coding (categorizing information), axial coding (identify one central category, identify relationships relative to central category), and selective coding” (Cooper & Shelley, 2009).

Design and Methodology

This study was conducted in Northern New Jersey. The administrators and teachers interviewed worked in schools that are demographically similar in terms of socioeconomic status. One requirement for participation in the study was that the administrators and teachers had to have been in an administrative/teaching position for at least 3 years so that they would be familiar with the school and students. Another inclusion requirement was education and licensure: Administrators had to have a Master in Administration, and teachers had to hold a standard state certified license.

The 15 administrators and teachers who participated in the study were chosen by the superintendents (who also participated), who had knowledge of the PARCC test and test results. The semistructured interview questions were designed after a review of the existing research on PARCC scores and their validity.

The interviews were scheduled to take approximately 30 minutes and were conducted in the participants’ schools to make them feel comfortable.

The researcher conducts face to face interviews with participants, interviews participants by telephone, or engages in focus group interviews, with six or eight interviewees in each group. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions of the participants” (Creswell, 2009)

I opted for face-to-face interviews with participants.

Significance of the Study

Since the beginning of the PARCC test, the NJDOE stated that “PARCC provides the most accurate reflection of student progress toward our academic standards that we have ever had” (NJDOE, 2016). However, little research exists to either support or refute this statement. I have been interested in researching and discovering whether the administrators and teachers in the state believe the test has altered the landscape of their public schools in Grades 3 to 6.

This study attempted to determine if the PARCC test has affected teachers or administrators in the areas of staffing, curriculum, technology, or evaluations. The subject pool consists of seasoned administrators/teachers who have seen the evolution of testing in the state of New Jersey and can give some insight into their perceptions of how the PARCC test, since its implementation, has changed the landscape of elementary schools in the four areas mentioned above, specifically in Grades 3 through 6.

This study will have great significance for future PARCC preparation for districts. It will provide the administrators and teachers information that will enable them to make informed discussions regarding staffing, curriculum, technology, and evaluations, as well as for successful preparation by administrators and teachers.

Delimitations of the Study

1. Subjects were isolated to northern New Jersey (upper socioeconomic demographic).
2. Data were taken from interviews of administrators and teachers. The belief was that they were all aware of the students in their schools and their abilities.
3. Administrators reviewed and compiled data from the PARCC, so they were well informed of the test.

Limitations of the Study

1. The sample size was small.
2. The administrators and teachers were not very open during the interviews because they were skeptical of my intentions.
3. The researcher always has some degree of bias.
4. One consortium was not applicable to other districts (upper socioeconomic demographic).

Definitions of Terms

Administrator refers to any male or female in an educational role holding a Master in Administration. They are part of a public school in the northern part of New Jersey and participate in the PARCC test data results.

Teacher refers to any male or female in an educational role holding a teaching certificate in the state of New Jersey.

ESPA refers to Elementary school Proficiency Assessment.

GEPA refers to the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment.

HSPA refers to the High School Proficiency Assessment.

ASK refers to the assessment of Skills and Knowledge.

PARCC refers to Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

The *NJDOE* is the New Jersey Department of Education, located in Trenton, New Jersey, with subsidiaries in each of the 21 counties.

Summary

Chapter 1 of this study sought to understand whether PARCC results have altered administrators' and teachers' perceptions of evaluations, staffing, technology, or curriculum

since the test's inception. This study became important to me after seeing the results of the PARCC exam and the reaction of administration and staff in the school in which I am employed. After looking at and extracting the information given to the districts from the state, I began to inquire about the actual success of the scores as they relate to the changing of the landscape in the 4 areas (evaluation, curriculum, staffing, and technology). I also became interested in the data and the role they played in creating or adjusting a district's curriculum to better help the students succeed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the existing literature related to the PARCC test and its influence on the landscape of public schools. The review begins with an overview of the PARCC and how schools have charted a new course in the age of this test.

When you teach children to do well on a test, are you really teaching them at all? At the heart of this debate are sophisticated notions about education, learning by rote and much more. Some experts believe this is the best way to encourage students to think for themselves, and take a more in-depth look into a subject, whereas many other experts complain the entire system is a test driven waste of time, that does no prepare students for the future. (Lilli, 2015)

The chapter then presents an overview of the changing strategies that have been implemented in public schools to provide for the test, as well as information about the public's perception of schools created by the PARCC test.

Literature Search Procedures

I conducted a literature search for research and other literature related to the New Jersey PARCC test and its effect on the landscape of New Jersey public schools. I utilized the following resources: Educational Resource Information Center, Google Scholar, the NJDOE website, and the U.S. Department of Education website. Most works were published within the last 5 years because the PARCC test was first used as the State of New Jersey's standardized assessment in 2014.

Criteria for Inclusion of Literature

For a document to be included in the review, it had to be of one of the following types:

- an article published within the last 10 years,
- a peer-reviewed journal article,

- a book on assessment,
- a book on qualitative research, or
- a government report on assessment.

Staff Evaluation

High-stakes testing is not new to New Jersey, but now that PARCC scores are used to compare schools and are tied to teacher evaluations, the testing platform has changed the landscape in public schools. Schools have been compared to each other utilizing test scores only recently. “In 2001, the second President Bush was inaugurated. Both he and his opponent, Al Gore, had argued for higher academic standards and more school choice during their campaigns. The two parties pulled together to enact ‘No Child Left Behind’” (Fowler, 2009). With the inception of the NCLB, NJ School Performance Report Cards were initiated, even though ESPA testing had been used in public schools since 1994, and then, ASK and then PARCC.

The School Performance Reports, as outlined in New Jersey’s NCLB flexibility request, were developed with the input of stakeholders across the state and provide a significant amount of new data to present a more complete picture of school performance, with the ultimate aim to help schools and stakeholders engage in local goal setting and improvement. (NJDOE, 2014)

The School Performance Report gives data on everything from academic achievement to college and career readiness to peer school comparisons. The NJDOE article deconstructs districts’ PARCC scores and identifies where they are lacking and excelling in mathematics and language arts. The article analyzes the scores and gives “evidence statements” as to where professional development would be needed for teachers in the identified areas of weakness. The districts then concentrate on improving the scores in their weak areas for the following school year. Teachers’ evaluations are tied to the PARCC scores and are reflected in their annual reviews.

The state's evaluation of scores also includes comparing districts to other districts within the same district factor grouping (DFG). "The results from these tests will be used to hold teachers, schools and districts accountable, ranking our schools across the state from lowest to highest based almost exclusively on the performance of their students on the exams" (Gazda, 2016). The DFGs compare schools in the same socioeconomic classification.

The District Factor Groupings (DFGs) were first developed in 1975 for the purpose of comparing students' performance on statewide assessments across demographically similar school districts. The categories are updated every 10 years when the census bureau releases the latest Decennial Census data. (NJDOE, 2014)

Advocates of this approach assert that such an accountability system is essential, or otherwise how are we to know how our schools are performing. Without such a system, how can we compare one school district to another? Without such a system how can we identify weak schools or teachers? These arguments are easily understandable and seem logical when taken at face value. However, educators know that these arguments are buttressed by false logic inherent in their formation and based upon the presumption that these tests, taken in isolation, are a true and accurate measure of school and teacher performance as well as individual student achievement. (Gazda, 2016)

DFGs are based on six criteria for each district:

5. percentage of adults with no high school education,
6. percentage of adults with some college education,
7. unemployment rate,
8. occupational status,
9. percentage of individuals in poverty, and
10. median family income.

The districts are ranked from the letter *A* being the Abbott districts to *J* being the wealthiest districts. Abbott districts were created in 1985 after the Abbott v. Burke case filed by the Education Law Center.

The ruling asserted that public primary and secondary education in poor communities throughout the state was unconstitutionally substandard.[1] The Abbott II ruling in 1990

had the most far-reaching effects, ordering the state to fund the (then) 28 Abbott districts at the average level of the state's wealthiest districts. The Abbott District system was replaced in 2007 by the New Jersey Schools Development Authority.

There are now 31 “Abbott districts” in the state, which are now referred to as “SDA Districts” based on the requirement for the state to cover all costs for school building and renovation projects in these districts under the supervision of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority.[2] The term “Abbott district” is still in common use since the Abbott districts receive very high funding levels for K-12 and are the only districts in New Jersey where the state pays for Pre-K for all students. (Wikipedia, 2019)

As the high-stakes tests continue to change the landscape of public schools in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing, and technology—of not only the school, but each teacher—the administrations do their best to stay abreast of developments and keep their staff determined and inspired.

Teaching in a New Jersey public school has become much more stressful with the inception of PARCC. “Teacher morale has taken a nose dive because of high-stakes test evaluations. Instead of rewarding good teachers, it may reward teachers with good students and penalize those who teach the most challenging students” (Jacobs, 2015). Jacobs’s (2015) article analyzed how tying the teacher evaluation system to PARCC scores has made many teachers nervous and upset, as their scores will be based on their class makeup, which is beyond their control. The makeup and ability of any given class changes yearly, and thus teachers’ evaluations will likely vary from year to year as well. Opponents of the test “complain that additional testing stresses the children, it diverts time and money from other priorities and it almost mandates that teachers teach for the test if they wish to achieve a positive evaluation” (Singelton, 2015).

Many teachers see the new evaluation system, which incorporates students’ scores on the PARCC, as a threat instead of a way to help improve instruction.

New evaluation systems were meant to be a tool to reward excellent instruction, provide opportunities for targeted professional development, and create systems of support in

schools and districts. Unfortunately, new teacher evaluations systems in many places were sold as ways to get rid of bad teachers. (Jacobs, 2015)

The Jacobs article analyzes how, although the new PARCC-based evaluation system is supposed to help eliminate poor teachers, it actually hurts master teachers, depending on their class makeup and cognitive abilities. Quite often, the valuable teachers will receive the lower functioning students as they are able to differentiate and support the students in various areas. Having the lower performing students, however, will bring these teachers' evaluation scores down. "The important thing here is not to use the test scores as a way to attack teachers and close schools, but improve the practice of teaching" (Solberg, 2015).

Teacher evaluation has been practiced since the 1700s. At that time, "clergy were considered logical choices for this role because of their extensive education and presumed ability to guide religious instruction in schools (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). By the early part of the 20th century, John Dewey was one of the most prolific writers in the field of education and evaluation. Dewey believed that ideas such as student-centered education, connecting the classroom to the real world, differentiation based on students' learning needs, and integration of content areas were ways of bridging the gap between students' passive role as learners and the active role they would need to play as citizens (Marzano et al., 2011).

In 2012 in New Jersey, the District Evaluation Advisory Committee informed districts that, by January 2013, they would have to adopt an evidence-supported teaching-practice observation instrument. With this came the implementation of the SGP, which accounts for 35–45% of a teachers' summative evaluation (the measure's influence has decreased over the past 2 years to 10%). The PARCC test had begun infiltrating teacher evaluations, and the stakes were raised.

Overall morale is also a factor, especially when it comes to “opting out.” Many New Jersey districts had many parents opting their children out of the PARCC test. After all the preparation and curriculum work the staff completed, to have many of the students not show up for the test is disappointing, not only for the staff but also for the district. The teachers were concerned because many students, whose scores were tied to specific teachers, did not show up for the PARCC. This has a huge impact on the teacher’s evaluation at his or her annual review. In December 2015, the U.S. Department of Education delineated actions a state could take against a local school district that did not assess at least 95% of its students on the PARCC. According to the New Jersey School Boards Association (2016), the state has the ability to do the following:

- Lowering a school district’s or a school’s rating in the state’s accountability system or amending the system to flag a school district or a school with a low participation rate.
- Counting nonparticipants as nonproficient in accountability determinations.
- Requiring a school district or a school to develop an improvement plan, or take corrective actions to ensure that all students participate in the statewide assessments in the future, and providing the state’s process to review and monitor such plans.
- Requiring a school district or a school to implement additional interventions aligned with the reason for low student participation, even if the state’s accountability system does not officially designate schools for such interventions.
- Designating a school district or school as a “high risk,” or a comparable status under the State’s law and regulations, with a clear explanation for the implications of such a designation.
- Withholding or directing use of state aid and/or funding flexibility. (p. 4)

For teachers whose evaluation depends on the SGP, opt outs are a major factor. Specifically, if fewer than 20 students in a class take the PARCC exam, student growth as reflected by the test scores cannot be factored into the evaluation, causing the teacher to get a lower evaluation than deserved.

Studies have shown that 7 out of 10 teachers have complained about becoming stressed due to test preparation activities, which are generally non motivational and not aligned with the objectives of the class. Many teachers have become frustrated by not being able to practice high quality teaching and have therefore chosen to leave state-run schools and apply to private schools, where high-stakes tests do not rule the curriculum. (Lynch, 2016)

Curriculum

Since the inception of the PARCC test, New Jersey has revamped the state's curriculum to better reflect the testing specifications. Most recently, in 2010, the National Governors Association and the Council of the Chief State School Officers led the development of the CCSS with input from administrators, curriculum experts, and educators. The New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the standards in 2010. The common core defines grade-level expectations from kindergarten through high school for what students should know and be able to do in English language arts and mathematics to be successful in college and their careers.

The common core is not actually a curriculum; it is expected that local school districts have the responsibility to develop a curriculum so that the teachers have the materials to ensure that students meet the CCSS. The state has provided the districts with a model curriculum to follow. Its purpose is to help districts and schools implement the CCSS. The PARCC test and the model curriculum were created to measure students' ability to apply knowledge and concepts instead of just memorizing rote facts.

Since the inception of the PARCC, many districts and teachers have complained about the amount of curriculum time that is spent on preparing for the test instead of teaching the actual curriculum. According to the New Jersey School Board Association, "test administration time should not adversely affect the educational program, according to association policy." Unfortunately, staff believe that,

leading up to the PARCC exam, regular instruction is suspended in reading and writing classes in order to prepare our students for the kind of passages and questions they will encounter. On average we will cancel six weeks of reading and writing instruction to prepare for the tests. The time for independent reading, read aloud and word study is replaced with repeated practice answering multiple choice questions and writing multi-paragraph essays in less time that they will ever be able to do in high school or college (Strauss, 2015)

Strauss elaborated on how teaching to the test takes away free exploration and the teacher's ability to use the curriculum creatively.

Not only will the students lose curriculum time while preparing for the PARCC, they will also lose a lot of time dedicated to taking the test itself.

This year students will lose seven additional learning days in grade three, eight days in grade four and nine days in grade five, while the children take the PARCC exam. Some people claim that the test times are only 75 minutes so there is time in the day for teaching; however, it will take at least an additional 40 minutes to get students appropriately seated, hand out the materials and read lengthy directions. This also does not account for the fact that some students are allowed up to the entire school day to complete the tests, and we cannot introduce new concepts with part of the class still testing. Furthermore, PARCC is only one of many states and district mandated tests that your children have to take each year. (Strauss, 2015)

“In addition, Testing has often had a greater and negative impact on learning than curriculum or standards. High-stake testing results in the dumbing down and narrowing of the curriculum” (Thomas, 2015).

Strauss also stressed that, although the testing company will lead you to believe that the test is only a certain amount of time each day, by the time you get the students where they need to be, with appropriate technology it will take much longer than suggested. Considering that the younger students need a break after taking a high-stakes test, teachers' reduce the workload to minimal expectations so as to give the students a respite. This concession takes away much curricular teaching time and is not considered when Pearson (the testing company for PARCC)

explains testing times and the test's interruptive impact on the day-to-day routine of an elementary school classroom.

Administrators at many schools report that they spend as much as a third of the school year preparing students to take these tests. That time includes the actual time spent taking the tests, the time spent taking pretests and benchmark tests and other practice tests, the time spent on the test prep materials, the time spent doing exercises and activities in textbooks and online materials that have been modeled on the test questions in order to prepare kids to answer questions of those kinds, and the time spent reporting , data analysis, data chats, proctoring, and other test housekeeping. (Ravitch, 2014)

There is also shift in the curriculum when it comes to teaching the students to love learning. Instead of letting students work on a project on their own time, they are told they need to finish projects within a timed period to prepare for the PARCC exam.

We became elementary school teachers because we wanted to help foster a love of learning. We teach our students that reading can bring joy and that math is magical. But that message is nullified when we start to prepare our students for standardized tests. We tell our students that they can no longer talk with friends to puzzle out a math solution, or consult the word wall to help them understand unfamiliar words. We tell our students that they need to read quickly because on testing days they will have a mere 75 minutes to read two or three stories, answer questions and write an essay. As we completely undermine what we have spent so much time building, our students begin to lose their passion for reading and math. If we extinguish the passion to learn at such a young age, how are we preparing them for college and careers? (Strauss, 2015)

Strauss also explained that many teachers did not go into education to teach to a test or to constantly have their students produce in a certain amount of time to prepare for a test. Educators went into teaching to have students explore and create in all areas of the curriculum and to spark a love for learning. Throughout the year, elementary school teachers tell students to write a rough draft or "sloppy copy" first and then self-correct and take the time to create a finished (published) copy of the work. This is not feasible when it comes to the PARCC test and the limited time students have to complete a written assignment. In turn, the timetables pressure students, who become confused about the correct way to create and write a story.

A high stakes test that presents students with passages they cannot read is not a useful educational tool, instead it will create anxiety for children young as 8 years old, who will learn to believe that standardized tests are stressful and lose confidence in their abilities. Frustrated teachers will watch their students suffer through these tests, which are not a tool for teaching but an obstacle to learning. (Law, 2016)

But there's an underlying problem with the PARCC regardless of its effectiveness, those parents and teachers say – in the weeks it took schools to administer the tests, students' daily curriculum learning was continually interrupted in some schools. Libraries were closed, schedules were flipped upside down and teachers pulled from regular assignments, educators said. Some mixed grades high school classes were missing different groups of students each day or week, forcing teachers to alter lesson plans. (Clark, 2015)

Clark (2015) elaborated on how the PARCC test interrupts curriculum teaching by having varied grades start the school day later so that districts are able to complete all the required PARCC testing. Many districts limit the use of technology in other classrooms during the PARCC testing time because of the amount of bandwidth needed to complete the test for other grades. Classrooms are also limited to a few Chromebooks or laptops for weeks because they are being utilized for the PARCC test. Technology is a huge part of any curriculum today, and not having access to it for up to 6 weeks is detrimental to student learning. "Teachers in Bergenfield Public Schools couldn't integrate technology into their daily lessons for weeks because of the laptops and bandwidth needed for the PARCC testing" (Clark, 2015).

Each year a new PARCC test is administered, and faculty and administrators scramble to keep up with the shifts in curriculum to meet the needs of the PARCC.

Each year, there are wholesale changes to curriculum because the goal of education has become "passing the test." We have to scramble to create lesson plans for these constantly changing expectations. How can we do our best work if we are not properly trained in the curriculum? A new lesson requires time for teachers to understand the concept deeply and determine how best to present it. It requires time to think about how to engage students in the lesson, how to accommodate for individual student needs, and to gather necessary materials. We need time to create visual supports, and to consider how to assess students' understanding of what is taught. Multiply that time by four or more subjects in a day, and you can see how it becomes impossible for teachers to be effective when curriculum is changed every year to fit a test. (Strauss, 2015)

From my 25 years in education and the districts in which I was employed, I have learned that most third- through fifth-grade classes are self-contained, so the students do not move from class to class as in a departmentalized setting. This leaves one teacher to teach all subject areas effectively while trying to concentrate on language arts and mathematics for PARCC scores and their evaluations. To say the least, quite often when I was teaching, the other subjects (social studies, science, handwriting, etc.) were deprioritized to ensure the students were well versed in language arts and mathematics for the PARCC.

Another aspect of curriculum for the younger grades would take place in the computer labs, which are closed down for many weeks during the PARCC testing at the school district where I am currently a principal. Keyboarding is now an important part of the technology curriculum, and many teachers and administrators feel that third-grade students are not prepared well enough or do not have the fine motor skills to type lengthy essays or answers for the PARCC test. “In the early grades, the tests end up being as much a test of keyboarding skills as of attainment in language arts or math. The online testing format is entirely inappropriate for most third graders” (Ravitch, 2014).

Although many districts in New Jersey have aligned their curriculum with the PARCC test, some school administrations argue that this approach is seriously flawed and can stunt student growth. In an article entitled “How PARCC’s False Rigor Stunts the Academic Growth of all Students,” McQuillan, Phelps, and Stotsky (2015) identified six flaws with the PARCC test, ranging from curriculum to technology to preparation—all aspects that have changed the landscape of elementary schools in New Jersey:

1. Most PARCC writing prompts do not elicit the kind of writing done in college or the real world.

2. PARCC uses formats for assessing word knowledge that is almost completely unsupported by research and seriously mislead teachers.
3. PARCC's computerized testing system has not shown more effectiveness than a paper-and-pencil based testing system or a return of useful information to the teachers of the students who took the PARCC tests.
4. PARCC uses "innovative" item-types for which no evidence exists to support claims that they tap deeper thinking and reasoning in understanding text.
5. PARCC tests require too many instructional hours to administer and prepare for. They also do not give enough information back to teachers or school to justify the extra hours and costs.
6. PARCC test-items do not use student-friendly language and its [English language arts] reading selections do not look as if they were selected by English teachers. (McQuillan et al., 2015, p. 6).

Staffing

With the implementation of the PARCC and its ripple effect on teachers' observations and district ranking status, many schools, including those in the consortium, are moving teachers so that they have their strongest teachers in specific disciplines teaching in their areas of expertise. Teachers also spend time out of the classroom to attend workshops to learn how to better teach to the PARCC test. Subject areas of such workshops include professional development for new curriculum, writing new curriculum, or learning what is new on the PARCC test. This means that strong teachers are sometimes absent from their teaching position for several days to rewrite curriculum, thereby interrupting the flow of learning for students. I have seen this situation occur in both my current and past districts. Many districts do not have the funds to pay their teachers to work during the summer to complete curricula, so they enlist their strongest language arts and mathematics teachers to complete the curriculum during the school year by taking them out of the classroom. This way, the districts do not have to pay extra for curriculum writing because it is done during the school year and school day.

Having teachers who have attended many PARCC workshops turnkey to other teachers or having them teach in tested grades is a trend in many schools with PARCC testing. Many of the consortium districts utilize the turnkey method during faculty meetings as discussed at our monthly consortium meetings. The shift in staffing began when New Jersey began the Highly Qualified program for public schools. According to the NJDOE (2014), to satisfy the federal definition of *highly qualified*, “teachers must: have at least a Bachelor’s degree, have valid state certification and demonstrate content expertise in the core academic subject(s) they teach.” All teachers from Grade 5 and above needed to be highly qualified in the area in which they were teaching, that is, have a formal degree for the subject area they were teaching. This caused quite a few staffing changes because, up to that time, any teacher was able to teach any subject in Grades 3–6. Many teachers felt compelled to return to school to obtain the degree for the discipline they were already teaching. The program also caused many schools to move to departmentalization. Departmentalization is when the students rotate to various teachers certified in each discipline for instruction instead of staying with the same teacher all day. The day usually consists of 40-minute periods for each discipline—language arts, writing, reading, social studies, and science.

With the onset of the PARCC testing, many teachers were moved to various positions to utilize their strengths and degrees. In the district where I am a principal, many teachers were rearranged to be sure that the strongest teachers in reading, writing, and mathematics were in the grades that were going to be taking the PARCC test, especially in the self-contained classes.

Staffing also involves scheduling the PARCC exam and using many teachers as monitors during the exam.

In order to maximize performance, schools often try not to schedule more than one session per day, as student performance declines in subsequent sessions due to fatigue. Furthermore, due to staffing, resource constraints, and students needing accommodations, different grade levels are tested at different times and on different days. Consequently with multiple sessions in each content area across many days, the disruption to the learning environment and lost instructional time has a substantial impact in our schools. (Gazda, 2016)

Gazda further explained that staff members are not used to the best of their abilities during testing because they are utilized as proctors or hall monitors. Depending on the size of the school and the number of students in each grade level testing for the PARCC, the test can take anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks. It also depends on whether the school is utilizing computer labs or laptops. Implementing the PARCC test can close computer labs for many weeks, making them useless for the other grade levels. During the PARCC testing window, many staff members are frustrated by being reassigned to be proctors during the testing period. Teachers are also often reassigned from their normal teaching position to accommodate the number of students being tested during PARCC.

Another aspect of staffing that has changed since the inception of the PARCC test is tenure. Administrators, like myself, are making sure that they tenure teachers who will be successful in their discipline for years to come. The teachers are held to a much higher standard in order for students to be successful on the PARCC. Because the PARCC scores are published and districts are compared, many administrators are closely evaluating new teachers to ensure that they can produce good PARCC scores. The tenure laws have also changed in New Jersey. Teachers now have to complete 4 full years in a district to be given tenure, whereas in the past it had been 3 years.

On August 6, 2012, New Jersey enacted the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TEACNJ) Act. The TEACHNJ Act makes dramatic changes in three areas: First, it lengthens the time necessary to obtain tenure; second, it institutes minimum evaluation criteria which a teacher or other teaching staff member must attain

to obtain tenure; and, third, it changes the procedures to fight tenure changes. (McLaughlin & Nardi, 2012)

Staff members are also asking for grade-level changes due to the new PARCC testing and how it ties into their evaluation. Many staff members who were known for their ability to differentiate and meet the needs of students on all levels are now asking that they do not receive a class list with children who are at risk or lower. Another option would be to separate the at-risk students across classes because each teacher knows that his or her evaluation will be tied to the test results. Loading a class with challenged students (who are not special education) will impact the teacher's evaluations. This challenge is causing many seasoned, dynamic teachers to question their class makeup because they do not want to be the teacher who receives the low-functioning students, even though they are the best suited staff members to teach these students.

On top of that, many teachers are discouraged by the fact that teachers in non-PARCC subjects do not have their evaluations tied to PARCC test scores. The language arts and mathematics teachers are the only ones whose evaluations depend upon PARCC scores. In contrast, the majority of the staff, from social studies teachers to art to music and so forth, do not have to worry about the test scores.

We feel this evaluation pits tested teachers against non-tested teachers and doesn't set a good dynamic. This type of different treatment is a disincentive for educators to teach in tested grades and subject areas. A legitimate question of fundamental fairness could also be made as well. (Symons, 2016)

Symons also argued that it is unfair that most staff members do not have to worry about being evaluated by test scores or SGPs.

This is also a difficult topic for administrators because the state has not provided definitive reasons as to why some teachers are evaluated by test scores whereas most others are not. "Principals do not have a good answer to the question: Why is my evaluation based upon

standardized test scores while my colleagues in other subject areas who do the same job I do are not?” (Symons, 2016).

Technology

The PARCC exam is taken by all the students within a period set by the state, and all students must complete the exam on a desktop or laptop. As a test coordinator for the past 18 years in two districts, I can say from experience that this posed a problem for many large districts. In particular, they did not have the bandwidth to support that amount of software all at once, and they did not have enough computers for students to complete the exam within the state’s timeframe. Many districts limit the amount of technology utilized in other classes (not being tested) during the 6-week testing window so as to not take away bandwidth from the testing sites.

This situation sent many districts scrambling to be able to support the bandwidth as well as to have enough computers available to accommodate the number of students in their schools.

The new tests are billed as more interactive and engaging than the pencil and paper tests, but the switch to the computers has also generated concern. At meetings about PARCC throughout the state, parents and teachers have questions about whether schools are properly equipped to handle the demands of the new tests and whether schools will be able to deal with computer crashes or any technology glitch. (Clark, 2015).

Clark (2015) also noted that many districts will have to invest a great deal of money getting all of their schools and facilities wired and ready for the PARCC each year. With technology changing yearly, schools will have to prepare each year to be sure that they are technologically savvy, aware, and prepared for the upcoming PARCC test when it comes to technology.

“In anticipation of PARCC, districts across the state have invested heavily in technology upgrades and training in part to avoid tech problems on testing days.” (Clark, 2015). In the past 2

years, according to Clark, the following districts have made improvements to their technology to support the PARCC testing program:

- Newark Public Schools made significant upgrades to both its facilities and equipment. The district spent about \$5 million on new laptops for the 2014–2015 school year and has spent more than \$9 million on technology infrastructure upgrades over the last three years. The district’s internet capacity is now 10 times higher than it was prior to the PARCC.
- Livingston Public Schools had the technology department conduct readiness tests and surveys to determine the strength and weaknesses of its network infrastructure and bandwidth. The district spent \$1.5 million on technology before the start of the school year.
- Elizabeth Public Schools purchased nearly 16,000 laptop computers and upgraded its wireless internet service. The district also hired technology coaches to support teachers and created internal tech teams within each school.

Even with all of these implementations in place, there are still glitches in the PARCC testing throughout the testing window. “

A glitch with the PARCC tests “start button” led Dumont High School to postpone testing that was scheduled that morning. And some students at Bayonne High School had trouble logging out of the test, causing extra stress for teachers. . . . Schools should expect some technology problems, just as issues arose with paper and pencil tests, Education Commissioner David Hespe said. (Clark, 2015)

In 2016, many students were not able to log into the PARCC exam one day. State Education Commissioner David Hespe put the responsibility squarely on Pearson, stating that it was not a New Jersey problem but that of the test facilitator (Clark, 2016).

Pearson is the testing company that was awarded the contract for the PARCC test for the state of New Jersey.

The state expects to pay Pearson as much as \$108 million over the next 4 years to produce the PARCC exams. The for-profit company has similar contracts in nearly a dozen other states administering the PARCC—short for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers—in one of the largest testing deals in U.S. history. (Heyboer, 2015)

More than 20 states began implementing the PARCC test, but this number has dwindled the 3 past years. “

At its peak, the standardized testing consortium that New Jersey belongs to included more than 20 states interested in using the same math and English exams. But when annual state assessments are administered in 2016, New Jersey will be one of just seven states and the District of Columbia still using the tests. (Clark, 2016)

The other states taking the PARCC exam are Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Mexico and Rhode Island, as well as the District of Columbia.

Along with computer issues, it is challenging to find the space to test all students on the same day. Many classrooms are needed to complete the PARCC and, quite often, large districts alter their daily schedules to be able to accommodate the testing. In some districts, the computer labs are closed for weeks to be able to complete the testing. This leaves many classes unable to utilize the computer labs for other projects.

Many schools had to convert classrooms into computer labs for the PARCC test. Some schools made these rooms permanent computer labs, taking away much needed classrooms. Other districts made temporary computer labs, thereby displacing the teacher and students until the PARCC test was completed. Such changes can be very disruptive to students and staff. Moreover, converting rooms into labs takes much-needed classrooms away from many schools that are bursting at the seams with large populations of students. Many districts are faced with the decision to add to their existing building to accommodate all of the students and new computer labs for the PARCC. “

But during March and early April, when the library was used for the computerized Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing, most of those books were off-limits to the school’s students. . . . School libraries, with open space and existing supply of computers, were a common testing site during the first round of PARCC testing, which lasted between one and four weeks in schools across New Jersey depending on their size. (Clark, 2015)

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the effects that the PARCC test has had on public elementary schools (Grades 3 to 6) in New Jersey in the areas of staffing, curriculum, technology, and evaluation. This study involved collecting data on PARCC testing in these four areas. Because PARCC is relatively new, the data were limited in depth and breadth. “Qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social human problem” (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the main research question was, has the PARCC test changed the landscape of public elementary schools in Grades 3 to 6 in the areas of staffing, curriculum, technology, and staffing? Two or three areas would not have provided enough data because the test has only been around a few years. The intended source of information was a group of administrators and teachers in a consortium district in northern New Jersey.

This chapter begins with a narrative of my educational career for the past 24 years, as well as my interest in the effect that the PARCC test has had on Grades 3–6 in public elementary schools. I continue to discuss the design of the study and the reasoning for my choice in methodology. The next part of the chapter includes a detailed explanation of sample recruitment along with biographical information for each of the participants interviewed. Finally, I review and discuss the data analysis. The study aimed to find and explore themes from the PARCC test that are worthy of research and discussion.

Background

At the time of this writing, I am completing my 24th year in the New Jersey education system. The first 6 years I spent teaching 4th and 6th grades. The next 6 years I spent as a

supervisor of basic skills, testing, and English as a second language (as the supervisor of testing, I began to see the effects testing had on elementary schools). For the past 12 years I have been the principal in a K–6 district in northern New Jersey.

My interest in the effects of testing on elementary schools began when I was a teacher in fourth grade. At that time the test was the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA), and it lasted 12 days. It included math and language arts, as well as other subjects, ranging from science to public speaking to art. As the years went on, the ESPA was pared down to a few days of math, language arts, and science. That is when I began to see the issues with staffing and curriculum, such as shifting master teachers to the tested grades, teaching to the test, and deemphasizing or even changing the curriculum to align with the test.

As the supervisor of testing in a large urban district in northern New Jersey and being in 6 different elementary schools, I began to see the influence that testing had on the landscape of the schools, and this piqued my interest even more. At that time, during the ASK test, I began to see the repercussions on staffing and curriculum. Then I became a principal and began to see the effects, not only on staffing and the curriculum but also on technology and evaluations—this began with the inception of the PARCC test. Prior to the PARCC, the tests had not been computer based (ESPA, ASK, GEPA, and HSPA) and were not tied to teacher evaluations (SGPs); in that way, PARCC altered schools’ technology needs and teaching strategies. Adding these two components to the testing field created a new landscape for testing for New Jersey public schools.

The longer I was involved in testing, especially as a principal, I continued to see the ripple effects that the process had on so many areas of teaching that it became a passion of mine to understand how it truly impacts teaching in New Jersey public schools. It made sense to me to

start to research how much the PARCC has altered the daily activities in Grades 3–6, so when it came to picking a topic for the dissertation study, I was well aware of what I wanted to research and explore. I also chose this topic because the state had already said that the PARCC testing would be in place until at least 2021 and was expected to continue beyond that year. I chose the Grades 3–6 because I am currently a principal in a K–6 district and have the most knowledge and contacts in that area. Specifically, I wanted to find out how PARCC testing has changed the landscape of New Jersey public education in Grades 3–6 in the areas of staffing, curriculum, technology, and evaluations.

Design

To obtain the best results for the questions posed in this paper, I decided to use a multiple case study. Because the PARCC was rather new and not much research exists on the areas I was studying, I decided to complete semistructured, open-ended interviews with seasoned administrators and teachers involved in PARCC testing. This type of data collection was chosen to allow the interview candidates enough freedom to explain their experiences in the study's four focus areas. I utilized Creswell's (2009) interview protocol, which included the following components:

- a heading;
- instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used from one interview to another;
- the questions (typically an ice-breaker question at the beginning) followed by 4 to 5 questions that are often the subquestions in a qualitative research plan, followed by some concluding statement or a question (e.g., "Who should I visit to learn more about my questions?");

- probes for the 4-5 questions, to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said;
- space between the questions to record responses; and
- a final thank you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent during the interview.

The interviewees in this study were both male and female. They had been in teaching or administration for at least 5 years and had experience with PARCC testing. This sample was selected to gain insight into both teachers' and administrators' perspectives regarding the PARCC and its relationship to curriculum, staffing, technology, and evaluations.

Sampling

All of the interviewees were part of a North Jersey consortium that involves four districts. The districts include six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The four districts have a district factor rating of "I" or "J," both of which indicate a higher socioeconomic status.

DFGs are based on six criteria for each district:

1. the percentage of adults with no high school education,
2. the percentage of adults with some college education,
3. unemployment rate,
4. occupational status,
5. the percentage of individuals in poverty, and
6. median family income.

The four districts that compose the only consortium in Essex County, New Jersey, are District A (J district), District B (I district), District C (J district), and District D (I district). All

of these districts filter into West Essex Middle School and West Essex High School. All of the administrators and teachers interviewed for this dissertation were employed by the sending districts. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of and actions taken by the districts' administrators and teachers in the areas of curriculum, technology, staffing, and evaluation since the PARCC test was implemented 3 years ago. The reason that four areas were chosen rather than, for instance, one or two, was to expand the empirical data available on this subject area.

Ultimately, my intent was to have an equal number of administrators (7) and teachers (7) from the same socioeconomic ranges to represent the wealthy districts in northern New Jersey and their relation with the PARCC exam.

Profiles of Participants and Sites

As mentioned, the administrators and teachers in this study were recruited from a northern New Jersey consortium. These four districts were chosen because they were all part of the same consortium and, therefore, shared the same curriculum, views, and goals, and their students all filtered into the same middle and high schools. They are also all considered wealthy districts. This section outlines the sending districts and the participants, who were interviewed in the summer of 2018. In an effort to protect confidentiality and assure anonymity, pseudonyms (Administrators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 and Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) were assigned to the participants.

District A

District A is an affluent town in Northern New Jersey and is part of the West Essex Consortium. District A has been categorized in the DFG as a J district, which implies it is one of the state's wealthiest districts. There are 328 students in the K–6 district and they filter into West

Essex Middle School and West Essex High School. At the time of data collection, Administrator 1 had been in education for 18 years, had been in the district for 14 years, and at this position for 7 years. Teacher 1 had been in education for 12 years, in the district for 10 years, and in this position for 8 years.

District B

District B is an affluent town in northern New Jersey and is part of the West Essex consortium. District B has been categorized in the DFG as an I district, which implies that it is an affluent district. There are 524 students in the K–6 district and they filter into West Essex Middle School and High School. Administrator 2 had been in education for 13 years, in the district for 11 years, in this position for 4 years. Administrator 3 had been in education for 26 years, in this district for 16 years, and in this position for 13 years. Teacher 2 had been in education for 9 years, in this district for 9 years, and in this position for 9 years. Teacher 3 has been in education for 25 years, in the district for 22 years, and in this position for 7 years.

District C

District C is an affluent town in northern New Jersey and is part of the West Essex Consortium. District C has been categorized in the DFG as a J district, which means it is one of the state's wealthiest districts. There are 653 students in the K–6 district, and they filter into West Essex Middle School and West Essex High School. Administrator 4 had been in education for 20 years, in the district for 13, and in this position for 7 years. Administrator 5 has been in education for 25 years, has been in this district for 13 and in this position for 13 years.

Teacher 4 had been in education for 13 years, in the district for 11 years, and in this position for 9 years. Teacher 5 had been in education for 8 years, in the district for 8 years, and in this position for 8 years.

District D

District D is an affluent town in Northern New Jersey and is part of the West Essex Consortium. District D has been categorized in the DFG as an I district, which implies that it is an affluent district. There are 588 students in the K–6 district, and they filter into West Essex Middle School and West Essex High School. Administrator 6 had been in education for 25 years, in the district for 5 years, and in this position for 2 years. Administrator 7 had been in education for 21 years, in the district for 12 years, and in this position for 12 years. Teacher 5 had been in education for 15 years, in the district for 15 years, and in this position for 9 years. Teacher 6 had been in education for 19 years, in the district for 14 years, and in this position for 9 years.

Data Collection

The data for this dissertation were collected through semistructured qualitative interviews of selected administrators and teachers. Prior to soliciting districts, administrators, and teachers for this dissertation, the research proposal was examined and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A). The IRB accounts for all federal regulations and protects the rights and welfare of study participants.

After the IRB approval, I followed a stringent procedure for acquiring the subjects for the dissertation and interviews. First, I solicited superintendents in the consortium at a consortium meeting that I attended. There I asked for permission to conduct my research in their districts. I presented a letter outlining my methodology of choice and my research questions (see Appendices B and C). All four consortium districts were interested in my research about the PARCC and were willing to participate. Once the superintendents granted me permission to interview within their districts, I contacted the principals to help with both the research and identifying eligible subjects within their schools and districts. The principals were all very

helpful in guiding me to teachers who met the study's inclusion criteria. The final step in the process consisted of asking subjects to participate in the research, signing a consent letter (see Appendix D), and arranging a time and location for the interview to take place. The willing participants from each of the four districts coordinated their work schedules with my school site visits and were interviewed and included in this study. The interviews took place over the summer, which gave the participants more flexibility for interview times because the students were not in school.

I wanted the participants to feel as though they could speak freely and openly about the PARCC test. To ensure this, I met the subjects in their classrooms or offices to give them a sense of comfort in their surroundings. I was hoping that the safe environment of their own space would promote unguarded responses and allow them to speak freely.

When interviewing, I utilized an audio recorder to avoid having to take copious notes, which might have made the participants think that an answer was correct or incorrect depending on when I was scribing notes. Turner (2010) encouraged that note-taking be handled carefully. Sometimes, when an interviewee sees the researchers jump to take a note, they can get a sense of approval or disapproval that could cause them to adjust their responses.

All subjects signed a consent form granting me permission to record the interview. Interviewees were informed that I would be using a digital voice-activated recorder by Dictopro with a double microphone, noise-reduction capability, and high-quality sound. They were also informed that the recordings would be stored in my condominium in a two-drawer locked filing cabinet. They were also informed that the recordings would be destroyed after 5 years.

The subjects were also told that their identities would be kept confidential. All names and details were omitted from all of the transcripts produced from the interviews, and each

participant was assigned a pseudonym based on a simple system of titles and numbers. School names were also eliminated from the research to protect the participants, which remained a top priority throughout the dissertation process.

Data Analysis

After the interviews with the subjects, it was time to analyze the data. Many hours of recorded interviews had to be analyzed. Creswell (2009) explained about data transformation: In the concurrent strategies, a researcher may quantify the qualitative data. This process involves creating codes and themes qualitatively, then counting the number of times they occur in the text data (or possibly the extent of talk about a code or theme by counting lines or sentences). This quantification of qualitative data then enables a researcher to compare quantitative results with qualitative data.

The first step was the process of preparing all of the data for organization and coding. For this study, it meant transcribing the interviews from the Dictopro. Transcribing the data on my own allowed me to familiarize myself with the interviews and data and to glean any themes that might have emerged through the interviews. This process was very time consuming.

The next step was coding. This was the process of coding the data into organized themes, or chunks. The coding process uncovered four major themes in the data. One theme was prevalent for each of the four areas of research about the PARCC (curriculum, staffing, technology, and evaluation).

For staffing, the theme that occurred was highly qualified/certifications. For curriculum, the major theme was CCSS (NJSLS). For technology, the prevailing theme was IT/devices. For evaluation, the theme involved SGPs.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Seven administrators and seven teachers participated in this qualitative, semistructured interview study. Throughout my interviews, I was able to see the passionate feelings and thoughts that all of these subjects had toward the PARCC test. The participants also revealed their thoughts on what was best for their students. Many of the interviewees were happy to share their thoughts and feelings on and their experiences with the PARCC test since its implementation, as well as the results tied to the PARCC test. Although most of the administrators and teachers gave positive feedback throughout the interviews, there were some questions that prompted some negative feedback. All the participants were foremost concerned about the success and interests of the students and shared their frustrations with the PARCC since its implementation in various educational areas. The interview questions covered four main areas of education (curriculum, staffing, technology, and evaluations) which all interviewees were versed in from their time in education. All of the participants were very willing to express their concerns, both positive and negative, as if they finally had someone to vent to about the PARCC. The data obtained from the interviews provided answers to the following questions:

1. What changes/alterations have you made to the language arts curriculum since the inception of the PARCC?
2. What changes/alterations have you made to the math curriculum since the inception of the PARCC?
3. What evaluation system did you choose to coincide with the PARCC and why?
4. What was the staff's reaction/concerns with evaluations being tied to PARCC scores?
5. What technological challenges did you encounter with the inception of PARCC?

6. What devices/computer labs/band width did you need to alter or purchase to be able to complete the PARCC in a timely fashion?
7. What staffing changes were implemented due to the PARCC exam?
8. For the PARCC, what disciplines were most affected by staff changes and why?
9. As mentioned earlier, four themes seemed to prevail for the four different areas of exploration. Questions 1 and 2 focused on the curriculum. Questions 3 and 4 focused on evaluation. Questions 5 and 6 focused on technology. Questions 7 and 8 focused on staffing and whether teachers were reassigned to different grades or subjects to apply their strengths to help improve students' test scores.

Curriculum

The first two questions dealt with the language arts and mathematics curriculums. These two curriculums, dictated by the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards, were chosen because the PARCC test focuses on these two subjects. The NJ ASK included science for every grade level, but that approach no longer applies with the PARCC. The NJDOE only implements the science part of the test in fourth and eighth grade to limit the amount of test time for the students in other grades. The theme that was prevalent in the curriculum questions had to do with the NJSLS and aligning the language arts and math curriculums to the NJSLS. Although curriculums are revised every 5 years (standard set by the NJDOE), some districts did not wait for the 5-year cycle to revise their curriculums to meet the NJSLS standards because of the PARCC test, according to the interviewees.

Administrator 1 stated,

We have aligned the Language Arts curriculum to the NJSLS standards. We have also implemented writer's workshop out of Teachers College as the instructional model as it supports the depth, rigor and required differentiation of the standards. This was done in 2017, but the district had begun moving towards a readers' workshop a bit prior. We feel

this will better prepare the students for the PARCC testing as it aligns with the test specifications.

Teacher 3 spoke about forming committees within the schools to review and align the language arts and mathematics curricula to the new state standards. She was not a member of the committee, but they met on professional development days throughout the year to align the curriculum with the standards. She did say that the district used to pay the teachers to complete curricula, but now they have them complete the work during school hours so they do not have to pay them.

Teacher 5 touched on this subject as well:

All of the language arts teachers met and discussed the changes in the state's curriculum and what had to be changed in our curriculum to help the staff better prepare the students for the PARCC test. We looked at the curriculum systemically so that the preparation for the PARCC would start in kindergarten and first grade and not just start in third grade, which is the first year the students take the test. We then met with the language arts supervisor to discuss the revisions that needed to be made.

Administrator 3 felt that they were “under the gun” to revise the math and language arts curriculums to coincide with the NJSLs, especially because their district was not up for revision of either curriculum for a few years.

Teacher 6 stated,

My colleagues and I are in the process of looking at new language arts basal programs that align better with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and the PARCC. We are currently looking at Houghton Mifflin and Learning without Tears. We are trying to see which program is best for our students.

Teacher 2 was annoyed that the state kept changing the name of and standards for the curricula:

As soon as we get used to one curriculum or way of teaching, the state decides to change the standards for each grade level and as teachers we have to revamp our lesson plans to meet the new, always changing, curriculums. I do not think that the people changing the curriculums are even in education. They seem to have no idea what teachers are up against in the classroom in this day and age.

Administrator 5 discussed that, along with aligning the curriculum to the NJSLS, they were also sending their teachers out for professional development to strengthen some areas of the curriculum. This administrator focused on math because their PARCC math scores were lower than those in language arts. He reported that many teachers were attending workshops offered by a local vendor, Conquer Math, because the program claims to be aligned with the PARCC test specifications and the NJSLS. He stated, “Although it is time out of the classroom for the teachers, I am hoping they are coming back with new strategies that will help the students, not just with the curriculum, but with the PARCC test, also.”

Teacher 2 also added to the conversation on the time spent out of the classroom:

The administration wants us to attend workshops to become familiar with the PARCC test and the type of questions that are on the test. The only problem is that I am out of the classroom a few days a year for the workshops, and those days are days that I need to prepare the kids for the test.

Administrator 2 was very positive and upbeat about the curriculum changes:

I see the curriculums moving toward a better way to prepare the students for any type of challenge. The students are now asked to explain and figure out problems or activities on their own so they can be problem solvers and not just memorize theories or equations. The children have to explain why they completed a problem the way they did, which helps teachers to analyze the way these students process information, which helps with differentiated instruction. Each child learns differently, so we have to start varying our strategies and plans to meet the needs of all of the learners.

Teacher 7 stated that

We have added a few internet-based programs to our language arts curriculum. Students use a program called Study Island. The format and content of Study Island has been aligned to the PARCC. Other internet programs, such as Raz Kids and Kid Biz, have also been added to our curriculum. One concern when the PARCC test was first instituted was that the children would not be able to type their answers. Since the inception of PARCC, I have my students typing all their stories into Google Docs every day to better prepare them for typing on the PARCC.

Teacher 3 expressed the same concern about typing answers for the PARCC test.

Students do much more typing of their writing and open-ended responses to better prepare them for typing during the PARCC test. And as for math, students are typing up their open-ended responses, and they are expected to explain the reasoning behind their strategies for answering the questions.

Teacher 1 discussed how the administration of her school provided curriculum writing time with a certified math instructor who is part of developing and assessing the actual state PARCC assessment. Supplemental materials were added to areas that they felt needed more emphasis from the PARCC evidence statements. Evidence statements are results from the PARCC tests showing districts where the majority of students fell short in areas compared to the rest of the state. With this information, districts hired consultants or sent staff to professional development in the areas in which the students struggled to help the teachers identify best practices in those areas to increase district test scores.

Evaluations

The next two questions dealt with the new evaluation process of teachers instituted along with PARCC; that is, evaluations for math and language arts are now tied to the PARCC results. SGP is the term that is now used as part of teachers' annual evaluations. The theme that evolved for these questions involved the unfair comparison for teachers' evaluations—more so from the teachers than from the administrators.

Every teacher receives an annual review, and in their annual is now a section for SGP, which is based on the PARCC scores from the students in their class(es). In the first few years of the PARCC era, the percentage of the teachers' annuals that involves the SGP has diminished. In the first year, the weight of SGP was 30% of a teacher's annual. In the past few years, the percentage has dropped, and the state is in the process of reducing it again, to 5% of the overall annual.

Administrator 1 stated,

We use the Stronge Model for our staff evaluation tool. We looked at various models and felt that the Stronge model worked best for our district. The teachers were unhappy, to say the least, when they found out that they were going to be evaluated on the PARCC scores. The staff seemed to be happy that the percentage weight for the SGP has dropped drastically in the past few years.

Administrator 5 felt that the Stronge model was the best model for their district, also. He stated that the consortium worked as a group to choose the best evaluation model. The consortium wanted to choose the same model to achieve consistency throughout the sending towns. “Since we all used the same model, we [the administrators] were able to coach and help each other with the initial implementation of the new evaluation system.”

Teacher 2 did not have any positive feedback for the new evaluation system or for the SGP:

It is unfair that the state compares one year to the next for teachers. Every year we get a new bunch of students, and some years they are smarter than other years. You cannot compare one group of students to another. It is unfair for the students and the teachers. They also publish the school’s scores, and it pits one school against another. And, again, you are comparing apples to oranges. Different kids and different teachers.

Teacher 5 raised a related concern:

Since they started evaluating the teachers on the students’ PARCC scores, the teachers joke around that they do not want any of the low kids because they want a good evaluation. Although they say it in jest, I believe that they truly mean it. Why would you want to set yourself up for failure by wanting to help out the students who have learning disabilities and are not classified?

Teacher 6 was concerned about the decision to become a language arts teacher as opposed to a specialized teacher (art, music, physical education).

It is not fair that only the math and language art teachers are called on the carpet for the students’ scores, and all the other teachers—and there are lot of them—do not get evaluated on any scores. I should have become a social studies teacher or a music teacher since they do not have to worry about student growth percentiles.

Administrator 3 added to this discussion, citing inequity related to teacher’s grade level:

As an administrator, I feel it is a team effort for the PARCC scores. Not just the current grade-level teachers. Third grade is the first year that the students take the PARCC; in this case I feel that kindergarten, first, and second grade are just as responsible for the scores as the third-grade teachers. Unfortunately, the first- and second-grade teachers are not part of the student growth percentiles, also, as they are not tested grades. Actually, third grade escapes student growth percentiles, as there is not a prior year of test scores to compare with the students, but they are still responsible for the initial PARCC scores for the third graders.

Teacher 1 had the same thoughts about the evaluation as Teacher 6. She thought that it was unfair that language arts and mathematics educators are the only teachers who get an SGP. She claimed that many teachers will not want to become a language arts or mathematics teacher because of the new evaluation system. “Why would a new teacher want that pressure on them when they can get a degree in social studies or one of the specials and not have to worry about SGPs? It just not a fair system.” She also went on to say that the first year of PARCC she had quite a few students opt out of the test from her class: “I was worried about my evaluation as almost a third of my class opted out of the test.”

Teacher 2 explained as follows:

We chose Stronge as our evaluation system as it comes with multiple methods to evaluate teacher and student performance. This was relieving to those who were worried about one item determining teacher effectiveness. Evaluation will always have subjectivity hidden within it. Subjective seems to be unavoidable, however, we felt the Stronge model had the least amount of this (subjectivity) in its system.

Teacher 4 discussed how many of the staff members at her school were not too concerned about the PARCC scores being tied to personal evaluations because the administration in the district understands the many factors that can affect test scores, positively or negatively, in addition to a teacher’s influence. The school administration did not pressure the teachers much about the PARCC scores because the administrators were well aware that many other indicators can indicate whether a student is making progress, such as ongoing portfolios or class assignments and assessments. The school climate is not one in which the focus is solely on the

PARCC scores. The administration believes in supporting the whole child (academics, social, emotional), not just a snapshot of a test score.

Technology

Interview Questions 5 and 6 dealt with technology and the preparedness for the PARCC test. When the PARCC was introduced to New Jersey, it was clear that districts had to be prepared for the first computer-based test and to ensure that they had all the parameters in place to successfully implement the test within the time frame given by the state. Many districts scrambled to be sure they had enough bandwidth, computers, laptops or computer labs depending on the size of the district and their philosophy on the best way to implement the computer-based test. The recurring themes throughout the interview responses related to bandwidth and the number of computers available to the students for testing.

Administrator 5 explained the initial IT scramble:

As soon as we were instructed that all students had to complete the test on a compute, we immediately had a meeting with the IT team to be sure that we were well prepared for the test, even though it was a few months away. We, as a district, needed to improve the bandwidth and decide if we wanted to purchase Chromebooks for the students to complete the test. We did not and do not have enough computer labs for all classes to circulate through to take the test in the amount of time that was allotted by the state.

Administrator 3 explained the administration's efforts:

We immediately got in touch with the IT supervisor and ordered Chromebooks as we knew we would need more. The hard part was where to take the funds from to pay for the laptops. Luckily, the PTA was nice enough to offer to purchase a few classroom sets for the school, which helped us out greatly. We were also worried about space and making sure the laptops did not crash or freeze during the testing.

Some teachers also discussed their views on the technological aspect of the test's administration. Teacher 2 did not see any problems with the computer-based test. "A few students got logged off during the test, but we were able to log them back on immediately and the test brought them right back to where they were." Teacher 5 did not have any issues with the

computers crashing or logging off, but she did have a problem with the closing of the computer lab for many weeks so the students could test. She explained,

To complete the PARCC in a timely manner, our school had to alter the computer lab by cancelling all computer classes in the school for the duration of the testing because the computer instructor is the proctor for the PARCC testing. There are only enough computers for one class at a time. Only two out of five classes can be tested each day, thus taking a long time to complete the test.

Teacher 7 touched on IT support:

The administration provided technical support in the case of any technical glitches. The IT staff and technical instructors were immediately available upon request. Fortunately, we have not experienced any technical challenge thus far. Due to the large amount of support provided by the administration, students were better prepared to use the computer to answer a variety of questions.

Administrator 6 did not believe that the district was given enough time to properly prepare for the PARCC test.

We were under the gun to order laptops so that the students could take the test. My fear was that the students would not be familiar with the laptops we ordered and that would hinder their ability to complete the test, not only in a timely fashion, but correctly. The first year of testing was very stressful for all of us. Since then, we have ironed out all the kinks and it is running much more smoothly.

Teacher 1 has been happy the past few years because her class is usually not the first to attempt the PARCC test in the computer lab.

By the time it is my class's time to take the test, the first few classes have ironed out the kinks. We have never experienced any technical problems. I know that my colleague, who was the first class to take the test last year, had a few issues with the computers freezing, but they were able to work through the issues. I just hope my class never has to be the first class to attempt the PARCC in the future.

Teacher 2 stated, "The IT team updated the internet accessibility during the PARCC administration to prevent any technological issues. The lab was set up and the schedules were changed to ensure a quiet testing environment."

Administrator 4 believes that moving toward a computer-based test was inevitable.

We knew it was coming down the pike, I just did not think it would happen so quickly. I do not mean year-wise; I mean from when the state told us about the PARCC test to actually having to administer it in the same year. Luckily, we already had one-on-one Chromebooks, so the students were familiar with using the Chromebooks for many activities, so I was not worried about them completing the test on them. I was more worried about the ability of the schools infrastructure of technology to allow many students to complete the test at once. I knew that the IT team was on top of it and let them manage that area of the PARCC test.

Administrator 1 also said that they have one-to-one Chromebooks for the fifth and sixth grades. She was concerned about the past performances of the third grade because they were not as proficient on the laptops:

We did not really have a technology program, though fifth and sixth had one-to-one Chromebooks. For 2017–2018 Grade 4 received one to one Chromebooks, too. The lack of consistent technology in grade three definitely has an impact on the students' abilities to express themselves fluently. Students are also challenged by using the computer for graphing and drawing as required by the math portion of the PARCC.

This was the only administrator who discussed technology as having an impact on the math section due to students' abilities to utilize various tools on the laptops. The PARCC test requires students to utilize various tools on the computer, including highlighting, math manipulatives (shapes), graphing, and drag and drop, to mention a few. If the students are not proficient in keyboarding or various tools on the computer keyboard, it can affect their score as well as their time to finish. It is important that the students be well versed on the laptop or desktop that they will be completing the PARCC test with to avoid any keyboarding obstacles.

Staffing

The last two interview questions dealt with staffing. These two topics received the least extensive responses from the interviewees—and have received less attention in the extant literature. Over the past few years, New Jersey has implemented the Highly Qualified program for various grade levels and courses. In the past, a K–6 college degree would allow teachers to teach any subject from grades kindergarten to sixth. Recently, the state has mandated that if a

teacher is teaching a specific subject in Grade 4 and up, the educator must be “highly qualified” in that area. This would make sense because one would want a qualified teacher in each subject area preparing the students for the PARCC test. The interview questions were designed to obtain a better understanding of whether school administrations were moving teachers to different grade levels or positions depending on their certifications or their strengths in a given area.

Specifically, for teachers who are strong in language arts or mathematics and teach in an untested grade, are those teachers being moved to a tested grade to help with PARCC scores?

Administrator 2 stated that, as soon as the PARCC test was implemented, she looked to move any qualified and dynamic teachers into classrooms where a single subject was taught, particularly mathematics and language arts. This way, the students were being taught by a highly qualified teacher in that area who should have a better chance of improving PARCC test scores.

Administrator 4 gave her thoughts on overseeing this process:

We do not have block scheduling/departmentalization in the lower grades, K–4, so the students are with the same teacher all day, and that teacher teaches all the subjects. I am tracking the PARCC scores for each teacher to see if any adjustments or changes are needed. I have to take into consideration that each year is a new set of students, so I need to take that into consideration when looking at the PARCC scores and evaluating the teachers.

Teacher 3 stated,

We did not see much in the way of changing staff around; we were more worried about the responsibilities of using the “dashboard” when administering the PARCC. Some of us are not very computer literate, so it took us awhile to get used to using the dashboard to monitor the students’ progress throughout the test.

Teacher 1 did not see much mobility in the schools with switching teachers, but she did see an increase of professional workshops, whether in or out of district, pertaining to language arts and mathematics. Teachers were encouraged to attend workshops they felt would help them in the class to better align their daily lesson plans with the PARCC format.

Teacher 5 noticed a lot more staff meetings and crosscurricular activities, as well as the appearance of administration at common planning times to review and reevaluate programs, homework, and textbooks. “Ever since the PARCC test, the principal has been at many more of our grade-level planning meetings to review PARCC scores and evidence statements to be sure we are all working on the same objectives.”

Administrator 1 did move a few teachers around with the inception of the PARCC to ensure that the strongest language arts and math teachers were working with as many of the students as possible. She explained,

Since our third grade classes are self-contained, I needed to be sure that I have strong teachers in those classrooms in all areas of the curriculum. I looked to see what teachers were Orton Gillingham certified and were strong in language arts and math and moved them into the third-grade classrooms. It has taken about 3 years to manipulate and move the staff members that I wanted, but I feel that I have a strong third-grade team put in place. Starting in fourth grade the classes are departmentalized, so it was easier to find highly qualified teachers for those positions as they teach the same subject all day. My biggest challenge at this point is maternity-leave replacements and making sure I have someone strong to cover those classes. I wish there were more men that want to teach in elementary school because they do not get pregnant. [said with a laugh]

Teacher 2 did not see any staff changes since the inception of the PARCC, but the district has been pushing for all elementary teachers to be certified in Orton Gillingham to help with reading and spelling. I am not sure if the PARCC had anything to do with this, but the district is offering classes for teachers who are interested in being certified.

Administrator 3 said,

At first, I was worried about the results of the PARCC test and the evaluation for the teachers. I know that the teachers differentiated their lessons to meet the needs of all of the learners and do their best in both mathematics and language arts. This is reflected in their lesson plans and their daily activities. I am in and out of the rooms quite a few times throughout the day. I did not feel as though I needed to move any staff members around, just get them stronger in any areas they may need some assistance. We utilized the evidence statements as well as MAP testing to give insight into where we need to focus on as a school.

Based on the reactions and statements from the interviewees, the PARCC test has had an impact in many areas of these elementary schools. Content analysis of patterns and themes would show that the administrators were more concerned about the influence the PARCC had on the teachers because that will impact student success. The administration wants to be sure that the teachers are well versed and comfortable teaching the subject areas that they are assigned to in their schools. A teacher who feels supported by their educational leaders will feel more secure in their day-to-day interaction with the students and the curriculum according to the teachers who were interviewed.

The administration wants to be sure that there is ongoing professional development to keep up with best practices in the content the students will be exposed to on the PARCC test. Introducing new content to the staff without professional development or the understanding as to why the new content is being infused into the curriculum will not bode well with the teachers. The teachers need to understand the reasoning behind curriculum revisions so that they can see the objective or mission of the revised curriculum.

From the interviews, it became obvious that the administration and the teachers want to work with each other to be successful in all areas of the curriculum and on the PARCC test. Success just involves constant communication from administrators to teachers as well as from teachers to administrators.

Change is very difficult for people to embrace, and that holds true for both the teachers and administrators interviewed. Why change something if it has been successful (at least in their eyes) for the past several years? Although there will always be those who do not like or accept change, if they are given reasons as to why the change is needed, whether in curriculum or

staffing, the decision might be palatable. According to Marzano, Walters, and McNulty (2005), there are two types of changes: first-order change and second-order change.

This is where the educational leaders need to present the facts to the staff so that they understand why these changes need to be made whether they are due to the trickle-down effect from NJDOE decisions or school-based decisions. Clear explanations will help with the staff's perception of whether the change is first order or second order.

The phenomenon of first versus second order change is an internal event. It is defined by the way people react to a proposed innovation. Whether change is perceived as first-order or second order depends on the knowledge, experience, values and flexibility of the individual or the group perceiving the change. . . . Depending on how they perceive the change initiative, some staff members may experience the initiative as first-order change and others will experience it as second order change. (Marzano et al., 2005)

Characteristics of First-Order Change:

- Is perceived as an extension of the past
- Fits within existing paradigms
- Is consistent with prevailing values and norms
- Can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills
- Requires resources and conditions currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations
- May be accepted because of common agreement that the innovation is necessary

Characteristics of Second-Order Change:

- Is perceived as a break in the past
- Lies outside existing paradigms
- Conflicts with prevailing values and norms
- Requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills
- Requires resources and/or conditions not currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations
- May be resisted because only those who have broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary. (Marzano et al., 2005)

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was motivated by the lack of information and empirical literature on New Jersey elementary schools' implementation of the PARCC exam and its effect on various areas, including curriculum, technology, evaluation, and staffing. It was also difficult to find any information on how districts handled various aspects of the PARCC test in their schools. This study sought to assist other educators to navigate their way to becoming a successful PARCC administrator. All New Jersey schools are now accountable for the educational growth of all of their students. Still, any educator would like to be aware of any strategies or practices that could help students—as well as teachers and administrators—achieve their full potential. Because no data are available on PARCC testing and how it has impacted elementary schools, this study's goal was to foster dialogue among educators to help better understand how the PARCC test can be positively supported by an entire educational community.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact that the PARCC test had on four key areas in elementary schools (curriculum, technology, evaluation, and staffing) and to help guide other districts to implement the PARCC successfully. I chose both administrators and teachers for this study because I wanted different views on the PARCC administration. The following interview questions were developed to further this study's inquiry.

Interview Questions

1. What changes/alterations have you made to the language arts curriculum since the inception of the PARCC?
2. What changes/alterations have you made to the math curriculum since the inception of the PARCC?

3. What evaluation system did you choose to coincide with the PARCC and why?
4. What was the staff's reaction/concerns with evaluations being tied to PARCC scores?
5. What technological challenges did you encounter with the inception of PARCC?
6. What devices/computer labs/band width did you need to alter or purchase to be able to complete the PARCC in a timely fashion?
7. What staffing changes were implemented due to the PARCC exam?
8. For the PARCC, what disciplines were most affected by staff changes and why?

This chapter discusses how the findings of the study align with the limited literature. I also present recommendations for future research about the PARCC test to help enable educators, whether in suburban, urban, charter, or public schools, to explore four major areas of their school (curriculum, evaluation, staffing, and technology) with the goal of maximizing administrator, teacher, and student success when undertaking the state exam.

Discussion

Curriculum

The findings of this study centered on four themes that emerged through the interviews with teachers and administrators. The first theme dealt with aligning a school's curriculum to the CCSS (NJSLS). All participants from both areas—administrators and teachers—discussed how their district immediately examined the NJSLS to ensure that the curriculum aligned with the standards. All participants in the study explained that, after comparing the district curriculum to the NJSLS, teachers and administrators alike had to collaborate collegially for the good of the district. The consensus was that the districts wanted to be sure that the curriculum was properly addressing the standards that are assessed on the PARCC.

That said, all of the districts revamped their language art and mathematics curricula soon after PARCC's implementation. The goal was to ensure that the district was properly preparing the students for the exam in all areas of both subjects. Some districts employed outside educational vendors to help with the alignment, and other districts depended on their curriculum specialists to update the curricula.

In this respect, the administrators and teachers were on the same page. They were all concerned that the present curricula aligned with the PARCC so that the students would do well. The administrators wanted the students to succeed so that the school would score highly on its annual state report card, and the teachers wanted the students to do well because the scores had become tied to their annuals (another topic of the interviews).

Both administrators and teachers were interested in receiving more professional development in language arts and mathematics. They were interested in ongoing professional development and not just a 1-day in service. Administrators wanted the teachers to feel secure in their teaching practices, and teachers wanted the ongoing support to continue with best practices.

Evaluations

The second theme that emerged from the interviewing process was in the area of evaluations and their impact on the schools for PARCC testing. The common themes for this topic were the teachers' perspective that test scores were being compared unfairly and teachers' fear or nervousness about their annual evaluation. In the 2 years that this study was in progress, the state dropped the percentage of test scores impacting teacher evaluations from 30% to 5%. Despite this decrease, the teachers still do not feel that this is a fair measurement instrument.

Teachers and administrators were concerned with the comparing of different students from year to year. Each year is comprised of a new group of students, and their academic levels

vary from year to year. If a teacher has a low-performing class one year, those scores will impact their evaluations. The teachers were also unhappy that only language-arts and math educators would be held to SGPs—all other disciplines were not accountable for their students' test performance. Consequently, both administrators and teachers were concerned that fewer candidates would enter language arts and mathematics as a teaching profession, given that those are the two areas that have scores tied to their evaluations at year end. Other disciplines do not have SGPs, so new candidates or teachers might be attracted to those areas considering that the evaluations are less strenuous.

Although the SGPs were a major concern for the teachers, they all felt as though the administration was well aware that the PARCC is only one of many indicators of a student's performance and academic abilities. The administrators interviewed were also aware that the PARCC test is just a snapshot—just one test that the students take throughout an entire school year.

Technology

Another prevalent theme during the interviews revolved around technology and the lack of its availability for the PARCC exam in the beginning. This area of the study was more concerning for the administrators than it was for the teachers. Although the teachers were worried about the students not being able to type in a short amount of time and having to become familiar with the PARCC Dashboard (monitoring students' progress online), the prevalent theme for this topic was the amount of bandwidth and computers or computer labs provided by the administration.

The administrators were worried about finishing the test in the allotted amount of time (weeks), the amount of bandwidth needed to support many students completing the test at the

same time, and circulating all of the students through a computer lab or having to purchase more laptops.

Ensuring sufficient bandwidth in the buildings was the first concern for all of the administrators. Every administrator interviewed immediately spoke about getting in touch with the IT (Information Technology/Technician) team and working with them to be sure their school was prepared with bandwidth.

Once they were prepared with the bandwidth, the administrators had to be sure they had enough laptops or time in the computer labs to complete the PARCC in the allotted amount of time. This varied from district to district. Some districts purchased more Chromebooks to alleviate this problem, but that meant the districts needed to procure funding. Other districts closed down their computer labs for weeks and circulated classes through the labs to complete the testing. Yet other districts utilized both approaches and had some students working in computer labs on desktops and others on Chromebooks.

The administrators were also worried about the PARCC test itself being up and working throughout the testing window and hoping there were no glitches on the testing software. Even starting a few minutes late due to test glitches could throw off an entire testing day and schedule. The teachers were more concerned with their students being able to complete a test on the computer in the allotted amount of time but also expressed concern about the bandwidth and quantity of computers/labs.

Staffing

The last part of the interview revolved around staffing in the schools. This area of the interview received the fewest amount of answers and explanations. The theme that occurred

throughout these interviews involved the certification of teachers or their ability to be Highly Qualified in specific disciplines.

The administrators wanted to be sure that they had the strongest language arts and mathematics teachers in the self-contained classes because these classes did not need a “highly qualified” teacher in a specific area. In the lower levels, these teachers were certified to teach all subjects with a K–5 or K–3 certificate. The upper grades were not as concerning because the teachers in those grades had to be highly qualified in those areas already. The teachers did not see much movement in staffing when it came to the PARCC but noticed an increase in professional development in the language arts and mathematics areas.

Recommendations for Future Research

High-stakes standardized testing is here to stay. It has been present in the New Jersey public school system for decades. The names may have changed (ESPA, ASK, PARCC), but testing is not going anywhere.

Education today is run rampant with evaluations. Classroom tests, national standardized assessments, even scores that reflect international performance—students from elementary school through high school face all of them. If state run schools are to receive federal funding, students should be given (and must pass) certain assessments. Ultimately, students’ futures and school funding rely on these standardized test scores. (Lynch, 2016)

In the last few months, the name of the test has changed, once again, with the inauguration of a new governor. The name for the test is now the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA). The test retains the same format as the PARCC but is just a bit shorter.

I would recommend that this study be replicated in an urban district to see if the administration and teachers have the same feelings/attitudes toward testing in all four of the areas studied in this dissertation. It would also be interesting to see this study replicated in private schools to see if the public sector is more focused on the testing in these areas than that of private

schools. Because private schools do not receive federal funding, do administrators and teachers worry as much about PARCC scores as their counterparts in the public sector? Do they even take the PARCC test, or do they use a different mode of assessment?

Private schools are able to select their students. Are enrollment decisions based on academics, and if so, would this give them an advantage over public schools when it comes to test scores? Do private schools have the ability to recruit academically strong students to increase their test scores?

What about curriculum? Are they held to the 5-year revision cycle set by the NJDOE? Are teachers required to be highly qualified in the areas that they teach to help with test scores?

How do private schools afford all of the technology required to keep up with the implementation of technology within the schools, whether for testing or to enhance instruction?

What evaluation system do these schools utilize for their teachers? Do the private schools monitor the SGP of each of their students, and are these results reflected in their annuals as they are for public school teachers?

Any related research to this topic would be interesting, not only to compare public and private schools but also to facilitate communication between the two sectors. They are both in the field of education and want the best for their students and want them to reach their potential. Any feedback of strategies or best practices between the two sectors could only enhance the potential of schools and their students.

Recommendations for Policy

Education policy plays a major role in the NJDOE implementing statewide tests. My first exposure to statewide testing occurred many years ago, when the test was called the ESPA. I was a young teacher and was curious about the impact of the test on the landscape of an elementary

school and how the test was formulated. Did the committee creating the test have teachers on its panel or just state employees reflecting on their time in school? “Policy as a chain of decisions stretching from the statehouse to the classroom is a byproduct of many games and relationships” (Fowler, 2009).

Throughout the interviews in this study, teachers were more concerned about how the PARCC test was created and who was actually on the team creating it. The teachers questioned the validity of the test and questions depending on who at the state level or testing company reviewed and piloted the test questions.

Informing the administration and staff of how and why the questions on the PARCC test were chosen would help them to have a better understanding of not just the questions but how to successfully answer those questions. If the testing company or the NJDOE shared this information, educators could better understand how and why this format of testing was chosen. I recommend that the state open the lines of communication with the public schools as to why a certain test is chosen and why alterations to curriculum and staffing are important to enhance the level of understanding of the PARCC test.

Recommendations for Practice

I first became interested in the impact state testing had on elementary schools when I entered teaching many years ago. After becoming the supervisor of testing for a large urban district in New Jersey, my interest increased greatly. Now that I am a principal, I am able to see firsthand the effects of a statewide test on an elementary school.

Educators have been saddled with a major task of creating an academically stimulating elementary school or classroom to meet or exceed the standards of the PARCC test. One way to achieve this in any elementary school is by collaboratively creating an environment of cohesive

empowerment from administrators to teachers. Helping the staff with professional development that ties into the standards that are being assessed on the PARCC and making them feel supported and included will only intensify the drive to have every child succeed, not only on the PARCC but also in 21st-century college and careers.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



January 30, 2019

Michael Stefanelli
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Stefanelli,

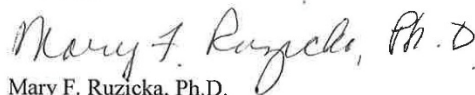
The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board office has reviewed your research proposal entitled "Does the PARCC Exam Alter the Landscape of a School in Grades 3-6 in the Areas of Evaluation, Curriculum, Staffing and Technology?" and categorized it as exempt (reflecting the intent of the new federal regulations).

Enclosed for your records is the signed Request for Approval form.

If used, Informed Consent documents and recruitment flyers are no longer stamped.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Luke Stedrak

Office of Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, NJ 07079 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361 • www.shu.edu

A H O M E F O R T H E M I N D , T H E H E A R T A N D T H E S P I R I T

**REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR
RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

All material must be typed.

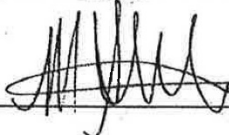
PROJECT TITLE: Does the PARCC exam alter the landscape of a school in grades 3-6 in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology?

H2019.1.1

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I(we) certify that I(we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I(we) further acknowledge my(our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Michael Stefaneli
RESEARCHER(S)



April 3, 2018
DATE

****Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.****

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.



RESEARCHER'S FACULTY ADVISOR for student researchers only

4/25/18
DATE

****Please print or type out name below signature****

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the Jan 2019 meeting.

The application was approved ☒ not approved ☐ by the Committee. Special conditions were ☐ were not ☒ set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Anthony J. Ruzicki, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR,
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

1/30/19
DATE

Seton Hall University
3/2005

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Michael Stefanelli

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] School District

Mrs. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent [REDACTED],

My name is Michael Stefanelli and I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University. I am writing to formally request permission to conduct part of my research in your district. My dissertation topic involves the questioning how the PARCC exam alters the landscape of a school in grades 3-6 in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology. In order to better understand these outcomes, I am hoping to interview one or more administrators or teachers in your district.

Research Purpose: The purpose of my study is to explore the effects that the PARCC test has had on four main areas in elementary school in the state of New Jersey. As a principal of an elementary school for 12 years and present for the inception of the PARCC I am hoping to explore the factors the PARCC exam has had in evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology.

Research Procedures: Administrators and teachers that agree to participate will take part in a face to face interview conducted by myself. The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes and focus primarily on evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology and the way the PARCC altered these areas in the landscape of elementary education.

Audio Taping: In an effort to ensure complete accuracy, all interview will be audiotaped during the questioning. Participants will be allowed to listen to any of their recording. The recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home at all times while they are being transcribed. Pseudonyms will be utilized. At the conclusion of the study, all audio tapes will be destroyed.

Contact Information: The individual responsible for this research effort is Michael Stefanelli, Principal researcher. mstefanelli@optonline.org; 973.476.6487.

[REDACTED] Superintendent, give permission for Michael Stefanelli to conduct research/interviews in our district. Date 4/18/18

Michael Stefanelli

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] School District

Mrs. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent [REDACTED]

My name is Michael Stefanelli and I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University. I am writing to formally request permission to conduct part of my research in your district. My dissertation topic involves the questioning how the PARCC exam alters the landscape of a school in grades 3-6 in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology. In order to better understand these outcomes, I am hoping to interview one or more administrators or teachers in your district.

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Contact Information: The individual responsible for this research effort is Michael Stefanelli, Principal researcher. mstefanelli@optonline.org; 973.476.6487.

I, [REDACTED] (superintendent), give permission for Michael Stefanelli to conduct research/interviews in our district. Date 4/10/18

[REDACTED]

Michael Stefanelli

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] School District

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent [REDACTED],

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Research Purpose: The purpose of my study is to explore the effects that the PARCC test has had on four main areas in elementary school in the state of New Jersey. As a principal of an elementary school for 12 years and present for the inception of the PARCC I am hoping to explore the factors the PARCC exam has had in evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology.

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Contact Information: The individual responsible for this research effort is Michael Stefanelli, Principal researcher. mstefanelli@optonline.org; 973.476.6487.

I, [REDACTED] (superintendent), give permission for Michael Stefanelli to conduct research/interviews in our district. Date April 9, 2018

Michael Stefanelli

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] School District

Mrs. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent [REDACTED]

My name is Michael Stefanelli and I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University. I am writing to formally request permission to conduct part of my research in your district. My dissertation topic involves the questioning how the PARCC exam alters the landscape of a school in grades 3-6 in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology. In order to better understand these outcomes, I am hoping to interview one or more administrators or teachers in your district.

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Research Procedures: Administrators and teachers that agree to participate will take part in a face to face interview conducted by myself. The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes and focus primarily on evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology and the way the PARCC altered these areas in the landscape of elementary education.

Audio Taping: In an effort to ensure complete accuracy, all interview will be audiotaped during the questioning. Participants will be allowed to listen to any of their recording. The recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home at all times while they are being transcribed. Pseudonyms will be utilized. At the conclusion of the study, all audio tapes will be destroyed.

Contact Information: The individual responsible for this research effort is Michael Stefanelli, Principal researcher. mstefanelli@optonline.org; 973.476.6487.

I, [REDACTED] (superintendent), give permission for Michael Stefanelli to conduct research/interviews in our district. Date 4/11/18

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How, if at all, has PARCC testing influenced/alterd administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the school in the areas of technology and staffing?
2. How, if at all, has PARCC testing influenced and informed teaching approaches, strategies, or professional development as related to the curriculum?
3. What are the principle concerns about how accurately PARCC testing reflects the perceptions of staff evaluation?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Informed Consent Form

_____, agrees to participate in a dissertation study on “Does the PARCC exam alter the landscape of a school in grades 3-6 in the areas of evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology?” conducted by Michael Stefanelli, a doctoral student at Seton Hall University.

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects that the PARCC exam has had on four major areas in elementary education – evaluation, curriculum, staffing and technology.

As this is a qualitative study, the data will be gathered through 30 minute interviews of administrators and teachers. The interview questions have been reviewed and approved by a panel of peers. Each interview will take up to 30 minutes. Interviews will be conducted at the participants’ school in their classrooms, offices or any location mutually agreed upon. There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort to any participant in this study. The following are a sample of the questions that will be asked:

- *What changes/ alterations have you made to the language arts curriculum since inception of the PARCC?
- *What evaluation system did your district choose to coincide with the PARCC and why?
- *What technological challenges did you encounter with the inception of the PARCC?
- *What staffing changes were implemented due to the PARCC exam?

The participants are told that this study is completely voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. There will be no penalty for discontinuing involvement in the study.

All the information gathered during the interviews will be confidential, anonymous and stored in a secure, locked facility. The benefit to taking part in the study is additional knowledge to help with the implementation of the PARCC and the areas which it effects in elementary schools.

The interviews will be recorded for reference purpose only. A pseudonym will be used to identify the participant and to keep their identity anonymous. The interviewee is entitled to a copy of the recording if they would like. The recordings will be kept in a locked facility in the researcher’s home. After three years, the recording will be destroyed.

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Michael Stefanelli at _____ You may also contact Dr. Luke Stedrak, the Dissertation Advisor, at his Seton Hall University office at 973.275.2725, or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board at 973.313.6314.

Participant _____ Date _____