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The Impact of Testing on Students, Teachers, and Families

Ashley Retz

Eastern Illinois University

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### Introduction

Americans still argue about education and the need to improve it. There have been several initiatives set up to help improve public education in the United States. According to McIntush (2002), in 1983, the release of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education set the agenda for education in the United States. Ronald Reagan and the National Commission on Excellence in Education believed that schools were in crisis and needed reform (McIntush, 2002). The report released by the Commission reformed schools at the state level as well. The same study also stated that states promoted more educational laws and policies than it had in the previous twenty years. Twelve years after the “A Nation at Risk” was released by Reagan, the Clinton administration’s secretary of education, Richard Riley, titled his second annual State of American Education Address: *Turning the Corner: From a Nation at Risk to a Nation with a Future* (McIntush, 2002).

The next reform came in 2002 when George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). It was aimed at increasing K-12 academic standards and raising school accountability (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014). Every year schools are required to meet specific targets from state testing of students to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools that receive Title I funding that does not meet AYP are listed as “needing improvement” but are commonly seen as “failing” (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014).

The most current reform is the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS was started in 2011 in order to define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers. It was started so that when students graduate high school, they will be able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs (Lavena, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). States were open to

the new standards thinking it would deepen students' understanding, making them more successful at the college level. Lavena et al. (2015) found that people thought the CCSS would make the United States more competitive internationally.

Teachers, families, and students lead such a different life than they did many years ago. The economy has changed. Teachers and families have one job, maybe two, to provide for their families. Students are living in a world where technology is readily available. These factors were not as significant when the initiatives in education began in the 1980s. Times are so different for everyone in education now.

There also seem to be more stressors involved in education. According to Gonzalez, Pters, Orange, & Grigsby (2017), the implementation of high-stakes testing increased teachers' stress levels. Two of the top five stressors teachers reported were teaching at-risk students without enough support and accountability measures enforced by state standards. Another explanation of teacher stress was feeling overwhelmed by the new accountability measures that teachers doubted their ability to make an impact in their students' lives (Gonzalez, Pters, Orange, & Grigsby, 2017).

Through my fourteen years of teaching, I have spoken with many colleagues who describe they are becoming more disinterested in education. They say they are just going through the motions of teaching because they are not seeing the successes of students in education. Many of the teachers entering the teaching field are students of NCLB, and feel they are not efficient teachers and are stressed and decide to pursue other occupations (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014).

When I first started teaching fourteen years ago, I would not have imagined the change I see in students and families now. I see high turnovers in education. When I was a first-year

teacher, I was working with teachers that had been in the education field for twenty years, at least! Now, I see teachers getting burnt out more often. Some of the parts of the new initiatives and testing have put new demands on teachers, families, and students.

In the study I conducted, I considered the impact that these assessments had on students at the elementary level. I looked into the lives of students and their families, the lives of teachers, and the realities that they faced in the classroom with state-mandated assessments and high-stakes testing.

### **Literature Review**

This review of the literature will provide an overview of research on educational reforms and the personal effects of high stakes testing. There have been many educational reforms within the past twenty years in the United States to help better education. These reforms were aimed at closing the achievement gaps among minority students and closing the differences among the United States and other countries.

#### **Nation at Risk**

Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education on August 26, 1983, with the support of Ronald Reagan (McIntush, 2000). This Commission was formed to take an in-depth look into the quality of education in the United States because Bell was concerned about the public thinking that something is wrong with the education system. The Commission was based because the secretary felt that it was his responsibility to provide leadership, constructive criticism, and effective assistance to schools and universities (McIntush, 2000).

The Commission had several areas that they wanted to pay particular attention to and make changes. They wanted to look at the quality of teaching and learning in all areas of education, compare American schools and colleges with other advanced nations, study the relationship between college admission requirements and student achievement in high schools, identify programs that result in a significant student success rate in college, how major social and educational changes in the last 25 years have affected student achievement, and define problems which must be overcome to successfully pursue excellence in education (McIntush, 2000).

The Commission gathered its information from five sources: papers from experts on a variety of educational issues; administrators, teachers, students, families, business leaders, public

officials, and representatives from professional and public groups; previous analyses of problems in education; letters from concerned citizens, teachers, and administrators; and reports of notable programs and favorable approaches in education (McIntush, 2000). The Commission was impressed with the diversity and differences of opinion it received. The report the Commission gave showed that men and women could agree on common goals and ways to pursue them.

The Commission defined the excellence of an individual learner as performing on the edge of ability and ways that test and push individual limits in school and in the workplace. Excellence for schools and colleges means that they set high expectations and goals for all learners and then try every way to help the student reach them. They also believed if the focus of education is in support of mathematics and science, then the other subjects of English, history, geography, economics, and foreign language would then improve as well (McIntush, 2000).

The public believed that education is the primary foundation and that it needs to be at the top of Federal funding. They believe this serves as the foundation for a satisfying life, an intelligent and civil society, a strong economy, and a safe and secure Nation. In the public survey, they believed that every student, planning to attend a college or not, should take four years of math, English, history/U.S. government, and science and adding to that two years of foreign language and economics or business (McIntush, 2000).

This push leads to more than 250 state task forces, in 50 states, being formed to study education and recommend changes in their states (Mehta, 2015). The report recommended longer school days and year, more homework, higher admission standards for universities, more testing for proficiency, higher standards for becoming a teacher, an 11-month professional year for teachers, and performance-based teacher pay (Mehta, 2015).

**No Child Left Behind**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed in 2002 under President George W. Bush. The goal of NCLB is to increase math and reading proficiency. All students in the United States were to show proficiency by 2014 (Bland, 2014). NCLB included giving all children a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to get a high-quality education. All children are to reach proficiency on State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (Bland, 2014). States were originally supposed to set standards for all students and show 100 percent proficiency by 2014. To receive federal funding, states were required to set challenging standards, annually test children, and develop and implement a statewide accountability system (Bland, 2014). A method to hold schools accountable for this, states set Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures. These measures were used for benchmarks for schools showing progress towards complete proficiency.

Each school categorizes students into multiple subgroups, and any subgroup that has at least 40 students must follow AYP requirements and meet performance targets. If one of the subgroups is unable to meet performance targets, then the entire school fails to meet AYP (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014). If a school fails to meet AYP for two consecutive years, then the school is labeled as *in need of improvement*.

**Common Core State Standards**

Fifteen years after the nation's governors declared an end towards national standards, all but four states had adopted them (LaVenita, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics are a result of the state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative. The purpose of the CCSS is to define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so when they graduate high school, they can succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and workforce

training programs. (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). English-language arts and math were the first two subjects chosen because these are areas where students build skill sets in other subject areas (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014).

In writing Common Core State Standards, developers had to gather information on what is needed for college and careers. Then the developers had to weight each standard against the information gathered (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). The developers were able to eliminate topics that were not essential and concentrate on the more critical needs. To meet the criteria of international needs, CCSS writers looked at what other nations, which showed high performance on international tests, considered important (LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). States that adopted the CCSS thought it left teachers to have more creative control over their classrooms. Teachers then would see the worth in teaching lessons that will train students to be more successful in college and the workplace (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014). The states' adoption of the CCSS went along with the realization that the rigor of proficiency varied from state to state. Individual states have left the responsibility of forming assessments (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014).

A study was done by LaVenía, Cohen-Vogel, and Lang (2015), looked at possible reasons states adopted the CCSS. In the findings, they discovered that there was an influence of a state's desire to receive federal funds from Race to the Top. Another reason states adopted the CCSS was that some states' officials had a higher level of involvement in national and interstate policy. States that had a track record of having standards-based reform were also likely to adopt CCSS.

**Effects of High-Stakes testing**

African-American students that are in an urban setting, but are high-achieving, have reported feeling like they are stereotyped as academically inferior and being driven to prove their intellectual worth (Wasserberg, 2017). African American students have expressed feelings of anxiety related to state tests.

High stakes testing also significantly impacts the lives of teachers. Teachers are still expected to have similar or better results with different groups of students with unique abilities, and these students are also expected to perform on grade level each year. Because of the requirements from the standards, veteran, novice, and future teachers consider and pursue other professions (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014).

Teacher morale and retention also seem to be affected by NCLB and the CCSS. Many schools cut time and teachers from science, social studies, and other electives to make more time for reading, writing, and mathematics since those are the subjects tested. The NCLB legislation has forced many districts to terminate teachers who were more experienced and replace them with less experienced teachers that fit the *highly qualified* criteria (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014).

## **Method**

In this section, I talk about the reason and purpose for the study and the design of the study. I give a brief overview of the school and participants involved in the study. I talk about the method I used to gather my data and how I collected it and analyzed it.

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Is mandated testing in the elementary grades causing stress to families, teachers, and students? This study is a quantitative research project to gather data through the use of surveys about the effects high stakes testing has on students, teachers, and families. Because some teachers' evaluations depend on test performance, (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014), my theory is that the surveys will show there is an increase in stress put on teachers and students. This stress may even extend to the home. The quantitative approach allows me to analyze participants' responses about stress and high stakes tests.

### **Research Design**

This research is based on three surveys—one to families, one to teachers, and one to students. These surveys were sent to 144 fourth and fifth-grade students, these students' families, and 25 teachers at an urban school. The paper survey, consisting of nine questions was distributed to students and teachers during the school day. Beginning November 12, 2019, students and teachers had one week to complete their surveys, and anonymous surveys were returned to the teacher mailroom by November 18. The surveys were sent home to families in the students' take-home folders. Families had until November 18 to return their surveys. The short and easy readability of the survey encouraged participants to complete it, giving me a large sample.

I conducted a pilot of all three surveys. I chose a coworker, a previous family, and her student. All of these participants in the pilot did not receive the final survey. I chose these particular people because I knew that they would make sure the surveys read well and were easy to understand and answer. They were able to tell me if there needed to be questions taken away or added. I wanted to pilot the surveys because I wanted to be sure that the surveys were asking the questions that I need to be answered.

### **Participants**

The survey was sent to fourth and fifth-grade students and their families, elementary teachers, interventionists, special education teachers, and ESL teachers for a total of roughly 200 surveys. The sampling used was a convenience sample of students, teachers, and families I am familiar with, and who are familiar with the importance of educational research.

The school district which I will call Generic School District is representative of small urban school districts. There are approximately 10,000 students in the district with a racial makeup of 36.1% students that are White, 35% Black, 11.7% Hispanic, 9.1% Asian, 0.1% American Indian, and 7.9% two or more races. In the school where surveys were distributed, which I will call J.A. Elementary, 36.6% of students are White, 26.7% Black, 9.2% Hispanic, 17.3% Asian, 0.4% Pacific Islander, and 10% are of two or more races. At the time of the study, 45.6 % of the students in this school received free or reduced lunch.

### **Measures**

I used a quantitative approach in my research because I relied on the teacher, parent, and student responses to a survey. I sent a survey home to every family (144 families) in grades four and five. Depending on the survey, there were seven to ten scaled and narrative response

questions for the families, students, and teachers to fill out in regards to state standardized testing. I used the paper survey to look at their feelings towards high stakes testing.

A paper survey (see Appendices A-C) was chosen as opposed to an online version (i.e., Qualtrics) because many families do not have access to internet and technology at home. Paper surveys ensured that everyone had an equal opportunity to participate. Once the surveys were completed, I collected the surveys from the teacher mailroom and entered the data into Excel. This allowed the research team (myself and my advisor) to analyze the data and form graphs.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

As described above, similar surveys were completed by teachers, students, and families. The surveys were color-coded to aid in record keeping. I felt that doing a survey was one way to get a proper perspective on how students, families, and teachers were feeling about state testing. With an anonymous survey, I believed that people could be more honest about how they feel knowing their names would not be shared, and the administration would not see what teachers said.

**Student survey.** Each teacher had their students fill out a survey and helped them if needed during no more than 10 minutes of their class time. The student survey consisted of nine questions. I looked at their perspective on state testing. All surveys were anonymous. I had a box to turn student surveys into the teacher mailroom. This maintained the anonymity that was needed.

**Teacher survey.** Each teacher was given a survey to fill out and had a week to complete it. The teacher survey consisted of nine questions with the ability to explain their selections. Each teacher turned in the survey to a labeled box in the teacher mailroom to ensure anonymity.

**Family survey.** Families received their surveys in the students' take-home folders. Families had the option of sending their survey back in an unmarked envelope to the teacher and the teacher could turn it in, or they could have the students turn it into the office. Each family had a week to complete the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

I used the analysis to answer the following research question: *Is mandated testing in the elementary grades causing stress to families, teachers, and students?*

I hypothesized that teachers and students could show that they experience testing anxiety and feel stress. To prove my hypothesis, I used descriptive statistics to analyze each survey and used a covariate analysis to compare the results from the student and teacher surveys, the family and student surveys, and the family and teacher surveys.

During this research study, I gathered data through survey questions. I analyzed these answers to show how much stress people feel about state testing. When I began this study, I believed that teacher and student answers would be relatively well matched. I thought that students would not perceive these tests as fair, and teachers would agree that they are not appropriate for the students. However, if I saw that a large number of teachers agreed that state testing is not reasonable for their students, but students chose differently, then I would know my hypothesis was incorrect.

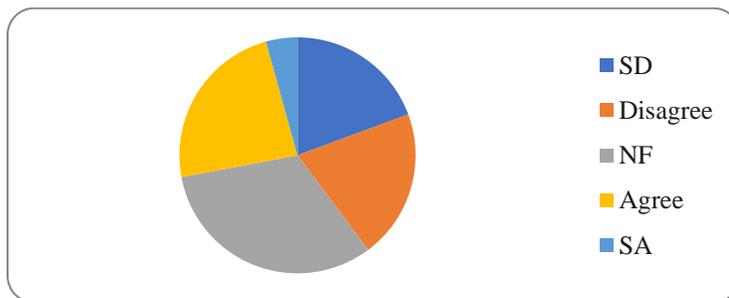
Another piece of the survey that I examined were responses to my question about student and teacher joy. Families, students, and teachers reflected on perceptions of joy during state testing, and teachers also reported on their joy during state testing. I anticipated the ability to analyze teacher, student, and family perceptions of joy during state testing. I used pie charts to compare the results from the teacher, student, and family surveys.

## Findings

In this section, I discuss the findings of the student, family, and teacher surveys. I divide this section into three parts, concentrating on each type of survey. Pie charts are used to show the results and percentages of responses to the questions from the surveys.

### Student Survey

I administered surveys to 144 students, and I received 93 student surveys back. In looking at the student surveys, many responses were similar. In response to Question 1, “I enjoy taking these tests,” 28% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they like taking the state assessments, while 39.8% disagree or strongly disagree—they did not like taking the assessments. 32.3% said they had no feelings about taking tests. This showed that students have a variety of feelings about taking state assessments. It was interesting that many students did say that they enjoyed taking state assessments. Students may not have known how they feel or were not sure if they enjoy taking tests, so they marked no feelings.



*Figure 1.* Results from the student survey, Question 1, “I enjoy taking these tests.”

In response to Question 3, “I can think clearly when I take these tests,” 40% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could think clearly when taking the tests, whereas 33.3% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 26.7% expressed they have no feelings towards Question 3. This showed that more students could think clearly when taking state assessments than the students who cannot think clearly when taking state assessments. Some students may

have answered, “No feelings,” because they did not know if they thought clearly during the assessments. Some students may not have understood what “thinking clearly” meant.

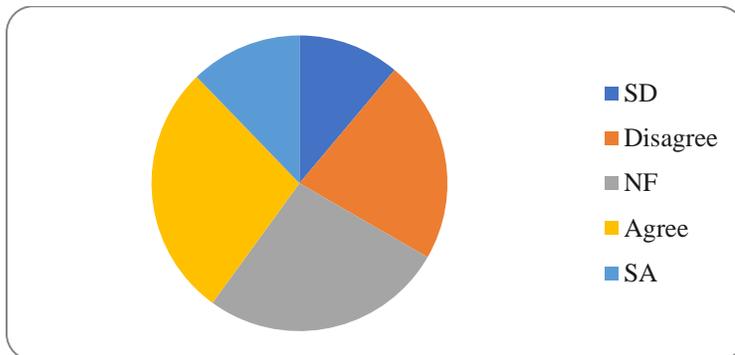


Figure 2. Response from the student survey, Question 3, “I can think clearly when taking these tests.

There are other results where students largely agreed on a question. In Question 2, “I get scared when taking these tests,” 22.8% strongly agree and 29.3% agree. These results added up to over half of the students surveyed agreeing that they got scared or nervous when taking state assessments. This result contradicts Question 1, where 28% agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed taking the assessments, but 52.1% agreed or strongly agreed that the assessments made them scared or nervous.

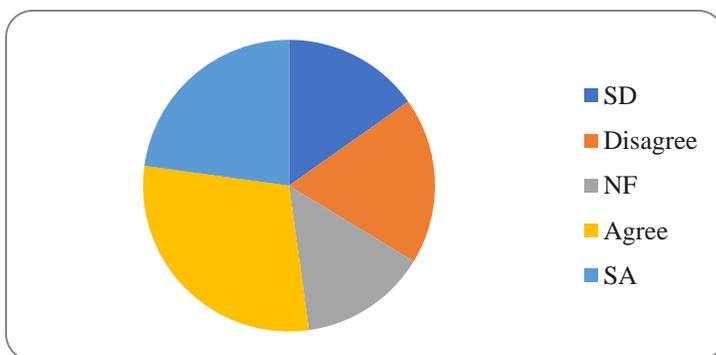
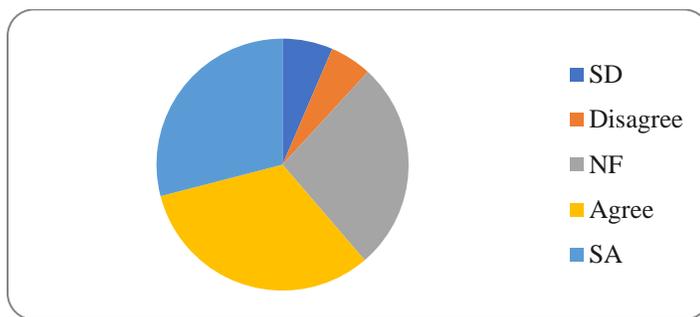


Figure 3. Results from the student survey, Question 2, “I get scared when taking these tests.”

In response to Question 6, “At the end of each test, I feel good about myself,” 29% agreed and 32.3% strongly agreed that they felt good about themselves after they took the

assessments, but this again contradicted that a large number of students feel nervous or scared. 11.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 26.9% of students had no feelings about Question 6. This shows me that most students feel good about themselves after they take the assessments, or do not have feelings about how they feel after the assessments. This means that students do feel comfortable with how they performed on the tests. That could be in part from the preparation prior to mandated testing. Even though students may feel nervous during the test, afterwards, they feel good about themselves. Some students could have answered no feelings because they were unsure of how they felt, or they never thought about how they felt once the test was completed.



*Figure 4.* Results to the student survey, Question 6. “At the end of each test, I feel good about myself.”

In answering Question 5, “I understand how to take these tests,” 35.5% of students strongly agreed, and 32.3% of students agreed that they understood how to take the assessments. 17.3% strongly disagreed or disagreed, and 15.1% had no feelings about understanding how to take state assessments. This shows me that most students understand how to take these assessments. Teachers use class time to help students prepare and practice taking the assessments. Students may have answered that they do understand because they have practiced before taking the actual assessment.

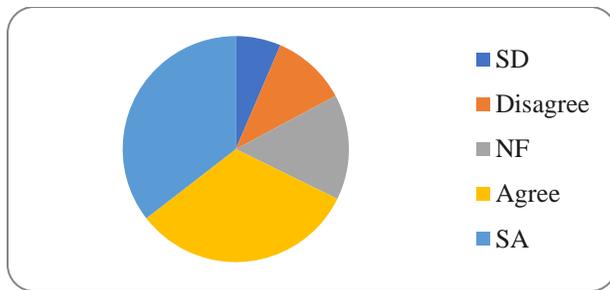


Figure 5. Results to student survey, Question 5. “I understand how to take these tests.”

There was one question, Question 4, “I try to stay at home so that I don’t have to take these tests,” that a large majority of the students strongly disagreed with. 52.7% of students strongly disagreed, and 20.4% disagreed that they tried to stay home so they did not have to take the tests, whereas 17.2% agreed and strongly agreed, and 9.7% had no feelings. This shows me that a majority of the students do come to school on testing days, rather than try to stay home to avoid testing. Many students are not given an option to come to school or not, so students may have answered that they do not try to get out of school on a testing day because they normally come to school every day.

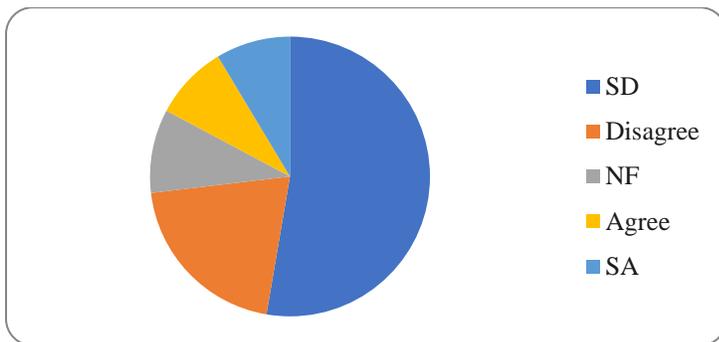
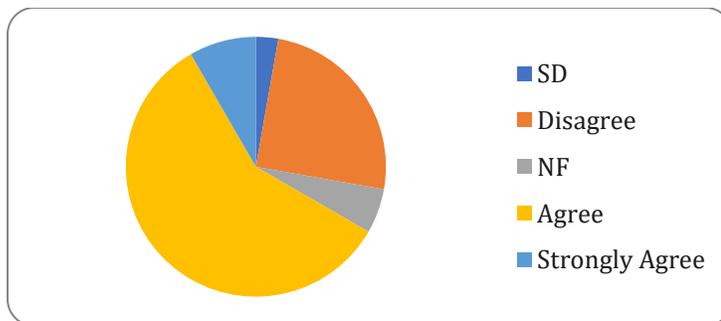


Figure 6. Results to the student survey, Question 4. “I try to stay at home so that I don’t have to take these tests.”

### Family Survey

I administered a survey to 144 families, and I received 37 surveys back from families. 83.3% of families that turned in the surveys are not on a free or reduced food program, and 16.7% are on a free or reduced program. In answer to Question 2, “I think that the frequency and amount of state-mandated assessments are stressful,” over half of the families, 58.3%, agreed and 8.3% strongly agreed, while 27.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the frequency and the amount of state-mandated testing is stressful. 5.6% marked no feelings. This shows me that families are noticing the amount of testing is stressful. This goes along with how students feel about testing. Over half of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they are scared when taking the assessments.



*Figure 7.* Results from the family survey, Question 2, “I think that the frequency and amount of state mandated assessments are stressful.”

Families also believed that their child(ren) perceived state-mandated testing as stressful. In Question 3, “My child(ren) perceive state-mandated assessment requirements as stressful,” 43.2% agreed and 10.8% strongly agreed, whereas 29.7% disagreed, 2.7% strongly disagreed, and 13.5% had no feelings. This means that most families believe their child(ren) think state mandated testing is stressful. The students may express this in behaviors different than normal or are more tired during the testing time. This does match, relatively, with the results from the students surveyed, with over half agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt scared or nervous.

Students agreed with families that testing was stressful, but the students also said they enjoyed taking the assessments, which does not match with these results.

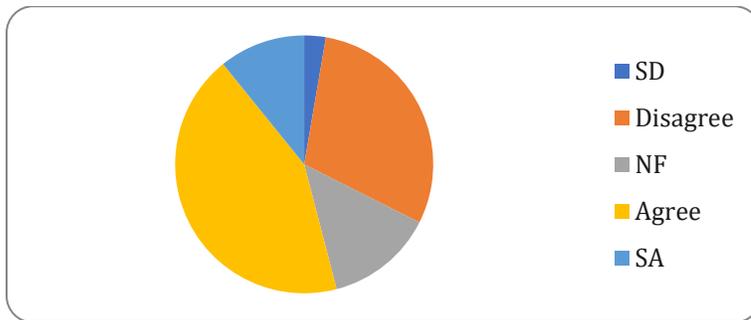


Figure 8. Results from the family survey, Question 3. “My child(ren) perceive state-mandated assessment requirements as stressful.”

In answering Question 4, “My child(ren) experience test anxiety on state-mandated assessment days,” 43.2% of families agreed, and 10.8% of families strongly agreed that their child(ren) experienced test anxiety. Meanwhile, 45.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their child(ren) experienced test anxiety. 5.7% stated they had no feelings. This shows me that families did not necessarily see their child(ren) experience test anxiety. The percentages were close with the number of families that agreed or strongly agreed and those that disagreed or strongly disagreed. If students enjoyed taking the assessments, then the students may not have expressed test anxiety to their families.

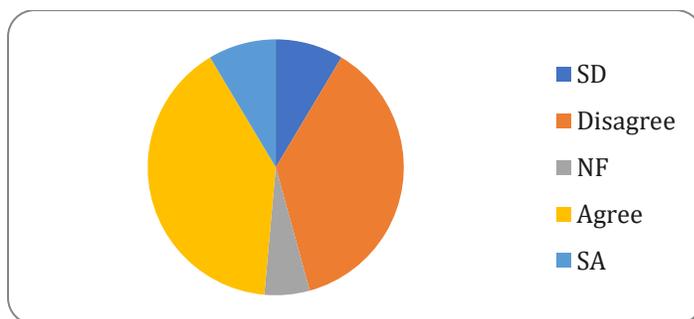
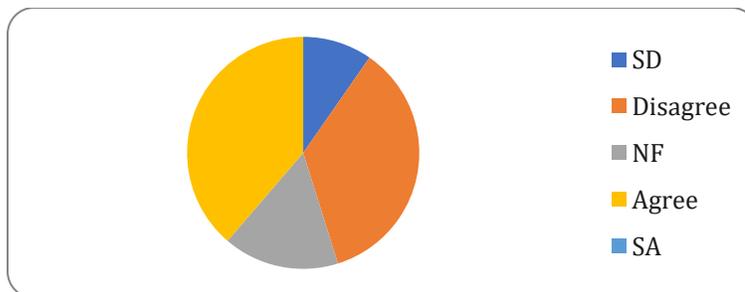


Figure 9. Results from the family survey, Question 4. “My child(ren) experience test anxiety on state-mandated assessment days.”

In response to Question 5, “State-mandated assessments are diminishing my child(ren)’s joy of learning,” families showed that 38.7% agree with that statement, that their child(ren)’s joy of learning is diminishing because of state testing, while 35.5% disagreed, 9.7% strongly disagreed, and 16.1% expressed no feelings. This shows me that families do not necessarily see diminished learning because of state testing. The percentages were close with families that agreed that they saw a diminished joy of learning and families that disagreed that their child(ren) had a diminished joy of learning because of state-mandated testing. This went along with what the students expressed in their survey. Students did not feel that their joy of learning was diminished because of testing; however, as we see in the next section, teachers did express that they think the students’ joy of learning is diminishing.



*Figure 10.* Results from the family survey, Question 5. “State-mandated assessments are diminishing my child(ren)’s joy of learning.”

### Teacher Survey

I administered 25 surveys to teachers, and I received 14 back from teachers. From the surveys gathered, I was able to analyze the data. In Question 1, “Do you find state testing: useful, somewhat useful, no opinion, not useful, or stressful,” teachers that returned the survey had similar responses whether state-mandated testing is not useful (35.7%), somewhat useful (35.7%), or stressful (28.6%). This shows me that more teachers find testing useful or somewhat useful. According to comments from teachers, one teacher stated, “Since the results come the

next year, it doesn't do me much good that year. Maybe it can help the next year's teacher."

Another teacher stated "It's a good baseline, but it is not the only thing I use to help students."

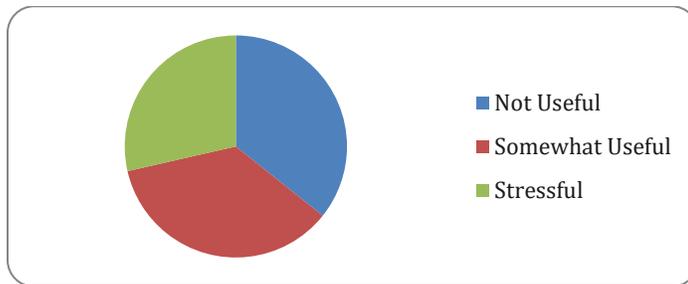


Figure 11. Results from the teacher survey, Question 1, "Do you find state testing: useful, somewhat useful, no opinion, not useful, or stressful."

In response to Question 2, "The frequency and amount of state-mandated assessment is stressful," a large number of teachers, 57.1%, agree, 35.7% strongly agree, and 7.1% expressed no opinions that the frequency and the amount of state-mandated testing is stressful. This shows me that a majority of the teachers did find that the amount of state-mandated testing was stressful. One teacher stated "We have to do testing for the district, and when you add on state-mandated tests, it increases the stress. It's too much for students."

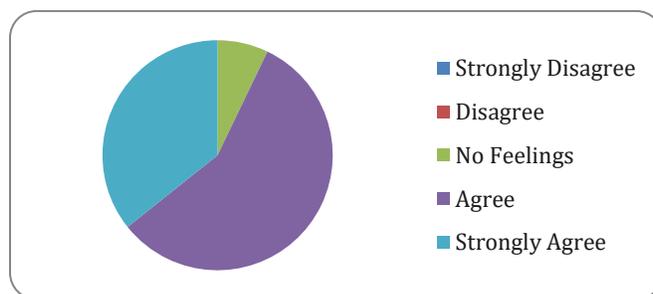


Figure 12. Results from the teacher survey, Question 2, "The frequency and amount of state-mandated assessment is stressful."

When responding to Question 3, "I have heard my students say that the state assessment requirements are fair and reasonable," 50% of teachers marked disagree, 42.9% marked strongly disagree, and 7.1% marked no opinion. This shows me that students have not expressed feelings about mandated tests being fair and reasonable to their teachers. Students may not have

expressed their feelings about the tests not being fair or reasonable because they were not aware of the requirements and were not sure of what is reasonable.

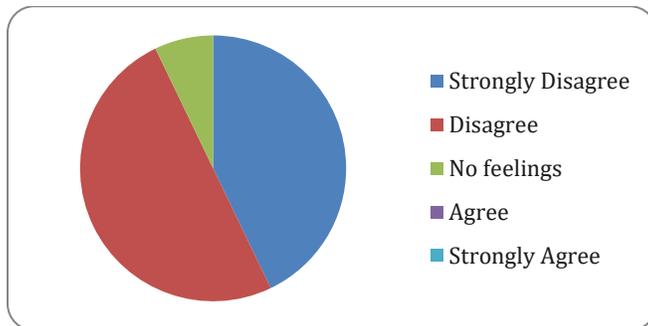


Figure 13. Results from the teacher survey, Question 3. “I have heard my students say that the state assessment requirements are fair and reasonable.”

I find it interesting that all teachers that submitted the survey agreed (35.7%) or strongly agreed (64.3%) in response to Question 4, “I see students experience frustration and anxiety on state-mandated assessment days,” that they saw students experience frustration and anxiety on assessment days. This was different than student responses for question number two on the student survey, “I get scared or nervous when taking these tests.” 22.8% strongly agreed and 29.3% agreed, equaling over half of the students surveyed agreed that they get scared or nervous when taking state assessments. This also supported that almost half of the families expressed that their student(s) experienced test anxiety.

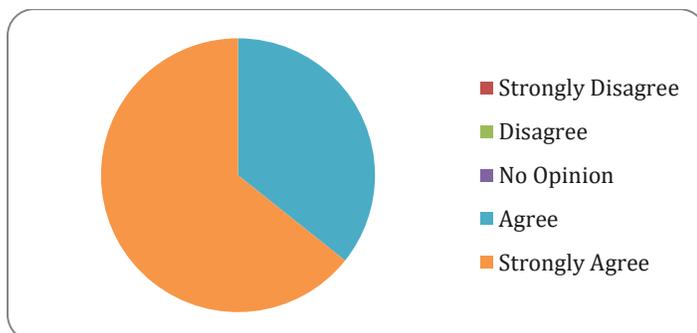
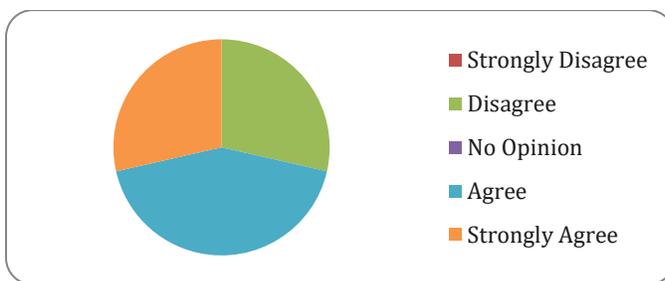


Figure 14. Results from the teacher survey, Question 4. “I see students experience frustration and anxiety on state-mandated assessment days.”

In answer to Question 5, “I don’t see joy in my students’ learning because of state-mandated testing,” many teachers responded that they mostly agree that they don’t see joy in students’ learning because of the amount of state-mandated testing. 28.6% disagreed, 28.6% strongly agreed, and 42.8% agreed. This shows me that teachers think their students are not enjoying learning because of the mandated state tests. However, students expressed that they do not feel that their joy of learning is diminishing because of state assessments, contradicting what the teachers said.



*Figure 15.* Results from the teacher survey, Question 5. “I don’t see joy in my students’ learning because of state-mandated testing,”

In response to Question 6, “State-mandated assessments are diminishing teacher joy of learning,” most teachers also strongly agreed that their joy of learning is diminishing because of state-mandated testing with 64.3% said they strongly agreed, 14.3% agree, 14.3% disagree, and 7.1% stated no opinion. This shows me that many teachers I surveyed are not enjoying teaching as much because of state-mandated testing. This could be because teachers are taking class time to teach how to take the assessments and letting students practice. This means that teachers are feeling like they are not enjoying teaching as much because of state testing. Because teachers have to take time out of their day to teach how to take a test, their joy of teaching is diminishing.

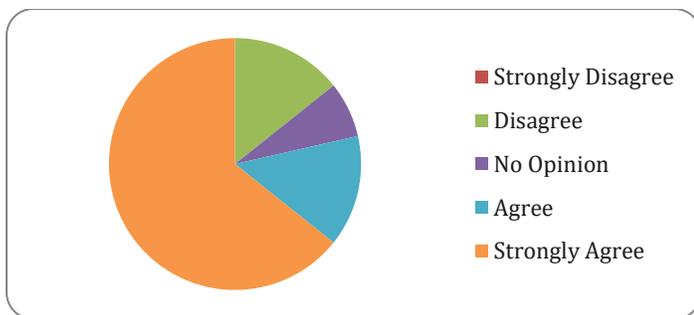


Figure 16. Results from the teacher survey, Question 6. “State-mandated assessments are diminishing teacher joy of learning,”

In answering Question 7, “State-mandated assessments are at an appropriate level for my students,” teachers also agreed that they believed the assessments were not at an appropriate level for students. 57.1% of teachers disagreed that the tests were at an appropriate level and 28.6% strongly disagreed. This means that almost all of the teachers that responded agreed that the state-mandated assessments were not an appropriate level for their students. 14.3% of teachers that responded expressed no opinion. This shows me that teachers felt that the state-mandated tests were not at an appropriate level for their students. Even though teachers said that the assessments were not at an appropriate level, students expressed that they understood how to take the assessments and that they felt good about themselves after the tests were complete.

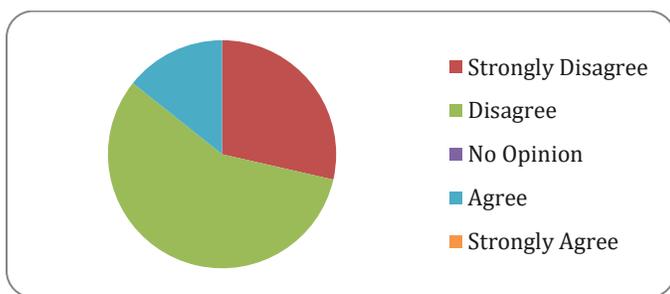


Figure 17. Results from the teacher survey, Question 7. “State-mandated assessments are at an appropriate level for my students,”

### Discussion

To research my question of, “Is state-mandated testing causing stress for students, families, and teachers?” I administered surveys to 144 students, 144 families, and 25 teachers. The data that I collected and evaluated suggests that students, families, and teachers experience some kind of stress related to state-mandated testing.

According to the surveys, students expressed that they feel anxious or scared while taking the assessments. However, to contradict that statement, students also expressed that they enjoyed taking the tests. This could be because teachers give little to no homework during assessment weeks. Students are also supplied snacks and gum on testing days, which does not happen during a typical school day. Students also get more breaks and are allowed to do other activities during the assessment weeks.

Teachers also expressed that they see their students stressing on testing days. Teachers also expressed that they, themselves, feel anxious or stressed. This could be because teachers feel that the assessments are not fair and are not at appropriate levels for students. One teacher stated, “Testing is difficult for students who are not performing at grade level. It can make them feel defeated.” Another teacher stated, “A majority of my students are below their grade level so state testing just causes frustration.” This supports a study done by Ward, Johnson, and Branson (2014), which discusses teachers are still expected to have similar or better results with different groups of students with unique abilities, and these students are also expected to perform on grade level each year.

I find it interesting that there were contradicting statements among students and teachers. Teachers expressed that they feel state assessments have diminished their students’ joy of learning; however, students did not agree with that statement. I believe that this could be

because, as a former teacher of a grade level that required state testing, I know that the students were not as motivated to practice for testing as they were for other things. Many times, when students were asked to take out their practice papers or to get their computer to practice, there would be many moans. Their posture would change as well. The student would sit hunched over or slip down into their chairs. Even with games and fun activities, I could see that the students did not enjoy it.

About half of the families that returned the survey felt that their child(ren) experienced stress. I think they are more of an observer of stress because the families are not in the classroom during the assessments. One family stated “Do families have anxiety waiting for the test results? Yes!” This could cause some stress because assessment results are distributed the next school year, several months after tests are completed. When listening and speaking with families at conferences, many families were concerned about the testing results of their student. They would ask about the percentile that their student fell in and wonder if they need to seek outside tutoring or services. When talking to the families, they seemed more concerned about it than the students did when the student and I would conference about their scores. I would get the previous year’s scores, and the student and I would discuss them. Many times students wouldn’t remember anything about the assessments, but the families would be anxious to see the scores at fall conferences.

### **Limitations**

One limitation I had with my research is that I only administered surveys to one school. I think I may have had a better understanding if the population was larger. I also think that I should have asked students that have had more experience taking state assessments. I surveyed those that have had one or two years of experience with testing. Some students answered most of

the questions with, “No feelings.” This could be because they didn’t really want to answer it. There was also one question that was on the next page, and a few students missed that question because they did not turn the paper over.

With only administering surveys to one school, I received 65% of student surveys back. Maybe if I would have administered the survey to a larger population, I would have a larger percent back. I received 57% of teacher surveys back and 27% of family surveys back. I think if I had given an online option to families and teachers, more surveys would have been returned. As a teacher, many times I would see a paper, set it aside to do later, but would accidentally forget about it or misplace it. If families and teachers would have it in their email, it could possibly help to remind them of the link.

Another limitation of the surveys was that they were anonymous. Because of this, I was not able to go back to the respondent and ask them some follow up questions, or to ask them to clarify what they wrote. I would have liked to ask a few of the teachers what they meant about some things that they wrote. I also would have like to speak to a few students to let them explain to me why they marked an answer the way they did.

A limitation that I had, but would like to do if given an opportunity, is to survey administrators. I know that administrators give teachers resources to practice with their students because test scores need to improve. There were times teachers and administration would have meetings to brainstorm ideas on how to raise scores for the school or district. As a teacher, this made me feel stressed because I know that my students had to perform well, which reflected me as a teacher, and then my principal as our administrator. I would like to have received insight into how principals and other administrators feel about the state-mandated assessments. I had always wondered if they would get as stressed as teachers or if they would be more stressed.

### **Conclusion**

This research aimed at identifying if students, families, and teachers experienced stress with state mandated testing. Based on a quantitative analysis of surveys, it can be concluded that students, teachers, and families do experience some kind stress. Students and teachers experience the stress, while families more observe stress. This indicates that state mandated testing can cause stress and anxiety for students, teachers, and families.

I used a quantitative study because I relied on the teacher, parent, and student responses on a survey. I chose a paper survey instead of an online survey because not all families have access to a computer or internet. A paper survey allowed all participants to have a chance to fill out a survey. I administered 144 surveys to students and families, and 25 surveys to teachers. I received 65% of surveys back from students, 57% of surveys back from teachers, and 27% of surveys back from families.

From my analysis, I was able to show that teachers, students, and families show or feel stress during state mandated testing. Even though students stated that they felt nervous or scared, they stated they enjoyed taking the assessments. This could be because they like the lesser amount of homework during testing weeks, or because they like the snacks and gum that are given to them during the testing weeks.

As we can see from some the literature teachers feel stress because they have to be sure their students achieve grade level goals, even though the students are not all at the same levels of learning (Ward, Johnson, & Branson, 2014.) Teachers expressed that they felt the assessments were not fair for all students. Some teachers felt this causes frustration for students, causing stress for teachers. Some teachers also stated that they don't feel the state mandated tests are as

useful because they do not get the results back until the next school year, and by then, they have moved on to the next grade level.

Families stated that they do think the amount of state-mandated testing causes stress to their child(ren). The families are not in the classroom to see first-hand what the school day is like with testing. Families expressed that they observe the stress with their child(ren). A family also stated that they felt anxious and stressed while they were waiting for the test results to come back.

In the future, this research needs to be done on a larger scale. The population size should be larger, giving a larger sample size. It would also be beneficial to do in-person interviews so that answers can be expanded and give more details. Participants can clarify questions if they are unsure, and the researcher can be sure that all parts of the survey are answered. It is important to pay attention to teachers' and students' mental health as some experience stress and anxiety with the amount of state-mandated testing.

Now that awareness has been made that students, teachers, and families experience stress with state-mandated testing, actions should be made to lessen the stress. One recommendation could be to prepare students to take mandated testing. Teachers and families could practice with students and have discussions about why students chose the answers they did. Teachers and families could understand more about the way their students think. Families could also be sure to have routines at home that will help with having a calm morning and evening when testing is going on. Teachers and families could also teach students coping skills for when they do feel stress or frustration during state mandated testing. Schools and families can work together to decrease stress and frustration.

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**Appendix A****Teacher Survey**

Ashley Retz Thesis Study  
Eastern Illinois University  
Due by Monday November 18

**Grade Level Taught:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Years teaching at this grade level:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Number of years teaching altogether:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please comment below on your level of agreement or disagreement with the statements about testing:**

**Do you find state testing: (Check one)**  
 very useful     somewhat useful     not useful     harmful

**Please explain your choice:**

**Have you altered your curriculum to prepare students for testing? (Check one)**  
 Not at all  
 Small amount  
 Modest amount  
 A great deal

**Please explain your choice:**

**Read each statement carefully. Choose one.**

**The frequency and amount of state mandated assessment is appropriate.**  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**Students perceive site, district, or state mandated assessment requirements as fair and reasonable.**  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**Students experience test anxiety on state mandated assessment days.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree +

**State mandated assessments are diminishing student joy of learning.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**State mandated assessments are diminishing teacher joy of learning.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**State mandated assessments are at an appropriate level for my students.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**Comments:**

**Appendix B****Student Survey**

Ashley Retz Thesis Study  
Eastern Illinois University  
Due by Monday November 18

**Grade Level:** \_\_\_\_\_

**This survey is to say how you feel about state testing.**

**Please choose one option for each question.**

**I enjoy taking the tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**I get scared or nervous when taking these tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**I can think clearly when I take these tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**I try to stay home so that I don't have to take these tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**I understand how to take these tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**At the end of each test, I feel good about myself.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**I talk to my parents about how I feel about these tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**My parents talk to me about the tests.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**Taking the tests do not upset me in any way.**

**Agree**     **Disagree**     **No feelings**

**Appendix C****Family Survey**

Ashley Retz Thesis Study  
Eastern Illinois University  
Due by Monday November 18

**Grade Level(s) of student(s): \_\_\_\_\_**

**My child receives free or reduced lunch/breakfast at school**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

**Please mark below your agreement or disagreement with the statements about testing:**

**The frequency and amount of state mandated assessment is appropriate.**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

**My student(s) perceive state mandated assessment requirements as fair and reasonable.**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

**My student(s) experience test anxiety on state mandated assessment days.**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

**State mandated assessments are diminishing my student(s) joy of learning.**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

**State mandated assessments are at an appropriate level for my student(s).**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

**I spend time with my student(s)n discussing state mandated testing.**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

**I believe state mandated testing is important for my student(s) learning.**

\_\_\_ Strongly Agree \_\_\_ Agree \_\_\_ Disagree \_\_\_ Strongly Disagree

## Appendix D



**Barkstall Elementary School**

Jessica Bradford, Principal  
Andrew Peralta, Assistant Principal

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2201 Hallbeck Dr. ♦ Champaign, IL 61822 ♦ (217) 373-5580

January 4, 2018

To the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at EIU,

This is a letter of permission for Ashley Retz to conduct a study involving 4th - 5th grade level students for a research project. The teacher is also Ashley Retz. Mrs. Retz wants to examine the perceptions of 4th - 5th grade level students and parents, and teachers about standardized testing. To do so, she will provide teachers, students and parents with an anonymous survey to be completed. Ashley Retz is a licensed, experienced professional under my leadership. I have agreed to both allow and oversee this.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at [bradfoje@u4sd.org](mailto:bradfoje@u4sd.org) or via phone at 217-369-4755.

Jessica Bradford  
Barkstall Principal