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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LEAP): A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF LOUISIANA'S HIGH STAKES TESTING POLICY, by ERICA DECUIR, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

THE LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LEAP): A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF LOUISIANA'S HIGH STAKES TESTING POLICY

by

Erica L. DeCuir

High stakes testing is popularly examined in educational research, but contemporary analyses tend to reflect a qualitative or quantitative research design (e.g., Au, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Gamble, 2010). Exhaustive debate over the relative success or failure of high stakes testing is often framed between competing visions of epistemological constructs, and the historical foundations of high stakes testing policies are rarely explored. The origins of high stakes testing can be traced to local school reform efforts in states like Louisiana, and investigating the roots of high stakes testing at the state level contextualizes the national debate on student assessment in research and scholarship.

Using historical research methods, this project details the local campaign to implement the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) as Louisiana's comprehensive high stakes testing program. Enacted under state law in 1986, the LEAP is a series of K-12 student assessments aligned to prescriptive state standards. The LEAP is among the nation's longest comprehensive high stakes testing programs and is the centerpiece to Louisiana's school accountability system. The narrative of its development offers critical insight into the overarching rationales for high stakes testing that continue to drive accountability policies throughout the country. This study

interweaves sociological and political history into a singular chronological record of the LEAP. Historical research methodology informs this study by establishing the basis for data collection and analysis. Historical research method is the systematic collection and evaluation of primary source data in order to determine trends, causes, or effects of past events (Gay, 1996; Lucey, 1984). Methods used in this research investigation include document analysis and oral history interviews. Multiple data sources are used to gain a thorough understanding of the historical context surrounding the implementation of the LEAP. The LEAP functions as both a student assessment program and policy of school accountability, and the story of its development is an important narrative within the field of high stakes testing research and scholarship.

THE LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LEAP): A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF LOUISIANA'S HIGH STAKES TESTING POLICY

by

Erica L. DeCuir

A Dissertation

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My work is dedicated to the founders and teachers at McDonogh #35 Senior High School in New Orleans, Louisiana. I too, am America.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Defining the Problem

Educational researchers have devoted extensive study to the applications, effects, and implications of high stakes testing. Many researchers criticize high stakes testing for narrowing curriculum and imposing "drill and kill" methods in classroom practice (e.g., Au, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Kozol, 2006; McNeil, 2001; Ravitch, 2010). Surveys of K-12 teacher perceptions are consistent with the findings in this line of research, and they often indicate teachers' contradictory views toward high stakes assessments (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Jones & Egley, 2006; Wellman, 2007), despite the tests' strong influence on instructional decisions (Faulkner & Cook, 2006; White, Sturtevant & Dunlap, 2003). By contrast, those researching positive trends in student test scores found evidence of increased academic performance for racial minorities (Roach, 2006) and lower-income students (Flesche, 2008; Winters, 2008). In respect to the legitimacy of high stakes testing as authentic models of student assessment, researchers have also examined issues of validity and reliability (Hattie, Jaeger, & Bond, 1999; Moss, 1994; Popham, 2008).

Prior research on high stakes testing tends to reflect a methodological approach consistent with either a qualitative or quantitative design. Exhaustive debate over the relative success or failure of high stakes testing is often framed between competing visions of epistemological and theoretical constructs, and the historical foundations of high stakes testing policies are rarely explored. Few research studies ask the critical and

overarching questions such as: Why is high stakes testing popularly regarded as a valid assessment of student learning and policy of school accountability? Where did high stakes testing originate and what are the lasting implications of its development? Who were instrumental in campaigning for high stakes testing and why did they support it? High stakes testing continues a very long tradition of standards-based curricula and testing in the United States, but the most immediate origins of this national movement can be traced to local school reform efforts in states like Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. The philosophy and rationale underlying high stakes testing took root within these states, and uncovering the foundations of high stakes testing at the state level contextualizes the national debate on student assessment in research and scholarship.

Overview of the Study

Using historical research methodology, I examine how and why the LEAP was established as a high stakes testing program in Louisiana's public schools. The LEAP program was first enacted under state law in 1986 and included an assortment of K-12 assessments aligned to prescriptive state standards. The law required local school systems to use the LEAP K-8 assessments as a principal criterion in promotional decisions, but local school officials retained final authority in student promotion. Successful scores on the LEAP eleventh grade test, called the graduate exit exam (GEE), were required to receive a high school diploma in public schools throughout the state. The LEAP was redesigned under state law in 1999 as Leap for the 21st Century (LEAP 21), and it became the centerpiece to the state's new school accountability system. The LEAP 21 program introduced more rigorous testing and increased the stakes associated

with student failure. All fourth and eighth graders who failed the LEAP 21 tests were automatically retained regardless of classroom performance or teacher recommendations for promotion. Schools and school districts with a high number of student failures faced financial sanctions or even state takeover. In this dissertation study, I identify key actors and significant events that contributed to the development and implementation of the LEAP. I also explore popular rationales that supported the LEAP as a valid assessment of student learning and policy of school accountability. Finally, I examine the implications of LEAP's development and the lasting effects on Louisiana students and communities.

Significance of the Study

Educational reform initiatives at the state level have predictive value for national educational policy. The Texas accountability system is often regarded as the model for the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that authorizes standardized curriculum and assessment programs in every state (Nelson, McGhee, Meno, & Slater, 2007). In early 2010, the Florida state legislature passed a landmark bill to eliminate tenure for all beginning teachers and align teacher pay to student performance on standardized tests (Hafenbrack & Postal, 2010). Although Florida's governor vetoed the merit pay bill under intense pressure from educators, national support for merit pay escalated as a result of the political debate in Florida. Using merit pay to evaluate teacher performance and salary was later made a criterion for the 2010 Race to the Top federal grant program, which awarded $4 billion dollars to school districts and states throughout the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Much is known about Texas and Florida's school accountability programs and their potential to impact national education policy, but little

has been researched on local educational initiatives in Louisiana.

In 2001, Louisiana became the first state to deny student promotion at the fourth and eighth grade level, and to deny a high school diploma, to those students who failed the LEAP 21/GEE state assessment (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Louisiana also imposed financial sanctions on low-performing schools and school districts as a part of LEAP 21. In 2004 the nationally-recognized educator magazine, *Education Week*, awarded Louisiana its top rating for standards and accountability and distinguished Louisiana's accountability-via-assessment policy as an example for others to follow (Skinner, 2004). In 2005, citing a history of poor LEAP test scores, the Louisiana Legislature voted to terminate all employees in the New Orleans Parish Schools (NOPS) system following Hurricane Katrina. Legislators created a hybrid school district in New Orleans consisting of traditional and charter schools operated by two different school boards: The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) operates about 12 mostly high performing schools in the city, and the Recovery School District (RSD) operates about 107 mostly low-performing schools in the city. Charter schools outnumber traditional schools in a ratio of 3:1 in both districts, and charter schools are managed by a hodgepodge of private companies, private individuals, and educational management organizations (EMOs). On its website the RSD states that it promotes "a system of autonomous school districts that are held accountable" and "business practices to ensure effectiveness and high standards" in fulfilling the mission for student improvement in struggling schools (Louisiana Department of Education "The Recovery School District, About the RSD," 2008). The hybridization of school districts in governance and operational structure found in New Orleans (i.e. local vs. state, traditional vs. charter, public vs. private) is a novel idea and

Louisiana is poised to lead the nation in redefining the operational control of public schools and the role of local communities within it.

Serious implications arise from using the LEAP to determine student promotion and graduation, school financing and school quality, and now with the RSD, school operations and governance. It is essential to identify how and why school accountability-via-assessment was adopted in Louisiana to determine the impact of the LEAP in improving teaching and student learning. An informed understanding of the historical foundations and rationales used to implement the LEAP contextualizes its relative success or failure in contemporary discourse on school reform. Before Louisiana accountability policies can be replicated in other areas around the country, the LEAP deserves critical historical analysis as a model of student assessment and policy of school accountability.

Conceptual Framework

Historical research is anchored by the collection and evaluation of primary source data to formulate historical accounts of the past. It relies on the authenticity of primary documents to draw inferences and interpretations based on patterns or relationships in history. Historical researchers "subordinate historical facts to an interpretive framework within which those facts are given meaning and significance" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 413). The procedures for conducting historical research are similar to other types of research paradigms: identify a topic or problem, formulate research questions, collect data, interpret data, and produce a verbal synthesis of the findings or interpretations (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 226). Garrahan (1946) attaches precision to primary source data

collection by identifying six levels of inquiry: date, localization, authorship, analysis, integrity, and credibility. The levels of inquiry constitute external criticism that eliminates the use of false evidence in historical analysis (Shafer, 1974). They also help to establish authenticity of collected data. Gay & Airasian (2000) offer four factors in considering the accuracy of primary documents, or internal criticism. First, the author of the document should be determined as a competent person knowledgeable about the event or occurrence under review. Second, the time delay should be noted in evaluating each data source. An observation or field notes written while the event is occurring (school board meeting minutes) or shortly after (diaries) are more likely to be accurate than recollections of those events many years later. Third, the bias and motives of the author should be considered in establishing the aims, audience, and purpose of the document. Finally, each piece of evidence should be compared with all others to determine the degree of agreement or validation (p. 229-230). In synthesizing historical evidence, the concluding hypothesis must have greater explanatory power for the nature or course of facts than any competing explanation (McCullagh, 1984).

Historical research is used to construct a perspective from the historical record that advances or clarifies our understanding of historical foundations and current events. Primary source collection and interpretation is the core of historical research method (Grigg, 1991). A conceptual framework of historical research informs this study by establishing the basis for data collection and analysis. Because the goal of this study is to determine the foundations of the LEAP, conclusions are derived from the interplay of historical interpretation and the context of primary source data collected from archival records and oral history interviews. A historical perspective of the LEAP is made from

primary source data analysis in both textual and non-textual forms.

Methodology

Historical research method is the systematic collection and evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to determine trends, causes, or effects of these events (Gay, 1996; Lucey, 1984). Methods used in this study include document analysis and oral history interviews. Document analysis involves collecting and analyzing primary source data. Data are then evaluated as a credible source and used to draw inferences or assumptions directed toward the historian's ends (Berkhofer, 2008). Objects are collected and classified into three data categories: physical material versus textual, written versus other media (film, sound), and personal versus institutional (p. 6-8). Documents are identified as credible sources by evaluating the relationship between the source and original activity in the arrangement and preservation of materials (Grigg, 1991, p. 233). Primary source data, whether it is a testimony, photograph, or government report, is examined through sourcing, inference, and interpretation. Multiple perspectives of historical events are acknowledged; first-hand accounts are produced with a particular aim and audience in view (McCullough & Richardson, 2000). Document analysis answers specific research questions that involve foundations, patterns, and descriptions of historical events and figures.

Oral history interviews complement document analysis as another method for obtaining primary source data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Oral history is used to supplement, not replace, the documentary record. Oral history is recorded as social history and measures the impact of larger political and economic events on local communities and cultures (Sharpless, 2008). Shafer (1974) advanced criteria for

evaluating eyewitness testimony in oral history interviews. He emphasized the distinction between real and literal meaning of an author's statements as well as the credibility and contradictions of an author's words. Standardized, open-ended interviews help to minimize interviewer effects, establish systematic questions for data analysis, and emphasize focused responses to research questions (Patton, 1990). Interviews are reviewed a second time using categories developed by the researcher. Oral history interviews provide a rich illustration of the historical record that complements document analysis. They serve to recount historical events, provide testimony, explain behavior, and establish multiple or contrary perspectives for a historical event.

Data Sources and Data Collection Methods

In determining the historical and legislative roots of the LEAP, I collected an extensive range of data sources. Data sources include official reports from the Louisiana Department of Education, the State Superintendent of Schools, Louisiana State Legislature, and Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE); press releases and minutes from local school board meetings and town hall meetings; and various court briefings. Academic literature, newspaper journalism, television scripts, and other media reports are used to supplement government and policy reports. Published accounts of the LEAP authored by teachers, parents, students, administrators, policy analysts, and journalists are also examined.

The oral history interviews reveal first-hand accounts from past students and teachers who were present in Louisiana schools as the LEAP was announced and implemented. Participants were active in the LEAP debates, witnessed its implementation in local schools, and are knowledgeable of its effects on teaching and

learning. Participants were chosen from a list of teachers and students who emerged as important actors from the LEAP archival data. The list was narrowed by eliminating deceased individuals, individuals who lacked requisite mental faculties, persons who declined to take part in the study, and those whose correspondence information could not be located. A total of six (6) participants were interviewed using Skype video calling or via the telephone. Each participant was interviewed singularly using a standardized, open-ended form. Interview transcripts were transcribed and arranged for data analysis.

Data Analysis

First, I collected and arranged archival data into three data categories: physical material versus textual, written versus other media (film and sound), and personal versus institutional. Second, I evaluated data to infer the authenticity of each document, the packaging and location of the document's source, and the context or perspective of the document's source. To perform document analysis, I drew from Garrahan's (1946) six levels of inquiry that constitute external criticism. I began by certifying the date, localization, author, and credibility of each document by collecting the documents from official depositories of the document's source. For example, biographies of Louisiana state senators were received from the archives of the Louisiana Senate, and LEAP test scores for urban school districts were obtained from press releases of the Louisiana Department of Education. I confirmed the integrity of the document by researching the authorship and relationship to the source. The author's relationship to the source indicates the legitimacy of the author as a competent person knowledgeable about the information provided in the document. For example, a summary of Louisiana's Competency-Based Act was obtained by the Official Journal of the State and certified in records belonging to

the official archives of the Louisiana State Congress. To analyze documents from secondary sources such as *The Times Picayune* newspaper, I separated editorial opinions from official reporting on topics such as test scores and election results. Within this dissertation, I identified newspaper articles as editorial opinions, interviews, or test scores released by state education officials.

Since my research topic involves a historical event that occurred over three decades earlier, it is important to outline the data analysis for oral history interviews. To establish internal criticism, I relied on Gay & Airasian's (2000) model for establishing accuracy of primary source information. There is significant time delay between the 1986 creation of the LEAP and the interviews I conducted in 2010. Because of the time delay, I carefully selected interview participants that were both competent and knowledgeable about events associated with the LEAP. I narrowed interview data to the information that directly illustrated important events in the historical record I uncovered from archival sources. I then compared interview responses included in this dissertation with all other evidence to determine the degree of validation. I analyzed both the interview and archival data to establish historical patterns, establish congruence in the historical record, and obtain verification. Finally, data was arranged so that a historical account emerges with explanatory power to illustrate a broad conception of the research focus guiding the study.

Definition of Terms

Educational policy: a mandate created by a legislative or institutional body that involves schooling and education

Excellence rationale: a theory of school improvement that promotes a universal standard of academic excellence in all schools regardless of socioeconomic status

High stakes testing: used interchangeably with high stakes assessments; refers to state-administered student assessment programs that establish punitive consequences for low student performance on standardized assessments

Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE): an administrative, policymaking body for elementary and secondary schools in Louisiana; BESE supervises school operations and management of public schools in Louisiana

Minimum Foundation Formula: The financing formula set by BESE to determine the annual costs of school financing in Louisiana; Louisiana Legislature approves the amount of the Minimum Foundation Program annually and BESE appropriates school funding accordingly

School accountability: an educational agenda that requires students, parents, teachers, school and district leaders to accept responsibility for student achievement on standardized tests through incentives and sanctions

Standards-based reform: an educational agenda that promotes standardized curriculum and assessments in local schools to raise academic performance on national and international achievement tests

Organization of Chapters

The remainder of this dissertation includes four subsequent chapters. In chapter two, I review the State Supervisory Program as Louisiana's first standardized curriculum and assessment program. The Louisiana Department of Education established the State Supervisory Program in 1921 to promote Anglo-American language and culture throughout the state. Student achievement testing, though limited to certain schools, was an important feature of the State Supervisory Program and tied Louisiana to the national testing movement that gained footing in the early 20th century. In chapter three, I examine the political and social foundations of high stakes testing in Louisiana and the excellence rationale that emerged as the founding principles of the LEAP. Together, chapters two and three provide a chronological overview of educational testing in Louisiana through state policy action, and serves to contextualize the story of LEAP within a larger framework of national and state testing practices. In chapter four, I detail the actions of local political and school leaders to establish the LEAP as a high stakes testing program. I also review legal challenges to the LEAP graduate exit exam (GEE) and the dual system of high school graduation requirements that resulted. Key architects of Louisiana's accountability system are introduced—former Governor Mike Foster, former Superintendent Cecil Picard, former BESE member-turned Superintendent Paul Pastorek, and former BESE member Leslie Jacobs. These political leaders spearheaded the LEAP for the 21st century Program (LEAP 21) that instituted both rigorous assessments and stringent accountability policies that define the LEAP program in present-day Louisiana. I conclude this historical analysis of the LEAP in chapter five by examining the implications of this high stakes testing policy in Louisiana.

CHAPTER 2

THE STATE SUPERVISORY PROGRAM: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN LOUISIANA

In the previous chapter, the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) is introduced as a critical high stakes testing policy that warrants meaningful historical analysis. In this chapter I examine the Louisiana State Supervisory Program as an antecedent of high stakes testing and the LEAP. In the early 1920s, state leaders developed the Supervisory Program as an educational policy to promote cultural assimilation of Louisiana's heterogeneous population. The State Supervisory Program emphasized Anglo-American cultural norms through standardized curriculum and assessment applied unevenly in racially segregated schools. I also situate Louisiana's State Supervisory Program within the larger national testing movement in the early 20th century. Louisiana's assessment policy differed somewhat from the national testing movement in terms of its scope, but rationales for the systematic use of standardized testing in public schools were similar. The national testing movement was advanced by educational psychologists and grew in popularity because of three reasons: hereditarianism, scientific experimentation, and social efficiency. Louisiana educational leaders embraced the State Supervisory Program for those same reasons, but fundamental values toward public education made Louisiana's testing program distinct. Louisiana's deep roots in French colonialism, Catholicism, and slavery, greatly influenced the scope of its State Supervisory Program and the unique educational structure that resulted.

Public Education in Louisiana

Public education in Louisiana has an interesting background story that began in the early 1800s with its first governor, William C. Claiborne (Hebert, 1999; Noble, 1999). When Claiborne arrived in Louisiana shortly after the transfer of the Louisiana Purchase, he found a polyglot population of French, African, Native American, and Spanish blends who were somewhat united in their disdain for the imposed English government. Schooling followed the traditional French model of private boarding schools, tutors, and apprenticeships for wealthy and upper-class families, with no provisions for the common masses. By law it was illegal to teach slaves to read or write, and thus about two-thirds of the population were forcibly illiterate. The free Black community received schooling from Catholic institutions and private schools, and their efforts established the largest literate Black community in the United States prior to the Civil War (Alberts, 1999). Free Blacks often received education that was both practical and political; education was secured for the collective advancement of Blacks both politically and economically (Mitchell, 2000). Small bands of Native Americans also received some religious and literacy instruction through Catholic monasteries that began under Spanish rule in Louisiana (Noble, 1999).

For Governor Claiborne, however, public schooling was the key agent to the Americanization of Louisiana. He was aware of the desperate need to “educate, indoctrinate, and Americanize a largely foreign, partly hostile population” (Suarez, 1999, p. 65). He pursued public education as a way to homogenize Louisiana’s eclecticism under the auspices of American language and culture. He sought legislation for the provision of public education through general taxation but he was unable to secure the

support of the powerful Creole elite, whose youth were educated in private Catholic schools. Discontent soon arose over school financing and the cultural imposition of Protestantism and the English language. As a result, the movement for public education languished until 1847 when the Anglo-Saxon population began to outnumber the Creole population. In 1847 the state legislature passed the first statewide public school law, which supported the establishment of public schools through general taxation (Hilton, Shipp, & Gremillion, 1999). Unfortunately, the fledgling school system did not gather much traction until 1877. The years 1847-1877 were marked by continual disruption from the Civil War and Reconstruction, when public schools were abandoned due to financial despair and the absence of educational leadership at the state and local level. Newly freed Blacks eagerly attended the schools of the Freedmen‘s Bureau during Reconstruction, but White resentment toward Northern control and integrated facilities led to a White boycott (p. 144).

Following Reconstruction, Louisiana schools obtained substantial support through state legislative action and local taxation (Hilton, Shipp, & Gremillion, 1999). The General School Act of 1877 and the Constitution of 1898 provided for the Louisiana Department of Education and Louisiana Superintendent of Schools. Soon after, steps were taken to centralize Louisiana school leadership under the parish and state leaders--as opposed to local authorities in towns and cities--in the General School Acts of 1912 and 1916. Together, these legislative acts authorized the Louisiana Department of Education to maintain the general supervision of school operations and financial appropriations. However, a particular emphasis of the Louisiana Department of Education was in creating uniform standards for curriculum, graduation, and student assessment.

Standardizing Curriculum and Instruction

Similar to other states in the Deep South, White Louisiana residents maintained deep-seated beliefs of White supremacy and Black subservience well after the federal constitutional ban on slavery. These beliefs resonated sharply within the educational system and were a central factor in the dual system of racially segregated schools that later emerged. The earliest activities of the Louisiana Department of Education (henceforth called the LDE) included consolidating local control, establishing institutes for teacher training, supervising instruction and curriculum development, and certifying high school diplomas (Alexander, 1940; Ives, 1999). Teacher training institutes began in the mid-1880s under direction of the Peabody Board. In 1899, then-State Superintendent Joseph A. Breaux "decried the lack of uniformity in the whole educational movement" and sought to manage teacher training and certification (Alexander, 1940, p. 10). State legislators soon gave authority to the LDE to conduct one-week summer training institutes for White teachers on a voluntary basis (although, teachers who did not attend forfeited one day's pay). The training institutes followed a prescribed schedule of instruction that targeted subject matter and methods. The institutes also imposed a list of basic ideas that emphasized the practical nature of schooling and the role of education in increasing "efficiency in all of the activities of life" (p. 17).

The LDE consolidated local control by merging White one-room schools into single parish schools and placing the appointment of parish school supervisors under their authority (Alexander, 1940; Rogers, 1936). The parish supervisor's role was to oversee instruction within the parish schools and evaluate whether certain standards were met in the elementary, junior high, and high school classrooms. In doing so, there was some

semblance of curriculum sequencing that provided for seamless transition between grade levels. The parish supervisors often created evaluation guides that were distributed to teachers in advance of classroom visits. For example, in 1923 the high school supervisor distributed a chart of nine teaching techniques in an attempt to promote their standard use in high schools (Alexander, 1940, p. 49). According to the 1929 manual, *Louisiana High School Standards, Organization, and Administration,* principals were urged to make no changes in the subjects offered or curriculum sequence (p. 51). The course of study for the high school included an emphasis on practical and agricultural courses alongside studies in English, American and Louisiana history.

Keeping in line with the fervor to develop uniform curricula and sequencing in the White system of schooling, great care was made to develop a standard course of study for Black schools. Black education was viewed suspiciously by many White Louisiana residents, especially White planters who relied on Black sharecropping labor to finance local economies. Only through public campaigns by John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board and the LDE to reassure White communities about the "special" curriculum for Blacks, did White attitudes change. In a 1918 bulletin entitled, "Aims and Needs of the Negro Public Education in Louisiana," the LDE stated the curriculum for Blacks would teach students how to perform duties "the world wants done" (Chujo, 1999, p. 310). Curriculum in both the elementary and secondary schools stressed agriculture, home economics, and limited literacy instruction. For Black elementary students, school terms were shortened to correspond with the planting season. The first four terms offered basic literacy instruction, the following four terms concentrated on American and Louisiana history, geography, and hygiene, and the last two terms focused on industrial

arts such as cooking and canning. Curriculum at the high school level almost exclusively stressed general and industrial education. The first two years offered courses on English language, American and Louisiana history, and industrial science. The last two years offered courses in manual trades and teacher training. Of the high school courses, a Black teacher in Caddo Parish concluded: “They want us to teach the children such things as shoe shining, waiting tables and….maid service” (as quoted in Johnson, 1997, p. 149).

Louisiana had the distinction of being the only state in the county to differentiate a separate, yet standardized curriculum exclusively for Blacks (Chujo, 1999, p. 310). A dual system of racially segregated schools maintained the color line entrenched during Louisiana’s colonial years, and the curricular emphasis on English language, history, and culture reflects the continuous attempt to Americanize Louisiana’s diverse population. However, the concern for standardization, industrial education, and practical living tied Louisiana to the larger Industrial Revolution dominating the nation. The State Supervisory Program embraced Industrial-era values but maintained Louisiana’s traditional views on race, schooling and society reflected in its colonial history.

The State Supervisory Program (1920-1934)

Legendary state school superintendent, T.H. Harris, who served from 1908 -1940, is credited for the high degree of centralization in the Louisiana school system (Rogers, 1936). Even more influential than legislative action, Harris sought a strong state educational system and enlisted the cooperation of business, political, and professional groups to achieve that goal. For Harris, the most important function of the state department was classroom supervision (Alexander, 1940, p. 49) and he began the State

Supervisory Program as a comprehensive program to promote uniform standards in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. State testing was initiated by the high school supervisor as early as 1910, who prepared mid-semester tests in the state office and forwarded them to principals, who in turn were required to issue and report test results (p. 52). In 1917 the first standardized achievement tests, Ayres Spelling Scale, was administered by Mr. John Foote, assistant to T.H. Harris (Rogers, 1936, p. 26). By the 1920s, an ambitious plan for statewide testing in core subjects for all students was included as a function of the Supervisory Program.

A state testing program was popularized as early as 1916 and was implemented in the 1920-1921 school year (Rogers, 1936). A summary of the Supervisory Program for the 1920-1921 school year indicates that parish supervisors administered commercial standardized achievement tests in arithmetic, reading, and spelling "to measure the efficiency of teaching" (p. 30). In 1922 the state education department created its own statewide test for seventh-graders to assess student achievement, and by the 1929-1930 school year the state education department began preparing statewide benchmark tests in arithmetic every six weeks for grades two to seven (p. 33). In subsequent years, the statewide testing program was expanded so that a benchmark test for each subject was prepared for each grade (Alexander, 1940, p. 52). Benchmark tests were aligned to the standards set by the Louisiana Department of Education for approved elementary and secondary schools. Curriculum guides were provided for content and sequencing in each six-week period for reading, writing, and arithmetic. Participation in the statewide testing program was voluntary, but department officials actively sought school participation and test results were tabulated and announced by state department workers (Alexander, 1940,

p. 52). The tests were used to assess and monitor student achievement of curriculum standards set by the Louisiana Department of Education, but did not impact student promotion, school operations, or school funding. Subjects were tested randomly each six-week period, and schools were not apprised which subjects would be tested. In doing so, the Louisiana Department of Education sought to enforce its curriculum recommendations for scope and sequence:

> The first grade will not be given a test during the first six weeks. After that a test in reading will be given after the course of each six-week period. In other grades, a test will be prepared in one subject each period. No announcement will be made as to what subject or subjects will be selected for the test in any period. Each test will be based on the textbooks of the latest adoption and the limits of the test will be confined to subject matter outlined for the six-week period. (Rogers, 1936, p. 52)

Not all of the test scores received would be included in the official test averages for Louisiana. The Louisiana Department of Education made determinations about which schools would be included in the state average and those that would be excluded, but no criteria are listed about how department supervisors made their decisions. Also, scores were not distributed statewide nor available for comparison and ranking; parishes could only obtain copies of their students' test scores (Alexander, 1940; Rogers, 1936).

The centralization and uniformity of Louisiana public schools had been achieved through the efforts of the Louisiana Department of Education by 1930. The department approved a set of standards for both the elementary and secondary level and certified graduates from schools that adhered to the set standards. Parish and local supervisors

enforced uniform standards in curriculum, teaching, and assessment through the use of standard evaluations, teaching guides, and assessments. The statewide testing program, however, was later abandoned by the Louisiana Department of Education as an integral feature of its Supervisory Program. Statewide testing in the high school was discontinued in 1933 and later ended in the elementary schools in 1934. Reports from the State Superintendent attributed the discontinuation of the testing program to a lack of state funding, but Rogers (1936) speculated that the exact checking of curriculum progress was also a factor. Alexander (1940) suggested that the standards and accompanying tests were too narrow and definite, and needed to be developed in cooperation with teachers and students. There is some indication that the department officials also thought the standards were too rigid. Standards applied in approving elementary schools in the 1938-1939 school term emphasized a flexible curriculum study under general recommendations for each grade level. Specifying attainments of academic achievement through tests and evaluation was made secondary to curriculum study and instructional development in schools. The Louisiana Department of Education did not abandon its efforts to engender homogenous and uniform courses of study. Rather, instead of administering a statewide testing program to assess student achievement of prescribed curricula, the department shifted its focus to curriculum development in setting standards, furnishing curriculum materials, teacher training, and direct classroom supervision. At the close of the 1930s, Alexander (1940) described the state education department as directive, or one that provided for the “comprehensive curriculum planning and development involving almost universal organized study” (p. 112). Ives (1999) concurred, crediting Louisiana’s centralized school system to heavy state financing and

state legislative action. He concluded his examination of educational leadership in Louisiana by stating: “Who pays the fiddler calls the tune” (p. 250).

The State Supervisory Program demonstrates a founding principle of strong state leadership in the promotion of standardized curriculum and assessment. It also illustrates curriculum differentiation along racial lines, which limited Black schools to only rudimentary literacy and industrial education. A major reason for this distinction was the state’s dependence on Black sharecropping labor to support the traditional agricultural economy. Standardized curriculum and assessment policies institutionalized unequal curriculum tracts between Blacks and Whites, which extended to school financing and facilities as well. In doing so, Black educational achievements lagged sharply behind Whites and served to perpetuate stereotypes of White intellectual superiority. Louisiana’s achievement tests were used to promote assimilation and homogeneity as summative assessments, but nationally, standardized tests were used as diagnostic tools to place students into differentiated curriculum tracts. The national testing movement championed Industrial-era values for technology and efficiency to manage public schools, and to distinguish college-bound students from the factory labor force.

The National Testing Movement and Louisiana

The origins of both intelligence and standardized achievement testing in American schools can be traced to the scientific discoveries of early 20th century European psychologists (Galton, 1869; Binet & Simon, 1916; Stern, 1990). American educational psychologists imported standardization design and test development from Europe, and refined intelligence and achievement testing for mass production in

American schools. Boring (1950) described the American branch of psychology as one which inherited its "physical body from German experimentalism and its mind from Darwin" (p. 506). In particular, it was the combining of statistical measurement with the genetic approach to human nature that defined American educational psychology in both theory and practice during this period. Leaders of American educational psychology—Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman, Edward Thordike, and Robert Yerkes—all subscribed to hereditarianism or the belief in social Darwinism. Hereditarianism espoused to a racialized hierarchy of mental ability to explain social and racial inequities. These hereditarian views greatly influenced standardized testing designs and their implementation. Standardization required statistical tools often found in the realm of natural sciences, which granted intelligence and achievement testing a degree of validity and credibility within society.

Henry Goddard, an American eugenicist who completed his training in Europe, administered the first standardized intelligence tests in America in 1913 (Goddard, 1917). He tested newly arrived immigrants at Ellis Island, and identified nearly 80 percent of Jewish, Italian, Russian, and Hungarians as mentally retarded. His Ellis Island study substantiated eugenicists' cause for deportations and restrictions in federal immigration policy (Gould, 1981). Lewis Terman, who personified the concept of biological determinism, revised the 1911 intelligence scale developed by French-born Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon in 1916 (Terman, 1916). Terman modified the Binet-Simon scale by adding tests on English vocabulary and fables. He standardized the Binet-Simon scale using a sample of White, middle-class children in the Stanford University community to develop norms. Native Americans, Mexicans, and African-Americans were excluded

from the standardization sample. Terman developed the Stanford-Binet intelligence test based on his revisions to the Binet scale and results of his standardization sample. Used as the model for subsequent intelligence tests in the United States (Gould, 1981; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001), the Stanford-Binet tests were replicated in numerous studies and continually reported the genetic, mental superiority of Anglo-Europeans (e.g., Garth, 1925; Goodenough, 1926; Shuey, 1958).

Edward Thorndike completed some of the earliest work in standardized achievement testing (Raftery, 1988). Thorndike's specialty was the application of quantitative methodology to the field of learning theory. He sought to eliminate subjectivity and variability in the assessment of student achievement by designing a series of achievement tests standardized for teacher administration. The arithmetic test was introduced in 1908 and later joined by spelling (1910), handwriting and drawing (1913), reading (1914), and language ability (1916) (Raftery, 1988). Thorndike developed teacher word lists, dictionaries, and other instructional materials to assist teachers in improving student performance on the achievement tests. By the close of 1916, a host of standardized achievement tests had been developed and commercially marketed to schools and school systems (Gray, 1916). Not all of the early achievement tests were norm-referenced, but they usually involved standard procedures of administration and scoring.

During World War I, Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman, Edward Thorndike, and Robert Yerkes collaborated to create a series of intelligence tests for the United States Army. The army tests were the first mass-produced written tests of intelligence and were used to classify military placement. Terman, Thorndike, and Yerkes later developed the

National Intelligence Test (NIT) in 1920 based on their revisions to the army intelligence tests. Using similar techniques of norming and standardization (the NIT was also standardized using a sample of Whites only), the NIT was designed to identify intellectual capacity in schoolchildren as early as the first grade. Terman campaigned for mass intelligence testing in school systems as a mechanism for classifying students into differentiated curriculum tracks. For Terman, mass intelligence testing increased school efficiency because curriculum placement would be determined according to native ability (Terman, 1916).

Terman's graduate students led the first system-wide adoption of intelligence testing and curriculum differentiation in Oakland, California in 1919 (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). From Oakland, intelligence testing and curriculum differentiation extended to other school systems around the country. In 1926, the U.S. Department of the Interior surveyed the use of group intelligence tests and ability grouping at the elementary, junior high, and high schools levels. Drawing from data in 292 cities, it was reported that 85% of elementary schools, 70% of junior high schools, and 49% of high schools used intelligence tests to classify students into homogenous ability groups (as cited in Gould, 1981). By the 1950s, intelligence and achievement testing became institutionalized in American schools, and in many cases they were a central factor in curriculum placement, promotion, and graduation as found in Los Angeles (Raftery, 1988), Detroit (Angus & Mirel, 1993), and Santa Fe (Mondale & Patton, 2001).

Nationally, intelligence and achievement tests were used to aid curriculum placement and differentiation. Major cities faced rapidly growing, ethnically diverse student populations that contrasted sharply to the demographics of older and established

private schools. The tests allowed school officials to place students in homogenous ability groups that aligned to their educability as indicated by intelligence and achievement test scores. In Louisiana, race was the distinguishing factor in curriculum study rather than standardized test scores. However, leading rationales for the systematic use of testing both nationally and in Louisiana were the same. The three reasons for systematic use of intelligence and achievement testing were hereditarianism, scientific experimentation, and social efficiency. Hereditarianism resonated sharply with commonly-held beliefs in Louisiana because it espoused to the supremacy of Anglo-American language, history, and culture. Early intelligence and achievement tests were standardized using norms developed from an almost exclusively all-White, middle-class sample population (Price, 1934). The tests were heavily marked by language ability, vocabulary, and behaviors established by the test developer and considered "normal" for the sample. Testing results repeatedly revealed the superiority of American-born Whites over foreigners and racial minorities, which fit neatly with Louisiana values for racially segregated schools and Anglo-American language and culture.

Also, the technological savvy inherent to standardized tests afforded them a degree of legitimacy both nationally and in Louisiana. For the founder-psychologists, the integration of statistical methods was vital to the level of rigor needed to advance educational testing in the mainstream. According to Goodenough (1950), Thorndike popularized his work in standardized achievement tests as a rigorous application of quantitative methods. Yerkes also "equated rigor and science with numbers and quantification," and believed intelligence testing would propel psychology as an established science "worthy of financial and institutional support" (Gould, 1981, p. 223).

In an advertisement for the National Intelligence Tests reprinted by Gould (1981), the tests were promoted to have undergone “careful analysis by a statistical staff” (p. 208). The posting also stated that the tests were “simple in application, reliable, and immediately useful for classifying children in Grades 3 to 8 with respect to intellectual ability” (p. 208). The psychologists gained legitimacy for intelligence and achievement testing as an extension of quantitative methodology already found in the natural sciences and well-established as scientific rigor. The promotion of statistical methods within test construction and development served as a popular rationale for the system-wide implementation of intelligence and achievement testing in American schools. Test scores carried a degree of certitude and public confidence that seemingly assured policymakers and school leaders of trustworthy results.

Perhaps the strongest rationale for the large-scale implementation of intelligence and achievement testing in schools was that the tests served to increase social efficiency. Kliebard (2004) succinctly describes the social efficiency ideal in the early twentieth century not only as an educational doctrine, but a societal urgency. Social efficiency reformers sought radical changes in school policy to meet direct social and economic needs of society. They argued that a classical liberal education lacked direct utility for large and diverse student populations. Instead, practical and vocational education was necessary to safeguard American identity and institutions from rapid urbanization and immigration. Advanced by sociologists John Franklin Bobbitt (1912) and David Snedden (1919), social efficiency leaders sought to integrate schools more closely within the fabric of existing and desired social structures. The first mass-produced intelligence tests created by Terman, Thorndike, and Yerkes for the United States army were premised on

a “particular conception of the good society and a particular attitude toward the nature of intelligence” (Spring, 1972, p. 13). The measurement of intelligence was based upon psychologists’ conception of the good society and the good man (p. 13). Intelligence tests gained acceptance as a vehicle for curriculum differentiation that prepared students for their anticipated social roles. In general, the American populace began to see more value in functional, social education that reduced costs and increased utility. Louisiana state leaders also valued functional education through their early policies of curriculum and assessment. The strong emphasis on industrial arts and domestic service signals intent to prepare students for unskilled labor in Louisiana’s agricultural, manufacturing, and service industries. The crux of Louisiana’s State Supervisory program was social education, for the program targeted the socializing force of public schools to advance Anglo-American social norms and to establish an industrial labor force.

Nationwide, intelligence and achievement testing gained footing because the tests exemplified popular values of the Industrial era—hereditarianism, scientific technology, and social efficiency. However, criticism of hereditarianism and high costs threatened educational testing following the Great Depression. In Louisiana, high costs contributed to the dissolution of the State Supervisory Program, but the tests’ strict adherence to Anglo-American language and cultural norms were also a factor in its discontinuation. Louisiana’s large Catholic communities rebelled against standardized curriculum and assessment as an encroachment of Protestantism. Catholic schools enjoyed a long history in Louisiana as one of the surviving legacies of the French colonial period, and public schools competed against private and Catholic schools that were preferred by Louisiana Creoles. Nationwide, hereditarianism and the deference to Anglo-American language

and culture drew critics to intelligence and achievement testing. Bond (1924) analyzed intelligence test data of White males and found a strong correlation between school achievement and test scores, debunking intelligence tests as a measure of genetic ability. Price (1934) examined the limitations of using a singular race, socio-economic group, and geographical location to establish norms used in intelligence tests, and questioned how Blacks' intelligence could be accurately measured when they were excluded from the standardization sample. Sanchez (1934) challenged the validity of intelligence tests and determined that prejudices often influenced which students were selected for testing and how scores would be interpreted. These minority scholars were joined by some White researchers, such as Boas (1943), whose investigations found the nature of intelligence to be "socially determined" (p. 164).

Especially damaging to hereditarianism was the retraction on genetic intelligence made by Terman, Goddard, and Brigham. According to Gould (1981), Goddard was first to recant in a 1928 article in the *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics*. He changed his position on the education of the "feeble-minded" by noting that many of these students were capable of learning and did not require segregated schooling. Terman acknowledged environmental factors as a condition of test score performance in the 1937 revision of the Stanford-Binet test (p. 221-222). Eventually, court challenges surfaced to challenge the practice of educational testing in curriculum placements or ability-grouping. In *Hobson v. Hansen* (1967) plaintiffs first questioned the legality of educational testing as a school policy for deciding curricular assignments. Plaintiffs successfully argued that the tests were used to disproportionately place Black students in the lowest curriculum tracks. Hobson was followed by *Diana* (1970), *Covarrubias* (1971), and *Guadalupe* (1972),

which collectively challenged the overrepresentation of minority students in special education classes (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). The combined criticism from court challenges, research and scholarship, and minority communities, contributed to policy challenges that reduced the mandatory practice of intelligence and achievement testing in curricular placements. Many school systems followed the lead from New York City Public Schools, which discontinued I.Q. testing as a means of classifying students in 1964 (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). However, criticisms of intelligence and achievement testing could not prevent the growing use of these tests as an institutional practice among schools, colleges, and universities. The 1966 Coleman survey reported that ninety percent of the nation's students were administered intelligence and/or achievement tests at both the elementary and secondary levels (Coleman, 1966). The creation of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in 1947 fostered systematic use of standardized testing in college admissions policies and a host of post-secondary institutions (Rein, 1974).

Louisiana officials revived their statewide student testing program during the desegregation era. The tests became a critical component of Louisiana's desegregation policy and were used to produce racially-segregated schools as a natural product of educational testing and ability-grouping. Eventually, intelligence and achievement tests became a central criterion for admissions to magnet schools and desegregated predominantly-White schools. Louisiana state officials also turned to a new form of achievement testing to uniformly assess all students and their academic achievement. To address criticisms in standardization design, achievement tests were modified to reflect a criterion-referenced format that assessed student knowledge of basic or minimum skills. Minimum competency tests were favored during the desegregation period to measure

student learning of prescribed core curricula. These tests were applauded as a way of promoting equity, but often lead to racial inequalities in student promotion and graduation.

Summary

The State Supervisory Program established a strong precedent for standardized curriculum and assessment early in the history of Louisiana public education. The push for standardization tied Louisiana to the larger social efficiency movement of the Industrial era, but Louisiana state officials also saw achievement testing as a vehicle for cultural assimilation. The legacy of the State Supervisory Program is a unique framework of public schooling that later shapes Louisiana high stakes testing policies. First, the State Supervisory Program embraced standardized curriculum and assessment as a way of promoting the supremacy of Anglo-American language, culture, and history. These standards were not totally accepted in Louisiana because of the deep connection to French colonialism and the system of Catholic schools that nurtured large Creole communities. The French system of schooling survived as the model for the upper and middle classes, who continued to service private or Catholic schools to educate their children. Thus, a dual system of schooling emerged along class lines where the upper and middle classes of both races predominantly attended nonpublic schools. Another legacy of the State Supervisory Program is the racial inequalities that it promoted. Curriculum standards were differentiated according to race and usually limited Black education to only rudimentary learning. Curriculum, funding, and facilities for Blacks were unequal to Whites, which led to unequal educational opportunities and attainment

between the races. Following *Brown*, racially-segregated schools and the inequalities that resulted, became the impetus for reviving standardized curriculum and assessment first initiated under the State Supervisory Program. School desegregation, a failed economy, and minimum-competency testing (MCT), were important social foundations of the LEAP that advanced a new excellence rationale for high stakes testing in Louisiana.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF HIGH STAKES TESTING IN LOUISIANA

From 1976 to 1986, Louisiana policymakers took aggressive action to reform public education through a policy framework of standards-based reform (SBR). Within a single decade lawmakers introduced over a hundred education bills to centralize curriculum, assessment, and student promotion firmly under state control. A 1985 constitutional amendment established The Louisiana Quality Education Fund, one of the largest education trusts in the country, to finance these reform initiatives. Such action was atypical for state leaders, who had not supported comprehensive school reform since the State Supervisory Program was disbanded in the 1930s. Louisiana's dependence on unskilled labor and its racially conservative political culture usually hindered state investment in public education (Elazar, 1984). Prior to the desegregation era, Johnson (1942) described Louisiana schools as a "vicious circle" where government neglect created a cycle of poverty that forced many into low-skilled and menial labor. The state's large Black student population, who amounted to just under half of all public school students, particularly suffered from underfunding and exploitation (Anderson, 1988; Chujo, 1999). Therefore, it is striking to note the aggressive efforts taken to develop the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) as the state's first comprehensive high stakes testing program. The LEAP is Louisiana's model of standards-based reform, grounded in the core values of education conservatives post-desegregation: standards, assessments, and accountability.

The LEAP began in 1986 as a program of standardized curriculum and assessments, but evolved into a weapon of school accountability under the revised LEAP for the 21st Century (LEAP 21) later implemented in 1999. Its origins are permeated by a number of contextual factors that prompted state leaders to urgently reform public schools. School desegregation, economic recession, low education rankings, and the national conservative movement influenced both legislative action and popular opinion in favor of the testing program. This chapter will detail the social foundations of the LEAP program to contextualize the larger sociopolitical factors that drew Louisiana policymakers toward high stakes testing.

School Desegregation

White Flight and Re-segregation

The foundations of Louisiana's high stakes testing program were laid in the social upheaval following *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the court-ordered desegregation of New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) in 1960. Louisiana's desegregation policy rested on the state's 1960 pupil placement law (R.S. 17:101), which authorized pupil assignments on the basis of elaborate standardized testing requirements and residential proximity to the school (Baker, 1996; McCarrick, 1964; Wieder, 1987). Pupil placement laws "had become the preferred method of avoiding desegregation" for southern states by relying on ostensibly nonracial factors to assign students in desegregated school systems (Klarman, 2004, p. 330). Louisiana's pupil placement law carefully omitted race in its wording, and its premise claimed to promote "better education, peace, and good order" of the state (R.S. 17:101; Baker, 1996, p. 226). Pupil

placement depended on residential proximity to the school, and because Louisiana's housing patterns were usually racially segregated, a vast majority of public schools would remain segregated as well.

In large urban areas such as New Orleans and Baton Rouge, there was a higher concentration of Blacks living in close-knit communities alongside Whites. Standardized testing requirements became essential to maintaining segregation in these urban school districts. A 1960 report by Louisiana's flagship newspaper, the *Times Picayune*, drew upon Blacks' lower test scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test to argue that differences in academic ability necessitated racially-segregated schools (Muller, 1976). But, by implementing the testing requirement for Black applicants, school leaders would ensure a quality education for all White students and minimize integration at the same time (Muller, 1976, p. 82). Lloyd Rittiner, President of the Orleans Parish School Board in 1960 and member of the White Citizens Council, speculated that "not more than a dozen" Blacks would be admitted to only a few White schools but the majority would remain segregated (p. 83). School leaders and citizens applauded standardized tests as a necessary requirement to uphold educational standards, but the goal was to defy desegregation mandates. Supposedly objective measures were used to eliminate Black candidates for pupil transfer to White schools in a campaign called the "scientific way" to school integration (Wieder, 1987).

In 1960 New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) became the first school district in Louisiana to desegregate, despite much protest and even an attempted coup by the state legislature (Baker, 1996). Although state and local officials assured that token integration of only the most talented Black students would occur, Whites immediately

boycotted the desegregated school system. Black students steadily repopulated these emptied schools post-desegregation. The Black student population in New Orleans Public Schools had been 57 percent prior to school desegregation in 1960. It rose to 70 percent in 1970, 86 percent in 1984, and 92 percent in 1993 (Baker, 1996, p. 472-473). In 1981, court-ordered desegregation of East Baton Rouge Parish also led to White boycotts and the repopulation of Black students in Baton Rouge's public schools. According to Bankston and Caldas' (2002) seminal work on Louisiana desegregation, the percentage of Black students in East Baton Rouge Parish remained constant during the years 1960-1980 at just under 40 percent. The onset of court-ordered desegregation and busing in 1981 lead to a "precipitous flight of White students to Baton Rouge's nonpublic schools" (p. 89-91). The percentage of Black students in East Baton Rouge public schools rose to 44 percent in 1981 and nearly 70 percent in 2000 (p. 90-99). White students that remained in East Baton Rouge public schools were heavily concentrated in magnet schools that were created to stem the tide of White flight. The declining percentage of White students in public schools occurred when the total population of White residents actually increased in Baton Rouge. The pattern in which desegregation lead to rapid and sharp decline of Whites in public schools was repeated in Lafayette (p. 111-112), Jefferson (p. 151), St. John the Baptist (p. 159), Rapides (p. 168), Caddo (p. 171-172), and Monroe (p. 183) parishes. In 1960, just prior to desegregation in Louisiana, Blacks were 31.9 percent of the total population in Louisiana and 39.1 percent of all public school students (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969, p. 14). Although the total Black population of Louisiana had remained constant at about 30 percent, Black students increased to 47 percent of the public school population in the 1990s (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). Importantly, Black

students dominated public schools in the strategic port city of New Orleans (93 percent) and the state capitol Baton Rouge (70 percent) by the end of the twentieth century. By contrast, Whites were 67 percent of the state population, but only 44 percent of public school students in the 1990s. Most Whites resettled in all-White or majority-White public school districts or utilized nonpublic schools, essentially continuing the system of segregated schooling post-Brown (Baker, 1996, p. 473).

The Concern for Educational Quality

School desegregation was the impetus behind the decline of White students in public schools and in urban schools in particular, but the desire for educational quality was popularly stated in defense of these actions. Leeson (1966) documented the rise in nonpublic school enrollment in Louisiana and around the country immediately following desegregation orders. Parents cited the desire for "quality education" as their motivation for leaving public schools (p. 22). The Louisiana Legislature even provided tuition grants for up to $360 to pay private school tuition (p. 22) until the action was ruled unconstitutional in 1967. When New Orleans desegregated in 1960, Muller (1976) observed that New Orleans White private school enrollment rose by nearly 2100 and the parochial school enrollment increased by over 1000 in that same year (p. 88). McDonogh #19 Elementary School, one of the two desegregated White schools in New Orleans in 1960, was completely boycotted by Whites by the end of the first week of desegregation although only three Black students had been admitted (p. 87). In the 1970-1971 school year alone the nonpublic enrollment in New Orleans increased by 90.3 percent over the previous year (Erickson & Donovan, 1972). "Race-related events" were the "most powerful explanatory variables" for the rapid enrollment in nonpublic schools (Erickson

& Donovan, 1976, p. 3), although parents discussed race in terms of their concern for quality in educational outcomes. The Public Affairs Research Council (1969) found that for most Whites, the "concern for educational outcomes [was] fed by long-held attitudes" toward Blacks that invoked segregationist ideals (p. 43). Although concerns for educational quality were used in defense of White flight from public schools, the rate and scale in which Whites fled schools suggest the desire to uphold segregation was preeminent in their actions.

However, in some cases Whites who feared their children would be desegregated to a predominantly Black school did have legitimate concerns for educational quality. Although public education in general progressed more slowly in Louisiana than in Northern states, the conditions of Black schools comparable to those schools serving Whites were grossly unequal (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969). In 1950-51, on the eve of *Brown*, 34.4 percent of Blacks attended small one-teacher schools compared to only 3.3 percent of Whites. There were 191,284 Black students registered in schools, but only 5,528 teachers hired to teach them. Black teachers were paid 30 percent lower than White teachers, despite their higher rate of advanced degrees and the much higher student-teacher ratio in Black schools. The inventory value of school facilities and equipment in Black schools was three times lower than the value of White facilities (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969, p. 18-19). Due to underfunding of Black education pre-*Brown*, most Black schools were unequal to White schools in the quality of facilities, resources, curriculum, and opportunities for advancement. These concerns for educational quality fueled Blacks' efforts toward school desegregation and greater racial equality. However, these same concerns for educational quality discouraged many

Whites from desegregated schools with significant Black populations. Even Whites sympathetic to school desegregation were unwilling to enroll their children in their neighborhood school if the school was predominantly Black (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969, p. 43).

Whites' resistance to desegregated schools, either due to racism or legitimate concerns for educational quality, only exasperated low support for public education in general and particularly in New Orleans and East Baton Rouge Parish where Blacks were overrepresented. For example, New Orleans voters rejected tax increases to support public schools from 1967-1980—representing 13 years of declining local revenues to supplement state funding. At that time about 85 percent of the school system's 84,000 students were Black (Moore, 1981). Charles Martin, the retiring school superintendent of New Orleans Public Schools in 1980, cited the lack of community and financial support. as the central reason for a multi-million deficit of the school system at the end of his term. Martin remarked to the *Times Picayune* in his final interview, "Having adequate funding does not guarantee quality, but the absence of the dollar ensures inferior education" (McKendall, 1985, p. 4). As more public schools desegregated, and specifically in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, public schools became synonymous with poor educational quality. This unfavorable image of public schools was partly due to economic divestment in public schools post-desegregation and partly because of a strong desire to uphold racial segregation.

The Campaign Against Social Promotion

Despite a negative public school image, graduation rates in Louisiana significantly increased in the immediate years following desegregation. In 1967 the

graduation rate of White students was 68 percent in comparison to about 42 percent of Black students (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969, p. 26-27). However, the Black graduation rate was three times greater than it was only a decade earlier in 1957. Black schools had greatly improved in student promotion or "holding power" as a Public Affairs Research Council report noted (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969, p. 26). Black student promotion and graduation rates were likely assisted by the rise in Black teachers, who also rose to the proportionate 36 percent in 1967 (Public Affairs Research Council, 1969). Louisiana's rising graduation rates were emblematic of a growing national trend to expand high school programs and compulsory attendance laws. School desegregation and civil rights laws granted racial minorities more access to secondary education, which played a tremendous role in Louisiana where Blacks students accounted for about forty percent of all public school students following desegregation (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). A sharp increase in Black high school graduates was viewed suspiciously, however, especially since Blacks' standardized test scores often still lagged behind Whites. The concern was immediately raised in New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS), Louisiana's first desegregated school system, during the Orleans Parish School Board election in 1972 *(The Times Picayune,* November 1972, p. 7). At a League of Women Voters campaign forum in 1972, school board candidates discussed the success of teacher certification tests in eliminating unqualified teachers and the need for competency tests in schools to remove social promotion.

Social promotion had become a growing concern during the desegregation era, and states such as Florida and Mississippi passed legislation in 1975 for statewide testing programs to reduce social promotion and toughen graduation requirements in schools

(Schechter, 1981). By 1978 the social promotion crisis rose to national prominence and spurred education reform towards minimum competency testing throughout the country. CBS News produced a three-part evening news series, “Is Anyone Out There Learning? A Report Card on American Public Education,” that symbolized the national mood concerning social promotion (CBS Broadcasting Inc., August 22, 1978). This series labeled recent high school graduates “functional illiterates” who glided through coursework without learning basic reading, writing, or communication skills. The lack of student motivation, the series continued, led to disciplinary problems, drugs, and violence in high schools within major American cities. Later that same year, Louisiana officials held an education conference in the New Orleans Superdome entitled, “Louisiana: Priorities for the Future” (Grady, 1978). Participants discussed the results of a recent education taskforce, who raised the issue of social promotion as the most pressing problem facing Louisianans. The taskforce questioned the literacy skills of recent high school graduates and complained that the business community was bearing the financial responsibility of training new employees in remedial literacy and communication skills. One of the centerpieces of the taskforce recommendations was the administration of a comprehensive examination as a vehicle for certifying the competence of high school graduates (Grady, 1978).

School desegregation dismantled Louisiana’s traditional dual system of racially-segregated schools, and expanded access to the state’s large Black student population. State officials and a racially conservative White majority rallied against unpopular desegregation mandates and what was perceived as an increasing number of incompetent high school graduates. The campaign against social promotion and desegregation

mandates, coupled with the growing negative image of public schools in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, pressured state policymakers for immediate and aggressive school reform. The years 1972-1974 introduced a new governor and state constitution to tackle educational policy and governance that would provide the infrastructure needed to engineer a comprehensive high stakes testing program.

Governor Edwin Edwards and the 1974 Constitution

Edwin Edwards was first elected in 1972 and eventually served four terms as Louisiana's governor (1972-1980, 1984-1988, and 1992-1996). He was born in Avoyelles Parish, a rural area of Louisiana populated by French-speaking Cajuns. After a short career as a lawyer in southwestern Acadia Parish, he began his political career as a local city councilman in 1954. Ten years later he won an election to the Louisiana State Senate and, after only one year in the state senate, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1965. When he became governor in 1972, Edwards positioned himself as a populist Democrat in the likeness of Huey P. Long. This populist image extended throughout his political career, and he is credited for increasing government aid to the poor and making Black and women appointments to civil service. However, Edwards' governorship was marred by criminal indictment and conviction for numerous charges of political corruption. Political scandal and personal infidelities dominate his biography and other publications about his life (Honeycutt, 2009; Bridges, 2002).

Although Edwards is most remembered for his public criminal trials, he worked privately to engineer significant reform to Louisiana's educational system. His

gubernatorial terms coincide with Louisiana's desegregation period and the transition to standards-based reform. During his first campaign in 1971, Edwards promised a Constitutional Convention to modernize the language and functionality of Louisiana's existing 1921 Constitution. Soon after his election, a total of 132 delegates met on Louisiana State University's campus to debate and revise articles relating to education, labor, and legislative procedures. Congressional delegates were former or existing state legislators and Edwards appointees (Ducote, 2001). According to their changes in the new 1974 Constitution, the state legislature must "provide for the education of the people of the state and shall establish and maintain a public educational system consisting of all schools" (LA Const. Art. VIII § 1). The wording "education of the people" was added to the Constitution to broaden the legislature's jurisdiction beyond only public education. Another section provided for a new Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), created as body corporate to "supervise and control the public elementary and secondary schools" and assume "budgetary responsibility for all funds appropriated or allocated by the state for those schools" (LA Const. Art. VIII § 4, A). BESE became the state legislature's policymaking arm that oversees both the School Superintendent and the Department of Education. BESE assumed budgetary and policymaking powers for public schools as a constitutionally-protected body. In a later section of the Constitution, private schools could apply for a certificate of approval from BESE which "shall carry the same privileges as one issued by a state public school" (LA Const. Art. VIII § 4). Members of the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) objected to these changes in constitutional language, which they viewed as a veiled attempt to extend monies to private school education under constitutional protection. In a letter to the Elementary and Secondary

Education Subcommittee, they argued that,

> The OPSB sees this change as a threatened reduction in funds for public education. The OPSB reaffirms its conviction that public funds should not be used for the general support of non-public schools. (Louisiana Constitutional Convention Minutes, August 29, 1973, p. 52)

There was marked disagreement at the Constitutional Convention on whether BESE members should be elected or appointed by the Governor. Edwards lobbied for the authority to appoint both BESE members and the State School Superintendent. By removing the elective office, BESE members would be answerable to Edwards instead of local citizens in public school districts. Louisiana voters ultimately rejected Edwards' proposal of appointed BESE members and State School Superintendent, but governors were granted three appointees to BESE's eleven-member Board. BESE has eleven members who serve four-year terms with no term limits for office. Eight members are elected from specially-drawn BESE districts and three are appointed by the Governor. Edwards used these appointees to represent gubernatorial interests in fiscal and policymaking decisions, and he assumed an influential role in BESE through his political muscle within the state (Honeycutt, 2009). Later, Edwards was also successful in changing the elective position of the State Superintendent to an appointed post. A 1984 conflict with Thomas Clausen, former teacher and last elected Superintendent, arose when Clausen wanted to reduce the passing score for the teacher certification test without BESE approval. Edwards " felt the move was diametrically opposed to new initiatives and countered with a bill not allowing the Superintendent to lower standards" (Honeycutt, 2009, p. 221). Following this bill, Edwards obtained the legislative backing

to make the Superintendent a BESE-appointed post through legislative act.

Another disagreement at the 1974 Constitutional Convention was the issue of Black representation on BESE. J.K. Haynes, a member of the Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee at the Convention, submitted a proposal for Blacks to receive equal or at least proportionate representation on BESE. The motion was ultimately denied, but delegate Anthony Rachal submitted a separate statement to the Constitutional records expressing his disappointment considering the large Black public school population in the state (Louisiana Constitutional Convention Minutes, 1973). Keith Johnson, BESE's first Black member, was elected from New Orleans in 1984 and remained the only Black member until the mid-1990s.

The 1974 Constitution ushered in significant changes educational policymaking in Louisiana that directly influenced the development of high stakes testing. With the creation of BESE, state lawmakers established a constitutionally-protected body to develop and execute policies as an agency of the state legislature. BESE had the capacity to implement school policy in a more efficient manner than the lawmaking process. BESE also solved the legislature's earlier problems with constitutionality when a judge disallowed its intervention into the New Orleans desegregation crisis of 1960; BESE was constitutionally-protected to intercede in local public school systems and provide the necessary oversight. The 1974 Constitution also expanded privileges to private schools and broadened the state's responsibility to both public and private education. This change in constitutional language signaled the state's intention to extend their educational appropriations and political support to nonpublic schools. As the desegregation period loomed forward particularly in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, nonpublic schools

established standing to compete for funding from the state's education budget. Competition for state funds grew significantly during the late 1970s and early 1980s due to a financial recession that gripped state government.

The Oil Boom and Bust

Since the decline of cotton and agricultural production in the early twentieth century, Louisiana shifted to an industrial economy that relied on the mining of its natural resources—principally oil, natural gas, and timber. Louisiana's lucrative oil and gas lands accounted for nearly 50% of the state's revenues by the 1970s and garnered oil lobbyists a powerful voice in educational policy (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1999, pg. 1-2). Oil companies depended on low-skilled laborers to support drilling operations in rural Louisiana, and they often rallied against higher taxes to fund large-scale school initiatives. When the price of oil dropped sharply in the 1980s, however, high unemployment and reduced revenues lead to large state deficits. Postsecondary and K-12 education programs were among the state's largest expenditures, and legislators pressed for ways to hold schools accountable for their funding. Unlike most states, Louisiana finances its public education system mainly through sales taxes rather than property taxes. Protected by constitutional language, Louisianans enjoy substantial homestead exemptions where most citizens pay virtually no property tax (Clendinen, 1986). With fewer tax revenues from its oil income, state legislators relied more heavily on sales taxes from local businesses to fund its education programs. In response, business organizations such as the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) and the Public Affairs Research Council (PAR) objected to higher taxes

to support what they considered wasteful spending in public schools. These leading business organizations sponsored research and public forums to press for school accountability, education standards, and reduced taxes. In fact, it was the Public Affair Research Council executive Ed Steimel that first used the term "school accountability" at the 1972 Constitutional Convention in discussions concerning BESE (Louisiana Constitutional Convention Minutes, 1972).

The Public Affairs Research Council (henceforth called by its common name PAR), established in 1950, is a policy research think-tank that investigates state and local government issues in Louisiana (PAR, www.la-par.org). It was founded by a group of leading professionals in industry, education, business, and government. As a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization, PAR is supported through tax-deductible donations from its prominent membership. According to its website, PAR does not lobby but its "research gets results" through policy recommendations that lead to governmental reforms. PAR "plants the seeds, cultivates the field of public opinion, and let others lobby." PAR planted its strongest seeds in educational reform, particularly standards-based reform and school accountability. Its investigative reports concerning K-12 school accountability can be traced as far back as the early 1980s, just as declining oil revenues began to deplete state reserves. The business community demanded greater urgency in school regulations that motivated legislators to act on recommendations to toughen promotion and graduation guidelines.

Dissatisfaction with Minimum-Competency Tests

The Rise of Minimum-Competency Testing

Louisiana's first testing program began in 1920 as a component of the State Supervisory Program initiated by then-Superintendent T.H. Harris (Rogers, 1936). Harris created the program to promote school curricula reflective of Anglo-American history, language, and culture. The testing program was discontinued in 1933, and state interest in standardized curriculum and assessment waned until the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests were first administered in 1969 (Louisiana Department of Education Math Highlights Report, 1976). In response to Louisiana's below-average performance on NAEP tests, the Louisiana Department of Education (LADOE) created the Louisiana Assessment Program in 1973. Modeled after NAEP assessments, the Louisiana Assessment Program tested a stratified random sample of 15,000 students and 5,000 students were tested in each key age level (nine year olds, fourteen year olds, and seventeen year olds). Reading tests were first administered in 1973, followed by Math and Social Studies in 1974, and Science in 1976. Louisiana students performed comparable to their southeastern counterparts in all academic areas, but continued to score below the national average (Louisiana Department of Education, Math Highlights Report, 1976). Louisiana's lagging performance on these normative tests fueled political debates concerning social promotion just as Blacks' access to desegregated schools widened.

State legislators passed the state's first school accountability act in 1977. Act 621, The Public School Accountability and Assessment Act, authorized statewide minimum standards in pupil proficiency in reading, writing, and math (R.S. 17:391.1-

391.10). One of the sponsors of this act was Cecil Picard, a state representative from Vermillion Parish first elected to the state House of Representatives in 1975. Picard, a former high school principal, was later elected to the state Senate in 1979 and appointed chairman of the Senate Education Committee when LEAP was developed and implemented. The Public School Accountability and Assessment Act required a system of shared accountability for all stakeholders to perform their respective responsibilities and duties in public education (Official Journal of the State, 1977). A list of stakeholders held accountable to taxpayers included BESE, local school boards, administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and students. The Act sought to assure that all programs "lead to the attainment of established goals for education" and basic, uniform skills and concepts were identified for each grade level (p. 1687). The law also stipulated that all students, rather than a randomized sample, would be tested in key grade levels and specified increased appropriations to the education budget for this purpose. The Act authorized a system of accountability for public schools (albeit very generally), and directed BESE and the State Superintendent to decide the policies, standards, assessments, and grades to be tested. Importantly, a section of the Act specifically dictated that the testing program should not be used to deny students promotion or graduation. In Section E, the law stipulated that,

> No provision of this Part shall be construed to mean, or represented to require, that graduation from a high school or promotion to another grade level is in any way dependent upon successful performance on any test administered as a part of this testing program (Official Journal of the State, 1977, p. 1688)

In compliance with Act 621, BESE coordinated with State Superintendent J. Kelly Nix to

adopt minimum standards in reading, writing, and mathematics, and to establish the new Louisiana State Assessment Program (LSAP) as a minimum-competency test for all students in grades 7 and 10. In the Superintendent's first legislative report of the LSAP, the tests were purposed to measure student performance and obtain demographic data related to student achievement (Legislative Report of the Louisiana State Assessment Program, p. 3). The LSAP was intended to promote school accountability through monitoring student progress, publishing test results, and assisting instructional planning to improve performance. Schools were advised to consider the reading assessments as a factor in student promotion, and literacy was the only subject area that was emphasized in promotion according to the law.

In 1979, just two years after its first accountability law, the state legislature passed Act 750, the Competency Based Education Law, which requires BESE to develop minimum standards and curriculum guidelines in all core content areas at all grade levels (Official Journal of the State, 1979). This Act established the Louisiana Competency Based Program as a comprehensive educational program based on core curriculum standards, a literary assessment, and pupil progression plans. Pupil progression plans were defined as a set of criteria each school system must evaluate to determine promotional and retention decisions. Local school systems had to submit pupil progression plans for approval by BESE before implemented. The law directed school officials to place emphasis on "mastery of reading, writing, and mathematics as consideration for promotion and placement provided that other factors shall be considered" (Official Journal of the State, 1979, p. 2099). A new testing program called the Basic Skills Testing Program (BST) was also included in the legislation to measure

student achievement in reading, math, and language arts abilities at all grade levels. To increase student accountability, substantive changes to promotion guidelines were made: 1) mathematics and language arts were added to reading as promotional subjects; and 2) the state tests were described as "principal criteria" for grade-to-grade promotion (Pechman, 1982). The Basic Skills Test (BST) was a criterion-referenced, minimum-competency test first administered in 1981-82 school year to 56,000 second-graders. A new grade level was added to the student assessment program each year (third grade BST was added in 1983; and fourth grade was added in 1984). BESE made plans to add a new grade level each year until all grades 2-12 were tested in 1992. The new Competency Based Education Law reiterated the stipulation in the earlier Public School Accountability Act, which indicated that teachers determined promotion or placement of students but particular emphasis should be placed on students' mastery of basic skills (Official Journal of the State, 1979, p. 2102). The competency based education law did not specify that student mastery would be defined solely by the Basic Skills Test, but it did repeal Section E of the earlier Public School Accountability Act. This section specifically stated that promotion and graduation could not be denied because of failing scores on the state exam. Section E was "hereby specifically repealed" in clear, stated terms in the new Competency Based Education Law (p. 2103). In addition, the new law required summer remediation for students who failed the BST and appropriated monies to operate remediation centers in central locations throughout the state.

By 1980, two student assessment programs emerged in Louisiana under mandate from the state legislature. First, the Louisiana State Assessment Program (LSAP) was authorized in 1977, and the State Superintendent decided to assess secondary students in

grades 7 and 10 with the purposes of publishing test results and gathering demographic data relative to student achievement. In the LSAP students were scored by the percentage of correct answers on the test, but it did not establish a cut-off score for student performance. The LSAP was primarily used to publish student achievement results and aid instructional and promotional decisions. Second, the Basic Skills Test (BST) was authorized in 1979 for grade 2 in Reading and Math achievement, wherein eventually all grades would be tested by 1992. BESE required students to attain at least a 75% proficiency level to successfully pass the BST. Teachers had the option of retaining or promoting students who lacked proficiency on the BST, but local districts had to include the BST as a factor in promotional decisions. BESE required school districts to develop a pupil progression plan, a policy that outlined specific criteria for student promotion, in which BST scores were made a principal criterion. Rather than using a commercial standardized test, the state legislature contracted with a testing agency to develop, administer, and score the Basic Skills Tests (Rachal & Hoffman, 1985). A committee of teachers, principals, parents, and interested citizens collaborated with the testing agency to identify skills and concepts included in curriculum standards and assessed by the BST and LSAP. These educators were integral to standard setting, test development, and field testing. The Superintendent provided a Calendar of Skills to inform parents of skills to be learned and an individual report on student progress. The BST was designed to end social promotion by requiring all students to master basic skills, establishing a cutoff score for proficiency levels, and holding all students accountable to taxpayers.

In the post-desegregation era, many state governments implemented minimum-

competency testing programs similar to Louisiana's Basic Skills Test (Pipho, 1978). The socio-political climate of the 1960s and 1970s differed greatly from the industrial period of the early twentieth century. Airisian (1987) describes this episode in American history as the "age of equity," beginning first with the historic *Brown* (1954) decision and continuing with civil rights legislative and policy initiatives at the local, state, and federal level (p. 396). School policy reform adopted three approaches to educational equity: equalizing inputs or financial resources among schools; equalizing outcomes in achievement or opportunity; and increasing inputs for low-performing students in order to equalize outcomes (Serow & Davies, 1982; Shepard, 1980). In addition to educational equity, policymakers sought to address the perceived lack of intellectual rigor in schools. Competency-based education fit neatly with public ideals for both school equity and intellectual rigor. Its antecedents are found in the theoretical works of Carroll (1963) and Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus (1971) that describe a mastery learning model where every student could achieve a criterion level of knowledge and skills. Instructional inputs (resources, materials, and instructional support) are differentiated according to students' needs, and constant testing and remediation ensured every child progressed to the intended level. In school practice, competency based education required every student to demonstrate mastery or attainment of specified criteria (Palardy & Eisele, 1972). Minimum-competency testing was promoted as a policy of school equity because it publicly identified the specific learning objectives that would be tested; acted as a diagnostic mechanism to identify students requiring remediation; and allowed state and district officials to intervene directly into classrooms to promote equal educational outcomes (Winfield, 1990). It also functioned as a policy to end social promotion. Test

development was generally made by authorities external to the teacher or local school district, and scores were often the determining factor in grade-to-grade promotion or high school graduation. By the mid-1970s over thirty-five states required local school districts to authorize MCT in elementary and secondary schools, including Louisiana (Pipho, 1978). Louisiana's Basic Skills Test (BST) was more aggressive than most minimum-competency tests at the time because the BST would eventually assess all grade levels as a form of universal achievement testing with cutoff scores for student performance.

Concern for Social Promotion Unabated

In just three years Louisiana officials implemented statewide curriculum standards and corresponding assessments for both elementary and secondary levels, yet there was still public concern that the tests were not rigorous enough to eliminate social promotion. In 1981 the *Times Picayune* published an influential education series called *New Orleans Schools in Crisis*. In the opening article, author Molly Moore wrote,

> In the last 20 years, the New Orleans Public School System has fallen into a critical state of academic, physical and financial despair. It is a school system of poor children, dilapidated schoolhouses, pinched budgets and a dismal public image. If it is judged on the quality of students it is producing, the system generally earns failing grades. (Moore, 1981, pg. 1)

Moore continued by noting the system's declining test scores on national norm-referenced tests and low scores on the new state BST implemented earlier that year. In a separate article examining the rise in remedial education at area colleges, Moore decried recent graduates' lack of college readiness and skills that render them unprepared for college-level work. Echoing the sentiments of many BST critics, Moore complained that

another decade would pass before social promotion would be curbed throughout the state. The BST was designed to add grade levels incrementally each year when public schools required more immediate action to improve academic standards.

A year after the *Picayune* education series, students' relatively high scores on the BST also did little to satisfy public scrutiny. On the first BST results in 1982, 89 percent of all students passed both the Reading and Math sections, 92 percent passed Reading, and 95 percent passed Math (Hays, 1982). Students in the New Orleans metropolitan area showed the widest discrepancy in test scores, but test scores reflected socio-economic differences rather than race. In New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS), a predominantly poor and Black school district, 75 percent of all students passed both sections of the BST. The same passing rate was found in neighboring St. Bernard Public Schools, a predominantly poor and White school district. But in St. Tammany Parish, an affluent suburb of New Orleans, student test scores were among the highest in the state (Hays, 1982). By 1984, the state's average score for second-graders topped 95 percent and 97 percent in Reading and Math, respectively. The state averages for third-grade Reading and Math proficiency were 93 percent and 89 percent, respectively. The state averages for the new fourth grade tests were 87 percent and 89 percent in Reading and Math, respectively. Overall, students performed very well on the BST statewide, far outperforming the 75 percent proficiency level set by BESE.

New Orleans Public Schools, although still showing one of the lowest BST district averages, had improved to meet the state average for all grades except the fourth grade in 1984. However, not all New Orleanians were convinced of the school system's academic progress. A group of New Orleans citizens from its affluent uptown

neighborhoods formed a citizens' task force in 1984 to investigate "unlikely scores" on the BST and any occurrences of testing abuse (McKendall, 1984). Although no cases of testing abuse were found, task force member and Tulane professor Samuel Stringfield volunteered to continue the analysis of testing results to further investigate test scores in New Orleans. In an interview with the *Times Picayune*, Ellen Pechman, Director of Testing and Evaluation for the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), attributed the rising test scores to improved instructional practices and greater familiarity with curriculum standards and assessments. In a later editorial to the *Times Picayune*, local principal Edward Washington questioned the public distrust of rising test scores in New Orleans. Washington criticized the lack of congratulatory response received from the both the *Picayune* and the larger New Orleans community to acknowledge that public school teachers and students performed well (Washington, 1984).

Criticism against the BST program grew as test scores continued to improve and their effect on social promotion appeared minimal. In Baton Rouge's legislative newspaper, *The Advocate*, lawmakers began to publicly complain that BST program wasted state funds at a time when the state's reserves were scarce. Since 1982, oil reserves fell from a high of 1.6 billion to just under $800 million annually (Clendinen, 1984). The 1979 Competency Based Education Law appropriated $506, 000 to the Department of Education to operate the new Competency-Based Program, and particularly student summer remediation and the BST. Half of Louisiana's oil profits had disappeared, just as the costs of financing public education increased.

Standards-Based Reform in Louisiana

The 1980 election of Ronald Reagan was the impetus for educational reform that promoted standard courses of study using a classical liberal curriculum. The Reagan administration organized a national commission to investigate a perceived mediocrity in the public schools that threatened the country's ability to produce a competitive workforce. The National Commission on Excellence in Education released its *Nation at Risk* report in 1983, and set the course for a national movement toward standards-based reform (SBR). The report contained thirty-eight recommendations for establishing school excellence through aggressive policymaking, standardized curriculum, and rigorous assessments (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). A year later the Education Commission of the States (ECS) convened a national conference with state policymakers to discuss school excellence and implementation of *Nation at Risk* recommendations (Pipho, 1984).

The excellence rationale espoused egalitarian ideals that required every student to master a uniform and rigorous program of study regardless of social, familial, or racial backgrounds. School excellence advocates claimed benefits to both the student and the state; students gained higher-level skills and equal opportunity to learn, and the state gained a competent citizenry that ensured the continued prosperity of the nation. For school excellence advocates these "higher-level skills" were found in traditional academic disciplines of the natural sciences and humanities. Finn & Ravitch (1984) were especially outspoken critics of functional or social education as the harbinger of mediocrity in school curriculum. In *Against Mediocrity*, the authors summarize the ideals of the excellence movement and its egalitarian mission when they penned,

> Those who today would deny the humanities as part of the educational birthright of every American are denying the very dream of a free and just society for all. (Finn & Ravitch, 1984, p. 241)

The standards-based reform (SBR) movement in Louisiana emerged from debates surrounding *Nation at Risk* and well-known school excellence advocates such as Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch. Such rhetoric represented a shift from earlier equity rationales of school policy reform that were supported by desegregation advocates. Rigorous curriculum and assessments replaced minimum competency testing as the preferred policy to raise educational standards, provide equal opportunity, and prevent social promotion. The excellence rationale resonated sharply in Baton Rouge, where the contentious 1981 desegregation mandate pressed conservatives in Louisiana for the use of more aggressive testing policies to stymie school desegregation. Many hoped SBR would satisfy court mandates for equal access and opportunity, while toughening promotion and graduation guidelines.

Soon after *Nation at Risk* was released in 1983, election campaigns for local school boards and BESE were overrun with education conservatives seeking candidacy to instill academic excellence in schools. Most significantly, the newly elected State School Superintendent Thomas Clausen ran a highly publicized and successful campaign against minimum competency testing in 1983. In an interview with *The Times Picayune*, he argued that student mastery of curriculum standards, rather than basic understanding, should be used as the barometer for student promotion (*The Times Picayune*, June 1983). Once elected, Clausen authorized the LADOE's Bureau of Evaluation to lead two studies investigating alternative testing strategies for Louisiana other than BST. Hoffman (1984)

conducted one study, and reported that both parents and local school systems desired higher standards of curriculum and assessment for students. Later, in an analysis of student remediation and effect on BST scores, Rachal and Hoffman (1985) found that remediation did not improve student deficiencies in students who failed the BST. In order to ensure students possessed adequate skills and concepts, failing students required both remediation and retention in their current grade level. These two studies were supported by mounting criticism of the BST program, particularly from lawmakers and the press, who argued that the BST lack rigor and failed to prevent social promotion. The BST was attacked for lacking difficulty (reflected by the high passing rates) and reinforcing low standards for students.

Newly-elected BESE members also undertook greater action toward standards-based reform and high stakes testing. In early 1984 BESE voted new requirements for high school graduates that increased both high school course requirements and introduced a high school exit exam (Loupe, 1984). Following recommendations from *Nation at Risk*, BESE increased high school coursework to four units of English, three units of math, three units of science, and three units of social studies. BESE reduced elective offerings and standardized core courses so that all students followed uniform curricula throughout the state. BESE also voted to establish a high school exit exam for graduates in order to receive their diplomas. The proposed requirements, including exit exam, were intended for all schools carrying the BESE seal—both public and private. In a separate meeting concerning elementary education, BESE voted to increase the BST cutoff score to 80 percent, and students who failed to achieve 80 percent proficiency on the BST were recommended for retention (*The Times Picayune*, January 1984). BESE's actions were

streamlined to the central ideals of standards-based reform. Standards-based reform's core educational philosophy—the idea that school systems could achieve equity and excellence through standardized curriculum and assessment versus desegregation mandates—provided a policy framework to balance minority rights with the demands of a conservative majority.

BESE's decision to establish a high school exit exam proved more difficult to implement than expected, considering the public mandate for raising academic standards in schools. Nonpublic parents and students objected to BESE's private school stipulation in their reform agenda, and petitioned the state legislature to prevent BESE from overstepping their regulatory authority (Johnson, 1995, p. 186). Also, the state's impending financial crisis threatened to halt any reform initiatives from taking root. The costs of running the existing BST program and remediation were plenty for the state's strained education budget, and the legislature funded the program by making other cuts to the basic operating budget for schools. Although state education officials embraced high stakes testing reform, BESE's 1984 reform initiatives were delayed by the impending financial collapse of the state. SBR could not advance in Louisiana without a consistent funding source to protect reform initiatives against future budget shortfalls.

The Louisiana Quality Education Fund

The BST program caused the price of public education to surge with little evidence of curbing promotion and graduation rates. By the mid-1980s lower oil revenues began to make a considerable impact on the Louisiana economy and the future of the BST. The 1979 Competency Based Education Law required the state to provide

remediation for all students who did not reach mastery on the BST, but these funds had to obtain approval from the state legislature each year. Remediation programs were fully funded for only the first year of the BST, but funds for the second year were not forthcoming (Peck, 1981). Sixteen remediation centers were proposed in the original law but half of those could not be established due to lack of state funding (Peck, 1981, p. 5). Student remediation programs were funded through per-pupil allocations to the education budget that were separate from the funding formula for basic school operations, called the Minimum Foundation Formula. With little state aid to provide for student remediation, school systems with larger underperforming populations such as New Orleans and St. Helena parishes shielded the financial burden for BST remediation out of their operating budget (Hodge, 1984). These local school districts began to challenge the BST's role as "principal criterion" in promotion decisions given the lack of state funding for student remediation. The weakening state economy threatened the future of BST or any comprehensive school reform agenda.

In early 1985 a growing state deficit set records in Louisiana history, and most believed Louisiana's experiment in standards-based reform was doomed. The 1985 BST administration was cancelled entirely because the legislature failed to appropriate monies to finance the testing program (Wardlaw, 1986). Also, the *Times Picayune* published another scathing education series in 1985 called, "Cheating Our Children" (*The Times Picayune*, October 1985). The *Picayune* based their education series on a newly released report by the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI). The LABI report found that Louisiana school systems spent a higher than average proportion of monies on support services such as transportation, food, and school counselors. The report

attributed the state's below-average student achievement on the misappropriation of school funds by local school systems. It also suggested that school systems required better management of existing monies instead of additional funding. LABI lobbied aggressively against higher taxes, and supported cuts to school funding that would eliminate administrative and support staff.

Governor Edwards was re-elected in 1984 amid huge state deficits and the inability to deliver on campaign promises for comprehensive education reform. Edwards, who defended the BST program as a model for increasing student achievement for all Louisiana's children, pledged to reduce the existing education budget by 5 percent and re-evaluate the BST program and its effectiveness in school accountability (Clendinen, 1986). He hurried negotiations for a settlement with the federal government concerning a long-running court battle over mineral rights and industry profits from the Gulf of Mexico shoreline. In November 1985 Edwards announced the "8g" settlement, a $700 million windfall from the federal government to end Louisiana's suit over mineral rights and revenues from its shoreline. Edwards backed a bill by Baton Rouge State Senator Thomas A. Hudson, who wanted to place the money into a dedicated trust for education. Edwards and state legislators placed about $600 million into a constitutionally-dedicated education trust to support high stakes testing reforms. The money was placed in an interest-bearing account that would yield about $200 million for Louisiana each year, commonly called The Louisiana Quality Education Fund or "8g" funds. PAR'S Edward Steimel, now representing Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI), lobbied state government in support of using the multi-million dollar windfall to protect the education reform agenda (Wardlaw, 1985). Steimel had good reason to doubt the

security of high stakes testing in Louisiana's troubled economy. The following year, 1986, was the worst economic year in Louisiana since the Great Depression. The state legislature faced at least a $420 million shortfall for the fiscal year 1986-1987 (Wardlaw, 1986). The education trust guaranteed continual funding for education reform, while lifting the heavier tax burden on businesses that were reluctant to fund public education. The money would yield revenues in the form of interest, divided equally between BESE and the Board of Regents, to finance policy-making and governance. The Louisiana Quality Education Fund gave BESE a vital funding source to finally continue its standards-based reform agenda.

Summary

School desegregation resulted in significant changes to the social context of public schooling that planted the seeds for high stakes testing and the LEAP. First, school desegregation led to swift abandonment of public schools by the White middle class and high rates of private and parochial school enrollment in the political strongholds of New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Second, it resulted in more pronounced racial segregation as Whites depopulated racially mixed areas in favor of racially homogenous areas in rural and suburban communities. Third, desegregation did little to alter conventional racist attitudes and public policies toward Black education in Louisiana. As Black students and teachers repopulated schools deserted by Whites, the traditional divestment in Black education resumed once a public school became identifiably Black. Desegregation changed school demographics in the political centers of Baton Rouge and New Orleans, resulting in waning support and low confidence in the educative value of

public schools. This poor image heightened skepticism of students' academic achievement as evidenced by rising promotion and graduation rates.

Rising graduation rates and poor educational quality in public schools had become a growing concern for education conservatives in the 1980s, and many states enacted minimum-competency testing to certify students' competence. Louisiana acted in a similar vein, but state leaders became dismayed with students' relative success in passing minimum competency tests. Many believed the tests reinforced low educational standards, raised education costs, and failed to curb social promotion. Elected education officials such as the State Superintendent and BESE accelerated plans for standardized curriculum and rigorous testing, drawing upon recommendations issued by the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report and education taskforces. The central reason for implementing high stakes testing in Louisiana was the elimination of social promotion, which was viewed as the cause of incompetency in high school graduates. Desegregation policies and the equity rationale grew more unpopular in the early 1980s, and the excellence rationale dominated the new conservative era of American politics. School excellence could be achieved through rigorous and uniform standards of curriculum and assessment; Standards-based reform remedied the problems of social promotion, educational quality, and racial inequity. However, the impending economic recession hampered any education reform in the state until the Louisiana Quality Education Fund was established in 1986. Once a continual funding source was created, state education leaders moved aggressively to implement the LEAP.

CHAPTER 4

A CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF THE LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LEAP)

In the previous chapter, I outlined important sociopolitical factors that drew Louisiana policymakers to standards-based reform and high stakes testing. These reform agendas were justified by the excellence rationale, which espoused rigorous student testing, stringent promotion and graduation guidelines, and elimination of school desegregation mandates. In this chapter, I examine the lawmaking and policymaking process that resulted in the LEAP, in particular the actions of Louisiana state officials to implement the high stakes testing program. The first installment of the LEAP program was enacted in the state in 1986 and included K-12 assessments aligned to prescriptive state standards. The law required local school systems to use the LEAP K-8 assessments to decide student promotion, but school systems did have some flexibility in promotional decisions based upon specific criteria and the academic needs of individual school systems. Successful scores on the LEAP high school graduate exit exam, however, were required as a condition of obtaining a high school diploma in the state. Because the tests were heavily weighted in student promotion and graduation, the LEAP is considered Louisiana's first comprehensive high stakes testing program.

The LEAP was redesigned under state law in 1999 as Leap for the 21st Century (LEAP 21), the brainchild of Louisiana Governor Murphy "Mike" Foster. Foster, along with his BESE appointees Paul Pastorek and Leslie Jacobs, advanced a school accountability policy that tied LEAP test scores to school compensation, faculty and staff

evaluations, school quality and accreditation, and student promotion and graduation. The LEAP 21 introduced rigorous testing formats that demanded content mastery as opposed to competency stressed in earlier LEAP tests. In 2001, Louisiana became the first state to deny student promotion at the fourth and eighth grade level, and to deny a high school diploma, to those students who failed the LEAP 21/GEE state assessment (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). The program received national praise from *Education Week* in 2004 (Skinner, 2004), but Louisiana locals were divided in their support for the high stakes testing program. Blacks rallied against the LEAP 21 in public protest and legislative action, but could not muster the larger political support to stymie the strict accountability policies associated with the testing program. Educators also complained about the soaring costs of accountability mandates that contributed to poor teacher pay and increased teacher responsibilities. State policymakers defended the LEAP 21 as a policy to raise academic standards for all students, and state officials worked in concert to develop the LEAP as a high stakes testing program.

LEAP Forward

BESE takes the lead

BESE was created under the 1974 Louisiana Constitution as a corporate entity with policymaking authority to supervise and manage K-12 education programs. Once organized, BESE outlined clear intentions for high stakes testing reform; its policy-making activities were often more aggressive than state education laws. Louisiana's 1977 accountability law, which established the Louisiana State Assessment Program (LSAP), specifically prohibited school systems from denying promotion or graduation on

the basis of the state assessment (Official Journal of the State, 1977). Although state officials publicly praised competency testing to expose and reduce social promotion, and there was precedent for promotional and graduation tests in states like Florida and Mississippi, legislators were divided in their political support to use standardized tests as a basis for promotional decisions (Moore, 1978). Opponents of promotional tests cited problems in test implementation and constitutionality. Some legislators feared massive failure rates would deny diplomas to well-deserving students in their districts. Others questioned the legality of promotional tests and considered the lawsuit pending against Florida's 1975 state law that authorized its test-for-graduation requirement. Florida's Black students sued under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment, and argued that past discriminatory policies of both the state and testing companies led Blacks to disproportionately fail the exit exam. While the Florida case, *Debra P. vs. Turlington* (1979), was in litigation, Louisiana legislators decided to implement its testing program as simply an assessment measure. Despite legislative refrain from promotional tests, BESE approved a proposal to require all eight graders to pass a basic literacy test before they could enter high school (Moore, 1978). BESE's decision occurred in 1978, the same year the Louisiana State Assessment Program (LSAP) was first administered to seventh and tenth graders as a standardized assessment independent of promotion and graduation requirements.

A legislative subcommittee later met with Department of Education officials to discuss BESE's eighth-grade promotional test (Moore, 1978). Lawmakers' concern for high failure rates resurfaced in the subcommittee talks, but New Orleans legislators defended BESE and the need for promotional testing. Henry Braden, a veteran White

Senator from New Orleans, stated that "half of New Orleans graduates lacked competency at the eighth grade level" (Moore, 1978, p. 35). He sought to expand the tests' use by backing a grade-by-grade promotional test for all students at all grade levels. However, some legislators were reluctant to endorse the promotional test until information was gathered concerning expected pass/fail rates. BESE's policy also overstepped the constitutional language included in the existing Public School Accountability and Assessment Act, which invited legal challenges to its policy if approved. The measure was tabled pending further legislative debate. In 1979, Florida plaintiffs won their suit in *Debra P. vs. Turlington* (1979) and the test-for-graduation requirement was ruled unconstitutional. Louisiana legislators were careful to craft pending high stakes testing legislation to avoid constitutionality issues witnessed in the Florida case. Senator Braden won his appeal for grade-by-grade proficiency tests in the following 1979 legislative session, when he sponsored the state's Competency-Based Education Law that established the Basic Skills Test (Official Journal of the State, 1979). The Competency-Based Education Law provided BESE the legislative backing to implement the grade-by-grade proficiency tests, but the law carefully stipulated that the tests were to be used as "principal criterion"—not sole criterion—for promotional decisions. Undeterred from its high stakes testing agenda, BESE authorized Department of Education officials to attend an invitational symposium in 1981 called "Issues of Competency and Accountability" (Schechter, 1981). Participants included state officials in the areas of research, evaluation, and curriculum from Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Louisiana's representative was David Hamilton, Section Chief of Legislative and Legal Analysis in the Louisiana Department of

Education. Diana Pullin, the staff attorney for Florida plaintiffs in the *Debra P. vs. Turlington* case, was a featured speaker. Pullin advised participants on constitutional language for minimum-competency testing laws, the validity of criterion-referenced versus norm-referenced formats in law and policy, the use of standardized curriculum and textbooks to prevent charges of discrimination, and the importance of establishing a remediation program (Schecter, 1981, p. 19). Such key advisement on constitutional issues in high stakes testing was significant to the Department of Education officials and their development of the LEAP. Also in 1981, BESE asked a district court to clarify its authority as a self-governing constitutional body rather than an agency of the state legislature (Johnson, 1995). In *Aguilard v. Treen* (1982), the Louisiana Supreme Court granted BESE general powers to set and implement educational policies in compliance with state law and directives of the state legislature. The court concluded that BESE is not self-executing and cannot contradict legislative resolutions and statutes in pursuit of its constitutional powers (Johnson, 1995, p. 187). Specifically, the court ruled that BESE had power to develop and execute educational policies as long as those policies did not contradict state laws and regulations.

In 1984 BESE took further action to toughen promotion and graduation guidelines through state testing following the *Nation at Risk* report. First, BESE raised the BST cutoff score from 75 percent to 80 percent in order to increase proficiency requirements for elementary students. A growing number of BST critics were skeptical of high passing rates that signaled minimal impact on student promotion. Second, BESE adopted a plan in early 1984 that increased high school course requirements and standardized a more rigorous program of study (Loupe, 1984). The plan also included a graduation test in

which successful scores were required to receive a high school diploma. Both of BESE's proposals overstepped the constitutional language used in the existing competency-based law. BESE's policy changes occurred in 1984, an election year, and local candidates popularized standardized curriculum and assessment in their education platforms. Both State School Superintendent-elect Tom Clausen and Governor-elect Edwin Edwards pledged to increase academic standards through higher standards and more rigorous assessments. Soon after he was elected, Superintendent Clausen gathered research evidence to lobby for a tougher, more comprehensive student assessment program (Hoffman, 1984), but he received pressure from the state's largest teachers union to improve working conditions and pay before a costly reform plan was enforced. Clausen's first task became negotiating with BESE to relax some of their policy changes for increasing and standardizing high school course requirements. The BESE plan was endorsed by the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Taskforce on Education, Inc. , whose chairman replied in a *Times Picayune* interview that the changes would yield "a more literate and competent citizenry" (Roehl, 1984). However, school officials attacked the BESE plan for its inflexibility, hastiness, and potential for increasing the drop-out rate. A retired Louisiana educator remembered a meeting at a local school to discuss BESE's plans for high school promotion and graduation requirements:

> BESE said they were going to change the classes and requirements for high school students. They said the changes were supposed to help all students get into college where they could get jobs. But they wanted the changes to go into effect immediately without giving us [teachers] a chance to prepare students. The students were capable of doing the work, but to introduce the changes so quickly

> without giving schools time to adjust was just setting the kids up for failure. We told the Board [BESE] that there were no options for students not considering college, and I thought it was unfair. (J. Smith, Personal communication, August 21, 2011)

Lobbied heavily by educators and school officials, Clausen proposed an alternative plan that granted more flexibility to local school systems and students to choose the courses that would satisfy the English, math, and science requirements. For example, the BESE plan required three units of Math—Algebra I and II, and Geometry with no substitutions. The Clausen plan also required three units of Math—Algebra I and two years of either Algebra II, geometry, trigonometry, general math, business math, or calculus. At a Louisiana School Supervisors Associations meeting in March 1984, parish school supervisors were divided over their support for Clausen and BESE (Loupe, 1984). BESE complained to state legislators and Governor Edwards—who had three appointees to the BESE board—that the elective office of the State School Superintendent posed confusion to the public over who held the political authority to set education policy. BESE's power struggle with State Superintendent Clausen delayed their plans to redesign high school curriculum and introduce a graduate exit exam. BESE also had no funding source at the time and appropriations for the BST were taken out of the Department of Education budget, which suffered under state budget cuts as the oil crisis continued. Governor Edwards resolved the major political and financial obstacles for BESE in the following legislative session, which made BESE's high stakes testing policies possible.

Governor Edwards Pushes Reform

In his 1984 election campaign, Governor Edwards unveiled an ambitious package

to reform K-12 education using standardized testing as a centerpiece to the reform agenda. During a speech in early 1985 to the Louisiana School Boards Association, Edwards touted expansive reforms that would fundamentally change the entire educational system (Thibodeaux, 1985, p. 1). His education plan included legislative proposals to make the State School Superintendent post appointive, award merit pay for teachers based on licensing exams, establish an education trust fund, secure monies for student summer remediation, require new administrators to pass a licensing exam, develop a teacher internship program, provide leadership training for principals, and replace the BST test with a nationally normed, commercial test for grades 2-11. When the legislative session opened in April 1985, however, Edwards faced a severe economic shortfall and imposed spending cuts on all state services (Office of Planning and Budget, 1985). The 1985-1986 state budget lacked monies to finance Edwards' educational initiatives, and they were postponed by the financial collapse of the state economy.

Cecil Picard, ranking member of the Senate Education Committee, publicly chided Edwards for failing to secure legislation to target testing programs for teachers and students (Thibodeaux, 1985, p. 1). Edwards defended his actions as "political acumen" in understanding what reforms were essential, economical, and likely to get passed in a tense political climate (p. 4). He abandoned pricey education packages to support key constitutional changes that would allow future high stakes testing legislation to advance. Edwards lobbied heavily for a BESE-appointed State School Superintendent and to dedicate the "8g" oil settlement funds to the Louisiana Education Trust Fund. The education trust, placed in an interest-bearing investment account, would yield monies to finance school reform initiatives in perpetuity. Also, a BESE-appointed State School

Superintendent would relieve the public pressure on the School Superintendent and distinguish BESE as the policymaking authority in K-12 education. Edwards' victories in the 1985 legislative session were vital to BESE's ability to authorize and finance an aggressive school reform agenda. BESE gained about $20 million dollars as the first payment from the investment account, which it used to shoulder the cost of test development delayed by the budget crisis. BESE members also welcomed their new power to appoint the State School Superintendent. Clausen, still embroiled in his power struggle with BESE, had been admonished by Edwards for lowering the cutoff scores for the state's teacher licensing exam. Clausen faced a teacher shortage and heavy lobbying from teachers unions, but Edwards pushed a legislative resolution against Clausen's actions and ruled them inconsistent with higher standards in K-12 education (Honeycutt, 2009). The state's first appointed State School Superintendent would take office at the close of Clausen's term in 1988, and BESE selected William Cody for his replacement. Cody, a veteran educator from Alabama, introduced an exit exam for eleventh-graders in his earlier post as Superintendent of Schools in Birmingham (Mckendall & Wardlaw, 1988).

Legislative Power

In the following 1986 legislative session, a renewed sense of urgency pushed legislators to develop a state testing program that promoted standards, assessments, and accountability. First, the existing Louisiana State Assessment Program (LSAP) for secondary students and Basic Skills Test (BST) for elementary grades had not deterred public concern for social promotion. Results from both testing programs indicated proficiency levels above 80 percent, yet a key comparative testing study released by the

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) placed Louisiana last among their southern counterparts in academic performance in 1986 (Southern Regional Education Board, 1986). Louisiana's low scores in the SREB study and NAEP tests substantiated legislative proposals for immediate and rigorous state testing to enforce academic improvement in schools. Also, White conservatives lobbied for policies that would achieve racial equity through school excellence and standards-based reform as opposed to existing court-ordered desegregation mandates. Finally, Edwards convinced lawmakers chose to dedicate that substantial oil windfall to an education trust rather than balance a strained budget, and they were anxious to use those funds to secure a comprehensive testing reform package. State revenues had declined to their worst levels in 1986, and the House Appropriations Committee voted to discontinue funding for the BST program and halt testing administration. The House chose to defer all financing for standards-based reform initiatives to BESE and the education trust instead of the general fund (Wardlaw, 1986).

As a result of renewed vigor for student testing among legislators, two major bills regarding high stakes testing circulated in the 1986 legislative session. The first bill, Act 146, established the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) as a more rigorous assessment program to accompany the curriculum standards imposed by the earlier competency-based education law. The LEAP act was sponsored jointly by chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Cecil Picard, and chairman of the House Education Committee, Jimmy Long. First elected to the State Senate in 1979, Picard was a former teacher and principal in Louisiana's rural Vermillion parish during the years 1959-1979 (Louisiana Secretary of State List of State Senators since 1880, 2009). He

retired from school administration upon election to the State Senate, and was hired as a consultant to a Louisiana petrochemical company. Picard was instrumental in education lawmaking during the school desegregation era, and concentrated his earlier efforts on institutionalizing teacher licensing exams and a state teacher evaluation system. In the previous 1985 legislative session he fought heavily to force all veteran teachers to submit to a recertification progress and obtain a passing score on the state licensing exam, but the measure was killed by the state's largest teachers union (Thibodeax, 1985, p. 1). Picard was a leading spokesman for standardized testing to assess the competence of both teachers and students during the desegregation period. Picard's counterpart in the State House, Jimmy Long, was first elected in 1968 and served seven consecutive terms thereafter. A businessman by occupation, Long represented the rural Winn parish of northwestern Louisiana. He garnered a reputation for being the state's most powerful legislator concerning education law. He represented Louisiana on the Southern Regional Educational Board and the Education Commission of States, the body that first administered the NAEP testing program in 1969 (Louisiana Secretary of State List of State Representatives since 1880, 2009).

Together, both chairman Jimmy Long of the House Education Committee and chairman Cecil Picard of the Senate Education Committee co-sponsored the LEAP law, which passed with large support from state legislators. In terms of its constitutional language, the LEAP law differed from earlier laws only regarding the number and type of assessments that would be administered under the existing the Louisiana Competency-Based Education program. Act 146 established the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) as a "process of measuring pupil performance in relation to grade

appropriate skills, state curriculum standards, and national educational indices" (Official Journal of the State, 1986, p. 364). The new LEAP program included specific instructions for a kindergarten assessment to inform student placement according to ability and readiness; criterion-referenced assessments in grades three, five, and seven aligned to state curriculum standards approved by BESE and used as principal criterion in promotion decisions; a national norm-referenced test administered to all students statewide in at least three grade levels; and an eleventh grade criterion-referenced test. The new assessments would require student "mastery of the grade appropriate skills" instead of "minimal competencies" stressed in earlier education laws (p. 366). The law further indicated that student promotion "shall be based upon student performance on a criterion-referenced test on grade appropriate skills as defined by the state curriculum" (p. 366). Like earlier testing programs, the law stated that "other factors shall be considered" in student promotion and school officials had ultimate authority in promotional decisions based on BESE-approved pupil progression plans (p. 367). The law was carefully worded to refrain from language that would expressly prohibit or require school systems to deny promotion or graduation based on students' test results. It contained clear and urgent directives that test development should begin immediately. Pilot testing for the LEAP K-8 assessments were scheduled for the same year 1986-1987, with implementation to begin the following 1987-1988 school year. Pilot testing for the LEAP eleventh grade test was scheduled to begin in 1987-1988, with implementation to begin no later than 1988-1989 school year.

Other important components of the LEAP law was the stipulation that all students who failed LEAP tests would receive remedial education programs according to BESE

regulations, and the provision to establish the Louisiana Educational Assessment Testing Commission to serve as advisor to BESE regarding the state assessments. The membership of the 16-person Louisiana Educational Assessment Testing Commission was specifically outlined to include a representative from all the major professional teacher organizations/unions, House Education committee, Senate Education committee, BESE, Board of Regents, Louisiana School Boards Association, Louisiana School Principals Association, Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, parent of a public school student (appointed by BESE), an interested citizen (appointed by BESE), and a college/university dean of education (appointed by BESE). According to the law, the Louisiana Educational Assessment Testing Commission was empowered to "recommend procedures for conducting, maintaining, and reporting reliable accountability measures of student performance" (Official Journal of the State, 1986, p. 367). A member of the original Louisiana Educational Assessment Testing Commission reported political pressure to implement the testing program immediately, before there was even a remediation plan for failing students,

> A major focus of the LEAP commission was setting and approving the structures that would encompass the LEAP. There was political pressure to put the system in place immediately, and such a policy required careful deliberation. I remember BESE appointed everyone on the commission and much of our discussion was based on whatever they had in mind. Also, a major concern was that BESE had no plans for failing students. There was a sense that failing students would probably drop out and that it was okay because they were not deserving of the high school diploma. (B. Road Personal communication, August 22, 2011)

Lawmakers included the Louisiana Educational Assessment Testing Commission in the constitutional language of the LEAP law because it was an assurance to educators that they would have input in crafting LEAP policies for students and schools. However, most of the members who served on the commission were named by BESE, which gave BESE members the most critical voice in shaping LEAP policy. The LEAP law represented Louisiana's model of standards-based reform by requiring students to master rigorous curriculum standards and assessments as opposed to basic skills knowledge. It carefully outlined a plan for rigorous standardized assessments to enhance the existing legislation on the competency-based law, but it did not specify punitive consequences for schools. There were high stakes only for students, whose promotion at key grade levels was now based on successful test scores on a LEAP test that required content mastery as opposed to basic skills. The law also did not specify a student remediation plan, but indicated that remediation would be offered to failing students. The ambiguity within the law made it unclear if remediation funds were the responsibility of the state in their annual budget, BESE, the Department of Education, or local school systems. The law was vague in outlining who would finance student remediation, which created a political football over who would shoulder the costs of remediating failing students.

The LEAP Exit Exam

As the LEAP bill neared passage in 1986, another bill requiring a graduation exit exam was proposed by state representative B.F. O'Neal (United Press International, p. B-2). The bill would award a high school diploma to those students who passed the graduation test. Failing students would receive a certificate of attendance rather than a

diploma. The measure passed the Senate Education Committee but it was later rejected by the full Senate. In the following 1987 legislative session, O'Neal proposed another bill to make the LEAP eleventh grade test a criterion for graduation (Hargroder & Anderson, 1987, p. 22). O'Neal, a state representative from the northern city of Shreveport, introduced the bill as an accountability measure that would certify the competence of all high school graduates. The bill passed the state House but halted in the Senate Education Committee due to a tiebreaker vote made by a Black state senator from New Orleans (Hargroder & Anderson, 1987, p. 22). Senator Dennis Bagneris was elected to the State Senate in 1983 and was vice-chairman of the Senate Education Committee. He was also a member of the Legislative Black Caucus, whose membership rose along with Black voting power following the civil rights movement. Bagneris succeeded in preventing legislation for a LEAP graduation test to move forward, and no other proposals surfaced in the state legislature afterward.

BESE began piloting the LEAP eleventh grade test in the 1987-1988 school year, and scheduled the first test administration in 1988-1989 under its new appointed State School Superintendent William Cody. The following year 1990, BESE set an administrative rule making the LEAP eleventh grade test a graduation requirement even though the measure failed to pass in the state legislature three years earlier (Johnson, 1995). The LEAP eleventh grade test was renamed the Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) and made applicable to all BESE-approved schools—both public and non-public. Private and parochial K-12 schools vigorously lobbied the state legislature to argue that BESE lacked constitutional authority to enforce such policy directives on non-public schools. Under its statutory powers set forth by *Aguilard v. Treen* (1982), state legislators passed a

concurrent resolution exempting non-public students from the GEE and LEAP testing (Johnson, 1995). Those students exempted from the GEE were students enrolled in private or parochial schools, home-schooled students, students who receive a General Education Diploma (GED), and students who matriculate from a non-public school but enroll in a public school in their high school years (Johnson, 1995, p. 188). BESE members were divided over the legislative resolution to exclude non-public students, and some members argued that fairness demanded an all-or-nothing approach (Wardlaw, 1990). Board member Huel Perkins of Baton Rouge called the proposed graduation test "inherently racist" in a BESE meeting following the legislative resolution (Wardlaw, 1990, 1). He continued that public school demographics indicated that Black schoolchildren would be more likely to succumb to the test than White schoolchildren who were exempt in non-public schools. Carson Killen of Gonzalez agreed that an uneven testing policy would single out public school students unfairly, and he introduced a proposal to make the test optional to non-public students. In the end, members Killen and Perkins represented the minority among the BESE board and the Killen proposal was denied. BESE acquiesced to the state legislature by revising their position on non-public students in the 1990 *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators* (Standard 2.099.00, Bulletin 741). Only public school students would be subject to the graduation exit exam.

When the GEE requirement was implemented in 1993, Black parents in New Orleans filed suit against BESE in *Rankins vs. Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (1993).* Using a similar argument raised in Florida's *Debra P. vs. Turlington (1981)*, plaintiffs charged the GEE violated the equal protection clause by establishing unequal rules for obtaining a high school diploma in the state of Louisiana

(Johnson, 1995). They argued that state aid to non-public schools—which had risen to an estimated $20 million in 1986—substantiated their claim that non-public schools should submit to the GEE as well as public schools. Plaintiffs continued that bias in test designs and development often produced racial disparities in test scores, which would disadvantage Black students otherwise qualified to graduate. A New Orleans district court agreed with plaintiffs, finding that the GEE was unfairly and discriminately administered (Johnson, 1995, p. 189).

BESE President James Stafford vowed his support for a court appeal to reverse the lower court decision that made the GEE unconstitutional. He defended the GEE as a measure for ensuring higher academic standards in Louisiana public schools. A divided BESE Board met in early 1993 to vote on a decision to appeal the *Rankins* case (Coyle & Wardlaw, 1993). BESE's only Black member, Keith Johnson of New Orleans, unsuccessfully sided with the minority vote to discontinue the GEE out of fairness to public school students and respect to the judicial decision. In a split 6-5 vote, BESE voted to appeal the *Rankins* decision in the Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeals. Publicly, Governor Edwards did not offer any comment on the graduation test and stated that he wanted to show respect for BESE's authority in setting educational policy. However, all three of Edwards' appointees to the BESE board voted to appeal the *Rankins* decision, which signaled Edwards' commanding role in safeguarding the GEE from legal challenges.

A year later BESE won their appeal in *Rankins*, and the appeals court found that BESE did not exceed its constitutional authority because "the statute is devoid of legislative intent regarding graduation exit exams" (637 So. 2d pg. 555). In the absence

of specific legislation against the GEE or certain provisions associated, the court held that BESE is constitutionally empowered to implement the exam as the governing board for elementary and secondary education. The appeals court maintained that BESE possessed power only to approve non-public schools but lacked authority to enforce its policy directives in schools protected by religious freedom (i.e. Catholic schools). The court did not address homeschooled students, GED students, or non-religious private schools who were also exempt from the GEE. In regard to the equal protection challenge, the court found that unlike the *Debra P.* case, BESE's GEE was a criterion-referenced test aligned to a state curriculum required for all students in all schools under all conditions. Because test development was not based on social or nonacademic factors, but rather on a disclosed set of curricula, test bias was an insufficient claim to establish an equal protection violation (Johnson, 1995, p. 187-190). Subsequently, both the Louisiana Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court denied later applications for a writ of certiorari to review the decision made by the appeals court.

Louisiana's dual system of graduation requirements remained a contentious issue that divided communities along both racial and class lines. Unlike the LEAP K-8 assessments, the GEE was inflexible in granting local school officials some influence in awarding high school diplomas. The GEE was a five-part examination that included separate assessments in English, math, science, social studies, and writing. Students had to successfully pass all five parts to receive the high school diploma. The LEAP act does include student remediation in its constitutional language, but the law does not clearly establish the agency responsible for financing remediation. The Louisiana Educational Assessment Testing Commission was successful in pressing state education officials for a

remediation plan before the first administration of the LEAP test (Associated Press, November 1988), but local school systems increasingly absorbed these costs. A remediation program was critically important at this juncture the because the graduate exit exam was an inflexible policy that denied a high school diploma to any failing student. Increasingly, local school systems were saddled with expensive remediation programs that pinched strained budgets in the economic recession.

Despite these criticism of the GEE, the LEAP program remained relatively consistent over the next ten years. The LEAP program replaced minimum-competency testing with rigorous K-12 assessments that required content mastery. BESE defended the GEE as a necessary tool to prevent social promotion and guarantee graduates who were capable of succeeding in college and professional employment. The high stakes fell mainly on students, whose promotion and graduation were largely based on the LEAP tests. About ten percent of students each year were denied their high school diplomas as a result of the GEE, and Blacks represented about 80 percent of these GEE failures (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). Although the failure rate was greater in the LEAP K-8 assessments, school systems were flexible in their decision to promote students based on factors that included classroom performance and teacher recommendation. By 1996, however, the new Louisiana governor Murphy "Mike" Foster revived the excellence rationale to seek tougher accountability policies for the LEAP K-8 assessments.

LEAP for the 21st Century (LEAP 21)

Mike Foster and his school accountability czars

As governor, Edwin Edwards wielded significant power in the state's K-12

education program and the LEAP was created under his leadership. Edwards was succeeded by Republican Governor Murphy "Mike" Foster in 1996, and Foster's educational vision really crafted the LEAP into a weapon for school accountability. Foster was born in Franklin, Louisiana as the son of a wealthy sugar planter and owner of oil and gas lands. Foster's father, Murphy Foster, Jr., was a former Louisiana governor and United States Senator. Foster grew up on his family's sugar cane plantation near Shreveport, Louisiana. He entered politics at the age of 57 as a Louisiana State Senator in 1987. While serving his second term as state senator, he ran a successful campaign for Governor and eventually served two terms (1996-2004). He campaigned on a conservative platform, promising to reduce aid to welfare programs, end affirmative action and racial quotas, and toughen criminal justice laws (Dictionary of Louisiana Biography, 2008; Williams, 2004).

Foster was endorsed by Ku Klux Klan member David Duke in 1995, and Foster pled guilty to an ethics violation for paying $150,000 to Duke for a mailing list of Duke's supporters (La Campaign Finance Opinion No. 99 – 360). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protested Foster's immediate end to statewide affirmative action programs after his election, and they marched outside the Governor's Mansion in early 1996. A White-rights group, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, rallied on the same day in support of Foster (Shuler, 1996, 1). A pro-business governor, Foster sought tax decreases for the business community and policies to increase profitability within the state. He also changed the state's grant program to college students, the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), so that eligibility was based on merit (GPA and test scores) as opposed to

financial need.

In his first election, Foster sought total gubernatorial control of BESE and campaigned for an appointed Board. “The buck will stop with me and my appointees. That can't happen with a BESE board that's mostly elected - no matter how fine the people who end up on it," said Foster to the Baton Rouge newspaper *The Advocate* in 1995 (*The Advocate*, October 1995). He argued that an elected board would be more accountable to their constituents and a hindrance to his bold school accountability agenda that pushed sanctions against failing schools and school systems. Foster’s threats to BESE members were genuine, and he found legislative support to abolish BESE in his first term. In both the 1995 and 1997 state legislative sessions, House bills were introduced to reduce BESE to an advisory body and make the state superintendent post-appointive by the governor (*The Advocate*, June 1995). After meetings with Foster and his staff, BESE members pledged support to Foster’s policies for high stakes testing in elementary grades, penalties and sanctions against schools and teachers, and strict oversight into low-performing school districts.

Unlike Edwards, who appointed teachers and educators to BESE in his tenure, Foster’s BESE appointees were business and law professionals with no classroom experience. Paul Pastorek, an appointee of Foster in 1996, became President of BESE in 2002 and later appointed by BESE to State School Superintendent in 2007 (Louisiana Public Broadcasting, 2011). A corporate attorney, Pastorek began practicing law in 1979 as a litigator specializing in corporate and transactional law. For nearly thirty years Pastorek has been an attorney with the law firm of Adams & Reese, one of largest firms in the southeastern United States. He is a longstanding member of the New Orleans

Chamber of Commerce and currently serves as the chairman of the New Orleans Regional Chamber of Commerce Area Council Executive Committee. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce Greater Baton Rouge and the World Trade Center of New Orleans. During his tenure on BESE, Pastorek played an integral role in the executive decision-making to utilize LEAP in order to evaluate, accredit, and penalize low-performing schools and districts. He was a member of Louisiana's LEARN Commission (1996) that supervised standards and curriculum reform, a member of Louisiana's Public School and District Accountability Commission (1996-1999), and a member of Louisiana's Task Force on Community and Vocational Technical Colleges (1997-1998). He created the nonprofit Next Horizon as a statewide education think tank when he left BESE in 2004 (Louisiana Public Broadcasting, 2011). In 2007 BESE appointed Pastorek as the State School Superintendent and he was given the highest salary of any State School Superintendent throughout the entire Gulf Coast (Maloney, 2008).

Leslie Jacobs, dubbed as the architect of school accountability in Louisiana, was also a 1996 Foster appointee and Vice-President of the Board in 2008. Born in New Orleans, she worked as an insurance executive at The Rosenthal Agency for three decades, and became President of the merged Hibernia Rosenthal Insurance when the company was purchased by Hibernia National Bank in 2000. She entered educational policymaking in 1992 as an elected member of the Orleans Parish School Board. She served on the Orleans Parish School board until 1996, when she was appointed to BESE by Governor Foster. In her final years as BESE member she served as the Board's Vice President. Jacobs is credited with the successful implementation of the Recovery School

District, which is designed to take over the supervisory and budgetary management of failing schools. The Recovery School District recruits charter school operators, educational management organizations (EMOs), and other private sector organizations to operate predominantly underachieving, low-income Black schools in New Orleans. Jacobs, regarded by many as the architect for school choice and competition in Louisiana, used failing LEAP scores and school accountability sanctions to overtake public schools and transfer control to private companies (Educate Now!, 2011).

Not only did Foster obtain pledged support from BESE members in enacting his strict school accountability platform, his appointees assumed Board leadership to assure Foster's vision would be a preeminent focus. Three years into Foster's first term, he was so pleased with BESE that he publicly praised the Board for leading the nation in strict accountability policies and took measures to expand BESE's power.

The Foster Plan

Foster embraced two elements in his education platform: high stakes testing and school accountability based on rewards and sanctions for academic performance. Soon after his 1996 election, Foster and State School Superintendent Raymond Arveson organized a 23-member Louisiana LEARN commission to study educational issues and develop a plan for policy reform. Foster's educational package drew upon the commission's recommendations, which he unveiled during a televised news conference that aired on Louisiana Public Broadcasting stations around the state (Shuler, 1996). Foster acknowledged that both good and bad schools could be found throughout the state, but believed the key to improving bad schools was sanctions against them. Foster identified bad schools as those with poor LEAP test scores and high rates of failure on the

GEE. According to Foster's news conference, these schools were bastions of persistent underachievement that should be held accountable to taxpayers and the students they serve. Foster's education policy would reward schools with proven records of academic achievement and sanction those who failed to improve student academic performance on the LEAP. Low-performing schools would face financial sanctions, closure, takeover by a state-approved management agency, or obligatory student transfer to other public schools or private schools of greater quality. The LEAP K-12 assessments were integral to Foster's school accountability policy because school quality was judged on LEAP test scores. Each school would receive a School Performance Score (SPS) as an annual quality rating (Louisiana Dept. of Education, 2011). Ninety-percent of the SPS at the elementary level was based on the LEAP K-8 assessments. At the high school level the GEE passing rate and high school graduation rate accounted for ninety percent of the SPS. It is important to note that since high school students cannot graduate without passing the GEE, the exit exam is an inherent factor in high school graduation rates (Louisiana Dept. of Education, 2011). Another important element of Foster's education package was redesigning the LEAP assessments to increase their difficulty and proficiency levels. Leslie Jacobs, member of the LEARN commission and later chairman of Foster's K-12 education transition team, expressed concern for grade inflation in public schools to Baton Rouge's *Advocate* in 1996. She stated that too many students with high GPAs were failing the GEE or required to take remedial courses in college. She wanted the GEE test redesigned to contain tougher questions to reflect high expectations that the state had for student learning (Myers, 1996). Foster echoed these sentiments in his televised news conference and argued that the grade-appropriate skills

stressed in the LEAP assessment actually assessed minimum skill levels. To increase Louisiana student performance in national rankings, state assessments should demand rigorous testing and higher proficiency levels to determine cutoff scores (Shuler, 1996).

Like his predecessor, Foster was unable to secure enough legislative support to appropriate additional monies to the Department of Education that would finance his education plan during the 1997 legislative session. His plan entailed rewarding high-performing schools with financial bonuses, developing tougher tests, and shouldering costs for student remediation—all expensive policies for an unpopular public school system (Myers, 1997). Both the Department of Education and the Minimum Foundation Program, which is the state school financing program, was funded through the annual state budget controlled by the state legislature. Proceeds from the education trust were awarded to BESE during Edwards' gubernatorial leadership to finance their policymaking activities. Beyond the education trust and the Minimum Foundation Program from the state's general fund, there was little political backing to appropriate more monies to an embattled public school system. In 1998, Foster's accountability program gained greater support after the release of key education rankings and national test comparisons reveal Louisiana's dismal student performance. In 1997, *Education Week* covered Louisiana's public educational system and noted lagging academic achievement comparable to other states around the country (Lawton, 1997). Louisiana's 1994 NAEP test scores were tied with California for the lowest reading scores on the NAEP tests. Louisiana had the highest proportion of students—60 percent—that could not reach the basic level (p. 117). An interesting note about the NAEP scores is that the 1994 test scores were worse than the 1992 NAEP test scores, which signaled a drop in

students who scored at the proficient level and an increase in those students scoring at the basic level. In addition, Louisiana's ACT scores remained stagnant and below the national average from 1994 to 1997, fueling calls for even tougher standards and assessments (Shipley, 1997). In 1998 BESE released a report indicating that about 2 percent of Louisiana's high school students were denied their high school diplomas because they failed the GEE. The report indicated that most students who were denied their high school diplomas failed to obtain the necessary course credits to graduate. The highest number of GEE failures were in New Orleans and East Baton Rouge parishes, which also had the highest number of students who had not accumulated enough credits to graduate. This admission by BESE brought the LEAP/GEE tests into the forefront and revived old fears that the tests did not enforce school accountability necessary to prevent social promotion (Myers, 1998).

In the 1999 legislative session, Foster was able to convince state legislators to renew a state sales tax that would fund his educational investments to the Department of Education and propel his education plan forward. He pushed LEAP 21 legislation to revise the Public School Accountability Act that would require all fourth and eighth graders to pass the LEAP test in order advance to the next grade. All LEAP/GEE tests were redesigned to reflect the highest cutoff scores and proficiency levels in efforts to improve academic achievement. A key piece of the legislation was the School Performance Scores (SPS) to allow parents and communities to publicly compare schools to rate educational quality or lack thereof. In 1999, when the new LEAP tests were first administered in public schools, one of Foster's aides told Baton Rouge's *The Advocate* that the new LEAP eighth grade tests were more rigorous than the current high school

exam (*The Advocate*, August 1999). About 44,000 fourth and eighth graders failed the new high stakes tests in the first 1999 spring administration. Nearly one-third of students, or about 38,000, failed the tests in the 2000 spring administration (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). The LEAP 21 program advanced very stringent accountability policies to end social promotion in schools and improve Louisiana's rankings. It removed total decision-making power from teachers and local officials and legitimized unequal funding to state schools based on test scores. In May 2008, the steady and massive number of student failures prompted state officials to change the all or nothing policy by permitting waivers and appeals (Sentell, 2008).

Summary

Although Louisiana's first state testing program ended in 1933, state leaders increasingly relied on standardized testing to maintain de facto segregation in the post-*Brown* era. Standardized tests became a popular method of limiting the number of Black applicants seeking transfer to desegregated White schools. Once organized as a constitutional body in 1974, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) took immediate action to enforce a comprehensive state testing policy that would limit student promotion to high school. In 1978, BESE authorized an eighth-grade functional literacy test for all students as a prerequisite to high school admission. Students who did not pass the literacy test were limited to a middle-school education and could not be promoted to high school. BESE's promotional test was more aggressive than the existing Louisiana State Assessment Program, which assessed basic literacy skills for high school students without impacting student promotion or graduation. The eighth-grade

promotional test was tabled by state legislators, who were divided over their support for the test until more information was collected on demographic data related to passing and failure rates. Veteran New Orleans state legislators particularly lobbied on behalf of BESE's promotional tests, and the Basic Skills Test was approved for all students as a principal criterion of student promotion in 1979. Following the *Nation at Risk* report, BESE sought to implement a high school graduation test in conjunction with increased course requirements for high school students. BESE's graduation test was delayed due to a divided state legislature and lack of financial resources, but Governor Edwin Edwards laid important foundations for high stakes testing in 1986.

Governor Edwards particularly supported BESE's reform agenda, and he enacted critical policies that allowed high stakes testing to take root in Louisiana. Edwards secured a consistent funding source for BESE through the education trust, placed the School Superintendent under BESE's authority, and was a decisive voice in the legal challenge to BESE's graduate exit exam (GEE). These developments allowed BESE to move forward with their plans for more rigorous testing and assessments geared at reducing social promotion. Lawmakers strengthened the existing laws for competency-based education by increasing the proficiency level students had to reach in order to pass the state tests. The new proficiency requirements were announced in the 1986 LEAP law, which established the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) as a comprehensive K-12 student assessment program that required students to attain content mastery of course curricula instead of basic skills. The LEAP did not specify student consequences for failure, but state tests were still regarded as the principal criterion in student promotion. After ten years of LEAP testing, Louisiana's new Governor Mike

Foster, Jr. introduced LEAP for the 21st century to promote school accountability. The LEAP 21 established an aggressive accountability framework where schools were rewarded or sanctioned based on students' LEAP scores. The tests themselves were also redesigned to require students' content mastery according to national, norm-referenced indices. Massive student failures accompanied the LEAP 21 tests, which resulted in unequal funding allocations to schools and school systems throughout the state.

There are several implications of the LEAP program for Louisiana students and schools. Because of Louisiana's large private and parochial school attendance rates, the LEAP's punitive consequences primarily befell poor families with limited options for schooling and education. Second, due to the Whites' boycotting of desegregated schools, Blacks are more concentrated in public schools and form the majority of K-8 public schoolchildren (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). Louisiana's Black population is just over 30 percent, which is a higher percentage than other states throughout the country. The Black public school population amounts to about half of all Louisiana public school students, and Louisiana's Black student population is double the national average (National Center for Education Statistics State Education Data Profiles, 2010). Black public school students especially outnumber Whites in the urban cities of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, where Blacks represented 90 percent of public school students during the 1990s (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). As a result, Blacks are more greatly impacted by demands for school accountability. Lastly, the LEAP policies and laws are vague in their description of funding to meet accountability mandates and provide student remediation. Increasingly, local school systems bore the costs of accountability mandates, which left many schools systems more financially destitute.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

In 2001, Johnson & Johnson (2006) completed a yearlong study in a rural Louisiana elementary school to investigate the effects of LEAP 21. Using "thick description" qualitative methods, the researchers obtained a one-year teaching post at Redbud Elementary School and took copious notes of their daily activities. Seeking an insider or "emic" perspective on LEAP 21, the researchers examined several implications for teaching and learning in a high stakes testing environment. The authors describe Redbud Elementary School as a dilapidated facility lacking in even basic resources such as a working telephone in the main office (p. xviii). Although most of the teachers were White, students were predominantly poor and Black. Teachers practiced "regulated teaching," or pedagogy in which scripted curriculum guides indicate a specific curricular focus, instructional concepts, assignments, materials, and pacing for each lesson. Because of LEAP 21, curriculum standards increased from the previous year and limited instructional time to study the prescribed curricula in-depth. Teachers spent much of their time preparing students for the LEAP 21 tests; little instructional resources were used beyond test preparation books, supplements, and computer programs.

In piercing detail, Johnson & Johnson (2006) describe narrowed curriculum, intensive test drills, underfunding, overworked teachers, student anxieties, smart and capable students, but only minimal student learning at Redbud Elementary. When students' test results were released at the end of the school year, about 74 percent of Redbud fourth graders failed either one or both of the LEAP 21 English/Language Arts or

LEAP 21 Math tests, and faced retention unless the students could pass the tests in a summer makeup administration (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 165). Statewide about 42 percent of all fourth graders failed to pass the required LEAP 21 tests and faced automatic retention (p. 165). The Redbud study illustrates the implications of high stakes testing for poor and underachieving schools in Louisiana, whose entire school culture is engrossed in test preparation and remediation. The study exposes the limitations of regulated teaching and packed curriculum that creates a stressful learning environment for students and teachers. Importantly, the Redbud study indicates that intensive high stakes testing actually does little to improve student achievement, as reflected by students' dismal test scores in spite of relentless test preparation.

According to interviews with teachers and students present when LEAP and LEAP 21 were first announced, the Redbud study examines one facet of the high stakes testing program. Participants also identified other significant implications of the LEAP that exacerbated perennial problems within Louisiana's educational system. First, the LEAP accentuated the class disparity between non-public school students and public school students. The LEAP contributed to a decrease in public school enrollment during the 1990s, and deepened the existing class divide between non-public and public schools. Second, local school systems had to absorb much of the LEAP test preparation and remediation costs. Lastly, the LEAP instigated racial politics in public education policy considered part and parcel of Louisiana's educational history. For many Blacks, the timing of the 1986 LEAP law and corresponding GEE signaled an attempt to use achievement tests to undermine Black educational progress during the desegregation period. The LEAP 21 rigorous accountability program, coupled by the fact that it was

spearheaded by Mike Foster, raised more suspicion within the Black community regarding the tests' usefulness in improving public education for thousands of Black students in public schools.

The Wealth Gap in Louisiana Schools

During the 1998 legislative session, lawmakers questioned rising public education costs despite a 10-year decline in public school enrollment (Myers, 1998). Education officials attributed the costs to additional school personnel, whose numbers had grown exponentially in recent years to comply with accountability mandates. The LEAP was enacted in 1986, and every year thereafter one employee had been added to the state payroll for every two students lost (Sentell, 2003, p. 1). In 1986 the state's public schools had 792, 831 students and 86,379 employees. The number of public school students dropped by about 27,448 in the period 1986-1997, but the number of school workers increased by half that amount (p. 1). About 16 percent of Louisiana's elementary and students were found in private schools by 1998, placing Louisiana third in the nation for private school enrollment (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999). Louisiana also ranked number one in the nation for the largest number of dropouts per total student enrollment (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999). By 2003 Louisiana public school student enrollment dipped again to about 699,000. The percentage of private school students remained at about 15 percent of all students, but the number of home-schooled students and drop-outs increased significantly (Sentell, 2003). Louisiana's public school enrollment in the years following the LEAP diverged from national trends in public school attendance. In the period of 1990-2000 Louisiana public students

declined by 5 percent, but public school enrollment rose nationwide by 9 percent during the same period (Sentell, 2003).

As earlier noted, Louisiana experienced a sharp decline in public school enrollment following school desegregation in 1960. The number of public school students continued to decline throughout the 1990s, which exasperated the wealth gap between non-public and public schools in Louisiana. Nonpublic school enrollment rose to 22 percent for Whites and 5 percent for Blacks during the 1990s, representing about one-third of Louisiana students (Bankston & Caldas, 2002, p. 146). The rise in private and parochial school attendance rates made Louisiana's dual educational system more entrenched within the state. Poor and lower classes became increasingly concentrated in public schools, whereas wealthy classes were increasingly concentrated in non-public schools. By the year 2000, about 66 percent of all public school students were receiving free or reduced lunch and labeled "economically disadvantaged" in the state records of student demographics (Louisiana Dept. of Education, 2011). In the major cities of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, the rate of economically disadvantaged students reached 90 percent (Louisiana Dept. of Education, 2011).

Because there is a much higher concentration of Louisiana's poor families in public schools, they are more adversely impacted by the punitive consequences associated with LEAP test scores. It is important to note the excellence rationale that supported high stakes testing in Louisiana embraced an egalitarian and populist message. Governor Edwards, Superintendent Clausen, and BESE President James Stafford all defended the LEAP as a tool for raising academic achievement for all Louisiana students regardless of social circumstances. Likewise, Governor Foster and BESE Vice-President

Leslie Jacobs popularized the LEAP 21 as a rigorous testing program to raise academic achievement in those students and schools with persistent academic underperformance. However, these state officials developed the LEAP and associated policies with an understanding that the high stakes testing program would largely impact poorer and working class families. Although promoted as an equitable policy to enforce all students to attain high standards, the LEAP's rigorous curriculum, testing, and demands on teachers and schools are largely enforced on poor students and families. The large failures rates on LEAP 21 signal a massive problem in which predominantly poor students are denied promotion and graduation because they cannot afford educational options where they are exempt from high stakes testing. This educational structure creates restrictions on promotion and graduation for Louisiana's poor and working classes that do not act as a barrier for many middle and upper class families.

To illustrate the widening class rift in Louisiana's educational structure and its effects on poorer children in public schools, a New Orleans teacher shared her experiences,

> The LEAP graduation test was not a major concern because almost everyone passed in the beginning. I know one person whose child could not pass and the parents immediately withdrew the student and sent her to a Catholic school. This was about 1994. The LEAP exit exam became more difficult later on, and we had lots of students who failed one or more parts. By then we had poorer students whose parents could not afford to send them elsewhere. There was more pressure on these students to work while attending school, but once they had failed the LEAP, they just continued working and never came back. (H. Lane, Personal

communication, 2011)

Another layer to the class divide in Louisiana schools is the power of the middle class in setting policies for the majority poorer classes in public schools. The middle class plays a larger role in shaping educational policy and discourse in the state that is sometimes contrary to the political voice of the poorer classes and their struggle for socio-economic mobility. A teacher in rural Lafayette explained that high stakes testing in Louisiana developed as a consequence of middle-class families at the helm of decision-making. She saw the LEAP as a policy advanced by the middle class and more of a directive for the poor masses in the public schools,

> A lot of people are still upset that only public school students have to take these tests and teachers have no say at all in student promotion. The state decided that rule and they did so because a lot of those state officials don't have kids in public schools. That's the problem. Those running the schools have no vested interest in the public schools getting better. They create policies that are both inflexible and unrealistic given the circumstances of public school students. (T. Howard, Personal communication, October 29, 2011)

These two teachers point to a class divide that became an increasing problem in Louisiana as a result of its high stakes testing program. A middle class boycott of public schools can be problematic when school policy and financing decisions are largely made by middle class citizens. The decision to implement the LEAP in nonpublic schools was met with vigorous opposition in the state legislature, but the same legislators agreed to such a policy for public school students. High stakes testing may not have taken root in Louisiana if it was a truly universal policy in which all students, regardless of social

class, were subjected to the punitive consequences associated with student accountability.

High Costs and Strained Budgets

In 2004 *Education Week* awarded Louisiana its top rating for standards and accountability, but graded the state a "D" in school financing and allocation of funds (Skinner, 2004). BESE is charged with developing the state financing formula, the Minimum Foundation Formula, to determine the estimated costs of providing "a minimum foundation program of education for all elementary and secondary schools" (LA Const., Art. VIII, § 13). BESE estimates annual educational costs to finance the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) and submits this amount for approval from the state legislature. The state legislature appropriates monies for the MFP in the state budget each year. Since 2000, the annual costs for educational programs are partly financed by the state and by each locality. The MFP formula requires local school systems to supply 35 percent of their education costs and the state pays 65 percent. Failure to provide the local support share will result in a proportionate percentage reduction in state aid. Additionally, state law requires that 70 percent of MFP funding to local school systems are dedicated to classroom instruction (teacher salary and retirement benefits, materials, and instructional aides). This financing model leaves just 30 percent of MFP shared among local schools to finance administrator salaries and benefits, utilities, supplies, maintenance, and extra-curricular activities. From fiscal year 1992 to fiscal year 2002 MFP appropriations grew by $664 million (Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, 2003, p. 35). Much of the increase in school financing from 1992 to 2002 were earmarked for cost-of-living pay raises and increases in school personnel. Accountability

mandates lead to an increase in hired specialists, special education teachers, consultants, administrators, and training programs, which absorb the increases in the Minimum Foundation Program at the local level. These data indicate that there has been very little increased funding to local schools when LEAP and LEAP 21 were implemented, despite the rigorous curriculum and punitive consequences the tests imposed.

In fact, local schools receive even less funding for operating expenses because they have to finance student remediation to meet the state's rigorous testing demands. Much of the appropriations for student remediation were contingent upon the availability of funds in the state budget. For example, the state was supposed to open testing remediation centers statewide to provide remediation for students who failed the BST, but appropriations were made for only one year and local school systems bore the costs for summer remediation thereafter (Schechter, 1981). When BESE first proposed a high school exit exam in 1984 to accompany their more rigorous program of study, New Orleans shouldered the costs of summer school remediation for about 3000 of its under-achieving high school students who had scored poorly on a basic skills test administered earlier in the school year (Hodge, 1984). Costs for the program totaled $312,000, which was a hefty price for the cash-strapped school system. In 1986, the year the LEAP law was enacted, St. Tammany Parish Schools lost significant state aid due to budget cuts. The system lost over $250,000 for student remediation on the existing BST program and almost $300,000 from their MFP financing (Haley, 1986). In fact all school systems lost monies in their MFP financing in 1986-87. The year 1986-87 was the worst economic year of the oil crisis and the total MFP was cut by about $18 million in the state budget. Although the education trust was established also in 1986, BESE gained the interest from

the oil settlement to finance its policymaking and governing efforts. The education trust financed high stakes testing reforms but did not fund increases in the MFP to finance local schools. When the Foster administration established LEAP 21, the legislature appropriated millions in state aid to fund student remediation. But the state's appropriations only covered 80 percent of the summer remediation for failing students. Local school systems were required to pay 20 percent of remediation costs out of their MFP financing (Legislative Fiscal Office, Fiscal Highlights 2000, 2000).

Another important factor in school financing is the higher rate of poverty-stricken students in Louisiana schools (66 percent), who sometimes require extra services such as individual tutoring, speech therapists, or vision aids to assist their cognitive development and retention. Louisiana's students requiring an individualized educational program (IEP) numbered 85,119 or about 13 percent of the total student population in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics State Education Data Profiles, 2010). To comply with both federal and state accountability targets, the costs for educating special populations can be dramatic. In a 2011 analysis of special education services in charter schools in New Orleans, Bordelon (2010) found that children with disabilities were underrepresented in charter schools due to lack of identification and resources to fund adequate instruction. The costs associated with testing, evaluation, and accommodations can quickly drain the resources of charter schools, which create an incentive for charters to reclassify students or deny admission to those requiring costly services.

The state financing to local schools represent a fundamental problem in the potential success of the LEAP in improving school quality. The LEAP demands academically rigorous curriculum standards and high proficiency levels for testing

performance, but schools are financed at a minimum level to support only basic operating services. This mismatch between school financing and the expectations for student test performance creates an uphill battle for poorer school systems to improve student achievement on the LEAP. Local school systems fund testing and remediation costs at the expense of other priorities that would enhance the educational environment and support student learning. Redbud Elementary, discussed in Johnson & Johnson's (2006) study, lacked playground equipment, library, arts or music classes, extra-curricular academic clubs, and basic supplies. Such gross underfunding limits those educational experiences that would support academic and developmental growth.

A former Louisiana student, who failed the eighth grade LEAP 21 and took summer remediation in 2001, noted how remediation did little to help students because the school conditions were not improved,

> I failed the math LEAP. A lot of people did and we had to go to summer school for like, three weeks. It was so hot, and we had little fans in the windows. The teachers just gave us workbooks and told us to do all the assignments to practice. To me it was a waste of time. It would have helped if I had someone to work with one-on-one. It wasn't like I was dumb, I could get the right answers but just needed help on the steps. The teachers said the tests were a lot harder because we had to show specific steps in our answers, we couldn't just bubble in the right answers. I could never understand that. We have to get the right answer, but we also have to show every single step? (O. Price, Personal communication, August 21, 2011)

The LEAP 21 increased demands for student proficiency in skill development and critical

thinking, but there was little improvement in school environments a result of increased financial pressures to meet accountability demands. One of implications of high stakes testing in Louisiana is the idea that academic achievement can be increased through classroom instruction alone, yet school facilities and the overall educational environment is neglected. There is a resistance to funding capital improvements to schools as evidenced by state laws that limit MFP funding to expenditures directly related to classroom instruction.

Racial Politics

As earlier noted, Blacks first challenged BESE's LEAP/GEE graduation policy in a 1993 lawsuit charging discrimination against public school students. Plaintiffs sought and won injunctive relief from the district court, but the decision was later reversed by the Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeals in 1994. Black plaintiffs' subsequent writs of certiorari were denied by the Louisiana Supreme Court and U.S. Supreme Court (Johnson, 1995). Although Blacks' test scores on the LEAP/GEE typically lagged behind Whites, Blacks' average test scores on the exit exam were satisfactory to pass the LEAP tests. When the first GEE tests were administered in 1990, Whites had an average score of 79 percent correct and Blacks had an average score of 67 percent correct (Bankston & Caldas, 2002, p. 192). However, Blacks were 78 percent of those who could not graduate because of failing one section of the LEAP/GEE. In 1998 Baton Rouge's *Advocate* reported that about 1500 Louisiana seniors could not graduate as a result of failing one section of the LEAP/GEE, and these students were concentrated in New Orleans and East Baton Rouge parishes (Myers, 1998). By 1998, when Foster announced the LEAP 21

program and his intention to make the LEAP tests more difficult, Blacks vigorously opposed the new promotional policy for fourth and eighth graders that would determine student promotion solely on the results of a more difficult LEAP 21. When LEAP 21 was piloted in the 1998-1999 school year, 44,000 fourth and eighth graders failed and would have been retained under the new policy. The next year 1999-2000, the LEAP 21 promotional requirement was instituted and 38,000 fourth and eighth graders failed one or both portions of the LEAP 21 English/Language Arts and LEAP 21 Math (Sentell, 2000). In total, about 30 percent of Louisiana fourth-graders faced automatic retention as result of failing one or both of the LEAP 21 sections.

Bill Quigley, then-assistant dean of the law school at Loyola University of New Orleans, signed on as legal advisor to the New Orleans-based Parents for Educational Justice formed in response to LEAP testing in 2000. In an interview with *Times Picayune*, Quigley noted that the new LEAP 21 test for eighth graders was harder than college admissions tests. He sent letters to then-State Superintendent Cecil Picard under the public records law for information regarding test development, old and new copies of LEAP tests, and names of the external contractors who developed the exam (Vaishnav, 2000). In response, House Education Committee chairman Carl Crane introduced legislation protecting the LEAP from the public records law and a resolution was passed exempting the LEAP from public records inspection in 2000. The following year, New Orleans House representative Renee Gill Pratt introduced legislation making the LEAP tests just one factor in student promotion. Again, chairman Carl Crane of the House Education Committee killed the bill as a threat to the state's accountability program (*The Advocate*, 2001). In an interview with *The Advocate* explaining the racial split over the

LEAP 21, Crane said,

> The tragedy of it all is the black population is the population that will benefit the most from high stakes testing and increased accountability in schools. (*The Advocate*, 2001, p. 10)

State Superintendent Cecil Picard also felt the need to address the racial split over LEAP testing in a bulletin released to parents in 2001 called *Reaching for results: A message from the superintendent* (Louisiana Department of Education, 2001). In a "Questions and Answers" section, criticism of the tests' unfairness is addressed:

Q. Won't such a difficult test be unfair to poor and minority students?

A. On the contrary, the LEAP 21 test, "high stakes" testing, and accountability ensure that all students who need extra help get it. For many schools, that additional help means redirecting resources to students most in need. (Louisiana Department of Education, 2001, p. 3).

The potential benefits to Blacks were promoted by state education officials and high ranking legislators, but many Blacks viewed the tests as a tool to weaken Black educational progress. The frenzy to implement tougher and more comprehensive promotional tests in Louisiana began during the desegregation period, and because of Governor Foster's connections to White rights groups, Blacks grew even more suspicious of the LEAP 21 as a model for improving Black education. In an editorial response to Crane's comments about the benefits of LEAP 21 for Blacks, a Black lawyer from Baton Rouge wrote to the *Advocate* to protest Crane's remarks. Her impassioned response bears the lengthy quotation,

> If this test is so "crucial to the future of education reform in Louisiana," why is it

> not given to all children in Louisiana?...It is not lost on us that the overwhelming majority of African-American children in this state attend public schools. It is also not lost on us that the overwhelming majority of children attending private and parochial schools in this state are White…. Certainly no one expects us to believe that the state of Louisiana is more concerned about African-American children that it is about White children. If Louisiana wants to show concern for children, we must show that we are concerned for all of our children. Administer this wonderful, God's gift to education, "high stakes test," to all the children in Louisiana, or administer it to none. (*Advocate*, 2002, p. 6)

Many Blacks were alarmed by the large failure rates on the LEAP 21. Blacks represented about 52 percent of all elementary schoolchildren taking the LEAP 21 in 1999 and about 31 percent of schoolchildren in the state (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). The secrecy, timing, and penalties associated with the LEAP fueled Blacks' skepticism of high stakes testing as a school excellence reform model. A former member of the 1986 LEAP testing commission noted that a perception of racial discrimination was dismissed under the necessity for ensuring all students possessed basic skills,

> At that time we had students who could not read about a fourth-grade level, but were passed along. I believe the LEAP, when first applied in the 1990s, served an important purpose for measuring basic skills and I think the test was much fair. The commission understood that a racial bias may be perceived, which is why we took care to include a Black educator on the commission to oversee much of the development. (I. Hays, Personal communication, August 22, 2011)

The LEAP remains a racially divisive issue in Louisiana because most of the

punitive effects of the LEAP are felt in the Black community. Louisiana's uneven testing policy follows a history of public education policy that reflect racial disparities (i.e. racially segregated schools, racially-differentiated curriculum, unequal school financing).

Conclusion

Louisiana's early public education policy sought standardization and achievement testing as means of assimilating the French-speaking, Catholic, and Creole population of the early twentieth century. The state's first achievement test was developed as a component of the State Supervisory Program in 1921. The achievement tests were voluntary, but encouraged by education officials as a vehicle for promoting a standard model of curriculum and instruction in the Anglo-American tradition. The State Supervisory Program discontinued during the Great Depression in 1933, but state interest in both intelligence and achievement testing resurfaced during the desegregation period. The tests became a featured component of the state's desegregation policy, which limited Black student enrollment to majority-White schools. Education officials touted student testing as a way of maintaining educational quality, but the main objective was to defy desegregation mandates. A wave of White boycotts to desegregated schools lead to increased Black enrollment in public schools but lesser political and financial support from state and local governments. As a result, public schools languished under financial disinvestment and student achievement lagged behind the national average. State legislators created the LEAP in 1986 to improve student achievement and prevent social promotion, but the LEAP more adversely impacted Black and poorer families in Louisiana. These groups are more adversely impacted because there is a higher

percentage of both Black and poor students in Louisiana and specifically at the K-8 grade level. By contrast, decisions regarding educational funding, policy, and accountability are decided by a largely White and middle class demographic. Racial and class division over the LEAP occurs because the middle class is concentrated in nonpublic schools that are exempt from high stakes testing, but the poorer classes are upheld to a strict standard of accountability.

High stakes testing in Louisiana is a factor in student promotion and graduation for public schools only, yet there is little evidence that the high stakes testing program has improved student achievement overall. Recent National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores can serve as a comparative assessment tool to monitor changes in Louisiana's student achievement relative to national indices. NAEP scores indicate that Louisiana student achievement levels have remained the same since 1992. In 1992, the difference between Louisiana NAEP fourth grade reading scores versus the national average was 11 points. In 2011, there was 10 point difference between Louisiana fourth grade reading scores and the national average. Louisiana's eighth grade reading scores lagged behind the national average by 9 points in 1998, and they lagged behind the national average by 9 points in 2011. Louisiana's NAEP fourth grade math scores were 11 points lower than the national average in 2011, and 27 percent of students scored below basic level. Louisiana's NAEP eighth grade math scores were 10 points below the national average, and there was no significant change in scores from 2009-2011. About 37 percent of Louisiana students scored below basic on the NAEP eighth grade math assessment, and 78 percent scored at the basic level or below basic level in 2011. Recent NAEP scores indicate that student achievement in Louisiana has consistently lagged

behind the national average despite the intensive high stakes testing program (National Center for Education Statistics NAEP, 2011).

A disturbing trend, however, is the drop-out rate in Louisiana that has increased since high stakes testing was introduced. In 2009, Louisiana had the highest drop-out rate in the country at 7.5 percent or 35,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics Dropout Rates, 2011). The drop-out rate is a problem because it limits a large population of Louisiana citizens to unskilled labor and fewer opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. Because there is a higher population of poorer students in the public schools, a situation in which tens of thousands of students drop out each year creates a cycle of poverty for many Louisiana families. In 2011, Louisiana Public Broadcasting (2011) aired a series called, “Dropout Dilemma: Louisiana’s Education Crisis” to investigate the drop-out issue and highlight solutions from the Louisiana Department of Education. In a feature story, journalists interviewed Scott Hughes as a representative of the Louisiana thinktank Alliance for Education. Hughes stated that most Louisiana students drop-out between grades 8 and 9 than at any other level in the K-12 system largely due to high stakes testing. Louisiana loses more students between grades 8 and 9 than at any time during students’ K-12 career. Why is the eighth grade LEAP test playing such a large role in drop-out rates? It could be due to allegations made by Parents for Educational Justice and law professor Bill Quigley, who argued that the eighth grade LEAP test is more rigorous than college admissions tests. Quigley’s argument cannot be verified, however, because previous and current LEAP tests are protected from public disclosure under Louisiana state law.

The LEAP narrative presents a historical context that indicates race played a

factor in both the social foundations and political efforts to implement the LEAP. Blacks, who dominated public schools in New Orleans and Baton Rouge by the 1990s, saw a dramatic increase in promotion and graduation as a result of civil rights gains and desegregation. However, these public schools harbored a negative image by a conservative White majority, and education officials at various levels sought to prevent social promotion by requiring students to demonstrate competency on a standardized test. The LEAP did not begin as a high stakes test in 1986, but punitive consequences became increasingly associated with students' performance under Governor Mike Foster. Foster supervised the expansion of high stakes testing policies in LEAP 21 that resulted in massive student failures in which thousands of students were retained or denied high school graduation. The LEAP 21 became a racially divisive issue because of Foster's relationships with Whites-rights groups and the predominance of Black failures on the test. Blacks' suspicion of the test increased when the LEAP was shielded from public records and review in 2000.

The current context of high stakes testing in Louisiana has expanded its focus from student promotion and graduation to teacher evaluation and tenure. Louisiana officials were recipients of federal 2011 Race to the Top funding that awarded grants to states engaged in a new branch of standards-based reform (U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top Fund, 2011). Among the goals in the Race to the Top educational reform agenda are teacher merit pay, technology integration, data-driven instruction, and charter school options for chronically failing public schools. All of these elements have found some resonance in Louisiana—in particular the state's the largest urban school district, New Orleans Public Schools. In efforts to improve student achievement in New Orleans,

state officials established the Recovery School District in 2006 as the largest charter school district in the country. In the 2009-2010 school year, about 61 percent of New Orleans students were enrolled in charter schools that operate as privately run, publicly-funded hybrids (Fenwick, 2010). The decentralized, privatization model that currently operates in New Orleans is now promoted as the solution to underachievement and represents a new shift in school reform—the free market model. The free market rationale argues that charters school operators should compete to produce the best educational programs, thereby boosting student achievement through market-driven methods.

However, the critical issue for New Orleans is that charter school operators are exempt from certain rules regarding teacher contracts and tenure, which has complicated the role of New Orleans' large Black teacher population. Prior to 2005, New Orleans was home to the only concentration of African-American educators in the state of Louisiana. Over 73% of the classroom teachers in New Orleans Public Schools were African-American, and a whopping 88% of school principals and administrators were African-American (Louisiana Department of Education, 2004). Members of the teachers union, the United Teachers of New Orleans, were the single largest group of educated, African-American homeowners in the city (Center for Community Change, 2006). In order to establish the new Recovery School District, the state closed traditional public schools and fired all New Orleans Public School employees en masse. The displaced teachers had to reapply as new hires and satisfy new testing requirements in the Recovery School District. In spite of earned Bachelor degrees, teaching experience, passing scores on the state teacher examination, and a successful record of teacher certification, the teachers had to pass a new examination initiated by the Recovery School District to screen new

applicants. In an essay written by a veteran New Orleans teacher, the disparity in the new testing requirements for New Orleans teachers versus other areas in Louisiana rings clear,

> Many highly qualified educators are not working in the new charter schools and the Recovery School District, because these districts are using unfair tactics to undermine the professionalism and the respect of veteran teachers. The test that these districts administer is an insult to the profession of teaching. Orleans Parish is the only district in which such tests take place. In any other school district, the state deems its certification system, which includes the national praxis exam, a good measure for hiring teachers. (Center for Community Change, 2006, 30-31)

Second, the displaced teachers were often required to submit scores from teacher licensing exams, record of successful teaching (as evidenced through student test scores), and evaluations of teaching performance in the hiring process. Students' test scores on state exams such as the LEAP are used as the central criterion for employment and contract renewal in many charter schools. There is a concern about the underlying assumptions of using student test scores to evaluate teacher quality and determine teacher pay. The LEAP narrative portrays a minimally-funded, yet high-demanding accountability program where the punitive effects largely impact Black and poor students. The firing of the state's largest Black teaching population creates more poverty and instability in the city of New Orleans that negates the success of any school reform model. There is also a concern as to why New Orleans teachers were the only city population summarily fired when there are other school districts throughout the state that also reflect chronically low student achievement.

High stakes testing in Louisiana has made a strong impact on student promotion

and graduation, but its punitive consequences have gradually intensified to include teachers and communities. The situation in Louisiana reflects a larger trend toward teacher accountability across the country. Teachers are increasingly judged by students' test scores on standardized tests, although there is an abundance of research indicating multiple factors of student achievement that include family background and school environment (eg., Coleman, 1966; Kohn, 2000; Kozol 2006). Teachers do play an important role in student learning, but it is problematic to apply the accountability matrix to teacher pay, evaluation, and tenure. A report from the Educational Commission of the States (2010) reviewed four merit pay initiatives in school districts across the U.S.: Denver, Texas, Chicago, and Iowa. Investigators found there was no difference in student achievement between those participating in the merit pay program and those that did not. Despite this admission by the Educational Commission of the States, merit pay initiatives have begun in many states across the country, and are defended by the free market rationale of school reform that promotes competition and incentives to schools and teachers. However, as indicated by the history of the LEAP, there are social, racial, and economic subtexts within school reform discourse that complicate high stakes testing programs and their intended goals. Further research concerning the LEAP and similar high stakes testing programs is warranted to investigate larger implications on employment, poverty, school improvement, racial equality, and community progress.

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