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FACULTY AND STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN PREPARING STUDENTS
FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION
OF HIGH SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES

by

MONICA E. RUIZ

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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Thank you for sharing in this experience with me.

Monica Ruiz

DEDICATION

To my beloved Diana for her unconditional love, sacrifice, and support. I love and miss you mom.

To my loving son, Avirett, for being my little partner and best friend. I love you to the stars and back.

To my loving husband, Victor, for motivating me and supporting me throughout this process. I love you.

To Georgette, for her love, strength, and wisdom. I love you sister.

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Monica E. Ruiz

University of the Incarnate Word, 2022

In 2020, nearly half of Texas's 385,000 public high school graduates were unprepared for college-level reading or math. Limited research reveals K-12 faculty perceive limited roles and responsibilities in the college process, relying heavily on guidance counselors and college admissions counselors for preparing students for college and careers. The purpose of this study was to help fill this gap by answering the central research question: How do high school and college-level faculty and staff prepare high school students for college and careers? I chose a qualitative, interpretive design to explore educators' individual and shared social meanings and interpretations. I used purposeful sampling to identify 10 subjects in South Central Texas who taught math, English language arts, social studies, or science in a high school, community college, university, and regional education agency participating in an alignment partnership in 2019. My data collection included semi-structured interviews, observations, e-mails, and supplemental documents. To study this phenomenon, I incorporated tools from grounded theory informed by Glaser and Strauss, and Charmaz. My data analysis methods involved using Hahn's coding technique to organize and format large quantities of data for coding. Finally, I also used member checking and triangulation of data to ensure accuracy of my data analysis and to increase validity. The College and Career Readiness Collaborative Theory emerged and illustrates how interaction and dialogue in an alignment partnership led a team of faculty and

staff to (a) co-construct meaning, (b) align curriculum, (c) clarify expectations, (d) improve perceptions, and (e) reevaluate teaching decisions to better prepare students for college and careers. This study reinforces the need for faculty and staff collaboration and dialogue to clarify skills gaps in entry level college courses, college level expectations, instruction, meanings, and perceptions of college and career readiness. Finally, the study addresses the pandemic's impact on college and career readiness and the achievement gap.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In 2008, the nationwide achievement gap led to College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) to better prepare high school students for college and careers. The achievement gap remains a problem for education and industry. In 2010, the THECB and TEA assigned vertical alignment teams to support standards revision, curriculum alignment, and student success across math, science, social studies, and English. By 2014, alignment partnerships existed across thirteen regions across Texas (Harris & Keller, 2018).

When I began my research in 2019, new revisions of Texas's college and career readiness standards were underway. College-level administrators and regional education agency staff from South Central Texas sought out high school, community college, and university faculty to collectively revise the standards. Twenty high school, community college, and university faculty committed to participate in the alignment partnership. The majority of participating faculty had experience working with high schools, colleges, universities, and industry. The participating high school enrollment consisted of 83% Hispanic and 57% low socioeconomic students. Students' STAAR results were higher than the state averages for 2019 and 2020 (TEA, 2019a).

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills Curriculum standards (TEKS) were adopted by Texas's State Board of Education with input from educators, parents, industry partners, and employers and outline what students should know and be able to do in each course or grade (TEA, 2019b). School districts and charter schools administer the STAAR test every year to measure the amount of student growth from year to year.

Each of the four vertical alignment teams consisted of four to five faculty teaching one of the four content areas (e.g., math, language arts and reading, social studies or history, and science). Faculty worked collectively to align their respective content with the Texas Essential

Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and CCRS. Regional education agency staff facilitated the process. In an effective curriculum alignment, faculty combine their efforts to address specific challenges and issues, identify and explore solutions, establish a common foundation, and share efforts for enhancing student outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Thousands of students are not college ready because the academic rigor of their high school and college-level institutions are not aligned (Lym, 2014; Manrique & Mason, 2010; THECB, 2017b; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Alignment in this context “refers to the content alignment between the education standards ... and the annual assessments its students take so their progress toward meeting those standards can be measured and evaluated” (Clough & Montgomery, 2015, p. 2). Nearly 84,000 high school graduates were not career ready in 2018, (TEA 2019; THECB, 2019b). Career readiness plays the most important role in predicting students’ career success (Wu, 2017, p. 122). Today’s employers are more likely to hire graduates demonstrating critical thinking, effective communication, leadership, and intercultural fluency (NACE, 2019).

Conley (2014) defines college and career readiness as the preparation and success in “entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate degree, a certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental courses” (p. 51). Existing research has yet to report the roles and perceptions of high school, community college, and university faculty in preparing their students for college and careers. Faculty roles and perceptions of college readiness is scarce in the literature (Breslow & Chadwick, 2016; Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019; Lewis et al., 2017; Malin & Hackman, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wright, 2017). Studies investigating faculty roles and perceptions of career readiness are also limited (Duncheon

& Muñoz, 2019; Lewis et al., 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014).

Investigating both concepts is necessary for understanding faculty perceptions and roles for ensuring students' college and career readiness. College readiness is success in entry level college courses while career readiness is success for courses or certificates leading to a specific career (Conley, 2012, p. 4). Scholars posit that college and career readiness requires similar content area knowledge and deeper level thinking (ACT, 2019; THECB, 2019a). Policymakers' integrated college and career readiness standards into the TEKS to address this need (THECB, 2009).

Collaboration is an effective strategy institutional leaders, state officials, and education experts agree support college readiness and college completion (THECB, 2019a; U.S. Departments of Education, 2017). Lym (2014) was one of the first scholars to publish the results of an alignment partnership between a Texas high school and community college. Results indicated student participation exposed high school faculty to college-level expectations and strategies. Later studies revealed similar findings (Hernandez, 2017; Wess, 2015).

Many teachers often rely on their school districts and the Internet for information related to college and career readiness standards because they lack direct access to college level institutions (Nadelson et al., 2014). Researchers site a lack of established relationships, organizational differences, time deficits, and scheduling conflicts as factors delaying teacher access to colleges and universities (Alfred et al., 2014; Harris & Keller, 2018; Wess, 2015). The level of teacher engagement and effectiveness plays a significant role in student achievement in math and reading (Valenta et al., 2010). If faculty are not equipped to shape students' knowledge and skills, then students will not be prepared for college and career readiness (Conley, 2013; Nadelson et al., 2014).

Scholars also recommend effective collaboration for empowering teachers in the implementation of college and career readiness (Creech and Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017; Kaplan et al., 2015; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Research suggests administrators play a supportive role in collaboration and college and career readiness resources (Hernandez, 2017; Malin and Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; McGaughy & Venezia, 2015; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative design study was to understand educators' perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness of high school students attending a public high school in South Central Texas. Empirical evidence on this topic is scarce and scholars recommend additional research to validate their findings (Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; Nadelson et al., 2014). This interpretative design study may also reveal practical and valuable strategies for leading K-16 curriculum alignment efforts. This study will contribute to existing research involving college and career readiness, collective sensemaking, collaboration, and curriculum alignment.

Scholars suggest that K-12 teachers and counselors make the biggest impact on their student's college and career readiness (Huerta et al., 2013; Welton, & Williams, 2015; Wright, 2017). However, the literature has failed to include the roles and perceptions of high school and college-level faculty in students' knowledge and skills attainment for college and careers. This study will address this gap by exploring faculty perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness.

I utilized semi-structured interviews, email correspondences, structured notes, and other documents to explore high school, community college, and university faculty and regional education agency staff perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness reform. This

chapter serves as an introduction to the research and provides the purpose of the study, including an overview of the research goals and description of the methodology. This chapter will also provide a contextual background with an overview of P-16 education reform which supports the need for identifying educator roles and perceptions for ensuring students' college and career readiness.

Background of the Problem

Remediation

The lack of college readiness among students has contributed to declining college and university enrollment and graduation rates (THECB, 2019a). Although remediation is a strategy for filling achievement gaps, it has created barriers to college completion for many students (Abraham et al., 2014). Over a third of all high school graduates will require remediation, costing Americans billions of dollars annually (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

High school and college level collaboration supports efforts for reducing the need for remediation (Barnett et al., 2012; Sambolt & Blumental, 2013). State policymakers encourage administrators and faculty to (a) adopt multiple college readiness assessments for student placement, (b) offer co-requisite remedial courses, and (c) implement on-going college level student support programs, (d) collaborate with local high schools, and (e) redesign accelerated developmental courses for managing student enrollment in remedial courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Curriculum Misalignment

Thousands of college students require remediation because the academic rigor of their high school and college level institutions are misaligned (Lym, 2014; Manrique & Mason, 2010; THECB, 2017b; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Policymakers and educators can improve

student achievement by aligning their curriculum, instruction, and assessments (Squires, 2012). In this context, alignment “refers to the content alignment between the education standards ... and the annual assessments its students take so their progress toward meeting those standards can be measured and evaluated” (Clough & Montgomery, 2015, p. 2).

The state mandate for improving college and career readiness through curriculum alignment of high school and college curriculum serves as a catalyst for change across Texas’ public schools. The student achievement gap remains despite the vertical alignment of the CCRS and the TEKS (THECB, 2019a). To explore college and career readiness further, I will describe vertical alignment, horizontal alignment, and their benefits.

Vertical alignment, or aligning curriculum across grade levels, is a critical factor supporting college and career readiness efforts (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In a college and career readiness context, “vertical alignment refers to curriculum that builds sequentially on the content and performance expectations taught in each course ... moving a student along a trajectory that culminates at the college and career readiness level” (McGaughy & Venezia, 2015, p. 102). Smith (2014) adds that vertical alignment improves student success and is facilitated by professional development, collaboration, and teaching strategies. Horizontal alignment “refers to the consistency across similar course titles and levels for students, resulting in a student having the opportunity to learn similar content and expectations regardless of which instructor is teaching the course” (McGaughy & Venezia, 2015, p. 102).

One strategy for improving college and career readiness involves increasing collaboration between high school and college level faculty (Alford, 2014; Harris et. al., 2016; THECB, 2019a; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Students are more prepared for college when high schools and colleges combine their efforts to align curriculum (Creech & Clouse, 2013;

Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Manrique & Mason, 2010; Wess, 2015). A review of the current literature revealed that when high school and community college faculty align curriculum they (a) initiate conversations and (b) incorporate college and career readiness into their curriculum (Alford, 2014; Harris et al., 2016; THECB, 2019a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Faculty leave alignment partnerships with a reinforced understanding of course alignment and action plans for leading change in instruction, policies, practices, and student expectations (Harris et al., 2016; THECB, 2017a). They also exchange knowledge and strategies (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang and Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015).

Context of the Study

New revisions of college and career readiness standards were in progress when I began my research in 2019. State officials designated a group of 20 high school, community college, and university faculty in the region to collectively revise the standards and align their curriculum. Participants had prior experience collaborating on college credit and industry certifications. In 2018-19, the high school's demographics were comprised of 83% Hispanic and 57% economically disadvantaged students (TEA, 2019a).

Hispanic, African American, and low socioeconomic students typically score lower on standardized tests than other student populations (TEA, 2019a). However, STAAR results at this school exceeded the state averages in 2019 and 2020. This suggests that the faculty and industry collaboration was effective in preparing students. Alignment partnerships have shown to improve student performance when high school and college align their curriculum and teaching strategies (Lym, 2014; THECB, 2019a).

Statement of the Problem

History of the Problem

In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board published the Closing the Gap Report to help increase college enrollment, graduation rates, degree completion, research budgets, and nationally recognized programs by 2015 (THECB, 2005). Board members co-constructed the CCRS as part of the closing the gap initiative to better prepare students (THECB, 2005). In 2002, President George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act to narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged and more advantaged students (Klein, 2015).

Student Achievement Gap. College and Career Readiness Standards are a set of standards associated with college and career readiness and are part of a larger Texas initiative, Closing the Gap (THECB, 2005). The Closing the Gap initiative was established nearly 20 years ago in response to Texas' declining college and university enrollment and graduation rates, especially among minorities (THECB, 2005).

The goal of the Closing The Gap initiative by 2020 was to (a) raise higher education participation rates by 500,000 students, (b) increase the number of degrees awarded by 50%, especially in high need subject areas, (c) significantly increase the number of nationally recognized college and university programs and services, and (d) increase institutional research funding by 50% (THECB, 2005).

In 2014, state leaders established House Bill 5: Foundation High School Program which included several programs of study and personal graduation plans to improve college and career readiness outcomes (TEA, 2019a). The TEA, THECB, and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) worked collaboratively to educate parents, students, and counselors about the new bill (TEA, 2019a). In 2018, THECB data revealed 44% of young adults completed degree or

certificate from a Texas or out-of-state college; an increase of only 3% (THECB, 2019a). In 2019, the THECB (2019a) aimed for (a) 60% of young adults earning a certificate or degree, and (b) 550,000 students finishing a certificate or degree by 2030.

College and Career Readiness Deficits. In 2007, the Texas legislature passed the Assessment of College Readiness in Curriculum to support and prepare students for college and career readiness (THECB, 2009). This section required that the TEA and THECB establish content-based alignment teams (e.g., Vertical Alignment Teams) to develop strategies for success in entry-level college courses offered at Texas public community colleges and universities (State of Texas, 2009).

The rest of the nation soon joined Texas' reform efforts as preparation for college and careers became a national priority (Achieve, 2012). Policymakers across 37 states describe college and career readiness as complex; requiring knowledge, skills, and strategies that impact academic achievement (Mishkind, 2014). Vertical alignment across high school and college requires curriculum revisions, professional development, and teacher certification (ACT, 2019; Harris et al., 2016).

College and career development should begin in K-12 education to expose students to course content applicability, career exploration, and technology proficiency (Xiong and Dossetti, 2022). Nearly half of all public high school graduates lack the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and certificate programs (TEA, 2019a). Administrators and principals should implement best practices and strategies to improve student readiness (ACT, 2019; Harris et al., 2016; Lym, 2009; Lym, 2014). Limited research suggests productive alignment partnerships support college readiness (Lym, 2014).

Standards-Based Reform

Standards-based reform began in the early eighties on a national scale to address significant declines in math across grade levels (Bergman et al., 1998). Texas public and charter schools began administering STAAR in 2012 to measure student learning outcomes for English, Algebra, Biology, and U.S. History (TEA, 2019a). STAAR results revealed Hispanic, Black and economically disadvantaged students scored lower across all content areas compared to other groups (TEA, 2019a). Students are required to pass the STAAR assessments throughout high school to earn a high school diploma.

Reading and Math Proficiency. Barnes and Slate (2014) determined that reading and math scores among Black, White and Hispanic graduates increased slightly. Data from 2015-2017 showed no meaningful change in STAAR scores for Algebra I, Biology, English I, and English II among high school students (TEA, 2018). The same occurred for the STAAR assessments across all content areas (TEA, 2018). Academic performance and college readiness gaps exists despite the proposed alignment of college and career readiness and TEKS standards.

The level of math proficiency, specifically in Algebra, will affect student's readiness for graduation and college (Smith, 2014). Students enrolled in rigorous math courses are more likely to meet the criteria and succeed in college level math (ACT, 2019; Manrique & Mason, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Improving college readiness in math has remained challenging for school administrators and faculty (Abraham, 2014). In 2020, a high percentage of Texas students did not graduate with the skills needed to succeed in college-level math (TEA, 2021).

Reading is a significant content area for college and career readiness (ACT, 2019; Conley, 2012; NCLE, 2013). Many high school students do not have English Composition

related courses after their sophomore year of high school and therefore are less prepared for college level English (Lym, 2014). Nearly 700 K-12 teachers surveyed from all content areas agreed that developing students' literacy was a top priority for them (NCLE, 2013). Faculty also expressed the need for an in-depth evaluations of curriculum standards and literacy requirements for each content area (NCLE, 2013).

College Entrance Exams

Millions of students attempt the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT) each year for entrance into U.S. colleges and universities (ACT, 2019; Clough & Montgomery, 2015; College Board, 2018). In 1929, the College Board designed and validated the SAT to assess students' college readiness (College Board, 2018). ACT began administering the ACT in 1959 (ACT, 2019). The higher the score the more likely the student is prepared for college-level courses. Yet, scholars argue that standardized tests alone will not measure students' college readiness (Breslow et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2016). Many colleges and universities began waiving ACT and SAT requirements for admissions during the pandemic but continue to use these scores to determine a student's eligibility for scholarships and special programs (e.g., honors, engineering, health professions).

The Texas State Legislature established the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) to measure student's eligibility for college-level coursework in reading, writing, and mathematics (TEA, 2021). The TSIA replaced the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) Test 10 years ago (THECB, 1988). Students meeting or exceeding a score of 350 for math and 351 for reading will be eligible to enroll in entry level college courses (e.g., English composition, history, government, or college algebra). Students not meeting the requirements enroll in

remedial courses. In 2020, math scores were lower than reading scores across the state and Hispanics and African Americans scored lower than Whites and Asians (THECB, 2021).

Minority and Economically Disadvantaged Students. Minority and economically disadvantaged students have fewer high-quality teachers and fewer opportunities to learn about college preparation, college admissions, and college placement (McLendon et al., 2008; Welton & Williams, 2015). This is evident in STAAR, TSIA, college enrollment rates, and remediation rates among Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students (TEA, 2019a; THECB 2019a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Years of negative academic climates, cultures, and reduced expectations create barriers for students in low-performing, high minority high schools (Martinez & Everman, 2017). Lowering expectations for disadvantaged students only widens the achievement gap (Hursh, 2007; Welton & Williams, 2015). Strong administrators who establish college level partnerships, outreach services, and student support services help produce a college culture over time (Martinez and Everman, 2017; Welton and Williams, 2015). High school and college level partnerships help build pathways for at-risk students (Hernandez, 2017; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015).

Low college-enrolling high schools served by their area public community colleges and universities under a Higher Education Assistance Plan (HEAP) had an average college enrollment rate of 36% compared to the 52% state-wide average (THECB, 2019a). Eighty four percent of the 102 institutions (e.g., 33 universities, 51 community colleges) surveyed interacted with one or more of the 197 low college-enrolling HEAP high schools in 2018 (THECB, 2019a). Less than a third of institutions offered college readiness or TSIA support (THECB, 2019a).

College level outreach services often focus on recruitment rather than preparing high school students for college readiness (Wang & Hodara, 2014, p. 13).

Barriers to College and Career Readiness Partnerships. The separate systems for K-12 and college level education creates silos, making it very difficult to coordinate and align curriculum, professional development, student support, and college and career readiness programming (McGaughy & Venezia, 2015). High school and college level faculty have distinct priorities and responsibilities that make collaboration extremely difficult (Alford et al., 2014; Kaplan et al., 2015; NCLE, 2013; Wess, 2015). Limited or no interaction between high school and college level faculty delays improvements to college and career readiness (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017; Kaplan et al., 2015; Lewis, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015).

In 2009, teachers from high achieving countries spent approximately 15 to 25 hours a week planning collaboratively with peers (Lantor-Fandel, 2009). Comparatively, American teachers spent an average of 7 hours a week on lesson planning, reflection, and learning new content (Kaplan, 2015). High school faculty spend most of their time and efforts on standardized test preparation (Alford et al., 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015).

Educators involved in successful college and career readiness partnerships recognize the purpose for collaboration and perceive the knowledge and strategies acquired from their peers as valuable (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). However, differences in institutional cultures contribute silos and isolation (McGaughy & Venezia, 2015; Wess, 2015). In one study, teachers worked in isolation and relied on their personal and professional experiences to incorporate college-style teaching practices (Duncheon & Muñoz,

2019). Many high school and college level faculty never meet prior to joining a partnership (Harris et al.,2016; Wess, 2015).

Personal Background

As a Mexican American and first-generation college student, I personally experienced the struggles students continue face in our educational system when they are not ready for college or careers. However, I see myself as fortunate for beating the odds. I spent a year in civil service and 3 years in the business sector after graduating high school. While in graduate school, I decided to transition to a career in education. I enrolled in a doctoral program to grow my strengths as a leader and support meaningful change as a school administrator.

In 2019, my content expert and methodologist suggested a dissertation study on a group of faculty working together on a curriculum alignment. Not much research had been written on the topic. My experience interviewing faculty inspired me to change directions once again and work in K-12 education. I currently teach at a Title-I high school in South Central Texas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative design study was to understand educators' perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness of high school students attending a public high school in South Central Texas. College and career readiness will be generally defined as students' preparation to successfully transition to college-level courses or certifications leading to a degree or career after high school.

Recent studies of middle school faculty and high school principals revealed they perceived their roles as (a) providing opportunities and exposure to college and career experiences, (b) setting high expectations, (c) developing knowledge of college and career readiness, and (c) incorporating college and career activities (Martinez & Everman, 2017;

Wright, 2017).

State mandated partnerships between public school districts and higher education partners help bolster student success (THECB, 2017b). The goal of this study was to identify perceived high school and college-level faculty and staff roles in high school students' college and career readiness. The results of this study may motivate policy makers and administrators to (a) re-evaluate existing college and career readiness (CCR) reform efforts (b) establish more CCR-centered professional development and collaboration, and (c) improve understanding of high school and college level faculty roles in college and career readiness. More research on this topic is warranted.

Research Gap

Abundant literature reveals middle school and high school faculty perceptions of their knowledge and roles in college and career readiness but ignore the perspectives of community college and university faculty (Breslow & Chadwick, 2016; Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019; Lewis et al., 2017; Malin & Hackman, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wright, 2017;). Existing studies present models for effective high school and college level partnerships but disregard the perspectives of college level faculty knowledge and roles in college and career readiness (Alford et al., 2012; Bush, 2017; Forrest et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015).

I incorporated college readiness and career readiness to address how educators perceive their roles in preparing students for college and careers. College and career readiness occurs when students have the capacity to apply key content knowledge in context to solve real-world problems (Conley, 2018, p. 17). This study draws on an interpretive case study design to help fill these gaps by examining the perceptions and roles of high school, community college, university,

and regional service agency faculty.

State officials integrated college and career readiness standards into the K-12 essential knowledge and skills to improve students' content area knowledge and deeper level thinking in preparation for college and the workforce (State of Texas, 2009). In response to differences in the content and expectations at each level, policymakers initiated collaborative and innovative partnerships between school districts and higher education partners to help bolster student success (THECB, 2017b). Partnerships are critical for supporting college and career pathways and for addressing student deficits (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015;).

Scholars inform us that middle school faculty, high school principals, and administrators at each level are significant to ensuring students' college and career readiness (Hernandez, 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez and Everman, 2017; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). Scholars maintain that high school and college level faculty involved in college and career readiness partnerships share strategies and opportunities for student success (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; McGaughy & Venezia, 2015; Wess, 2015). Scholars recommend further research.

Now more than ever, school districts and college level institutions are accountable for preparing students for college and industry (THECB, 2019a). Identifying the roles of faculty at each level will help clarify educator expectations for ensuring high school students' college and career readiness.

Research Questions

My objective was to examine educator's roles in a high school, community college, university, and regional education agency for ensuring students' readiness for college and careers. In a curriculum alignment partnership, known as AVATAR, high school, college level,

and regional agency faculty collaborate to bolster student success across institutional level.

Teacher efficacy is a critical factor contributing to student achievement (Cordell et al., 2019; Kim & Seo, 2018; Persson et al., 2015; Valenta et al., 2010). Teachers are more equipped to shape students' college and career readiness when they are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills (Conley et al., 2010; Conley, 2014; Nadelson et al., 2014). Presenting educator's perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness after their participation in an alignment partnership may encourage policymakers and administrators to address how to better support college and career readiness efforts across high schools, community college, and universities. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do educators develop students' college and career readiness?
2. How do educators prepare students for college and careers?
3. How significant is collaboration to educators' knowledge and perceptions of college and careers?
4. How does collaboration influence educators' roles in college and careers?
5. What support do educators receive for preparing students for college and careers?

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative design study was to understand educators' perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness of high school students attending a public high school in South Central Texas. The central research question is: How do educators perceive their roles for ensuring students are prepared for college and careers after high school?

Summary of Methodology

I used an interpretative design to better understand the perceived meanings, contexts, and processes of different perspectives to understand individual and shared social meanings; in particular faculty perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness (Stake, 1995). I used

purposeful sampling to identify subjects meeting the following criteria: high school, college-level faculty and regional education staff specializing in Math, English/Writing, Social Studies, and Science.

The data collection technique for this interpretative design study was semi-structured interviews, field notes, e-mail correspondence, and collected documents. Part one of the interview included a request for demographic data such as name, content area, grade level, and job title. Next, semi-structured interview questions, ranging from 45-60 min, allowed participants to respond to and discuss as needed. During the interview, I asked participants specific questions, which were guided by the research questions. I used a recording device and notetaking to record responses and Microsoft Office for data organization and coding.

I transcribed interviews and utilized tools from grounded theory to analyze semi-structured interviews, email correspondences, structured notes, and other documents within the framework of the interpretative design. For data analysis, I used Hahn's (2008) coding technique to format the data for coding. I borrowed coding and data analysis techniques from grounded theory, informed by Charmaz (2006) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). I then employed member checking and data triangulation (e.g., using multiple sources of data) to increase the internal validity of my study (Creswell, 2018; Stake, 1995).

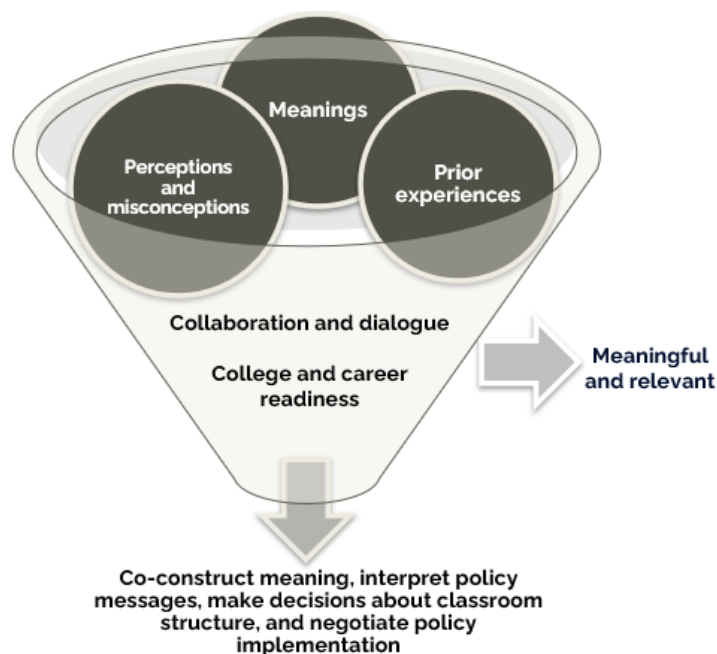
College and career readiness is a familiar term used by many educators today; however evidence of how educators understand its meaning and significance is still developing (Conley, 2018; Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; Lewis, 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014). Scholars recommend further evaluation of faculty perceptions of their knowledge and roles in preparing high school students for college (Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; Lewis, 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014). It is imperative to include high school, community college, and university faculty perspectives in the

same study. Recent college and career readiness studies exclude at least one perspective (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014). State officials and industry leaders rely on faculty to prepare students for college and careers (THECB, 2019a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

I used Coburn's Collective Sensemaking Theory and Conley's College and Career Readiness Model to frame my research study. My conceptual framework illustrates how collaboration and dialogue help individuals make sense of information they receive from others; influencing their perceptions, meanings, instruction, and policy (see Figure 1). According to Conley's research, faculty discussions about cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills, and transition skills better prepare students for college and careers.

Spillane et al., (2016) developed a cognitive framework, stemming from cognitive processes and social cognition, to characterize sensemaking in the implementation process for standards-based reform. Faculty use analytical and logical reasoning to influence decisions, develop action plans, and guide future action (Breslow et al., 2016). Coburn (2016) presented a model of collective sensemaking, drawn from sensemaking, wherein faculty interaction shapes their decisions about teaching new policy (Coburn, 2016). For example, faculty (a) co-construct meaning, (b) interpret policy messages, (c) make decisions about classroom structures, and (d) negotiate policy implementation (p. 145). Collective sensemaking improves faculty perceptions of strategies and institutional goals (Allen & Penuel, 2015). Faculty also reconcile perceptions and misconceptions while sensemaking with peers (Coburn, 2016).

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework*

Note: This model of my conceptual framework shows how individuals join alignment partnerships with prior experiences, meanings, perceptions, and misconceptions. Collective sensemaking of college and career readiness through meaningful and relevant dialogue and collaboration helps individuals co-construct meaning, interpret policy messages, make decisions about classroom structures, and negotiate policy implementation.

Scholars recommend professional development to manage the implementation of new policies and standards (Coburn, 2016). Professional development is an effective approach for making sense of education reform, policy changes, and practices (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016). Subsequently, collective sensemaking can influence state policymakers' efforts about changing local practices (Spillane, 1996; Spillane et al., 2016).

Conley's (2012) model best illustrates how high school and college level faculty can help shape students' knowledge and skills in preparation for entry level college courses and careers. Conley's (2013) four keys to college and career readiness include: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, transition knowledge and skills, and learning skills and techniques. Conley's model

aligns with the practical and technical competencies today's employers seek in applicants (Coleman & Craig, 2019).

Significance of the Study

My findings provide insight into high school, community college, and university faculty roles in college and career readiness. While college-level faculty contributions are vital to curriculum alignment and college and career readiness, scholarly research ignores high school and college-level faculty perspectives (Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Sambolt & Blumental, 2013; Wright, 2017). This study's findings revealed participants prepare students for college and careers by clarifying expectations, improving perceptions, aligning curriculum, reevaluating instruction, and co-constructing meaning.

First, the partnership will help faculty, staff, and students clarify college-level expectations. Interaction and dialogue about expectations, instruction, assessments, and curriculum at each educational level better prepares students after high school graduation. Faculty are more likely to revise their curriculum after collaborating with their peers.

Second, faculty and staff will improve their perceptions about standards and policies they are expected to teach in their classrooms because they are more likely to implement new policies when information is relevant and meaningful (Coburn, 2016). Interaction and dialogue allow for opportunities for open discussions and information sharing.

Third, aligning curriculum is critical for college and career readiness (Conley, 2018). Faculty and staff work together to align their curriculum and content across grade levels to ensure student learning is seamless between high school and college.

Next, partnerships provide faculty and staff with opportunities to reevaluate their instruction to better prepare students for college and careers. Most high school and college-level

faculty revise their instruction, assessments, and curriculum following collaboration. The partnership equips regional education agency staff with the knowledge and resources for future alignment partnerships.

Lastly, conversations help faculty and staff co-construct meaning about standards, policies and reconcile misconceptions. Partnerships help faculty and staff make more informed decisions about curriculum and instruction.

As college and career readiness reform sparks changes in high school and college level education, policymakers and administrators will be more informed of faculty perceptions and actions following alignment partnerships. This study contributes to existing literature involving college and career readiness, curriculum alignment, and collective sensemaking.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of the study include a small sample size and challenges with participant recruitment. I invited 20 faculty to participate in the study but only 10 willingly consented. Next, the results are not generalizable and may not reflect the thoughts and perceptions of all high school and college level educators. For example, the regional education agency is unique to Texas. The results of this study reflect the perceptions of individuals participating in a particular vertical alignment partnership. Lastly, another limitation included my bias in interpreting the data. An interpretive design allowed me to collect rich data from field experts to explain how high school and college level faculty interpret their roles in college and career readiness (Stake, 1995).

The following delimitations are presented for the study. For the purposes of this study's focus and research questions, the researcher contributed to existing literature by gaining a better understanding of the perspectives of high school, community college, university, and regional

education agency faculty and staff. Using an interpretive approach helped clarify meanings, contexts, and processes from different faculty perspectives to understand social meanings (Stake, 1995). Results may inform policymakers, school administrators, and other stakeholders how to better prepare students for college and careers.

I selected individuals who met specific criteria within the scope of the study. Each participant taught a content area assessed for college and career readiness. Although there were other topics worth exploring, the scarcity of research on this topic influenced my selection of the problem.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This study explored how educators perceive their roles for ensuring high school students' preparation for college and careers. The study also examined how faculty collaborate, how their interaction with their colleagues clarifies their roles, and how significant a partnership is on their knowledge and perceptions of college and career readiness. Identifying key roles of high school, community college, university, and regional faculty and staff may clarify knowledge and skills gaps, expectations, and challenges for policymakers, faculty, industry partners, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

K-12 faculty remain students' leading sources of college knowledge; more so than peers, parents, coaches, guidance counselors, and the Internet (Griffith, 2016; Huerta et al., 2013; Nadelson et al., 2014). College freshmen perceive college visits, AP courses, college prep teachers, and courses as secondary sources for their college readiness (Huerta et al., 2013). Academic content and use of technology also contribute to students' college readiness (Griffith, 2016). These findings support Conley's (2018) four key cognitive strategies, wherein students' technology proficiency and content knowledge reinforce their college and career readiness.

College level faculty rely on prior educational experiences and professional training to support students' college readiness (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). Faculty also rely heavily on their school districts, principals, the Internet, professional journals, professional organizations, and state departments for college matriculation information (Nadelson et al., 2014). Faculty efforts to make sense of college and career readiness involves evaluating data, knowledge, and experiences from multiple sources (Breslow et al., 2016, p. 3).

Other studies revealed high school faculty lacked confidence in preparing students for college (Lewis et al., 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014; Welton and Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015). The

majority of high school faculty are confident in providing general information about college, but lack knowledge about placement tests, articulation agreements, and early college programs (Lewis et al., 2017). Deficit perceptions are common among high school faculty with varying levels of teaching experience (Lewis, 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015). In this context, deficit perceptions describe teachers' perceived lack of essential knowledge and skills (Welton & Williams, 2015).

Deficit perceptions and lowered academic expectations hinder student success; further delaying college and career readiness (Welton & Williams, 2015). These findings support students' perceptions of inadequate support they received with career exploration, college resources, and the college transition process (Griffith, 2016). In contrast, a similar study revealed high school faculty implemented college-style teaching practices to expose their students to college sooner (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019).

Faculty Roles in College and Career Readiness

Existing studies present models for effective high school and college level partnerships, but neglect faculty perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness (Alford et al., 2012; Bush, 2017; Forrest et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). The above research reveals alignment partnerships help faculty (a) shape students' knowledge and skills, (b) support faculty efforts, (c) clarify college-level expectations, and (d) strengthen curriculum alignment. This study will add to the existing literature by including perceptions of high school, community college, university, and regional education faculty and staff.

Shape Students' Knowledge and Skills

Preparing high school students for college and careers will require high school and college level efforts in helping to shape students' knowledge and skills. Providing students college and career opportunities is an effective strategy for bolstering their college and career readiness (Breslow et. al., 2016; Bush, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). High school faculty have the capacity to teach critical thinking, communication, ethics, and social responsibility within a college-going culture of support and college level collaboration (Breslow et al., 2016). High school faculty are also expected to prepare students for academic content and technology use (Griffith, 2016; Wright, 2017).

Middle school counselors expose students to college and careers, academic skills, technology use, college tours, career fairs, guidance lessons, career interest surveys, social emotional counseling, academic counseling, guiding and motivating students, and supporting parents (Wright, 2017, p. 94). Principals are key players in counselor efforts (Wright, 2017).

College-Going Cultures

College-going cultures support collaboration with college level partners and experts (Breslow et al., 2016; Lym, 2014; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Welton & Williams, 2015). College-going cultures also support college readiness (Nadelson et al.; 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Lewis, 2017). Although social climate and education reform influence school culture, high school principals provide overarching support for college and career readiness (Breslow et al., 2016; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Welton & Williams, 2015). Adequate research reveals principals facilitate college and career readiness by developing college-going cultures, trust and support, faculty knowledge and skills, shared vision and norms, collaboration (internal and external), and a focus on student

learning (Breslow et al., 2016; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wright, 2017).

Faculty teaching in schools lacking college-going cultures often feel isolated and rely on their personal experiences to teach students college readiness (Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; Welton & Williams, 2015). A culture of failure and academic decline, focus on teaching the state tests, lack of system-wide college readiness, and the instability of staff produce lower levels of college and career readiness (Welton, & Williams, 2015). Preparing students for standardized tests rather than college and career readiness is common, but ineffective for college and career readiness (Welton & Williams, 2015).

Alignment Partnerships

McGaughy and Venezia (2015) describe a college readiness partnership as a group of representatives from at least one high school and one college level institution working jointly or collaborating to improve college and career readiness within a community. Lawson (2013) describes collaboration in this context as “an intervention designed to create and reinforce shared awareness of interdependent relationships as well as to enable once independent stakeholders to optimize, and act in relation to, their codependence” (p. 640).

Existing research suggests alignment partnerships are effective practices for integrating college-level instruction, expectations, and teaching strategies (Alford et al., 2014; Creech & Clouse, 2013; Forrest et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). External programs such as Gear Up and AVID provide college resources in the form of informational workshops, mentoring, and activities (Wang & Hodara, 2014; Welton and Williams, 2015). College representatives often educate high schools about applications, enrollment, and year 1 of college (Wang & Hodara, 2014). University administrators often

initiate collaboration with high schools to bridge the student achievement gap (Bush, 2017; Creech & Close, 2013; Forrest et al., 2012; Wang & Hodara, 2014).

Faculty perceive a heightened responsibility for educating high school students and teaching them more holistically (Forrest et al., 2012). However, college level faculty must be more proactive in providing sources of quality college and career information (Nadelson et al., 2014). More research is needed to understand community college and university faculty perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness.

Support Faculty Efforts

High school and college level faculty distinct priorities and responsibilities make collaboration with their colleagues difficult to coordinate (NCLE, 2013; Wess, 2015). The average time American teachers spend on professional development and lesson planning is problematic; much lower than the international average (NCLE, 2013). Expanded time schedules allow more time for collaborative planning for improvement of college and career readiness (Kaplan et. al., 2015, p. 16).

Supportive Leadership. Supporting faculty and staff efforts is critical for significant improvements to college and career readiness. Strong and supportive leaders, professional development, and collaboration are necessary for preparing high school faculty and their students for college and careers. First, leaders must be student-centered and support appropriate risk-taking when meeting students' needs (Breslow et. al., 2016; Martinez & Everman, 2017). The absence or loss of a strong leader leaves a considerable gap in a partnership (Hernandez, 2017; McGaughy & Venezia, 2015). The participation of tenured faculty helps identify students' needs (Hernandez, 2017).

Strong and supportive leadership at each institutional level is critical to establishing and

maintaining alignment partnerships (Alford et. al., 2014; Breslow et al., 2016; Hernandez, 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015). Leaders play a pivotal role in providing the adequate time and resources for accomplishing the partnership's objectives (McGaughy & Venezia, 2015). High school administrators and principals are responsible for establishing relationships with stakeholders at community colleges, universities, and businesses (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015).

Professional Development

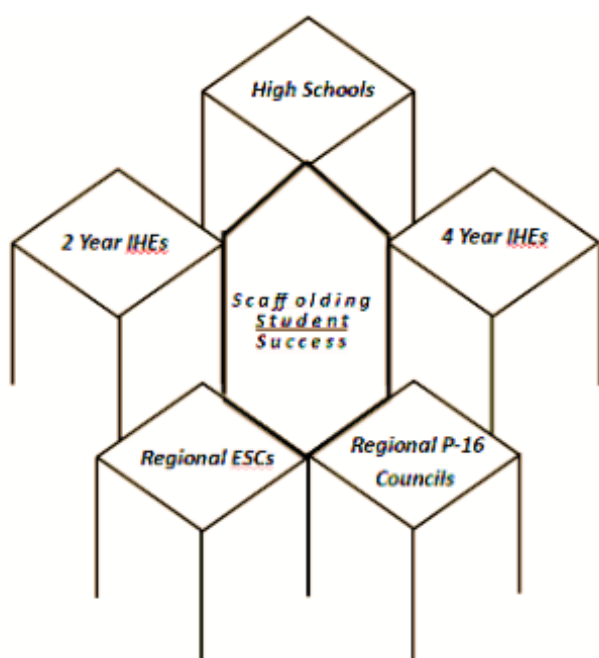
Next, incorporating professional development impacts and empower faculty (Wess, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016). Breslow et al. (2016) define professional development as “the continuous process of building educator capacity ... to ensure teachers’ actions and student learning align with the school’s cultural identity” (p. 3). Existing studies of high school faculty revealed a lack of professional development strategies involving the college process (Alford et al., 2014; Hernandez, 2017). Effective high school principals focus on meeting with faculty regularly and establishing professional development (Breslow et al., 2016; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017). External partnerships expose faculty and students to college level expectations, strategies, knowledge, and skills (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015).

Alignment of high school and college standards will require statewide changes in professional development and training (Harris et al., 2014). In 2011, the coordinating board, regional education service agencies, and regional P-16 councils initiated Academic Vertical Alignment Training and Renewal (AVATAR) partnerships between school districts, community colleges, and universities. K-12 faculty knowledge and perceptions of college and career readiness improves after participating in professional development (Nadelson et al., 2014).

Professional development completed through AVATAR is cost effective with long term change. The purpose of the partnership is to foster critical conversations between faculty about course alignment and action plans for leading change in instruction, policies and practices, and expectations for students (Harris & Keller, 2018). Harris and Keller's (2016) AVATAR model represents professional development among school districts, community college, universities, and regional staff as a framework for student success (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

AVATAR Model



Note: Harris and Keller's (2018) AVATAR Model is a professional development model that promotes networking for curriculum alignment across high schools, college-level institutions, and regional education agencies.

Clarify College Level Expectations

High school graduates believed their teachers could benefit from learning more effective strategies for college and career readiness (Griffith, 2016). This implies these graduates were not as prepared for college as they could have been. High school and college level faculty are more

likely to establish strategies when they work together. Earlier studies revealed high school-college partnerships improved student outcomes (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Forrest et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2017; Huerta et al., 2013; Lym, 2014; Martinez & Everman, 2017; Wang and Hodara, 2014; Welton, & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015).

Reading and Writing

Alignment partnerships help faculty develop strategies and practices for enhancing student success in college level courses (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Exchanging information about syllabi, cross-institutional observations, feedback, assignments, and texts improved instruction and student performance (Forrest et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014). Faculty are more likely to revise their curriculum after their exposure to college-level rigor and strategies (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015).

High school students significantly improved their reading and writing following an alignment partnership (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). High school faculty implemented a new English curriculum and increased student support services that aligned with the community college (Hernandez, 2017). Faculty learn about college level curriculum, plagiarism policies, sample essays, and writing strategies (Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Community college faculty emphasized the importance of teaching more nonfiction during discussions with high school faculty (Lym, 2014). Faculty also discussed college level reading, writing, intellectual curiosity, reasoning, making arguments, and research skills (Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015).

Student Support Services

Students are more likely to matriculate to college when they have adequate support from counselors and teachers (Huerta et al., 2013; Welton, & Williams, 2015). Exposure to college-related resources as early as middle school helps students identify the college and career pathways to take after high school (Huerta et al., 2013; Williams, 2014; Wright, 2017). High school and college level faculty are better equipped to build pathways for students, particularly at-risk students, through relevant activities and services (Hernandez, 2017; Wang and Hodara, 2014).

College Transition Skills

Students enrolling in college demonstrate skills gaps and require the necessary cognitive strategies to succeed in college (Conley, 2018). Interaction exposed high school faculty to college pathways, college application processes, and campus life (Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). Conversations supported strategies for students' goal-setting, independent learning, and work habits (Lym, 2014). High school faculty believe college level faculty should provide 1st-year college students with peer study groups, goal setting, communication skills, research skills, and plagiarism policies to better prepare them for college (Lym, 2014). Community college faculty were better informed of student services and activities after partnerships (Hernandez, 2017; Wang & Hodara, 2014). Guiding students through the college transition process help faculty clarify their roles in college-readiness (Hernandez, 2017).

Strengthen Curriculum Alignment

In many instances, faculty end partnerships with new understandings of course alignment and action plans for leading change in instruction (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Forrest et al., 2012; Lym, 2014; Harris et. al., 2016; Hernandez, 2017; THECB, 2017; Wess, 2015). Faculty

interaction and dialogue are critical for curriculum alignment (Alford, 2014; Harris et. al., 2016; THECB, 2019a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The active exchange of ideas leads to instruction revision, pedagogy development, and increased student and faculty engagement (Forrest et al., 2012).

High school and college level faculty are more likely to align their course content after co-teaching a college level course (Creech and Clouse, 2013; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Experts recommend faculty from each level meet regularly to review syllabi and assignments to ensure content is aligned (Lym, 2014). High school and college level faculty should concentrate on discrepancies in key cognitive and foundational skills if content is already aligned (Alford, 2014).

An appointed facilitator is necessary for supporting policy implementation and support to individuals or groups (Lessard et. al., 2016). External facilitators (a) provide outside expertise, (b) are an objective third party, (c) keep stakeholders focused on objectives, (d) empower faculty, and (e) recruit faculty (Hernandez, 2017, p. 63). Regional education agency staff facilitate alignment partnerships in Texas.

Barriers to Collaboration

Collaboration and dialogue are ideal and can produce great results. However, faculty collaboration remains complex. Several factors prevent high school and college level faculty from meeting. First, faculty are often confined to their classrooms with minimal interaction with their peers (Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; NCLE, 2013). Limited or no interaction also delays improvements to college and career readiness through increased isolation, professional development deficits, deficit perceptions, and information gaps (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017; Kaplan et al., 2015; Lewis, 2017; Lym,

2014; Nadelson et al.; 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015).

Next, time constraints and distinct priorities make collaboration challenging for faculty. The average time American teachers spend on professional development and lesson planning is problematic; much lower than the international average (NCLE, 2013). High school faculty spend most of their time and efforts on standardized test preparation (Alford et al., 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015).

Third, faculty resistance or lack of buy in thwart their exposure to data, student support services, and constructive feedback (Hernandez, 2017; Wang & Hodara, 2014). Highly qualified and experienced teachers are more likely to join and remain in partnerships long-term (Creech & Clouse, 2013).

Next, condescension is a concern for many faculty participating in alignment partnerships (Wess, 2015). Condescension occurs when faculty from different high schools, community colleges, and universities work together and patronizing attitudes emerge, sometimes due to misconceptions.

Lastly, cultural differences within organizations are major barriers to collaboration (Rippner, 2017; Wess, 2015). Klein (2017) maintains that an organization's values and beliefs are critical aspects in education partnerships. Organizational differences can trigger communication problems, distrust, and varying expectations of worker responsibilities (Kezar, 2011, p. 209).

Effective collaboration requires trust, communication, a shared vision, and purpose (Bush, 2017; Kelly and Schaefer, 2014). Alignment partnerships motivate faculty through conversations across institutional levels, collaboration, and relationship building (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Expanded time schedules allow more time for collaboration

(Kaplan et. al., 2015, p. 16). Meeting regularly will help with relationship building and may resolve condescension over time. Partnerships build trust through transparency and mutual expectations (Hartman, 2017, p. 45). Meaningful learning can begin once collaboration is established across different institutional cultures and contexts (Wess, 2015).

Improvements made by a partnership can take up to two years due to the time it takes to build relationships (Lawson, 2013). Although partnerships take time, they are an effective long-term strategy (Barnett et. al., 2012; Hartman, 2017). High school and college level faculty perceived the resources and strategies gained from partnerships were beneficial (Wess, 2015, p. 75). Kelly and Schaefer (2014) believe administrators can establish effective collaboration by (a) defining what a collaborative environment is, (b) teaching collaborative skills, (c) rewarding collaborative behavior, (d) aligning metrics for success among departments, and (e) ensuring leaders understand their roles (p. 6).

Conceptual Framework

Sensemaking Theory

Simply communicating new standards and policies to faculty is not an effective form of policy implementation (Spillane, 1996; Spillane et al., 2016). School districts influence state-level policy implementation efforts by increasing the relevance of policies among school practitioners (Spillane, 1996). School district administrators and faculty interact with their communities and understand the circumstances shaping policy (Spillane, 1996). Their influence on statewide policies is often overlooked (Spillane, 1993; Spillane, 1996).

Spillane et al., (2016) developed a cognitive framework, stemming from cognitive processes and social cognition, to characterize sensemaking in the implementation process for instructional policies and standards-based reform. Spillane (1996) posits that school districts are

more likely to influence the policies and standards at the state level when school administrators support teaching and learning through professional development, curriculum, materials, teacher supervision, and assessments (pg. 84).

Sensemaking of information emerges through an individual's values, beliefs, and experiences and occurs in three stages (Spillane et al, 2016):

- Individual cognition is an individual's sensemaking of new information using his or her values, beliefs, experiences, and prior knowledge.
- Situated cognition represents the significance of a situation or context in an individual's sensemaking process.
- Role of representations describes the role of policy and external factors in an individual's sensemaking process.

Ample research on sensemaking theory describes how K-12 faculty make sense of education policy (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016; Duncheon & Munoz, 2019; Phillippo & Blosser, 2018). Individuals are more likely to co-construct meaning through interaction and dialogue. For example, shared sensemaking among K-12 faculty helped improve meanings of policies and practices (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016; Phillippo & Blosser, 2018). Faculty not given opportunities to interact with their peers felt isolated and relied on their personal experiences to interpret college and career readiness policy (Duncheon & Muñoz; 2019). Often times their experiences may not align with their students' experiences.

Both individual and shared experiences help faculty interpret policy meaning and integrate policy into their teaching practices (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016; Phillippo & Blosser, 2018). Some high school institutions experience positive results after modifying their school curriculum following a partnership (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Forrest et

al., 2012; Lym, 2014). Studies examining faculty sensemaking at community colleges and universities are scarce and require more research.

Policy implementation fails when the purpose is unclear or weak, or when the purpose does not fit with the interests of stakeholders (Spillane et al., 2016). This is another reason why deficit perceptions among high school faculty exists. College and career readiness reform may be unclear, irrelevant, or misaligned with faculty agendas and therefore absent from their curriculum. Therefore, communicating the rationale and relevance for change is critical for policy implementation (Spillane, 2016). If an organization lacks structure, then the purpose and direction for policy implementation will be unclear (Breslow et al., 2016).

As mentioned earlier, partnerships require strong leaders and direction to be effective. Opportunities to interact with other faculty will depend on the leadership, such as school principals and college administrators (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Coburn, 2016; Duncheon & Muñoz; 2019). Leaders and policymakers should increase expectations and accountability of college readiness reform (Bush, 2017; Duncheon & Muñoz; 2019). Leaders are also responsible for effectively communicating the rationale and relevance for policy implementation to faculty (Spillane, 2016).

Collective Sensemaking Theory

Professional development and sensemaking help with the implementation of new policies and standards (Allen and Penuel, 2015). Faculty collaboration, interaction, and conversations help faculty learn and interpret changes in their settings and practices (Allen & Panuel, 2015; Coburn, 2016; Brown & Weber, 2016; Phillippo & Blosser, 2018; Duncheon & Munoz, 2019). Coburn's (2016) collective sensemaking theory, drawn from sensemaking theory, explains how group interaction helps shape an individual's decision about teaching. Individuals (a) co-

construct meaning and interpret policy messages, (b) make decisions concerning classroom structures, (c) reconcile inconsistencies and misconceptions, and (d) negotiate technical and practical details of implementation (Coburn, 2016, p. 145). Sensemaking can occur in formal and informal settings (Coburn, 2016; Spillane et al., 2016).

Professional Development

Scholars suggest professional development as a strategy for collective sensemaking and managing the implementation of new policies and standards (Coburn, 2016). Professional development is an effective approach for making sense of education reform, policy changes, and practices (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016). Collective sensemaking improves individuals' perceptions of strategies and institutional goals (Allen & Penuel, 2015). Brown and Weber (2016) concluded that high school faculty must make understand how policies align with their instruction to incorporate them in their teaching. Subsequently, collective sensemaking among faculty has the power to change practice and policy (Spillane et al., 2016).

College and Career Readiness Model

Measuring student success in college and careers involves more than passing standardized tests (Breslow et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2016). Many students enrolled at colleges and universities demonstrated learning gaps and lacked the cognitive skills to succeed in college and careers (Conley, 2018). Neisser (2014), a cognitive psychologist, defines cognition as the processes of thinking, concept-formation, remembering, and problem-solving (p. 8). Conley's (2012) research resulted in four key strategies and competencies students need to succeed in college: (a) cognitive strategies, (b) content knowledge, (c) learning skills and techniques, and (d) transition knowledge and skills.

First, "cognitive strategies include formulating hypotheses, problem-solving, identifying

sources, collecting information, analyzing and evaluating findings, organizing and constructing tasks, and precision and accuracy” (Conley, 2014, p. 56). Faculty should emphasize and develop students’ cognitive strategies in the classroom (Conley, 2014).

Second, content knowledge from core subjects includes “key terms and terminology, factual information, linking ideas, organizing concepts, technical knowledge and skills, challenge level, value, attribution, and effort” (Conley, 2012, p. 3).

Next, “learning skills and techniques include goal-setting, persistence, self-awareness, motivation, help seeking, progress monitoring, self-efficacy, time management, test taking skills, note taking skills, memorization and recall, strategic reading, collaborative learning, and technology proficiency” (Conley, 2012, p. 3).

Lastly, “transition knowledge and skills include an awareness of college programs, financial aid and admissions processes, career pathways or college majors, college-level and workforce norms and expectations, and self-advocacy” (Conley, 2014, p. 56).

A review of the literature reveals college and career readiness partnerships provide faculty with the knowledge and skills for college and career readiness (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). Faculty at each level discuss cognitive strategies and content knowledge such as reading, writing, intellectual curiosity, reasoning, making arguments, and research skills (Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). Conversations clarify transition knowledge and skills, such as college pathways, college and financial aid applications, and college life (Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). Faculty conversations about students’ learning skills and techniques included goal setting, independent learning, and work habits (Lym, 2014).

High school faculty play a significant role in student achievement (Cordell et al., 2019; Kim & Seo, 2018; Persson et al., 2015; Valenta et al., 2010). Consequently, administrators, principals, and teacher educators should ensure high school faculty have the knowledge and skills necessary to incorporate key cognitive skills into their instruction.

Methodological Approach

I employed a case study methodology “to explain, describe, or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur” (Yin, 2014, p. 24). An interpretive approach informed by Stake (1995) clarifies the perceived meanings, contexts, and processes from diverse perspectives to understand individual and shared social meanings. The structure of an interpretive design is particularly important due to the lack of scholarly attention given to the research questions presented in this study. The interpretive case study aims to identify the perceived roles of high school, college level, and regional education agency faculty and staff for preparing students for college and careers.

Conclusion

A comprehensive review of the literature revealed middle school and high school faculty perceive limited roles in preparing high school students for college and careers. High school faculty rely on guidance counselors and college admissions counselors to provide matriculation assistance to students. Alignment partnerships create opportunities for shaping students’ knowledge and skills, supporting faculty efforts, clarifying college level expectations, and strengthening curriculum. Barriers to collaboration such as isolation, time constraints, distinct priorities, resistance, condescension, and organizational differences and limited access to college level faculty contribute to faculty deficit perceptions. Studies exploring faculty perceptions of their roles and knowledge in career readiness is scarce, providing limited information on high

school, community college, and university faculty. Regional education agencies are unique to Texas and information on regional education agency staff is limited. Stakeholders may utilize this research to better understand the roles of high school, community college, university, and regional education agency faculty and staff for preparing students for college and careers.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This dissertation attempted to answer the central research question: How do high school and college-level faculty and staff prepare high school students for college and careers? I selected a qualitative approach “for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2018, p. 26). In this chapter, I will discuss my overall approach and rationale, methodology, protection of human subjects, data collection, data analysis, my role as researcher, and trustworthiness.

Overall Approach and Rationale

A constructivist worldview supports the belief that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work by developing subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell, 2018, p. 30). I utilized semi-structured interviews, email correspondences, and documents within the framework of the interpretive case study design to interpret faculty roles in college and career readiness. To study this phenomenon, I used tools from grounded theory for data analysis. Coding involves the conceptual coding of transcripts and analyzing codes into two categories. I then analyzed each category to develop five overarching themes.

Methodology

I employed a case study methodological approach “to explain, describe, or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur” (Yin, 2014, p. 1). A case study research design is widely used in the social sciences (Crowe et. al., 2011). I selected an interpretive design informed by Stake (1995) to understand the perceived meanings, contexts and processes from diverse perspectives in an attempt to understand participants’ individual and shared social meanings.

The structure of the interpretive design includes open-ended interview questions, e-mail

discussions, collected documents, and observations for an accurate interpretation of this phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Semi-structure, face-to-face interview questions encouraged faculty to reply and discuss as needed (Appendix D). Previous studies of college and career readiness used a similar, open approach (Lym, 2014; Hernandez, 2017; Martinez and Everman, 2017; Wess, 2015; Wright, 2017).

The goal of this research is not to generalize about all faculty in this region; rather to understand the perceptions of a particular group of faculty and staff working together to prepare students for college and careers. The interpretative case study aims to identify the perceived roles of high school, college level, and regional education agency faculty for preparing students for college and careers. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do educators develop students' college and career readiness?
2. How do educators prepare students for college and careers?
3. How significant is collaboration to educators' knowledge and perceptions of college and careers?
4. How does collaboration influence educators' roles in college and careers?
5. What support do educators receive for preparing students for college and careers?

Site and Population Selection

Interviews and observations occurred at an on-campus site at the high school, community college, university, or regional education agency and were coordinated with each participant. The high school sits near the city's epicenter and has a current enrollment of 175 students. Many students are low-income, Hispanic, and meet the national average in terms of Math, Science, Language Arts and Reading, and Social Studies. The school was in its first academic year and administrator's worked collaboratively with industry partners to prepare students for careers in

technology and business, such as coding, cyber-security, game design, and business. Exposure to industry and businesses help students explore degree programs and careers (TAWB, 2014).

Students live in the area or were invited to enroll via lottery.

The community college serves an average of 20,000 students per semester and is a Hispanic serving institution (HSI) due to the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled (ACCD Institutional Research, 2017). The urban community college is known internationally for its associate degrees and technical programs. The public university has enrollment of 34,000 and is an HSI (Fast Facts, 2021). The regional education agency is located within miles of the high school and facilitates the training and program development of educational reform in the city.

Participants

I used purposeful sampling to identify subjects meeting the following criteria: Math, English/Language Arts, Social Studies/History, and Science faculty teaching at a high school, community college, and/or university. Expertise and professional knowledge of core content and curriculum was the rationale for identifying the subjects. The subject population included high school, community college, and university faculty and a regional education agency staff specializing in Math, English/Language Arts, Social Studies/History, and Science. I collected demographic data, such as content area, grade level taught, and job title. Three faculty taught Math, three faculty taught history, one faculty taught English, and two faculty taught science. A principal, a community college administrator, a university administrator, and regional facilitator were also interviewed.

Research Instruments

I used an iPhone audio recorder and laptop to record interviews, take notes, and store data. I used Rev.com to import audio recordings and transcribe interviews. I utilized Microsoft

Word and Excel for data organization and coding (Hahn, 2008, 20). Data was stored on my laptop and Google Drive with password protection for security purposes.

Interview Protocols and Procedures

I conducted interviews in participants' offices and designated locations agreed upon by the individuals. Previous studies of college readiness partnerships have used a similar, open approach (Lym, 2014; Hernandez, 2017; Wess, 2015). The analysis included (a) interviews with administrators and faculty at the four participating institutions (one high school principal, two high school faculty, one community college administrator, one university faculty, one university administrator, three university faculty, and one regional facilitator), and (b) semi-structured face-to-face interviews, observations, e-mail discussions, and collected documents.

I communicated with the high school principal and university administrator to request permission for the study using an IRB (see Appendix A). The principal and administrator facilitated subject participation to ensure participants were available and willing to participate. All participants will receive a general overview in the invitation letter (Appendix B) and a detailed explanation of the study in the Informed Consent (Appendix C). Willing participants signed the informed consent before entering the study so they may fully understand the study and the study's purpose. Participants also received a printed copy of the Informed Consent for their records.

Consent forms are securely maintained in a locked facility. I sought guidance from a gatekeeper at the university to help facilitate communication efforts between her, the institutions, and the participants. I did not offer incentives to study participants. Subjects could opt out of the study at any point during the study.

Semi-structured interview questions allowed participants to respond to and discuss the

issues as needed. During the interviews, I asked participants specific questions guided by the research questions. Part one of the interview (see Appendix D) included a request for demographic data such as name, content, grade level, and job title. I implemented in-person interviews, ranging from 45-60 min, to collect data following a set question protocol based on the participants' roles.

Protection of Human Subjects: Ethical Considerations

There is a potential risk that subjects will be identified and that their anonymity will be disclosed. I minimized this risk by encrypting information and protecting the data. Data is saved on my personal computer, Google drive, email, and thumb drives. All data storage units are password protected and passwords are secured and private and only known to me. Any physical documents and digital recordings are stored in a locked cabinet in my home office.

To maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for participants (See Table 1) and their institutions. I collected limited demographic data to protect the anonymity of the participants in an attempt to avoid the possibility of identifying participants. Participants received an email with an invitation and description of the study (Appendix B) and the Informed Consent (Appendix C). I established and maintained trust and rapport with all participants by providing clear descriptions and expectations of this study and addressed all anticipated and unanticipated issues. Subjects could opt out at any point during the study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) allowed participants to respond to and discuss as needed. The interviews, ranging from 45-60 min, followed a set question protocol based on the participant's job title. During the interviews, I asked participants specific questions guided by the research. Previous studies of college and career readiness have used a similar,

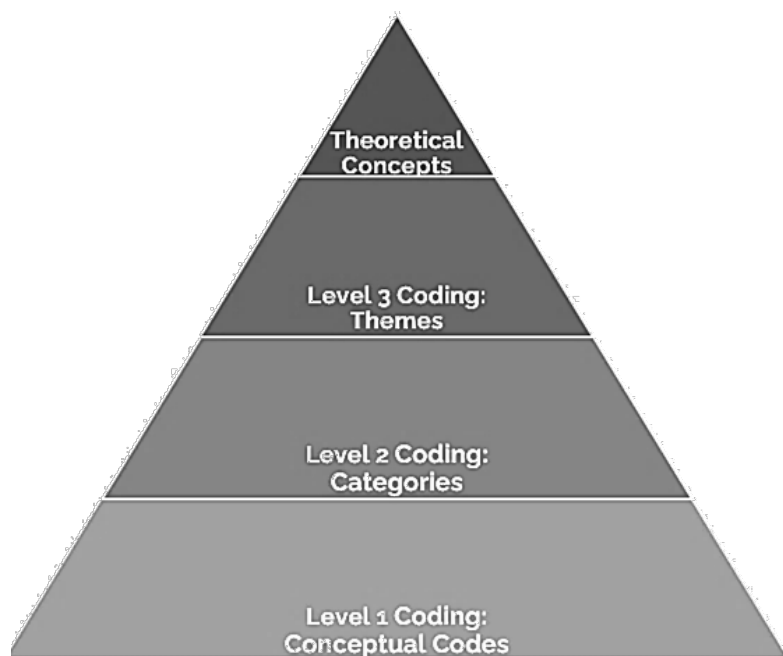
open approach (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Martinez and Everman, 2017; Wess, 2015; Wright, 2017).

Grounded theory allows for the combination of a variety of traditional data collection procedures, such as: such as semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews, e-mail correspondence, collected documents, and observations (Hahn, 2008). Data triangulation was used to increase the internal validity of the study (Stake, 1995, p. 18).

Data Analysis

I used coding and analysis strategies from grounded theory techniques informed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2006). After recording and transcribing interviews, I utilized Microsoft Word to sort and code large quantities of unsorted material with the goal of finding empirical answers to research questions (Hahn, 2008, p. 5). Hahn's coding technique consists of utilizing Word to format the data for coding (Hahn, 2008, p. 20). Coding "involves interacting with data using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 56). Using Hahn's (2008) coding technique:

1. I analyzed and labeled raw data into conceptual codes and key concepts and patterns.
2. I focused my analysis on my conceptual codes which led to the development of my categories.
3. I applied thematic coding of the categories which led to the development of five overarching themes and a theory.

Figure 3*Levels of Coding in Qualitative Study*

Note. This figure shows the levels of coding proposed by Hahn (2008). Using Hahn's (2008) coding technique, I analyzed and labeled raw data into conceptual codes and key concepts/patterns. A more focused analysis of my conceptual codes led to the development of my categories. Thematic coding of the categories led to the development of five overarching themes leading to a theory.

I employed theoretical sampling and constant comparative approach during data analysis to identify emerging themes and gaps in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). These practices assisted me with developing an initial understanding of common themes regarding educators' roles in student's college and career readiness.

Role of Researcher

I am a Mexican-American and first-generation college student living in the Southern United States. I am currently employed as a teacher at a Title-I school. I acknowledge that my personal, cultural, and historical experiences shaped my interpretations of faculty responses to interview questions (Creswell, 2018). Although I was a university employee at the time of data

collection, I had not developed personal connections to participants prior to the study. Therefore, a university gatekeeper organizing the partnership helped me gain access to participants. My connection to the university in this study did not place participants at any risk or compromise my ability to disclose the data accurately (Creswell, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Generalizability of findings and external validity was more challenging when utilizing a smaller sample size for this study. Challenges with recruiting participants for the study resulted in only 10 willing participants. I used the following procedures to validate findings. First, triangulation of the data (e.g., semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews, e-mail discussions, collected documents, and observations) increased the internal validity of the study through the cross-referencing of information (Stake, 1995, p. 18).

Next, I employed member checking wherein I shared the major findings with participants to confirm my interpretations were accurate (Birt et. al. 2016). Finally, my background shaped my interpretations of faculty responses, but did not compromise my ability to disclose the data accurately (Creswell, 2018). Threats to validity were addressed through the design of the study, data collection, data analysis, and when drawing conclusions from the findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative design study, was to understand educators' perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness. The state of Texas selected the participants from a South Central Texas high school, community college, university, and regional education agency to revise and align curriculum standards and better prepare high school students for college and career readiness. I used purposeful sampling to identify 10 subjects meeting my study criteria. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, e-

mails, documents, and observations to interpret this phenomenon. For data analysis, I used Hahn's coding technique to format the data for coding. I used theoretical sampling and constant comparative approach during data analysis to identify emerging themes and gaps in the data. Triangulation of the data and member checking increased the internal validity of my study. Next, I will present my categories, sub-themes, and overarching themes that emerged from participant responses.

Chapter 4. Findings

Using an interpretative design study, I investigated high school, community college, and university faculty and staff perceptions of their roles in students' college and career readiness. Data analysis of participant responses revealed high school, community college, university faculty and regional education agency staff prepare high school students for college and careers by (a) clarifying expectations, (b) improving perceptions, (c) aligning curriculum, (d) reevaluating teaching decisions, and (e) co-construct meaning. The results also offer practical strategies for effective collaboration and professional development at high schools, community colleges, and universities. I addressed the following research questions:

1. How do educators develop students' college and career readiness?
2. How do educators prepare students for college and careers?
3. How significant is collaboration to educators' knowledge and perceptions of college and careers?
4. How does collaboration influence educators' roles in college and careers?
5. What professional support do educators receive for preparing students for college and career readiness?

Data Cleaning

I compiled data from semi-structured face-to-face interviews, e-mail discussions, collected documents, and observations to better understand the roles of high school, community college, university, and regional education agency faculty and staff for ensuring student's college and career readiness. After transcribing recorded interviews using Rev.com, I utilized Microsoft Word and Excel to sort and code through the large quantities of data with the goal of finding empirical answers to the research questions (Hahn, 2008, p. 5).

I borrowed coding and data analysis techniques from grounded theory informed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2006). I employed theoretical sampling and constant comparative approach during data analysis to identify emerging themes, sub-themes, and categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Demographic Data Analysis

I interviewed 10 faculty from a high school, community college, university, and a regional education agency. I collected participant characteristics such as names, content areas, grade levels, and job titles (see Table 1). I assigned participants' pseudonyms for anonymity, represented by Sara, Edward, Paul, Sue, Tricia, Sam, Heather, Fred, Victor, and Alexa. I also assigned the high school, community college, and university pseudonyms for anonymity, represented by Southern Valley High School, Southern Community College, and Southern Regional University.

I used purposeful sampling to identify subjects meeting the following criteria: high school, community college, and university faculty specializing in Math, English/Writing, Social Studies, and Science; high school principal; and college-level administrators. The subject population included 10 individuals from one high school, community college, university, and regional education agency in the South Central Texas. I collected demographic data such as content area, grade level, and job title and used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities (see Table 1).

Table 1*Participant Characteristics*

Content/subject area	High School	Community College	University	Region
English Language Arts				
Faculty			Tricia	
Principal				
Administrator				
Facilitator				
Math				
Faculty	Sara, Edward			
Principal				
Administrator		Fred		
Facilitator				
Science				
Faculty			Sue	
Principal			Heather	
Administrator				
Facilitator				
Social Studies				
Faculty		Paul	Sam	
Principal			Victor	
Administrator				
Facilitator				Alexa

Note: The figure shows the characteristics of each participant: content, grade level, and job title/role. Pseudonyms were used for anonymity and to protect the participants' identities.

I used purposeful sampling to identify subjects meeting the following criteria: high school, community college, and university faculty specializing in Math, English/Writing, Social Studies, and Science; high school principal; and college-level administrators. The subject population included 10 individuals from one high school, community college, university, and regional education agency in the South Central Texas. I collected demographic data such as

content area, grade level, and job title and used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities (see Table 1).

Results Analysis

Data analysis of participants' responses revealed five overarching themes, 12 sub-themes, and 33 categories (see Table 1). Faculty roles in college and career readiness include clarifying expectations, improving perceptions, aligning curriculum, reevaluating teaching decisions, and co-constructing meaning.

Table 2

Overview of Results

5 Overarching themes	Clarify expectations	Improve perceptions	Align Curriculum	Reevaluate teaching decisions	Co-construct meaning
12 Sub-themes	Learning, cognition, content, matriculation	Collaboration and dialogue	Curriculum and standards	Teaching methods and content	Collaboration and professional development
33 Categories	self-awareness experiential learning communication problem-solving analyzing skills content math concepts student agency college and career pathways college culture college admissions	interaction joint efforts adequate time knowledge sharing dialogue vertical collaboration horizontal collaboration	academic rigor college knowledge student deficits standardized tests assessments	calculator use technology use math concepts content knowledge terminology definitions	collective efforts communication curriculum development relationship building

Clarify Expectations was the first overarching theme and explains how faculty develop students' college and career readiness. Alignment partnerships clarify expectations at each level to better prepare students for college and careers. I used Conley's (2014) model to explain my four sub-themes: learning, cognition, content, and matriculation. Sub-themes include learning, cognition, content, and matriculation. Categories include self-awareness, experiential learning,

technology, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, analyzing skills, content, math concepts, student agency, college and career pathways, college culture, and college admissions.

Improve Perceptions emerged as the second theme and describes how faculty prepare students for college and career readiness. Faculty were better prepared to support students' readiness because of their access to collaboration and dialogue. Opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration and dialogue improved faculty knowledge and perceptions. Sub-themes include collaboration and dialogue. Categories include interaction, joint efforts, adequate time, knowledge sharing, dialogue, vertical collaboration, and horizontal collaboration.

Align Curriculum emerged as the third theme and describes the significance of collaboration on faculty knowledge and perceptions of college and career readiness. Faculty gained access to other institutions in support of alignment efforts. Discussions about academic rigor, college knowledge, student deficits, standardized tests, and assessments helped alignment efforts. Faculty improved their knowledge and perceptions about college and career readiness and were more apt to align their curriculum to college-level expectations. Sub-themes include curriculum and standards. Categories include academic rigor, college knowledge, student deficits, standardized tests, and assessments.

Reevaluate Teaching Decisions emerged as the fourth theme and explains how collaboration influenced faculty roles in college and career readiness. Discussions about calculator use, technology use, math concepts, content knowledge, terminology, and definitions influenced faculty to reevaluate their teaching. Sub-themes include teaching methods and content. Categories include calculator use, technology use, math concepts, content knowledge, terminology, and definitions.

Co-construct Meaning emerged as the last theme and describes the support faculty

receive for preparing students for college and careers. Alignment partnerships provide opportunities for co-constructing meaning. Faculty exposure to collective efforts, communication, curriculum development, and relationship building helped them prepare students for college and careers. The two sub-themes include collaboration and professional development. Categories include collective efforts, communication, curriculum development, and relationship building.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis of participant responses revealed high school, community college, university faculty and regional education agency staff prepare high school students for college and careers by (a) clarifying expectations, (b) improving perceptions, (c) aligning curriculum, (d) reevaluating teaching decisions, and (e) co-construct meaning. Using Hahn's (2008) coding technique, I analyzed and labeled raw data into conceptual codes and key concepts/patterns. A more focused analysis of my conceptual codes led to the development of my categories. Thematic coding of the categories led to the development of five overarching themes, 12 sub-themes, and 33 categories (see Table 1).

Theme 1: Clarify Expectations

Data analysis of participant responses to Research Question 1: How do educators develop students' college and career readiness, revealed faculty clarify expectations for high school students. My sub-themes include learning, cognition, content, and matriculation (see Table 3). Categories include self-awareness, experiential learning, technology, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, analyzing skills, content, math concepts, student agency, college and career pathways, college culture, and college admissions.

Table 3*Theme 1: Clarify Expectations*

Theme 1: Clarify Expectations			
Sub-themes	Categories	Example quotes	Participants with responses representing categories
Learning	Self-awareness experiential learning project management support	<p>“We expect people to behave a certain way for the good of everybody in the room and making [students] aware of those expectations and why society has those expectations of them. The role of an educator is a very multifaceted one, especially when you consider what we are trying to prepare them for and not just in an academic setting.” (Edward)</p> <p>“I encourage my students and make them believe that they can succeed and keep them in long enough to make them realize that they can do it.” (Tricia)</p>	Alexa, Edward, Heather, Tricia, Sara, Victor
Cognition	Communication problem-solving analytical skills	“What I emphasize with them is that the skills we are working with in history are good for understanding information, breaking down text, putting information within its context, and making arguments. Those are all skills you have to do in any kind of work.” (Paul)	Edward, Heather, Paul, Tricia, Sam
Content	Math concepts content	“I’m looking for content experts. They have to know their content backwards and forwards so they can actually differentiate it, modify, and adjust. If they are not strong as a physics teacher, then they are not going to be able to adjust and find different ways to evaluate or teach because they are still not strong in the content themselves.” (Heather)	Heather, Paul, Sam, Tricia, Victor
Matriculation	Student agency college and career pathways college culture college admissions process	<p>“Students’ organizational skills, how to self-advocate, how to control their emotions, how to respond to things in the formal register or the professional stance versus informal and developing students' self-confidence.” (Heather)</p> <p>“If students want to go to college, then they will have everything they need to do that. If they want to work and then go to college or go to a 2-year, then work, then go to a 4-year. Whatever their options are, that they are just continuing to pursue their education all the way through the rest of the trajectory of their life. We want to encourage lifelong learners.” (Alexa)</p>	Alexa, Edward, Sam, Sara, Victor

Learning

Learning includes “goal setting persistence, self-awareness, motivation, help seeking, progress monitoring, and self-efficacy, time management, test taking skills, note taking skills, memorization and recall, strategic reading, collaborative learning, and technology proficiency” (Conley, 2012, p. 3). Faculty perceived developing students’ learning such as their self-awareness, experiential learning, and project management supports college and career readiness.

Self-Awareness. Edward and Heather from the high school believed teaching self-awareness was important since many of their students did not have that modeling at home. In addition, Edward believed one of his roles included increasing students’ awareness of societal expectations in preparation for all types of settings:

We expect people to behave a certain way for the good of everybody in the room and making [students] aware of those expectations and why society has those expectations of them. The role of an educator is a very multifaceted one, especially when you consider what we are trying to prepare them for and not just in an academic setting.

Tricia perceived teaching self-awareness was important for students’ academic success and persistence through to graduation. She believed she should “encourage my students and make them believe that they can succeed and keep them in long enough to make them realize that they can do it.”

Experiential Learning. Edward perceived he needed to expose his students to organizations, volunteering, and community service projects to develop good citizenship. Victor also believed in the importance of providing experiential learning opportunities to students. He explained he “wrote many grants to prepare students through field trips and other initiatives around experiential learning and such. I have been in this role for many years as an educator.”

Project Management. Training with industry partners provided faculty helped develop

essential skills employers seek in job applicants. Heather emphasized modeling and teaching project management skills:

Our industry partners said, “Wow if you could teach your kids how to do that. They either can use Trello or Post-it notes.” Frost Bank is the one that trained us and we must see it at their place of employment. The challenge for all of us is to come back and start using it and modeling it. I am teaching kids how to do that to manage their own projects within their teams and like what you are working on that day and so forth.

Cognition

The majority of the 10 participants across each institution believed in developing students’ cognitive strategies. Conley’s (2012) key cognitive strategies include “problem formulation (hypothesize and strategize), research (identify and collect), interpretation (analyze and evaluate), communication (organize and construct), precision & accuracy, monitor, and confirm” (p. 4). Faculty at the high school and college level believed developing students’ communication, problem-solving, and analytical skills were essential to college and career readiness.

Communication Skills. Tricia, Heather, and Victor believed their roles included teaching oral and written communication skills in preparation for college and careers. Tricia was passionate about teaching writing skills to students:

We need to get students ready to write in their respective fields and in order to do that literature is not necessary. As sad as that makes some of us, it is the reality. I think it is necessary for them to be exposed to it in high school so that they can see if it is something they are interested in and then learn about it and understand that there is this whole other way to learn analysis and to experience the world.

Problem-Solving. Paul emphasized the analysis and problem-solving skills he taught in his freshmen courses were applicable to any career:

What I emphasize with them is that the skills we are working with in history are good for understanding information, breaking down text, putting information within its context, and making arguments. Those are all skills you have to do in any kind of work.

Sam perceived one of his roles was to “provide students with the necessary skills to be successful teachers in their classrooms, either in their field experiences or in their careers.” Tricia at the same institution perceived one of her roles was to prepare freshmen for college. She believed college level faculty were responsible for teaching freshmen the knowledge and skills necessary for navigating through to graduation:

We have to transition them. I think that in any general education classes, which has to be part of the goal to make sure that these kids are getting ready and are able to get through college.

Analyzing Skills. Paul perceived his role was teaching analytical skills rather than content-focused skills in his content area:

I teach history, but as I tell my students in their career it is very unlikely, they are going to be in a hospital ER and somebody says, ‘Stat, tell me the terms of these treaties.’ Instead, it is the ability to analyze primary and high school sources, create arguments, and think about history as a process.

Content

Conley (2012) asserts content knowledge includes “structure of knowledge, technical knowledge and skills, challenge level, value, attribution, and effort” (p. 3). Sara and Edward helped students develop key math concepts in preparation for more difficult math courses.

Math Concepts. Edward perceived teaching math concepts was important to his students’ learning, but he struggled with the lessons he observed at the college level:

When I see the math homework that my dual credit students are doing, it's not conceptual. It is very mechanical and procedurally oriented. It creates a conflict whereas a teacher and someone who truly loves the content area he teaches; I want to go into that conceptual realm with them.

Content. Heather believed teaching content was important for preparing students for college and careers. She expressed the importance of hiring content experts:

I’m looking for content experts. They have to know their content backwards and forwards so they can actually differentiate it, modify, and adjust. If they are not strong as a physics

teacher, then they are not going to be able to adjust and find different ways to evaluate or teach because they are still not strong in the content themselves.

Matriculation

Conley (2012) defines transition skills as “college level awareness, college costs, matriculation, career awareness, role and identity, self-advocacy, and institutional advocacy” (p.

4). At least one participant from each institution agreed that developing students’ matriculation skills was important. Participant responses included student agency, college and career pathways, college culture, and the college admissions process were essential to students’ skills for college and career readiness.

Student Agency. Heather emphasized the importance of teaching student agency. She expected faculty to incorporate student agency into the curriculum and campus culture. She described student agency as “students’ organizational skills, how to self-advocate, how to control their emotions, how to respond to things in the formal register or the professional stance versus informal and developing students' self-confidence.”

College and Career Pathways. Sara and Edward believed developing students’ awareness of the different pathways available after graduation was vital. Alexa from the regional education service agency emphasized developing students’ knowledge about pathway options available after high school:

If students want to go to college, then they will have everything they need to do that. If they want to work and then go to college or go to a 2-year, then work, then go to a 4-year. Whatever their options are, that they are just continuing to pursue their education all the way through the rest of the trajectory of their life. We want to encourage lifelong learners.

Heather from the high school believed the partnership informed her how to develop high school students’ knowledge about the different pathways after high school:

It was nice having [Southern Community College] and [Southern Regional University] together because we could see differences even between the two. It helped us inform our 4-year high school pathway before they go on to college and we send them off wherever they may go and so on. Seeing where those bridges are and make connections.

Conversations about college-level expectations helped Sara develop her high school math students college and career pathways:

Being able to speak with the professors and understand the different courses that the kids are taking based on their career choices. I've always seen it as, 'Just do this math, not this math.' Whereas the professor was really able to say, 'Okay, business kids need to go the business calculus route.' It was nice to be able to see and to understand where our kids who excel at math will be.

College Culture. Paul believed exposing his students to the college environment was important for developing college and career readiness. For example, he regularly invited community college honors students to present at high schools about their transition from high school to college. Tricia believed introducing students to college was essential and viewed one of her roles as helping freshmen acclimate to the university environment by helping them understand college culture:

Our role is introducing them to what college is. It is essential. I see part of my job, especially in that first semester, as getting them comfortable in this environment and helping them understand what academia is really all about.

College Admissions Process. Fred perceived developing students' knowledge about college entrance assessments and developmental, co-requisite, and refresher courses was important. He worked closely with area high schools through dual credit and early college high school programs. As a result, he developed good relationships with high school administrators to communicate the college admissions process:

After high school coming into a junior college, many students are not prepared yet. So we make sure when they come in, they get their TSI scores. The state is really pushing the co-requisite math and English courses. We try to place them into the right one, whether it is going to be a co-requisite, 1-hour developmental, or 2-hour developmental, or a refresher and retest after that. That is how we are getting them here for the first step.

Theme 2: Improve Perceptions

Data analysis of participant responses to Research Question 2: How do educators prepare students for college and careers, revealed faculty were better prepared to help students for college and career readiness because they had access to faculty from other institutional levels. Faculty were more confident in preparing students for college and careers because their knowledge and perceptions improved through collaboration and dialogue. My sub-themes include collaboration and dialogue (see Table 4). Categories include interaction, joint efforts, adequate time, knowledge sharing, dialogue, vertical collaboration, and horizontal collaboration.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a group's "interaction, debate, and working together toward a common goal" (Kelly & Schaefer, 2014, p. 5). High school and college-level faculty establish a shared awareness of interdependent relationships and optimize their co-dependence when they collaborate (Lawson, 2013, p. 640). Faculty and staff believed interaction, joint efforts, and adequate time improved their knowledge and perceptions about college and career readiness.

Interaction. Sara and Edward agreed that interaction with faculty and staff from community colleges, universities, regional agencies, and industry was valuable. Edward expressed how fortunate he was to collaborate with college-level faculty and industry partners at his school compared to "teachers who aren't at [southern valley] high school and don't get the opportunity to collaborate with professors and industry." Tricia believed her interaction with high school faculty helped her address student deficits:

The last two years are the first group of kids who have been taught 100% under No Child Left Behind. That has been a huge difference in the education level of students. It is much lower than I have ever seen it. I do think our kids are successful. I think we have to work much harder to get them to be successful.

Table 4*Theme 2: Improve Perceptions*

Theme 2: Improve Perceptions			
Sub-themes	Categories	Example quotes	Participants with responses representing categories
Collaboration	Interaction joint efforts adequate time	“In the alignment, it was more like a conversation about a particular standard or expectation of learners and looking at that particular standard and how it was addressed in the different settings so that people could jointly then identify where the crossover points were.” (Sue)	Alexa, Edward, Fred Sara, Sue, Tricia
		“We work with [Southern Regional University] and other universities and colleges to try to develop an alignment from high school to college. I think all the conversations we have been having in the last 10 years have been very effective. If you went back 20 years, there was a lot of finger-pointing. I think with the conversations we have had and with the way we are doing the refreshers and co-requisite classes, we are seeing the success rates go up drastically.” (Fred)	
Dialogue	Knowledge sharing dialogue vertical collaboration horizontal collaboration	“Here we're like, ‘I got this great assignment. It worked,’ or ‘I’ve tried this, and nothing worked. Does anybody have any great ideas?’ We work together and regularly bounce ideas off each other and talk to each other about our students.”(Tricia)	Edward, Heather, Paul, Sara, Sue, Tricia
		“Every kid says, I have Mr. [Green] for math, Ms. [Brown] for English, and Ms. [Grey] for history. That way the teachers can talk to each other. In a horizontal way, it really helps to make sure that we're taking care of the student in a very holistic manner.” (Edward)	

Sue at the university perceived conversations with high school faculty supported positive curriculum alignment outcomes between institutions:

In the alignment, it was more like a conversation about a particular standard or expectation of learners and looking at that particular standard and how it was addressed in the different settings so that people could jointly then identify where the crossover points were.

Joint Efforts. Alexa believed her work with forming design teams of faculty from high schools, community colleges, and universities helps prepare students. She explained that “bringing K-12 faculty together with 2-year faculty and 4-year faculty” helped produce “good, strong vertical alignment work.”

Adequate Time. Fred perceived sufficient time for collaboration was essential for supporting students’ college and career readiness. He expressed how collaboration and student outcomes improved over time:

We work with [Southern Regional University] and other universities and colleges to try to develop an alignment from high school to college. I think all the conversations we have been having in the last 10 years have been very effective. If you went back 20 years, there was a lot of finger-pointing. I think with all the conversations we have had and with the way we are doing the refreshers and co-requisite classes, we are seeing the success rates go up drastically.

Dialogue

Seven out of 10 participants believed alignment partnerships were effective strategies for preparing students and faculty. Conversations about content, teaching practices, expectations, standards, skills gaps, terminology, definitions, and challenges helped faculty make more sense of policies and standards (Coburn, 2016).

Knowledge Sharing. Categories included knowledge sharing and vertical and horizontal collaboration. Knowledge sharing is “a process where individuals mutually exchange their implicit (tacit) and explicit knowledge to create new knowledge” (van den Hooff & de Ridder,

2004, p.119). My data analysis of participant responses revealed knowledge sharing emerged as a category (see Table 4). I will provide a comprehensive explanation of each category and sub-category.

Knowledge sharing sub-categories included exchanging information, exchanging knowledge, and exchanging understanding. Faculty shared documents, such as syllabi, assessments, and lesson plans. Overall, faculty were receptive to sharing their expertise and believed the different lenses created more effective work groups. For example, Sue believed:

Any of these alignment conversations are always about really looking with new eyes or through a different lens at something that you've looked at before. In these conversations, it feels to me like the texture and the understanding of the content and the practices deepens by the very nature of having different conversation partners.

Exchange Information. Sharing information and resources such as lesson plans and documents, terminology, and definitions proved valuable to faculty. Overall, participants believed exchanging information was important for ensuring college and career readiness. Sara and Edward valued the exchange of information. Sara expressed she was “more confident when sharing higher education expectations” with her students “after getting to meet the professors and hearing their perspectives.”

Exchange Knowledge. Overall, faculty from all institutional levels gained knowledge from participating in the partnership. It is possible that participants were more inclined to exchange knowledge due to similar expectations in place at their respective institutions. Tricia expressed the importance of sharing the work in her department, specifically when creating lessons:

Here we're like, ‘I got this great assignment. It worked,’ or ‘I’ve tried this and nothing worked. Does anybody have any great ideas?’ We work together and regularly bounce ideas off each other and talk to each other about our students.

Heather agreed that working with others with different perspectives and expertise was valuable:

I'm willing to say, 'Hey guys, what do you think about this? Tear it apart.' I'm okay with that and it's not going to hurt my feelings. I'm not upset if we agree to disagree on a pathway or an approach. I'm learning from other principals. I'm not scared to pick up the phone and ask, "Hey, can you give your perspective on this?"

Exchange Understanding. Exchanging understanding about educational standards at each level was valuable for faculty. Victor believed that "the first thing you've got to figure out is where your students are and where they're coming in from." Paul described his understanding of the educational system by participating in alignment projects:

I've certainly learned a lot about how high school education is in the state by working on these teams. I certainly have a much better understanding of the obstacles that my students face when they come to college and much better understanding as to where the skills gaps I see in my classroom are coming from. It really has informed my work and really has led me over the years to really shape what I do in my classroom.

Tricia shared a similar perspective by describing the importance of understanding what her students are learning before transitioning to higher education:

If we do not have any way to understand what they are coming with, how can we teach them? We expect them to be at a certain level, but if we do not know where they are coming from, we have no way to create a curriculum or design a course that will meet their needs. I can meet them where they are at and design curriculum from that, that will build on what they know and expand their knowledge.

Heather perceived knowing higher education standards was key to preparing students for college. She sought to understand "key caveats, pieces in their assessments and their syllabi that are core to the standard of that higher education institute." Faculty perceptions and beliefs created challenges within the teams. For example, Edward explained his disappointment with a conversation he had with another math professor in his team:

I remember it being an interesting experience that one of the professors was more of a traditionalist. The professor was very much like it is the end all be all if students cannot

perform this. But it is very much an archaic tradition. What place do they have in a math class? I felt that we did not meet in the middle. We ended up not continuing to work with that individual once we realized that mediation was not possible. We were not as confident, and that individual did not show a willingness to budge.

Most study participants had previously worked on vertical alignment projects with high schools, community colleges, and/or universities. Participants believed vertical and horizontal collaboration supported both faculty and students.

Vertical Collaboration. In this context, vertical collaboration refers to collaboration for aligning instructional strategies across grade levels (Berry et al., 2009, p. 6). Faculty believed vertical collaboration was an effective strategy for ensuring students' college and career readiness.

Horizontal Collaboration. Horizontal collaboration refers to collaboration within the same grade level or subject area (Berry et al., 2009, p. 6). Faculty believed horizontal collaboration was an effective collaborative strategy for ensuring students' college and career readiness. Horizontal collaboration supported collaboration within similar content areas, collaboration across different content areas, and helped students make connections between different courses.

Collaboration Within Similar Content Areas. Sara perceived horizontal collaboration supported each student holistically, while providing faculty support with their lessons across the same content area: "We are all teaching Algebra 2 so it's nice to have the three of us so all our grade levels have at least one class of Algebra 2."

Collaboration Across Different Content Areas. Edward expressed how valuable collaborating with faculty from other content areas supported students holistically, by keeping lines of communication open between faculty across similar grade levels:

Every kid says, I have Mr. [Green] for math, Ms. [Brown] for English, and Ms. [Grey] for history. That way the teachers can talk to each other. In a horizontal way, it really helps to make sure that we're taking care of the student in a very holistic manner.

Tricia believed horizontal collaboration was an effective strategy for supporting both students and faculty at the 4-year level. She regularly sought recommendations from other writing faculty to address student needs:

This semester I was teaching kids how to use Word. That is something that as a department, we talk about at meetings, and we talk about with each other. It is important to make sure that I am not missing something that other colleagues are seeing. What do these kids need, and can I change my teaching methods or content to better meet their needs?

Theme 3: Align Curriculum

Data analysis of participant responses to Research Question 3: How significant is collaboration to educators' knowledge and perceptions of college and careers, revealed faculty were more apt to align their curriculum to college-level expectations. Faculty were more confident about aligning curriculum because their participation in alignment improved their knowledge and perceptions about college and career readiness. Sub-themes include curriculum and standards (see Table 5). Categories include academic rigor, college knowledge, student deficits, standardized tests, and assessments.

Curriculum

Aligning curriculum across high schools and colleges is an effective strategy for preparing high school students for college. Alexa believed it was important to find solutions for assessing and closing student achievement gap:

We intend to help teachers come together and figure out how to assess what is happening there. If there is a gap, how do you know how to fill the gap in instruction or assessment or with curriculum? How do we support faculty and operationalizing standards?

Table 5*Theme 3: Align Curriculum*

Theme 3: Align Curriculum			
Sub-Themes	Categories	Example Quotes	Participants with responses representing categories
Curriculum	Academic rigor college knowledge student deficits	<p>“We intend to help teachers come together and figure out how to assess what is happening there. If there is a gap, how do you know how to fill the gap in instruction or assessment or with curriculum? How do we support faculty and operationalizing standards?”(Alexa)</p> <p>“On a vertical level, we have several students attending dual credit classes this year. We are trying our best to make it engaging to high school students but also mirror what it is going to look like when they go to college.” (Edward)</p>	Alexa, Edward, Fred, Sam, Sue
Standards	Standardized tests assessments	<p>“When we talk about these career and college readiness tests, who in any career ever has to take a high stakes test? Right? That is not something we ever do in the world. You might have to write a report. You might have to make a presentation. You might have to make an argument. I have not had to fill in a multiple-choice test in 20 years. STAAR exams are multiple-choice exam and you cannot really assess career and college readiness skills on a multiple-choice exam.” (Paul)</p> <p>“I didn't know that there were these codified standards for college and career readiness. Once I saw those, it started clicking to me. All this stuff that we do at the university level, with the 1st year of core courses, like the AIS courses and all those to help students be successful, it comes from those standards.” (Sam)</p>	Alexa, Edward, Paul, Sam

Academic Rigor. Academic rigor at the high school, community college, and university level was important to curriculum planning. Sue at the university joined “conversations about a particular standard or expectation of learners and looked at how it was addressed in the different settings so that people could jointly then identify where the crossover points were.”

College Knowledge. Dual credit courses are college-level courses students enroll in while concurrently enrolled in high school. Aside from awarding college credit, dual credit exposes students to college-level expectations. For example, Edward explained dual credit courses eased his students’ transitions from high school to college by exposing them to the college setting and academic rigor:

On a vertical level, we have several students attending dual credit classes this year. We are trying our best to make it engaging to high school students but also mirror what it is going to look like when they go to college.

Fred at the community college explained his campus’s involvement in dual credit and alignment partnerships:

We have quite a bit of dual credit. We have early college with [South Valley] high school and one of our deans oversees all that. We also work very closely with the school districts and the high school. Then we also work with [Southern Regional University] and other universities and colleges to try to develop an alignment from high school to college.

Student Deficits. Student performance in dual credit courses helps gauge students’ readiness for college-level rigor. Alexa believed that exposure to high school and college-level curriculum helped faculty identify and address student deficits and misalignments between high school and college-level instruction and assessment:

Students get into dual credit and then have to drop out. We see that what is actually being taught is not necessarily up to the level of rigor of college career readiness standards. Then we see the struggles and the data matches those struggles. We see that what teachers might be using for instruction or assessment is actually below that college career readiness standard. If that is so, then we see that performance also matches that in standardized tests.

Standards

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are sets of standards designed to prepare K-12 students for success in college and careers. Students in grades 9-12 will take a STAAR test for Algebra I, English I, English II, Biology, and U.S. History. Many Texas graduates are not prepared for college and careers despite the integration and revision of the TEKS (TEA, 2019a).

STAAR and TEKS. In this study, alignment discussions exposed community college and university faculty to the TEKS; offering some newfound perspectives about standardized testing. School districts and charter schools administer the STAAR test every year to assess students' proficiency of the TEKS. Paul at the community college believed the school system imposed a coverage model (e.g., teaching to the standards), particularly in history:

We are going to help folks make a lesson plan and we are going to make sure that lesson plan aligns with the curricular content that they have to cover in the TEKS. I think many teachers know that. The way the system is designed, particularly with the history curriculum, is very much a coverage model.

Conversations between high school and college-level faculty is one alternative to using a coverage model. Edward from the high school believed conversations about college-level expectations helps determine which college-level skills and TEKS to focus on:

That helps me figure out what skills I need to focus more on and if I can have the time to get to these other skills. What I know for sure my students need to be successful are "blank." And that really helps. You do have to make tough choices as a teacher of which TEK to spend more time on. I would say it helps my role because in Texas, all educators use TEKS. As a teacher you must be able to say, I taught my TEKS this year.

College and Career Readiness Standards. High school and college-level faculty perspectives varied when discussing the significance of college and career readiness standards. Paul, community college faculty, believed "learning about the STAAR and TEKS, learning

about that process, has really informed what I do in my class and then what I help those teachers work on.” However, Paul was not a proponent of standardized testing:

When we talk about these career and college readiness tests, who in any career ever has to take a high stakes test? Right? That is not something we ever do in the world. You might have to write a report. You might have to make a presentation. You might have to make an argument. I have not had to fill in a multiple-choice test in 20 years. STAAR exams are multiple-choice exam and you cannot really assess career and college readiness skills on a multiple-choice exam.

Sam acknowledged alignment partnerships helped him make clearer connections between college and career readiness standards and college-level curriculum:

All this stuff that we do at the university level, with the 1st year of core courses, like the AIS courses and all those to help students be successful, it comes from those standards. I didn't realize that there's something that's unifying all that, so that helps me give me a better perspective of what we do here for continuous improvement and looking at programmatic assessment. I've been thinking that I should connect my coursework to the college and career readiness standards.

Alexa explained faculty is more likely to incorporate college and career readiness standards into their lessons when alignment efforts are consistent:

It is great to have standards. It is great to put them in your lesson plans if that is happening. It's great to think about what that looks like for your students. If you do not think about it regularly, then students are not really reaching them.

Theme 4: Reevaluate Teaching Decisions

Data analysis of participant responses to Research Question 4: How does collaboration influence educators' roles in college and careers, revealed faculty reevaluated their teaching after alignment partnerships. Conversations and dialogue about calculator use, technology use, math concepts, content knowledge, terminology, and definitions influenced faculty to reevaluate existing practices. Sub-themes include teaching methods and content. Categories include calculator use, technology use, math concepts, content knowledge, terminology, and definitions. (see Table 6). In this context, teaching methods are instructional decisions faculty use to teach

their content. Content refers to the subject matter faculty teach.

Table 6

Theme 4: Reevaluate Teaching Decisions

Theme 4: Reevaluate Teaching Decisions			
Sub-Themes	Categories	Example Quotes	Participants with responses representing categories
Teaching methods	calculator use technology use	<p>“This semester I was teaching kids how to use Word. And that's something that as a department we talk about at meetings and we talk about with each other.” (Tricia)</p> <p>“They do the basics without [calculator] so that they understand the concept and then when they get into real world application, it is when they'd take it away because it becomes a problem that's harder to solve.” (Sara)</p>	Edward, Sam, Sara, Tricia
Content	math concepts content knowledge terminology definitions	“It's important that we share what we do, that we have a common language, especially when we say what's the lesson plan. For example, that we have the same definitions of things.” (Sam)	Sam, Tricia

Content

Understanding how faculty teach their content is significant when attempting to align curriculum across institutional levels. Participants' exposure to content and teaching methods from other contexts inspired them to reevaluate their instruction. Conley (2012) describes subject area content knowledge as “key terms and terminology, factual information, linking ideas, organizing concepts, technical knowledge and skills, challenge level, value, attribution, and effort” (p. 3).

Math Concepts. Sara from the high school perceived sharing math content with college-level faculty was valuable, “When we sat down and looked at it, we would say, ‘Okay, you're doing this right and when you teach this, maybe add this little piece.’”

Edward remained in contact “with my middle school colleagues and I ask things like, ‘whenever you teach students the slope of a line, can you teach me how you teach them slope?’”

Content Knowledge. Tricia believed that working with high school faculty helps her understand what those high school kids are actually learning and helps me so that I can kind of take them from where they're at. I can meet them where they're at and design curriculum from that, and build on what they know and expand their knowledge.”

Sam “enjoyed being with people that were teaching in other contexts. I thrive in those kinds of conversations. I like talking about teaching. I like working with people with their teaching. It was fun”

Terminology. Tricia and Sam perceived clarifying terminology they use in their classes was important for teaching college-level courses. For example, Tricia perceived that sharing a common language is important to student success:

I think one of the keys is language. One of the first things I tell my students is that their high school teachers and professors use a completely different language even though they are talking about the same stuff. I tell my students, “Do not assume that you do not know something just because I say it and I'm talking about something you think you've never heard of. You have probably done it.

Tricia explained the partnership clarified the meaning of vertical alignment since it was not a term used at the university level. Sam agreed and explained, “it's important that we share what we do, that we have a common language, especially when we say what's the lesson plan. For example, that we have the same definitions of things.”

Teaching Methods

Calculator Use. Sara explained she received clarification from community college and university faculty regarding their expectations of calculator use:

We had conversations about calculators. A big math issue is, ‘Do you use calculators? Do you not use the calculators? How much are they being used and in what ways?’ So, we were able to have those conversations, which was nice to be able to hear the perspective of the university and what their expectations are of them. Basically to use it more to enrich the class versus just plug it into the calculator. They do the basics without it so that they understand the concept and then when they get into real world application, it is when they'd take it away because it becomes a problem that's harder to solve.

Technology Use. Tricia said:

So like when we see that our students are coming in and they're not technologically advanced at all, even though they have this reputation for being this tech generation, they don't know technology, they know their phones and they know how to use social media. This semester I was teaching kids how to use Word. And that's something that as a department we talk about at meetings, and we talk about with each other.

Theme 5: Co-Construct Meaning

Data analysis of participant responses to Research Question 5: What support do educators receive for preparing students for college and careers, revealed faculty exposure to professional development and collaboration helped them prepare students for college and careers. Alignment partnerships provide opportunities for co-constructing meaning. Sub-themes include collaboration and professional development (see Table 7). Categories include collective efforts, communication, curriculum development, and relationship building.

Collaboration

Collaboration is key to alignment. Faculty have additional means of support when administrators and principals give them time to collaborate.

Table 7*Theme 5: Co-Construct Meaning*

Sub-Themes	Categories	Example Quotes	Participants with responses representing categories
Collaboration	collective efforts communication	<p>“So one thing I learned is that I had to go back to the table and say, “Hey, this is not a [Southern Regional University] initiative, nor is this just a [school district] initiative. This is a three-way partnership. It isn’t going to work unless everybody’s at the table.” (Victor)</p> <p>“They purposely put us next to each other so we can collaborate with our lessons. I’m working with the other math teachers now that we have more teachers on the campus.” (Sara)</p>	Alexa, Heather, Sara, Victor,
Professional development	curriculum alignment relationship building	<p>“The team can feel a little bit lost in their purpose and it is awkward until there is adequate time to build the team between higher education and the campus.” (Heather)</p>	Heather, Victor

Collective Efforts. Sara explained “They purposely put us next to each other so we can collaborate with our lessons. I’m working with the other math teachers now that we have more teachers on the campus.”

Victor used his administrative role to provide faculty support and reinforce collective efforts among faculty:

So one thing I learned is that I had to go back to the table and say, “Hey, this is not a [Southern Regional University] initiative, nor is this just a [school district] initiative. This is a three-way partnership. It isn’t going to work unless everybody’s at the table.

Heather stressed the importance of learning and growing together to ensure students are better prepared for college:

In order to ensure students are prepared, we must have well equipped teachers. If they have all bad, then usually the rest can be taught. Then we can learn, and all grow together.

Victor emphasized that paying external consultants was unnecessary if faculty can work together and have honest conversations:

This should not be done by a consultant who charges \$3000. This is not hard work. It's just people having honest conversations and then doing something with that, and it can be done very cheaply, and it should be given away. That was always my mantra.

Communication. Alexa also used her facilitative role to reinforce the importance of effective communication during the partnership:

When folks get off the rails a little about how they are communicating with one another, they really need to go back to what they agreed to do in collaboration. That is hard to do if you do not have someone dedicated and focused on making that happen.

Professional Development

Breslow et al (2016) describe professional development as “the continuous process of building educator capacity ... designed to ensure teachers’ actions and student learning align with the school’s cultural identity” (p. 3).

Curriculum Alignment. Victor from the university believed providing professional development opportunities was key to alignment:

I worked with educators and helped prepare teachers to align their curriculum and work collaboratively with 2- and 4-year institutions. That's pretty much been a passion of mine for years.

Relationship Building. Heather from the high school relayed the importance of establishing alignment partnerships for faculty team building: “The team can feel a little bit lost in their purpose and it is awkward until there is adequate time to build the team between higher education and the campus.”

Conclusion

Data analysis for each of the five research questions revealed faculty perceived their roles as clarifying expectations at each institutional level, improving perceptions of policies and standards, aligning curriculum across institutional levels, reevaluating their teaching decisions, and co-constructing meaning through collective sensemaking and dialogue. Professional development and administrator support are key to curriculum alignment and should be accessible, intentional, consistent, cost-effective, and purposeful. A theory emerged from the data analysis.

Chapter 5. Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

High school faculty play vital roles in student achievement (Cordell et. al., 2019; Kim & Seo, 2018; Persson et. al., 2015; Valenta et. al., 2010). Scholars recommend more studies of faculty perceptions of their roles in college and career readiness (Lewis, 2017; Lym, 2014; Martinez, 2017; Nadelson et. al., 2014; Wright, 2017). The results of this study suggest that faculty roles are multifaceted due to their various obligations. Consequently, administrators and facilitators must better prepare faculty to help develop students' knowledge and skills for success in college and careers (Conley, 2014).

In addition, high school, community college, and university faculty must streamline the knowledge and skills students need to be successful in college and careers (Coleman & Craig, 2019; Conley, 2018; Xiong & Dossetti, 2022). Study findings may provide policymakers, administrators, faculty, students, parents, industry partners and other stakeholders with strategies to improve college and career readiness. This qualitative, interpretive design study, aimed to fill this research gap by answering the central research question: How do high school and college-level faculty and staff prepare high school students for college and careers?

Discussion

Recent studies inform us that college and career readiness partnerships help high school faculty (a) shape students' knowledge and skills, (b) support faculty efforts, (c) clarify college-level expectations, and (d) strengthen curriculum alignment (Alford et al., 2012; Bush, 2017; Forrest et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015). These studies fail to address how faculty and staff from community colleges, universities, and regional education agencies prepare students for college and careers. This study adds to the existing literature by including high school, community college, university, and regional education

faculty and staff perspectives.

The data analysis revealed high school, community college, and university faculty and regional education agency staff prepare students for college and careers by (a) clarifying expectations at each educational level, (b) improving perceptions of college and career readiness; (c) aligning curriculum; (d) reevaluating teaching decisions, and (e) co-constructing meaning.

The results of this study revealed collaboration between high school and college level faculty clarified college level expectations (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014). I applied Conley's (2012) key college and career readiness model to explain the knowledge and skills faculty believe are important to student's college and career readiness.

Learning

Learning skills provide students with the skills they need for academic success - goal setting, technology proficiency, test taking skills, self-awareness, and persistence (Conley, 2012). Tricia taught self-awareness in her university English classes. She provided high school faculty with recommendations and strategies to better prepare students for college level English.

In addition, college-level faculty stressed the importance of delivering experiential learning opportunities (e.g., volunteering, community service, student activities) and project management. A lack of proficiency in learning skills and techniques often cause students to struggle even if they master content knowledge (Conley, 2014, p. 42).

Transition Skills

College-level faculty emphasized the importance of developing student agency, college and career pathways, college culture, and college admissions. Transition skills include college matriculation skills, self-advocacy, identity, and college culture awareness (Conley, 2012). Faculty developed student agency, college culture, degree pathways, and college matriculation

skills. For example, Paul at the community college emphasized the importance of teaching matriculation skills in history classes. These findings are consistent with earlier studies of high school faculty roles in the college transition process (Lewis et al., 2017; Nadelson et al., 2014; Welton and Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015).

Cognitive Strategies

Faculty agreed their roles included developing students' cognitive strategies such as communication, problem solving, analyzing skills, content, and math concepts. High school faculty, Edward and Sara, perceived multiple-choice tests do not assess students' cognitive abilities. Paul emphasized the importance of analyzing and evaluating primary sources in high school in preparation for college level history.

Clarity and Relevance of Policies

The study results reinforce that high school, community college, and university faculty are more likely to incorporate new standards and policies if the information they are getting from administrators are clear and relevant (Coburn, 2016). Faculty expressed their knowledge and perceptions about college and career readiness improved after participating in alignment partnerships. College level faculty and regional staff perceived alignment partnerships as valuable to alignment efforts between institutions.

Collaboration

Opportunities to collaborate helped faculty make sense of standards and policies (Coburn, 2016). Collaboration and dialogue also helped faculty align curriculum standards and content across grade levels. Faculty also identified and addressed achievement gaps, student deficits, and curriculum misalignments. Participation in alignment partnerships improved faculty knowledge and perceptions about college and career readiness. High school and university faculty perceived

collaboration across the same content area or grade level supported students holistically while keeping lines of communication open between faculty. A holistic approach to assessment provides a better foundation for student success (ACT, 2019).

Conversations and Dialogue

Faculty agreed that conversations about curriculum and assessments helped them align their curriculum across institutional levels and identify gaps in instruction, assessments, and curriculum. Conversations helped faculty determine which skills to integrate into their teaching. Having a common language and definitions helps with instruction and provides clarity for students. Conversations about curriculum and content helped faculty reevaluate their teaching to better prepare students. For example, calculators and multiple-choice tests in math were important topics for high school math faculty.

Relationship Building

Faculty spent a year collaborating during the partnership in which they had time for team building. Most faculty were comfortable working together and sharing their feedback and concerns. I never observed conflicts, condescension, or criticism among faculty. Some faculty voiced their dissatisfaction with policies and standards, but faculty were respectful and considerate toward each other and wanted to contribute to the process.

Writing Skills and Technology Proficiency

Tricia from the university emphasized strong writing skills and technology proficiency better prepared her students for college-level English. She taught Microsoft Word in her freshmen classes to narrow this skills gap. Tricia explained most incoming freshmen are not proficient in Microsoft Word so she now includes it in her English Composition curriculum. This evidence, although limited, confirms earlier studies of skills gaps in writing among high school

students (Alford et al., 2014; Creech & Clouse, 2013; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015).

Math

Edward expressed concerns with the math curriculum taught at the university, which he described as “very mechanical and procedurally oriented.” His concern was that students would not grasp the conceptual skills of math, which are vital for grasping the content knowledge and skills. Edward also expressed the differences in content he observed between the community college and university math classes. The partnership provided Edward direct access to community college and university faculty when he had questions about his content. Conversations about helped Edward and Sara from the high school better align their curriculum to the college and university.

Social Studies and History

Community college history faculty, Paul, emphasized the importance of teaching analytical skills rather than focusing on content. He explained that school districts that expose students to analyzing skills, rather than content (e.g., dates and names) will be more prepared for college and careers. Paul recommended high school faculty teach students to analyze primary and secondary sources, create arguments, and think about history as a process.

Content Knowledge

Content knowledge from core subjects includes key terms and terminology, information, linking ideas, organizing concepts, technical knowledge and skills, challenge level, value, attribution, and effort (Conley, 2012, p. 3). Sara and Edward from the high school incorporated content knowledge and key math concepts found at the college level. The high school principal, Heather, emphasized a strong content area knowledge as the foundation of an effective teacher. According to Conley (2014) faculty should have strong content knowledge.

Professional Development

Heather from the high school emphasized the importance of providing on site professional development regularly to faculty. Administrators and regional education staff provided faculty with collaborative opportunities and professional development during the partnership. The high school principal closed the school on designated Fridays or Saturdays to host on-site professional development and meetings. Administrators and regional staff provided faculty with a hospitality room, classroom space, technology access, and wi-fi to compensate faculty for limited funding and personal time. Faculty were usually in attendance and productive on meeting days. This study reinforces that administrators must provide professional development and collaborative opportunities to faculty to better prepare students for college and careers (Alford et. al., 2014; Breslow et al., 2016; Hernandez, 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; McGaughy & Venezia, 2015; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015).

Participants agreed that professional development was another important factor in preparing students for college and career readiness. Victor from the university and Alexa from the region believed professional development and collaboration were essential for defining and operationalizing standards, and assessing gaps in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Professional development is an effective approach for understanding education reform, policy changes, and practices (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016; Coburn, 2016; THECB, 2017b).

Relevance and Buy-In

The 10 participants volunteered for the partnership because the alignment work was relevant and important to curriculum alignment. Reinforcing objectives and relevance during the

partnership also increased buy-in among faculty. Participants believed the partnership (a) clarified content, standards, and expectations, (b) conveyed information, understanding, and knowledge, (c) supported students holistically, (d) opened lines of communication, (e) created effective strategies, and (f) showed connections between courses. Results reflect similar findings from earlier studies (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wang & Hodara, 2014; Wess, 2015).

Threats to Internal Validity

I invited 20 faculty to participate in the study but only 10 willingly consented. Therefore, the small sample size may have influenced the results of the study due to challenges with recruitment. In addition, one to three faculty per content area and institutional level were represented in this study, which excludes faculty perspectives from all content and grade levels. For example, only one English faculty participated in the study. Future research with additional English faculty is recommended to address the study's limitations. Another limitation included my bias in interpreting the data. I applied an interpretive design to allow for the collection of rich data from the sample size to explain how high school and college level faculty and regional education staff interpret their roles in college and career readiness to increase of the study's internal validity (Stake, 1995).

Generalizability of Findings

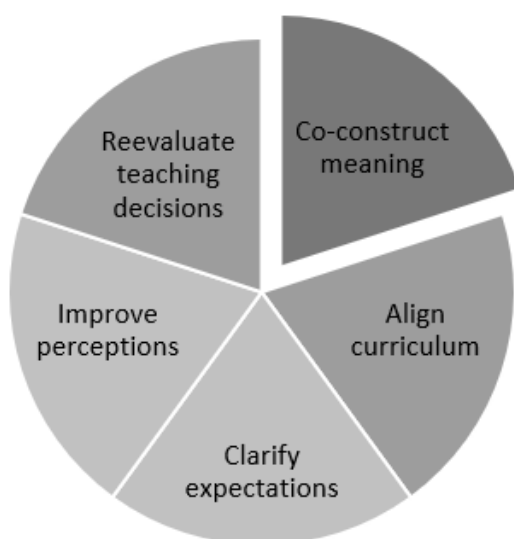
The results of this study reflect the perceptions of individuals participating in a particular alignment partnership in South Central Texas. The results are not generalizable and may not reflect the thoughts and perceptions of all high school, community college, and university faculty and regional education staff. The goal of this research is not to generalize about all faculty and staff; but rather to understand the perceptions of a particular group of educators in South Central Texas.

College and Career Readiness Collaborative Theory

The College and Career Readiness Collaborative Theory emerged from my data analysis and describes how collaboration and dialogue help faculty and staff clarify expectations for students, improve their perceptions about college and career readiness, align curriculum across institutional levels, reevaluate their teaching decisions, and co-construct meaning to help prepare students for college and careers (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

College and Career Readiness Collaborative Theory



Note: This figure of the College and Career Readiness Collaborative Theory shows how faculty and staff collaboration and dialogue clarify expectations, improve perceptions, align curriculum, reevaluate teaching decisions, and co-construct meaning to help prepare students for college courses and careers.

Conclusions

The results of this study revealed that high school, community college, and university faculty, in partnership with regional education staff, worked together to help prepare students for college and careers. This study reinforces the need for faculty and staff collaboration and dialogue to clarify skills gaps (Alford et al., 2014; Coburn, 2016; Conley, 2018; Creech &

Clouse, 2013; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Curriculum alignment is more effective when strong and supportive administrators provide dedicated faculty with opportunities to collaborate (Hernandez, 2017; Malin and Hackmann, 2017; Martinez & Everman, 2017; McGaughy & Venezia, 2015; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wess, 2015).

This study adds community college and university faculty perspectives, which are scarce in the literature. College-level faculty emphasized the importance of critical thinking and analyzing skills, ability to navigate college, and word processing. Findings further validate Coburn's (2016) Collective Sensemaking Theory in that faculty interaction and dialogue influence teachers' meanings and decisions about instruction and policy. The study contributes a college level faculty perspective to Coburn's theory. The study also supports Conley's research and makes contributions to alignment research, which is still developing.

Implications for Practice

My study proposes that students will be better prepared for college and careers when dedicated high school, community college, university faculty and regional education agency staff work together in alignment partnerships. Implications for practice include (a) partnering with industry leaders, (b) increasing funding and incentives for professional development and collaboration, (c) offering professional development opportunities, (d) establish college and career readiness plans in high schools, (e) removing barriers to faculty collaboration, and (f) including parents and families in discussions.

Partner With Industry Leaders

When high school faculty collaborate with community college and university faculty, they support efforts in assessing and improving student deficits in preparation for college and careers. Partnering with industry leaders is also important to alignment (TEA, 2019b). State

officials and industry leaders rely on faculty to prepare students for college and careers (THECB, 2019a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Exposure to industry and businesses help students explore degree programs and careers (TAWB, 2014).

Increase Funding and Incentives

My study suggests that faculty and students will be better prepared for college and careers when education leaders provide high school and college-level faculty with opportunities for collaboration and professional development to work on alignment and narrow the achievement gap. Budget deficits, standards revisions, industry demands, and future outbreaks will require high school and college-level administrators to establish innovative and cost-effective strategies to equip faculty and their students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in colleges and careers.

Professional Development

Results of this study may encourage policymakers, educators, industry partners, and other stakeholders to reevaluate existing policies and practices, professional development, funding, and incentives for faculty collaboration. Professional development is an effective approach for making sense of education reform, policy changes, and practices (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Brown & Weber, 2016). Individuals are more likely to implement policies that are relevant and meaningful (Coburn, 2016).

College and Career Readiness Plans

Participants emphasized the importance of dual credit and alignment partnerships as effective preparation for high school students. Developing alignment plans, or articulation agreements, from high school to college helps high school faculty better prepare their students for college. Each plan outlines prerequisites and courses for industry certifications and degrees.

This will require efforts from high schools, community colleges, universities, and industry to ensure plans are seamless and effective.

Remove Barriers to Collaboration

Barriers to collaboration include time constraints, distinct priorities, cultural differences, resistance, isolation, and condescension among faculty. Faculty are more likely to participate in alignment partnerships when the work is relevant and meaningful. Meeting regularly will help with relationship building and may resolve condescension over time. Conversations, collaboration, and relationship building encourage faculty in alignment partnerships (Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Remove barriers by (a) defining what a collaborative environment is, (b) teaching collaborative skills, (c) rewarding collaborative behavior, (d) aligning metrics for success among departments, and (e) ensuring leaders understand their roles (Kelly and Schaefer, 2014, p. 6).

Include Parents and Families

Parent and family engagement and communication is a vital component to preparing students for college and careers (Gilfillan et. al., 2021). The state looks to parents for their feedback and input about school policy (TEA, 2019b). Therefore, faculty should include parents and families in discussions about college and career readiness plans. It is especially important to include parents of at-risk students in discussions and relevant activities (Hernandez, 2017; Wang and Hodara, 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study may (a) encourage policy makers and administrators to reevaluate existing college and career readiness reform efforts, (b) motivate school districts, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders to reevaluate professional development and

external partnerships, and (c) stimulate collaboration between faculty. The results of this study may also provide insight and resources for school district, community college, and university administrators.

A future study addressing the roles of faculty in a different region or geographical location is recommended to validate the study's findings. In addition, using a larger sample size will address the study's limitations of having a smaller sample size.

Earlier studies suggest an increase in academic performance in college level English following alignment partnerships (Creech and Clouse, 2013; Hernandez, 2017; Lym, 2014; Wess, 2015). Partnerships exposed high school students to college-level curriculum, instruction, assessments, and faculty. A longitudinal study measuring student outcomes in college-level English and other core subjects is recommended.

Limited empirical research exists investigating industry's role in preparing high school students for college and careers. Today's employers are more likely to hire graduates that demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving, effective communication, leadership, and intercultural fluency (NACE, 2019). The pandemic also generated more careers requiring practical, technical, software-oriented, and digital competencies (Coleman and Craig, 2019). A recommendation for a future study would include examining industry's role in preparing high school students for college and careers.

This study's findings suggest high school, community college, and university faculty and regional education staff perceive their roles in college and career readiness as clarifying expectations, improving perceptions, aligning curriculum, reevaluating teaching decisions, and co-constructing meaning. Scholars recommend preparing students for college and careers as early as kindergarten (Xiong and Dossetti, 2022). Roles of elementary school faculty are scarce

in the literature (Williams, 2014; Wright, 2017). A recommendation for future research would include testing the College and Career Readiness Collaborative Theory in elementary and middle schools to expand on these research findings.

Negative Impacts of COVID-19

I cannot end this report without discussing the effects of COVID-19 on college and career readiness. As COVID-19 unleashed instability around the world in 2019, millions pivoted to virtual platforms amidst isolation, illness, and record-high unemployment rates. Many of us are still adapting to the residual effects of the pandemic (Kissam, 2021). The pandemic exacerbated the student achievement gap and shined a spotlight on student deficits. Policymakers and industry leaders will continue to rely heavily on school districts, community colleges, and universities to prepare students (THECB, 2019a).

As many of us working in classrooms know, the pandemic has caused students adverse mental, emotional, and physical health effects. School districts are managing enrollment drops, student disengagement, mental health issues, and reestablishment of classroom expectations (Kissam, 2021). Thirty seven percent of K-12 faculty teaching during the pandemic said they would likely quit (Kronk, 2020).

Low income, minorities, and ESL learners are most affected by COVID-19 (Hoofman & Secord, 2021). Student disengagement, or COVID slide, increased during the pandemic and is higher among Hispanic, African American, Pacific Islander, and economically disadvantaged students (TEA, 2020). Consequently, STAARS scores declined by 12% in 2020 (TEA, 2021). College enrollment has declined by one million students across the U.S. (MacDowell, 2022).

Positive Impacts of COVID-19

The Coronavirus produced new jobs and increased opportunities for industry

certifications, changing the existing landscape of education (Austin, 2021). Industry certifications are helping individuals, especially women, increase their marketability and earning potential (Lui, 2021). As a result, college students are beginning to shift from traditional degrees to certifications and training (NEIT, 2021). Seventy five percent of college students surveyed indicated they preferred online learning more than in-person learning (Kronk, 2020). Future pandemics are inevitable. The landscape of higher education and industry is changing. Colleges and universities must reevaluate existing programs and courses to accommodate student needs and industry demands.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

IRB Approval Letter



July 10, 2019

To: Ms Monica Ruiz

From: University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board, FWA00009201

Monica:

Your request to conduct the study titled EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN ENSURING STUDENT'S COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS was approved by exempt review on 07/10/2019. Your IRB approval number is 19-07-002. You have approval to conduct this study through 7/10/2020.

The stamped informed consent document is uploaded to the Correspondence section in the Research Ethics Review system. Please use only the stamped version of the informed consent document.

Please keep in mind the following responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Conducting the study only according to the protocol approved by the IRB.
2. Submitting any changes to the protocol and/or consent documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to the implementation of the changes. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
3. Ensuring that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
4. Reporting immediately to the IRB any severe adverse reaction or serious problem, whether anticipated or unanticipated.
5. Reporting immediately to the IRB the death of a subject, regardless of the cause.
6. Reporting promptly to the IRB any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of the subjects to participate in the study or, once enrolled, to continue to take part.
7. Timely submission of an annual status report (for exempt studies) or a request for continuing review (for expedited and full Board studies). Use either the **IRB Study Status Update** or **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
8. Completion and maintenance of an active (non-expired) CITI human subjects training certificate.
9. Timely notification of a project's completion. Use the **IRB Closure** form.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Bilicek
Research Compliance Coordinator
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3565
bilicek@uiwtx.edu

Appendix B:

Invitation Letter

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are invited to participate in a research study about your perceived roles for ensuring the college and career readiness of high school students. The information obtained from this study will be used for research purposes only. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may decline to participate in this study if you choose. Please note there is no direct benefit that will accrue to you from participating in this study; however, your participation will contribute greatly to college and career readiness efforts.

Things you should know -

Your responses to interview questions will be anonymous and the research findings from the data collected will be reported in aggregate form. Since we are not collecting any personally identifying information from you, your responses will not be linked back to you.

Participation in interviews and observations -

Completing and submitting the attached Informed Consent represents your authorization to participate in the research study. You may choose to opt out of the study at any time. To do so, you may refuse to participate in the interviews and observations.

If you have questions at any time about the study or interviews, you may contact either Monica Ruiz at mruiz2@student.uiwtx.edu or Dr. Norman St. Clair at stclair@uiwtx.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or offer input, contact the UIW Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (210) 805-3036. This research and survey tool has been approved by the UIW IRB (IRB #19-07-002).

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,
Monica E. Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C:

Informed Consent

Subject Consent to Take Part in a Study of Educator Perceptions of Their Roles in Ensuring
Student's College and Career Readiness
University of the Incarnate Word

Authorized Study Personnel: Monica E. Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate
UIW Dreeban School of Education
(210) 425-3868
mruiz2@uiwtx.edu

Norman St. Clair, Ph.D. (Chair)
UIW Dreeban School of Education
(210) 829-3831
stclair@uiwtx.edu

Key Information: Your consent is being sought for a research study. The purpose of the research is to identify your perceived roles as an educator for ensuring the college and career readiness of high school students.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- Procedures will include recorded and/or transcribed interviews, field notes and observations.
- Two visits with the researcher are required.
- These visits will take three hours total of your time.
- There is a potential risk that participant's anonymity will be disclosed or that subjects will be identified.
- The researcher will minimize this risk by encrypting information and protecting the data.
- You will not be paid for your participation.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate at any time.

Invitation: You are invited to volunteer as one of nine subjects in the research project named above. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study? You are being asked to be in this study because you are a Math, Language Arts and Reading, Social Studies, or Science educator and/or administrator at a high school, two-year college, four-year university, or regional education agency.

What is the reason for doing this research study? The purpose of this study is to identify the perceived roles of educators at a high school, two-year college, four-year university, and regional education agency for ensuring the college and career readiness of high school students.

What will be done during this research study? As the subject, you will be asked a set of questions related to the study and the interviews will range from 45-60 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will ask you specific questions guided by the research. The researcher will also notate group interactions and communication with participant's permission.

The researcher would like to audio-record this interview to make sure that she remembers accurately all the information you provide. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the researcher during the study and for one year after the study is complete. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, she will take notes instead.

She may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

How will my data/samples/images be used? The researcher will use audio-recording and/or field notes to make sure that she remembers accurately all the information you provide. The transcriptions of all notes will be used for presentations or articles resulting from this work.

What are the possible risks of being in this study? As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information the researcher collects from you could be breached – she will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form. The researcher will minimize this risk by encrypting information and protecting the data.

What are the possible benefits to you? You are not expected to receive any benefits from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people? The benefits to society may include: 1) the re-evaluation by policy makers and education administrators of existing college and career readiness (CCR) reform efforts; 2) the re-evaluation by school districts, IHEs and other stakeholders of CCR-centered professional development and collaborative partnerships; and 3) a better understanding by high school, two-year college, four-year college, and regional education agency educators of their roles in college and career readiness efforts.

What will being in this research study cost you? There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study? You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

How will information about you be protected? Everything we learn about you in the study will be confidential. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. If we publish with results of the study, you will not be identified in any way unless you give explicit permission in writing.

The data will be stored electronically on a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for one year after the study is complete.

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start? You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study at any time, for any reason. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Cast Tech High School, San Antonio College, the University of Texas at San Antonio, or Region 20. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can or cannot be used if you decide to withdraw before finishing the study.

What should you do if you have a problem or question during this research study? If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

If you have any questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have additional questions about your rights or wish to report a problem that may be related to the study, please contact the University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board office at 210-805-3036 or 210-805-3565.

Consent for future use of data

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ I give permission for my deidentified data to be used in the future for additional analysis or other relevant research studies. I understand that no additional informed consent for this use will be sought. I understand that my deidentified data can be stored indefinitely.

_____ I give my permission for my data to be used for this research study only. I do not give permission for any future use beyond the scope of this research study. I understand that my data will be destroyed within one year after completion of this study.

Consent

Your signature indicates that you (1) consent to take part in this research study, (2) that you have read and understand the information given above, and (3) that the information above was explained to you, and you have been given the chance to discuss it and ask questions. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Principal Investigator/Designee

Signature of Principal Investigator/Designee

Date

Appendix D:

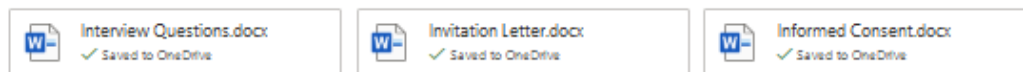
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

QUESTION	RESPONSE
1. Describe your role(s) as an educator for ensuring students are prepared for college and careers after high school? How do you develop students' college and career readiness?	
2. Describe how you work with other educators (i.e. collaborate) to ensure students are prepared for college and careers after high school?	
3. How does participation in the partnership clarify your roles for ensuring students are prepared for college and careers?	
4. How significant is collaboration to your knowledge and perceptions of college and career readiness?	
5. What support do you receive for preparing students for college and careers?	
6. What else would you like to share?	
7. What is your age?	
8. What grade level(s) do you teach? How long have you been employed as an educator?	
9. What is your highest level of education?	
10. Would you describe yourself as a first-generation college student?	

Appendix E: School District Email Request

Ruiz, Monica E.

Mon 7/22/2019 1:59 PM



Show all 5 attachments (443 KB) Download all Saved all to Attachments

Dear Ms. Ozuna,

I am currently enrolled in the Dreeban School of Education at The University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX, and am in the process of writing my dissertation entitled: Educator Perceptions of Their Roles in Ensuring Student's College and Career Readiness. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at [REDACTED].

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit three educators from [REDACTED] High School to complete semi-structured interviews (questions enclosed). Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit a total of two Math, Science, Social Studies, or Language Arts/Reading educators and one principal [REDACTED] participating in the College and Career Readiness Standards Review and Revision Project with [REDACTED] the [REDACTED]. Interested educators who volunteer to participate, will be given an *Invitation Letter* and *Informed Consent* to review and sign (copies enclosed) and return to the primary researcher prior to the interview process. If the request is approved I would begin collecting data during the fall.

If approval is granted, participants will complete the interview in a classroom or other quiet setting on or off site with permission. The researcher would like to audio-record interviews to make sure that she accurately transcribes all the information provided. The interview process should take no longer than 60 minutes. A follow up interview may be requested in person or by phone, which could take up to 60 minutes.

The researcher also requests permission to conduct observations and take field notes during project meetings. The researcher will take the necessary steps to minimize any potential risk that participants anonymity will be disclosed or that subjects will be identified. No costs will be incurred by either your institution or the participants.

If you agree, kindly reply with your consent and permission for me to conduct this study. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address any questions or concerns that you may have: [REDACTED] Thank you for your consideration.

If you are not the individual I need to submit IRB requests to please feel free to email me the correct contact.

Sincerely,

Monica E. Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate

Attachments

Appendix F:
Community College Email Request

Re: Permission to Conduct Research Study

From: Ruiz, Monica E. [<mailto:mruiz2@student.uivtx.edu>]
Sent: Monday, July 15, 2019 4:11 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Permission to Conduct Research Study

****THIS EMAIL IS FROM AN EXTERNAL SENDER OUTSIDE OF THE ALAMO COLLEGES.
Be cautious before clicking links or opening attachments from unknown sources. Do not provide personal or confidential information.****

Dear Ms. Zottarelli,

I am currently enrolled in the Dreeban School of Education at The University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX, and am in the process of writing my dissertation entitled: Educator Perceptions of Their Roles in Ensuring Student's College and Career Readiness. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit three educators from San Antonio College to complete a semi-structured interview (questions enclosed). Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit two Math, Science, Social Studies, or English/Language Arts professors and one administrator participating in the College and Career Readiness Standards Review and [REDACTED], the [REDACTED]. Interested educators who volunteer to participate, will be given an *Invitation Letter* and *Informed Consent* to review and sign (copies enclosed) and return to the primary researcher prior to the interview process.

If approval is granted, participants will complete the interview in a classroom at [REDACTED] or other quiet setting on or off campus with permission. The researcher would like to audio-record interviews to make sure that she accurately transcribes all the information provided. The interview process should take no longer than 60 minutes. A follow up interview may be requested in person or by phone, which could take up to 60 minutes. The researcher also requests permission to conduct observations and take field notes during project meetings. The researcher will take the necessary steps to minimize any potential risk that participants anonymity will be disclosed or that subjects will be identified. No costs will be incurred by either your institution or the participants.

If you agree, kindly attach a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address any questions or concerns that you may have: mruiz2@uivtx.edu. I will follow up with an email next week.

Sincerely,

Monica E. Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate

Attachments

Appendix G:
University Email Request

Reply all Delete Junk Block ...

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

From: Ruiz, Monica E. <mruiz2@student.uivtx.edu>

Sent: Monday, July 15, 2019 4:22 PM

[REDACTED]

Subject: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Good afternoon.

I am currently enrolled in the Dreeban School of Education at The University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX, and am in the process of writing my dissertation entitled: Educator Perceptions of Their Roles in Ensuring Student's College and Career Readiness. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit three educators from [REDACTED] to complete a semi-structured interview (questions enclosed). Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit two Math, Science, Social Studies, or English/Language Arts professors and an administrator participating in the *College and Career Readiness* [REDACTED]. Interested educators who volunteer to participate, will be given an *Invitation Letter* and *Informed Consent* to review and sign (copies enclosed) and return to the primary researcher prior to the interview process.

If approval is granted, participants will complete the interview in a classroom at [REDACTED] or quiet setting on or off campus with permission. The researcher would like to audio-record interviews to make sure that she accurately transcribes all the information provided. The interview process should take no longer than 60 minutes. A follow up interview may be requested in person or by phone, which could take up to 60 minutes. The researcher also requests permission to conduct observations and take field notes during project meetings. The researcher will take the necessary steps to minimize any potential risk that participants anonymity will be disclosed or that subjects will be identified. No costs will be incurred by either your institution or the participants.

If you agree, kindly attach a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address any questions or concerns that you may have: mruiz2@uivtx.edu. I will follow up with an email next week.

Respectfully,

Monica E. Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate

Attachments

Appendix H

Regional Education Agency Email Request

Reply all Delete Junk Block ...

Fw: Request to Conduct Research

From: Ruiz, Monica E.
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2019 12:28:47 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Request to Conduct Research

[REDACTED]

Good afternoon. Thank you again for your assistance.

I am currently enrolled in the Dreeban School of Education at The University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX, and am in the process of writing my dissertation entitled: Educator Perceptions of Their Roles in Ensuring Student's College and Career Readiness. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution.

I hope that your institution will allow me to recruit one administrator from [REDACTED] to complete a semi-structured interview (interview guide enclosed). Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit [REDACTED] participating in the *College and Career Readiness Standards Review and Revision Project* with [REDACTED] the [REDACTED]. The participant will be given an *Invitation Letter* and *Informed Consent* to review and sign (copies enclosed) and return to the primary researcher prior to the interview process.

If approval is granted, the participant will complete the interview at [REDACTED] or other quiet setting on or off campus with permission. The interview process should take no longer than 60 minutes. A follow up interview may be requested in person or by phone, which could take up to 60 minutes. The researcher would like to audio-record interviews to make sure that she accurately transcribes all the information provided. The researcher also requests permission to conduct observations and take field notes during project meetings. The researcher will take the necessary steps to minimize any potential risk that participants anonymity will be disclosed or that subjects will be identified. No costs will be incurred by either your institution or the participants.

I have attached the documentation your institution has requested. If you agree, kindly reply by email acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. You may contact me at my email address any questions or concerns that you may have: mruiz2@uiwtx.edu.

Sincerely,

Monica E. Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate

Attachments

Appendix I:

Regional Service Agency Request Form

SECTION-E: Communications
E-FORM-4: Request to Conduct Survey Non-ESC-20 Agency Organization

This request for approval of the approval of the Executive Organization:
Address:

San Antonio, TX 78209

Contact Name:
Address (if different from above):

Email: marviz2@uiw.tx.edu Phone #: (210) 425-3868

Purpose/justification for the proposed survey: Participant interviews will be used to identify perceived roles of educators in college
Sponsor: University of the Incarnate Word realms.

How the sponsoring agency/organization will benefit from the survey: the sponsoring agency will not benefit from the interview.
How the survey results will be used: Interviews will be used for presentations of articles in

Population of Interest: [Redacted]
Responding to the survey will be: Voluntary/optional Review and Revision - VAT
 Required: (specify the justification for a required response):


General Description: Size of the proposed sample: 9 (1 from 20)
How will the sample be selected? Purposive sampling will be used to identify subjects.
Data collection: How will the data be collected? Individual interviews, observations, field notes
When will the subjects be surveyed? Begin: 8/2019 End: 5/2020

Attach a copy of the proposed data collection instrument (e.g. survey, interview guide, questionnaire, etc.).

Signature of Requestor: [Signature] Date: 7/18/2019
Signature of ESC-20 Approver: [Redacted]


Appendix J.

School District Study Authorization



 Notice of Approval

To: Ms. Monica Rutz

From: San Antonio Independent School District
 sting
 Institutional and Community Based Research

Date: 10/1/2019

Re: Educator's Perceived Roles In Ensuring Student's College and Career Readiness

Research Request Status: Approved

Survey Request Status: Does not apply

Expiration Date: August 31, 2020

The above referenced proposal has been approved as submitted for the school year 2019-2020. Please provide a copy of this approval notice with all communications regarding this request.


Please be advised of the following:


- Participation in this research is voluntary and dependent upon campus principal approval and, where applicable, parent approval.
- Student surveys must be approved by the Parent Review Committee.
- A waiver and background check are needed for each non-employee researcher that will be on campus. The online waiver can be accessed [HERE](#).
- Changes to the study focus, sampling, or data collection methodology after your research request has been approved must be submitted for review by the Research Request Review Committee.

Please adhere to the guidelines established on the Research Agreement you submitted with your request. The guidelines can be accessed [HERE](#).


Your point of contact with the District will be Emily Bleser. If you have any questions they can be reached at ebleser1@saisd.net.

We wish you success in this study and look forward to receiving the final study report.



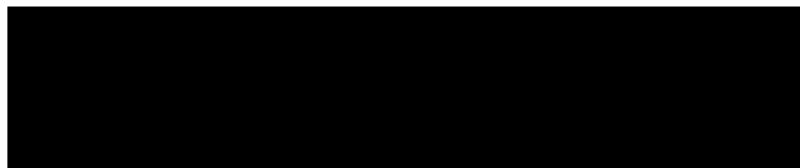


cc: Theresa Urrabazo, Executive Director, Research, Evaluation, Accountability and Testing; Research Review Committee



Appendix K:

Community College Study Authorization

**Notice of Determination: Exempt Review**

Principle Investigator: Monica Ruiz, University of Incarnate Word
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Norman St. Clair. University of the Incarnate Word
Protocol Title: *Educator Perceptions of Their Roles in Ensuring Student's College and Career Readiness*
Approval Date: August 29, 2019

The University of Incarnate Word IRB Application and Letter of IRB Approval dated July 10, 2018, were submitted to and reviewed.

This memo authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principle Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the college and federal relations found in 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the [REDACTED] IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying [REDACTED] IRB of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.

If you have questions, please contact [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix L:
University Study Authorization

Reply all Delete Junk Block ...

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study



IRB <[REDACTED]>

Tue 7/16/2019 3:24 PM

Ruiz, Monica E.; [REDACTED]



-1 other

Good afternoon Monica,

As [REDACTED] a public institution, you are welcome to visit the campus to conduct your research with students, faculty or staff. Once you have approval from your institution, you may begin contact. We would not need to review your study. You should contact the department in which you plan to conduct your research. If you have any flyers you wish to post on campus, you will need to contact [REDACTED]. They may ask you for a copy of your institution's IRB approval and this e-mail.

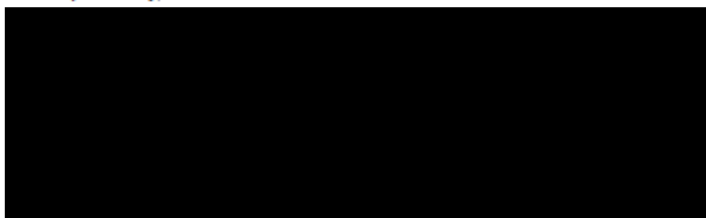
Important notes:

* Per regulations the IRB must keep records of all correspondence with researchers about their research.

**When sending any revisions to the IRB, make your revisions in the versions we send.

*** To support document version control & improve review time, the IRB sends all documents with "Track Changes" on. **Please note:** Not using track changes slows our review and approval processes.

Respectfully,



Appendix M:
Regional Agency Study Authorization

FW: Request to Conduct Research

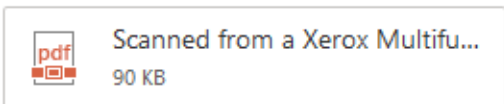
 You replied on Fri 7/19/2019 3:58 PM



[Redacted] >

Fri 7/19/2019 9:02 AM

Ruiz, Monica E.; [Redacted] >



Good morning Monica,

Thank you for your interest in including [Redacted] in your research. Your request has been approved to interview [Redacted]. Look forward to seeing the results of your work.

Have a great weekend.

