Achieve Scholarship: A Policy Process Case Study

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ACHIEVE SCHOLARSHIP: A POLICY PROCESS CASE STUDY

SANDRA ROCHA

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership & Administration

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Dedication

With a heart full of gratitude, I dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad, Rudy and Juanita Rocha. They sowed the seeds of faith, perseverance, and strong will. My greatest supporters and staunchest defenders. Although my dad is not here, physically, his legacy lives on through me. My mom is the personification of strength, endurance, and grit and pushed back when life did not play fair. That is what drives me. Without them, this dissertation would not have been possible.
Acknowledgements

I was fortunate to have a dissertation committee that fostered the initiation of this dissertation and guidance through its fruition. Dr. Don Schulte, you are the reason I enrolled in the doctoral program. You encourage and remind students to be grateful. I am grateful for your guidance and feedback you provided. Dr. Donna Ekal, you agreed to meet with me even before you knew me. I am appreciative of your valuable advice and meaningful insight throughout this process. Dr. Rodolfo Rincones, my co-chair, you read through my drafts multiple times and challenged me to do more than I thought I could. Your support, time, and feedback were truly appreciated. Dr. Teresa Cortez, my co-chair, even with a heavy workload you took me on as your dissertation student. You saw the value and work I did as I researched the Promise program for my superintendent internship and recommended, I make it my dissertation. It was a long journey, but you were consistently my support. I am grateful for your insight, time, feedback, patience, and faith in me. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the four stakeholders of this research. Your passion to help students and the community of El Paso is inspiring.
Abstract

This study applies the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory to look at a specific program, about specific stakeholders, within a policy process, and during a specific timeframe. The purpose of this study was to document the process of establishing and describing how the program’s stakeholders navigate, collaboratively, through the policy process of deciding whether to adopt a version of Texas Promise in El Paso. This was not a study on the entire six phases of the policy process. The focus of the research was to understand how the stakeholders maneuver through the initial three phases of the policy process, to include: initiation; estimation; and the selection phase. A qualitative policy process analysis and case study approach was used with four stakeholders. The data collected stemmed from interviews, electronic communication, and internship notes. Findings from this study indicate that the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory works well when analyzing how stakeholders navigate the process of decision-making towards policy implementation. This study is a community policy process collaboration wherein the stakeholders were willing to attempt to find a solution to local problems that students face in El Paso, TX.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Texas Promise: How it Started

In early 2019, an independent school district superintendent, Dr. Miguel Gomez, within the El Paso County, attended a conference in San Antonio, Texas, where he learned about a program called Dallas Promise. Dallas Promise is a collaboration between school districts, community colleges, universities, the area workforce, and community advocates to close the equity gap and bring forth change within all the involved institutions in Dallas, Texas. The Promise program is a last dollar scholarship, which means the Promise scholarship pays what remains after the Pell Grant and other scholarships are exhausted (Dallas County Promise, 2019). Additionally, students are matched with degree plans that lead to career pathways in high-demand industries in the Dallas area. The superintendent took interest and decided he wanted to explore the possibilities of creating a similar Promise program in his school district in El Paso, Texas.

In February 2019, with assistance from my professors, I was able to connect with Dr. Gomez to begin my superintendent internship. After our first telephone call, Dr. Gomez charged me with researching Dallas Promise and identifying what is needed to implement the Promise program to El Paso. And so, I began investigating the Texas Promise policy process.

My search began with going to the Dallas Promise website. I found that Dallas Promise had been so successful, other cities in Texas were also interested in having the Promise program. To provide support to other cities, Dallas Promise created a branch called Texas Promise to act as a facilitator and a support system for those cities outside of Dallas. Currently, there are several cities in Texas in various stages of implementing the Promise program.
Texas Promise has three main goals: (1) to help high schools ensure all students graduate high school and are college and career ready; (2) to ensure that 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 will have a college degree by 2030; (3) and to help the workforce solve the talent gap (Dallas County Promise, 2019). Its foundational purpose is to have a thriving community and eradicate poverty (Dallas County Promise, 2019). These goals are defined and explained in the literature review.

This study was about the policy process of whether a version of Texas Promise would be considered for adoption in El Paso. For this research, the identified stakeholders, using pseudonyms, in El Paso that have shown interest in Texas Promise are: West County ISD, the Community Council, and the University. Even as some information may be public record, as the researcher, I made every effort to conserve the stakeholders’ privacy. I attempted to identify the contacts at El Paso Community College (EPCC) to gauge interest levels regarding this initiative, but a stakeholder was not identified in time for this study.

As the stakeholders progressed in the policy process, so did the name of the Promise scholarship in El Paso. What began as Texas Promise has now evolved to the Achieve Scholarship.

**El Paso Demographics**

This study took place in El Paso, Texas. Having background knowledge and data provided a greater understanding as to why the stakeholders have certain perceptions and ideologies.

El Paso is unique among other major cities in Texas. El Paso is in the westernmost point in Texas and is the only major city in the Mountain Time Zone. The closest major city to El Paso in Texas is San Antonio, which is 551 miles away. Dallas, where Texas Promise originated, is
635 miles away (Google, 2020). The population of El Paso County is 839,238 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The population is made up of 82.9 percent Hispanic, 11.6 percent White, and four percent African American. Other races are less than four percent, combined (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The median income is $46,871 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Table 1 depicts the poverty levels and educational attainment percentages for El Paso County and other counties in Texas that are also in various phases of implementing Texas Promise.

**Table 1**

*County Demographics: Poverty Levels and Educational Attainment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>El Paso County</th>
<th>Bexar County</th>
<th>Travis County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty Level</strong></td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School (HS) Graduation Rate</strong></td>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS Diploma or Equivalency</strong></td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some College or Associate Degree</strong></td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bachelor’s Degree</strong></td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Population 18-24 |
|------------------|----------------|
| **HS Diploma or Equivalency** | 23.0%          | 25.9%        | 16.1%         |
| **Some College**  | 23.4%          | 22.5%        | 16.2%         |
| **Associate Degree** | 8.0%           | 8.2%         | 5.1%          |
| **Bachelor’s Degree** | 22.8%          | 27.6%        | 48.6%         |

**Note.** U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

**Statement of the Problem**

El Paso has a poverty rate of 20.5 percent while Texas has a poverty rate of 14.9 percent and the United States’ poverty rate is 11.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Early childhood (EC) through post-secondary education, is fundamental in reducing the poverty rate (Anyon, 2014). However, there is a disconnect between EC-12 education, post-secondary education, and
the El Paso workforce (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2016). Some collaboration is occurring; however, it is needed with greater intent (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2016). Each entity is trying to overcome equity gaps that cannot be solved independently of each other.

The following are problems in El Paso that are caused by poverty and need to be addressed by more than one entity. El Paso County high school student graduation rates are low; not over 78 percent since 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Moreover, many of the 77.5 percent of seniors who do graduate from high school are not college ready (Luna-Torres et al., 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Another challenge students face is not having the financial resources to fill the gap after what is covered by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA) (Luna-Torres et al, 2018). Lastly, students without a degree struggle to find good paying jobs in their communities resulting in businesses have a hard time finding skilled workers (Boatman & Long, 2018; Carnevale et al., 2013).

Texas Promise is the believed catalyst that can address the above problems in El Paso. Texas Promise had not been introduced in El Paso therefore, the systems to implement this program had not been established.

Communities, for the most part, are not privy to the details of establishing an entity, such as Texas Promise. Citizens may be aware of the problem and may desire a solution, but they are not aware of the negotiations and decisions among the stakeholders that take place behind closed doors even before a consensus is reached to implement a program like Texas Promise. This study provided an insider view of establishing a Promise program within the El Paso region.
**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to document the process of establishing and describing how the program’s stakeholders navigate, collaboratively, through the policy process of deciding whether or not to adopt Texas Promise in El Paso. This included identifying and defining the problems; determining the goals, objectives, and strategic positioning; conducting a cost and benefit analysis; and ascertaining the perspectives, values, roles, and negotiation strategies the stakeholders used to make decisions regarding Texas Promise.

This was not a study on the entire six phases of the policy process (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). The focus of the research was to understand how the stakeholders maneuvered through the initial three phases of the policy process, including: initiation; estimation; and selection. By studying the first three phases, stakeholders determined if they should consider implementing Texas Promise in El Paso for the purpose of addressing and ultimately rectifying the stated problems. The last three phases of implementation, evaluation, and termination begin after the selection phase and are not be part of this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

What is a theoretical framework? Maxwell (2012) defines a theoretical framework as a “system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research- is a key part of your design” (p. 39). Green (2014) said that a theoretical framework is used to, “give direction to a study” and each framework will utilize theory or theories differently (p. 35). Grant and Osanloo (2014) wrote that a theoretical framework, “is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed for a research…it serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significances, and the research question” (p. 12). Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009) stated that a “theoretical framework
involves the presentation of a specific theory, such as systems theory or self-efficacy and empirical and conceptual work about that theory” (p. 6).

Grant and Osanloo (2014) made a key point; they compared a theoretical framework to a blueprint that an architect develops. And, as the theoretical framework guides the researcher, it also provides the specific lens from which the research will be viewed (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

This research utilized the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory to look at a specific program, about specific stakeholders, within a policy process, and during a specific timeframe.

**Policy Process Framework**

The policy process framework provides direction by grouping the process into a “sequence of functional phases” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Olsen, 2003, p.356). The policy process serves as a “basic template that allows to systematize and compare the diverse debates, approaches, and models in the field and to assess the individual contribution of the respective approaches to the discipline” (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p.43). This framework follows the process of the policy phases over time and “stresses the interconnections and interdependencies between different groups” (Olsen, 2003, p. 357; Weible, Heikkila, deLeon, & Sabatier, 2012).

There are phase variations of the policy process, Brewer and deLeon (1983) formulated a six-phase policy process that is widely used. The six steps consist of initiation, estimation, selection, implementation, evaluation, and termination (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Weible et al., 2012). The sequence is not rigid, but fluid, a useful tool to monitor forward progress (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Olsen, 2003). At times it is necessary to stop and re-evaluate within the policy process because as time passes the problem could have changed, evolved, or new information or data could have been retrieved (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Olsen,
It is prudent to ask questions during each stage of the policy process to “understand the value demands, expectations, and identifications of each” stakeholder (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 16). Figure 1 depicts the phases of the policy process.

Figure 1
Policy Process Phases

The process of the policy phases is the “study of change and development of policy and the related actors, events, and contexts” (Weible et al., 2012, p. 3). As it is related to human fallibility in decision making, the policy process does not always follow the six-phase sequence, as stated above. Only in an ideal world, with completely rational people, would the sequence be followed from Phase One to Phase Six (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). Moreover, in policy research it is rarely the case where the “whole policy cycle framework” is researched given the time constraints and complexity involved in analyzing the phases. (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 45). This research focused on the initiation, estimation, and selection phases.

Bounded Rationality Theory

According to Simon (1990) bounded rationality is “used to designate rational choice that takes into account the cognitive limitations of the decision-maker” (p. 15). Weible et al. (2012) stated, as it concerns the policy process “individuals are goal-oriented but imperfect in their
cognitive abilities to understand the contextual environment that they must navigate for goal achievement” (p. 5). Decision makers have cognitive constraints, in the form of lacking information, resources, time, or mental processes (Simon, 1990). Given the human cognitive imperfections in decision making, bounded rationality will be utilized in this study. It is impossible to understand and have all the information needed for all decisions made within the phases of the policy process (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Jann & Wegrich, 2007).

The policy process framework and bounded rationality were used to provide direction to the study. The phases of the policy process provided the template to organize the sequence of actions (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Bounded rationality theory helped explain how the decisions were made as the stakeholders considered implementing Texas Promise in El Paso (Simon, 1990). This theory was selected for this study as it is widely used in the field of policy process research for realistic perspective (deLeon & Weible, 2010; Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Weible et al., 2012).

**Research Question**

The overall research question guiding this study was as follows: How did the stakeholders navigate through the first three phases (initiation, estimation, and selection) of the policy process, as they work to decide whether or not to adopt the Texas Promise Program in El Paso?

**Secondary Questions**

The secondary questions guiding this study are:

1. In the initiation phase, how did the stakeholders define and prioritize the problems? How did these priorities align with each other?
2. In the estimation phase, what did the stakeholders perceive as the risks, costs, and benefits of adopting Texas Promise in El Paso?

3. In the selection phase, what was each stakeholder willing to compromise, negotiate, and accommodate before they decided to adopt the Texas Promise?

**Significance of the Study**

This study centered on the policy process of introducing a new a scholarship program, Texas Promise, to El Paso and explores the relevance it has for EC-12 education, higher-education institutions, and the local workforce. The significance of this study was to unveil the intricacies of the policy process as stakeholders navigate through the first three phases of the policy process cycle: initiation, estimation and selection. Each stakeholders’ perspectives and values will be identified to determine their “why?” in considering adopting Texas Promise in El Paso.

**60x30TX**

In 2015, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) launched 60x30TX. The main goal of 60x30TX is to have 60 percent of Texans, ages 25-34, obtain a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2030 (60x30TX.com, 2020). To remain competitive and relevant with other cities in Texas and the country in education and the workforce, El Paso needs to achieve these goals. To accomplish this, El Paso students need to be college and/or career ready. El Paso students need guidance and mentoring for their college and career path to stay in El Paso. Some El Paso students need financial support, aside from FAFSA/TASFA, to attend a two- or four-year college. Also, El Paso students need post-secondary education to have the opportunity to make living wages (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2016;
Carnevale, 2013). Table 2 shows the educational attainment and income from El Paso County, Bexar County, and Travis County; two other counties considering implementing Texas Promise.

**Table 2**  
*Educational Attainment and Income*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High School Diploma/GED</th>
<th>Some College/Associate Degree</th>
<th>Bachelor’s Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Paso</td>
<td>$23,602</td>
<td>$28,036</td>
<td>$46,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bexar</td>
<td>$28,457</td>
<td>$34,189</td>
<td>$50,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>$30,978</td>
<td>$39,479</td>
<td>$58,055</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

**College, Career, Military Ready**

The Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) Student Achievement accountability domain, how EC-12 schools are rated, is directly correlated to the 60x30TX. Within the Student Achievement domain, high schools are rated and granted points towards their A-F rating if a student is College, Career, Military Ready (CCMR). CCMR is 40 percent of the Student Achievement domain (TEA, 2019). Further details will be provided in the literature review.

With this research, the examination of the policy process regarding Texas Promise in El Paso identified the macro and micro level challenges and opportunities to continue to add to this study.

**Personal Disclosure**

To maintain the ethical integrity of the research it was incumbent of me to disclose my involvement as it pertained to bringing Texas Promise to El Paso. Creswell (2009) explained that given the depth of the researcher’s involvement with the participants in a qualitative research, it is necessary for the researcher to disclose any biases and background regarding the researcher
and the study. I am currently an assistant principal at an El Paso ISD high school. A function of my work includes, working with students, teachers, counselors, and parents to help students graduate with their cohort. My investment in this topic is one where I, as the researcher, am fully immersed in navigating through the policy process of adopting Texas Promise in El Paso. I served as an intern with Dr. Gomez 3, West County ISD Superintendent, and arranged for an initial meeting between the Community Council and Dr. Gomez. I have also had individual meetings with the Community Council and Texas Promise representatives.

**Summary**

This chapter introduced Texas Promise, a promise program that supports students by overcoming financial barriers to post-secondary education. At the same time providing resources, direction, and information, thus students graduate high school ready for post-secondary education. While enrolled in post-secondary education students are provided with guidance into high demand fields that will yield live-able wages in the workforce within the city they reside.

The focus was on the policy process framework as Texas Promise is introduced to El Paso, TX. The policy process was be supported and guided by the Bounded Rationality Theory. Reinforcing, that as humans, we cannot have every piece of data and information and that humans are fallible, but still make decisions about policy to eradicate a defined problem.

This chapter also laid out the research questions that strive to answer the research problem. Additionally, the significance of the study was explained to understand the reason for this study. Finally, my personal disclosure. I have dual roles as the researcher and participant in the policy process. I will remain transparent as I study and work with each stakeholder. These processes will be further explained in Chapter 3.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction: The Whys

As stated in Chapter 1, this research will be studied through the lens of the policy process framework. A thorough understanding of the phases of the policy process is needed to connect how the stakeholders incorporate their “whys” within the phases of the policy process.

The driving reason, the “why”, Texas Promise exists, is to ultimately eradicate poverty in Texas (Dallas County Promise, 2019). There are more than 12 million children in the United States living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). These low socio-economic students cannot afford college tuition or are left with a financial gap after the Pell Grant (Anyon, 2014; Luna-Torres et al., 2018). As we begin to narrow that scope, low socioeconomic students tend to be Black or Latino and they carry most of the burden of the negative effects of poverty (Anyon, 2014; Luna-Torres et al., 2018).

The second “why” of Texas Promise is to increase college readiness (Dallas County Promise, 2019). The literature definitively shows that low socio-economic students are less likely to be college ready (Bettinger, Boatman, Long, 2013; Duncheon, 2015). EC-12 education is now bearing some of the responsibility regarding post-secondary readiness. If a student takes a remedial course in post-secondary education, it decreases the chances of a student completing a post-secondary credential (Bettinger et al., 2013; Bailey & Smith Jaggers, 2016; Duncheon, 2015; Illich, Hagan, & McCallister, 2004).

The third “why” of Texas Promise is to increase the number of students who graduate with a two-year associates degree or bachelor’s degree (Dallas County Promise, 2019) (Anyon, 2014; Luna-Torres et al., 2018).
Last “why” is to fill the El Paso workforce talent gap. El Paso does not have the people with the necessary skills to fill the high-wage positions (National Center for Higher Education Management System, 2016). According to the National Center for Higher Education Management System (2016), “El Paso is characterized as having both low education attainment levels and low per capita income” (p. 2).

To begin, I will explain the phases of the policy process and bounded rationality theory that will be studied in this research. Second, Texas Promise will be reviewed in detail. Having that background knowledge will facilitate the discourse regarding the policy process of adopting Texas Promise in El Paso. Third, I will examine the research and literature to set the definition of poverty. Next, four aspects concerning EC-12 will be reviewed: socioeconomics and education, the achievement gap, graduation rates for El Paso, and the Texas Agency’s (TEA) accountability rating system. Then, I will elaborate on what it means to be post-secondary ready and the implications of 60x30TX. Lastly, this review will identify the gaps in the research to contribute to the body of knowledge currently available.

**Policy Analysis Defined**

Policy is about society’s problems and the actions taken to make important decisions. In essence, policy is about processes and the outcomes (Ball, 1993). Policy is also fluid, in that it is “always in a state of ‘becoming’, of ‘was’ and ‘never was’ and ‘not quite’ (Ball, 1993, p. 11). This will be evident as the phases of policy process are explained.

**Policy Process Phases**

The six phases of the policy process are: initiation, estimation, selection, implementation, evaluation, and termination (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). The phases of the policy process provide the researcher with direction, as well as a map to maneuver through the policy process. This
study will focus on the first three phases. Jann and Wegrich (2007) state that rarely do policy
studies incorporate all the phases of the policy process. Time parameters limit this research to the
initiation phase, estimation phase, and selection phase.

**Initiation Phase**

The initiation phase is set into motion when a problem is identified, however, this stage
can also begin when an opportunity arises (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). This qualitative study
begins with the opportunity to bring Texas Promise to El Paso to help alleviate the standing
problems of having a 20.5 percent poverty rate, lacking financial resources for post-secondary
education, students lacking college readiness skills, and lacking talent in the work force (U.S.
Census Bureau, 2019). During this phase, the stakeholder’s organizations remain unchanged.
Stakeholders, usually, do not dispute the existence of a problem because the opportunity would
not be needed if there was not an existing problem. Several things can occur in this phase as the
stakeholders identify the problem as it relates to the opportunity; the first is having to redefine
the problem (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). This can occur as more information is acquired and can
potentially derail the entire policy (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Commonly, however, adjustments
within the policy process are done with resources and time lost (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).
Another occurrence within the initiation phase is that stakeholders prioritize the parts of the
problem and determine how much time will be invested into the process (Brewer & deLeon,
1983). It is within this phase that perceptions and communication networks begin (Brewer &
deLeon, 1983). Additionally, this phase begins the “innovative tasks of conceptualizing
and…collecting the information necessary” to develop possible policy choices (Brewer &
deLeon, 1983, p. 18). This is a complex process; each stakeholder is attempting to sell their
perceptions of the problem to the other stakeholders with decision making influence (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

It is each stakeholder’s set of values that not only shapes their perceptions, but also forms their goals and objectives. The initiation phase sets the foundation for the policy by the creation of the goals and objectives that will be pursued throughout the policy process (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). This component needs to be done systematically, by examining and investigating the problem or the opportunity and to carefully assess all the options that can eventually become future decisions. By doing this, the stakeholders address the uncertainties that may exist.

**Estimation Phase**

Estimation is the second phase in the policy cycle. It is a continuation of the initiation phase. Here, “predetermining risks, costs, and benefits” of what was defined and determined in the initiation phase begins (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 18). Accuracy of the cost-benefit analysis is vital as this will affect the decisions made in the other stages of the policy process. This analysis is also based on what the stakeholder’s value, as also mentioned in the initiation stage (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). The goal in the estimation phase is to “reduce uncertainties” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 83).

This phase of the policy process also emphasizes the values of the stakeholders (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). And as a result, “multiple interpretations of a problem, with a variety of methods, theories, and data…and value-based perspectives” are construed. (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 84). Considering different perspectives and values assists in mitigating any misunderstandings or failures (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

“Time is important” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 92). In any decision-making process, time is not limitless. Either a decision is made, or it becomes a non-decision. Some decision-
makers rely heavily on data, while other decision-makers rely on intuition. However, because humans have “limited intellectual and operational capacities for analysis” (p. 88) all decisions will have “some element of subjective intuition attached” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 93).

A vital step occurs in the estimation phase; the complex social system that entails many variables that will eventually become policy will need to be simplified. This simplification process is important because given our “limited intellectual and operational capacities for analysis”, simplifying will yield comprehension (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 88).

Selection Phase

A choice is made in the selection phase of the policy process. The stakeholders decide to move forward with the policy implementation or not. This is not necessarily a simple task of an approving yes or no. Compromises and evaluations maybe made regarding the goals and objectives that the stakeholders had initially established. This phase of the policy process requires the stakeholders to understand that they will not get everything you want. A consensus is required (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; deLeon & Weible, 2010). And as such, their values are at stake. The stakeholders determine what they are willing to compromise and what the deal-breakers are. Their values are weighed against the values of the other stakeholders and they lobby for their values (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; deLeon & Weible, 2010).

During this stage of the policy process, stakeholders do not have verification that the policy will work to resolve the problem/s that initiated the policy process in El Paso. They can only rely on the data and limited information they have gathered and retrieved thus far (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

The selection phase of the policy process requires the balance between the technical and the emotional. Technical information is considered in the decision-making process. And as much
as the selection phase is a political phase, it is also an emotional phase. “It is as irrational as rational” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 187). It is a juxtaposition. “Ideological and technical information must be reconciled. Ideological information refers to the thoughts, feeling, attitudes, and conduct of the human being; technical information refers to the material and measurable aspects of an issue” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 182). Both are essential to reach a decision. Humans are “not immune to emotional factors” and should not be considered a hinderance. It is the emotions that shape a person’s experiences, values, viewpoints, expectations, and what moves humans to action. Brewer and deLeon (1983) refer to this process as “emotional consensus” (p. 183).

After the first three phases, implementation follows. In this phase, program goals, rules, and timelines for the program are developed. Followed by evaluation. Here the program measures and criteria are established to determine the success of the program, up to that point. Finally, in termination, adjustments are made to the policy, if necessary. And sometimes, it does mean, that the policy or program is terminated because the cost outweighs the benefits (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

Within the policy process of the problem that is being addressed, exist the continuation of all the other responsibilities and obligations the stakeholders have already committed themselves prior to or even during the policy process. Each policy process cannot exist in isolation. The stakeholders do not and cannot allot their entire time and energy to only that one problem. Therefore, bounded rationality supports the policy process. It is not feasible to believe that the stakeholders can acquire all the needed data, information, and knowledge before a decision is made. The decisions will be made with gaps in the data the stakeholders acquire. And that is acceptable in the policy process (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Weible et al.,
Below, in figure 2, are the characteristics of the first three phases of the policy process framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Estimation</th>
<th>Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| -Creative thinking about a problem.  
-Definition of objectives.  
-Innovative option design.  
-Tentative and preliminary exploration of concepts, claims, and possibilities | -Thorough investigation of concepts and claims.  
-Examination of impacts.  
-Examination of likely consequences.  
-Establishment of expected performance criteria and indicators | -Debate of possible options.  
-Compromises, bargains, and accommodations.  
-Reduction of uncertainty about options.  
-Integration of ideological and other nonrational elements of decision.  
-Decision among options.  
-Assignment of executive responsibility |

*Note. Brewer & deLeon’s (1983) first three phases of the policy process.*

**Figure 2**

*Policy Process Phases*

**Bounded Rationality Theory**

Bounded rationality theory, developed and modified by Simon (1957), will be used to understand the complexity of decision-making within the policy process. Bounded rationality was developed as an alternative to rational decision-making to make allowances for human limited cognitive capabilities (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Weible et al., 2012). When making decisions in the policy process, bounded rationality is “drawn toward the study of information-processing and problem solving” (Jones & Thomas, 2012, p. 279). Often the data and information the stakeholders are receiving to make a decision can be “vague, ambiguous, and most importantly, is generated from multiple sources” (Jones & Thomas, 2012, 280). Decision-making is complex and can lead to costly outcomes (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Jones, 2002). Not
only monetarily, but in outputs that can disrupt the entire policy process or strain stakeholder relationships (Jones & Thomas, 2012).

Rational decision-making assumes all actors in the policy decision making process have all the data and information needed to make a decision (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). Bounded rationality “seeks to identify, in theory and in actual behavior, procedures for choosing that are computationally simpler, and that account for observed inconsistencies in human choice patterns” (Simon, 1990, p. 16).

Bounded rationality recognizes that there is an amount of uncertainty because as humans we have limits. Given the cognitive and resource limitations, a complete comprehensive analysis of the problems, then goals, then possible alternatives are not possible when there are constraints. The constraints include, but are not limited to, time, knowledge, resources, and experience on the subject. Rationality is limited; however, this does not mean decisions are made irrationally. This means there is an acknowledgment that people operate and make decisions within a spectrum of being completely rational, based on the complexity of the environment and the resources that are available at the time (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Jones, 2002; Weible et al., 2012; Simon, 1990).

Jones (2002) acknowledges that bounded rationality falls short of “predicting precise events” however, it does provide a distribution of possible predictions (p. 270). To compensate for this, humans make use of heuristics and mental shortcuts to make the best decisions (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Jones, 2002; Weible et al., 2012; Simon, 1990). Using heuristics allows a person to “simplify, understand, interpret, and respond to incoming stimuli” (Weible et al., 2012, p. 5).

Bounded rationality also has a principle of trade-offs; “trading off one goal against another in a choice” (Jones, 2002, p. 274). To compensate for this, Simon (1990) uses the notion of satisficing. This is a combination of, to satisfy and suffice (Simon, 1990). Aspiration levels
are determined for the end goal, then if the choice is ‘good enough’ the decision is made, as ‘good enough’ goes beyond the aspiration expectations (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Jones, 2002; Weible et al., 2012; Simon, 1990). Critics will say that satisficing is a “poverty-stricken version of maximization” (Jones, 2002, p. 274). This, however, is misguided; satisficing contributes to the maximization, as it pertains to the subject’s “cost of information and decision making” (Jones, 2002, p. 274). Perfect maximization is not attainable, because our environments are complex, there are limited resources, and humans are limited in their rationality. Simon (1957) wrote “human behavior is intendedly rational, but only limited so” (p. 24). This provides for a more realistic depiction of how humans make decisions.

**Promise Origins**

**Tennessee Promise**

Tennessee Promise began in 2008 when five people formed the KnoxAchieves board in response to students in Knox County not advancing any further in post-secondary education after high school graduation. The board of five wanted to create program that not only provided financial support, but also support in guiding students to post-secondary education. The board raised monies from community businesses and supported students while in high school. As the program grew in success, the name also evolved to TnAchives and now it is Tennessee Promise (Boehnke, 2014; Tennessee Promise, 2018).

**Dallas County Promise**

Dallas County Promise is modeled after the Tennessee Promise. The program is a collaboration among school districts, community colleges, universities, community workforce, and community advocates to increase college completion and guide students through secondary and post-secondary education. It is a last-dollar scholarship program that began in 2014. They
found that 30 percent of jobs in the Dallas Fort Worth area required an associate degree or certificate to make a living wage of $51,000 a year (Dallas County Promise, 2019). The Dallas County Promise, “mission is to achieve the 60x30TX plan with equity in Dallas County.” Its goals are: “a promise to help schools ensure ALL students graduate college and career ready; A promise to help colleges and universities achieve 60x30TX with equity for Dallas County; A promise to help workforce solve the talent gap” (Dallas County Promise, 2019, p. 1).

Dallas County Promise arose out of need. Poverty levels had increased in Dallas County. Also, the people of Dallas did not have the needed skills to fill the jobs that were available because they did not have a post-secondary certificate or degree (Dallas County Promise, 2019). “Only 10% of eighth-grade students from low-income families in Dallas County earned a two- or four-year degree within six years following their high school graduation” (Dallas County Promise, 2019, p. 1).

The Dallas County Promise success is measurable. The 2018 graduates are Dallas County Promise’s first cohort, with 31 high schools and approximately 9,300 seniors (Dallas County Promise, 2019). Of those students, 96 percent, of eligible students, signed the Promise Pledge (Dallas County Promise, 2019). The Promise Pledge is non-binding commitment to fill out the FAFSA/TASFA forms before the designated date and attend any of the partner post-secondary institutions (Dallas County Promise, 2019). According to Dallas County Promise (2019), they ranked fourth nationwide, at 67 percent, for FAFSA completions which earned students three million new dollars in Pell Grants. Post-secondary enrollment also increased: 57 percent, a 6 percent increase of Promise students enrolled at one of the Dallas County college/university partners (Dallas County Promise, 2019). Cohort two, 2019 graduates, increased to 43 high schools and approximately 16,500 seniors. There was a two percent increase, 98 percent, of
Promise Pledges signed and an increase of seven percent in FAFSA completions. Due to their efforts, Dallas County Promise ranked second in FAFSA completions in the U.S. (Dallas County Promise, 2019).

As Dallas Promise success increased, other cities in Texas showed interest in bringing the Promise program to their city. Dallas Promise created Texas Promise to act as a catalyst and offer guidance, support, and data to those wanting to implement Texas Promise (Dallas County Promise, 2019).

The Promise program has a theory of change. Dallas Promise’s core functions are to reduce the financial barriers for students, change systems to better serve students, and to make data-driven decisions are a few (Dallas County Promise, 2019). The contributing factors to meet those functions, include increasing the completion of FAFSA/TASFA, increase secondary academic readiness, and increase college access (Dallas County Promise, 2019). This will result in increasing post-secondary enrollment and increase post-secondary completion (Dallas County Promise, 2019). The driving “why?” of Promise is to eradicate poverty and to provide equitable opportunities for college choice and graduation (Dallas County Promise, 2019).

Who pays for Dallas Promise? The Promise program in Dallas has multiple funders. One of their biggest funders is JP Morgan Chase Bank, who in 2018 granted three million dollars to Dallas Promise (JPMorgan Chase & Co., 2018). Another major funder, Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD), has granted $400,000 to Dallas Promise. Other funders include: Capital One Foundation, Fidelity Foundation, Highland Capital Management, McKinsey & Company, and United Way of Metropolitan Dallas (Dallas County Promise, 2019).
Each Promise program is responsible for finding its own funders. Texas Promise offers supports to secure the funders, but ultimately it is the responsibility of each Promise program to find funders for its Promise program.

Below, in Figure 3, Dallas County Promise: Theory of Change, shows the core functions, contributing factors, results, and driving why of the Promise program.

![Diagram of core functions, contributing factors, results, and driving why of the Promise program.]

*Note: Dallas County Promise, 2019*

**Figure 3**  
*Dallas County Promise: Theory of Change*

**Achieve Scholarship**

Figure 4 below, is a graphic representation of the current stakeholders who are working to implement a version of Texas Promise in El Paso. At this moment West County ISD, Community Council, and the University are the three organizations actively wanting to bring a version of Texas Promise to El Paso. West County ISD is a small district wanting to bring Texas Promise to the school district, but it needs a funding source and wants to implement it immediately. The Community Council, an organization made up of business leaders also wants
to bring Texas Promise to El Paso, but in a wider scope. The purpose of creating El Paso Promise is five-fold: increase college readiness, help students financially, keep businesses in El Paso, fill the talent gap, and eradicate poverty (Community Council, 2019).

Note: Texas Promise stakeholders and how they are interconnected

Figure 4
Texas Promise in El Paso Framework

West County ISD

West County Independent School District officially opened on April 18, 1959 but had schools in the area since 1911. Its first graduating class was in 1964. In 2003, West County ISD voters passed a bond to build a new high school that could house at least 1,800 students. West County ISD and El Paso Community College collaborated and in 2008 opened the Early College High School adjacent to West County High School (West County ISD, 2016).
The population of West County is 6,321, as of the 2010 census. Hispanics or Latinos make up 91.4 percent of the population. In West County, 59.3 percent of the population, above the age of 25, has a high school diploma or higher credential. Only 15.9 percent of people, above the age of 25, have a bachelor’s degree or higher. The poverty rate is 42.6 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

West County ISD’s vision is to be a “premier district preparing tomorrow’s best today with innovative, future-focused learning opportunities for every student” (West County ISD, 2016, p. 1).

Its mission is to create rigorous, student-centered classrooms which develop future-ready students to compete in a global economy and thrive in a multicultural world” (West County ISD, 2016, p. 1). West County ISD’s goals consist of increasing the STAAR scores in reading, writing, and math. Their final goal is to increase the number of graduating students that are College, Career, and Military Ready (CCMR) (West County ISD, 2016).

For the 2017-2018 school year, West County High School, “Met Standard” on Student Achievement, School Progress, Closing the Gaps, and Overall, on the accountability rating system. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has three ratings: Met Standard, Improvement Required, or Not Rated (TEA, 2019).

Community Council

The Community Council is a not-for-profit organization that is focused on education and economic expansion in the El Paso area. They consist of business leaders, community supporters, and parents to collaborate with educators and the community on different initiatives. The Community Council has six guiding principles when selecting which initiative to support:
educational achievement, investments in resources, collaborative approach, sustainable initiatives, proven track record of results, and measurable outcomes (Community Council, 2018).

Community Council is actively, since 2017, organizing the 60x30 El Paso initiative with the leaders in education, business, and community. 60x30 El Paso has the same goals as the 60x30TX that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board designed (Community Council, 2018).

**Similar Texas Promise Scholarship Programs**

**PayDirt Promise**

The PayDirt Promise, through The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), offers a financial aid program that covers tuition and other fees associated with taking courses at UTEP after other grants or scholarships have been exhausted. This is not a scholarship program. PayDirt Promise was previously named UTEP Promise. Under the UTEP Promise program, students qualified if their parents had an income of $30,000 or less (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2018).

The new PayDirt Promise has eligibility requirements that students must meet. First, students qualify for the funds if families have an income of $40,000 or less in a year (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2018). Second, students must be studying to receive their first bachelor’s degree (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2018). Next, students must be a resident of Texas and take at least 12 credit hours each semester (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2018). Last, students must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA. Students are eligible to continue receiving funds for four consecutive academic years (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2018).

Currently, PayDirt Promise does not offer other support systems, such as, mentorships or student check-ins (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2018). This program has helped
approximately 5,000 students since 2019 (Esquivel & Saenz, 2019). In 2019-2020, 25,177 students enrolled at UTEP (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2019).

**Poverty Causes Community Problems**

Poverty is not static; it is driven and changed by policy. Anyon (2014) poignantly states that “the proactive role of the federal government is maintaining…poverty and therefore poverty education” (p. 29). The federal, state, and local policies are interconnected, and both perpetuate poverty and its effects.

This needs to be acknowledged to be able to address poverty and poverty in education. Education policy alone will not eradicate poverty. The Federal government has policies, such as the minimum wage, that sustains poverty. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) sets the minimum wage and enforces it. It is Congress that decides to change the minimum wage by amending the FLSA (Anyon, 2014; Reimers, 2000; U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). The current minimum wage is $7.25 an hour and has been since 2009 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). A person with a child, working full-time at minimum wage, $7.25, would be below the poverty threshold of $17,308 and poverty guideline of $16,910 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The difference between the poverty threshold and poverty guideline will be explained in further detail.

During the 2007 recession, 8.6 million jobs were lost. Minorities were twice as likely to be the victims of those job losses. By 2013, most of those jobs were recovered, however, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) the people hired, had both training and education (Carnevale, 2013). With the current work requirements, people will need post-secondary degrees or certificates (Carnevale, 2013). Because the U.S. wants to remain
competitive in global economics people will need 21st century skills, such as: reading comprehension, critical thinking, complex problem solving, and negotiation (Carnevale, 2013).

**Identifying Poverty**

Poverty is deprivation (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Iceland, 2013). Though this is an overly simplistic definition, the term deprivation embodies all that poverty entails. It is the lack of income, social capital, basic resources, equity, and opportunities (Anyon, 2014; Cass, 2010; Iceland, 2013). Some researchers have described poverty as a “stifling force;” a force that holds the poor captive for generations (Anyon, 2014; Cass, 2010, p. 6; Iceland, 2013).

For this review, poverty is defined using the U.S. Government’s definition. The U.S. Government uses two terms when measuring and defining poverty: poverty thresholds and poverty guidelines (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). The poverty measures are set forth by the Federal government. This determines how the government allocates funds and determines eligibility for other Federal programs. Some of those programs include, but are not limited to: Head Start, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the National School Lunch Program, and School Breakfast Program (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

**Poverty Thresholds**

Poverty thresholds are calculated and updated yearly by the U.S. Census Bureau (2018) using complex formulas. There are 48 thresholds in which each family or individual will fall into. This is based on family size and total income. If an individual or family falls below the threshold, they are in poverty, as shown in Table 3. The purpose of the poverty thresholds is to identify the number of people in poverty. It is a statistical tool (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).
Table 3
Poverty Thresholds for 2018 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Family Unit</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Five</th>
<th>Six</th>
<th>Seven</th>
<th>Eight or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Person:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under age 65</td>
<td>13,064</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 65 and older</td>
<td>12,043</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two People:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Householder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under Age 65</td>
<td>16,815</td>
<td>17,308</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Householder aged 65 and older</td>
<td>15,178</td>
<td>17,242</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three People</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four People</td>
<td>19,642</td>
<td>20,212</td>
<td>20,231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five People</td>
<td>25,900</td>
<td>26,324</td>
<td>25,465</td>
<td>25,554</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six People</td>
<td>31,234</td>
<td>31,689</td>
<td>30,718</td>
<td>29,967</td>
<td>29,509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven People</td>
<td>35,925</td>
<td>36,068</td>
<td>35,324</td>
<td>34,612</td>
<td>33,553</td>
<td>32,925</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight People</td>
<td>41,336</td>
<td>41,594</td>
<td>40,705</td>
<td>40,085</td>
<td>38,929</td>
<td>37,581</td>
<td>36,102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine People or more</td>
<td>46,231</td>
<td>46,640</td>
<td>45,800</td>
<td>45,064</td>
<td>44,021</td>
<td>42,696</td>
<td>41,317</td>
<td>40,967</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. U.S. Census Bureau, 2019*

For example, a single mother with two children earning less than $20,231 would meet the poverty threshold.

*Poverty Guidelines*

“The poverty guidelines may be formally referenced as ‘the poverty guidelines updated periodically in the Federal Register by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the authority of 42. U.S.C. 9901(2)” (2019). These poverty guidelines, as with poverty thresholds, are updated yearly. However, it is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019) to set forth the guidelines. The guidelines are a simpler version of the poverty thresholds. For instance, the poverty guidelines below increase $4,422.00 for each additional person. It is easy to look at the data table and determine the next guideline. Because of
the simplicity, poverty guidelines are used administratively to determine eligibility for different federal programs, as I stated earlier. If an individual or family falls below the set poverty guideline they are classified as living in poverty. Poverty guidelines have an administrative purpose; the guidelines are used to determine financial eligibility for certain programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Table 4 shows the poverty guidelines for the number of people living in the household without considering age. For example, a household of three people earning less than $21,330 would be considered living in poverty.

**Table 4**  
*Poverty Guidelines*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons in Family/ Household</th>
<th>Poverty Guideline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$12,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>25,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>34,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>39,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>43,430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

**Title I**

Title I, specifically, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provides supplemental funds to local education agencies (LEA). This program is also known as the Education for the Disadvantaged-Grants to Local Educational Agencies, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. School districts and schools that have a high number of low-income students can qualify for Title I funds (Kilty, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).
This leads back to the poverty guidelines. Title I uses the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (2019) poverty guidelines. If a student qualifies for free or reduced lunch, then they are classified as living in poverty. Schools are eligible for the Title I funds when 40% of the students enrolled are low-income or living in poverty (Kilty, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

**Who is Poor?**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), there were 39.7 million people in poverty in 2017; that is 12.3 percent of Americans that were poor. Even though that is the government's official poverty rate, the U.S. created another poverty report in 2011, the Supplemental Poverty Measure, that considers other factors that the official poverty rate does not. One of those factors is accounting for individuals who get federal assistance. Another factor is accounting for those individuals who do not get counted for the official poverty rate (Fox, 2017; Iceland, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The Supplemental Poverty Measure for 2017 indicates that 13.9 percent of all people in the U.S. were in poverty. The statistics are worse for children under 18. There were, in 2017, 17.5 percent or 12.8 million children in poverty (Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

The effects of poverty are not distributed evenly among Americans or communities. Most people living in poverty are minorities, specifically Latinos and African Americans (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2006; Iceland, 2013; Milner, 2013; Reardon, 2013). Table 5 uses the official poverty rates to show the 2017 poverty percentages among minorities (Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018). The unfortunate statistic is that the United States’ poverty rates for minority children are higher than many other industrialized nations (Fauth, 2004; Moore et al., 2009; Woodward, 2009).
Table 5

US Poverty Rate in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Under Age 18 and Under</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outside Influences in Schools

Berliner (2009) found that children spend “1,150 waking hours a year in school versus about 4,700 more waking hours per year in their families and neighborhoods” (p.3). These are waking hours spent in or around their homes and neighborhoods. The family and environmental stressors, such as family violence, dilapidated homes, gangs, and language deficiencies, have an undeniable amount of influence as to how that child will behave and learn in school (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2009; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Fauth, 2004; Reimers, 2000; Van der Berg, 2008). These stressors can have a negative effect on a child’s cognitive functions (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Evans & Schamberg, 2009; Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013). The longer a child experiences the environmental stressors, the greater the negative effects on the child’s body and neurological development (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2009; Evans & Schamberg, 2009).

What originated outside of the school still manifests itself as behavioral issues in the classroom (Berliner, 2009; Books-Gunn et al., 1993; Fauth, 2004). Other manifestations include lower IQ, increased high school dropout rates, internalized and externalized problems (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Slopen et al., 2010). Internalized problems include anxiety, depression, or withdrawal and externalized problems were defined as aggression, hyperactivity, or noncompliance (Slopen et al., 2010). These factors shape the child even before they enter school because the neighborhoods are causing unequal opportunities (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993;
Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, 2004). Van der Berg (2008), Milner, (2013) and Berliner (2009) all agree that outside influences must be understood and addressed at the policy level because schools and academic achievement are being dictated by this complex issue of poverty.

**Education**

Today there is greater pressure on public education. Although education has been called the great equalizer it cannot, of itself, eradicate the consequential effects of poverty (Anyon, 2014; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Ladd, 2012). There are challenges. Poor students, who are mostly Latino and Black, are at a greater risk of being retained, dropping out of high school, and have a learning disability (Anyon, 2014; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For education to have an impact on poverty, policy makers, district and campus administrators, post-secondary education, and the community workforce must acknowledge the correlation between socioeconomics and education achievement, acknowledge that there is an achievement gap, acknowledge that teacher quality matters, acknowledge that the teacher’s understanding of the student in poverty matters, acknowledge that the type of courses a student takes matters, and acknowledge that collaboration is needed (Reimers, 2000).

**Socioeconomics and Educational Achievement**

There is an undeniable correlation between socioeconomics and educational achievement (Anyon, 2014; Downey et al., 2004; Duncan & Brook-Gunn, 2000; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Ladd, 2012; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Ravitch, 2013). Children who live in high socioeconomic homes achieve greater academic success (Carnevale et al., 2013; Green & Anyon, 2010; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Van der Berg, 2008). And, children who live in low socioeconomic homes had a high probability of having to cope with poor grades, poor behavior, and lack of motivation (Green & Anyon, 2010; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Van der Berg,
The effects of not having resources at home or at school leads to low academic achievement and, therefore, less opportunities (Greene & Anyon, 2010; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Higher socioeconomic students have parents who will advocate for their child to get into better schools, enroll in higher level courses, take those courses with high quality teachers, provide tutors, and experience outside opportunities (Ladd, 2012; Downey et al., 2004). Low socioeconomic students have parents who do not have the income or knowledge to know what additional educational materials their child needs to succeed. These parents, whose lives are less stable, are less likely to take their children on educational outings (Anyon, 2014; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). These students lack social capital (Iceland, 2013). Low socio-economic parents do not go to their child’s school, as often, to advocate for them to take higher rigor classes or classes with better teachers (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). As a result of not getting the attention and support they need, low socioeconomic students are ten times the rate of higher socio-economic students to not graduate from high school (Duncan & Brook-Gunn, 2000; Hopson & Lee, 2011). They have a higher likelihood of not mastering the content and more discipline problems (Duncan & Brook-Gunn, 2000; Hopson & Lee, 2011). They have had 12 years of disadvantages, coming from behind and not being supported (Carnevale et al., 2013; Duncan & Brook-Gunn, 2000; Hopson & Lee, 2011).

Another reason there is a correlation between socioeconomics and academic achievement is because everything produces after its own kind. Low socioeconomic neighborhoods with little resources, produces low socioeconomic schools (Anyon, 2014; Kober, 2001. These schools have mostly enrolled poor students, who are predominantly Latino and Black (Anyon, 2014; Kober, 2001. With little support and funding, these schools cannot properly maintain the building structures, they offer outdated technology, if any at all (Anyon, 2014; Kober, 2001. The class
sizes are large, they offer very few advanced courses, and less qualified teachers teach at these schools (Anyon, 2014; Kober, 2001).

**Achievement Gap**

The achievement gap is defined as the disparity in academic outcomes between low socioeconomic students, who will likely be Latino or Black, and high socioeconomic students. The disparity can be in assessment results, grades, placement in special education classes, lack of placement in advanced academic courses, graduation rates, and suspension due to behavioral issues. The achievement gap begins before students commences their educational careers. This is not an issue of genetic ability; this is a result of the effects of poverty (Howard, 2010; Kober, 2001; Ravitch, 2013; Valencia, 2015).

Currently, the achievement gap between low socioeconomic students and high socioeconomic students is substantial enough that even if Black or Latino students improve to close the achievement gap, the gap does not close because the higher socioeconomic students are also doing better academically. For the achievement gap to close, Black and Latino students need to improve at a faster rate than the higher performing students (Kober, 2001; Reimer, 2000). In Texas, 2016, 94 percent of White students graduated from a four-year high school, while only 86 percent of Black students and 87 percent of Hispanic students graduated from a four-year high school. Of the 21,600 students who dropped out, approximately 14,400 Texas students were economically disadvantaged. For those students who did not graduate, there are some repercussions. Those students are less likely to be proficient in reading compared to their White counterparts. And those students struggle to find employment that will sufficiently meet their financial needs (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2018).
Region 19, which encompasses El Paso County, is also affected by the achievement gap. The Texas Education Agency reported in 2017-2018 that 61.5 percent of Hispanic students, 58.9 percent of Black students, and 73.2 percent of White students were College, Career, or Military Ready (CCMR) (TEA, 2019).

Specific to only to college ready, only 47.2 percent of Hispanic students, 41.9 percent of Black students, and 63.4 percent of White students graduated high school college ready. In 2017-2018, 35.8 percent of Hispanic students, 34.0 percent of Black students, and 58.4 percent met the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSI) criteria for both math and English. That same year, 22.8 percent of Hispanic students, 18.5 percent of Black students, and 26.1 percent of White students successfully completed a Dual Credit course in any subject (TEA, 2019).

Given the effects of poverty and the disparity in which they are distributed, schools still have been charged with the responsibility of closing the achievement gap (Berliner, 2006; Valencia, 2015): the “great equalizer” (Downey et al., 2004, p. 632). The problem is that although schools are not completely “fruitless,” schools alone do not reduce the inequalities between low socioeconomic students and high socioeconomic students (Berliner, 2006; Berliner, 2009; Downey et al., 2004, p. 633; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Valencia, 2015). “As wonderful as some teachers and schools are, most cannot eliminate inequalities that have their roots outside their doors and that influence events within them” (Berliner, 2009, p. 40). To reiterate, policy makers need to acknowledge this to implement poverty eradication policy to work in conjunction with educational institutions. Then, education will have a more powerful effect on poverty.
Closing the Gap

Education holds the potential to close the achievement gap, however, there needs to be a paradigm shift within the educational systems (Kober, 2001; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Valencia, 2015; Van der Berg, 2008). There is not a quick fix to a problem that is embedded in the educational settings. Schools need to offer more advanced academic courses to Black and Latino students. Quality teachers need to teach at high-poverty schools. The content curriculum needs to be rigorous for all students. High-poverty schools need to be able to schedule small class sizes. As crucial as that is, students need to feel motivated by their school leaders and the culture needs to lend itself to a standard of excellence (Kober, 2001; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Valencia, 2015).

Graduation Rates for El Paso Region

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) measures graduation rates by using, “four-year longitudinal” data (TEA, 2019, p. 1). Each 9th grade student, as they begin high school, are grouped in cohorts. Those 9th graders have four years to graduate high school. The number of enrolled students in the 9th grade, is then divided by the number of students who graduated four years later. All students within the cohort are tracked. Students are subtracted from the beginning number if, students dropout or take the GED test to earn a Texas Certificate High School Equivalency (TxCHSE). Also, students can be added to the cohort if they transfer to the school being tracked (TEA, 2019).

Table 6 is a 2018 graduation comparison of schools in Region 19. This information will provide data to compare with West County ISD (TEA, 2019).
Table 6
2018 Graduation Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISD</th>
<th>Class Size</th>
<th># of Graduates</th>
<th>Graduation Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun City ISD</td>
<td>4,472</td>
<td>3,724</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Valley ISD</td>
<td>3,150</td>
<td>2,825</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain View ISD</td>
<td>3,501</td>
<td>3,216</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East County ISD</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West County ISD</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Region 19 school districts. TEA, 2019  
* A dash (-) indicates data are not reported to protect student anonymity.

Table 7 depicts the graduation rates and dropout rates for class of 2018, 2017, and 2016 at West County High School (TEA, 2019). The table indicates that West County High School has increased its graduation rates each year since 2016. From 2016 to 2017 the dropout rate decreased 1.4 percent, but remained at 4.1 percent from 2017 to 2018.

Table 7
West County High School Graduation and Dropout Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Of</th>
<th>Class Size</th>
<th>Graduated Rate (%)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Dropped Out Rate %</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Graduated, Continued, or Received TxCHSE Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>&lt;400</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>&lt;450</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Grade 9 four-year longitudinal graduation and dropout rates.  
*A dash (-) indicates data are not reported to protect student anonymity.*
TEA Accountability Rating System

The purpose of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) accountability rating system is to assess “public school students on what they have learned and determining district and school accountability rating” (TEA, 2019, p. 1). During the 85th Texas Legislature, House Bill 22 was passed, based on the new academic accountability system school districts and schools are given an A, B, C, D, or F rating that measures academic performance. A rating of A represents, Exemplary Performance, B, Recognized Performance, C, Acceptable Performance, D, in Need of Improvement, and F, Unacceptable Performance. There are three domains that are measured: student achievement, school progress, and closing the gaps (TEA, 2019). For the purpose of this literature review, student achievement regarding College, Career, Military Ready (CCMR) component only will be reviewed.

Student Achievement Domain

Under the Student Achievement Domain, high schools are rated on three different items: State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR); College, Career, Military Ready (CCMR); and graduation rates. Each area is assigned a percentage: 40% STAAR, 40% CCMR, 20% graduation rates.

College, Career, Military Ready

The purpose of CCMR is to ensure all students are either college ready, career ready, or military ready. Students can still graduate high school without fulfilling CCMR. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) rates the school’s CCMR component by assigning each graduate one point for meeting any of three indicators. The formula is as follows:

\[
\text{Number of Graduates Who Accomplish Any One of the CCMR Indicators (Numerator)} \div \text{Number of Annual Graduates (Denominator)}
\]
**College Ready**

There are five ways a student can acquire the college ready CCMR point.

1. Student scores a 3 or better on an Advanced Placement exam or earns a score of 4 on an International Baccalaureate (IB) exam.

2. Student meets the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) criteria in English Language (ELA)/Reading and Math (SAT/ACT/TSIA/College Prep Course).

3. Student completes a dual credit course (At least three hours in ELA/Reading or math. At least nine hours in other subjects).

4. Student earns an associate’s degree.

5. Student completes an OnRamps course, which is a dual-enrollment course with The University of Texas at Austin (TEA, 2019).

**Military Ready**

There is one criterion for students to be military ready.

1. Student enlists in the United States Armed Forces (TEA, 2019).

   In 2017-2018, 4.9 percent of the El Paso cohort enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces: 6.8 percent of Black students, 4.8 percent of Hispanic students, and 5.3 percent of White students (TEA, 2019).

**Career Ready**

There are five ways to be career ready.

1. Earn an industry-based certification offered by the school district’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that are TEA approved (TEA, 2019). In El Paso, 5.0 percent of Hispanic students, 2.6 percent of Black students, and 5.2 percent of White students earned an industry-based certification in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019).
2. CTE coherent sequence coursework completion and credit aligned with approved industry-based certifications (one-half point credit). This means the student took the courses, but did not take or pass the certification assessment (TEA, 2019). In El Paso, 32.1 percent of Hispanic students, 27.9 percent of Black students, and 26.9 percent of White students completed the CTE courses in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019).

3. Graduate with completed an Individual Education Program (IEP) and workforce readiness. This is for special education students (TEA, 2019). In El Paso, 0.4 percent of Hispanic students, 0.4 percent of Black students, and 0.3 percent of White students graduated with an IEP and workforce readiness in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019).

4. Earn a Level I or Level II certificate. Awarded by an institution of higher education certifying the satisfactory completion of a higher education program. A Level I certificates are awarded for completing a program with at least 15 semester credit hours, but not more than 42 semester credit hours. A Level II certificates are awarded from completing a program with at least 30 semester hours, but not more than 51 semester credit hours. In El Paso, no students graduated with a Level I or Level II Certificate in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019).

5. Graduate under an advanced degree plan and be identified as a current special education student (TEA, 2019). In El Paso, 3.4 percent of Hispanic students, 4.2 percent of Black students, and 2.8 percent of White students graduated under an advanced degree plan in 2017-2018 (TEA, 2019).

Post-Secondary Readiness

What does it mean to be college ready? The answer is not explicit through the THECB (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Duncheon, 2015). EC-12 schools have guidelines and requirements have been set forth by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), to include taking
certain courses or earning certain scores on assessments to meet the graduation requirements for high school (TEA, 2019). But, does meeting those requirements presume a student is truly college ready?

An indicator of a being college ready includes the student not needing to enroll in remedial courses at post-secondary institutions (Bailey & Smith Jaggars, 2016; Conely, 2008; Duncheon, 2015; Illich et al., 2004). Another indicator calls for students to utilize “21st century skills” that enables students to earn a degree or certificate from a post-secondary institution (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016, p. 28; Duncheon, 2015). The expectation from post-secondary professors is that students enroll in their courses already having “21st century skills” to navigate through their college courses immediately after high school (Conley, 2008; DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Duncheon, 2015). Some of those skills include, but are not limited to: critical thinking, writing abilities, problem solving, inferencing skills, communication abilities, and self-management behavior (Conley, 2008; DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Duncheon, 2015).

Even though the definition of college readiness is not clearly defined, it is low socioeconomic students who are over-represented in this group (Duncheon, 2015; Luna-Torres et al., 2018). Meaning, poor students are taking more remedial courses or dropping out of post-secondary education at a higher rate than higher socio-economic students (Duncheon, 2015; Luna-Torres et al., 2018).

Preparing students to become college or career ready is not the burden of only high schools (Conley, 2008; DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016). The responsibility also needs to be carried by EC-8th grade schools, higher education institutions, and the workforce community. Ultimately, though, the problem of ill-prepared students for college will continue if the definition of a college ready student is not explicitly defined.
According to the U.S. Department of Education, nationwide, 40 percent of students attending a four-year institution require at least one remedial class and 68 percent of students attending a community college require at least one remedial class (Chen & Simone, 2016; Boatman & Long, 2018). Remedial courses are defined as courses taken in a post-secondary institution because the student does not have the required skills in reading, writing, and/or math to successfully pass a college-level course (Illich, Hagen, & McCallister, 2004).

Students are facing three challenges in school; first, students are not fully informed about which degree program leads to a career pathway that is in high demand in El Paso. Second, when students enroll in post-secondary education, at least one-third of them enroll in a remedial class (Boatman & Long, 2018; National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2016). This trend is seen statewide and not exclusive to El Paso (Boatman & Long, 2018). Lastly, as a result of taking remedial classes the student is no longer in their original cohort, it increases the amount of total tuition costs, it lowers the student’s self-esteem, it increases frustration, and therefore, decreases the chances of graduating (Boatman & Long, 2018; Luna-Torres et al., 2018). In 2014, West County ISD had 395 high school graduates. Within eight years, 58 received a two-year degree and 25 students received a four-year degree from a Texas public college (TPEIR, 2020). Table 8 shows how many post-secondary degrees were obtained within seven to eight years after high school graduation (TPEIR, 2020).
Table 8
High School Graduates Receiving College Degrees by High School Graduation Year: Region 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 to 8 years</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 to 6 years</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 to 4 years</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Same Year of HS Graduation</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,472</td>
<td>1,389</td>
<td>1,362</td>
<td>1,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 to 8 years</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 years or less</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,073</td>
<td>1,798</td>
<td>1,578</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Information was retrieved from Texas Public Education Information Resource (2020)

--- represents the years that have not yet passed

Income Inequality and Social Mobility

Income inequality has been receiving increased attention and although it is being discussed in the media and on social platforms, this is not a new concept. Since the 1970’s the inequality gap has widened and continues to grow wider (Carnevale et al., 2013; Rank & Hirschl, 2015; Reardon, 2013). Even though that was referencing income inequality, inequality comes in many forms, “background, treatment, expectations, and opportunities” (Orfield & Lee, 2005, p. 5). The inequality gap, in all its forms, is a symptom of a much larger broken system (Reardon, 2013).

Race and socioeconomic status are connected to poverty, inequality, and opportunities that create trends of poverty segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Our communities are becoming segregated (Orfield & Lee, 2005). The most vulnerable population, children, suffer some of the
greatest inequality and segregation. Black and Latino children living in poverty are more likely
to attend poor schools (Cass, 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Reardon, 2013, Reimers, 2000). Their
schools are, “inferior” (p.6) and their neighborhoods have the stigma of poverty that leads to
family violence, unrest and crime (Cass, 2010; Berliner, 2009). These children are inundated
with lack and substandard conditions that are not only in their neighborhoods, but their schools
as well (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Cass, 2010; Ducan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). The “poor
children swim in a sea of poverty. “It is all they know” because, “their parents and almost
everyone they know are poor and struggling” (Cass, 2010, p. 6).

An optimist view regarding inequality is the potential for social mobility (Anyon, 2014;
Cass, 2010; Reardon, 2013). However, social mobility is not easily achieved for the poor,
especially Black and Latino poor (Anyon, 2014; Cass, 2010; Reardon, 2013). The United States
continues to see the inequality gap widen and the opportunity for social mobility lessens
(Berliner, 2013; Rank & Hirschl, 2015). There are high numbers of families in poverty because
the middle-class families are seeing mobility, however, the movement is downward towards the
working-poor (Cass, 2010; Berliner, 2013; Carnevale et al., 2013). The trend among children is
that the rich are staying rich, and poor are staying poor (Cass, 2010; Berliner, 2013). If there is
any mobility, only 23 percent will move up one income level (Cass, 2010). African Americans
fare much worse (Cass, 2010). Reardon (2013) stated that the income gap could be explained
because upward social mobility is more difficult now. Good jobs that were available to people
without degrees are no longer available (Anyon, 2014; Carnevale et al., 2013; Reardon,
2013). The result is that there are many Americans that are experiencing downward mobility and
by the age of 60 almost 62 percent of people have experienced a year of poverty (Rank
& Hirschl, 2015).
Texas was waning in post-secondary degree or certificate attainment (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Paredes, 2016). In 2013, 35 percent of Texans, between the ages of 25-34 years old, had an associate degree or higher. The national percentage, for the same age group, was 42 percent. Faring worse than California at 40 percent, New York at 51 percent, and Minnesota at 52 percent (Paredes, 2016).

Data gathered from the 2016 Texas Higher Education Almanac found that only 14 out of 100 Hispanic eighth graders in Texas attain a post-secondary degree or certificate, 13 out of 100 Black eighth graders attain a post-secondary degree or certificate, and 11 out of 100 economically disadvantaged eighth grades attain a post-secondary degree or certificate. In 2003, out of a 100 eighth graders, 69 graduated from high school, 53 enrolled in post-secondary education, and 20 received a degree or certificate (Paredes, 2016).

Table 9 provides a comparison of Texas, Region 19, and West County ISD on the subject of the college readiness percentages, and economically disadvantaged percentages.

**Table 9**

*Four-Year Longitudinal Comparisons-2018*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Graduates</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
<th>College Ready</th>
<th>College, Career, Military Ready</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>347,893</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 19</td>
<td>12,545</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(El Paso and Hudspeth counties)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West County ISD</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* TEA, 2020
In 2015, in response to the above data, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board developed four goals to be met by 2030. The first and main goal: “at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 will have a certificate or degree” from any higher education institution (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019, p. 1). Research by Carneval, Smith, & Strohl (2013) determined that by 2020, “65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school” (p. 22). The THECB used this data to create this goal. The second goal, “is for students of all ages to complete at least 555,000 certificates or associate, bachelor’s or master’s degrees (CABMs) in FY 2030 from an institution of higher education in Texas” (THECB, 2019, p. 4). This goal is more specific; it does not include an age range, counts only master’s degrees and below, the degree or certificate must be earned in Texas, and counts all the degrees earned. Goal number two also focuses on Black, Hispanic, and low socio-economic status people and their attainment of degrees and certificates (THECB, 2019). The third goal states; “All graduates from Texas public institutions of higher education will have completed programs with identifiable marketable skills” (THECB, 2019, p. 9). The THECB is charging the post-secondary institutions with creating systems to identify marketable skills within each program (THECB, 2019). The fourth and final goal says: “Undergraduate student loan debt will not exceed 60 percent of first-year wages for graduates of Texas public institutions” (THECB, 2019, p. 12). This goal is meant to support students in their debt management. This allows for student with bachelor’s degrees or less to have the means to pay for their school debt.

The reasoning for the four goals is to keep up with the requirements of the jobs that are entering the workforce in Texas. As the workforce evolves and changes, especially in healthcare and STEM occupations, those jobs are no longer attainable with just a high school diploma
The needed skills for the changing workforce will only be possible with more education (60x30TX, 2017).

**FAFSA**

The U.S. government offers financial aid for college through an application process called the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Through grants, loans, and work-study opportunities, the U.S Department of Education provides more than $120 billion in aid. Students, however, need to meet the criteria set forth by U.S. Department of Education. First, applicants need to have a high school diploma, General Educational Development (GED), or if homeschooled, meet the completion criteria approved by the state. Secondly, the applicant needs to be enrolled or accepted at an institution of higher education whether it is for a degree or certificate program. The third requirement is the applicant needs a valid Social Security number. If you are a male, a fourth criteria is required; register with Selective Service, if between the ages of 18 and 25. And last, the applicant needs to fit within one of the five categories: a U.S. citizen or U.S. National, a U.S. permanent resident, have an Arrival-Departure Record (Refugee, Asylum granted), designated as a battered immigrant-qualified alien under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), or have T visa or parent with T-1 visa. Additionally, students must make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) by maintaining a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) and be enrolled at least half-time to continue receiving aid (Federal Student Aid, 2019).

Once the criteria are met, two measures are used to determine how much money the student will receive. The first is the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). This number is determined by the Central Processing System (CPS) using the data from the FAFSA application. There are three formulas that are used, and each formula also has a simplified version of the formula, if the student meets certain criteria. For the purpose of this literature review, only
Formula A, simplified EFC formula for dependent students will be reviewed as well as those students that qualify for zero EFC. To be eligible for the simplified EFC formula for the 2019-2020 award year, one of two criteria must be met:

Anyone included in the parents’ household size (as defined on the FAFSA) received benefits during 2017 or 2018 from any of the designated means-tested federal benefit programs: the Medicaid Program, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Free and Reduced Price School Lunch Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (Federal Student Aid, 2019, p. 4).

Or parents filed, could file, but not required to file the 2017 IRS Form 1040A or filed or were eligible to file the 1040EZ. Or parents did not need to file any income tax return. Or the parent is a dislocated worker. Then, the parents need to have, from 2017, a combined income of $49,999.00 or less (Federal Student Aid, 2019).

The FAFSA CPS can also determine which students qualify for an automatic zero EFC calculation. Again, the student needs to meet certain criteria which are the same as the simplified dependent criteria, with a few exceptions: combined income of $26,000.00 or less. This is $1,000.00 more than in 2018 (Federal Student Aid, 2019).

The other measure is the Cost of Attendance (COA), which is the cost of attending the school for the fall and spring semester. This is calculated by the college the student will attend; Tuition, room and board, cost of books and supplies, allowance for dependent care, and costs due to a disability are a few components used to estimate the COA (Federal Student Aid, 2019).
Finally, to determine the student’s financial need, the Cost of Attendance (COA) is subtracted from the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). That number is what the student is eligible to receive and cannot received more than that number (Federal Student Aid, 2019). The financial assistance students can receive from the U.S. Department of Education is the Federal Pell Grant. The Pell Grant is money the student does not need to repay. However, the maximum amount a student can receive for the 2019-2020 award year is $6,195.00 (Federal Student Aid, 2019).

**Gaps in the Literature**

There are some limitations in the literature review. The location of the studies can limit the results of the research and how it pertains to the El Paso region. Studies regarding a policy process and Texas Promise have not been studied in El Paso. Additionally, another gap pertains to the stakeholders. The stakeholders do not specifically know they are working within a policy process. The gaps in literature provide opportunities for research and help further advance the study of education and poverty eradication.

**Summary**

This literature review explained the first three phases of the policy process of adopting Texas Promise in El Paso. A thorough explanation of the Promise program was given to understand why there is an interest in this program.

There are four identified reasons to justify the consideration of adopting Texas Promise. They are as follows: eradicate poverty, increase college readiness, increase the number of students who graduate with an associate or bachelor’s degree, and fill the El Paso workforce talent gap. Each is addressed with the literature.
Texas Promise has the potential to address the effects of poverty and provide the needed opportunities that students need to be successful and financially secure adults.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research is to study how each stakeholder navigated through the first three phases of the policy process as they consider implementation of a Promise program in El Paso. I sought to understand the challenges and opportunities through the lens of each stakeholder as they work through the policy process cycle. In this chapter, the researcher provided the methodological overview of this study. The data gathered in this study will be used to answer the following research questions:

How does each stakeholder navigate through the first three phases of the policy process, as they work to decide whether to adopt the Texas Promise Scholarship Program in El Paso?

- In the initiation phase, how do the stakeholders define and prioritize the problem?
- In the estimation phase, what are the perceived risks, costs, and benefits of adopting Texas Promise in El Paso?
- In the selection phase, what is each stakeholder willing to compromise, negotiate, and accommodate before they decide to adopt the Texas Promise?

Qualitative Policy Case Study Methodology

This study is using a qualitative approach to gather data and investigate what, “themes, categories, patterns,” and answers can be identified (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 216). A qualitative research study can explore different viewpoints and embrace the complexity of finding meaning as data is interpreted through interviews, observation, and documents (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To remain true to the exploration of the human element, a qualitative study is the preferred method as the interest lies in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they
attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). It is the responsibility of the researcher to immerse themselves in the study and to make sense of the data that is collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lichtman, 2013). Given my involvement in the process of considering the adoption of Texas Promise to El Paso certainly allows me to immerse myself in this study.

A key point in qualitative research is the human element. This allows the research to be dynamic and fluid and as such, there is not one prescribed way of doing research. Its purpose is to “describe, understand, and interpret human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 17).

**Case Study Approach**

There are different types of qualitative research: phenomenology, narrative inquiry, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study to name a few. Each type of qualitative research has the basic characteristics of understanding meaning and process, collecting data through interviews, observations, and documents, and the results are descriptive as themes or categories are found (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” to investigate a real-life phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 36; Zainal, 2007). The case is defined as a “bounded system” because there are boundaries regarding the number of stakeholders in the case; the number is finite (Merriam, 1985, p. 207; Yazan, 2015). However, this does not limit the case. The bounded system allows for the data collection to have a conclusion (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam, 1998). The researcher needs to be cautious to ensure the boundaries are not too narrow, as this can led to lack of data. And the opposite is true as well; if the boundaries are too wide it can lead to too much information to manage (Lichtman, 2013).
A case study, the selected method for this research, is a holistic and “in-depth examination of a particular case” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 90; Zainal, 2007). The case can be defined as a “person, a program, a group, a specific policy, and so on” (Lichtman, 2013; Yazan, 2015, p. 139). Its definition is not to be constrained to only a single definition. This allows for greater flexibility on what can be studied as a case (Yazan, 2015).

The case study approach will allow the researcher to conduct a systematic inquiry of points of view from different stakeholders to consider the implementation of Texas Promise in El Paso. Explaining the decision-making process using the phases of the policy process framework; their “why?” and to identify what barriers, the stakeholders think they face.

Merriam (1998) makes the point that, “[b]y concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 29). Another unique attribute of case study research is that it, “allows for a level of understanding and explanation not possible through conventional experimental or survey designs” (Merriam, 1985, p. 204). It provides an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of the…social unit being studied” (Merriam, 1985, p. 206). Case studies are not restricted to only one method of data collection. Collection of data can be acquired in a myriad of methods including: interviews, observations, data from documents, surveys, and testing (Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015). Additionally, a qualitative case study provides enough detail to provide validity to the interpretation of the research (Merriam, 185; Yazan, 2015).

A qualitative case study method goes beyond the limitations of a quantitative case study method, in that a qualitative case study addresses the social and behavioral components of the question. It allows for “behavioral conditions through the actor’s perspective” to be analyzed. It captures the “complexities of real-life situations” that are not revealed in a quantitative case
study. Another advantage of a qualitative case study is the ability to examine the data “within the context of its use, that is, within the situation in which the activity takes place” (Zainal, 2007, p. 4).

Policy Process Analysis and Case Study Method Combined

“Case studies are a good part of the backbone of policy analysis and research” (Pal, 2005, p. 227). Case studies and policy analyses have common attributes that complement the research method and the theoretical framework. Policy analysis is human-centered and consists of cumulative work (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). To the same extent, a case study will provide the human component by completing the in-depth exploration and understanding as there are large quantities of information. A case study will also lend itself to the phases of policy analysis because a case “may represent a process consisting of a series of steps that form a sequence of activities” (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). Another contributing attribute is that policy analysis is about real-world problems that can be complicated. Each stakeholder has different perspectives and values. A case study facilitates a platform for those perspectives and values to be contextualized in the research (Pal, 2005). This provides the necessary environment to uncover interactions and nuances between the stakeholders. Ultimately, the policy process framework and the case study qualitative method allows for the discoveries of interconnections and interdependencies between the stakeholders (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Creswell, 2012; Pal, 2005; Yazan, 2015).

Below is Figure 5 which depicts the characteristics of a policy process, case study, and shared characteristics of both. This is used to show why the case study approach will be used over other qualitative methods.
As a participant researcher in a qualitative study, I bring 12 years of experience in the field of education. I was a middle school teacher for nine years and a testing coordinator for three of those years. Currently, I am an assistant principal at a high school with El Paso ISD. As a native Texan and El Pasoan, I offer my experience and knowledge of the community and educational policy. Additionally, my experience from El Paso ISD will offer a different perspective in West County ISD.

My post-secondary education is from The University of Texas at El Paso. I graduated with a master’s degree in EC-12 administration, and I am currently a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Foundations program with a focus on EC-12 administration with a superintendent certification.
Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is multifaceted and calls for clarification in a qualitative study “to make their research credible” (Lichtman, 2013; Unluer, 2012, p. 1). It is through this role that the researcher acts as a “conduit through which all information flows” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 164). There are different types of researcher roles, one is not better than the other (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I am an active member researcher; a researcher “involved with the central activities of the group without fully committing…to the members’ values and goals” (Adler & Adler, 1987; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55).

The role of active member researcher was initiated when I began my superintendent internship. Prior to this, I had not met Dr. Miguel Gomez or Mr. David Ramos from the Community Council. I quickly, however, became immersed in the Texas Promise project. This role required me to attain local data to ensure Texas Promise would meet the needs of El Paso students. This data included, funding sources, interest levels, workforce needs, and major employers in the El Paso area.

I also took the role of a project planner which included, organizing, and facilitating meetings with the El Paso stakeholders and Texas Promise representatives in Dallas. The first contact I made at Texas Promise was Dr. Eric Ban, Managing Director of Dallas Promise and Texas Promise, by emailing him. Then, Sarah Jensen, Senior Consultant, become my contact at Texas Promise. She serves as a resource for information regarding Texas Promise and what was needed to have a Promise program.

While an active member researcher, I am still an outsider. I am not an employee of the West County ISD nor am I a member of the Community Council. I am not being compensated monetarily or in any other form. The role I took on was that of an intermediary between Texas
Promise and West County ISD and also between the Community Council and West County ISD. As we proceed through the policy cycle, I also represent a support system and a resource to the stakeholders.

**Research Setting**

The research setting is Region 19, El Paso, Texas. Because Texas Promise serves as a support system, the stakeholders stay in contact with the organization which is in Dallas. To date, meetings have been held at Dr. Gomez’s office, Superintendent of West County ISD, West County ISD’s board room, and Mr. Ramos’ office, the Community Council’s Executive Director.

**Stakeholders**

The stakeholders for this research included the Community Council, West County ISD, and the University. The interviews took place between November 2020 through February 2021. All interviews were conducted on a virtual platform to abide by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations during the COVID19 pandemic. Below is a description of each stakeholder and how they perceive themselves:

**Community Council:** a not-for-profit organization designed to support El Paso’s public education system. It consists of El Paso business leaders, philanthropists, and community leaders. Its leaders are “leading efforts to increase educational attainment and improve success of students in the El Paso region.” Community Council supports initiatives that aim to reach the 60x30TX goals (Community Council, 2019). Community Council would be the potential funder for Texas Promise in El Paso.

David Ramos - Executive Director, Board Secretary, Licensed Attorney, 10 Years’ Experience Working with Educators

Community Council’s focus as an organization is in improving academic attainment because of the connection to long-term economic expansion and development. [O]ur
objective is to put extension to improving our academic attainment levels, starting with K through 12, because that's the preparatory basis for subsequent preparation. [W]e want to create is a situation where we're as competitive as other major cities in the state of Texas (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

Javier Mata - Data Director, 40 Years in EC-12 Education

We’re an advocacy group. Community Council is an outgrowth of the organization Community en Acción [action in Spanish] that also focuses on the economics and quality of life. Community Council just totally focuses on the educational piece to try to drive the economic engine of the community (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

West County ISD: a small school district in West Texas. It consists of one tradition high school and an early college high school. West County High School received an overall B rating from TEA for the 2018-2019 school year (TEA, 2020). The high school per student expenditure was $7,801, compared to $9,844 for Texas (TEA, 2020).

Dr. Miguel Gomez – Superintendent, 26 Years in EC-12 Education, 8 Years in El Paso

[W]e’re perceived as a top tier school district in the community. Among the region, since we do have two “A’s”, back-to-back. So, I think we’ve viewed as competitive. West side of El Paso, 6200 kids, 70% economically disadvantaged (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021).

The University: a Tier I Research University. Enrolls approximately 25,000 students a year.

Offers school based financial assistance.

Todd Allen – Vice President, 13 Years in Higher Education

[P]eople generally perceive that we’re important. It's important that we're here and that we're trying to help serve the community. And so Hispanic Serving Institutions understand that we are at powerhouse and from a percentage standpoint there is no other R1 institution that has as many Hispanic students. We've got 83% of our student population is Hispanic. And, we're leading the country, so really important metrics there. We know that we're serving the community well, we have to continue to serve the community (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Texas Promise: the catalyst. Texas Promise is a collaboration between school districts, colleges, employers, and communities to prepare students for college and empower them to
graduate with either a two- or four-year degree in a field that will fill the workforce talent gap. Their mission is to achieve the 60x30TX plan. The Texas Promise representatives, from Dallas, serve as a support system and information resource. They do not fund the program.

El Paso Community College (EPCC): there are five community college campuses located in El Paso. At this time a contact has not yet been established.

**Role as Active Member Researcher**

As an active member researcher, I communicated and acted as the intermediary to gather information about Texas Promise, set-up meetings with the stakeholders, and updated Texas Promise on behalf of West County ISD. I was Dr. Gomez’s superintendent intern. The researcher provided the dates of meetings or updates the researcher had with the stakeholders (see Appendix B).

**Ethical Considerations**

All university policies and procedures related to human subject research were followed. Maintaining confidentiality was a top priority. Permission was always asked and granted prior to making contact, conducting interviews, or having any correspondence. Pseudonyms were used for the stakeholders and their organizations.

**Data Collection**

Data collections were gathered through interviews and communication that is conducted through emails, video conferencing platforms, superintendent internship meeting notes, websites, and in-person. Additionally, documents from the stakeholders were also examined. Monthly check-ins were conducted via video conferencing platforms and Texas Promise representatives were available to answer questions over the phone, email, or video conferencing platforms. Both
Community Council and West County ISD stakeholders have also traveled to Dallas to meet with Texas Promise representatives. Establishing contacts with El Paso Community College and The University of Texas at El Paso are still in progress.

**Document Review Purpose**

The purpose of reviewing the stakeholder’s documents was to provide background knowledge and to corroborate interview data. The document review consisted of: emails, websites, and superintendent internship meeting notes.

**Emails**

Emails were used to communicate with Dr. Gomez; Mr. Ramos, Executive Director of the Community Council; Sarah Jensen, Senior Consultant for Texas Promise; and Dr. Eric Ban, Managing Director of Dallas County Promise. Communication will consist of disseminating information and setting up meetings.

**Websites**

Websites for Community Council, West County ISD, and Texas Promise were also used for document analysis: DallasCountyPromise.org; Community Council.org; and WestCounty-isd.org

**Superintendent Internship Meeting Notes**

Throughout my internship, I met with the stakeholders individually and as a group. I took meticulous notes during these meetings.

**Video Conferencing Platforms**

Video conferencing services to conduct virtual face-to-face meetings with Sarah Jensen and Dr. Ban from Texas Promise. This type of communication was also used to conference with
other cities in Texas working towards adopting Texas Promise in their cities. This was used to provide information and receive feedback from Texas Promise and others around the state.

**Interviews**

An interview is a structured conversation where the researcher is systematically using questions for data collection. The interviewer acts as the instrument to facilitate the conditions for the stakeholders to reveal their perceptions and points of view (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108).

For the purpose of this research, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were used. A semi-structured interview has the following structure: open-ended questions, flexibility in those questions, no exact wording or question order, and allows for further probing (see Appendix A) (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Probing questions ensure I reached the needed in-depth details and nuances of what will be said. This revealed, not only the different opinions, but the different themes (Creswell, 2012; Owen, 2014).

The questions for the interviews were framed to answer the research questions for this study. Stakeholders from Community Council, West County ISD, and the university were interviewed. Permission was obtained from stakeholders prior to each interview following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines (Creswell, 2012; Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Table 10 identifies what the interview questions answered.
With the world-wide halt from COVID19, the format for the interviews differed. Although the preferred method would have been face-to-face, the interviews were held virtually on a video conferencing platform and were recorded with permission from each stakeholder.

Each stakeholder was interviewed three times. The first interview was comprised of questions pertaining to the initiation phase of the policy process. The second interview comprised questions pertaining to the estimation phase. The third interview comprised questions pertaining to the selection phase. A fourth interview was listed on a as-needed bases if clarifying questions for the stakeholder were needed.

All interviews were set-up and completed with Mr. Ramos, Mr. Mata, Dr. Gomez, and Mr. Allen by the end of February 2021 and took place on a video conference platform. An interview for each stakeholder was completed once a week for three weeks. The interviews were conducted individually, with each stakeholder.

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Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Initiation Phase Questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Estimation Phase Questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Selection Phase Questions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify stakeholders</td>
<td>Problem defined</td>
<td>Deal-breakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem identified</td>
<td>Calculate costs &amp; benefits</td>
<td>Negotiations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>Program outline</td>
<td>Compromises</td>
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<td>Goals</td>
<td>Expected performance</td>
<td>Rules</td>
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<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Procedural matters</td>
<td>Program assignments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Program goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Timelines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The interview questions will answer the points in each phase of the policy process.

Brewer & deLeon, 1983.
**Document Analysis**

Document analysis was be used for data collection. Documents from Texas Promise, West County ISD, and Community Council were be utilized. The stakeholders’ websites were be used to acquire these documents. And, once the interviews are transcribed, they too become documents (Owen, 2014). “Documents are produced in social settings and are always to be regarded as collective (social) products” (Prior, 2003, p. 26). This form of data collection can provide background knowledge and insight into the stakeholders’ values and goals (Owen, 2014).

**Interpreting the Data**

The data was synthesized and evaluated for different themes that emerge as the focus remains on the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory. A theme is reached as an outcome of coding. “A set of themes is a good thing to emerge from analysis” as they can reveal the stakeholder’s processes, emotions, and values (Saldana, 2013, p. 14).

**Coding Method.**

The coding process involves analyzing a word or phrase to extract and interpret meaning. A code is a “researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning” (Owen, 2014; Saldana, 2013, p. 4). Coding, as a benefit, adds value to the study. It allows the researcher to link data for the purpose of bringing forth ideas as a result of that collected data. Coding also adds value by providing a method to take the data and add order to the data (Owen, 2014; Saldana, 2013). Once data is collected, coding will begin. It is not necessary to gather all the data prior to coding (Saldana, 2013). This research used two methods of coding: Descriptive Coding and In Vivo Coding.
**Descriptive Coding**

Descriptive Coding is fitting for a qualitative research. This type of coding can be used for documents, interviews, and any correspondence (Saldana, 2013). Once the data is transcribed, Descriptive Coding condenses a short phrase into a noun. This method of coding “categorizes data at a basic level to provide the researcher with an organizational grasp of the study” (Owen, 2014; Saldana, 2013, p. 91). Because Descriptive Coding can be simplistic with only a noun, other coding methods were also selected to complement each other (Saldana, 2013).

**In Vivo Coding**

In Vivo Coding is also known as literal coding, verbatim coding, inductive coding, indigenous coding, and emic coding. For this study it was called In Vivo Coding. The stakeholder’s actual word or short phases are the codes (Ravindran, 2019; Saldana, 2013). There is not a set number of codes that are required. That is at the researcher’s discretion. In Vivo Coding highlighted to the researcher what the stakeholders find important to them. As with Descriptive Coding, In Vivo Coding is appropriate for a qualitative study (Saldana, 2013).

As a supplementary organizational tool, I used NVivo 12 Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) Data manager. NVivo 12 serves as a data manager. All the data were easily accessible without being restricted to one aspect of the NVivo 12 program. Although the software aids in organization, it is the responsibility of the researcher to set the parameters and dictate what is needed to be extracted from the data (Owen, 2014).

NVivo 12 allows for the researcher to upload the transcribed interviews and create nodes. The nodes hold the codes and themes set by the researcher (Ravindran, 2019; Saldana, 2013). This research will apply the deductive process to the codes. Using the deductive process will allow the research to pre-determine the themes that emerged from the policy process framework.
and bounded rationality theory. The interview responses obtained are then grouped into those pre-determined themes (Ravindran, 2019). Below, Figure 6, provides a visual depiction of the data analysis.

**Figure 6**
*Deductive Approach*

**Data Validity**

There are strategies that a researcher can incorporate into their study to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. I employed two strategies: triangulation and reflexivity.

Triangulation provides the researcher the strategy to “increase the credibility” of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 244). By “comparing and cross-checking” the stakeholders’ interview responses, meeting notes, and websites and looking for similar outcomes, I was able affirm the validity of my evaluation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The second strategy used was reflexivity. This strategy is also interchangeable with critical reflection or researcher’s position (Berger, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This strategy allows for the researcher to process “continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation” regarding “positionality” (Berger, 2015). It provides transparency of the researcher’s perspectives, biases, beliefs, and assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, this strategy allowed the researcher, as semi-insider, to consciously remain alert and critically reflect
to “avoid projecting [my] own experiences” (Berger, 2015, p. 230). With the understanding as Sword (1999) stated, “no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher and we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved” (p. 277).

Summary

Chapter 3 presents the study’s research design and methodology. This qualitative case study research centers on the policy process of Texas Promise in El Paso, utilizing a policy process framework and bound rationality theory to guide the study. This chapter also explained the rational for utilizing policy process analysis and case study methodology.

Included are the stakeholders, the methods data will be collected and analyzed, and the types of coding that will be used. Additionally, given my involvement in this policy process the role of an active participant was defined and explained.
Chapter 4: The Results

In this chapter the findings are presented and discussed. Included is the explanation of the analysis that was conducted. Demonstrating the connections with the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory and how the analysis ties back to the research questions.

RQ: How did the stakeholders navigate through the first three phases (initiation, estimation, and selection) of the policy process, as they work to decide whether to adopt the Texas Promise Program in El Paso?

• In the initiation phase, how do the stakeholders define and prioritize the problem?

• In the estimation phase, what are the perceived risks, costs, and benefits of adopting Texas Promise in El Paso?

• In the selection phase, what is each stakeholder willing to compromise, negotiate, and accommodate before they decide to adopt the Texas Promise?

Themes

The themes used for this study were pre-set from the literature review, the policy process framework, and bounded rationality theory (Ravindran, 2019). Using the deductive approach permits the researcher to apply pre-set themes (Ravindran, 2019). The initial number of pre-set themes was originally 25 themes. After comparing all the stakeholders’ responses for redundancy, a concise set of pre-themes was configured. Table 11 provides a preview of the nine themes that were used for this research.
Table 11
Policy Process Phases, Components, and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of phase</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation Phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Creative thinking about a problem</td>
<td>- Identify problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Definition of objectives</td>
<td>- Goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Innovative option design</td>
<td>- Identify stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tentative and preliminary exploration of concepts, claims, and possibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimation Phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Thorough investigation of concepts and claims</td>
<td>- Cost, benefit, risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Examination of impacts</td>
<td>- Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Examination of likely consequences.</td>
<td>- Values</td>
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<td>- Establishment of expected performance criteria and indicators</td>
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<td>Selection Phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Debate of possible options</td>
<td>- Negotiations</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Compromises, bargains, and accommodations</td>
<td>- Data &amp; Intuition</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reduction of uncertainty about options</td>
<td>- Decisions/nondecisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Integration of ideological and other nonrational elements of decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Decision among options</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Assignment of executive responsibility</td>
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Focused interview questions were derived using the policy process framework with bounded rationality as its theory (Ravindran, 2019). The interview questions were used to gather information regarding how they navigate the policy process and the connections between the policy process and bound rationality theory. The stakeholders’ words were coded and grouped into the pre-set themes.
All the interviews were transcribed manually by the researcher and uploaded into the NVivo 12 software. Coding using the In Vivo method “draws from the participant’s own language for codes” (Saldana, 2013, p. 84).

**Initiation Phase**

The initiation phase sets into motion the policy process. The need to solve a problem or problems, precipitates the policy process to address or solve the problems (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). There were three pre-set themes within the initiation phase: Identified Problems, Goals and Objectives, and Identify Stakeholders. Table 13 shows the number of times all four stakeholders discussed the pre-set themes within the interviews. There was a total of 12 interviews: three interviews per stakeholder.

**Table 12**

*Initiation Phase Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>How many times the theme was mentioned across all interviews</th>
<th>How many times it was mentioned by interview</th>
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<td>Identify Problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals &amp; Objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify Stakeholders</td>
<td>76</td>
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**Theme #1: Identify Problems**

A pre-set theme within the initiation phase was Identify Problems. Each of the stakeholders identified what they perceived to be the problems in the community that led to them seeking out the Promise program. As further analyses were conducted, two NVivo themes were merged into the Identified Problems theme: Factors that Perpetuate the Problems and Prioritized Problems. The pre-set themes of Factors that Perpetuate the Problems and Prioritized Problems
were initially added to the nodes in NVivo, however, the data showed that the stakeholders’ responses mimicked the Identified Problems theme. A component of the policy process involves the stakeholders prioritizing the identified problems (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). However, the analysis revealed that the identified problems had already been prioritized because of the stakeholders’ experience in their fields and the problems have endured for years in El Paso.

There were four main problems that were identified by all four stakeholders: students are not college ready, students are not completing post-secondary education, El Paso is lacking highly skilled workers, and poverty among Hispanics. The identified problems become interconnected, where one causes or perpetuates the other problems (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2006; Iceland, 2013; Milner, 2013; Reardon, 2013). A combination of the four problems were mentioned 96 times among the 12 interviews.

**Problem #1: Students Are Not College Ready**

El Paso needs to improve the quality of education, student academic attainment, and a higher quality workforce to be viewed as a competitive market among the state. Reported by TEA (2019), within the El Paso area, only 47.2 percent of Hispanics students were college ready. There is a perception of El Paso being “out of sight and out of mind [and] people in Texas imagine El Paso is on a different side of the planet” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Mr. Mata stated: “the main cause of such low achievement numbers, and we quickly came to the conclusion, is college readiness coming out of high school. It's the main cause” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

Mr. Ramos further explains:

I think one of the biggest problems is a lack of, perhaps, understanding that education and good quality education both at K through 12 and then leading into post-secondary is
something that really is the demarcation [metric] of individual opportunity and success. Understanding that really, in our society, as Americans and in El Paso particularly, the ability to do whatever it is you want to do really rests with the level of commitment you're willing to make to your educational preparation (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

Mr. Ramos continued by stating:

And people are always saying, how come we don't compete at this level? Well, it has a lot to do with our educational attainment and the other piece to that, unlike other market locations, we don't have a large influx of people coming in as people go out there. You go to Austin, you go to Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, there's constant movement of people coming in and out. We have a very low percentage of that, and so what I'm saying is that in those marketplaces, we know that they don't have the same level of educational attainment. They're ahead of us…. So, until we reach that level, we've got to home-grow our talent and do so at a much higher proficiency level than what we're doing at the present. We have a very small, a very dismal completion rate and that completion rate or our percentage of enrollment is higher than the rest of the state, but we do not complete. Our students do not complete on a timely basis or even in some instances on any basis (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

The literature aligns with the stakeholders’ views. Only 62.2% of high school students who graduate in the El Paso region are coded as College Ready by the state standards (TEA, 2020). As many as 68 percent of students require a remedial college course, indicating high school graduates are not college ready (Chen & Simone, 2016).

**Problem #2: Students are Not Completing Post-Secondary Education**

El Paso has a cultural mentality in some areas of the city that believe that post-secondary “is not necessarily for everybody, and so therefore they look at the idea that not everybody should be prepared for college” (David Ramos, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Javier Mata stressed the percentages of EC-12 and post-secondary completion rates especially among Latinos.

[W]e send more kids on to higher ed and it's always been, from the very beginning, somewhere between 55% and 60% of our 8th graders will go on to finish high school, then go on to college. We’re about 3% percentage points, not percent, percentage points better than the state average, year in, year out. On the other hand, we have the lowest college completion rate of any region in the state. It's the lowest. We're less than 20%,
and if you look at our low-income kids, they are lower than that. And if you look at our low-income males, they’re even lower than that. Our low-income male Latinos are at about 13%. Latino girls are about, right at our average, about 20%. How are we going to bring in industry and grow the economy if we have the lowest percentage of higher education degreed adults of any region in the state (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

Out of 100 Hispanic students, 86 of them do not attain a post-secondary degree (Paredes, 2016). In Region 19, El Paso area, out of the 11,848 2012 graduates, only 3,545 have obtained a post-secondary degree within eight years. Out of the 11,789 2013 graduates, only 3,187 obtained a post-secondary degree within eight years (TPEIR, 2020). The findings sustain the literature regarding students not obtaining a post-secondary degree.

Post-secondary enrollment is high, but wanes when it comes to completion. There needs to be an increase in the number of people that have the four-year degree to increase their earning potential. Additionally, the likelihood of upward mobility decreases when a student does not obtain a degree in post-secondary education (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2018).

**Problem #3: El Paso is Lacking Highly Skilled Workers**

Mr. Mata makes the connection between not obtaining a post-secondary degree and the types of employment available in El Paso.

Big economic engines, big companies, they see the data just as well as we do and then they see that we don't have a highly educated workforce. So regardless of all the other amenities, that's the key one when you give companies looking to commit, big tax breaks or any of the other stuff that they may get, it's they want to make sure they have an educated workforce if they're going to invest in the community (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020).

Dr. Gomez talked about the repercussions of not obtaining a post-secondary degree to secure a high wage job.

[W]e look at the workforce; our region is high tourism. And for [West County] ISD, I don't want our kids to be cooks. I want our kids to have, like I said, high wage, high demand, high skilled jobs. That's the way I envision really taking those high wage, high demand, high skilled jobs and making pathways for bringing in business partners to work
with our teachers and our kids (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021).

**Problem #4: Poverty Among Hispanics**

The connection between what the stakeholders said regarding the inequities among Hispanics, to include the high poverty rate, and literature is evident. Hispanics have higher rates of poverty, lower rates of academic achievement, and a lesser chance of increasing their socioeconomic status (Anyon, 2014; Cass, 2010; Reardon, 2013). The quote below is the Mr. Allen’s anecdote of what is perpetuating the problem. They explain that the Hispanic demographic has been “historically is left behind” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

My sisters are older than I am, and they're technically half-sisters, but I never understood that when I was a kid. We just grew up, and they're my sisters, they’re half Mexican. And their lives look very different than what my life looks like. I came from a lower middle class, working class family. I was a single dad in college. The percentages were against me, but there's no point at which my gender or the color of my skin was held against me. My sisters can't say the same thing and so I have always felt so compelled to do my part as one, from a privileged class who's picked himself up, yes, by the bootstraps, but again, a lot of things going for me that were not my doing, right. I'm not OK with that and I think we can make a difference and so it's really clear to me, especially now in this country with some of the things that we've seen over the last few years, I don't think from a racial equality standpoint, we as a country are where we thought we were (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Stakeholders were asked during their first interview if they believed the problems, they had identified had caused a crisis in the community. Crisis was defined as, in a state where change is imminently needed. Dr. Gomez believed that the problems were in such a state “because it deals with Mexicanos” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021).

The lack of change within the EC-12 educational systems was also perpetuating the problems. “It’s the same system over and over. There’s nothing really, holding, forcing us to
change” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). “Like I said, people like change without change” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021).

Mr. Ramos corroborates Dr. Gomez’s statements by stating “The older the system is, the more difficult it is for it to change and adapt because people get used to what they routinely do” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020).

In March of 2020, the country and world shut down due to the COVID19 pandemic. EC-12 schools and post-secondary institutions began teaching remotely. Without preparation, teachers were teaching and students were learning via a virtual learning environment. COVID19 has exposed El Paso’s inequalities regarding poverty, education, and virtual learning. Its effects will last several years; “going forward into 2022 and 2023 (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 20, 2020). We are “going to see a much higher percentage of [the] graduating class not ready. They're not going be ready because they didn't get their foundation in the 8th and 9th grade” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020). Even if the problems were not at a crisis level, the pandemic immediately changed that; “there's no other way than to characterize what we're going through right now as a crisis, I think the need is pronounced, and I don't think we fully have an understanding of what the scope of that need is (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Dr. Gomez asserts:

COVID is showing the inequities of our system. Kids are failing. Remotely or not remotely, they’re failing at a larger rate. Poverty has always been there, just never addressed. Kids have been poor for a while. I don't know if mom or dad are back there, or you're sharing your computer with your other siblings. Did you eat today? You see kids that are babysitting at home, little brothers and sisters that they have to feed them because mom and dad have to work. We haven't addressed their social needs, the poverty gap (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021).

The correlation between socioeconomics and achievement are supported by the literature. Low socioeconomic students, that statistically are minorities, have lower educational
achievements (Anyon, 2014; Downey et al., 2004; Duncan & Brook-Gunn, 2000; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Ladd, 2012; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Ravitch, 2013). This disparity of the achievement gap of Hispanic students, compared to those in the higher socioeconomic bracket has not improved (Berliner, 2006; Berliner, 2009; Downey et al., 2004, p. 633; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Valencia, 2015). The educational effects of COVID19 still remains to be seen in its full fruition.

Given the magnitude of the problems, the stakeholders did not minimize the effects the problems have had on the students in El Paso, but they remained committed to addressing those problems by their continued efforts to implement the Achieve Scholarship in El Paso.

Theme #2: Identify Stakeholders

The implementation of the Achieve Scholarship in El Paso was contingent on whether the stakeholders were willing to collaborate. During the early stages of the policy process the stakeholders needed to be identified (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

Community Council

The Community Council recognized the importance of stakeholder identification:

It's going to be very important because the other stakeholders, in part, are the beneficiaries of the effort, so we've identified them as the university, the El Paso Community College, and then of course the independent school districts. The nine independent school districts of our region that effectively are the suppliers for the most part of the students that attend those two institutions who could be and probably will be, direct beneficiaries of the scholarship structure and benefit (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

It should be noted that at the time of the interviews only two ISD’s had expressed interest in the Promise program; West County ISD was the only ISD actively attempting and reaching out to the Community Council to implement the scholarship. However, the Community Council had not started its official ISD recruitment efforts.
The Community Council had partnered up with Commit in Dallas and although not a stakeholder for the El Paso Achieve Scholarship, Commit has had much influence within the Community Council. Dr. Ban, Executive Director of Dallas Promise is also an executive for Commit (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). As the group evolved, this allowed them to prioritize the problems that were stated above. Mr. Ramos stated:

There are a couple of people and this was before we formed [Community Council] used to be another group in El Paso called the [Sun City] group and it had an education committee and through that education committee we got exposed to a few people that eventually were the founders of what became Commit. And then we had the same idea, same kind of thinking about how we can improve or what we need to do to improve, you know, an education. Originally, we focused on simply trying to get more students into college and so we were thinking dealing more with higher ed, as it turns out, overtime we came to recognize that we have to put the attention at K - 12 because of the remediation problem. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

**West County ISD**

As I started researching Texas Promise for Dr. Gomez, our primary concern was that it was each city’s responsibility to fund their own Promise program. I wanted to identify stakeholders who could fund the Promise program in El Paso. I had read about the Community Council, as they had already worked with several ISD’s throughout the county of El Paso on different projects. I did not have a contact until Texas Promise in Dallas, TX provided that information.

In addition to identifying the Community Council, Dr. Gomez “wanted a conglomerate of people” involved to include “Texas Workforce Commission, other legislators to be involved, wanted businesses to be involved, higher ed to be involved, parent groups to be involved, teachers’ associations to be involved… most importantly, that child to be involved. That’s the biggest thing, how do you get these kids investing in their lives” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2020).
The University

The Community Council reached out to Mr. Allen “right after [they] got here. It was maybe July or August [2020] …because they had this idea for the Achieve Scholarship” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Mr. Allen had only been in their current position at the University since May 2020, but understood the potential of the Achieve Scholarship, even though their department was under reconstruction as initiative from the new university president. When asked by the Community Council to become a stakeholder, this is how Mr. Allen responded:

They asked if we wanted to participate in this in this effort, which of course the answer is, absolutely we do. We are so far away from being able to have a full-fledged comprehensive fund-raising campaign. But under any set of circumstances, we can tell a compelling story of why student support matters, and no matter how it's structured, we need scholarship dollars. Like the desert needs the snow right now. (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

I really appreciate that they're modeling it after a successful program, but I also really appreciate some of the modifications they are aiming to make, to cater it specifically to what is going make the most difference here too, growing the workforce. But I mean, it's 100% mutually beneficial, and so I'm excited about what that can look like. (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Mr. Allen approaches identifying stakeholders differently for the scholarship program for the following reasons: became involved only five months ago, the University has a new president, and Mr. Allen is new to their position at the University. Their perspective is from a funding standpoint.

I think we're going to talk with Achieve about what the parameters are, what the initial opportunity is, find a donor who wants to do that, and then we can say, OK, we have something here to talk about. We know that it will work. What's the broader opportunity look like. And that's when we start engaging other partners. So again, on our side, I think we have access. There are a lot of different foundations, corporate and otherwise who might have an interest in this kind of project, but boy, we have a lot of donors who really want to help our students. And so, if we have a compelling message to bring to them. We want to make sure everybody understands what we're trying to do. (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021)
Given that the University was in the initial phase of the policy process, Mr. Allen would confer with the Community Council to ensure the right stakeholders are further identified. Mr. Allen’s preference would be to:

work with [the Community Council] to understand how to prioritize that list and who the right people are, going to talk with those groups, that has the best opportunity for success. I tend to take a bite size list and do a great job with that rather than kind of splash it all over. I mean there's any number of different partners that we've got. Donors all across the countries. People who graduated from [the University] and have never come back, but they really want to help our students. This is, from the business community designed, yes, to help the students but also to make sure that we have an educated workforce. (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021)

Theme #3: Goals and Objectives

The process of developing goal and objectives “is not easy”, however it does provide a clear purpose for the policy that is being considered (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 48). The goals and objectives set the foundation for the policy process (Brewer & deLeon, 1981). The stakeholders’ goals and objectives varied slightly, but everyone’s end goal was to see the students succeed. All the stakeholders were “focused on student success” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021). From the policy process framework analysis, goals and objectives do not need to be identical (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). “More often than not [the goals and objectives] overlap only in certain areas” (Brewer & deLeon, 1984, p. 50).

High Performing Seats, High Performing Schools

The stakeholders’ goals within the same organization, Community Council, also varied slightly, but ultimately, all their goals aligned to having “high performing seats, high performing schools” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020). That goal was mentioned 15 times by Mr. Ramos throughout the three interviews. The Community Council defines that goal as:
Seats capable and actually graduating a college-ready high school senior. Which to us is then translated to mean an individual can then matriculate into post-secondary education, complete that education within six years of that enrollment, and do so without remediation (David Ramos, personal communication, 1, October 19, 2020).

Dr. Gomez’s, West County’s Superintendent, actions align with the Community Council’s goal of high performing seats, high performing schools. West County ISD has partnered up with the Community Council, twice, prior to this Promise program. The first grant worked towards increasing the number of 8th graders taking Algebra I to 90 percent. “Typically, in El Paso, about 30 percent of the 8th graders take Algebra I” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). The second grant from the Community Council paid for West County ISD teachers to get their master’s degree. With a master’s degree, the teacher meets the criteria to teach a dual credit class (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021).

When a student takes an advance academic course, such as a dual credit class, that student is more likely to graduate high school college ready and not need remedial college courses (Bailey & Smith Jaggars, 2016; Valencia, 2015).

**Timely Completion and Remediation**

One of the objectives to achieve the “high performing seat, high performing schools” goal was timely completion of post-secondary education within six years. Mr. Mata stated the graduation rate for the university is “about 40 percent…taking six years. The community college, in three years, it’s about 33 percent. The goal is to get the graduation rate up to 60 percent by 2030” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). This is in line with 60x30TX (60x30TX, 2017).

A primary motivation for including the merit component in the Achieve Scholarship stems from “the track record for the completion rate after graduating is fairly robust” when
students take “dual credit courses. Statistically, the Meets and Master levels [on STAAR] are the ones that reflect a high proficiency in completing college” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

Mr. Mata stated, “if we get more of our kids achievement ready i.e. college ready with dual credit, algebra and English, then we see the potential for getting more graduates, at a higher percentage” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). When students are required to take remedial courses for post-secondary because students were not college ready, it delays graduation (Boatman & Long, 2018; National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2016). Mr. Ramos states: “our effort here is to eventually eliminate the need for any kind of remediation” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020).

The stakeholders’ responses align with the literature: 40 percent of students attending a four-year institution require at least one remedial class and 68 percent of students attending a community college require at least one remedial class (Chen & Simone, 2016; Boatman & Long, 2018). When students take remedial courses in post-secondary education, they are no longer on track to graduate with their cohort, extending the time it takes a student to earn a degree (Boatman & Long, 2018; Luna-Torres et al., 2018).

**Funding**

The success of the Achieve Scholarship is contingent on funding. It was not important to the stakeholders where the funds come from because the “biggest burden is having the resources to pay for [post-secondary], so that's what we're taking care of with Achieve” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020). Mr. Mata explains:

> If these organizations that provide lots of scholarships and adopt our achievement metrics, then our money can be combined with their money. We don't want credit for the name or the brand, but it would be called the McDonald's Achieve Scholarship. It could be called the New Car Dealers Achieve Scholarship, or it can be called the LULAC
Achieve Scholarship. Their company will still come first. We want them to get credit for it (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

The objective is “to meet a need for financial assistance to complete college for a majority of the student population that was going to college” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020). The funding goal is still evolving for all the stakeholders.

For Mr. Allen, who was only contacted by the Community Council in August 2020, has this to say:

My goals around that, right now, is probably a little too early in the process. Also, part of it is I don't really have any fundraisers. I just hired an associate vice president who started on Monday (1/25/2021) and so this person is going to help lead the development aspect, the arm of things. If it looks like we are on the same page about how to structure it, then we can start pulling information, pulling data and start having more focused conversations (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

With the onset of COVID19, the stakeholders have allowed for some flexibility regarding their timeline. At that time, the Community Council had one million dollars for the Achieve Scholarship, but “school districts will need to put up their six dollars per ADA (Average Daily Attendance). Then we’ll get the second million” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). Mr. Mata said “COVID could continue, and it could last 18 months. So, I don't want to put a time pressure on it right now, with all of the unknowns that we have” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

High Wage, High Demand, High Skilled Jobs

The Achieve Scholarship “really changes the focus beyond high school” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Dr. Gomez stated that “the one thing that I like about Texas Promise is the mobility” component (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Providing the opportunity for students to level-up their socio-economic status. Students need to be “marketable…helping them find a high wage, high demand, skilled job” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Dr. Gomez mentions the goal of
“high wage, high demand, skilled jobs” seven times in three interviews. That goal aligns with the Community Council’s goal, as well. Mr. Mata stated “we need a highly educated, technologically skilled workforce (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

Mr. Ramos confirmed by explaining:

Remember what we're trying to do is create a competitive positioning for this marketplace based on human talent, and to do that, if we got a majority of our talent that's at that college-ready level and can compete at that higher level of an educational attainment (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020).

The stakeholders were asked: What happens if these goals are not met? Dr. Gomez responded, “Kids fail. They don't go to that next tax bracket. It’s crucial that the goals be met” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Javier Mata answered “ultimately, if they're not met, our community loses. In terms of its economic development and creating a much higher educated competent workforce. We lose” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

**Estimation Phase**

The estimation phase is the continuance of the initiation phase. In this phase the stakeholders, using their values, conducted cost/benefits analysis to deduce the risks involved between the identification of the problem and the tentative solution, which in this study is the Achieve Scholarship (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Table 13 shows the number of times all four stakeholders discussed the pre-set themes within the 12 interviews.
### Table 13

*Estimation Phase Themes*

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<th>Theme</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
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### Theme #1: Values

It is the stakeholders’ values that advances the stakeholders through the estimation phase (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Values are an abstract construct and “policy is one concrete manifestation or embodiment of the collective perception” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 107). The stakeholders identified three values: student success, collaboration to address issues, and college readiness.

**Student Success**

Dr. Gomez stated that value of student success is achieved by adhering to the “culture of excellence, high expectations, student centered accountability and transparency” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021). West County ISD has established an expectation of student success before they were a superintendent:

> When I was a principal, I told staff I want 100% pass. They’d say that’s impossible. Well, are you going be that 1% that talks to that parent and that kid? When you go to combat you want 100% of your troops to come back. I don't want to give that American flag to that family or to that widow or to those kids. That's what it is. You're dealing with human lives. You got 91%, that's 9% that didn’t pass. What are we doing with that 9%? (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021)

Mr. Ramos believes that the Achieve Scholarship will provide an avenue for mutual commitment between the student and scholarship stakeholders:
There needs to be an understanding that in getting access to this kind of support systems, you need to apply yourself, you need to be prepared. You need to assure that you're going to complete, and you need to make a commitment to that end. It's not a situation of OK, well I'm going do this and if this doesn't work out, well, okay. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2021).

Mr. Allen, again, is in a unique position. Their involvement is relatively new and when asked what their values are regarding the Achieve Scholarship, they said this:

I don't know, at the moment. I can't list the values, but probably it's embedded in the mission statement. Now those are formal words that we spend time on. It's that time working together to come up with it. I think just the mantra, do right by our students, that has to be it. I think it's becoming more and more important that colleges do everything they can to do right by the students. The era of tough love or if they figure it out, they figure it out, that's long gone. We're trying to help everybody wants who wants this and who needs this. And so, I don't know if I can point to any value statement that is ingrained in our heads, but I believe that if you're working in higher education, in education at all, you're almost certainly not doing it for the money. You're in for the students, first and foremost. Yup, we also are working on research that creates knowledge, but we understand our institution, is in it for the students. I have been at institutions where I think they put the research mission ahead of the student success mission. This is not one of those institutions. It's not that hard for us to understand what our actual job is and it's making sure that we're doing right by the students. (Todd Allen, February 3, 2021)

**Collaboration to Address Issues**

The stakeholders acknowledge that the Achieve Scholarship is mutually beneficial. The immediate beneficiaries are the students who receive the scholarship throughout their college career, however, many of the stakeholders are also “effectively beneficiaries of the system, in the sense that we employ people, or we work with people that become recruited out of the school systems, eventually, so we got a vested interest to get the highest quality period” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020).

Working in collaboration with the stakeholders who are part of the school systems and the workforce to provide insight to address and respond to the problems. There is a temptation to blame each other for the problems that were identified; EC-12 could blame the parents, post-
secondary could blame EC-12, the workforce could blame the post-secondary, and the degreed students could blame the workforce for not importing or creating financially substantial jobs in El Paso. Mr. Ramos stated:

That's mainly the reason why we came together. We needed to figure out how we solve this issue now. We constructively solve it and then create structures that allow over time for those solutions to sustain themselves just so that we don't find ourselves 25 years later and another group of leaders are getting together and saying, you know what, this isn't working, what can we do to fix this problem? (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020)

**College Readiness**

College readiness is a sentiment that is repeated in multiple sections. It is a major component of the Achieve Scholarship. The literature review addresses the low percentages regarding student college readiness (TPEIR, 2020). High school students need to take advance courses to increase the likelihood of being college ready. Students who take advance classes tend to score higher in state assessments (Ladd, 2012; Downey et al., 2004). The Meets and Masters level on the STAAR state assessment are significant indicators of college readiness. Mr. Mata stated:

The key here, to the Promise Program to make it successful is the college readiness of the student. So, what initiatives can we support to make more students college ready. Like, training more teachers to teach dual credit. Double dose in algebra while in high school. Helping pay for summer TSI academies, so that students get some upfront training for when they take the TSI exam because most of the time they take it cold. So, any kind of college readiness initiative, we'll support. As long as we can see that there's a connection to college readiness and higher outcomes, we'll support it. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020)

The stakeholders believe that even if their values are not identical, they do overlap, and ultimately do share the same values.
Theme #2: Costs and Benefits

Part of the purpose of the estimation phase is to lessen the uncertainties of considering a policy as a solution for an identified problem (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). That process requires the stakeholders to identify the costs and benefits. Mr. Mata reiterates this notion of conducting a cost benefit analysis with any new program:

What's the track record of those initiatives? We have to do our homework and our own research. We've looked at a lot of different programs over the last five years, and many, many of them come with very high praise of them. But when we start to look deep, and we unpeel this onion. We do critical review and look for certain things with similar demographics, similar income of students that they're serving. So, we do a lot of needs assessment of any new initiatives and if it shows promise, then we're going to look at it very strategically. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Costs and Risks

Implementing the Achieve Scholarship carries a risk for all the stakeholders. Mr. Ramos stated the “the risks are like any other well-intentioned program, it doesn't accomplish what it sets out to do” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020). Another risk is if students “don't fulfill the objectives of the scholarship” because the scholarship was not adequately funded (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020). Mr. Allen shares, “I think there's a risk that money runs out and that's a deep concern of mine” (Todd Allen 4, personal communication, February 3, 2021). Mr. Allen 1 explains the cost:

You got to raise the money to be able to then fund the scholarship opportunity. So, the costs are significant in the sense that anytime you try to reach at the philanthropy commitment, particularly in our region, it becomes a big challenge because there's usually a handful of resources that we go to, to be able to try and raise the money. It's not to say that they’re the only ones that are here. We just have to dig deeper into the resource, into the vein that's there, the potential givers who just are never usually out, get the outreach and are not tapped. So, a program like this will require us to try to figure out who can we reach out to, in addition to the ones that are identified. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020)
The stakeholders are willing to take on any initial costs that was presented because the cost of not implementing the Achieve Scholarship could be much higher. The greater risk is not “pushing against the establishment. Keeping the current norm.” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021). When Mr. Mata was asked about the costs, they did not address it directly, instead they responded by saying this:

We live nationwide in one of the bottom 5 metroplexes from an economic point of view. We'll never get out of that unless we have a much higher educated workforce. So, we’re willing to invest into programs that will give us greater output in terms of students being ready to go to college. That's the only thing that's going to attract new business, which is going to improve the economics of our city and the quality of life for everyone, and that's our hope, to be able to do that. Without that, we're going stay an economically poor community. Of course, they'll always be some small percentage of very well-off people, and then there will be another band of well-off people and this band is mostly educators, relative to where they are in the city, and then everybody else is poor. And so, we can’t improve that unless we get more people coming out with higher education degrees, and that's how we will meet or begin to get better or closer to the 60x30 plan of the state. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020)

The stakeholders were also asked: At what point do the costs outweigh the benefits? Mr. Ramos summarized:

If we can’t grow the economy to absorb the talent and to use the talent, then it's not a cost, because when you educate a person and you give them a skill set, even if they just decide not to stay here, that still an addition to your society, even if it's not in your back door, so it's not, to me, a wasted effort by any stretch of the imagination. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23,2020)

Benefits

If through the implementation of the Achieve Scholarship and accomplishing what the stakeholders intend, the “benefits are obvious” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). It benefits the students, and it benefits the community. The students graduate post-secondary highly skilled and “they could be a productive member of the workforce (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). And ultimately, “move a kid up the socio-economic ladder” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021). Mr. Ramos stated:
[We] will be graduating very qualified individuals in demand occupations, whether in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, business, education, which is where we think that's where the demand is in this economy. They'll begin to fill in the positions that perhaps employers in the region have gotten used to recruiting outside our region to be able to fill. [Students] can stay here and have an opportunity here and not give up something in order to stay here, versus going someplace else. Then that increases the competition, which in theory should then improve the quality and capability and the skill sets and all of a sudden, you're off on a different track than what we did for the last 50 to 60 years. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020)

**Theme #3: Funding**

It is the stakeholders’ responsibility to fund the Achieve Scholarship and as such, funding, was a prominent theme. Funding was discussed, in the section above, as it pertained to the Goals and Objectives themes. The analysis pertaining to funding are the evidence as to how the stakeholders will fund the program and the impact of not being able to fund the scholarship can have. The stakeholders acknowledge the ramification if the funds are not secured. Mr. Ramos stated, “if we don’t raise the amount of money that we were targeting, that means that we're not going to have the same kind of impact that we want to have” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020). The Community Council wanted to be able to, with statistical probability, to ensure future philanthropists their monies “actually accomplishes what we want it to. Because that's the biggest challenge of any philanthropy” (Javier Mata, personal communication, October 19, 2020).

To entice philanthropist to contribute to the Achieve Scholarship, the Community Council wants to incentivize donating funds by attaching the philanthropist’s name to the scholarship, if the funder requests. “The funders gets the credit, they get to use their philanthropy dollars, and we give them the conduit to make it happen in the fashion that they want. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 19, 2020). Mr. Ramos posits:

I'm not going try and suggest to you that it's going be an easy thing to get done, but we think that it's important enough that we need to make this effort and we're hopeful that in
the next four to five months, as we begin the actual fundraising conversations that we’ll be able to make enough of the case that will gain attention, traction, and I think once a few of these scholarships get awarded and it can track it. Hopefully, that'll give people even better example of how this is going to work and how effective it can be. (David Ramos, personal conversation, October 19, 2020)

Texas Promise in Dallas has a “foundation with $52,000,000 in it. So, resources for them are a non-issue. For us, it's a very significant issue. Even though we're making progress, but it's a significant issue.” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020). Currently the scholarship fund has one million dollars and an “anonymous donor through [the University] has already matched our one million a year” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 20, 2020). The Community Council will continue to fund the one million dollars for the next ten years “for match money” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). With two million dollars and the “commitment over a 10-year period, so there's a sustainability factor” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020).

The Community Council’s expectation from each stakeholder is to contribute to the scholarship fund. EC-12 school districts will be required to contribute a small amount, approximately six dollars per Average Daily Attendance (ADA). This type of funding has been approved through the Texas Attorney General’s opinion:

If you have a partner with a higher ed institution and a matching community organization, on these bases and if it falls within the mission of the school, IE, getting more kids to be college ready, you set an academic requirement for it. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020)

Mr. Mata explains that, in collaboration with all the other districts and post-secondary institutions, the scholarship can relieve the burden of financing post-secondary education. This is the Community Council’s plan:

We're going to go to the superintendents and school boards and say, if every school district puts up their share. Each school district would have to put up six dollars per ADA. That'll equal to one million dollars that could be matched up with our million.
What we see from the data, is that if we can put together somewhere between two and half million to three million overall, each year, that will be able to serve any high school graduate that has 12 hours or more with a 3.0 GPA, that has family income, middle level income for our community between $40,000- $65,000, be able to serve them all. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020)

West County ISD, from the beginning, asserted they would implement a version of the Promise program whether they found an outside funder or not. When I presented Dallas Promise to the school board, it was presented as the program is currently designed in Dallas, which did not include the EC-12 school districts contributing financially to the scholarship.

When Dr. Gomez and I were certain that the Community Council would manage the financial component of the scholarship, that alleviated some of the pressure. Dr. Gomez, through our meetings with the Mr. Ramos, understood that the Community Council “wants from [West County ISD] some monetary input” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021). And as such, “we need to go back to the board if you’re going to allocate money or something like this. (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021).

Dr. Gomez was willing to wait on the implementation of the Promise program because the “[Community Council] is the main fund, the purse, if you will. So, you want to make sure that they have their system and structures in place before you start taking time” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021). Mr. Mata affirmed they “had conversations with two of the ISD’s: [West County ISD] and Socorro. And [West County ISD] was ready to go” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 20, 2020).

The University has restructured itself to make “fund raising a huge priority” for further advancement and progress from the “status quo to excellence” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Mr. Allen is confident the University “can spend [the funds]
in a way that's going to be meaningful” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

“Student success has to be” at the center of the “fundraising piece”, Mr. Allen affirmed (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). Partnering up with the Community Council was viewed as an “opportunity” because they are a “group in town where there might be a matching gift opportunity. It's our top priority and it can provide an incentive for even more money to go to our students” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). Though committed to fundraising, the University acknowledges that even a small amount of fundraising will make a difference:

[The University president] says this often, and I think it really resonates, people ask her all the time if five-hundred dollars is really going to make a difference and she says, well, yeah, to that student who doesn’t have five-hundred dollars, it’s going to make a world of difference. It might mean them getting a degree or not. (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021)

Selection Phase

In the selection phase the stakeholders make a decision to move forward with implementation of the Achieve Scholarship or not. The stakeholders collaborate, accommodate, and compromise to negotiate the rules of the program (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Using data and heuristics, the stakeholders made the decision to implement the Achieve Scholarship in El Paso. Table 14 show the number of times all four stakeholders discussed the pre-set theme within the 12 interviews.
Table 14
Selection Phase Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>How many times the theme was mentioned across all interviews</th>
<th>How many times it was mentioned by interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiations</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data &amp; Intuition</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Theme #1: Negotiations**

The stakeholders understand the importance of negotiations amongst each other. Calling it a “critical step in the process” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). Negotiation talks require flexibility and being able to accommodate the other stakeholders without there being a “conflict in [their] philosophy” or “destroying the objective” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Communication allows for the stakeholders to “take into account their feedback on what they would like to see in the process” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). Dr. Gomez explained:

> It's really important because what you want to do is create that dialogue. So, rather than debate and wanting to win, the negotiations allows you to see others different points of view. So, you’re not necessarily negotiating, you really want to create dialogue and you want people to give you, the good, the bad, the ugly. Let's make sure that you're on target, because it's never, my idea, it’s our idea, because they are our kids. (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021)

**Timely Completion**

The stakeholders from the Community Council, throughout the negotiations were trying to “establish a norm” of “timely completion” of post-secondary education (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020). This is defined as completing a four-year baccalaureate level university within six years or two years for an associate’s degree. Another
norm the Community Council stakeholder wished to standardize was achieving “high performing seats” in EC-12 (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020).

**EC-12 ISD’s**

West County ISD is in different position than the other ISD’s in El Paso County. The school district has been a stakeholder since February 2019 and has proactively searched out the Promise program. The other ISD’s have not reached out to the Community Council about the Promise program. Seeking out and negotiating with the other ISD’s will require:

A deeper conversation than we’ve had with the University or with El Paso Community College because I think in some respects the ISD’s will suggest to us that perhaps their mission is a bit wider than just simply college readiness, even though, the state is sending a clear signal that is paramount because the nature of economic demand and just the economic landscape. And, of course, 60x30. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020)

To become a stakeholder the ISD’s need to make a two-fold commitment: accept the “merit and the financial matching piece” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 20, 2020). Regarding the financial component, Mr. Ramos explains:

We think there should be some skin in the game, that the ISD’s are not just graduating students. But that they're putting some money into the process and we don't think it should be a lot of money, but we think it should be some money. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020)

Before the Community Council had announced the merit component to the Achieve Scholarship, Dr. Gomez wanted the students to have some accountability as well. The Community Council had some members give scholarship monies in the past without a merit component. Dr. Gomez explained: “They were giving all these kids money, but there was no commitment from them. If you give a kid this scholarship and they, for whatever reason, don't go
through with it, I want something in my investment (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021).

**Post-Secondary**

Mr. Allen, with the University, when first approached by the Mr. Ramos, from the Community Council stated that initially was there some misconceptions regarding the merit component of the Achieve Scholarship. Mr. Allen was still willing to work with Mr. Ramos but wanted to continue the negotiations. After further conversations Mr. Allen realized the wording of the criteria was different than what was originally thought. Mr. Allen reported: “Now that I understand the criteria was not ‘and’ but ‘or’…this partnership is going be really great” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021).

The second negotiation piece, for the University, was the rigidity of the language as it pertained to “high demand career fields in STEM” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Mr. Allen continued by stating, “we're going to be able to help students, but we want to characterize things as broadly as possible” (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Stakeholder provides an example:

> [The Community Council] doesn’t list nursing, but boy, that's a very high demand career field. It's not technically STEM. So when we talk to the people from Achieve, they say, well, yes of course, let's define that as broadly as possible. (Todd Allen, personal communication, January 26, 2021)

With those clarifications the University is waiting on a draft of the MOU. “I don’t expect there to be any changes” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 10, 2021).

**Theme #2: Data and Intuition**

The stakeholders used data and intuition to make decisions regarding the Achieve Scholarship. Data and intuition are key components in the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory. All the stakeholders viewed data in a similar manner: “data first”,

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“really critical”, “prominent role” and “accountability”. Three of the stakeholders’ view of intuition and its role in decision making was similar. Mr. Mata, the data director for the Community Council, pushed against relying on intuition. The determinant factor, according to Mr. Mata, is the data component.

Data and Decisions

The function of data is significant for all four stakeholders when it pertains to making decisions. Mr. Allen stated, “we don't make any significant decision without data” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 10, 2021). Mr. Ramos explained how data was used to make decisions about the Achieve Scholarship:

Data is really critical. We like to think that all of our thinking and investment call are based on data. Now you need to balance the data. Be balanced about what the data is telling you because data is data. It was through our analysis of where we stood in terms of performance, in terms of completion rates, in terms of 8th graders that went through all high school and then go on through college and the number of them who actually, within six years, graduated from college and how that plays into our Hispanic demographics. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020)

Mr. Allen also explains the relationship between data and decision-making:

[The University] has great access to make meaning of numbers. What I have personally experienced is that we don't even think about trying to make a decision, if and when there's data available to analyze first. It's just not strategic and we have a good benefit of having a lot of really smart people here who can help us make better decisions. (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021)

All the stakeholders were asked: How do you reconcile not being able to have all the data or information before making a decision and moving forward with any program?

Mr. Ramos, Dr. Gomez, and Mr. Allen stated that a “balance” or “protocols” involving data are necessary to avoid “analysis paralysis” because they do not have the “clearest picture” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020; Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021; Todd Allen, personal communication, February 10, 2021). As humans, if “systems or structures” are not in place we may not want to make a decision “because
there is a little bit more information you could have” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020; Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021).

Mr. Mata, data director, explained data can inevitably be collected in response to the question above.

Thankfully, we've not been in that position very often. I can only recall maybe once or twice that we didn't have the data, so we slow down. Slow down and wait to see if we can get there. There's always some way to get to data in any state about any school district. Every state has their TEA. So, there's always a way to get to data and we take our time to do that. Once we have a significant amount of data, then we have a full discussion about that and it comes down to, here's the data if they can show you better data than this. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Mr. Allen’s perspective is different from the other stakeholders. Their job is getting data and to deviate from that would mean they are not doing their job.

*Intuition and Decisions*

Intuition in decision-making goes by many names: gut-feeling, heuristics, experience, mental-shortcuts, creativity. When attached to bounded rationality theory there is an awareness of the human cognitive limits (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). There is a denseness in the policy process decision-making. Using intuition assists in confirming the data to make the best decision. Mr. Allen stated “data can’t tell the whole story. Sometimes you gotta feel it; that gut intuition” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021).

The stakeholders noted that intuition comes many forms. Dr. Gomez stated intuition is “based on things that you've experienced or things that you've seen, or things that you know. A repertoire of one’s toolbox” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, February 3, 2021).

Mr. Ramos defined how intuition is used in decision-making:

There's obviously an emotional quotient component involved. I would describe it as more like a judgment or an assessment based on experience and what the likelihood is driven by, of course, the data so I think for the most part unless you're talking about a mathematical output or a measurement output, because it's a finite component, you're
always going to have some semblance of judgment in how you assess how you implement. But by putting the criteria that we put in place, I think it reduces the prospects of invoking judgment when in fact you're using a qualitative standard instead of a quantity. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 30, 2020)

Decisions cannot be made entirely without emotional factors, intuition, or gut-feelings. Dr. Gomez, using his decision-making toolbox, based on experience and self-improvement to mitigate the reliance of intuition, knowing you can only do so much because humans are emotional beings.

Have a toolbox to do as much as possible to get you away from the ego and the emotion behind when you make a decision. Because every decision you make and every non-decision you make have consequences. It’s the third law of thermodynamics; every action has a reaction. (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021)

Mr. Mata, whose occupation is data, acknowledged decision-makers use intuition or heuristics, in conjunction with data. They stated: “we’re human beings. We can never get away from that totally, but wouldn't weigh that heavily. I wouldn't make that the dealmaker” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 20, 2020).

Theme #3: Decisions

The decision’s theme pertains to the protocols within their organizations at it relates to decision-making. All the stakeholders want to be “part of the solution. We can’t sit on the sidelines” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021)

Community Council

Mr. Ramos and Mr. Mata are board members of the Community Council. While working on the Promise program that evolved into the Achieve Scholarship, Mr. Ramos and Mr. Mata “were a two-man team. It's a very collaborative process” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 6, 2020). Both stakeholders gathered information and data regarding the Promise program. Prior to presenting the Promise program they “tried to establish the criteria for why we
would make an investment in a particular program” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020). The next stage involved defining the type of scholarship the El Paso Promise program would become: needs based or needs and merit based. Mr. Ramos stated,

As a group, we decided that merit side needed to be incorporated because that game is confidence and it would get a higher likelihood at the beneficiaries of the scholarship, the student, would actually accomplish what they were being supported to do, getting their degree, fulfilled their professional track, whatever it might be. (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020)

The Community Council procedural process started with Mr. Ramos and Mr. Mata gathering information and data. Then they outsourced having the data “packaged” to make it presentable to the Community Council’s Executive Committee then presented to the Community Council’s Board. Mr. Mata explained the process:

We presented it to the Executive committee at least four times now, we got their feedback, went back and took a look at their issues. Made the necessary changes. Clarified the information and things like that. Then ultimately it went to the board three times; two for information and one for approval. So, we know it's been really vetted now at this point. (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020)

**West County ISD**

Within the school district, the West County School Board members are the policy makers. The superintendent’s “job is to recommend” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). On July 16, 2019 the Texas Promise program was approved by the School Board, but as a needs-based scholarship because at that point the Community Council had not added the merit component or the financial component.

Dr. Gomez was asked why they thought the other ISD’s had not been as proactive in seeking out a program such as Texas Promise, but they were. Dr. Gomez stated:

I’m very progressive. I want results. If you have something different, let's talk. I follow research but, what is the research that supports this method. I mean, our schools are laboratories. Also, the board is from [West County], born and raised and they want [West County], not to be on the map, but provide kids a future. Something and not just talk.
As a result of the Community Council’s additions to the Achieve Scholarship, Dr. Gomez was asked the following question:

We presented to the Board and the Board approved Texas Promise, but since [the Community Council] has renamed the Promise program for El Paso to Achieve and added some different metrics to it or criteria, would you or I have to go back to the Board to present the new version because of the changes?

Dr. Gomez responded:

Yes, I mean you would want to do that just for transparency and accountability. Because what you don't want them to say is this isn't what you presented. You want to be very open and honest to say, hey, we presented this, however, after getting [Community Council] to analyze what Dallas was doing in Tennessee, they wanted to make their own changes and they brought it here. (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 21, 2021)

The University

Mr. Allen has the authority to make decisions regarding with which scholarships to implement at the University. Although, they have decision-making authority the first meeting with the Community Council included four members of the Community Council and three employees of the University. Mr. Ramos and Mr. Allen were present for the initial meeting. The subsequent meetings were between Mr. Ramos and Mr. Allen. Mr. Allen has recently hired a new associate vice president who has started to attend the meetings with Mr. Ramos and Mr. Allen. Mr. Allen explained the next steps:

We just are trying to make sure that we understand what each other is saying about the fund-raising initiative attached to it. We've got the criteria for the scholarship hammered out and that's what I needed. Now we're trying to understand, make sure that we understand the fundraising component, the different responsibilities. So, the conversations have been great. I mean, we're both trying to achieve the same thing. We speak a different language and we're trying to try to make sure that those mesh up. I'm feeling no tension or pressure whatsoever. We're doing nothing, but trying to help each other. (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 10, 2021)

Mr. Allen has decided to move forward with implementing the Achieve Scholarship at
the University. The University has enough information and data to make an official decision. Mr. Allen did have any reservations or concerns regarding the Achieve Scholarship.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 incorporated the results of the analysis, answered the research questions, and established the association between the analysis and the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory. This study consisted of four stakeholders who are leaders within their organizations and have at least 10 years’ experience in either EC-12 or post-secondary education. Each stakeholder was interviewed three times. The interview questions were organized to answer the questions of how the stakeholders navigate through the policy process and allowing for analysis of the first three phases of the policy process framework.

Descriptive coding and In Vivo coding were used to aid in organizing and preparing for the analyze of the data. Using the deductive approach, nine pre-set themes were used and organized through the NVivo 12 Software: (a) Identify problems, (b) Goal and objective, (c) Identify stakeholders, (d) Cost, benefit, risks, (e) Funding, (f) Values, (g) Negotiations, (h) Data and Intuition, (i) Decisions/Non-Decisions.

Utilizing the themes above, the stakeholders navigated the policy process by identifying and recognizing the importance of those themes that aligned with the policy process framework and bounded rationality theory. Chapter 5 will include the further analysis of the themes as they relate to the framework and theory.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative policy process case study was to document the process of establishing and describing how the program’s stakeholders navigate, collaboratively, through the policy process of deciding whether to adopt a version of the Promise program in El Paso. The policy process for the Promise program was initiated by four main problems in El Paso, TX: low graduation rates, students not being college ready, not having the financial resources to pay for post-secondary education, and not finding high skilled jobs. This then exacerbates the high poverty rate in El Paso.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the significant findings as it corresponds to the literature and with the problems stated above. The connections between the policy process framework and what the stakeholders revealed through their policy process of the Promise program will also be discussed. Then the decision-making process as it relates to heuristics will be asserted. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and future research.

This chapter also contains further discussion on the research questions:

RQ1: How does each stakeholder navigate collectively through the first three phases (initiation, estimation, and selection) of the policy process, as they work to decide whether to adopt the Texas Promise Program in El Paso?

Brewer & deLeon’s (1983) policy process framework consist of six phases. This study covered the first three phases. The stakeholders navigated through the initiation phase, estimation phase, and selection phase. The nine pre-set themes were identified in conjunction with the characteristics of each phase of the policy process. The results of this study align with the
literature regarding: the phases of the policy process, decision-making processes, and the “why” the stakeholders collaborated to address the issues.

**Discussion of Findings**

The research findings are consistent with the literature associated with the policy process framework. Weible et al. (2012) stated that the policy process is the “study of change and development of policy and the related actors, events, and contexts” (p. 3). In this study the four stakeholders navigate through the first three phases of the policy process to initiate change by deciding to implement a Promise program, the Achieve Scholarship. The primary research question was divided into three sub-questions, each link to the first three phases of the policy process: initiation phase, estimation phase, and selection phase.

**Policy Process Framework**

The purpose to the policy process framework is to have a “sequence of functional phases” (Brew & deLeon, 1983; Olsen, 2003, p.356). It is considered a template, for the analyst, to organize information from different stakeholders to identify and recognize the interconnections and interdependencies (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).

The stakeholders did navigate through all three phases. Although, there is a sequence of phases that does not mean that the stakeholder cannot go back to a previous phase (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). This occurred when Dr. Gomez, superintendent of West County ISD, and I presented to the school board for approval of the Promise program. That phase is considered the selection phase, as it was the decision to implement a new policy. However, when it became known that the Community Council had added the merit and funding component, Dr. Gomez returned to the estimation phased to reevaluate if the school district’s values and cost/benefit analysis were still aligned to the Achieve Scholarship.
Additionally, not all stakeholders are at the same phase, at the same time. They have different timelines. Mr. Ramos, Mr. Mata, and Dr. Gomez initiated the policy process in early 2019. Mr. Allen began the policy process in September of 2020. While Mr. Ramos, Mr. Mata, and Dr. Gomez were in the estimation phase, gathering data, Mr. Allen was in the initiation phase. The policy process framework is not rigid, its function is to monitor forward progress (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Table 15 is a visual representation of each stakeholder’s phase position within the policy process between February 2019 to February 2021. The table does not show the start of COVID19, as it slowed the policy process.

**Table 15**  
*Policy Process Timeline for Each Stakeholder by Phase*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D.R.</th>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Estimation</th>
<th>Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J.M.</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Estimation</td>
<td>Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Estimation</td>
<td>Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.A.</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Estimation</td>
<td>Selection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Note.* Number represents the four stakeholders.

*Initiation Phase*

In the initiation phase, the stakeholders identify the problems that provoke the need for a new policy (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). As Brewer and deLeon (1983) explained, and such was the case with this study, the stakeholders did not dispute the existence of the problems. Though there were slight variations of the problems. The result sought to provide students with an opportunity to achieve success, academically and financially, in El Paso.
In the process of identifying other stakeholders, each of them is attempting to influence the perception of the other (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). While Dr. Gomez acknowledged that timely completion of post-secondary, a high value priority for the Community Council, is statistically low, it was not the main problem for the EC-12 superintendent. However, after the August 21, 2019 and January 13, 2020 meetings, Dr. Gomez agrees with the Promise Scholarship criteria, because their values and goals of student success were still a high priority. Additionally, Dr. Gomez understood the district’s position given that the Community Council held the majority of the funds for the scholarship. This did not mean they were willing to compromise their values (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021).

*Estimation Phase*

The estimation phase is the continuation of the initiation phase (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). A simplification process occurs in the estimation phase. It is a complex social system with many variables. Though complex, the process is important because it promotes understanding of the policy that is decided upon (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Stakeholders identify their values, conduct cost/benefits analysis, and sift through multiple interpretations to simplify the process (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Dr. Gomez stated “we’re trying to find rationality in complex systems. So, I turned it into a word: simplicity; simple and complex. We try to make it simple and so we try to find the answers, to make sense (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021).

*Selection Phase*

The selection phase is the culmination of the first two phases; however, the negotiations continue. Stakeholders need to decide to what point they are willing to compromise or accommodate another stakeholder. A consensus needs to be reached (Brewer & deLeon, 1983).
The predominant discussion point among the stakeholders was the funding component of the Achieve Scholarship. Mr. Ramos and Mr. Mata, the Community Council, will have two million dollars by the time the scholarship is implemented. Dr. Gomez, the superintendent, was willing to accept the Community Council’s criteria of contributing six dollars per ADA, pending the approval of the school board. In the estimation phase, Dr. Gomez had inquired about the possibility of requiring students to pay back some portion of the scholarship if the student stopped attending post-secondary courses. They wanted the students to have buy-in and accountability. Ultimately, the Achieve Scholarship does not have that requirement, but the stakeholders believe that the merit component statistically increased the probability of students completing post-secondary education within a six-year timeline.

Mr. Allen, the University, was eager to join the stakeholders. The University, with the new president, has prioritized fundraising. Mr. Allen was willing to compromise on some of the criteria. Specifically, the amount of credit hours the student needs to take to qualify for the Achieve Scholarship. Students are required, by the scholarship criteria, to take 30 credit hours a year. The University considers 24 credit hours, full time. Dr. Gomez is aware that many of the students also work while attending the University. When Mr. Allen relayed this information to the Community Council, they rebutted by stating that the students would not need to work because the scholarship would be paying for their courses. Mr. Allen was willing to accept the criteria and monitor that component and would revisit that point if students begin to struggle with that criteria. None of the stakeholders stated they felt they had compromised their values for the Achieve Scholarship.

In the selection phase, the stakeholders have the data needed to decide whether to implement the Achieve Scholarship or not. Brewer & deLeon (1983) stated that there is a
balance between the technical and the emotional or ideological. They defined it as, “thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and conduct of the human being; technical information refers to the material and measurable aspects of an issue” (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, p. 183). Humans, as Brewer & deLeon (1983) stated are “not immune to emotional factors” (p. 183). All the stakeholders acknowledge and accept that aspect of the emotional human being: we are not detached from our emotions. Mr. Ramos, Dr. Gomez, and Mr. Allen view the emotional component differently from Mr. Mata, the data director. Mr. Ramos, Dr. Gomez, and Mr. Allen consider the intuitive, gut-feeling as an advantage to create a clearer picture of the situation before making a decision. Mr. Ramos does not want to discourage the intuitive part of decision-making because “it's through that intuitive base that we adapt and we get creative, that we think about things that otherwise won't appear on a piece of paper in a textbook” (David Ramos, personal communication, October 23, 2020). Dr. Gomez explains how they balance data and intuition:

> You want the data to always put you in check, regardless of what you think because now the data is telling you a picture of where you are and that's part of that self-reflection piece. And that's part of mindfulness, you don't label the data as good or bad. Data is, what data is. (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021)

For Mr. Allen, data plays a “prominent role” in decision-making. They do not encourage people to make decisions “based on gut, if there are numbers available. It's just not strategic” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). Mr. Allen also explained that sometimes “data cannot tell the whole story” (Mr. Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). A situation can arise where the data is similar when comparing two programs or people for a position. Both people can have similar experiences and come highly recommended. Mr. Allen stated that a decision is made based on the initial data and “who do you connect with the best” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, February 3, 2021).
Mr. Mata, the data director, consciously, works to eliminate as much as the emotional component in decision-making as possible. They stated, “there's always some way to get to data” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020). If data is not available or access is difficult, then the process needs to slow down, until the data is available. This type of situation rarely occurs (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 13, 2020). Mr. Mata eventually conceded: “We’re human beings. You can never get away from that totally, but I wouldn't weigh that heavily. I wouldn't make that the dealmaker. The merits are the dealmakers” (Javier Mata, personal communication, November 20, 2020). In full disclosure, I had to ask Mr. Mata, three times about intuition. The third follow-up question was: Are you saying that is it best to not use emotional factors when making decisions? After this question, they responded with above statement.

**Bounded Rationality**

Bounded rationality is a theory of decision-making under the premise that rationality is finite (Simon, 1990). This is not to insinuate that human decision-making is non-rational (Simon, 1990). Humans have limited cognition. We are limited in time, resources, experience, and knowledge. However, that is not to insinuate the absence of rationality (Simon, 1990; Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Weible et al, 2012). Information is processed and problems solving is still necessary (Jones & Thomas, 2012). All the stakeholders acknowledge this presupposition. It is through their vast knowledge and experience that the stakeholders can accept their limitations and use them towards their advantage.

Heuristics is a term used with bounded rationality (Simon, 1957). To optimize decision-making, humans consciously acquire “mental short-cuts” through their experiences (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Jones, 2002; Weible et al., 2012; Simon, 1990, p. 92). Dr. Gomez makes a
conscious effort to build-up their “repertoire of one’s toolbox” (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 28, 2021). They accomplish this by reading books on leadership, management, wisdom, thinking, and on speaking with impact. The stakeholders were all making decision from the inception of this policy process. They relied on their experience in education, whether EC-12 or post-secondary, to utilize the mental short-cuts.

Mr. Allen is cognizant of becoming “paralyzed by not having the clearest picture” (Todd Allen, personal communication, February 3, 2021). This is to mean, not having all the desired data or information and suspending the forward progress. Mr. Allen provided the example of misunderstanding the scholarship criteria, initially, and concerned that the number of students who would qualit for this scholarship would be minimal. Given their experience in scholarship fundraising in post-secondary education, they knew how to make the decision to move forward. They were willing to accept the criteria, knowing they could review the criteria the next year and still have the monies available for future students. Following another meeting with Mr. Ramos, Mr. Todd receive the clarification, and the concern was eliminated.

Despite Mr. Mata’s analytic decision-making process and their efforts to strive for more data to do more analyses, they rely on their 40-year experience in education. As a result, they are able to make decisions based on data, but also wielding their experience.

The “Whys”

There were four motivations why the stakeholders sought out the Promise program: help students financially, fill the talent gap, increase college readiness, and keep high wage businesses in El Paso. All these reasons culminated to ultimately attempt to eradicate poverty. There is a connection between poverty and Hispanics. El Paso’s population consist of 83 percent of Hispanics and the poverty rate is 20.5 percent (US Census Bureau, 2019). The stakeholders’
“why” is validated with the literature. The effects of poverty statistically impact Hispanics at higher percentage than non-Hispanic White (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2006; Iceland, 2013; Milner, 2013; Reardon, 2013). This disparity effects the Hispanics students’ families, neighborhoods, and schools (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2009; Slopen et al., 2010).

The stakeholders discussed funding multiple times in their interviews. This was, in part, because there is a correlation between a student’s socioeconomic status and educational achievement. A low socioeconomic student is unlikely to take advanced courses, then leads to not being college ready, then requires the student to take remedial courses in post-secondary, then takes longer than six years to obtain a post-secondary degree or is not obtained at all (Boatman & Long, 2018; Luna-Torres et al., 2018). The stakeholders’ intent for this scholarship includes mitigating those poverty effects to facility opportunities for success (Boatman & Long, 2018; Luna-Torres et al., 2018). The students’ success benefits the individual student and the community of El Paso.

Mr. Ramos, Mr. Mata, and Dr. Gomez have been in El Paso at least eight years. They feel a connection to this community. They have shared values as they view El Paso as their home. Mr. Allen, with less than a year in El Paso, was still able to have similar values as the other stakeholders because he has had personal experiences with his Hispanic family. Mr. Allen arrived in El Paso understanding the disadvantages young Hispanics have in this country, even though they are not Hispanic themselves. They intend to make El Paso their home for years to come.

**Limitations**

The researcher acknowledges this study has limitations: sample size, study restricted to El Paso, TX, and the study does not cover the last three phases of the policy process.
Sample size

This study includes four stakeholders. However, the selected stakeholders were in a position within their organizations to make decisions regarding this policy. Mr. Ramos and Mr. Mata, Community Council Board Members, prepared the data and presented to the board for final approval. Dr. Gomez and the researcher, acting as the intern, prepared the data and presented to the West County School Board for approval for the initial Promise program. All decisions within the initiation phase and estimation phase were made by these stakeholders. Mr. Allen, within their position at the University, has the authority to accept or reject scholarships. The four stakeholders had the authority to decide if the criteria of the Achieve Scholarship had any dealbreakers, which the stakeholders deemed, did not. They all had the power to negotiate, collaborate, and compromise.

The researcher was not able to establish contact with a stakeholder for the community college. The Community Council had met informally with the community college president. Early on, the community college has expressed interest in the Promise program. The researcher attempted to initiate contact by going to speak to the president’s secretary and requesting a meeting. By the time the interviews ended in late 2020, the Community Council had not made official contact with the community college in El Paso.

Only First Three Phases of Policy Process

This study covers the first three phases of the policy phases: initiation phase, estimation phase, selection phase. The remaining phases that were not covered include, implementation phase, evaluation phase, termination phase. Seldomly, do researchers cover all six phases (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). Time constraints was the principal reason for not being able to cover all six
phases. By April 2021, the Achieve Scholarship had not yet been implemented. The Community Council is aiming for Fall 2021 or Fall 2022.

**Setting: Restricted to El Paso**

The final limitation is the setting of this study. The research took place in El Paso County, Texas. It encompasses the needs specific to this community. If this study were to be replicated in another city with a similar scholarship program, the policy process framework would remain unchanged. However, the manner in which the stakeholders in another city navigate the policy process would differ.

**Implications for Practice**

Policy processes occur in education continuously. However, decisions about those policies are made far from the communities they effect. The educational policy makers are legislators, who in many cases, do not have any educational background. Local community education practitioners need to get involved in policy processes. When Dr. Gomez, the superintendent, was asked who they thought should be involved in the policy process, they stated: workforce commission, parent groups, students, teachers, and legislators (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Education practitioners should become proficient in policy process; how it works, how policy is initiated, and how decisions are made, how stakeholders negotiate. Then use that knowledge to write about policy in education from the practitioner’s point of view. Purposely and deliberately analyzing the policy process, decision-making, and bounded rationality heightened an awareness that has been beneficial not only in this study, but in my professional career as well. This would be an added benefit for any educator.
All the stakeholders in this study had at least 10 years’ experience in education, then engaged in this policy process boldly. They recognized the community’s needs and sought out a policy, as a solution to those needs.

As stated, the stakeholders have many years of experience in K–12 education, the workforce, and post-secondary education. The policy process could have had different outcomes if the stakeholders did not have the experience.

This study asserts that bounded rationality and heuristics were a part of this study’s stakeholders’ decision-making process. Humans are emotional beings and usually cannot preclude emotion from decision-making. There are cognitive limitations that need to be accepted and use mental shortcuts to maximize decision-making (Brewer & deLeon, 1983, Simon, 1990). Data played a valuable and crucial part for the stakeholders in this study. They would not have proceeded forward with the Achieve Scholarship if the data were not available.

**Future Research**

This study leaves much room for future research. The last three phases in the policy process framework could be studied after the stakeholders complete the policy process. The study could be of those three phases or the researcher could take a broad look at all six phases and analyze how the phases overlap. The future researcher could also analyze if the first three phase are re-introduced in the latter policy phases.

Research can be done in other cities implementing a similar Promise program and yield different results. The policy process framework would remain the same, but the needs and what the city values could be differ. The city’s approach to who they believe should be stakeholders and who would manage the program could also differ.
Conclusions

This policy process began because there was a need. The four stakeholders were willing to inquire and collaborate to determine the merits of a program called Dallas Promise. The stakeholders knew the challenges the students of El Paso face. The purpose was to analyze how each of the stakeholders navigated through each of the first three phases of the policy process. As researcher and participant, I elected to use the policy process framework by Brewer and deLeon (1983) and using bounded rationality to explain and analyze how the stakeholders approached decision-making. The stakeholders took almost three years to navigate through the first three phases. The momentum of policy process for the stakeholders was decelerated in March 2020 as El Paso and the country went into lockdown because of COVID19. By summer of 2020 the stakeholders continued to move forward.

The Community Council has officially selected to implement the Achieve Scholarship. The University has officially selected to implement the Achieve Scholarship. West County ISD’s superintendent agrees with the scholarship criteria and is pending the school Board’s decision with the new merit and funding criteria.

Dissecting the way a human makes decisions is a conscious effort. For the simplest act, humans, in seconds, review and consider alternative options (Brewer & deLeon, 1983). Decisions stemming from choosing what to wear in the morning to choosing to implement a program that has the potential to change a person’s life for the better. The stakeholders were deliberate in choosing data over emotion or intuition, but not completely dismissing the positive contribution intuition can have on decision-making. Their experience made them aware that there are times where every piece of data cannot be acquired. Then, using their intuition toolbox,
heuristics, or mental shorts, the gaps are filled-in and a decision is made. The stakeholders do not allow themselves to be paralyzed by not having all the data that can lead to a non-decision.

This study also asserts and concurs with Brewer and deLeon’s (1983) policy process framework’s purpose and Simon’s (1957) bounded rationality theory. The policy phases overlap and blend with each other. One phase is not independent of the other. The framework served as a useful template that functioned to identify interconnections and interdependencies of the stakeholders as they navigated through the policy process phases. Bounded rationality theory pairs well with the policy process framework. Both framework and theory complemented the decision-making cognitive processes.

What started as Texas Promise has become the El Paso Achieve Scholarship. Designed with the Promise foundation, but modified to generate positive outcomes for the specific needs of the students of El Paso and the stakeholders that are funding the scholarship. The four stakeholders navigated through the first three phases of the policy process, striving not only to meet their needs or their organization’s needs, but had the forethought that the Achieve Scholarship would afford student success and community success. This policy process study for the Achieve Scholarship has been collaborative community effort to ultimately eradicate poverty in El Paso.
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https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/hrg.htm


* Pseudonyms used to preserve the privacy of the stakeholder. Contact researcher for reference.
Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

KEY: SD - School District

CA - Community Agency

Background Questions:

(All stakeholders) - How did you hear about Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders) – How long have you been in your position at (organization)?

(All stakeholders) – Have you worked with (other organization) in other capacities? What were they?

Initiation Phase:

(All stakeholders) - (Perceptions) Describe Texas Promise.

(All stakeholders) - (Perceptions) Is the problem a crisis in El Paso?

(All stakeholders) - (Perceptions) How would Texas Promise address those problems?

(All stakeholders) - (Perceptions) At this point, how do you envision Texas Promise working in El Paso?

(Community Council) - (Perceptions) What do you think West County ISD contributed to the initiation process as you considered implementing Texas Promise in El Paso?

(All stakeholders) - (Problems identified) What are the problems in El Paso that initiated seeking out Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders) - (Problems identified) What are some factors contributing to the problem you perceive?

(All stakeholders) - (Problems identified) Were any other systems already in place to address the problem? If so, why initiate Texas Promise?
(All stakeholders)- (Problems identified) What aspects of the problems are a potential solution with Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders)- (Goals) What is/are the goal(s) if Texas Promise for implemented in El Paso? Why are these your goals?

(All stakeholders)- (Goals) What was the process in developing these goals?

(All stakeholders)- (Goals) Who was involved in the goal making?

(All stakeholders)- (Goals) Did you consider any other goals?

(All stakeholders)- (Objectives) What are the objectives to reach those goals?

(All stakeholders) – (Objectives) Are the objectives aligned to the goals?

(All stakeholders) - (Objectives) What will happen if the goals are not met within your timeline?

(All stakeholders) - (Objectives) Who will track the objectives?

(Community Council) - (Identify stakeholders) Before you started meeting with West County ISD, what schools or ISD’s were you considering to begin the networking process?

(West County ISD) - (Identify stakeholders) I did some research on where Dallas Promise received their funding. Prior to contacting Community Council, what other funding resources did you consider?

(All stakeholders) - (Identify stakeholders) Who will be making the decisions during each step of whether Texas Promise will be implemented?

(All stakeholders) - (Identify stakeholders) When was your initial contact with Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders) – (Identify stakeholders) Who else should or what other organizations should be involved in trying to bring Texas Promise to El Paso?
**Estimation Phase:**

(All stakeholders) - (Role) Do you feel it is your burden to find a solution for the problem you identified?

(All stakeholders) - (Role) What role will (organization) have in Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders) – (Role) How much time can you/organization dedicate to process of Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders) – (Role) How do you add one more initiative or program to your program without sacrificing effectiveness and efficiency?

(All stakeholders) – (Role) How are you perceived in this community?

(All stakeholders) - (Problem defined) How are the problems effecting your organization that motivated you to search out a solution?

(All stakeholders) - (Problem defined) Are there any other programs that can also address the problems in the community?

(All stakeholders) - (Problem defined) How would you define the problems in your organization and community?

(All stakeholders) – (Problem defined) Does El Paso have the potential to address and find the solution to those problems?

(All stakeholders) - (Cost/Benefit) What are risks, costs, and benefits if Texas Promise is implemented in El Paso?

(Community Council) (Cost/Benefit) Commit was contacted for data. What type of data was Community Council requesting?

(West County ISD)- (Cost/Benefit) What benefits outweighed the costs to move forward with presenting to the school board?
(All stakeholders) - (Cost/Benefit) What resources do you have at your disposal?

(All stakeholders) – (Cost/Benefit) At what point do the cost outweigh the benefits?

(All stakeholders) - (Values) What values are guiding your organization on to during this process?

(All stakeholders) - (Values) Do you feel like your organization or you share the same values as the other stakeholders?

(All stakeholders) - (Values) The problems are complex and citywide. How do you reconcile that and simplify it for your organization?

(West County ISD) - (Values) You had me research the largest employers in El Paso. What was the reason for that?

(All stakeholders) - (Values) How do you reconcile not being able to have ALL the data or information before making a decision to move forward with trying to implement Texas Promise? (perfect foresight and total reduction of uncertainty will never be attainable: Bounded Rationality Theory)

(All stakeholders) - (Procedural matters) How will (your organization) be affected by Texas Promise?

(All stakeholders) - (Procedural matters) What procedural matters or protocols must be adhered to when making decisions?

(All stakeholders) – (Procedural matters) What role does data take in your organization?

(CA) - (Procedural matters) In September 2019, you had stated that Texas Promise would be presented to the Community Council Board in six months. What preparations were needed for that presentation?
(SD) - (Procedural matters) I presented Texas Promise to the school board, did you believe that the school board would approve moving forward with Texas Promise?

(Community Council) – (Program outline) In September 2019, you had stated, Community Council was going to wait 6 months before moving forward. What was done during that time?
(West County) - (Program outline) In April 2019 you were ready to quickly move forward with the Texas Promise even if no one else was on board. Why?

(All stakeholders) - (Program outline) How do you envision the program working?
(All stakeholders) - (Program outline) What is the program outline?
(All stakeholders) - (Program outline) Who will be responsible for monitoring and/or adjusting the outline?

**Selection Phase:**

(All stakeholders) (Negotiations) (Deal-breakers) What are some deal-breakers, if any, in regard to working with another stakeholder or within the process of considering adopting Texas Promise?
(All stakeholders) -(Negotiations) (Compromise) Do you feel any pressure to compromise your values when working with the other stakeholders?
(All stakeholders) - (Negotiations) How important is it to negotiate with other stakeholders?
(All stakeholders) – (Negotiations) Is intuition considered when negotiating with other stakeholders?
(All stakeholders) - (Decision/Nondecision) Are you making a decision to move forward with implementing Texas Promise with a gut-feeling or based on data?
(All stakeholders) - (Decision/Nondecision) Do you believed a decision can be made without emotional factors?
Once a decision is made to move forward with adopting Texas Promise, do you think you will question your decision later?

What is your typical decision-making style? Was that style used when making decisions for Texas Promise?

How do you know what information to trust when making decisions?

Should decisions be based, in some part, on intuition?

What is (organization’s) timeline for implementing Texas Promise?

How will you work with the other stakeholders to keep to that timeline?

Why is a timeline important?

Do you have enough information/data to create a timeline or make a decision?

What are some program rules that have been agreed upon or would like to have?

Who will manage the program for your organization?

How do rules help reduce uncertainty? Do they?

Who will decide what the rules are?
Appendix B: Researcher Information Table

*Communication Between Researcher and Stakeholders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 27, 2019</td>
<td>Established phone contact Dr. Gomez and immediately tasked to research Texas Promise and what was needed to bring the program to their district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 4, 2019</td>
<td>Met Dr. Gomez in-person at his office. The emphasis was and continues to be “high demand, high wage” jobs in their area (Miguel Gomez, personal communication, March 4, 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11, 2019</td>
<td>Sent initial email to Dr. Eric Dan, Executive Director of Texas Promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1, 2019</td>
<td>No answer from Dr. Ban. Resent email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6, 2019</td>
<td>Dr. Ban responded and included Chris Smith, Senior Consultant for Texas Promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 7, 2019</td>
<td>Established contact with Chris Smith. Mr. Smith became my contact at Texas Promise. Mr. Smith explained than another organization was also working on bringing Texas Promise to El Paso.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 10, 2019</td>
<td>Mr. Smith emailed Community Council’s information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22, 2019</td>
<td>Phone conference meeting with Mr. Smith, Dr. Gomez, &amp; West County Board President. Mr. Smith answered questions regarding Texas Promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26, 2019</td>
<td>Spoke to Mr. Ramos on the phone for the first time. Short conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25, 2019</td>
<td>Chris Smith left his position at Texas Promise and introduced to Sarah Jensen. Ms. Jensen become my new contact at Texas Promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2, 2019</td>
<td>Zoom meeting with Ms. Jensen. She answered questions about Texas Promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 16, 2019</td>
<td>Dr. Gomez and I present Texas Promise to West County School Board for their approval to move forward with implementation in the district. School Board approves the Promise Program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
July 17, 2019  Virtual online meeting with Texas Promise and other cities in Texas that were in the process of implementing Texas Promise. The meeting consisted of updates from each city, suggestions to engage students, methods to make the transition from EC-12 to post-secondary easier, and funding.

July 25, 2019  Zoom meeting with Ms. Jensen. Update regarding the school board meeting.

August 21, 2019  Met with Mr. Ramos at Dr. Gomez’s office. The stakeholders have collaborated on other programs. Both expressed interest in working together again. Dr. Gomez stated they would be open to be the pilot district for Texas Promise in El Paso. Dr. Gomez also expressed interest in holding the student accountable when awarded the monies. Mr. Ramos stated the Community Council wants to add a merit component to the scholarship (David Ramos & Miguel Gomez, personal communication, August 21, 2019).

August 28, 2019  Virtual online meeting with Texas Promise and other cities in Texas. Updates regarding Texas legislature, specifically HB3 and CCMR.

September 5, 2019  Zoom meeting with Ms. Jensen. Updates and answered questions.

September 11, 2019  Met with Mr. Ramos and Mr. Mata in-person. Discussed the needs of the community: retention rates, remedial classes, businesses leaving the region, and building a culture of college. The Community Council was planning on rolling out the scholarship program in approximately six months (David Ramos & Javier Mata, personal communication, September 11, 2019).

December 11, 2019  Email update from Mr. Ramos. The stakeholder explained “spent time focusing on the funding for the Promise Scholarship” (David Ramos, personal communication, December 11, 2019). It is the Community Council’s “view that funding for the Promise Scholarship should be a joint effort between the educational institutions and private philanthropy in the region” (David Ramos, personal communication, December 11, 2019). At this point El Paso Community College had “indicated a willingness to provide financial resources towards this effort” and in the “process of engaging with UTEP to assess their willingness to commit financial resources to the scholarship fund” (David Ramos, personal communication, December 11, 2019). The “next step [was] to reach out to the ISDs and assess a similar willingness to commit resources towards the Promise Scholarship Fund” and “together a marketing/communication plan” (David Ramos, personal communication, December 11, 2019). The Community Council’s objective is to “press for higher academic
“attainment” and to graduate a “college ready” student (David Ramos, personal communication, December 11, 2019). Mr. Ramos also requested to meet with Dr. Gomez, once again to “discuss tactics “and get a commitment from West County ISD (David Ramos, personal communication, December 11, 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 13, 2020</td>
<td>Met with Mr. Ramos at Dr. Gomez’s office. Mr. Ramos explained that the Promise Scholarship would include a merit component and a small funding commitment from ISD’s. Dr. Gomez stated they are in favor of those criteria. Given the changes, school board approval would be needed again (David Ramos &amp; Miguel Gomez, personal communication, January 13, 2020).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 29, 2020</td>
<td>Email update from Mr. Ramos. The COVID19 pandemic had shut-down non-essential businesses and schools were online. Mr. Ramos explained they have “been working on the scholarship architecture these last few months and have a structure that we support and will begin to fundraise in late summer early Fall” (David Ramos, personal communication, April 29, 2020). A new name was given to the El Paso Promise Scholarship; “we now refer to as the El Paso Achieve Scholarship” (David Ramos, April 29, 2020). We agreed we would meet with Dr. Gomez during the summer 2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 19, 2020</td>
<td>Zoom meeting with Ms. Jensen. Updates and answer questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6, 2020</td>
<td>Met with Mr. Ramos &amp; Dr. Gomez using an online virtual platform. Updates on the merit components of the Achieve Scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 14, 2020</td>
<td>Mr. Ramos provided contact information for Mr. Allen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 11, 2021</td>
<td>Initiated email contact with Mr. Allen. Mr. Allen responded the same day and agreed to participate in the study.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Texas Promise: A Policy Process Case Study
Principal Investigator: Sandra Rocha
UTEP: Educational Leadership and Foundations

Introduction
You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. It is important that you read the information that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this research is to determine how each participant navigates through the processes of deciding whether to adopt the Texas Promise scholarship program in El Paso to address student community problems.
In 2015, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) launched 60x30TX. The main goal of 60x30TX is to have 60 percent of Texans, ages 25-34, obtain a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2030 (60x30TX.com, 2017). To remain competitive and relevant with other cities in Texas and the country in education and the workforce, El Paso needs to achieve these goals. To accomplish this, El Paso high school students need to be college and/or career ready when they graduate. El Paso students need financial assistance, guidance and mentoring for their college and career path to stay in El Paso. Some El Paso students need financial support, aside from FAFSA/TASFA, to attend a two- or four-year college. And, El Paso students need post-secondary education to have the opportunity to make living wages (Carnevale et al., 2013).
The Texas Education Agency (TEA) uses an accountability rating system to strive to reach a component of 60x30TX. Under the Student Achievement Domain, high schools are rated on three different items: State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), College, Career, Military Ready (CCMR), and graduation rates. Each area is assigned a percentage: 40% STAAR, 40% CCMR, 20% graduation rates. The purpose of CCMR is to ensure all students are either, college ready, career ready, or military ready.
Approximately, six people will be participating in this study at UTEP.
You are being asked to be in the study because you are leading the cause in addressing the student community problems and because of your interest in considering implementation of Texas Promise in El Paso. If you decide to participate in this study, your involvement will last approximately two months. There will be three interviews and another interview will be scheduled only if clarification is needed. The interviews will be scheduled once a week, based on your schedule. Each interview will take approximately one hour.

**What is involved in the study?**

If you agree to take part in this study, the research team will: Contact you via email to schedule all the interviews. There will be three interviews and one more if needed for clarification purposes. Due to Covid-19, the interviews will take place via Zoom or Webex as a backup. With your permission, I will utilize the Zoom recording mechanism in addition to an audio recording on a digital recording device. Each interview will take approximately one hour. You and the interviewer will meet on Zoom to answer questions about the decisions to implement Texas Promise in El Paso. Each recording will be saved using codes. Your responses will be transcribed and will be made available for review upon request.

You will: Answer the interview questions after they are asked, and you will have the option not to answer any question. Each interview will cover one phase of the policy process.

- **Interview #1** will cover the initiation phase to include questions about problem identification, perceptions, goals, and objectives.
- **Interview #2** will cover the estimation phase to include questions about defining the problems, cost and benefits, program outline, procedural matters, values, and roles.
- **Interview #3** will cover the selection phase to include questions about negotiations, program rules, program assignments, program goals, timelines, decisions/nondecisions.
- **Interview #4** will be schedule only if the researcher needs clarification.

**Informed Consent Form** --- Please note that your participation in this study involves remote and/or virtual research interactions with our research staff. You will be audio and/or video recorded by a device that is separate from the online conferencing system. Therefore, privacy and confidentiality is not guaranteed due to the nature of the research environment.

**What are the risks and discomforts of the study?**

The risks associated with this research are no greater than those involved in daily activities.

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Study Number: [1629071-1]
There are minimal risks or discomforts associated with participation. Due to the use of online conferencing systems, your privacy and confidentiality is not guaranteed.

**Are there benefits to taking part in this study?**
You are not likely to benefit by taking part in this study. The benefits to society in general include providing knowledge in the policy process of deciding to implement Texas Promise in El Paso. It also provides opportunities for other researchers to continue the research on the remaining three phases of the policy process.

**What are my costs?**
There are no direct costs.

**Will I be paid to participate in this study?**
You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study.

**What other options are there?**
You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

**What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?**
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to skip any questions or stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm.
Who do I call if I have questions or problems?
You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Sandra Rocha at (915) 433-4636 or email her at: sand2255@aol.com.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-7693) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

What about confidentiality?
Your part in this study is confidential. You and your affiliated organization will be given a pseudonym and will not be named in any publication or presentations. The following procedures will be followed to keep your personal information confidential: Data will not be shared with other project participants. Interviews will take place on Zoom. Only the interviewer and you will have the Zoom meeting ID and password for each interview. Each interview will have a new ID and password. I will be the only person to admit participants into the interviews. If Zoom is not working, Webex will be utilized. Webex, like Zoom will have security features. Webex will also have a meeting ID and password. Only the interviewer will have access to admit participants into the session. The interviewer, only, will have access to the audio-video recording and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at a secure location. The recordings will be transcribed and analyzed for this project. Upon the conclusion of this project, the audio recordings will not be released to anyone and will be destroyed after five years.

The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your name will not be disclosed in those presentations. Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include, but are not necessarily limited to:
- Dr. Teresa Cortez & Dr. Rodolfo Rincones
- Office of Human Research Protections
- UTEP Institutional Review Board

Because of the need to release information to these parties, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

All records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at a secure location and destroyed after five years. Audio/Visual recording will be saved using codes that corresponds with each participant.

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Approved on: August 11, 2020
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Study Number: [1629071-1]
on an external hard drive and an audio recorder. Only the researcher will have access to the locked cabinet.

**Authorization Statement**

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I will be given a copy of the form to keep. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study.

Participant’s Name (printed)

Participant’s Signature Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

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Approved on: August 11, 2020
Expires on: August 10, 2022
Study Number: [1629071-1]
Vita

Sandra Rocha was born in El Paso, TX. Prior to career in education, she was a probation officer for four years. She worked with victims of domestic violence and child abuse. Sandra has been in education for 15 years. She worked in a middle school as a science teacher and testing coordinator for 10 years. Currently, she is an assistant principal at a high school in El Paso, Texas.

Sandra received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice at The University of Texas at El Paso. In 2006, she received her Alternative Certification in Education at The University of Texas at El Paso. She also earned a master’s degree in Educational Leadership and Foundations from The University of Texas at El Paso.

Contact Information: sand2255@gmail.com

This dissertation was typed by Sandra Rocha.