Native American Students' Perceptions of
High-Stakes Testing in New Mexico

by

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Given the political and public demands for accountability, using the voices of students from the frontlines, this study investigated student perceptions of New Mexico’s high-stakes testing program taking public schools in the right direction. Did the students perceive the program having an impact on retention, drop outs, or graduation requirements? What were the perceptions of Navajo students in Navajo reservation schools as to the impact of high-stakes testing on their emotional, physical, social, and academic well-being? The specific tests examined were the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) on Native American students.

Based on interviews published by the Daily Times of Farmington, New Mexico, our local newspaper, some of the students reported that the testing program was not taking schools in the right direction, that the test was used improperly, and that the one-time test scores were not an accurate assessment of students learning. In addition, they were cited on negative and positive effects on the curriculum, teaching and learning, and student and teacher motivation.

Based on the survey results, the students’ positive and negative concerns and praises of high-stakes testing were categorized into themes. The positive effects cited included the fact that the testing held students, educators, and parents accountable for their actions. The students were not opposed to accountability, but rather, opposed to the manner in which it was currently implemented. Several
implications of these findings were examined: (a) requirements to pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam; (b) what high stakes testing meant for the emotional well-being of the students; (c) the impact of sanctions under New Mexico’s high-stakes testing proficiency; and (d) the effects of high-stakes tests on students’ perceptions, experiences and attitudes.

Student voices are not commonly heard in meetings and discussions about K-12 education policy. Yet, the adults who control policy could learn much from listening to what students have to say about their experiences.
To my children:
Kandace Renee Chee and Matthew Harold Tracy, to my special children, you both are a wonderful creation. You were designed in the heart of God, fashioned by His loving hands, and given to our family as his precious gift. Thank you for all you do for me, your prayers, your words, your encouragement and every moment you’ve selflessly given to our family-I am forever grateful to both of you, you are appreciated, celebrated and loved.

To my grandchildren:
Atiya Autumn Joe, Takai Jaedon Beyale and Lily Precious Beyale, who unknowingly sacrificed so many hours of their childhood the past two years who helped me keep faith through the challenges, who gave me a reason to finish what I started, who genuinely celebrated my successes.

To my husband, Harold R. Tracy, who always loved me for who I am and his support in this venture.

To my mom, Margaret Yazzie, and late dad, Wilson Yazzie, who taught me all about hard work and the value of education.

To my sister, Ramona Yazzie, for her loving encouragement, patience, and prayers in this endeavor.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The quality of this dissertation owes much to the knowledge and wisdom of my three incredible committee members. I extend profound gratitude to Dr. Dee Spencer for generously agreeing to be my chair, for her wise guidance in structuring and pacing the work, for her keen insights that continually focused the process and enriched the product, and for her skillful steering and cheering through the challenges. Her faith in my work and my abilities as a scholar emboldened and encouraged me when my own courage waned.

A very special thank you to Dr. Appleton for kindly stepping in and firmly giving me direction when the budget crises left the university in disarray. His role as taskmaster was helpful to all NAEL cohort members. Thank you, Dr. Janet Slowman-Chee, for your unfailing commitment to my success in all academic and professional endeavors; for your time, knowledge, wisdom, and wealth of insights about education and leadership that were given with unreserved generosity.

I extend deep appreciation to fellow scholars and colleagues in education who offered moral and technical support in this project. Thank you, Dr. Frances Vatali and Dr. Marlena Shepard, not only for your insightful readings, dialogue, and input as the work progressed, but also your steadfast support, sound judgment, and firm faith in me.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the high school principals, one in particular, Scott Story, who was very helpful in this research. A very special thanks to the students who gave of their valuable time to do interviews with me.
Thanks beyond words goes to my family and my friends. I thank each and everyone who had a role in my accomplishments.

Through the excerpt below by Sarah Young, my acknowledgment of daily continual guidance primarily goes to the One Who is always present with me:

Try to view each day as an adventure, carefully planned out by your Guide. Instead of staring into the day that is ahead of you, attempting to program it according to your will, be attentive to Me and to all I have prepared for you. Thank Me for this day of life, recognizing that it is a precious, unrepeatable gift. Trust that I am with you each moment, whether you sense my Presence or not. A thankful, trusting attitude helps you to see events in your life from My perspective. Expect each day to contain surprises! Resist your tendency to search for the easiest route through the day. Be willing to follow wherever I lead. No matter how steep or treacherous the path before you, the safest place to be is by My side. (Psalm 118: 24; 1 Peter 2: 21)
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially of such of them as may be settled on agricultural parts of the Reservation, and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that, for every thirty children between said ages who can be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished who will reside among said Indians, and fully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. The provision of this article to continue for not less than ten years.

(Andrew Johnson, President of the United States of America, article six, Treaty of 1868)

The year 1968 marks the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Peace between the Navajo Tribe and the U.S. Government. The treaty, signed by 29 Navajo headmen and 10 officers of the U.S. Army on June 1, 1868, brought to an end a tragic period of suffering, hardship, deprivation, and exile at Bosque Redondo, New Mexico. During the intervening century, the Navajo people have witnessed a substantial population increase and have undergone drastic and far-reaching changes in their economy, self-government, social status, education, and living conditions.

The civilization policies of the federal government did not touch the Navajos prior to their incarceration at Fort Sumner, Bosque Redondo, New Mexico, from 1864 to 1868. Before that, Navajos knew nothing about the school as an institution to educate youth. The educating process in Navajo culture was
carried on primarily by the family and extended family; and, through this process, young people received a good education, an education to prepare them to live the life expected of them. They were taught what they needed to know to function in their society: the rules and taboos of their culture, the skills to make a living from their flocks and farms, the accepted behavior expected of them, and the responsibilities they must assume to be respected Navajos. Boys were taught what they needed to know to function as male members of the tribe, and girls were taught their roles. Each individual youth, in keeping with his or her age and maturity, not only was permitted but also expected to participate with adults in the activities of the group in work, social life, and certain ceremonials. Cultural values were passed on through stories, legends, ceremonials, and everyday living. This traditional learning process kept youth and adults in close step with each other, and it developed in young Navajos a sense of worth, self-respect, and respect for elders. The educational process was sound, and it made sense in a culture that was self-contained, with little need for outside contacts (Thompson, 1975, p. 26).

When the signing of the 1868 Treaty of Peace between the Navajo Tribe and the U.S. Government, there were several rulings established and expected. First, in order to ensure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education was admitted, especially of those settled on agricultural parts of the Reservation. They were to pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of 6 and 16, to attend school. Second, it was
the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation was strictly complied with. It was agreed by the United States that for every 30 children between said ages, who could be induced or compelled to attend school, a house would be provided. Third, a teacher who was competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education would reside among said Indians and fully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. One hundred years later, it appears that the expectations of the 1868 treaty have unfortunately been reduced to a single policy: high-stakes testing. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) ensures that high-stakes testing will become a mainstay of public educational organizations and practices in the decade to come (Boger, 2003).

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act 2001. By all accounts, it is the most sweeping educational reform legislation since President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced his landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The No Child Left Behind Act legislation is actually a reauthorization and revision of the 1965 legislation.

The No Child Left Behind Act increased the role of the federal government in guaranteeing the quality of public education for all children in the United States with an emphasis on (a) increased funding for school districts in low-income areas, (b) higher achievement for poor and minority students, and (c) new measures to hold schools accountable for their students’ progress, In the process, No Child Left Behind has dramatically expanded the role of standardized
testing in American public education, requiring that students in Grades 3 through 8 be tested every year in reading and mathematics.

Since the 1920s, testing has played an important role in both the assessment of students’ growth and influencing curriculum changes in schools. It now plays an even larger role in educational reform. Elected officials have become major advocates for the expanded role of testing and the use of standardized test data in the articulation of education policy at the elementary and secondary levels (Gifford, 1990).

Anecdotal observations and empirical studies have argued that standardized tests have cultural bias (Miller, 1975; Valencia & Suzuki, 2000). National norms are based on Anglo, middle-class samples that are inappropriate for use with students of color (Agbenyega & Jiggetts, 1999); the language of standardized tests ordinarily follows Anglo European language patterns (Agbenyega & Jiggetts, 1999); and standardized tests tend to reflect a deductive mode of thinking which is not consistent with an American Indian centric worldview and thinking style, which can be described as intuitive (Gifford, 1986). Finally according to Agbenyega and Jiggetts (1999), standardized testing tends to be the main reason why students of color (Navajos) are more likely to be segregated into special education.

Throughout the country, high-stakes testing, which Heubert (2000) defined as tests that are used in making decisions about which students will be promoted or retained in a grade and which students will receive a high school
diploma, is emerging as one of the most significant movements in American public education.

In the high-stakes test movement, New Mexico has developed its own high-stakes test (New Mexico High School Competency Exam - NMHSCE). The New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE) is a set of tests constructed to assess student performance in six content domains defined by the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. These standards support the responsibility of New Mexico public schools to determine which students have attained adequate mastery of the New Mexico essential competencies.

As the examination has evolved since 1986, new tests items have been added, old ones replaced, and performance-based test items (open-ended and constructed response-type items) have been piloted and included. These changes led to a revised examination, with new domain specifications, which were administered during the 1995-1996 school year.

In 1996 a Standard Setting workshop using the Bookmark procedure was conducted to recommend the cut scores for passing. This Standard Setting workshop involved content specialists from the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. However the 150 scale score standard stayed in place until spring 2001, at which time the standard was raised to 175. This change was in response to the recommendations of the 1996 Standard Setting Committee. In spring 2008, the New Mexico High School Competency Examination was administered to 29,715 tenth-grade students. The NMHSCE was also
administered, in part or in its entirety, to those juniors and seniors who had not previously taken or passed one or more tests, as well as to students who had already completed all coursework, but had not passed the entire NMHSCE. The assessment was updated against the Content Standards in 1995-1996, and the results, beginning in 1998-1999, have included most Special Education students in the standardized assessment (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).

Of the 19,672 tenth-grade students in the standardized administration attempting all six tests, 63.4% passed all of them. The overall percentage of students passing the NMHSCE has fluctuated over the years. On average, 85% of the tenth-graders passed all six subtests until the 2000-2001 school year. With the change to a passing score of 175 in 2001, a noticeable drop can be seen in the percentage passing all portions of the examination on the first attempt.

For the past five years, the passing rate has averaged 63%. All scores are associated with some measurement variability, as the scores are observed scores and not true scores. A student’s true score is the hypothetical average score that would result if the test could be administered repeatedly without the effect of practice or fatigue. The standard error of measurement gives the range within which the student’s true score is likely to reside, and this value is shown in Table 1. The overall mean scale scores have shown incremental changes over the years, decreasing slightly in 2008. The overall mean scale scores for the last four years are slightly above the mean of 200 that was established in 1989 (Table 1).
Table 1

*New Mexico High School Competency Examination Mean Statewide Scale Scores (First Listing)*

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
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<td>209.2</td>
<td>198.7</td>
<td>209.4</td>
<td>198.9</td>
<td>199.0</td>
<td>203.0</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>212.0</td>
<td>198.7</td>
<td>208.6</td>
<td>195.8</td>
<td>199.4</td>
<td>202.9</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>207.8</td>
<td>198.9</td>
<td>207.3</td>
<td>201.4</td>
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<td>203.6</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>204.5</td>
<td>198.2</td>
<td>206.0</td>
<td>207.4</td>
<td>200.5</td>
<td>203.3</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Adapted from *Assessment and Accountability Division*, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.accountability/

As shown in Table 2, it is evident that the Native American ethnic group shows that only half of the groups are passing all six subtests in the last four years, from 2005-2008. The majority of these students are of color, low-income students, limited English-proficiency students, students with disabilities (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).
Table 2

*Results by Ethnicity-Percentage Passing All Six Subtests*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Caucasian/White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Assessment and Accountability Division, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at [http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/)*

Given that there is a disparity in the passing rate between students of color and percentages of those passing the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (Tables 2 and 3), in particular Native Americans, Blacks, and Hispanics, relative to their White and Asian counterparts on high-stakes testing exams in New Mexico (Table 3) as well as in other states and counties (Table 5, 6 and 7), the investigator is concerned that disparity in the passing rate on high-stakes testing may be adversely affecting Native American students’ educational attainment, potentially having negative effects (e.g. stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, etc.) on these students. While high-stakes testing may be affecting other students of color in a similar manner, this thesis will focus exclusively on Native Americans on the Navajo reservation public schools.
Table 3

New Mexico High School Competency Exam: Mean Statewide Passing Scores
(Spring 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Caucasian/White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>216.2</td>
<td>203.1</td>
<td>196.9</td>
<td>211.5</td>
<td>195.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>210.0</td>
<td>194.4</td>
<td>190.0</td>
<td>211.6</td>
<td>189.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>221.7</td>
<td>195.6</td>
<td>195.4</td>
<td>227.1</td>
<td>195.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>226.7</td>
<td>199.0</td>
<td>196.1</td>
<td>221.0</td>
<td>191.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>214.5</td>
<td>194.8</td>
<td>191.3</td>
<td>206.7</td>
<td>192.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Passing  
81  56  52  71  51

Note. Adapted from Assessment and Accountability Division, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/

Graduation rates are a fundamental indicator of whether or not the nation’s public school system is doing what it is intended to do: enroll, engage, and educate youth to be productive members of society. Since almost 90% of the fastest growing and highest paying jobs require some postsecondary education, having a high school diploma and the skills to succeed in college and the workplace are essential. Yet nationally, one third of the students, about 1.3 million, each year leave high school without a diploma, at a high cost to themselves and society at large. Unacceptably low graduation rates, particularly
among poor and minority students, have been obscured for far too long by inaccurate data, calculations, and reporting and inadequate accountability systems at the state and federal levels.

The problematic calculations for graduation rates to be useful, they must be reliable, consistent across states, and comparable. Although the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to use a particular graduation rate calculations, poor definitions and inconsistent implementations have resulted in a range of confusing graduation rate calculations that do not provide the accurate measurement intended by the law. Over the last few years, independent researchers have confirmed that many more of the nation’s youth are dropping out during high school than had been reported, and they have issued estimates that most experts agree are far more accurate than those of most government sources (Table 4). In most states there is a wide variation between state-reported, federally reported, and independently reported rates. Recently announced federal regulations require that states implement a common formula by school year 2010-2011; however, further federal action is needed to clarify the role of graduation rates in reporting and accountability systems. Since 2006, New Mexico has changed its methods of graduation rate calculations (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, July).
Table 4

*Problematic Calculation Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting agency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State-reported for NCLB:</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Dept. of Education:</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Education Week:</em></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap between state and independent sources</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Assessment and Accountability Division, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/*

Table 5 shows there are significant graduation gaps among student subgroups. According to the Editorial Projects at the Education Research Center, about 56% of all students in New Mexico graduate from high school with a regular diploma in four years. There is a 6% estimated four-year graduation rate gap between *all students* at 56% and *Native Americans* at 50% (Table 6).
Table 5

*New Mexico's Graduation Gap (2007-2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student subgroups</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 6

*2008 High School Graduation rates in the United States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% Graduation rate</th>
<th>% Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Mexico is ranked as the 41st and has a 65% graduation rate compared to the other states. It is considered one the states with low graduation rates. Graduation rates by New Mexico counties show ranges from 47% to 94.2% (Table 7). San Juan County, the focus of this study, ranks at the lower end of the rates at 57.4%

Table 7

*New Mexico High School Graduation Rates by County (2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taos</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mckinley</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan County (Navajo Reservation)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalupe</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Kids Count Data Center, by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012. Available at http://datacenter.kidscount.org/*

There is a large body of literature surrounding the topic of high-stakes testing in particular because of the recent changes in federal laws requiring states to implement testing systems. The impact of tests on teachers relative to instructional decisions and professionalism are but two of the issues surrounding the accountability movement. However, there is no literature on the voices of students on high-stakes testing, only in particular, the practice of requiring students to pass a test in order to be promoted from grade to grade or to graduate from high school. Students are required to pay for their performance in the “Race to the Top,” a 4.35 billion United States Department of Education program.
designed to spur reforms in state and local district K-12 education. It is funded by the ED Recovery Act as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and was announced by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on July 24, 2009. Many educators have loudly protested the bill, with some pointing out stress and harm to children who will know that their teachers’ fates rest with how they do on these tests. As an educator, I strongly believe that it has a dumb down effect on our education. I believe that it has caused many of our best teachers and principals to leave the profession or the state of New Mexico because this legislation is so profoundly disrespectful towards the education profession. It has put students themselves and their schools at risk of severe sanctions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Standardized testing and the psychological impact on minority students are concerns of the investigator; in other words, high-stakes testing as part of the standardized testing movement has been detrimental to people of color (Green & Griffore, 1980; Miller, 1975). With the exception of some Asian students, it is well documented that the majority of students of color do not do well on standardized assessments (Boone & Adesso, 1974; Green & Griffore, 1980; Miller, 1975); yet laws are being implemented in secondary educational systems throughout the country that require students to pass certain standardized tests to graduate from a “public” high school or to be promoted to the next grade level (NCLB, 2001).
Research suggests that high stakes testing is related to an increase in the number of students who drop out, leaving high school without a diploma, or who are retained (Haney, 2000; Horn 2003). Standardized testing in general tends to cause these students to be placed in special education classes and tracked in lower curriculum levels (Darling-Hammond, 2000c; Lee & Bryk, 1988; Orfield & Gordon, 2001).

The use of high-stakes standardized tests was intended to assist in the improvement of public education, and in some cases it has. However, it is the investigator’s view that it has created long-term, intractable problems for people of color. Although intended to motivate students to reach higher performance levels, the high-stakes nature of standardized tests can have quite the opposite effect (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). To date, no research exists on the psychological effects of high-stakes testing on Native American students in New Mexico (in particular Navajos). However, research based on teacher opinion and anecdotal evidence indicates that high-stakes testing has caused some students to experience stress, anxiety, fatigue, anger, boredom, low self-esteem, low morale, worry, pessimism, and to become increasingly withdrawn (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Ediger, 2000; Jones & Egley, 2004; Jones, Jones, Hardin, Chapman, Yarbrough, & Davis, 1999; Koretz, Barron, Mitchell, & Stecher, 1996; Wheelock, Bebell, & Haney, 2000).

High-stakes testing is a method associated with the school accountability movement and the standards movement that brought together people who wish to
maintain high standards for school curricula and high expectations for the performance of all students (Gunzenhauser, 2003). The heightened emphasis on high-stakes testing has resulted in both negative and positive effects for students.

Little research has been done to connect high-stakes testing and its effects (i.e., positive, negative, neutral) upon American Indian children. Furthermore, Native American children’s voices have not been incorporated in any policy making regarding high-stakes testing.

Discovering how high-stakes testing under the NCLB Act has affected schools and students on the Navajo reservation area public schools is the objective of this research. Many of the researchers suggest that high-stakes testing has had a negative influence on schools (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This study has explored whether this has been the case at three specific schools in New Mexico.

**Research Questions**

The researcher identified three study questions in order to explore the link between positive and negative effects of high-stakes testing as another form of “separate and unequal” education for Native American children and may, in fact, potentially have negative effects (e.g., stress, anxiety, self-esteem, etc.) on these students. This proposition is examined through a qualitative research design focused on three questions:

1. How do Native American students perceive the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment)?
2. How do Native American students perceive the quality of education they receive through the New Mexico public school system?

3. What impact, if any, has the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) had on Native American students’ educational experiences?

This dissertation’s research questions can provide schools with a deeper understanding of how high-stakes testing has impacted the students. Only by understanding the negative and/or positive effects of high-stakes testing can educators and policymakers hope to make changes to the NCLB Act that support a positive school culture.

**Significance of the Study**

Although high-stakes testing continues to be a source of major inequalities, many researchers and practitioners believe that standards-based reform and high-stakes testing will have the greatest impact on Blacks, Latinos, English-language learners, and students with disabilities. There are serious disputes, however, over whether promotion and graduation testing will help such students or hurt them.
Proponents of standards-based reform and high-stakes testing point out that these students are among those who are most often educated poorly, and who therefore have the most to gain from a movement whose central objective is to hold all schools, teachers, and students to high standards of teaching and learning. They also fear that many such children will be harmed by high-stakes tests; that they will disproportionately be retained in grade or denied high school diplomas, both of which have highly negative consequences for students because their schools do not expose them to the knowledge and skills that students need to pass the tests.

Even on graduation tests that measure basic skills, for example, minority students and students with disabilities usually fail at higher rates than other students, especially in the years after such tests are first introduced. Although many students with disabilities were excluded from state graduation-test programs, those who did participate failed at rates over 50% (McLaughlin, 2000).

Despite the sheer number of examples showing negative effects when particular indicators take on so much importance, many people still believe high-stakes testing is a viable way to improve education. By doing so, they defy a perfectly valid and ubiquitous social science principle—at their peril. High-stakes testing is exactly the kind of practice that Donald Campbell warned us about (Nicholas & Berliner, 2007, p. 30).

The significance of this study is to examine the effects of high-stakes tests on students’ perceptions, experiences, and attitudes, more specifically to look at
the effects of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/ High School Graduation Assessment) on Native American students. Student voices are not commonly heard in meetings and discussions about K-12 education policy. Yet the adults who control policy, and districts and schools, could learn much from listening to what students have to say about their experiences with school, about their interests and desires for learning, and about what they do and how they learn outside formal school.

The results of this study can serve to reinforce or disprove various theories on high-stakes testing. My goal is to present a cohesive and convincing set of examples of the positive and negative problems associated with high-stakes testing.

Delimitations

The study was limited to three high schools located on the Navajo reservation and one school located off the reservation near the reservation border. All public high schools are part of the Central Consolidated School District in New Mexico. There are a total of 466 students who participated. Out of this group 381 students are Native American (Navajo) students. All of these students qualify for free lunch. All three high schools did not make Adequately Yearly Progress in 2009-2010.

Only high school juniors and seniors from different socioeconomic areas were selected to be the focus of this study. Although all the high school students
were from different racial backgrounds who participated in this study, my main objective was to focus on the Navajo students regarding the effects of high-stakes testing on high schools students on and off the Navajo reservation. Only high school students participated in the surveys; four groups of 15 students each from each high school were selected for the interviews.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: AYP is part of the NCLB Act. Each state sets increasing achieving goals on math and reading assessments, with all students meeting the state’s standards for “proficient” by 2014. AYP is based not only on student averages, but on the performance of low-income students, students with limited English proficiency (LEP), minority students, and students with disabilities. A school that fails to show improvement in any subgroup does not make AYP. In addition, to make AYP, schools are required to test 95% of the entire school population (Weiner & Hall, 2004).

*Border town*: The “border town” refers to communities that fall outside, but close to, the borders of the Navajo Nation. The communities serve a large population of Native Americans and often serve as trading and business centers for people living on the reservation.

*Culture*: In the context of this study, culture refers to the shared beliefs, customs, social behaviors, and values of particular groups defined by race or class. Within this study, participants in interviews often used the word interchangeably with race.
**High-stakes testing**: This term refers to tests that have serious consequences for teachers, schools, students, and/or school systems, such as school ratings, student retention, and monetary incentives (Jones & Egley, 2004).

**Navajo**: The Navajo or Dineh (Diné or Naabéehó) of the Southwestern United States are the largest single federally recognized tribe of the United States of America. The Navajo Nation has 300,048 enrolled tribal members. The Navajo Nation constitutes an independent governmental body which manages the Navajo Indian reservation in the Four Corners area of the United States. The Navajo language is spoken throughout the region, although most Navajo speak English as well.

**New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE)**: The New Mexico High School Competency Examination is a set of tests constructed to assess student performance in six content domains defined by the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. It supports the responsibility of New Mexico essential competencies. Beginning with the ninth-grade class of 1986-1987, New Mexico public high school students have been required to pass the NMHSCE to receive a New Mexico high school diploma. The 1989-1990 school year was the first year that graduating seniors were required to pass the examination.

**New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment)**: This is the new assessment to be administered to New Mexico juniors as the state's new high school exit exam in spring 2011. The SBA/HSGA will replace the New Mexico High School Competency Exam that has been in use
since 1986. The SBA is the test currently being used by the New Mexico Public Education Department to assess Adequate Yearly Progress. This year's 11th-graders will take the SBA in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. The SBA/HSGA is the state's first high school exit exam to be aligned with New Mexico Content Standards in Grades 9 through 12.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001: NCLB became law January 8, 2002, with President’s Bush’s signature. The act substantially revises the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. NCLB is the most current, most aggressive, and one of the largest federal mandates associated with high-stakes testing ever placed on schools. It is based on increasing accountability, expanding state and local flexibility, expanding choices for parents, and focusing resources on proven educational methods. NCLB expects all students to reach high standards of proficiency in reading and math by 2014. AYP has been measured in each public school since 2003.

Race: Race is defined, in accord with the U. S. Census Bureau, as a group of people who are distinguished from other groups by their origin in a particular part of the world (Grieco & Cassidy 2001).

Reservation: The Navajo Nation reservation is a semi-autonomous Native American-governed territory covering 27,425 square miles, occupying all of northeastern Arizona, the southeastern portion of Utah, and the northwestern portion of New Mexico. It is the largest land area assigned primarily to a Native American jurisdiction within the United States. After the Long Walk, the
Navajos’ return from their imprisonment in Bosque Redondo, the Navajo Indian Reservation was established according to the Treaty of 1668.

*Treaty of 1868:* Treaty between the United States of America and the Navajo Tribe of Indians concluded June 1, 1868; ratification advised July 25, 1868; proclaimed August 12, 1868. The treaty was made and concluded at Fort Sumner, in the Territory of New Mexico, on June 1, 1868. Article one of the treaty states that from the day of the treaty and forward, war between the parties to this agreement would forever cease. The government of the United States desired peace, and pledged their honor to keep it. The Indians desired peace, and pledged their honor to keep it.

*White:* For the purposes of this study, White refers to a racial categorization of those individuals with light-skinned coloring, generally of western European, non-Hispanic descent.

*Whiteness:* As an interdisciplinary of Critical Race Theory, whiteness studies focus on the cultural, historical, and social construction of whiteness as an ideology tied to social status (Wikipedia, 2010)

**Organization of the Study**

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, definition of terms, delimitations of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature on the positive and negative effects high-stakes testing, the impact of inequalities of education of Native Americans, the theoretical
perspectives of cultural influences, and Critical Race Theory. Chapter 3 describes
the research methodology. Chapter 4 consists of analysis of data and a summary
of the findings. Chapter 5 presents the conclusion and recommendations for
policy, practice, and further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is to position research in a particular context. In order to understand the complex connection of critical race theory and education, the reader is provided with a background in social theories to conceptualize the disparities between Native Americans and White educational outcomes, for example, family and cultural influences and the effects of social stratification. While these theories provide some insights into explaining Native American-White educational disparities, the study proposed here analyzed disparities in Native American-White educational outcomes through critical race theory.

Additionally, the researcher provides an overview of Indian education and the trust duty of the United States government to provide an education to the nation’s tribal members. As, a people, the Navajos who represent the majority of student population in the Central Consolidated School District have a long history of economic, political, and social subordination at the hands of Whites. Knowledge of this history is necessary to understand the context of this research.

To conclude, the researcher provides literature on high-stakes testing, positive and negative effects of high-stakes testing, scoring errors of the high-stakes testing, and the psychological impact that have caused stress, anxiety, and depression, mostly impacting students.
Critical Race Theory in Education

Solorzano and Yosso (2002a) defined Critical Race Theory in education as “a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 132). CRT has recently shined a light on nearly every aspect of schooling, including tracking, curriculum, discipline, school hierarchy, teacher preparation, and testing. CRT gave voice to silenced arguments about what may be wrong about mainstream beliefs in education, exposed negative stereotyping and racist practices in schools, and encouraged dialogue about how to define race and determine what it means in the training of teachers and in classroom practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)

Critical race theory provides four propositions that may help explain persistent racial inequalities in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). First, the concept of race is a product of social thought and relations. It is a social construction. As such, it is not something objective, inherent, or fixed. Race, as social construction, corresponds to no biological or genetics reality; rather, race and its components is something that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. Second, racism is ordinary and is an ingrained feature of our social landscape; it is not perceived by people in the dominant culture. Third, racism is sustained by myths, presuppositions, and popular beliefs that make up common culture which renders Native Americans and others as being inferior from the
beginning. Fourth, White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks and other racial groups only when these promote White self-interest (Bell, 1980).

Critical race theory, as it relates to education, challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial groups. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) identified five themes of critical race theory of education that form its basic perspectives, pedagogy, and research methods.

First, critical race theory of education recognizes the central role racism plays in the structuring of schools and schooling practices and that racism intersects with other forms of subordination, including sexism and elitism. Critical race theory acknowledges that notions of objectivity, neutrality, and meritocracy, as well as curricular practices, such as tracking, teacher expectations, and intelligence testing, have historically been used to subordinate students of color. In addition, critical race theorists identify four components of racism: (a) it has cumulative impact on both the individual and the group; (b) it takes on instrumental and individual forms; (c) it has macro (e.g., racial profiling; Native American students being placed in remedial courses without any apparent rational and micro (e.g., high school guidance counselors telling Native American students that they are not college material) components; and (d) it has conscious and unconscious elements (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).
Second, critical race theory is cognizant of the fact that the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching about racial subordination (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Critical race educators can use methods such as chronicles, family history, storytelling, scenario building, narratives, biographies, and parables to draw on the strength of lived experiences students bring into and outside the classroom (Delgado, 1989).

Third, critical race theory challenges the essentialism and the uni-disciplinary focus of most traditional analysis. Critical race theory insists on an analysis of race and racism by placing them in both an historical separate but equal and contemporary (high-stakes tests) context using interdisciplinary methods (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Fourth, critical race theory examines the system of education as part of a critique of social inequality (i.e., social inequality is reinforced through the education system and its practices). Critical race educators challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, through research, pedagogy, and praxis (i.e., ascertaining how a theory or lesson becomes part of lived experience). Critical race theorists argue that traditional claims of objectivity and meritocracy camouflage the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).
A critical race framework is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991). Critical race theorists envision the ultimate elimination of sexism and racism and the empowerment of the underrepresented.

Overall, critical race theory in education realizes that the educational system is designed to maintain a White hierarchy in place. Current instructional strategies assume that Native Americans students are deficient (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize Native Americans students’ deficiency under the guise of scientific rationalism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Finally, despite the recorded history of the fight for school desegregation, critical race theory argues that, rather than serving as a solution to social inequalities, school desegregation has been promoted only in ways that are advantageous to Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The major critiques of critical race theory is that it ignores the possibility that racial inequality has been detrimental to Native Americans; it may not be experienced equally in the same manner by all Native Americans. But some Native Americans argue that these laws or policies have opened doors that would have remained closed in the absence of the Treaty of 1868.

Educational scholars have split views as to the purpose and usefulness of standardized testing. In many ways, either argument sounds credible. Rather than relying solely upon educational scholars to inform our understanding of the worth of standardized testing, it is far more practical to refer to educational laws and
policy on an historical level to shed light on this compelling issue. As with any reform or movement, many important events have lead to this debate on standardized testing, particularly along the lines of the beginning of educational laws and policies for Native Americans. Therefore, it is imperative to place an informed discussion of standardized testing in the context of these historical occurrences and policy decisions.

**Counter-Storytelling**

Counter-storytelling is a powerful means for creating meanings as well as challenging myths (Delgado 1989). Counter-storytelling is a tool that CRT scholars employ to contradict racist characterizations of social life. Counter-storytelling also aims to expose race neutral discourse to reveal how white privilege operates within an ideological framework to reinforce and support unequal societal relations between whites and people of color.

**Types of Counter-Stories**

There are three genres of counter-stories documented by CRT scholars: personal stories, other people’s stories or narratives, and composite stories. Personal stories comprise direct reports of experience of persons of color and how they experience racial discrimination, insult, injury, or disadvantage. Other people’s stories hold the power to move and when they are retold they take on a “larger than life” quality. What begins as a particular, individual experience gains validation through the act of retelling. Composite stories or narratives represent accumulation, a gathering together, and a synthesis of numerous individual
stories. Solorzano and Yosso (2002b) discussed two aspects of counter-storytelling: theoretical sensitivity and cultural sensitivity. The concept of theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) refers to the special insight and capacity of the researcher to interpret and give meaning to data. Cultural sensitivity (Bernal, 1998) refers to the capacity of individuals as members of socio historical communities to accurately read and interpret the meaning of informants. The import of these concepts of this study is the idea of sensitivity to meanings embedded in narratives of the students.

**Counter-Storytelling in Education**

Counter-storytelling in education uses personal narratives to highlight shared experiences of racism and dispel racial stereotypes especially those held by the majority as DeCuir and Dixson (2004) explain:

Counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counter stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups. (p. 27)

Storytelling helps racial minorities to use their experiences of racial oppression to strengthen their identities as would increasing the use of minority discourse in our schools. The core of CRT that addresses the underlying rational for the inequalities of the educational system is property rights. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) reflected the crucial role that property rights plays in our educational system, particularly the notion of Whiteness as property in their argument for a CRT approach to education, “U.S. society is based on property
rights rather than human rights” and “the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity” (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995, p. 47). Ladson-Billings (2009b) provided the historical connection of property rights and ownership to citizenship with implications for how the notions of citizenship as well as property rights and ownership affect minorities within the educational system.

In the early history of the nation only propertied White males enjoyed the franchise. The significance of property ownership as a prerequisite to citizenship was tied to the British notion that only people who owned the country, not merely those who lived in it, were eligible to make decisions about it (Ladson-Billings, 2009a, p. 25).

In this way, Ladson-Billings (2009c) explained how property rights, citizenship, and race are crucial to understanding CRT’s conceptual framework for education. Property ownership and Whiteness are necessary conditions for property rights which frames property in cultural as well as racial terms such that Whiteness becomes property. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) cite Harris’ explanation of how the reification of race establishes Whiteness as property through Harris’ (1993) functions or rights of property: “(1) rights of disposition; (2) rights to use and enjoyment; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used the CRT conceptual framework to explain how property rights not only serve the self-interest of Whites but also provide the undergirding
for White hegemony over education. Whiteness, therefore, becomes the ultimate property value that Whites leverage to perpetuate their system of educational advantages and privileges.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used the CRT perspective to show that culturally based property rights help to explain how the privileges associated with Whiteness lead to the objectification and subordination of racial minorities especially African Americans within the education arena and now Native Americans. Harris’ (1993) rights of disposition indicate that property rights such as Whiteness are transferable but only when they serve the self-interest of Whites. Although only Whites naturally possess Whiteness, Whiteness can be transferred such as by rewarding minority students for conformity to “White norms” or punishing minority students for violating “White norms” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59).

Harris’ (1993) rights to the use and enjoyment of property are reflected in how the curriculum is structured and to whom its access is limited. Whiteness provides Whites with certain social, cultural, and economic privileges (McIntosh, 1990) including control over who has the right to the use and enjoy school property such as the curriculum (Kozol, 1991). Ladson-Billings (2009a) explained that control over the curriculum empowers Whites to determine which students have access not only to top quality curricula but also honors programs, advanced placement courses, gifted and talented programs, as well as those courses that prepare students for college admission and academic success. Ladson-Billings
used the CRT conceptual framework to define a school curriculum “as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script’’ (Ladson-Billings, 2009a, p. 29). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) summarized White control over the curriculum as having “served to reify this notion of Whiteness as property whereby the rights to possession, use and enjoyment, and disposition, have been enjoyed almost exclusively by Whites” (p. 28).

“CRT suggests that current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient” and “intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize African American student deficiency” (Ladson-Billings, 2009a, pp. 29-30). These assumptions are consistent with Harris’ (1993) functions or rights of reputation and status property. Ladson-Billings and Tate explained how Harris’ tenet applies to schools: “to damage someone’s reputation is to damage some aspect of his or her personal property,” which when applied to schools means that “to identify a school or program as nonwhite in any way is to diminish its reputation or status” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). Poor urban school districts with concentrations of minority students suffer poor reputations and low status as compared to their White suburban counterparts.

The school system component that portrays Harris’ (1993) absolute right to exclude as well as CRT’s conception of American educational inequality and racism is the inequitable funding of schools that is based on property values. Although wealthy school districts can afford a higher level of property taxes with which to fund their schools and provide a higher quality of education based on
their higher property values, economically disadvantaged school districts are not able to raise the local property tax revenues necessary to fund a commensurate level of education for their students. Ladson-Billings and Tate explained that a school’s curriculum is also a form of intellectual property that demonstrates Harris’ (1993) absolute right to exclude: “The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the ‘property values’ of the school” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 54). Ladson-Billings and Tate used curriculum to demonstrate how property rights accrue to property owners and the extent to which a school benefits from its property rights is in direct proportion to the amount and kinds of property it owns.

The availability of “rich” (or enriched) intellectual property delimits what is now called “opportunity to learn”—the presumption that along with providing educational “standards” that detail what students should know and be able to do, they must have the material resources that support their learning. Thus, intellectual property must be undergirded by “real” property, that is, science labs, computers and other state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers. Of course, Kozol demonstrated that schools that serve poor students of color are unlikely to have access to these resources and, consequently, students will have little or no opportunity to learn despite the attempt to mandate educational standards (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pp. 54-55).

In terms of the disparities in school district funding that disproportionately restrict the level, quality, and availability of financial, material, and human
resources to low-income urban school districts with concentrations of minorities, “CRT argues that the inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism” (Ladson-Billings, 2009b, p. 31). CRT, therefore, seems to argue that Harris’ (1993) property function in terms of education is perhaps the most “powerful determinant of academic advantage” (Ladson-Billings, 2009b, p. 32) because it represents the convergence of Whiteness as property and educational inequality.

One of the major critiques of critical race theory is that it ignores the possibility that the racial inequality that it asserts has been detrimental to people of color and may not be experienced equally or in the same manner by all people of color. There are several people of color who feel that they have never been subjected to racial inequality. Consequently, critical race theory does assume that all people of color feel that the law of education has discriminated against them. Others argue that these laws or policies have opened doors that would have remained closed in the absence of such legislation (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, 1964).

The world is full of inequalities. In the United States, there are many inequalities among the different races. Taking note in the different educational backgrounds in the different groups is the key when analyzing the inequalities among the different races. The United States, the land of opportunity, does provide the American Dream. However, the American Dream must come with equal quality education for all. Education is the foundation that affects people for
the rest of their lives in the area of inequality between the races in income, in the workforce, and in unemployment.

**Disparities Amongst Groups**

Disparities amongst groups do exist and it is important to recognize how this might impact different groups’ opportunities to pass high-stakes exams. *Education Watch: The 1996 Education Trust State and National Data Book* (The Education Trust, 2003), describes the following differences among groups:

1. Minority and low-income students are more likely to be taught a lower level curriculum (where NCLB actually cites this as a justification).

2. Around 55 out of every 100 Asian Americans and White students complete Algebra 2 and geometry, where only 35% of African Americans and Native American seniors take these courses.

3. African American and Latino students who graduate from high school are much less likely than Whites to continue their education.

4. In schools where more than 30% of students are considered poor, 59% of teachers report that they do not have sufficient books and other reading resources where only 16% of teachers report insufficient books at more affluent schools.
5. Minority and low-income students are less likely than their more advantaged peers to be in classes taught by teachers who majored in their fields of study (Echols & Echols-Williams, 2004).

**Racially Correlated Disparities in Education**

Grissmer, Flanagan, & Williamson, (1998) explained that during the 1970s and 1980s, the racial gap in educational outcomes narrowed. Today, however, racially correlated disparities in K-12 education are present in grades, test scores, retention and dropout rates, graduation rates, identification for special education and gifted programs, extracurricular involvement, and discipline rates. Researchers have formulated several theories to explain the disparities between Native Americans and White educational outcomes. These theories include family and cultural influences, the effects of social stratification and critical race theory. These theories may provide limited insight on Native American-White educational disparities. Most of the focus is on exploring the differences through critical race theory and analyzing these differences.

Mickelson’s (2002) on family and cultural influences explains that racial disparities in school performance fall into two categories. One is the characteristics of families, number of children, marital status of parents, number of adults in household, income, and educational background. Two is social class dynamics; these dynamics are deeply connected in ways families interact with school, how parents socialize their children for schooling, and how parents participate in their child’s education.
Tracy (2007) explained in the fall issue of the *New Mexico English* Journal the family and cultural influences of Navajo parents in bringing up their children and what they should learn first:

Raised on the reservation, I could relate to my student’s upbringing. The way the path is set for my students is the same way my life is set. To be successful in your life is based on your mental, social, emotional, physical and spiritual strengths. Your mental growth allows you to develop intellectual ability and maturity to perceive and understand yourself and the way you relate yourself to your natural environment. When I was a child, I learned to notice the connection between the sun and the earth. I was taught to pay attention to the environment and how it affects our family and community. Navajo philosophy states that a person must always be in a state of balance, and that the whole self must be developed—social, physical, mental, and spiritual. I was told by my father that Western education does not prepare you for a better life. The Western education teaches you the values of academic and professional preparation, but the ethical and moral standards should be taught at home as a preparation for challenges in life. Maybe this is why children who have a traditional upbringing cannot make the connections from reading to writing in view of the fact that observation of their environment was stressed daily. So socializing for schooling was never stressed, only the ethical and moral standards of living an honest respectful life.

**The Navajo’s Long Walk for Education**

The long walk for education began with their initial rejection to their full acceptance of the need for formal schooling. The story which took place between these two extremes is filled with accounts of neglect, indifference, struggle, disappointments and, hopefully, final achievement of educational opportunities for all Navajo children and youth. This historical story has emphasized the changing policies and viewpoints of leadership in Indian affairs and their effects on the Navajos’ plight.
The Navajo Reservation and border town schools has had their share of the impact of high stakes testing. According to Landry (2009) in an article of the *Daily Times* newspaper of Farmington, New Mexico, on May 16, 2009, Central Consolidated School District seniors were not allowed to participate in ceremonies even though caps and gowns were purchased. As many as 26 high school seniors in the Central Consolidated School District who purchased graduation announcements earlier in the year were not allowed to participate in commencement exercises. According to Landry (2009),

Sean Begay, a senior at Shiprock High School, sent 80 invitations to family and friends before his scores on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam came back. The eighteen-year-old, who earned a 3.2 grade point average, failed the social studies portion of the test by nine points. The score has forced him to change his graduation plans. “I had family coming from Kansas,” Begay said. “Now they are waiting to see if I can even walk.” Begay is one of eighteen students at Shiprock High School who planned to graduate, but were told recently that they didn’t meet all the requirements. “That was 12 years of school,” Begay said. “I feel like that is all going down the drain. That is very discouraging, it is devastating.” He said. With only days to spare before graduation, Begay approached the district’s governing board to plead for permission to walk across the stage with his classmates. He is requesting the board vote to permit all students like him to participate, but receive a certificate of completion, as allowed by state law.

Through his experience with the New Mexico High School Competency Exam cut-scores, Begay became a crusader for students who failed portions of the state test, encouraging them to stay in school and take the test again next fall.

Begay said three of his classmates dropped out of school after receiving their test scores. “They were ashamed,” he said. “They lost confidence and self-esteem. They feel like they put shame to their families, to themselves.”
According to the data provided to the *Daily Times* newspaper 26 high school students would not be graduating with the Central Consolidated School District, because they did not make the cut-score for one of the required subject areas. The five schools reported their results: Kirtland High School and Newcomb High School had four students each; Shiprock Alternative Schools and Career Prep School had all seniors graduating; and Shiprock High School had 18 students.

According to Landry (2009),

On May 20, 2009 there was no waiver for non-graduating seniors to participate in the Shiprock High School commencement, although Begay presented the school board and administrators with a petition signed by 120 of his classmates. The waiver which appeared on the agenda, died prior to a vote, signaling the abrupt end to a weeks-long crusade by Shiprock High School senior Sean Begay, who pleed with the board to allow non-graduating seniors to walk across the stage with their classmates. Much of the concern by the board and administrators were refunds being made to the students who ordered graduation caps, gowns and announcements. Interim Superintendent Bill Noland advised board members prior to the expected vote that approval of the waiver should come with guidelines about figuring class ranking with the addition of non-graduating students and inclusion of the students on the graduating roster.

The result of this story is that 26 students were left behind and not allowed to graduate and receive a high school diploma. The burden of these failures and the shaming strategy has fallen most heavily on the very children and neighborhoods NCLB was claimed to assist.

**History of Navajo Education**

Early formal education programs for American Indians, beginning with some groups in colonial times and extending to the late 1920s and early 1930s,
aimed at “civilizing” and “Christianizing” Indians. The boarding school was used in an effort to achieve these objectives. Indian youths were removed from their respective groups and enrolled in distant boarding schools for several years with no, or little, contact with their Indian groups. While they were at the boarding schools, deliberate and persistent efforts were made to erase everything Indian about them (Thompson, 1975).

The civilization policies of the federal government did not touch the Navajos prior to their incarceration at Fort Sumner (Bosque Redondo), New Mexico, from 1864 to 1868. Before that, Navajos knew nothing about the school as an institution to educate youth. Their only education was carried out primarily by the family and extended family. To carry out the national policy of “civilization” and “Christianization” of Indians, an act of Congress assigned the responsibility for education to various religious groups (Act of April 10, 1868). National policy, after the Treaty of 1868, applied to Navajos as well as other Indian tribes, and, shortly thereafter, the Presbyterian Board of Missions assumed responsibility for the “Christianization” and “civilization” of Navajos. The first classroom was set up in a building at Ft. Defiance, and a teacher Miss Gaston was sent there to organize a day school. The school failed. These failures prompted authorities to turn to the boarding school approach, an approach conceived by the Rev. Wheelock in the East and hailed as the only successful method to “civilize” and “Christianize” Indians. The building of a boarding school and the establishment of a reservation provided tangible evidence that the long hand of
federal policy had at last reached the Navajos and from then on would greatly affect their life style. A special direct tie had been established between Navajos and the federal government, a tie which still exists today. Like other Indian tribes, Navajos from then on would feel the winds of changing policy blowing over them from the national level, policies that would have an undermining effect on their traditional life. The first boarding schools gave a few Navajos a “taste of education,” words used by the late Chee Dodge who said, “We have had a taste of education. We like the taste and we want more” (Thompson, 1975, p. 28).

**Impact of Boarding Schools**

Navajos who attended the early boarding schools usually favored such institutions for their own children, and the idea became firmly entrenched for a long time in Navajo thinking. The schools provided clothing and subsistence, which was a drawing point in their favor. Much is talked and written about the treatment of children in boarding schools. Without a doubt, treatment in terms of today’s disciplinary standards was severe. Regimentation and punishment, including corporal punishment, were measures used to keep discipline. However, in reviewing disciplinary measures in non-Indian public and private schools of the same period, corporal punishment was not uncommon. This was the era when “spare the rod and spoil the child” was a basic principle of school discipline throughout the nation. Some Navajos who attended early boarding schools often tell of the punishments they received, but usually they weighed the educational advantages they believed they had against the treatment. Those who bear
resentment or bitterness tend to be in the minority. Today’s standards of operation forbid the use of such treatment and especially corporal punishment, not only in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools but generally throughout the nation’s public schools (Thompson, 1975).

The California Achievement Test, although fully recognized as a weak measurement of achievement for the Navajo students was administered to the students. It was the best that could be found to give a very rough measurement of progress. Naturally, during pupils’ initial year at the boarding schools, they could not score because they could not handle the English required to take the test. However, at the end of the first year they could score, which would give a rough indication of their academic achievement for the year. Most first-year students’ rate of academic achievement was between two and three years. This indicated that 12 to 18 year-olds had a maturity level that allowed them to absorb beginning subject matter much more rapidly than 6-year-old beginners, especially when the subject matter was presented to them in Navajo. At that point where the level of subject matter paralleled their level of maturity, roughly about their third year in the program, achievement for most of them slowed down to growth normal for their age group (Thompson, 1975).

To show the progress pupils made each year, a report card with academic growth shown by bar graphs in subject areas such as reading, arithmetic, and spelling was devised. This visual type of report showed both the pupil and the parents the progress made each year by the pupil. A more objective measurement
was a recording kept on plastic records (soundscriber records) of each pupil’s response in English to a set of questions. By replying these test records both pupils and teachers could ascertain the student’s growth in English language usage from the beginning to the end of the year (Thompson, 1975).

Americanization was an assimilation effort by the United States to transform Native American culture to European-American culture between the years of 1790–1920. George Washington and Henry Knox were first to propose the cultural transformation of Native Americans. They formulated a policy of encouraging the “civilizing” process. With increased waves of immigration from Europe, there was growing public support for education to encourage a standard set of cultural values and practices to be held in common by the majority of citizens. Education was viewed as the primary method in the acculturation process for minorities (Thompson, 1975).

Americanization policies were based on the idea that when indigenous people learned the customs and values of the United States (European-American) they would be able to merge tribal traditions with European-American culture and peacefully join the majority society. After the end of the Indian Wars, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the government outlawed the practice of traditional religious ceremonies. It established boarding schools which children were required to attend. In these schools they were forced to speak English, study standard subjects, attend church, and leave tribal traditions behind (Wikipedia, 2010).
Many of the Native Americans were taken from their parents to be put in boarding schools to assimilate them into the European-American customs and values. An Indian boarding school refers to one of many schools that were established in the United States during the late 19th century to educate Native American youths according to Euro-American standards. In some areas, these schools were primarily run by missionaries. Especially given the young age of some of the children sent to the schools, they have been documented as traumatic experiences for many of the children who attended them. They were generally forbidden to speak their native languages, taught Christianity instead of their native religions, and in numerous other ways forced to abandon their Indian identity and adopt European-American culture. Tragically, many cases of mental and sexual abuse have been documented, as in North Dakota (Wikipedia, 2010).

By 1923 in the Northwest, most Indian schools had closed and Indian students were attending public schools. States took on increasing responsibility for their education. Other studies suggest attendance in some Indian boarding schools grew in areas of the United States throughout the first half of the 20th century, doubling from 1900 to the 1960s. Enrollment reached its highest point in the 1970s. In 1973, 60,000 American Indian children were estimated to have been enrolled in an Indian boarding school (Wikipedia, 2010).

As you can see, control over education for Native Americans was exercised by Whites, and in most situations, Native Americans were forced vigorously at every turn by Whites to “Christianization” and “civilize” in a
disrespectful way by trying to erase everything Indian about them. Nevertheless, through sheer determination, blood, sweat, and tears, Navajos preserved. However, on the surface significant gains have been made with regards to Native Americans’ educational attainment.

**A Brief Overview of Indian Education in the United States**

After nearly two centuries of United States government policy aimed at fully assimilating Native Americans by any means possible, policymakers and educators find themselves at a crossroads. The education system, one of the primary tools of assimilation through the 18th and 20th centuries, has failed to produce.

The majority of American Indian students who can compete with their White counterparts are not proficient carriers of their heritage culture or language. Which system of education is a more appropriate mainstreamed or culture-based system? The legal obligation the federal, state, and tribal governments is still at hand today.

**The Trust Duty**

The United States government has a unique relationship with tribes, known as a “trust duty.” As an example, the Indian Tribal Justice Support Act of 1993 states: “(1) There is a government-to-government relationship between the United States and each Indian tribe: and (2) the United has a trust responsibility to each tribal government that includes the protection of the sovereignty of each tribal government” (25 U.S.C. Secs.3601-3631). The primary source of this
government responsibility is the hundreds of treaties that were negotiated between the U.S. government and various Indian tribes between 1785 and 1871. According to the Supreme Court, the promises made by the U.S. Government in exchange for land promises of protection, food, clothing, shelter, and education create a unique relationship between the treaty tribes and the federal government, “moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust” (*Seminole Nation v. United States*, 1942). In many of these treaties, the U.S. government has yet to keep its word.

According to Cross (1999), in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the United States promised to provide a suitable education to numerous tribes. In fact 110 Indian treaties name education as one of the resources that would be provided to tribal members. Yet, over two centuries later, Native American students disproportionately drop out of school and are overrepresented in special education programs (*Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002*), have an average age in upper grade levels that is one year or more off the median age for their grade levels (*Nel, 1994*), and have a higher rate of suicide, low-self-esteem, and drug and alcohol abuse than their peers (*Shaughnessy, Doshi, & Jones, 2004*). Native American Navajos students who have the lowest achievement scores of any ethnic minority attend school with high numbers of underqualified and inexperienced teachers (*Pavel, Curtin, & Whitener, 1998*), and experience a lack of curricular and extracurricular activities compared to their suburban, non-minority counterparts (*Klein, 2009*)
Legislative Support

Several key pieces of legislation provide additional support to Indian education. Title VII of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) states,

It is the policy of the United States to fulfill the Federal Government’s unique and containing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children. The Federal Government will continue to work toward the goal of ensuring that programs that serve Indian children are of the highest quality and provide for not only the basic elementary and secondary educational needs, but also the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these children. (7101)

Through Title VII, funds are provided to schools and districts with high percentages of Native children.

The Indian Education Act (2003) is a crucial piece of federal legislation that aims to provide equitable educational opportunities to Native students, maintain Native languages through school-based programs, and increase tribal control of education systems. Cross’s (1999) concept of a “three-legged stool” of Indian education depicts the cooperation of state, federal, and tribal governments in appropriately running the schools that serve Navajo students.

The Future of Indian Education

In Indian education, there are no easy answers. Even within communities where Navajo students are being educated, there is a belief about what should be provided in not consistent. However, achievement data and anecdotal evidence paint a dismal picture of what is currently provided to students on and near the reservation. It is more than clear that government obligations have yet to be met, but there is little agreement on how best to accomplish this. Key issues to be
resolved in the decades to come include adequate funding to close the achievement gap, attainment to issues of culture and languages, Indian self-determination in education, and fulfillment of the United States government’s trust duty to provide education to Native Americans (Navajos).

**Education Reform in New Mexico**

The purpose of New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE) is a set of tests constructed to assess student performance in six content domains defined by the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. It supports the responsibility of New Mexico public schools to determine that students have attained adequate mastery of the New Mexico essential competencies. The New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and Accountability in New Mexico schools is based upon the outcomes of education identified in the *Nation At Risk* report, which recommended standardized testing at major transition points from one level of schooling to another, particularly from high school to college or to work. The purpose of these tests would be to (a) certify each student’s credentials, (b) identify need or remedial intervention, and (c) identify the opportunity for advance or accelerated work. The intent was to have states pursue these outcomes without a federal education policy; the goal is excellence in education. Interestingly, the New Mexico Reform Act of 1986 addressed almost every educational component in the national report, but failed to address outcomes.
However, in 1989, legislation was passed to correct oversight. The legislation also identified a requirement that school districts were to publish an annual report that would include standardized achievement test results. In 1999, an amendment to this law required the “high-stakes” testing that is part of the New Mexico accountability process. This amendment carried with it monetary incentives and recognition for high-performing schools and sanctions in the form of interventions for low-performing schools. Five indexes mandated by the statue for accountability are assessments for (a) student achievement using a standardized test, (b) school safety, (c) drop-out rate (d) attendance, and (e) parent and community involvement. The accountability program has been in place in New Mexico since 1999, and mirrors the program mandated in the 2002 reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Mondragon & Stapleton, 2005).

Accountability became a significant subject of educational discussion in the 1960s and 1970s. Leon Lessinger and Ralph Tyler (1971) were leading analysts of accountability in education, although patterned on industrial models of accountability, which were considered inappropriate for education. Concepts of educational accountability were sought and adapted. One of the chief implications of accountability in education is that citizens increasingly demanded to know how their children were being taught, what they were learning and why they were being taught that subject. Clearly accountability is one of the important and critical functions of state educational systems.
Reform measures have not been without controversy; at issue is whether efforts for reform are exclusively or inclusionary in scope. Community and other groups seek to have their voices heard and as the investigator I would like for the students’ voice to be heard as well. Always challenging for New Mexico and for educational leaders have been the responsibilities involved in following national trends and fulfilling federal mandates. A review of New Mexico’s reform scene would not be complete without acknowledging that although there have been sins of reforms attempted, not properly designed, funded or completed, and sins of omission, there has also been long periods of neglect and indifference to Native Americans (Navajos).

**History of New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE)**

Beginning with the ninth-grade class of 1986-87, New Mexico public high school students have been required to pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) to receive a New Mexico high school diploma. The 1989-1990 school year was the first year that graduating seniors were required to pass the examination. Seniors who do not pass the examination, but fulfill the other course and credit requirements, are given the option of exiting with a certificate of completion or returning within the next five years to retake the examination, pass it, and receive a diploma. A student may receive an accommodation or waiver to the examination based on bilingual or special education program guidelines or unusual circumstances (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).
The NMHSCE assesses competencies in the content areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing (Composition). Sophomores who fail any part of the NMHSCE have another chance in their junior year and two chances in their senior year to successfully complete the examination before graduation deadlines. All students participate; some participate through the standardized administration while others receive an accommodated administration as specified by their IEP. The remainder are administered the New Mexico Alternative Assessment. The NMHSCE may be taken in Spanish if the student qualifies to do so.

Test domain specifications, which describe the specific knowledge and skills that are assessed by the examination, were originally developed with the assistance and review of the Statewide Assessment Task Force and their colleagues and put into place with the first administration of the NMHSCE during the 1987-1988 school year (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).

The data from the tenth grade population tested that year were used to develop a New Mexico scale with a mean of 200 and a standard deviation of 40 for each of the following tests: reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. A Standard Setting Committee met that year and recommended that a scale score of 150 would represent adequate performance on each of these tests. The New Mexico State Board of Education adopted that recommendation. The Composition (writing) Test consists of a single prompt, different each year, and therefore not scaled. Instead, the scoring rubric provides the scale. This scale is a
six-point rubric and uses the average of two reads. In the first few years of the program, a score of 2.5 was used as the passing score. In 1993-1994 the standard was raised to 3.0 (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).

As the examination has evolved since 1986, new tests items have been added, old ones replaced, and performance-based test items (open-ended and constructed-response type items) have been piloted and included. These changes led to a revised examination, with new domain specifications, which were administered during the 1995-1996 school year. Individuals from the State Public Education Department, local school districts, institutions of higher education, and publishers’ representatives were all involved in the development and review of the pool of new test items, as well as the new domain specifications for the 1995-1996 NMHSCE (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).

In 1996 a Standard Setting workshop using the Bookmark procedure was conducted to recommend the cut scores for passing. This Standard Setting workshop involved content specialist from the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. However, the 150 scale score standard stayed in place until spring 2001 at which time the standard was raised to 175. This change was in response to the recommendations of the 1996 Standard Setting Committee. In spring 2008, the New Mexico High School Competency Examination was administered to 29,715 tenth-grade students. The NMHSCE was also administered, in part or in its entirety, to those juniors and seniors who had not previously taken or passed one or more tests, as well as to students who already
completed all coursework, but had not passed the entire NMHSCE. The assessment was updated against the Content Standards in 1995-1996, and the results, beginning in 1998-1999, have included most Special Education students in the standardized assessment (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008).

Of the 19,672 tenth-grade students in the standardized administration attempting all six tests, 63.4% passed all of them. The overall percentage of students passing the NMHSCE has fluctuated over the years. On average, 85% of tenth-graders passed all six subtests until the 2000-2001 school year. With the change to a passing score of 175 in 2001, a noticeable drop can be seen in the percentage passing all portions of the examination on the first attempt. For the past five years, the passing rate has averaged 63%. All scores are associated with some measurement variability, as the scores are observed scores and not true scores. A student’s true score is the hypothetical average score that would result if the test could be administered repeatedly without the effect of practice or fatigue. The standard error of measurement gives the range within which the student’s true score is likely to reside, and this value is shown in Table 8. The overall mean scale scores have shown incremental changes over the years, decreasing slightly in 2008. The overall mean scale scores for the last four years presented in Table 8 are slightly above the mean of 200 that was established in 1989.
Table 8

*New Mexico High School Competency Examination Mean Statewide Scale Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
<th>Overall Mean Scale Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>209.2</td>
<td>198.7</td>
<td>209.4</td>
<td>198.9</td>
<td>199.0</td>
<td>203.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>212.0</td>
<td>198.7</td>
<td>208.6</td>
<td>195.8</td>
<td>199.4</td>
<td>202.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>207.8</td>
<td>198.9</td>
<td>207.3</td>
<td>201.4</td>
<td>202.4</td>
<td>203.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>204.5</td>
<td>198.2</td>
<td>206.0</td>
<td>207.4</td>
<td>200.5</td>
<td>203.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from *Assessment and Accountability Division*, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at [http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/)

Table 9

*New Mexico High School Competency Exam (2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Percent Passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>216.2</td>
<td>221.7</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>212.0</td>
<td>227.1</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>207.8</td>
<td>195.6</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>204.5</td>
<td>199.2</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>195.1</td>
<td>195.8</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from *Assessment and Accountability Division*, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at [http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/)
As many as 26 high school seniors in the Central Consolidated School District who purchased graduation announcements were not allowed to participate in commencement exercises in 2009. Many were affected by the New Mexico High School Competency Examination Statewide Scale Scores. At the end all students missed the opportunity of receiving a high school diploma. This fact is quiet compelling and illuminates educational failure on both the state and local level. In the final analysis, Native American students (Navajos) end up bearing the brunt of educational failure by not receiving a high school diploma, which has far-reaching implications in terms of their professional and educational options thereafter.

There are several factors that may account for the inability of Native American (Navajo) students to pass the High School Exit Exam thus far. The majority of the Navajo students enrolled in the three high schools that were studied come from low-income families and single-parent families. Some researchers place the responsibility on the individual student, some on the family structure, and some on the school or community group. At the individual level, there are several possible explanations: some students do not perform well on standardized tests due to anxiety, stress, fatigue, or test phobia (Conner, 2003), or they do not possess the intellectual capacity to pass a standardized test. At school-level, theories include the following: teachers do not teach well (Center on Educational Policy, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000b); they have low expectations of students, especially students from low-income communities and students of
color (Ferguson, 2003; Gill & Reynolds, 1999); they are not certified in the subject matter which they are teaching (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; No Child Left Behind, 2001); experienced teachers are assigned to high performance schools and the inexperienced teachers are assigned to the low performing schools (Kohn, 2002); some schools have more financial resources and are able to offer more enriched and extensive learning opportunities (Brantlinger, 2003; Center on Education Policy, 2001); and, one-third of the high-stakes test graders do not have a college degree, and one-half do not have any teaching experience. Finally, on the family or community level, theories include student’s family income (Gustafson, 2002); the number of parents living in the home (Battle, 1997); per-capita income (Hawkins, 1993); parents’ expectations (Seyfried & Joong Chung, 2002); and not having positive role models at home or in the community (Israal, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001).

Considering all of the variables that factor into the quality of education that Native American students, other students of color, and low-income students receive, it is highly unlikely they would be successful in passing the New Mexico High School Competency Examination.

New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment

Another injustice to Navajo High Schools students in San Juan County is the New Mexico Public Education Department’s news release as of September 24, 2010 that the State initiates a new High School Exit Exam in spring 2011. Based
on the interview with a guidance counselor, the question I asked was “How much information about this new change do the students know about?” His reply was that they were recently informed and that they have not had any type of orientation for the students on these changes. So this change may also account for the inability or ability of Navajo high school students to pass the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) and how that can affect the student’s graduation goals.

The News Release indicates the following: Beginning in the spring 2011, the Grade 11 New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) will be administered as New Mexico’s high school exit exam, announced New Mexico Secretary of Education Designate, Dr. Susanna M. Murphy. The SBA/HSGA will replace the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) that has been in use since 1986. The SBA is the test currently being used by the New Mexico Public Education Department to assess Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The new exit exam was set by State Statute 22-13-1.1(L), NMSA 1978. This year’s 11th graders will take the SBA in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. The SBA/HSGA is the State’s first high school exit exam to be aligned with New Mexico Content Standards in Grades 9 through 12. Students will have three opportunities to pass the SBA/HSGA in high school, once in the spring of their junior year, and in the fall and winter of their senior year. Students leaving high school without a diploma will be allowed to retake the SBA/HSGA for five years after leaving.
The old high school exit exam, the NMHSCE, was last administered to Grade 10 students in spring 2009. Any student who did not pass the NMHSCE will be retested with that test. Students who leave high school without a diploma will be able to retake the NMHSCE for five years after leaving high school. The new SBA/HSGA met approval from the U.S. Department of Education for use as the State’s assessment for measuring the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of schools and districts. It will serve a dual role as a graduation assessment and accountability assessment. A different set of passing scores from those used for AYP will be established to determine eligibility for a diploma.

There is considerable debate as to how the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the new State’s initiative to implement the new New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) in spring 2011. Further, there are several factors that lead to students’ inability to successfully pass the High School Exit Exams; there are limited options that allowed students to meet competency determination standards after several unsuccessful retests. Given the foregoing, the High School Exit Exam and the way changes are taking place presented by the New Mexico Public Education Department and the students’ having no knowledge of what is at stake, as well as the guidance counselors not being knowledgeable enough to guide the students in their graduation process.
High-Stakes Testing

High-stakes testing is playing a major role in determining the content, context, and quality of current and future educational policies (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). As it currently stands, 22 states have implemented an examination that students must pass before they graduate from high school (Center on Education Policy, 2006). High-stakes tests and high school graduation examinations tend to be found in states that have a higher percentage of Native Americans and Hispanics relative to the White population (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). It is predicted that by 2008, 81% of all American states will be implementing high school graduation examinations (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). In the traditions of critical race theorists proponents (e.g., Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) one could speculate that perhaps high-stakes tests are being implemented to hinder some Native Americans students from graduating, thus further reinforcing a separate and unequal education policy.

Individual and groups have voiced their opposition to the whole idea of high-stakes testing (Fuhrman, Goertz, & Duffy, 2004; Harman, 2000; Ohanian, 1999). Critics of high-stakes testing charge that it has led to increased dropout rates; that more students are being forced to take the General Educational Development examination; that there is less chance for educational advancement and career opportunities; that there has been a redirection of the focus of teaching and learning; and that teachers focus more time and attention on specific test content, rather than on curriculum standards. Administrators tend to devalue

Advocates for high-stakes testing (e.g., Achieve, 2001; President George W. Bush, 2001; Rodney Paige, former Secretary of Education, 2001; The Education Trust, 2003) contend that students work harder and learn more when they have to take high-stakes tests. Teachers need high-stake tests because of knowing what is important to learn. Students will be motivated to do their best and score well on high-stakes tests. High-stakes testing, it is argued, aids teachers in instructional decision-making and assists them in individualizing programs to support student learning needs. It further provides information about how well educational systems are doing; and helps policymakers judge the effectiveness of educational policies. If students score well on tests, they will have feelings of success; and if they do poorly on such tests, they will make increased efforts to learn (Amrien & Berliner, 2002; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Rubin, 2003; Stecher, 2002; WestEd, 2000).

**Positive Effects of High-Stakes Standardized Testing**

Some scholars argue that high-stakes standardized testing has positive effects on students, teachers, and administrators. For example, Stecher (2002) asserted that among students, high-stakes standardized testing provides clearer insight into their strengths and weaknesses because of the way in which both knowledge and skills quantified. He also said that this approach to measuring
student outcomes sends clearer signals to students about what to study, helping them associate and align personal effort with rewards that are specifically manifested, in the case, as higher outcome measures. Viewed from this perspective, standardized tests are believed to motivate students to work harder in school by increasing the level of accountability and quantifying the extent to which they have mastered skills or acquired discrete facts or knowledge.

Stecher (2002) also maintained that high-stakes standardized testing helps teachers identify areas of weaknesses and strengths in their curriculum, the quality of which is measured, although indirectly, through the standardized test scores of their students. In other words, this suggests that teachers are thereby led to align both their pedagogical approaches as well as the content of class teaching and learning with externally defined educational learning goals measured by standardized tests. Such measures of students’ learning enable teachers to better diagnose individual student needs, thus motivating teachers to work smarter and harder. Stecher (2002) declared that standardized tests ultimately benefit teachers because the professionals are encouraged to sharpen their teaching skills and enhance their profession through ongoing professional development. Standardized tests also help teachers identify content not mastered by students and redirect instruction accordingly.

Stecher (2002) continued that high-stakes standardized testing helps administrators assess the quality of the program at specific schools and across districts and directs them in making better and more informed decisions about
resources allocation, such as identify appropriate professional development that is beneficial to teachers who work with specific students. In addition, standardized testing provides a basis on which administrators are able to critically examine school policies related to curriculum and instruction, leading them to implement appropriate changes in school policies that improve teaching and learning. Additionally, Stecher emphasized that high-stakes standardized testing improves policymakers’ ability to monitor school system performance and helps policymakers assess the efficacy of educational policies and fosters better allocation of state educational resources.

**Negative Effects of High-Stakes Testing**

There is evidence that suggests that there are massive flaws in the growing use of such high-stakes standardized tests that impact both students and teachers. Stecher (2002) speculated that high-stakes standardized tests have multiple negative consequences. For instance, standardized tests cause some students to devalue grades and school assessments altogether, make other students more competitive, and still other students become frustrated and feel defeated. Koretz, McCaffrey, and Hamilton (2001) focused on the impact of standardized tests on teachers. They speculated that high-stakes standardized tests tempt teachers to cheat when preparing or administering tests to students. The authors suggested that teachers may engage in inappropriate test preparation and focus more on specific test content than on curriculum, which devalues teachers’ sense of professional worth.
Plainly put, standardized testing does not appear to improve educational value. In fact, some teachers indicated that standardized tests have a deleterious effect on poor and minority students. These negative consequences manifest themselves in several ways. These tests are not good indicators of student achievement and refocus attention away from more important learning opportunities. Standardized tests may place students under stress that is harmful to their health. Furthermore, standardized tests do not comprehensively measure teaching and learning in every school context, nor can such tests possibly detect qualitative variables, such as school or teacher effectiveness. Moreover, standardized tests tend to discourage students in the most vulnerable educational contexts, increasing dropout rates among at-risk-students. In the final analysis, public schools lose.

The Coalition for Educational Justice insists that high-stakes standardized testing is class-biased and racist. Specifically, teachers at schools in low-income communities of Native Americans tend to focus their pedagogy on “Back to Basics” lessons and testing drills, thus erecting boundaries around students’ ability to infuse themes or concepts beyond the discrete lesson or drill into other more complex and intellectualized learning experiences. On the other hand, teachers in schools located in more wealthy areas may be able to focus on more rigorous, project-based learning activities that allow students to integrate concepts and utilize information in a more complex and intellectual fashion, as part of an ongoing knowledge-building process.
The Coalition for Educational Justice also insist that many parents are not informed enough of the new and old High School Exit Exams and their children are not getting the help they need when they do not pass state exams. The State’s High School Exit Exams show wider achievement gaps between rich and poor students. All in all, the children are big losers in the test score game. The decisions made by the state’s Department of Public Education requirements for high school diplomas are tougher and could send graduation rates well below the norm, especially among poor and minority students.

Also when tests are only given in English, tests measure national origin more than mastery of school material. When tests are language-biased, otherwise competent students are punished for not speaking English fluently. Finally, standardized tests do not measure several aspects of teaching and learning that are central, such as creativity and problem-solving abilities, among others.

Vinson, Gibson, and Ross (2001) maintained that high-stakes standardized tests fail to acknowledge and account for individual and cultural differences in knowledge, values, experiences, learning styles, economics resources, and access to dominant academic artifacts that contribute to both the appearance of achievement and the status of cultural hegemony upon which standards-based reforms depend. This denial of diversity and failure accounts for differences and takes further away from the mainstream, White, and middle class.

High-stakes standardized testing does not account for student motivations. Rather than contributing to students’ motivation to achieve, standardized tests
tend to promote anxiety and a preoccupation with test scores that often undermines students’ interest in learning and desire to be challenged. Furthermore, standardized tests drive curricula and instructions in such a way that ultimately children are negatively impacted; their learning experience suffers as a result (Ross, 1999). Teachers’ pedagogy often becomes overly focused on test preparation and administration, which decreases the focus on time for quality teaching and learning that motivates students and enhances their commitment to engagement in learning as a process. Unfortunately, many children compare their performance on standardized tests with a measure of their potential. In the final analysis standardized tests promote a single view of truth, knowledge, and learning, and completely disregard any value of diversity and of truth, knowledge, and learning.

**Scoring Errors in High-Stakes Testing**

It is hard to believe that scoring errors are pervasive in high-stakes testing. This is particularly disturbing given the importance attached to the results of high-stakes testing in making educational decisions for individual students. Hendrie and Hurst (2002) reported that Harcourt Educational Measurement, the contractor that produces testing assessments for secondary educational systems throughout the country, mistakenly failed 736 students on high school graduation tests when these students had passed it. Similar, Franck and Hacker (2000) reported a scoring error on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). Questioning some scores, administrators from the Missouri Unified School District asked McGraw Hill, the
contractor, to rescore 200 essays that the administrators believed received unreasonably low scores. Upon doing so, McGraw Hill admitted that 33 of these formerly failed essays received higher scores.

These scoring errors have also gone in the opposite direction. Houtz (1999) reported that scores were inflated on the Washington Assessment of Students Learning (WASL) for over 400,000 student essays. Apparently, upon re-scoring the essay, it was discovered that a scorer gave too many perfect scores for grammar and spelling. Also, Pearce (1999) reported that on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), Arizona state educators found an incorrectly keyed item in the tenth-grade mathematics test. As well, Bower (1998) reported that on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), a calculation error resulted in incorrect scores for Grades 4, 8, and 10. Additionally, De Vise (1998) reported that on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) an errant computer scanner that counted all responses marked B as incorrect was blamed for an error that affected about 19,500 of 650,000 test-takers. Harp (1997) reported that on the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), a programmer error yielded low vocational studies and arts and humanities tests scores. Ross (1997) reported on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP), due to a scoring discrepancy, students with high percentile rankings were classified as requiring remediation, while those with much lower percentile rankings were said to have met state standards. Frahm (1999) reported that on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) the Department of Education
determined that student scores on the essay portion of the test were too low, requiring that 75,000 sixth and eighth grade essays be rescored. The Department of Education determined that the second set of scores was too high.

Regardless of whether the scoring error overestimates or underestimates students’ abilities, knowledge, or competencies, it is highly probable that these scoring errors on high-stakes tests have had dire consequences psychologically, and may have caused stress, anxiety, and depression, mostly impacting students and their parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Transitory Factors

Transitory factors, defined by Le and Klien (2002), refer to situations that may be short-lived and that may have an impact on a student’s performance on a given test. Transitory factors refer to psychological and emotional factors that affect an individual test-taker. They are also often associated with environmental factors and a variety of other variables that may impact test performance. A student’s physical well-being is an example. A student’s test performance may, in part, be a function of whether the individual is healthy or ill. On an emotional level, another transitory factor includes the extent to which the student suffers from test anxiety; that is, if the student is relaxed or anxious during the test and the effects that this may have on the individual’s performance. Another significant transitory factor is the time of the day the test is given. Transitory factors that are environmental include the room lighting as well as whether the testing environment is comfortable or not, or how crowded the auditorium or room is on
the day of the test, along with a broad array of other environmental conditions. Other important factors include the degree of adherence to instructions and time limits by the individual who administers the test, the quality of the test booklets and other materials, and the encouragement that teachers give to students to do well on the tests.

As a result of all the variables that affect the reliability of a test as outlined and elaborated on above, test reliability should be viewed with high skepticism. In other words, tests may not be measuring what students do and do not know. Rather, test scores may be detecting the psychological, emotional, and environmental factors explained. Therefore, one could easily question the reliability of the results of any given test. Considering that there are several factors and outside entities that contribute to the validity of tests, the likelihood that tests are actually valid for all students at all times is highly questionable.

**Social Impact of Testing**

The use of high-stakes tests in schools has been questioned since the tests were first implemented in most states several years ago. Some have questioned the use of student test scores to measure educational quality (Popham, 1990), while others have questioned the more direct effects on students and teachers (Kohn, 2002). Yet, politicians and many in the public arena seem determined more than ever to hold educators accountable through the use of high-stakes tests.

While high-stakes testing was intended to motivate teachers and students to achieve optimal performance levels, studies conducted soon after the
implementation of high-stakes programs indicate that high-stakes testing can have quite the opposite effect on teachers. Hoffman, Assaf, and Parris (2001) surveyed educators in Texas and found that 85% of them were thinking of leaving the profession because of the restraints the tests place on decision-making. Similarly, a survey of 708 Floridian educators given by Jones and Egley (2004) found that some teachers felt that their motivation to remain teachers had decreased and thus were more likely to leave the profession. Again, Jones and colleagues’ (1999) survey of 470 North Carolina elementary teachers indicated that 80% of the teachers were thinking of leaving the profession because of the implementation of high-stakes testing.

Studies also suggest that high-stakes testing assessments increase stress and anxiety among teachers. Jones and Egley’s (2004) study of teachers in Florida found that some teachers felt that they were feeling stress from the pressure of high-stakes testing. Jones and colleagues (1999) stated that 76% of the teachers reported that teaching was more stressful as a result of high-stakes testing.

As the pressure to improve test scores intensifies throughout the country, it appears that the higher the stakes on a given test, the greater the level of teacher focus on test preparation and the greater the chance of teachers teaching to the test to the detriment of other aspects of teaching/learning.

**The Impact of High-Stakes Testing on Students**

High-stakes testing impacts students in terms of their educational choices and options, their academic performance and intellectual development, and their
psychological health. With regard to educational choices, empirical studies have repeatedly demonstrated positive association between the introduction of high-stakes testing and increased student dropout rates (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Haney, 2000; Madaus & Clarke, 2001). The associations have been especially strong among poor and minority students according to Madaus and Clarke. They pointed out that the most negative academic effects of high-stakes testing, including grade retention and school dropout, are not experienced equally by all children but fall disproportionately on the small shoulders of those who possess special needs and/or who are most economically disadvantaged, (Johnson, 2007).

It is important to acknowledge, as Nieto and Johnson suggested (Chapter 2 this volume), that many poor parents are strong supporters of NCLB. They support it because they perceive that they and their children have been seriously disadvantaged by an educational system seriously biased against them in terms of the inadequate resources and supports provided. Many of the parents believe, or at least hope, that NCLB will correct these inequities. Unfortunately, what we know about the impact of high-stakes tests is that their negative educational consequences—retention and dropout—will be disproportionately borne by their children under the current NCLB legislation. This was dramatically demonstrated in Haney’s (2000) reanalysis of the “Texas’ educational miracle” data that demonstrated the disproportionate numbers of Hispanic and African American students who dropped out following the advent of high-stakes testing in Texas in the 1990s (Johnson, 2007).
A great deal of attention has also focused on the psychological impact of high-stakes testing on American children and adolescents. Much of this attention has revolved around the stress engendered by such tests including general psychological distress and the test anxiety first identified by Mandler and Sarason (1952). Many students are intimately acquainted with the sympathetic nervous system signs of test anxiety including sweating palms, nausea, and inhibited concentration and recall (Gregor, 2005; McCarthy & Goffin, 2005). For the many afflicted with this test-taking malady, high-stakes testing is not a recipe for academic success but rather a recipe for physical discomfort and poor test performance (Johnson, 2007).

General psychological distress is another common concomitant of high-stakes tests. According to Abrams, Pedulla and Madaus (2003), “increased levels of anxiety, stress, and fatigue are often seen among students participating in high stakes testing” (p. 20). Other examples of the psychological consequences for children can be found throughout Johnson and Johnson’s (2002) compelling book on high-stakes testing. For example, “As the children begin the first timed test, Kevin vomits in his hands and runs to the bathroom.” “Gerard takes one look at the first section and begins to cry” (p. 141). Learning that they have failed the tests, “most of the children are crying.” “One little girl in the room next door tells her friend, ‘I am going to kill myself.’” (p. 177). They also cite a headline in a local paper that read, “Failure of LEAP Test Prompts Suicide Attempt by Fifteen Year Old Student” (p. 42).
There is also suggestive evidence that some children may turn to alcohol and drugs to self-medicate the emotional distress produced by these tests (E. Morehouse, personal communications, July 1, 2004.) Then, too, some have suggested that rather than providing the necessary assistance that “at-risk” students certainly deserve, teachers particularly resent such students because of the treat they pose to the class’s test average and the teacher’s job security or salary advancement (Johnson & Johnson, 2002).

Some might argue that high-stakes tests and the negative consequences associated with failure will teach children that school is serious business to which they need to apply themselves. The recently released summary of findings on Chicago’s nine-year experiment to eliminate social promotion suggests otherwise (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Allensworth, 2005). Results revealed increased dropout rates among those children retained in the third grade, the same pattern observed by Haney (2000) in Texas following the advent of high-stakes testing there (Johnson, 2007).

For all these reasons, the wisdom of our current system of high-stakes testing must be seriously questioned. But those who have imposed and expanded this system are either ignoring this information or simply ignorant of it (Johnson, 2007). As Kohn (2000) has passionately argued, it is our responsibility to educate them through whatever means will most expeditiously and effectively gain their attention.
An educational practice that increases the likelihood of the school dropout rather than enhancing student’s academic performance surely must be questioned. To label such a program No Child Left Behind is nothing less than cynical political propaganda. But there may be other serious, unintended consequences associated with use of such testing procedures.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effects of Standardized Testing on Students**

A survey conducted by Koretz et al. (1996) found that one third of the educators in Kentucky reported that student morale had declined in response to Kentucky’s high-stakes test. Clarke, Shore, Rhoades, Abrams, Miao, and Li (2003) interviewed 360 educators in three states, and found that the interviewees reported that high-stakes testing created more stress for students. Furthermore, Jones and Egley’s (2004) survey of 708 Florida educators found that a quarter of the teachers reported that high-stakes testing has caused students to feel too much pressure and stress. There is no question that many students undergo serious stress when asked to take the high-stakes testing, and as result of the stress students are subjected to decreased social functioning, feelings of low-self-worth, and lower achievement.

**Students’ Perceptions of Standardized Testing**

Paris et al. (2000) surveyed 46 second through eleventh grade classes in Michigan, California, Arizona, and Florida. Their investigation found that students hold positive views about achievement tests but with increasing age and grade and familiarity with tests, they have more negative attitudes towards testing.
Many older students distrust the accuracy and validity of the tests, dissatisfied with the feedback. The students also worried about social comparisons that might result from the test scores. Older students reported that they gave less effort and had fewer effective strategies for taking achievement tests than younger students.

Paris et al. (2000) surveyed 120 students in fourth, seventh, and tenth grades in Michigan and revealed that tenth graders harbored many negative attitudes about the state-mandated standardized test. The tenth graders thought that it was acceptable to cheat, to fill in answers blindly, and to try half-heartedly to do well. In addition, they did not feel anxious about the test nor did they check their answers. On the other hand, younger students held more positive views and felt that the state-mandated standardized test was important.

Paris and colleagues’ (1990) survey of 1,000 students in Michigan, California, Arizona, and Florida found that younger students believed that the test was useful for measuring how much students learned, identifying students with specific learning problems, and showing a student’s intelligence. Conversely, high school students believed that test scores did not show how intelligent you are, and that test scores did not reflect the qualities of a good student.

Karmos and Karmos (1984) in a survey of the Stanford Achievement Test found that 360 sixth through ninth graders held positive attitudes about the test in general, but many students reported negative attitudes about the purpose of the test and a lack of motivation to try harder. In this survey taken by Karmos and Karmos (1984), 47% of the students thought that taking achievement tests was a
waste of time; 36% thought achievement tests were dumb; and 36% of the students thought more about just getting the achievement test over with than doing well on it.

The results of these studies clearly indicate that as students get older, their attitudes towards standardized testing becomes increasingly negative. Therefore, their negative perception appears to have direct consequences for their test-taking behavior.

**Narrow Curriculum**

As predicted by Jones and colleagues (2003), in the race to demonstrate AYP, schools have cut back on P.E., health, art, social studies, and foreign language classes. Nearly 30% of the elementary schools surveyed by the Council for Basic Education (CBE) have reduced the amount of time spent on social studies classes. Some schools have even abandoned recess. In Atlanta, since the late 1990s schools have stopped having recess to secure more time for test-related programs. Jesus Garcia, president of the National Council for the Social Studies states, “We’re very concerned our children are leaving our schools having a rather distorted and unbalanced curriculum presented to them that will result in kids who can perform well on tests, but who know very little about other subject areas” (Rosenfield, 2004, p. 27).

Hoffman and colleagues’ (2001) survey of Texas educators found that 60% of the teachers reported that high-stakes testing leaves little time for real instruction. In open-ended interviews conducted with educators in three states,
Brown (1992) found that teachers reported altering the scope and sequence of the curriculum and eliminating concepts that were not covered on state tests. Likewise, Moon, Callahan, and Tomlinson’s (2003) questionnaire of educators from all 50 states found that teachers reported spending considerable amount of time preparing students for high-stakes testing prior to and after the test.

Many believe that rigorous testing policies, such as high-stakes testing, encourage teachers and students to get stern about teaching and learning. It appears that the test encourages teachers to teach to the test and consequently narrow the curriculum and instruction. Moreover, teachers are aware of the consequences that high stakes testing is having on some students.

**Summary**

In summary, the question of how high-stakes testing in the United States public schools impacts Native American students continues to be raised. High-stakes testing has come to dominate the educational landscape; states increasingly are relying solely on test results to rate their schools on student performance, rewarding the high-achieving schools, and sanctioning schools with poor performance. Yet, according to a study in the American Educational Research Journal, test scores alone are insufficient for measuring school and student performance. Moreover, failure to use other complementary measures of school performance, in addition to test scores, could lead to erroneous conclusions about which schools are effective and what characteristics promote effectiveness. Policymakers say that high-stakes testing implies that students of color have
access to the same resources as White students that will allow them to be successful in passing the NMSBA-New Mexico Standards Based Assessment test in the state of New Mexico. Additionally, policymakers have failed to take into consideration the psychological harmful effects that certain laws and policies have when they are implemented.

Despite the fact that research indicates that students’ perception of high-stakes testing has been measured, little attention has focused on how Native American students perceive the impact high-stakes testing has on them. The purpose of this study is to explain that high-stakes testing is just another form of unequal education that may cause significant psychological harm to the consciousness of the Native American student. Another purpose of this study is to increase the policymakers’ awareness that laws and policy of education not only affect society but also impact people individually in how they feel and think about themselves.

In addition, the reader is provided with a comprehensive review of the literature, as it pertains to Critical Race Theory. CRT provides a useful theoretical framework for an examination of the current discussion of differences in academic achievement between Native Americans and White children, as well as the context of categorizing the “high-stakes testing” discussion as a major part of counter-storytelling. First, the literature includes how CRT scholars challenge the traditional claims of “neutrality, objectively, colorblindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interest of dominant groups in American society”
(Dalgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 170). They insist on subjectivity and the reformulation of legal doctrine to reflect the perspectives of those who have experienced and have been victimized by racism firsthand (Delgado, 1988). As a result, racially correlated disparities in education ties in with CRT.

Second, the investigator provided insights into the History of Navajo Education, highlighting the areas of Indian education, impact of boarding schools, the “trust duty,” legislative support, and the future of Indian education. Third, the investigator focused on the education reform in New Mexico, history of New Mexico High School Competency Exam; and the new exit exam presented in the fall of 2010, as well as the pros and cons of the NMHSCE. Fourth, attention shifted to high-stakes testing, highlighting the negative and positive effects, scoring errors, social impacts of testing, and the impact of high-stakes testing on students. As a final point in the literature review the investigator provides insights to teachers’ and students’ perceptions of high stakes testing and the narrowing of the curriculum. In all, the literature points to a need for further study on the impact of high-stakes testing on the experiences of Native Americans students. Chapter 3 reviews the methodology used to explore and describe Navajo high school students’ perceptions of high-stakes testing in New Mexico.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the methods used in this dissertation to explore and describe Navajo high school students’ perceptions of high-stakes testing in New Mexico. Surveys were administered to Navajo and non-Navajo students who were juniors and seniors in the Central Consolidated School District #22 to provide an understanding of why high school students are not passing the New Mexico High School Exit Exam (New Mexico High School Competency Exam, NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment). Chapter 3 describes the mixed-method (surveys and interviews) approach to gaining data, the population and sample, sampling procedures, implementation, and data collection procedures and analysis.

Research Design

The research for this study employed a mixed-method approach to gain data from both qualitative and quantitative sources. The intent of mixed-method research is to provide more comprehensive answers to research questions, going beyond the limitations of a single approach. Furthermore, to provide a platform of critical race theory as the use of voice for Navajo students to articulate their reality of how the high-stakes testing—New Mexico Standards Based Assessment—is impacting their lives. Another reason for using mixed methods in the research is that it can be “used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Use of
this method also produces a greater number of unique responses from the group while protecting their identity.

Topics mentioned in Chapter 2, Review of the Literature, shows that little is known about Native American students’ perception of high-stakes testing. Therefore, this research will add to the small literature that is available.

Population and Sample

The participants selected for the research were enrolled in schools that had 98% of its students who were Navajo and had a high number of students who were labeled non-proficient on the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment. Central Consolidated schools were selected for the study because they fulfilled the selection criteria. The district is the 11th largest in New Mexico and covers approximately 3,000 square miles in the Four Corners Region. There are over 600 certified teachers in the school district that serves three major communities: Kirtland, New Mexico; Newcomb, New Mexico; and Shiprock, New Mexico. The district serves approximately 7,000 K through 12 students, 90% of whom are Navajo, 9% are Anglo, and 2% are Hispanic, a high number of whom are labeled non-proficient on the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (see Tables 10 and 11): 75% to 90% in math and 56% to 77% in readings.
### Table 10

**MATH-Native American Indian Only 2008-2009 School Accountability Report (9-12 Grades)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Number Participated</th>
<th>Number Tested</th>
<th>Percent Proficient</th>
<th>AYP Goal</th>
<th>Percent Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirtland Central</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiprock High</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomb High</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Assessment and Accountability Division, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at [http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/)*

### Table 11

**READING-Native American Indian Only 2008-2009 School Accountability Report (9-12 Grades)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Number Participated</th>
<th>Number Tested</th>
<th>Percent Proficient</th>
<th>AYP Goal</th>
<th>Percent Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirtland Central</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiprock High</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomb High</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Assessment and Accountability Division, by New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d. Available at [http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/accountability/)*
As seen in Table 12, there were a total of 466 students who participated in the survey. There were 381 Navajo students (82%), 65 Whites (14%), 13 Hispanics (13%), and 7 others who had Asian and African American backgrounds. Table 13 shows there were 241 males (52%) and 225 female (48%) who participated in the study, and 55% (241) were juniors and 45% (212) were seniors.

Table 12

*Survey Data: Participating Students by Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Central Consolidated Schools, $N = 466$

Table 13

*Survey Data: Participating Students by Grade and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/Gender</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Central Consolidated Schools, $N = 466$
From these groups, 36 were selected for interviews, all of whom were Navajo (Table 14). As seen in Table 13, there was a balanced distribution of males and females and juniors and seniors.

**Table 14**

*Interview Data: Participating Students by Gender, Grade Level, and Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Juniors</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
<th>Native American/Navajos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newcomb High</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiprock/Career Prep</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirtland Central</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

**Surveys**

Surveys were useful in collecting the data to assess attitudes and characteristics of students about high-stakes testing. The student survey consisted of 20 questions to which students selected answers on a Likert scale indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement. In this case, *don’t know, strongly disagree, disagree, agree* and *strongly agree* were utilized. The questions focused on their awareness and opinions about high-stakes tests administered in New Mexico and effects the tests have had on them.
Interviews

The investigator conducted interviews to obtain more detailed information about participants’ feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors, and wanted to explore new issues in depth (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Salkind, 2006). Additionally, interviews offered advantages, such as, (a) to ensure a high rate of participation (Goddard & Villanova, 2006; Jackson, 2003); (b) encourage free expression (Goddard & Villanova, 2006); (c) discover personal information, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that a paper-pencil survey might not uncover (Goddard & Villanova, 2006); and (d) allow the respondents to reveal otherwise concealed attitudes (Goddard & Villanova, 2006).

The interview questions (Appendix A) were composed of three major questions with subquestions that were more detailed:

1. How do Native American students perceive the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment)?

   - Do you know what the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment is?

   - What are the advantages or positive aspects of New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?
• What are the disadvantages or negative aspects of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

• Why do you think (the students) need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

• If you could change one thing about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment, what would it be?

• Do you think the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment is fair?

• What would you like people to know about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment that I have not asked?

2. How do Native American students perceive the quality of education they receive through the New Mexico public school system?

• How is that the (off reservation schools) do better on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment than the (on the reservation schools)?
• Why do you (the policy makers) think that the students need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

• Do you feel you get enough information about graduation requirements from school officials?

• Do you know the current graduation progress you have made (graduation checklist)?

• Do your parents know the current status of your graduation progress?

• Do you know the changes made as of September 24, 2010, that the state of New Mexico initiated new High School Exit Exam in spring of 2011? If you do, what have you been told?

3. What impact if any has the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) had on Native American students’ educational experiences?

• When you hear of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment, what comes to mind?

• What do you think some factors that might prevent some student from successfully passing the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or
New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

- What effect will the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment have on your future?
- How do you think students feel about themselves after taking the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

**Data Collection and Procedures**

First, permission was obtained from Arizona State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB; Appendix B) and the Navajo Nation Institutional Review Board (Appendix C). A Class C permit (Appendix D) was obtained from the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department, Cultural Resource Compliance Section. Community Chapter resolutions were gained and approval from the school board of Central Consolidated School District #22 was obtained.

Prior to the start of the interviews at the respective sites, consent forms were collected with parents’ signatures (Appendix E). At the time the consent forms were sent out, students and parents were informed that the results of the research study might be published, but that the students’ names would not be used; the surveys and interviews would be kept confidential; and no student names would be utilized to protect their identities. The recorded information and
transcripts were reviewed by the dissertation advisors as part of the research processes, but confidentiality was maintained at all times.

Before the investigator started the interviews, she had a recruitment script available at each of three schools describing what the research would entail. First, before the interviews began the investigator conversed briefly with each of them to set the interviewee participants at ease and establish a warm comfortable rapport (Berg, 2004). Second, the investigator prepared each interviewee by explaining the overall purpose of the study and allowing time for questions about the research. Third, the students were assured that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or affect on their grades or the New Mexico High School Competency Exam. Fourth, confidentiality was established by the consent form (see Appendix E) given to each interviewee prior to the interview. Fifth, each interviewee was given ample time to read the interview questions. Anonymity was established by only identifying the place and time of the interview on the tape; participants were instructed not to call any participants by his or her name. Lastly, the data (i.e., tapes and transcripts) were stored in a safe so that only the investigator could access the data (Flick, 2006).

In summary, the procedures for participant recruitment and criteria were as follows:

1. All juniors and seniors were contacted by the investigator at each of the three schools.
2. Introduction of the research title, purpose, process, and their participation rights were shared with all the juniors and seniors at each school.

3. An orientation was set up at each of the schools on how the research study would be implemented: parental consent, consent/assent forms, participation rights, confidentiality, tools used during the survey, and the questions for the interview. The questions were shared with the students, so that they would know what to expect.

4. Students were told that their participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time.

5. Counter-storytelling was utilized before the interviews to encourage conversation which yielded stories as part of the data. The use of counter-stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Storytelling helps racial minorities use their experiences of racial oppression to strengthen their identities as would increasing the use of minority discourse in our schools. The advantage of utilizing this method was that it provided the investigator the opportunity to select people with the characteristics that were important to his research (Creswell, 2003).
Data Analysis

The qualitative data (interviews) and quantitative data (survey) were analyzed separately. Survey results for all three high schools were combined and then disaggregated by gender, grade, and ethnicity. After the final calculations, percentages of responses were recorded.

The interviews were transcribed and categorized into subheadings keeping in mind the three major questions in the research—*affects on the future, equity of testing*, and *the psychological impact*—to generate insights on students’ perceptions about each question.

Limitations

The study was limited to three high schools in Central Consolidated School District #22, New Mexico. The student enrollment for each school was at least 98% Navajo, and were schools with a high number of students who were scored as *non-proficient* on the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND RESEARCH

This chapter contains a description of the major themes and findings from the data collected and analyzed. The data from student surveys and interviews are presented and then compared around the major themes of the study.

Survey Responses

Table 15 shows the combined results for all students who took the survey (N = 466) in responses to their knowledge of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam. Over 74% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what the New Mexico High School competency exam was; only 6% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed; and a larger proportion (20%) indicated that they didn’t know about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.

Table 15

Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what the New Mexico High School Competency Exam is.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As displayed in Table 16, over 71% of the high school students agreed or strongly agreed that they knew about the new-New Mexico High School competency exam policies and graduation requirements, 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 15% didn’t know about the new policies on graduation requirements of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.

Table 16

*Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know about the new-New Mexico Standard Based Assessment policies on graduation requirements</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of all students, 59% agreed and strongly agreed that they could pass with an 80% or a higher passing grade on the comprehensive skills on the NMHSEE, 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 21% didn’t know if they could pass the exam (see Table 17).

Table 17

Question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I believe I could earn a passing grade of 80% or higher on a comprehensive test like the New Mexico High School Exit Exam.</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 shows that nearly two thirds (63%) of the students agreed and strongly agreed that they would return to school and try to retake the New Mexico High School Exit Exam in order to graduate and receive their diplomas. About one fourth (23%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 13% didn’t know whether they would return to retake the Exit Exam.

Table 18

*Question 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t Know</strong></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree</strong></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree</strong></td>
<td>173</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If I am unable to pass the final test at the end of my senior year, I would stay in school and try to retake the test in order to receive my diploma?*
When asked if they thought that high-stakes testing (NMSBA) was fair, 51\% disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 16), 33\% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that the test was fair, and 17\% said they didn’t know if it was fair (see Table 19).

Table 19

*Question 5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The High Stakes Testing is Fair. (New Mexico Standard Based Assessment)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20 shows that most (89%) of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they were learning from their classes, only 8% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed*, and 4% said they *didn’t know* if they were learning from their classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I am learning from my classes.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About two thirds (65%) of the students *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that they felt stressed when they had to take the New Mexico High School Competency Exam. About one fourth (26%) *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that they did not stress during test time, and only 9% said they *didn’t know* if they stressed over testing (see Table 21).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I feel stressed when I have to take the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Table 22, over three fourths (78%) of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that they enjoyed taking the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMSBA). Only 9% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed taking the exam, and 13% responded that they didn’t know if they enjoyed taking the exam.

| Table 22
| Question 8
|
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|
| I enjoy taking the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMSBA). | Respondents | Percent |
| Don’t Know | 60 | 12.8 |
| Strongly Disagree | 198 | 42.4 |
| Disagree | 164 | 35.1 |
| Agree | 36 | 7.7 |
| Strongly Agree | 8 | 1.7 |
Nearly half (48%) of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they got enough information from school officials about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (see Table 23). However, 39% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they did not get enough information. Only 12% said they didn’t know whether they got enough information about the NMHSCE.

Table 23

Question 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I get enough information from school officials about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked if they thought students in off-reservation schools did better on the NMHSCE than those on the reservation, over half (55%) responded that they didn’t know (see Table 24). However, surprisingly, 26% strongly agreed or agreed that schools off the reservation did better on the NMHSCE, but 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 10</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The off-reservation schools do better on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam than those on the reservation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Table 25, students’ responses to the item asking if their parents were aware of the NMHSCE, over two thirds (68%) strongly agree or agreed. Far fewer (16%) disagree and strongly disagreed that their parents had knowledge of the exam, and an equal proportion (16%) didn’t know.

Table 25

*Question 11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*My parents or guardian are aware of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam that I have to take.*
Responses to the item asking if they were confident enough to pass all subject areas of the NMHSCE showed that about two thirds (61%) of the students agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 26). Less than 20% (18%) responded that they were not confident to pass the NMHCE, and 21% didn’t know.

Table 26

**Question 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I am confident enough to pass all subject areas of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.*
Over half (56%) of the students agreed or strongly agreed they knew what their current graduation progress was on the graduation checklist (see Table 27). However, the other half (44%) of the students either disagreed or strongly disagreed or didn’t know about their graduation progress.

Table 27

Question 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know the current graduation progress I have made using my graduation checklist.</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 14 (Table 28) asked the students if they had a voice in making decisions about the New Mexico High School Exit Exam to which nearly half (45%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. About one third (31%) agreed or strongly agreed, and 24% said they didn’t know if they had a voice in the decision-making.

### Table 28

**Question 14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 29 shows that most students (86%) *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that they would be very disappointed if they were not promoted or did not receive their diploma based on not passing one test in the high school exam. Few (9%) said they *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* that they would not be disappointed; and curiously, 5% *didn’t know* if they would be disappointed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I would be very disappointed if I was not promoted to the next grade and I was kept from receiving my diploma because of the results of one test.</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over 60% strongly agreed or agreed that policymakers believe that students need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam. About 16% of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed, and about one fourth (24%) didn't know (see Table 30).

Table 30

*Question 16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The policy makers think that the students need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.*
Nearly three fourths (73%) of the students *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that teachers helped them study and learn to pass the New Mexico Competency Exam (see Table 31). There were 18% who *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed*, and only 9% *didn't know* if teachers helped them study for the exam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 31</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*My teachers help me study and learn to pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.*

| Don’t Know            | 43          | 9.2     |
| Strongly Disagree     | 32          | 6.8     |
| Disagree              | 50          | 10.7    |
| Agree                 | 252         | 54.0    |
| Strongly Agree        | 89          | 19.0    |
Question 18 (Table 32) asked whether the New Mexico High School Competency Exam had an impact on the students’ future plans to attend college.

Over 60% strongly agreed or agreed, 19% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 21% didn’t know if it would have an impact on their future plans for college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32

Question 18

*The New Mexico High School Competency Exam has an impact on my future plans to attend college.*
Over half (55%) of the students *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that the NMHSCE was very important to them (see Table 33). However, about one third (29%) *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that it was important to them, and 16% of the student *didn’t know*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The last item asked students if they received help from their school counselor on the status of their graduation requirements (see Table 34). Over 64% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they received help from their school counselor. However, 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 12% didn’t know, representing 167 students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I get help from my school counselor on the status of my graduation requirements.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Responses

The interviews were transcribed and categorized into themes related to the three major questions in the research, which related to students’ views of high stakes tests: (a) affects on the future, (b) equity of testing, and (c) the psychological impact. The three themes are discussed here, and comparisons are made of the responses on the survey to the dialogue in the interviews.

Theme: Affects on the Future

There were seven interview questions that related to students’ views about the NMHSCE exams’ affects on their future. A summary of their responses is presented followed by their comments for questions related to the theme.

Summary

Overall, findings in the study were similar across the students in the three high schools in regard to the affects of testing on their future. In response to Survey Question Number 6 (I am learning from my classes) most students (89%) were positive. Most (74%) of the students knew what the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment was and how that related to their graduation requirements (Question 1). However, on Survey Question 18 (The New Mexico High School Competency Exam has an impact on my future plans to attend college), many students (60%) agreed that there was an impact. In response to Survey Question 12 (I am confident enough to pass all subject areas of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam) students indicated they were confident enough to pass all subject areas, although there was still concern for not passing and how that
would have an impact on their future and going to college. Both on the survey questions and in the interviews, students agreed that the Graduation Assessment does affect their future.

In the interviews, the students said they felt that their school culture was positive, although one student shared that school was not always easy or fun. She added that she endeavored to make it a positive experience at all times. Most students believed that education was very important and they wanted to graduate with as much knowledge as possible in order to excel in college and beyond. Despite their positive attitudes toward school, the majority expressed they would absolutely rather hang out with friends than take a test, even though they acknowledged that their passing grades would help them get into college.

Other students stressed a concern about a particular coach teaching a social studies class and thought that the class was a waste of time; that it was a book-and-paper class or read-and-do-the-questions-in-the-book class. Students questioned how the class helped with history questions on the test when the teacher hardly ever communicated with them.

Comments in Interviews

1. Do you know what the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment is?

   All the students interviewed knew what the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) was.
2. What are the advantages or positive aspects of New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

The participants agreed that New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment would affect their future. Examples of their comments are as follows:

One student said:

If I pass, I think I’d be pretty confident going to college knowing that I got the most out of high school. I will be able to get a better job, because the Exit Exam prepares you to be able to get a diploma; and if you have a diploma, you get a better job.

Still another commented:

I think it would be good experience to go through a hard core test like that. I mean the standards are that high, and actually taking the test, and when you do pass or don’t you have had the experience. I would take it again until I passed.

3. What are the disadvantages or negative aspects of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

One student commented:

The negative side of testing is that some kids are not prepared to take the test. I know I’ve been prepared well enough because I want to pass. So you know, I ask for help. The kids who don’t ask for help, they’re disadvantaged—a lot-SPED students and some of the students here who come from a home that’s Navajo-speaking only. They’re disadvantaged in the part of the English area.

Still another student said:
Some kids, they freak out. Like me I’m just freaking out about the test. I won’t be able to sleep, because I’m worried about the test whether I can pass or not. I don’t do so well on my Math and English class.

One student said:

Don’t freak out. As long as you study and like take the effort into it and get advice and get help—actually get help instead of waiting for the help to get to come to you, I think you would be okay, not to worry too much than before.

4. Why do you think (the students) need to do to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

One student said:

They say, the only reason they tell us is to graduate. That’s the only reason they say. To get somewhere in life, meaning going to college or a technical college. It’s easy for teachers and policymakers to tell us to pass the test. But for some students it is hard.

Another student said:

I think the school wants us to pass, because they want to look good and they want to be above other schools. They are not thinking about how the kids are going feel if there is so much pressure on them to do good.

One student had a different perspective and said:

Yes, they want us to pass, so that they can figure out how much we took in, to actually like tried to pay attention. How much of the group of seniors learned in each subject area, so they can find out who is having trouble, and to graduate.

5. If you could change one thing about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment, what would it be?

One student said:
What is the change? Probably not require a test to graduate. Maybe just do a portfolio of a project to pass instead of using a test for the seniors.

Another student said:

I am a junior this year. I don’t know what I would change. I haven’t take the test so I don’t really know how it’s gonna be.

While another student said:

They don’t really tell us what the test requires. They just tell us to pass and graduate. I know my English teacher says there will be short-answered essays; that’s basically what they told us to do—practice on our short answer essays and you’ll pass the test. So we have no idea how it’s gonna be. So they just built us up to thinking it’s to be extremely difficult, through the roof. I don’t know what to expect from the test comparing to what it’s been before, because now it’s the 11th grade reading level. I know my reading level is low compared to the 11th grade.

6. What would you like people to know about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment that I have not asked?

One student said:

It’s kinda hard because it’s like a brand new test and we’re the guinea pigs, and we have no idea what’s going to be on the test. So I can’t say much about what I want people to know. Just that, be prepared for the unexpected.

Another student said:

I think they should let our parents know what we have to do to pass the test, so our parents can help in that way. I know that as a school we are told in an assembly that our school does show poor performance overall. So, how is the school going to help us do better when there is a lot of us and one counselor at our school, and we have like junior and seniors. We over 100 students combined. They need to tell us how they can help us to pass the test.
7. Why do the policy makers think that the students need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

One student said:

Do they have the right to hold graduation status with one test? It doesn’t seem fair. I guess because it’s just one test. You know I got all A’s throughout my entire high school years; and if I missed this test, it would be because of nervousness or I wouldn’t even know—like that would devastate me if it’s just this one test. Yeah, it is kinda messed up. I mean it’s like just this one test. Even if we’re a point off, just one point or half a point, we won’t be able to graduate, even if we met all of our credits or standards. It’s kinda messed up how this one test piece of paper tells you this is what your score is. I know the test is important to take, but it also determines the outcome of my future. It sucks.

Another student said:

Well, I think those people who make the decision for us do not know who we are and where we are coming from. They are gambling with our future. They are not our local council delegate but yet they make decisions for you and me, decisions on whether you’re gonna graduate or not. It feels as though they know how much knowledge we have, but that’s not really how it is. I don’t know how to explain. Yeah, so we’ll probably keep the test we did not pass, but have another alternative. Yeah, it’s a hard decision. You have to think about every single type of kid out here. Every kind has different study partners, different learning patterns as well, and they just think each kind has different problems too, you know. So I don’t know how they can make that decision. It would just be really hard trying to find a solution to fit every type of kid. So I guess they only have one solution, is the one test to pass.

Finally another student said:

It sounds like the policy makers have the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment tied to their career or their reputation. Everything is always tied to something political. I guess they think that all families and students are the same. One size fits all. I know this test is not designed to our culture and heritage. I know they do not understand us. We don’t understand their decision making for us as far as test taking goes to graduate from a high school. That upsets me very much, because we pay
the consequences when the policy makers have no idea what happens to us. Most of them are probably not educators but business people who make drastic decisions like business people do—they take risks. This is what my future looks like?

Another remarked:

Knowing I graduate from high school and giving me confidence. But, like if I don’t pass it will affect my whole life, I may not go to college. I won’t get a high school diploma. So I know it has a great effect on the rest of my life.

One student concluded with:

I will have no life. Basically just stay home. What can you do on the Navajo reservation? There are no jobs. I would have to travel at least 60 miles one way to the nearest town to look for a job.

Another student said,

I know the test is important but what you don’t know about reservation schools, we don’t get brand new stuff like books. We get the used books and hand-me-down items used from Kirtland High School. We got used books from Kirtland, but we still managed to use them. Just the experience from that I know, people think that the off-reservation school is better than our school. I know it takes money for things to happen. But we are all under one school district and yet we still get treated as second class people. I know Kirtland students get more help from their teachers. Yeah, they have more advantages, we don’t. We are an isolated community. I know they have more counselors than we do. We only have one. So they get more help with test preparation. I know that you’re probably thinking, “How does this student know all this?” Well, I can tell you, we experience it every day. Sometimes, going to school is not fair to me and my friends. We are being challenged in that way; we are labeled already. How does that make us feel? Sometime I feel stupid. But I am not staying around when I graduate. You are asking me this question. Are you going to make a difference for me and my friends?

Still another student said:

Yeah, most of the students at our school, their parents work out in Shiprock, Gallup, or Farmington, some even further. For students who live close to town and their parents work nearby, they get help from their parents with homework and other stuff. With me, my parents work out of town so I don’t ever see them until after 7 pm. I have to make dinner.
myself and do my homework. Most of the school activities my parents
don’t attend because they are tired, and most events are scheduled at
6 p.m. How does this affect my wish to pass the test? It totally affects my
future.

Finally, another student said:

Students at our school drop out because of social problems. Some have
alcoholic parents, tends to reflect the economic and racial make-up of our
small remote communities on the Navajo reservation. I know some girls
who drop out due to pregnancy as well as academic difficulties. Most guys
drop out because of drugs or behavioral problems. Some drop out to seek
employment after getting a girl pregnant. You see these students only have
a slim chance of succeeding, earning a decent wage or achieving a stable
and productive life. As for me I am working very hard to keep up my
grades. I know for some of the students military is a way out of the
reservation. There are no jobs here. I think even if you drop out of school
and you get a job, it’s still a downhill slide, because few jobs openings
exist for those who don’t have a high school diploma. Yeah, I think
joining the military is the answer.

One student said:

It decides for me, whether or not I graduate. So it puts a lot on my future. I
don’t know if this test is really for what it was intended to do—make us
pass and graduate so we can go to college, or is it just a political game for
the politicians. I know they make a lot of the decisions for us students. We
don’t have a say in what happens to our future. We just try to make what
is expected of us.

And another remarked:

I don’t think the test is fair, because when I started high school I wasn’t
taught like I should have been taught for the NMSBA. So, it’s more like
NMSBA is coming, so don’t make a mistake. That’s basically it; that’s all
they told me. The teacher was horrible, and when the time came I didn’t
know. I don’t think this test is fair. If I don’t make it, I’m screwed for life.
Theme: Equity of Testing

Summary

Based on students’ responses on the survey (6 questions) and in the interviews, there were important expressions of students’ opinions regarding the equity of testing. On Survey Question Number 2 (I know about the new-New Mexico Standard Based Assessment policies on graduation requirements), 71% of the students indicated they were aware of the policies. Yet, for Survey Question Number 13 (I know the current graduation progress I have made using my graduation checklist), only slightly over half (56%) knew their progress, and 44% of the students reported that they didn’t know.

In addition to these two questions, Survey Question Number 11 (My parents are aware of the high school exit exam that I have to take), respondents indicated that their parents were knowledgeable of the exit exam. Yet, a lot of the stress that was generated from the exit exam requirement was not shared with their parents. On Question Number 16 (The policymakers think that the students need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam), 60% of the students agreed with the statement. However, in the interview responses, many voiced concerns about being a part of decision-making and that policymakers were not aware of the impact and the effects it had on the high school students.

Question number 10 (The off-reservation schools do better on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam than those on the reservation), showed
that slightly over half (55%) of the students didn’t know. Yet, in the interviews there were some indications that students were aware of the differences between off-reservation schools and schools on the Navajo reservation—all of which were under one school district. The last question, Survey Question Number 5 (The high stakes testing is fair), was the only question that both survey responses (51%) and interview responses showed agreement; that is, they disagreed that high stakes testing was fair.

Comments in Interviews

8. Do you think the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment is fair?

One student said:

I think it’s kinda both not fair and fair because they do give us more than one chance to retake the test. You have three chances to take the test: once in your junior year; you do it twice your senior year. That’s what they’ve been telling us. I think it’s Mr. Joe telling me.

Still another student said:

In the past, I know two years ago it was called the NMSKI? Now it’s called NMSBA. I never heard of NMSBA till a couple of months ago. I haven’t taken the test. I know they were really harsh with students about the NMSKI. I mean they did not get any chances to retake the test. That’s kinda harsh, not fair. Now at least they give you another chance.

Yet another student said:

I don’t think they should base our graduation on how we did on the test that is only for one day and only considered on certain numbers or points. Students should graduate on how they did in four years, not in five days, because if I failed the test in five days, but passed all my classes and got straight A’s, I still don’t get my high school diploma. I don’t see it as fair.
And another remarked:

I think tests that students do is a money-making scheme. I hear some teachers discussing this, and it made me think that they are right. So if they think that it’s not fair, why do they make us take the test? So what if the people who check the test score make a mistake of checking our answers. Then they make us lose our diploma based on their mistake. So I say the test is not fair.

One student said:

I think it’s fair because it’s helping us succeed in life and it’s showing us what we need help on and what we are good at.

Finally one student said:

Yeah, your saying it’s fair because test-taking you can do, which some us can’t do and you always have good grades. So, for you, you have an advantage over us.

9. How is that the off-reservation schools do better on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment than the on-the-reservation schools?

One student said:

I think it has somewhat to do with the environment that we’re in, you know, like we have to go through different things than most other cultures have to through, like substance abuse and stuff like that. We just—as Native American people we struggle more than I see most cultures. There’s a lot of family issues and problems that people have on the rez, and they try to use their techniques on us, which is not made for us. In our culture we have ceremonies for our people when they become unbalanced in their life. Not only that, we also have appreciation ceremonies. In that way, we are good people; that’s what White people don’t have when they are unbalanced. They use pills to readjust—we don’t. So I say as a reservation school we do just fine. It’s about keeping people out who do not know our ways, our culture.
9. Do you feel you get enough information about graduation requirements from school officials?

One student said:

Yes, I do, I have to know how much credits I completed towards my graduation requirement. I like to go to the counselor myself, get it done that way. I know some students do not take the initiative to do this on their own. The only time is when they have whole group meetings with us. It’s never done individually. To go there on your own is what they expect us to do. So, students who don’t go there never get a one-to-one academic counseling. The only option is to go by yourself.

Another student said:

I think that school counselors and other officials do not give us enough information about the High School Exit Exam, ACT, SAT. For some students they understand the process and procedures but there are those of us who are at the other end of the spectrum, who no matter how many times we meet as a group, we will never understand. It has to be completed on a one-to-one basis for me. The information they gave us at first, they told us the seniors this year will graduate based on the new-New Mexico Standard Based Assessment and then they changed their minds and said they weren’t going to do it this year, because they did not have the money to do it. It feels like they are playing with our future. There is no definite information given.

10. Do you know the current graduation progress you have made (graduation checklist)?

One student said:

Yeah that is similar to what you just asked us. If we meet with the counselor by ourselves we know what requirements we have met. But you have to make an appointment with the counselor to do the graduation check list. Other students I know have not checked into this. This is also done as a whole group and you can ask to meet with the counselor. Some students do not meet with the counselors alone so they have not completed their checklist for graduation. So like I said, some get help, some do not get the help they need.

Another student commented:
I have not really seen any of the students go through the checklist with the counselor alone. I know they meet with all of us as a group, which is sometimes hard for some of the students. Some students are having trouble with not passing a class and losing credits because of that. I think the school people should closely monitor our graduation requirements, so they can have some mentoring programs for us, so we can pass the graduation requirements.

11. Do your parents know the current status of your graduation progress?

One student said:

Yes, I told them. Our counselor Mr. Joe, he liked went through the entire checklist with me, my mom, and my dad. We talked about it for about an hour. My parents are making sure I meet all of my requirements.

Another student said:

My mom came in during parent-teacher conference and she talked with my counselor. She shared where I was at. Yeah, I know my parents are pretty sure I am on the right track.

Still another student said:

Yeah, my parents know, they know a lot. Yes, they know about my graduation credit status.

Finally another student said:

My parents told me that was my responsibility. So I take it upon myself to meet all the deadlines and requirements for testing. I know what my graduation status is and what I need to do to keep my grades up.

12. Do you know the changes made as of September 24, 2010, that the state of New Mexico initiated a new High School Exit Exam in spring of 2011? If you do, what have you been told?

One student said:

We’ve been told that the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment is an 11th grade reading level, 11th grade questions, everything that we should have been taught is going to be in there. I am not really familiar with the
new test we have to take. I thought it was always like the test you take in
the 9th grade. You take the 9th grade test I thought that it was the same as
that the whole time.

Another student said:

Well we haven’t taken any of the tests, just preparing for it in my classes;
that’s what we’ve been doing. All the tests seem the same. There was a
meeting set up about the new exam for the parents to come to. But it was
in a large building and it was hard for parents to ask questions. My parents
said they did not really understand the purpose of the meeting. They
thought I passed my senior year with the credits I accumulated throughout
the four years.

Another remarked:

I think they just sent home a letter about the new high school exam. But I
heard for some districts they can lower the passing score. I guess that’s the
disadvantage—that’s what my English teacher said. Yeah, that’s unfair. I
guess we should all be on one level and that’s the only fair thing to do.

Theme: Psychological Impact

Summary

In the research literature, it is well documented that Native American
students who take part in high-stakes tests express emotions such as anxiety,
anger, and worry about social comparisons that result from test scores (Paris, Roth
& Turner, 2000; Wheelock et al., 2000). The Native American students included
in this study concurred that the NMSBA examination had some type of
psychological effect on them. There were consistent responses on the surveys and
interviews. Students described feeling stupid, worried, stress, scared, and
depressed. In response to Survey Question 15 (I would be very disappointed if I
was not promoted to the next grade and I was kept from receiving my diploma
because of the result of one test), 86% of the students strongly agreed (399
students). On Survey Question number 8 (I enjoy taking the New Mexico High School Competency Exam), 78% of the students strongly disagreed, and on a related question (I feel stressed when I have to take the New Mexico High School Competency Exam), 65% of the students strongly agreed. Furthermore, on Survey Question Number 4 (If I am unable to pass the final test at the end of senior year, I would stay in school and try to retake the test in order to receive my diploma.), 63% of the students responded agree.

Comments in Interviews

13. When you hear of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment, what comes to mind?

One student said:

A lot of studying and teachers just warning us, that’s what comes to mind. Just a lot of assemblies and taking us out of class and telling us how important this test is and how they increased the difficulty of it. I feel really stressed out, because I don’t know what the test looks like and I don’t know what is going to be on the test.

Another student said:

Graduation comes to mind. If I don’t pass this test, I won’t graduate. It is about me and my future. There a lot at stake for me. Both my parents are educators so it’s a lot of stress and expectation on me.

One student expressed:

What comes to mind for me is that it is very important to pass and graduate and get a bunch of study guides and like practice test. Graduation comes to mind. If I don’t pass this test, I won’t graduate. I’d probably get my GED and go on to college. I know the local community college will help me with my GED and get my diploma and help me go on to college. So I have a backup plan. I can still make it happen. Nothing is going to stop me from getting my high school diploma.
14. What do you think are some factors that might prevent some students from successfully passing the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

One student said:

I think the only factor is themselves, if they choose to study or not. You can’t make somebody do it. They have to want to do it. It’s all up to the students to excel if they want. They are accountable. I am accountable for my own work and studies.

Another student said:

I would say the same is that if we choose to study or not. But if you don’t study you don’t get the grades you need. The factors would be not putting an effort into your studies or actually not taking advantage of the help teachers are giving us. Another factor, on the other hand, would be that teachers are not teaching us the skills or the subjects required for the test. So I think it works both ways. I also think that each of us, the students have our subject weaknesses and strengths. My strength is history, English and science, I don’t really have trouble with these subjects, but my weakness is math. I know for some of the students, they have a hard time with writing, which is also required on most tests.

Another remarked:

I think the worst part about school is having to take tests. No matter how smart you think you are, or how much you like school, there is nothing worse than having to take a test. Having to sit in a room with nothing to refer to for help, and only your study methods the night before to rely on. It makes me very nervous. I get pissed when I study for a test and what I studied is not on the test. Sometimes teachers do that to us. It’s a waste of time for me. Sometimes I am worried and scared at the same time for not passing, cause you gotta find another way to like do your best so you can move on.
15. What effect will the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment have on your future?

Another student said:

Yeah, graduation. If I don’t graduate, I won’t be able to go to college—possibly not. I would feel stupid if I did not pass. It’s like this one purpose, though it’s like playing a simple game. If you don’t pass, you won’t graduate; you pass, you’re pretty good to go. I know that if you pass it, you feel relaxed, but if you don’t, you’re depressed. You gotta take it again.

Another commented:

Yeah, I think the teachers themselves do not know what they are supposed to teach us. I know my history teacher is a coach, and all we do in his class is read and do questions out of the book. He never communicates with us. He sits at his computer and drinks soda all the time. He’s not a teacher. You can easily pass it if you enjoy doing questions out of the book. I think we need better teachers who can help us pass the NMSBA. It’s just not fair. And lots of times teachers are not equipped, not enough books, not enough supplies for science class, calculators for math. Teachers need to do something different where we are actually learning, more stuff to help the students, different methods of teaching, cause a lot of people are more hands-on. All this affects how we do on the test. So it’s not all our fault.

16. How do you think students feel about themselves after taking the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

One student said:

The students worry how they did, if they passed or not. They feel horrible cause they don’t know if they passed or not pass. Did they do enough work so they are so miserable not knowing.

Still, another student declared:

Yeah, they would all be very nervous. They probably feel tense and scared of how they did, whether they did good or not. Then I think they feel
happy that they took the test and it’s over with. Then when they find out they didn’t pass, they get mad at their self that they have to take it again.

Another student said:

Well I know some students feel they did not do well; they feel very badly cause they know they won’t graduate. And if they are border line, they probably just live in fear until they find out how they did. I think it’s different for all of us how we feel. I felt the stress for a month cause I didn’t know what I would be tested on and if I was going to pass, if I was going to graduate. Literally, I went crazy, I think, over this. I will be relieved when it’s all over with, but what happens if I don’t pass. I guess take it again. I hate thinking about it.

Still another remarked:

I would be worried. That’s all I would be thinking about. Did I pass it or I didn’t pass? “How do you think I did,” asking my teachers? I don’t know man. It’s scary because it is about my graduation day. It determines whether I graduate or not. The expectations are so high that I may not be able to stand up for myself. I would be very ashamed if I didn’t pass it. I am a high performing student but this seems to take away my future goals, more demoralizing, I guess. There is so much emphasis on pass the test, so much on the high stakes nature of it that some girls are literally crying when they know they have to retest. I gotta imagine that they don’t feel too good about that process. It’s something we take personally. I know teachers tell us not to take it too personal. What do they know about me? I get very discouraged, you know, about why I am coming to school when I can’t do this; and I can’t do that; and I’m not happy with that.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to look at the effects of the high-stakes tests on Native American students. Survey and interview data showed that there were three themes that reflected high school students’ opinions. These themes are discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 5 and are related to the three major research questions and their relationship to Critical Race Theory (CRT).
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to look at the effects of high-stakes tests on Native American high school students. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do Native American students perceive the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment)?

2. How do Native American students perceive the quality of education they receive through the New Mexico public school system?

3. What impact, if any, has the New Mexico High School Competency Exam (NMHSCE) and the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment (SBA/High School Graduation Assessment) had on Native American students’ educational experiences?

Research Methods

The results of this study were based on a mixed-methods research design that included surveys and in-depth interviews with students in three high schools on the Navajo Nation.
Major Findings

To answer the research questions, there were three themes that emerged from analysis of the survey and interview data: (a) the effects on students’ futures; (b) the equity of testing, and (c) the psychological impact of high-stakes tests on students.

**Theme: Effects on the future.** Overall, findings were similar across students in the three high schools in regard to the effects of testing on their education and on their futures. Students indicated they were confident enough to pass all subject areas, although there was still concern for not passing and how that would have an impact on their future and going to college. Both in the survey questions and in the interviews, students agreed that the Graduation Assessment does have an effect on their future. The majority of these students attended class regularly, generally avoided trouble, felt connected to their schools, and held high educational values and hopes for their future. The students appeared willing to work hard to earn an education and appeared to be looking for opportunities to achieve this objective.

**Theme: Equity of testing.** Based on the surveys and interviews, the students realized that “higher education is the gateway to success” and in order to be successful in life, the first hurdle is to pass the NMSBA. In addition, Native American students perceived that inequity exists as it relates to resources. The border town schools, such as Kirtland High School, have better resources that include better teachers, better-maintained buildings, and a more structured
educational environment, just to name a few. Finally the NMSBA has had an impact on the students’ educational experiences. All students, regardless of which school they were from, indicated that high-stakes tests are not fair.

**Theme: Psychological impact.** The third theme focused on the psychological impact on students if they failed a test required for high school graduation. Students reported a wide range of adverse emotional reactions such as feeling anxiety, anger, worried, stupid, stressed, scared, depressed, and less proud of themselves. In fact, 86% of the students *strongly agreed* (399 students) that they would be very disappointed in themselves for not passing. Other students indicated they would retake the test, although they might experience a substantial drop in self Esteem, feel embarrassed in front of their peers, and would strain relationships with parents and peers. The impact of a failed test could alter their educational plans and career plans, and others would drop out of school because they would be discouraged and humiliated by failing the test.

**Recommendations for Schools and Communities**

Recommendations for schools and communities include the following:

1. A community and school partnership should be established to recognize the need for ongoing comprehensive evaluation of student progress and school improvement. High-stakes testing can be fairly administered if the process involves each of the stakeholder groups (students, parents, teachers, administrators and communities) in understanding the testing system, preparing each group for the testing process, using multiple methods for demonstrating
learning other than teaching to the test, and using two or more testing systems to
measure results.

2. The Navajo Nation Community Chapters of Newcomb, Shiprock, and
Nenahnezad, New Mexico, will support high standards, core curriculum
alignment to those standards, tests which measure what they purport to measure,
and professional development for teachers to incorporate these academic
standards. The Chapters will be more informed of the impact that high-stakes
testing may have on teachers’ careers, students’ opportunities, and the school
district’s future.

3. Student support in the local high school should be provided through:
   • Preparing students through online test preparation in math, science, and
     English and access the Chapter’s technology lab.
   • Providing the dates of the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment
     Exit Testing scheduled each spring.
   • Informing parents at local Chapter meetings of continual graduation
     progress checks with their high school student and meeting with the
     school counsellors on a continual basis during the 10th through 12th
     grade school years.
   • Providing math and English tutoring to all high school students by local
     volunteers from the communities in each chapter. Buses should be
     available to transport students to their homes after tutoring.
Being aware of the performance status of each high school: Newcomb High School, Shiprock High School, and Kirtland High School; and providing incentives and school recognition at their local chapter meetings.

Local communities understanding the testing programs used within each school and district and advocating them to ensure that multiple measures for demonstrating learning and accountability are used.

Expecting school counsellors to have more parental contacts and inform parents of the standardized curriculum and a school-wide common goal of graduating all students. School counsellors should meet with parents and students on graduation progress to define the needs and to provide support for the student. It is important that teachers and counsellors be coaches and comforters for the students to help increase students’ self-confidence and feelings of being in control, to help them feel more supported, and to decrease feelings of isolation and alienation. School counsellors need to promote, plan, and implement school-wide programs that address high-stakes testing issues (e.g., relaxation techniques, testing tips, administration and scoring procedures, etc.).

Developing a brochure for the students, parents, and communities about the graduation requirements, including information about the assessments in subject areas, what is required for each grade level, how many times they can take the test, what to do if they did not pass, and
what alternatives they have, providing a sample of the alternative portfolio, contacts for tutoring, website addresses of online tutoring, and ACT and other online test preparation programs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research is suggested in several areas:

- More research needs to be conducted with regard to obtaining the perceptions of Native Americans students and other students of colour as to high-stakes testing nationwide to allow their voices to be heard about how high-stakes testing affects their lives.

- More research needs to be done in the area of what types of psychological counselling services may be available for students who reside in the state of New Mexico where high-stakes testing is mandatory.

- More research that alerts teachers, administrators, and policy makers as to their awareness of the perceptions students have when they are taking a test.

**Concluding Remarks**

Based on the voices of Navajo juniors and seniors in three high schools in New Mexico, it is argued that there are three assumptions that are not necessarily valid for using standardized tests, such as the New Mexico Standard Based Assessment with English Language Learners (ELL) students. First, standardized test scores reflect learning in the content areas, and ELL students may not have
had opportunities to learn the content of the tests. Secondly, standardized tests assume native-speaker levels of ELL’s performance; therefore, the inferences made about these students based on their test scores are more than likely not valid. Therefore, this assumption or practice is discriminating and biased as CRT theory asserts.

Finally, standardized test scores may be used by school administrators to put pressure on teachers to teach to the test, although teaching to the test brings the validity of the tests scores into question. In addition, by their very status, ELL students are in transition to English language proficiency and are not yet capable of showing what they know on standardized tests which are developed for native speakers of English. Most of the vocabulary words used in state standardized tests are words that Navajo students do not use on a daily basis. Looking through the lens of CRT, the majority of the group hiding behind the meritocracy mythology when they developed the NMSBA assumed that every student had equal access to educational opportunities, and therefore every student should be able to meet the same standards of performance. However, this assumption ignored the “academic apartheid” or “apartheid of knowledge” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 97). By using Native American students’ voices, this researcher hopes to convey these shortcomings of high-stakes testing to the general public.
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Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 42 U.S.C. 2000(d) et seq., 34 C.F.R.


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Individual Interview Questions

1. Do you know what the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment is?

2. When you hear of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment, what comes to mind?

3. What do you think some factors that might prevent some student from successfully passing the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

4. What effect will the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment have on your future?

5. How is that the (off reservation schools) do better on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment than the (on the reservation schools)?

6. What are the advantages or positive aspects of New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

7. What are the disadvantages or negative aspects of the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

8. Why do you think (the students) need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

9. Why do you (the policy makers) think that the students need to successfully pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?
10. If you could change one thing about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment, what would it be?

11. How do you think students feel about themselves after taking the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment?

12. Do you think the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment is fair?

13. Do you feel you get enough information about graduation requirements from school officials?

14. Do you know the current graduation progress you have made (graduation checklist)?

15. Do your parents know the current status of your graduation progress?

16. What would you like people to know about the New Mexico High School Competency Exam or New Mexico Standard Based Assessment/High School Graduation Assessment that I have not asked?

17. Do you know the changes made as of September 24, 2010, that the State of New Mexico initiated new High School Exit Exam in spring of 2011? If you do, what have you been told?

18. My teachers help me study and learn to pass the New Mexico High School Competency Exam.

19. I get help from my school counselor on the status of my graduation requirements.

20. Do you plan to attend college after your graduation? Have you decided which college you will attend?
APPENDIX B

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY’S

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 01/04/2011

Committee Action: Expedited Approval

Approval Date: 01/04/2011

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 1012005808

Study Title: Native American Students’ perceptions of high-stakes testing in New Mexico

Expiration Date: 01/03/2012

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator’s responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.
APPENDIX C

NAVAJO NATION INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
December 17, 2010

Dear Ms. Yazzie-Tracy,

This letter is to confirm the CCSD School Board’s action on 12/16/2010 approving support to your proposed research and dissertation on Native American Students’ Perception on High Stakes Testing as part of your Doctoral Program with ASU.

We wish you the best of luck in this endeavor and will look forward to hearing your findings when they are completed.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Gregg Epperson
Superintendent of Schools
Central Consolidated School District 22
PO Box 1199
Shiprock, NM 87420
APPENDIX D

CLASS C PERMIT
March 10, 2011

Ms. Gladys Y. Tracy
Arizona State University
40 CR 6211
Kirtland, NM 97417

Dear Ms. Tracy

This is to advise you that Study #NNR-11.89T "Native American Students' Perception of High Stakes Testing in New Mexico" was presented to Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board on February 15, 2011 and considered your initial research proposal. The Board made the following actions:

- The Consent Form needs NNHRRB contact person listed as the first contact and submit to the IRB Board to be stamped and signed;
- Who is the PI? You will need to change the PI to Gladys Y. Tracy on all documents;
- Historic Preservation Permit needs to be obtained and submit to the Research Program before the project begins;
- A permanent ID# NNR-11.296 is assigned to the study to be used as reference on all documents pertinent to the study; and The approval of the research proposal is effective from February 15, 2011 to February 15, 2012 with all standard conditions.

Additional contingencies are:

The Navajo Nation retains ownership of all data obtained within its territorial boundaries The Principal Investigator shall submit to the NNHRRB a plan and timeline on how and when the data/statistics will be turned over to the Navajo Nation;

2. Only the approved informed consent document(s) will be used in the study;

3. Any proposed future changes to the protocol or the consent form(s) must again be submitted to the Board for review and approval prior to implementation of the proposed change;

4. If the results of the study will be published or used for oral presentations at professional conferences, the proposed publication, abstract and/or presentation materials must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program for Board review and prior approval;

5. Upon Board approval, three (3) copies of the final publication must be submitted to the Navajo Research
6. All manuscripts must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program for Board Review and prior approval;

7. The Principal Investigator must submit a dissemination plan on how the results of the study and how these results will be reported back to the Navajo Nation. The Principal Investigator must share specifically how these results will generally benefit or improve the health of the Navajo people. This can be completed by:

   a) Conducting an educational in-service for the community people and health care providers on the Navajo Nation and present the findings. Provide documentation of these in-services presented.
   b) Developing educational materials for use by the health care providers and the community people and providing the training on how to use the materials; and
   c) Presenting and sharing the results of the study at a research conference sponsored by the Navajo Nation for its health care providers and the Navajo people.

8. The Principal Investigator is expected to submit documentation on 7a, b, & c. - 9. The Principal Investigator must submit quarterly and annual reports as scheduled.

This approval will automatically expire on February 15, 2012 unless sooner suspended, revoked or terminated by action of the Board. A continuation of the research project may be requested by submitting a written request at least sixty (60) days prior to the expiration date to the:

Navajo Division of Health -Research Program
Post Office Box 1390
Window Rock, Arizona 86515

If you have any questions, please call the Navajo Research Program at (928) 871- 6650.

Cc: Beverly Becenti-Pigman
NNR-11.296
Chrono
Gladys Yazzie Tracy
40 CR 6211
Kirtland, New Mexico 87417

Dear Ms. Tracy:

Enclosed is the Navajo Nation Cultural Resources Investigation Permit No.: C1106-E for a period of ELEVEN MONTHS, BEGINNING FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AND ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2011, to conduct INVESTIGATE HOW HIGH STAKES TESTING HAS IMP ACTED THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON THE NA v AJO RESERV ATION, CONDUCT INTERVIEWS AND REQUEST SURVEYS FROM JUNIORS AND SENIORS AT THE THREE HIGH SCHOOLS, TO DETERMINE WHY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE NOT PASSING THE HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM, NEWCOMB, SHPROCK, NENAHNEZAD, SAN JUAN COUNTY, NEW MEXICO.

If you have any questions, please call Ron Maldonado or Judy Arviso at (928) 871-7147.

Thank you.

Sincerely, ~ Tamara Bill

CAlan S. Downer

Historic Preservation Officer
APPENDIX E

WRITTEN CHILD CONSENT/ASSENT FORM
Native American students' perceptions of high-stakes testing in New Mexico

I have been informed to participate in a study concerning "Native American students' perception of high-stakes testing in New Mexico." The expected duration of my participation will begin on March 17, 2011 and end on April 18, 2011.

I have been asked to participate in the survey and an interview. The interview will be a one-on-one interview with the principal investigator (Gladys Yazzie Tracy) that will take 60 minutes in length. The meeting will be audio-taped for the purpose of reviewing the information. The interviewer will protect confidentiality at all times and my part in this study is anonymous. That means no one, with the exception of the interviewer, will know that the answers are from me, the interviewee. The recorded information and transcripts will be reviewed by the dissertation advisors as part of the research process. Confidentiality will be maintained during this time.

My participation in this study is voluntary. I can skip questions if I wish. If I choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty; this will not affect my grade or my participation in the New Mexico High School Exit Exam.

My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my grade, in any way.

I understand that if I am under 18 years old, I need my parent(s) permission for me to participate and if I am 18 years-old I do not need my parent(s) permission to participate.

Signature / Printed Name / Date