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STAAR Preparation: How It Affects the Perceptions of Third-Grade Students

Taylor Whitworth

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Abstract

Test preparation is a hot button topic in education today. Many studies have looked at students' and teachers' perceptions after the administration of the STAAR test. This study investigated third-grade students' perceptions of the STAAR before and after previous-form test preparation interventions. The researcher used observations, surveys, and interviews to collect data. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method and descriptive statistics. The author found five major themes that answered the two original research questions. Most students had negative perceptions of the STAAR test prior to intervention, and these often stemmed from information from family members. Overall, the previous-form STAAR preparation had a positive impact on student perceptions.

STAAR Preparation: How It Affects the Perceptions of Third-Grade Students

I
 don't
 get this.
 It's long.
 Take your time.
 Evrebody be quite.
 When something big is happening I get really nervous. I'm scared.
 I don't want to take the STAAR. I can't do this one.
 It is cinduve hard. I want to pass this grade.
 This is a big test. I never took one befor.
 If you fale you fale the grade.
 It's going to be very hard.
 I know y'all can do it.
 Slow down! One step at a time
 I'm excited. Do your best.
 I mite fail. Ovrwelnde.
 I did it! Peace.
 Yes! Quiet.

This poem represents the general feelings of the students in my third-grade classroom in relation to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness, or STAAR test. All of these are direct quotes from my students' writing on the pre-intervention survey I gave or are my own words from the first intervention day. This study investigates how a certain type of standardized test preparation can possibly affect these perceptions.

Purpose

This study is important in the context of the third-grade classroom because third grade represents a large transition year for elementary school students. I sought to understand the perceptions of elementary students before and after being exposed to released test materials. Test preparation has the ability to build students' preparedness and self-confidence for any upcoming exam or standardized test. A teacher's job is to prepare students for successful futures. For students, standardized tests could have many effects, such as the ability to proceed to the next grade-level or getting accepted into college. The results of this study could impact the way teachers go about preparing students for standardized tests. This study adds to the knowledge

base of teachers by providing insight into the perceptions of third-grade students relating to STAAR testing before and after previous-form test preparation occurred. Previous-form test preparation is "...practice based directly on students' use of... earlier versions of the same test, which are no longer being published" (Popham, 2020, p. 347). My study addressed these under-researched areas by answering the following questions:

- 1) What are third graders' current perceptions of STAAR, and where are they coming from?
- 2) In what ways does previous-form math STAAR preparation affect the STAAR perceptions of third-grade students in my homeroom?

During this study, I was a graduate student in my second semester of co-teaching in a third-grade classroom. My cooperating teacher and I taught two classes of students at Acres Elementary (all names are pseudonyms) which served about 500 students. Of these students, around 43% were White, 40% were Hispanic, 10% were African American, 5% were two or more races, 1% were American Indian, and 1% were Asian (all numbers were rounded). Over half of the students attending Acres Elementary were economically disadvantaged, and 1% were English Learners (EL).

Literature Review

The amount of pressure placed on students and teachers to get higher scores on the STAAR test has increased from year to year. For example, in previous years, students in Texas have faced pressure because their STAAR scores determined their advancement to the next grade. This requirement has since been removed by House Bill 4545 (Texas Education Agency, 2021). In other states, such as the Midwest area, grade retention was one of the most daunting issues that students mentioned when discussing standardized testing (Dutro & Selland, 2012).

This pressure to pass and advance to the next grade has negative effects on students in many ways.

Teachers have recognized that “the climate of high stakes tests undoubtedly translates to increased student anxiety and self-doubt” (Landry, 2006, p. 39). The length of testing, possible change in environment, and change in routine on testing days have all caused students to feel isolated, nervous, upset, and unable to perform at their best (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005). A Texas student explained this pressure by listing people who would be upset if they did not pass and concluded by saying “...You’ll [I’ll] be upset because everyone is upset with you [me]!” (Strauss, 2014, para. 3). With all of the potential negative impacts of standardized testing, stakeholders still hope that the assessments will result in valid and reliable data. Unfortunately, many students have felt that the test does not grant them the ability to show what they are truly capable of (Giambo, 2017).

Students’ feelings and hesitations are not something that any teacher should ignore. Teachers should take the time to directly involve students in the choices that affect their educational success (Dutro & Selland, 2012; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). When students are asked what they think will most benefit them, teachers who listen well can often find the best strategies to scaffold learning. The input from students increases their confidence and their sense of ownership of the classroom at the same time.

When students have more confidence in themselves and their ability to succeed on the test, they have a greater chance to perform to the best of their ability on test day. This confidence is sometimes called academic self-concept (ASC) and is highly beneficial “because the motivational properties of ASC could initiate adaptive learning strategies and behaviors...which would have a positive effect on future achievement and success” (Wu et al., 2021, p. 1769).

Relative levels of a student's self-concept can help predict performance both in class and on standardized tests (Lauermaun et al., 2020). In order for students to feel more confident in their own abilities, teachers must appropriately prepare them.

There are many ways to go about preparing students for standardized tests, but teachers have to be careful not to overwhelm their students. "Teaching to the test" is a phrase that has been used in education recently, but simply teaching to the test has been frowned upon because it can detract from the in-depth, hands-on learning that we want students to receive (Davis & Vehabovic, 2018; Gebril & Eid, 2017). Davis and Vehabovic (2018) suggested that "...of about 10,000 minutes of comprehension instruction... no more than 5%... should be focused on test-centric instruction" (p. 586). As previously stated, overemphasizing the pressure and possible consequences of failing a standardized test should be avoided at all costs (Simpson, 2016). So, how should we prepare students while still maintaining the quality of learning and high levels of self-concept that we want for them?

In a case study conducted in two different elementary school classrooms, researchers found that creating instructional activities based on test preparation strategies could lead to a greater chance for success on assessments (Lam, 2013). For my study, the test preparation strategy that I chose to base my interventions on is what Popham (2020) calls previous-form test preparation. Previous form-test preparation is when a released version of the same test, from a previous year, is used to show students what questions may look like. Each year, after all students in the state have taken the STAAR test, the Texas Education Agency (2022) releases the paper test form and additional sample questions. These resources include "test forms that were administered online [which] are released as practice tests" (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Previous-form test preparation, like all other forms of preparing students for a test, should be used sparingly and not as the basis for a full curriculum.

Many studies have investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of intense preparation practices as well as their perceptions after the standardized test has been administered. However, there is little research related to students' perceptions of standardized tests before ever having taken one or how previous-form test preparation sessions affect these perceptions. These new perspectives are what my study contributes to the existing pool of knowledge.

Methods

The next few sections describe different aspects of the action research study that I conducted as a clinical teacher in a third-grade classroom. I acted as a teacher and a researcher to gather data on students' perceptions of the STAAR test before and after 12 previous-form test preparation interventions.

Participant Selection

Twenty-one third-grade students from the math, science, and social studies classroom in which I served as a clinical teacher were asked to participate. There were 11 boys and 10 girls; ten of the students were Caucasian, six were Hispanic, three were African American, and two were two or more races. Of those, 18 students received parent permission and assented to participating in the study. In addition to the student participants, I also participated as teacher and researcher. I made it clear in the consent and assent materials that participation was completely optional, and the students were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Participation was not tied to grades in any way.

Data Collection

I collected data through observations and journaling, student interviews, and student pre- and post-surveys. I gave a survey, using both Likert scale (Vogt, 1999) and free-response questions, to all participating students to complete at the beginning of the five-week observation period to collect overall feelings about the STAAR (see Appendix A).

The interventions in this study were 12, five-minute-long test-preparation sessions with observations over a four-week period. These interventions took place in the later part of the fourth and beginning of the fifth six weeks. I journaled after each intervention period to record general questions or feelings that students expressed. The intervention consisted of showing the students a released math STAAR test question and asking them to work through it on their own. After three minutes, we discussed the question and the answer as a class.

I gave a post-survey (see Appendix A) to the students at the end of this five-week period. This post-survey had the same questions as the pre-survey with a few additional questions about how students felt about the preparation process and how, if at all, it changed their perceptions. Data from the surveys were "...pieced together with other data to get a true picture of what [was] happening in [my] classroom" (Hubbard & Power, 2003, p. 65).

Student interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and occurred with eight students chosen via the pre-survey results (see Appendix B). I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) to select four students who had positive perceptions and four students who demonstrated negative STAAR perceptions on the pre-survey to interview to find out how, if at all, their perceptions changed after the interventions. Since more than four students had positive and/or negative perceptions, I chose a mix of students who represented the class demographics, as closely as possible. Interviews were 10-11 minutes long and occurred within the week

following the four-week implementation of the previous-form math STAAR preparation. All student interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Once all data was collected, I began to analyze the qualitative data using the constant comparative method (Hubbard & Power, 2003). All student interviews were transcribed then analyzed alongside my observation journals and the open-ended questions from the student surveys. I used a primary and secondary coding system to code the first 20% of my data and found 16 level 1 codes. I then used these codes to analyze the remaining 80% of the data (Tracy, 2013). Level 1 codes describe what is in the data, not what is synthesized from it. After all data was analyzed, I used NVivo to index the information so that it could be synthesized into five level 2 codes, or overarching themes that emerged from the data. Next, I created analytic memos for each of these level 2 codes to better explain what they meant and how they were important to my study. I recorded these level 1 and level 2 codes in a codebook (see Appendix C).

Along with the coding and analysis of the qualitative data, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data. Likert scale scores on the surveys were used to gather an understanding of whether the students' perceptions were impacted by the previous-form STAAR preparation, and if so, how. This data was displayed in a bar graph to show the impact that the intervention had on each area in question.

Findings

Through data collection and analysis, five level 2 codes emerged, leading to the five major findings discussed below. Quantitative data is represented in the form of graphs and qualitative data is represented through poetic transcriptions. Poetic transcriptions involve the researcher taking the participants' words and rearranging them to create a visual representation

of qualitative findings (Glesne, 1997). One poetic transcription was created for each major finding, and the words used came from pre- and post-surveys and student interviews. These findings are highly important to the study and help answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are third graders' current perceptions of STAAR, and where are they coming from?
- 2) In what ways does previous-form math STAAR preparation affect the STAAR perceptions of third-grade students in my homeroom?

Perceptions Before Intervention

“Where It All Began...”

Nervous.

Nervous.

Nervous.

It's like really important.

When do you think about it?

The

whole

day.

I do not feel really good about it.

I know that it is going to be hard.

I never had one. I'm scared to fail. I'm nrvis.

[I feel] a little bit scared, and at the same time... *brave.*

The above transcription represents many of the students' perceptions of and feelings about the STAAR test before any intervention took place. The level 2 code that represents this major finding is titled “Nervous or Scared,” and it has two level 1 subcodes. I had predicted that students would mention being nervous based on my previous interactions with them regarding feelings about school in general, but the use of the stronger “scared” emotion surprised me. These findings answer the research question “What are third graders' current perceptions of STAAR...?” Students consistently expressed how nervous they were for the STAAR test. Their responses were seen on both surveys (see Figure 1) and during interviews (see Figure 2). These

feelings of fear led many students to doubt themselves and their academic abilities, which led me to the creation of the “self-doubt” subcode.

Figure 1

Roman’s Pre-Survey Response

2. How do you feel about taking the STAAR test this year?

3. Why do you feel this way?

I'm a little nervous about the STAAR test

Note. This pre-survey was the very first data collection method used, so this is Roman’s response before any intervention or conversation about the STAAR.

Figure 2

My Interview with Beau

T: Good. How prepared did you feel before we did our STAAR test um warm-ups?

B: Uh, I didn't really know how hard the questions would be, so I was still a little nervous.

Note. This interview response about not knowing enough was given by many students on surveys and in interviews.

Self-doubt is a perception that was mentioned multiple times and could potentially impact a student’s success. Kolton reported that he was scared “to STAAR test ‘cause [he] thought [he] would fail”, and many of his classmates shared the same sentiment. Students’ self-perceptions could cause them to feel more nervous on test day, which could lead to worse performance on the test. Many of these doubts or worries stemmed from all of the unknowns surrounding the

STAAR test. This leads to the other level 1 code in this group, which is labeled “newness of the STAAR.” This finding alludes to one of the main reasons I chose to do this research project.

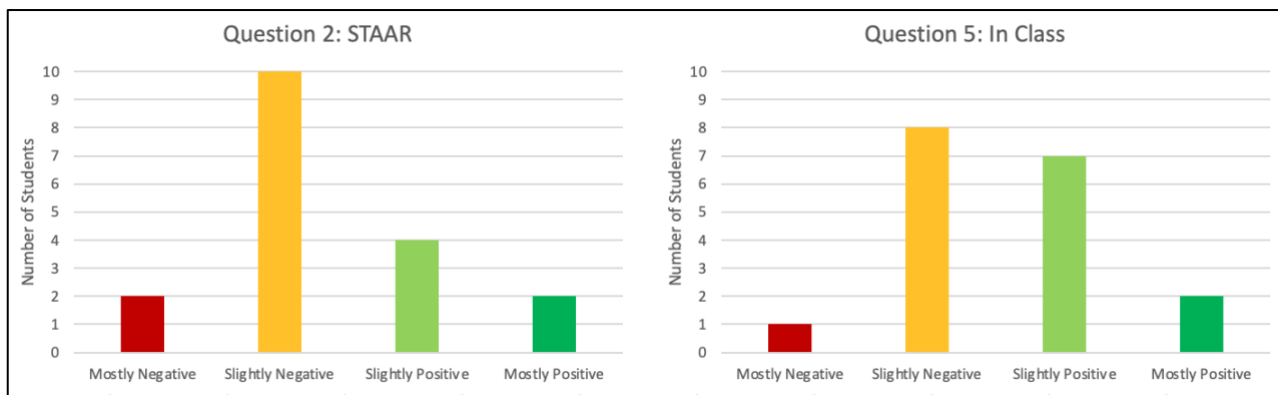
Third grade is a big transitional year for students, which includes their first time ever taking the statewide standardized tests. We can all relate to the nerves felt when doing something important for the first time, and the students in my clinical teaching placement were no different. This finding was seen both in the qualitative and quantitative data.

Quantitative Data: Nervous or Scared

I included questions on the surveys and in the interviews about regular class tests in addition to the STAAR test to see if there was a difference in student perception between the two. Many students expressed something similar to Amelia when she said the STAAR was “like really important... like it’s [more] important than other tests.” Figure 3 shows the students’ perceptions of the STAAR test and of other class tests.

Figure 3

Pre-Survey Questions 2 and 5 Results



Note. Question 2: How do you feel about taking the STAAR test this year? Question 5: How do you feel when you take a test in class? The color of the bar matches the color of the face that students could choose on the survey (see Appendix A)

This figure shows that students perceive the STAAR test as worse or more nerve-racking than other tests, even though they have not taken the STAAR yet. As you can see, 12 students had either mostly or slightly negative perceptions of the STAAR test, while only nine students had negative perceptions of other tests in class. Similarly, three more students circled a slightly positive response to class tests than to the STAAR test. The next part of the first research question focused on where these perceptions were coming from.

Family Knowledge Base

“Who Is Telling Them This?”

Mom. Dad.

Brother. Sister.

It's most of everybody.

My sister is just like telling me I don't need to be worried...

My brothers [said] that you gotta work hard on the STAAR...

Do you feel pressure to make a 100? *Yes.*

My parents have told me that it can move you grades.

My brother told me... if you fale, you fale the grade.

Has anyone ever told you you can do better?

My mom. My dad. Henry.

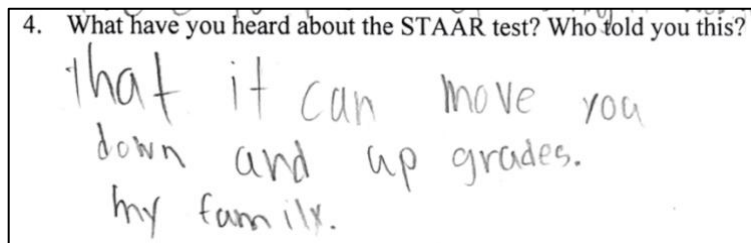
One thing that I was extremely interested in was where my students were learning about how hard, long, or important the STAAR test was. When I started thinking of topics to research, I was having a hard time until one day, we pulled a kid aside and asked why he was so scared to do any of his work. His response was “my brother told me third grade was hard and the STAAR test is scary.” I immediately knew that this is what I wanted to research. Third graders are in the unique position of never having taken a statewide standardized test, meaning that the only information they know about it has to come from outside their own experiences.

This intriguing interaction led to part of my first research question which is “What are third graders' current perceptions of STAAR, *and where are they coming from?*” Through

surveys, interviews, and observations of interventions, it became very apparent that students had learned about grade retention from their families and that many of them felt pressure to do well from various sources. Parents and siblings often inadvertently pass fears to their third-grade children/siblings by telling them that the STAAR test will take all day and that it helps determine if students move on to fourth grade (see Figure 4). Whether they truly believe this, or they are just trying to scare the student into doing well, it is not helpful.

Figure 4

Beau's Pre-Survey Response



Note. Beau told me in his interview that these ideas came from his mom, dad, and sister.

Grade retention is a thing of the past. STAAR testing used to determine if students moved on in transitional grades such as fifth and eighth. However, this law has since been removed (Texas Education Agency, 2021). The STAAR test is just one factor that teachers and administrators consider when choosing the best path for a student. On top of this grade retention misconception, there is also pressure to pass. Applying too much pressure can cause students to overthink or shutdown, both resulting in the opposite of what was intended. This pressure can even affect more than just test day, as many students noted that they think about the STAAR test on normal school days as well (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

My Interview with Grayson

T: Okay. I know you think it's good. How often, *when* do you think about it?

G: Um... what do you mean by like when?

T: When do you think- do you think about it when you get to school in the morning? When we're doing our warm-ups? When you're at lunch, when you're at recess, when you're in Mrs. Goodwin's class, when you're in our class, when do you think about it?

G: The whole day.

Note. There were long pauses between these questions and answers, which is why I provided many options for him to choose from. He came up with “the whole day” on his own.

This family knowledge base that consisted of misinformation and pressure was what initially led me to dig deeper into how third graders feel about the STAAR. It also made me realize that I can help students feel better by showing them formats and content that will be on the STAAR and helping them understand what happens with their scores. However, family knowledge was not the only factor that caused students to feel nervous or scared.

Distractions

“What Else?”

Sometimes I’m worried someone will cheat.
It takes a long time to finish. It has harder questions.

No

work

shown.

If... I hear noise... [I have] to start over.

Quiet.

Not noisy.

Ignoring.

If they make too much noise, it’s *affecting*.

I went into this research with a small bias because I thought that one of the only factors making my students nervous was what they had learned about the STAAR from their families. I did not realize how many distractions were present in my students’ lives each and every day

because I have learned how to tune most of the background noise out. Even though this finding did not answer one of my original research questions, it is still extremely important in my study.

The concerns of specific test day distractions that many students brought up contributed to the students' overall perceptions of the STAAR. They were worried that their classmates would talk or be too noisy for them to focus enough on reading the problems. In fact, "too much talking" and "excessive noise" were mentioned 18 times throughout the observations, surveys, and interviews. Some students even requested to sit in certain areas of the room so that they could not see as many people on test day. Many students mentioned how long they heard the STAAR would be and how they were concerned that they would not be able to try their best consistently in that time period (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Asher's Pre-Survey Response

2. How do you feel about taking the STAAR test this year?

3. Why do you feel this way?

4. What have you heard about the STAAR test? Who told you this?

Handwritten response: Becos I fee like it will take very long

The response includes a sad face, a neutral face with a hand pointing to it, and two happy faces.

Note. Students' perceptions of how long the test will take often stem from class tests and everyday worksheets.

Along with the concerns that were expressed in interviews or on surveys, there were also distractions during the intervention warm-ups that potentially affected the students' focus levels and their perceptions of how well they did. I had not thought ahead of time about how the formatting on the board, coupled with the way our desks were arranged, could create issues. The

tables towards the back of the room often could not see the questions, and the students had to move to the carpet, which took up time and distracted them, as well as their classmates. Along with this, some of the more detailed pictures and/or problems could not easily be seen or answered on the board. Lastly, having to show their work on a separate surface than the question caused many of them to not show work at all and make their best guess (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

My Field Notes of Observation/Intervention Number Eight

Four minutes in, I saw many boards with only answer choices written, so I said, “show your work and don’t erase”.

Note. This was just one of the many times that I reminded the students to show their work.

While I could connect this lack of focus/work shown to the format of the warm-up questions, the STAAR test is similar in that students are required to work online questions on a separate piece of scratch paper. Overall, a variety of distractions proved to be a large part of both the warm-ups and the students’ perceptions and hesitancy about the STAAR. Even with family knowledge-based misconceptions and other distractions, many students noted the benefit of the previous-form STAAR preparation warm-ups.

Perceptions After Intervention

“How Have Their Perceptions Changed?”

That was so *easy*.

It’s *helping* me get better.

It was *preparing* me for the real thing.

A little bit *smarter*... because we’ve done it a lot.

I will be prepared and *ready for everything* that’s coming towards me.

A lot more prepared... because *we already did the warm-ups*.

I liked the ones where *we went over them together*.

[I feel] kind of *confident* about myself.

I’m starting to *think about it less*.

I had *so much practice*.

This poem represents a lot of the positive effects that students mentioned feeling after completing the 12 days of released STAAR question warm-ups. These major findings answer the second research question, which is “In what ways does previous-form math STAAR preparation affect the STAAR perceptions of third-grade students in my homeroom?” Many students reported feeling more prepared and less anxious about the STAAR when they got to see what the questions would actually be like (see Figure 8). Some noted that they liked the formatting of a short review each morning that we then went over immediately as a class. I was able to show them test-taking strategies and provide reassurance through these interventions.

Figure 8

My Interview with Amelia

T: How do you feel now, after we've done all those warm-ups?

A: Um, great. And it's, I feel like it's gonna make me a little bit smarter and let me know what's coming and what kind of questions will be on the STAAR.

Note. Many students expressed similar positive feelings about the warm-ups.

I noticed earlier in the year that my students' fear of the STAAR test was causing problems in their regular classwork as well as their perceptions of themselves as students. As previously discussed, these students felt nervous because of the pressure placed on them by their parents, teachers, and themselves. I wanted to find a way to flip this narrative and remind them that they are going to be ready for the STAAR when it gets here in May (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Kyla's Post-Survey Response

11. Do you feel like you are more prepared to take the STAAR test now? Why or why not?

Yes Now I Feel better bc
Peupple told me good things about
the star test like my teachers

Note. This question was asked after two questions about the warm-ups specifically.

The subcodes under the “Warmups Were Helpful” level 2 code included how students felt about getting immediate feedback as well as how seeing the questions boosted their confidence. This was important to my study because it showed that the right kind of preparation, that does not put more pressure on students, can help them succeed and boost their self-efficacy. During some of the warm-ups I wrote about the cheers and positive remarks I heard as students realized that they had gotten the questions correct (see Figure 10). These were a strong indicator to me that their perceptions from the pre-surveys had changed quite a bit.

Figure 10

Field Notes from Observation/Intervention Number One

As we were checking the second one, I noticed that all students got the question correct. As students were erasing and putting their boards away, I heard comments like “that was so easy” and “I thought it would be harder”. As well as “I knew how to do those” and “that wasn’t even hard”.

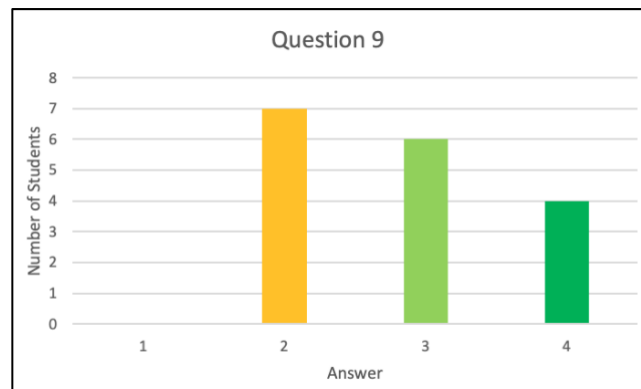
Note. There were comments made by many different students, and these were just the four that I heard clearly enough to write down.

Quantitative Data: Warm-Ups

On the post-survey results, more than half of the students scored their feelings about the warm-ups at a three or four (positive perceptions), and none of them scored it at a one (most negative option), as seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Post-Survey Question 9 Results



Note. Question 9: How did you feel during the STAAR test question lessons?

The warm-ups proved to be beneficial, as seen through students' surveys and interviews, but there were other factors that students noted would also help them be prepared for the test.

“Do Your Best.”

“What Else Could Help?”

Focus.

If you try, you'll... sometimes get it right.

Focus.

You wanna pay attention and learn a lot.

Focus.

I've been practicing... outside of school.

Focus.

If I could have a little break after a while.

Focus.

Get some good sleep. Eat a good breakfast.

Focus.

In response to many of the nervous or hesitant feelings that students expressed during the warm-ups, I caught myself saying “do your best” quite often. This is one of the only responses that we, as teachers, can give on the real STAAR, and I wanted to match that as closely as possible during our previous-form STAAR preparation warm-ups. The “do your best” code and its subcodes represent things that the students felt were helpful that were not related to the warm-ups. Since third grade is such a huge transition year, students have to learn how to be more independent at school. This is why my cooperating teacher and I said “do your best” so often. This finding was significant in my placement, specifically for STAAR testing, and it helped give a fuller picture of both parts of the research question, “What are third graders' current perceptions of STAAR, and where are they coming from?” This data suggests that some students get their perceptions of how they will do from the benchmark and/or from how much they focus while in class.

“Do your best” was one way that I prepared my students for test day, but there were other ways that we talked about as a whole class that were brought up in interviews and on surveys. These included eating a good breakfast, getting good sleep, and taking breaks. These were all things that students recognized would help them do their best and be more prepared for the STAAR. It was very surprising to see how many students mentioned practicing math equations at home, typically with the help of their parents. Many students remarked that they felt better after practicing at home or at school. However, the aspect mentioned most was how important it is to focus in class and on both schoolwork and warm-ups (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Natalie’s Pre-Survey and Interview Responses

8. What do you think will help you do better on the STAAR test?
focusing.

T: Paying a lot of attention. How do you feel about it though?

N: I- I feel good that- um... I focus 'cause a lot of people don't focus.

Note. This student needed more prompting in the interview to help her extend her answers, which is why I repeated her previous answer and asked the question again.

It would be unreasonable, and would produce less supported results, to assume that all changes in student perception were direct results of the intervention. I wanted to be sure to include some of the factors, outside of the warm-up interventions, that affected students’ perceptions so that I could provide the most accurate picture. These outside factors are directly linked to some of the limitations that I found within my study.

Limitations

One of the biggest limitations to this study was the delays experienced at the beginning. I had planned for the entire study to take place before the students took their math benchmark; however, this timeline got pushed back. Therefore, many students mentioned on their post-survey or during their interview, that the benchmark was also helpful. While this is useful information, it could have also had an effect on students' perceptions, rather than only the warm-ups occurring during this time. In addition, there were many distractions (provided by both students and adults) that created a less-than-ideal test preparation environment and caused some students to be off-task, causing them to not benefit as much as they may have been able to otherwise. Even though these limitations existed, the results were significant and can be used to inform other educators' decisions in their own classroom.

Implications for Teachers

Altogether, the self-doubt, newness of the STAAR, and general nerves related to standardized testing can make for a difficult test day. The pressure that is put on students and teachers to get good scores on the STAAR can cause stressful environments and lead some to "teach to the test." Students feel the rush of reviewing and constantly taking practice tests, but often do not find relief from their worries. I originally chose the research questions for this study so that I could potentially help ease my students' worries about their first year of STAAR testing, and their interviews and post-surveys show just that. I found that many of the perceptions the third-grade students had before the intervention came from their families. Overall, students expressed that the warm-up interventions were helpful and also a slight perception change towards a more positive outlook after the intervention.

One major implication of this study is that students will most likely hear about standardized state tests before they ever take one, whether that is from a family member or

previous teacher. Any teacher who teaches the first year of testing in their state, such as third grade teachers in Texas, should recognize this and find ways to help their students understand the truth about these tests. Misconceptions get passed around and can cause unnecessary nerves, but we, as educators, can circumvent these issues. I would encourage teachers to inform their students what standardized tests look like by showing them released versions of past tests.

Another implication is that showing students what the test questions will actually look like, and actually telling them that they are solving old test questions, can be extremely beneficial. As many of my students mentioned, they gained confidence and became less anxious when they saw that they could succeed with old STAAR questions. Many teachers fall into the practice of overdoing test preparation, which only ends up putting more pressure on students. I wanted to avoid this as much as possible, which is why I chose to do warm-up interventions, rather than full lessons spent on reviewing. This short and simple daily intervention provided enough of a look ahead for students to feel less nervous and to learn that they truly were more prepared than they had expected.

The students and I learned a lot from this study. They learned that they really can succeed if they slow down, show their work, and read everything carefully. The students also learned that my cooperating teacher and I taught them everything they needed to know for third grade. We reminded them of this verbally, but being able to see it for themselves was much more impactful. I learned that the formatting on the board was a difficult obstacle and that in the future, it would be better to send the questions to the students' Chromebooks so that they could practice how the test will actually look. I also learned that even a small review, with reassurance from the teacher and immediate feedback, can dramatically impact some students' perceptions of both the test itself and themselves.

While there may be a lot that we cannot control, such as what students hear outside of our classroom or other potential distractions, there are strategies that we can easily implement to aid our students in succeeding. Third grade is a transitional year for many reasons, and teachers should be willing to do all they can to help make this transition smoother for their students. This study investigated one of those ways, and the data suggests that what we choose to tell our students about standardized testing can have an impact on them. My research led me to even more questions about testing and all of the aspects that go into it that I would like to investigate in my future career.

The first thing that I would like to continue looking at is other forms of test preparation and whether they have similar impacts as the previous-form test preparation that I chose to implement in this study. There are so many programs and strategies for test preparation that have yet to be explored in great depth. Another piece of this study that I wonder about is how we, as educators, can help rewrite the narrative that students hear from others about the test and themselves. What other methods, besides test preparation, can positively impact students' perceptions and therefore potentially set them up for more success in the future? These were the main two questions that emerged as I was researching my original topic.

My clinical teaching classroom environment has already felt the impact from increased confidence and more positive reassurance, as well as general knowledge of what is to come. In my future career, I plan to implement short review sessions that let the students in on what is coming up, whether that is for teacher-generated classroom tests or the state standardized tests. All students deserve to know that they have been taught the necessary information to succeed and that they are capable of doing so. Previous-form STAAR preparation worked wonders in my current placement, and I hope that it can do the same for other groups of students in the future.

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Appendix A

STAAR Perceptions Pre-Survey

1. Do you know what the STAAR test is? (circle one) Yes No

2. How do you feel about taking the STAAR test this year?



3. Why do you feel this way?

4. What have you heard about the STAAR test? Who told you this?

5. How do you feel when you take a test in class?



6. Why do you feel this way?

7. How do you think you will feel after taking the STAAR test?



8. What do you think will help you do better on the STAAR test?

STAAR Perceptions Post-Survey

1. Do you know what the STAAR test is? (circle one) Yes No

2. How do you feel about taking the STAAR test this year?



3. Why do you feel this way?

4. What have you heard about the STAAR test? Who told you this?

5. How do you feel when you take a test in class?



6. Why do you feel this way?

7. How do you think you will feel after taking the STAAR test?



8. What do you think will help you do better on the STAAR test?

9. How did you feel during the STAAR test question lessons?



10. Why did you feel this way?

11. Do you feel like you are more prepared to take the STAAR test now? Why or why not?

12. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the STAAR or the lessons we did?

Appendix B**Student Interview Protocol**

1. How do you feel about the STAAR test? Why?
2. What have you heard about the STAAR test? Who did you hear this from?
3. Walk me through a typical day of school for you. How often do you think about the STAAR test?
4. How prepared did you feel before our STAAR question lessons? Why?
5. How prepared do you feel now? Why?
6. Walk me through how you felt during our first STAAR question lesson.
7. Walk me through how you felt during our most recent STAAR question lesson.
8. What do you think affects how well you perform on the STAAR test?
9. How do you feel when taking other tests at school? Why?
10. What else do you think would help you better prepare for the STAAR test?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the STAAR test or the STAAR question lessons that we have done?

Questions varied and additional questions were asked depending on the answers of the participants.

Appendix C

Codebook

Code	Level	Definition	Example
Nervous or Scared	2	The overall feeling that many students expressed when discussing the STAAR was nervousness.	“Because when something big is happening, I get really nervous.”
Newness of the STAAR	1	This is the first year the students will take the STAAR, which raised concerns.	“I felt li- I wasn't prepared at all... because I had no idea what would be on the STAAR test.”
Self-Doubt	1	Students’ perceived shortcomings and/or an inability to pass the test.	“Because I was- I was worried because... I thought I wouldn't... pass it.”
“Do your best”	2	This in vivo code represents something that the students hear from their teachers constantly.	“I can’t figure out the answer.” “Do your best.”
Benchmark	1	The benchmark allowed them to see what testing would be like.	“Because since we took the practice, so we can get ready for the STAAR test, I feel more of like getting ready for it.”
Focusing is Helpful	1	Students noted that focusing while in class or testing is highly beneficial.	“What do you think will help you do better on the STAAR test?” “Focus hard in class.”
Practice Makes Permanent	1	Many students mentioned practicing at school and at home.	“You feel more prepared?” “Because we practiced. We practiced more about it.”
Preparation for Test Day	1	Many discussions revolved around how best to prepare for test day.	“I'm gonna get up really early, wash my face, and eat... some good breakfast.”
Family Knowledge Base	2	Many students came into 3 rd grade with information about the STAAR from their families.	“No... well, my brother said he thinks- he said it's 20% of your grade.”
Grade Retention	1	Students expressed concern about not moving on to 4 th grade because of the STAAR.	“Because if I fail, I’ll go back to 2 nd grade.”

Pressure To Do Well	1	Pressure is felt from various directions for students to pass the test.	“So, do you feel pressure to make a 100?” “Yes...”
Warm-Ups Were Helpful	2	The benefits of previous-form STAAR preparation were highlighted in students’ responses.	“How do you feel... after... those warm-ups?” “Um, great... I feel like... a little bit smarter...”
Immediate Feedback	1	I provided immediate feedback by going over each warm-up.	“I liked the ones where we went over them together... because I can- because I know if I got the answers right or wrong.”
Self-Confidence	1	Students’ own feelings that they can succeed in class and on the STAAR.	“Because I’m in third grade and I can do anything in third grade.”
Strategies	1	Multiple test-taking strategies were covered in warm-ups and mentioned in interviews.	We went “one answer choice at a time and mark[ed] out the wrong ones”.
Teacher Reassurance	1	The reminders, from either teacher, that they can succeed and have learned what they need to know.	“[This] is a review from a long time ago and [this] is a review from last week. I know that you can all do both of them.”
Distractions	2	Many distractions that students feel could affect their testing abilities.	“Maybe if I was... close to the lockers... I like to do tests when I’m not around other people.”
Formatting on the Board	1	The STAAR warm-up sessions were presented on the Promethean board, which caused a few issues.	I told tables three and four that they could move to the carpet to see better if needed.
Lack of Stamina	1	Many students expressed concerns over how long the STAAR test would be.	“I might get a little tired and maybe like... start forgetting stuff about the questions...”
No Work Shown	1	As I was observing, I noticed multiple times that students were not attempting to show work.	“Some students seemed less confident... and I think that is because they weren’t... writing their work down.
Others Talking or Noisy	1	This group of students is rather talkative and many of them noted how distracting it is.	“Um, if they make too much noise, it's affecting.” “Yeah, it's distracting, right?” “Yeah.”