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Educator-Legislators' Meaning Making of Education within the Policy Context

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Educator-Legislators' Meaning Making of Education within the Policy Context

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to my parents, who never ceased in their commitment to my education. From asking my third-grade teacher to make sure she called on me so that I would learn to speak up in class, to allowing me to leave home at 16 and go to college, to fostering my academic success even at 30, I could never be more grateful. Thank you for raising me with such care, love, and respect. I also dedicate my dissertation to my daughter and to my son on the way. I have been blessed with a great Texas public education my entire life and I now fight for you, and all children, to have the same.

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Abstract

Educator-Legislators' Meaning Making of Education within the Policy Context

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Educator-legislators serve a unique role in providing a practitioner perspective and a voice for educators and students in their policymaking position. However, the literature on legislative behavior and occupation lacks specific findings about educator-legislators and how a professional background as an educator impacts education policy. Furthermore, the literature on legislative behavior is heavily quantitative and provides no information on how a professional background may moderate behavior. To address these gaps in understanding, this study asks the following research questions: (1) How do current and former Texas State legislators with an occupational background as an educator make meaning of education within the policy context? (2) How does this meaning making of education impact their legislative behavior? Using a conceptual framework based on sensemaking, this study employs a multicase study model to generate a theory about meaning making and legislative behavior. The findings showed that educator-legislators have deeply-held core beliefs about the purpose of public education and the role of government in fulfilling that purpose that drive their policymaking, both in terms of behavior and approach. These beliefs are rooted in their professional identity but are also

impacted by their political and personal identities. The theory generated by this study extends current thought about legislative behavior and provides a conceptual and methodological framework for future studies on similar topics.

Key words: educator-legislator, legislative behavior, sensemaking, education politics, Texas legislature

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Chapter One: Introduction

In a House public education committee hearing during the 84th Texas legislature in 2015, four committee members cast no votes for a controversial public school accountability bill. All three former educators on the committee, two Republicans and one Democrat, were united in their vote against the bill. The fourth nay was cast by a Democratic member who formerly taught in higher education and was working towards an education-focused doctorate. In response to the bill's eventual enactment into law, over half of school districts in Texas joined a resolution in opposition of the resulting accountability changes. While it may have been coincidence that the three "educator-legislators" of the House public education committee voted in unison, it is worth exploring if their shared occupational background influenced their behavior. This study aims to build an understanding about how an occupational experience in education impacts legislators' meaning making of education and the impact of that meaning making on behavior within the policy context.

Meaning making is a concept that describes the process humans undergo as they create constructions of the world around them that constitute their reality (Crotty, 1998). This concept is rooted in constructionist thought, which assumes that all knowledge is constructed through conscious shaping, molding, and interaction with an object or experience (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, meaning making takes place within a context in which social and cultural norms control and direct behavior and experience (Crotty, 1998).

To ground the study, I use Weick's (1995) seven characteristics of sensemaking, which argue that the sensemaking process is: grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Legislators who were

educators continuously make sense of education as they interact with education through their former work in the classroom and current work in the Capitol (Weick, 1995). The meaning they construct is impacted by the interactive human community they exist in, which dictates cultural and social norms relating to education such as its purpose and structure. These meanings are the underlying bases for behaviors the legislator engages in when acting on education-related policies (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Crotty, 1998).

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Studies of the relationship between legislator characteristics (race, class, gender, occupation, and partisan affiliation) and legislative behavior are concentrated in the quantitative realm of political science and offer little empirical explanation as to how or why a characteristic may moderate behavior. However, these studies are useful in generating an overall idea of the motivations and factors that lead to policy outcomes. These motivations, while based on correlations between myriad variables and resulting behavioral outcomes, help to point out potential underlying meaning making. For instance, if race correlates to behavior on certain race-based policies, then race must mean something. Or, if being a Black legislator means nothing about the way Black Republicans behave but does impact the way Black Democrats behave, then party may moderate the meaning of race. According to the literature, legislator behaviors are motivated by identity, party politics, and electoral politics, but educator-legislators are unique in that they may or may not fit these expectations.

The literature on legislative behavior, which are actions the legislator takes within the policy context (roll call votes, sponsorship of legislation, floor speeches, committee assignments, etc.) suggests that legislators tend to favor policies that benefit themselves or their own social group (Battista, 2012; Brown, 2011; Carnes, 2012; Couch et al., 1992;

Francis & Bramlett, 2017; Grumbach, 2015; Hansen et al., 2019; Hansen & Treul, 2015; Hero & Preuhs, 2010; Jenkins, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016; Lupton, 2017; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Mendez & Grose, 2018; Thiele et al., 2012; Washington, 2008; Witko & Friedman, 2008).

The few studies that contribute to our knowledge of how a background in education impacts legislative behavior suggest that a limited number of educators actually serve on education-related committees (Battista, 2012, 2013; Hamm et al., 2011) and tend to serve an informational purpose while on the committee rather than simply serving the whims of the education "industry" (Battista, 2012, 2013). Results are mixed as to whether serving on an education committee helps educator-legislators gain leadership within the policy context (Francis & Bramlett, 2017; Maske, 2019). However, occupation-committee congruency may lead to higher amounts of education-related legislation from educator-legislators (Francis & Bramlett, 2017), which could in turn make them leaders in the field.

Race, gender, class, and ideology interact with occupational background across the literature on legislative behavior. For educator-legislators specifically, the prevailing ideology tends to be more liberal (Carnes, 2012; Grumbach, 2015; Maske, 2019), though membership in the Republican party may overrule the behavioral effects of the occupation in some cases (Grumbach, 2015; Lamare, 2016). Educator-legislators also tend to be female, Democrat, and elected by majority-Black constituencies, which has important effects on how these legislators are impacted by institutional sexism (Volden et al., 2018), party politics (Jenkins, 2010; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017; Lupton, 2017), and electoral politics (Hansen & Treul, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017; Lupton, 2017).

Beyond the few studies that contribute to our knowledge about educator-legislators, the literature overall reveals that party politics are an important anchor for legislator

behavior, as party membership and the corresponding liberal-conservative ideological stances lend themselves to well-understood, predictable behavioral patterns (Frederick, 2009; Hero & Preuhs, 2010; Jenkins, 2010; Lupton, 2017; Matter & Stutzer, 2015, Mendez & Grose, 2018). Notably, members of the Republican party demonstrate such high levels of party loyalty that many other factors, like gender, class, and race, are often negated (Frederick, 2009; Grumback, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016). In other cases, legislator characteristics like race (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012), gender (Frederick, 2009; Jenkins, 2012; Volden et al., 2018), class (Carnes, 2012; Grumbach, 2015), occupation (Lupton, 2017; Maske, 2019), family structure (Washington, 2008), constituency characteristics (Hansen & Treul, 2015), and partisan competitiveness of the legislator's state or district (Jenkins, 2010; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017) may cause diversity of behavior within the Democratic party or cause Republican legislators to stray from the norms of their party.

In addition to party politics, electoral politics impact the motivations of legislator behavior. A legislator appeases those they deem most important to their election, which could be their electoral base (Kirkland & Slapin, 2017), the majority of their constituency (Hansen & Treul, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012), or a specific racial subset of their constituency (Mendez & Grose, 2018). Additionally, campaign contributions, which fund reelection efforts are impacted by legislator occupation (Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Witko & Friedman, 2008) and interest group politics (Hansen & Treul, 2015).

While these studies confirm that legislator characteristics matter in determining behavior, only one study actually examined how a characteristic (race) impacts the legislator's meaning making as they engage in the policy process (Brown, 2011). Furthermore, only one study, which is outdated and lacks generalizability despite its quantitative methods, explicitly examined educator-legislators (Couch et al., 1992).

Therefore, not only do we not know how a former occupational experience in education imparts meaning on legislators, but we also know nothing about the broader field of how legislator characteristics lead to the meaning making that precedes behavior within the policy context.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The literature reveals a black box in our understanding of how legislator characteristics *lead to* behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, the small slice of literature that sheds light on the effects of an occupational background in education suggests that former educators do not follow behavioral patterns of self-service typical to other professions. Without having a foundation of knowledge of how background moderates understanding, it is difficult to make any hypotheses about how an occupational background in education impacts the meaning making that would lead to behavior. By gaining focused and detailed knowledge on how a specific career, education, impacts the meaning making of legislators within the policy context, we can begin to break ground on this uncharted territory in legislative studies.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the former occupational experience of Texas legislators who were educators has influenced their understanding of and interaction with education within the policy context. The following research questions will be asked:

1. How do current and former Texas State legislators with an occupational background as an educator make meaning of education within the policy context?
2. How does this meaning making of education impact their legislative behavior?

Overview of Theoretical Framework

This study focused on exploring how former educators who became legislators make meaning of education through their former occupational experience and how this impacts their work within the policy context. In approaching this inquiry, I adopted an epistemological view of constructionism, which provides that there is no objective truth and that individuals make meaning through their interactions with the world (Crotty, 1998). Within constructionism, the interpretivist theoretical perspective of social constructivism centers on understanding, meaning, and process situated within a cultural and historical context. This theoretical perspective focuses the inquiry within an exploratory framework to make appropriate methodological choices (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2008). Thus, I chose an interview- and content analysis-based qualitative multiple case study, which allowed for comparison, theory generation, and assertions about the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the case study design requires the researcher to be cognizant of their own biases and to constantly reflect on how their experiences may impact interpretation (Maxwell, 2013), which was crucial given my own experience as an educator and policy actor.

Overview of Methods and Data Analysis

To design the multi-case study, I followed the theory and guidance of Sharan B. Merriam (1998), who focuses on qualitative case studies in education. I used purposeful sampling to gather five participants (Miles et al., 2014) who are current or former Texas legislators with past occupational experience in K-12 education. Each participant defined a single case within the study. Among these legislators are variations in partisan affiliation, race, gender, and age, which provided greater confidence in the findings as I conducted cross-case comparisons (Miles et al., 2014). Within each case, I used a theoretical sampling

technique (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014) to complement the interview data by collecting publicly-available content such as news articles, media interviews, biographies, floor and committee activity, and authored legislation.

To compare findings across cases and create consistency in instrumentation, the interview component of this study consisted of one 60-minute, semi-structured interview (Merriam, 1998). Before and after the interview, I collected publicly-available content related to the when the legislator was running for office or in office to build a policy-context bounded case description for each participant. The interview questions were crafted to elucidate the concept of meaning making from the participants and were based on Lofland et al.'s (2005) explanation that meaning is manifested in ideologies and kindred concepts, rules or norms, and self-concepts and identities. During the interview, I used probes for clarity (Merriam, 1998) and member-checking to allow for participant verification of my interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). After the interview, I wrote reflective notes to capture thoughts that were later used in the data analysis stage.

The data analysis portion of the study was broken into two parts. In order to create descriptive findings for each participant (Chapter Four), I completed a multi-stage analysis. In the first stage, I used the software program NVivo to inductively code the entire corpus of data for each participant, including interviews, legislation, news media, and other content. In the second stage, I created focus codes to begin consolidating the first-cycle codes into themes (Saldaña, 2016). In the third stage, I used these codes to write a comprehensive narrative for each participant that outlined their identity, their meaning making of education in the policy context, and how that meaning making impacted their legislative behavior. During this process, I created a visual conceptualization for each participant of the relationships emerging from the data.

To generate analytical findings, I used the focus codes generated from the first and second stages of coding, as well as the narratives, to create network models or "concept maps" for each participant (Miles et al., 2014) and to model the interconnectedness of the codes. As I created each concept map, I wrote an analytical summary for each case (Chapter Five). I then created a holistic overlay of all five maps to visualize the strongest, most prevalent relationships. This was an essential step to generating themes and a theory about the relationship of identity to meaning making and to behavior. Using the overlay, each legislator's concept map, and the narratives, I wrote analytical findings (Chapter Six) organized by research question and containing themes that led to an overall theory (Chapter Seven).

TERMS

It is important to define several key terms for consistency throughout this study. As I conducted my literature review, I noticed the term "lawyer-legislator" (Matter & Stutzer, 2015) and contrasted it with "legislator-educator" (Couch et al., 1992), which sounded like someone who educated legislators. For my purposes, I decided to follow Matter and Stutzer in designating legislators (past or present) who were former educators as "educator-legislators." In Texas, all legislators will necessarily be former educators, as holding public office while being paid on the public dollar is prohibited under the Texas Constitution. In order to define educator, I incorporated all teachers, administrators, counselors, and superintendents within the K-12 public or private school setting. In Texas, the requirements to become an administrator include service as a classroom teacher. In this study, each participant is a former educator (teacher, administrator, or counselor in some combination) in Texas public traditional schools, not public charter schools. The participants sometimes used the term "teacher" and sometimes used the term "educator." I maintained their choice

of wording throughout the dissertation to reflect the participants' meaning, while using "educator" in any other instance. Additionally, while the participants spoke about education broadly, it can be assumed that any reference to education is specific to public education, as that is the purview of the state legislature.

Ensuring Validity and Addressing Limitations

This study is a qualitative interview- and content-analysis based inquiry and is vulnerable to threats of researcher bias and reactivity, which impact interpretations and interactions with participants (Maxwell, 2013). I increased external validity by explicitly stating my personal assumptions and biases within the study (Miles et al., 2014) and by using multiple forms of data and analytical techniques across multiple cases (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014). Multiple forms of data enriched the case descriptions and cross-validated findings from interviews, while multiple stages of coding and analytical techniques to pattern data allowed for rigorous comparisons across the multiple cases. To enhance internal validity, I used data triangulation, member-checking, and disclosed my own background and experiences to participants (Merriam, 1998). Since I aimed to build understanding of a widely unknown topic, it was essential that the internal and external validity of this study be as high as possible.

This study is limited in that it is not intended to provide information that would lead to generalizations among all legislators who were educators (Merriam, 1998). The focus of the inquiry is bounded to a limited number of legislators in a single state and is also bounded by time in that the participants can only express their meaning of education within the policy context now that they have interacted with that space. Furthermore, my own biases and past experiences limit the study due to the interpretations and meaning making I, as the researcher, have already made. These inevitably colored the findings of this study.

Lastly, the study is limited by the amount of trust the participants feel towards me and the willingness they have in sharing their personal story, given their elected position.

STUDY SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

The significance of this study is rooted in its potential contribution to an unknown phenomenon about how a specific occupation can lead to understanding and subsequent legislative behavior. Policy actors at all levels, such as advocates, lobbyists, legislators, and executive branch officials, can benefit from a deeper understanding of how backgrounds influence the way legislators interpret policies. By institutional design, legislators are usually something else first- a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a business owner. Knowing how backgrounds influence interpretations helps policy actors focus their efforts towards influencing policy more effectively when interacting with others. Lastly, this study has implications for the presence of educators on other policymaking bodies, such as school boards, state boards of education, state certification boards, and other working groups or task forces that may be created to facilitate policy work.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the dissertation, which is focused on generating a theory about how a specific occupational background leads to meaning making and an impact on legislative behavior. The study aims to fill both a content and a methodological gap within political science and educational policy scholarship. Chapter Two will review pertinent extant literature related to how legislator characteristics and background correlate to certain behaviors. In this chapter, it is clear that there is little scholarship on educator-legislators and only one study in the field that uses qualitative methods. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and theory used to guide the study. In

Chapter Four, I describe each legislator in detail using a narrative format and in Chapter Five, I present analytical within-case findings for each research question. In Chapter Six, I consolidate and theme the data across cases and answer the research questions. In Chapter Seven, I summarize the study, describe the emergent theory, discuss the study's implications, and conclude.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I first present findings from the literature related to how identity impacts legislator behavior. This includes the political, personal, and professional identities of the legislator and behaviors such as sponsored legislation (a term that encompasses both federal and state level scenarios and means "authored") and votes cast. I then present an emergent theme from the literature, which is the interaction of electoral and political factors and behavior. Elections and political context can alter behavior just as identity can, sometimes in more or less powerful ways. Next, I present findings and themes specifically related to educator-legislators, most of which were embedded in broader studies of legislative behavior. I then discuss the corpus of literature and present a conceptual map of the literature to outline the emergent relationships between identity, meaning making, other factors, and legislative behavior, as well as directions for future research. Lastly, I detail my conceptual framework for meaning making, which sets the stage for methodology (Chapter Three) and analysis (Chapters Four, Five, and Six).

Impact of Identity on Legislative Behavior

The political, personal, and professional identities of a legislator impact their legislative behavior. A legislator's political background, which may include constituent demographics, party affiliation, and campaign contributions, motivates legislators to behave for purposes of power and reelection. Personal characteristics, such as race, gender, class, parental background, and educational level provide an entirely different set of motivating factors that run deeper into the legislator's identity. Professional background adds yet another dimension to the ways that legislators behave that hinges on occupational expertise. As each facet of identity operates on legislative behavior, the resulting actions

of the legislator provide evidence that understanding legislator characteristics matters in studies of policy and politics.

Professional Identity

Professional or occupational background, the focal point of this literature review, plays a significant role in legislative behavior and political attitudes (Battista, 2012; Carnes, 2012; Dreher et al., 2008; Grumbach, 2015; Horowitz & Stam, 2014; Maske, 2019). An individual's occupation impacts their socialization and internalized experiences, as well as the relationships and identities they create (Carnes, 2012; Caza et al., 2018; Keely & Tan, 2008). For example, in democracies worldwide, political leaders with military and combat experience used war as a last resort because of the risk aversion associated with a lived fear of death, while those with military but no combat experience were more likely to vote to engage in combat (Horowitz & Stam, 2014). Likewise, political leaders with business backgrounds tend to enact policies that favor business (Witko & Friedman, 2008).

I am particularly interested in legislators who have an occupational background in education. Aggregated state legislature data shows that the percentage of state legislators who are educators (6%) is less than half the percentage of those who are attorneys and a fifth of the percentage of those who are in business-related occupations (Kurtz, 2015). Furthermore, in some state legislatures, such as Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Wisconsin, the percentage of legislators who were educators in 2015 was particularly low, at 3% or less (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015).

The number of educator-legislators is limited by laws in some states that prohibit elected officials from also being employed by a governmental entity (Will, 2018b). Additionally, many legislators who list their occupation as "retired" hail from the education

profession, which may bring the actual percentage of educator-legislators across state legislatures to 12% (Maske, 2019). Considering that the expertise former educators carry into political office impacts the education profession and millions of school-aged children, it is important to understand how the presence of educator-legislators affects education policy.

The literature directly related to an education-focused inquiry is extremely limited. Only one piece of literature reviewed herein (Couch et al., 1992) explicitly examines the legislative behavior of educators who became legislators. Recent waves of teacher activism, increased numbers of educators campaigning for and being elected to office (Reilly, 2018; Will, 2018a), and the salience of education as a political issue makes the study of how educator-legislators behave timely and relevant.

In this section, I gather and analyze literature on how legislators' professional, personal, and political identities merge to inform their behavior as an elected official. I base this inquiry into identity and behavior by asking the following question: What does the existing empirical literature reveal about how demographic variables influence legislative behavior? I focus first on what the literature says about legislators who have an occupational background in education. I then broaden the scope to include all occupational backgrounds and finally expand further into other personal and political characteristics. By encompassing all legislator characteristics into this review, I can pull themes across the entire foundation of studies related to legislator behavior.

Themes emerged from the literature on how occupational background, both educational and otherwise, leads to certain motivations for legislative behavior. In contrast, studies pertaining to personal characteristics focused less on how a certain race, gender, or class identity would motivate a behavior and more on the correlation between personal characteristics and raced, gendered, and classed policy outcomes. Throughout the

occupational and personal background literature, party affiliation played a significant role in moderating behavior, sometimes superseding other characteristics. Altogether, the various backgrounds of legislators create a complex foundation for legislative behavior, in which some characteristics appear to mitigate others depending on the policy issue.

Educational Occupational Background

In 1992, Couch et al. published an article investigating Alabama's "legislator-educators" who were concurrently employed at public institutions of higher education. The study regressed variables related to legislator salaries and dollars appropriated to public institutions of higher education in Alabama and found that for every dollar a school paid to a legislator-educator's salary, funding levels were about 1.3 cents higher per student enrolled than for schools that were not employers of legislator-educators. The authors noted this as a form of "pork barrel politics," in which politicians appropriate money directly to their own benefit, as well as a result of the education lobby.

While Couch et al. (1992) framed the legislative behavioral outcomes of educators as motivated by self-interest and interest groups, other studies posit that information theory is a determinant of legislative behavior. For example, in the case of committee assignments, legislators are appointed to committees based on specialization traits such as occupation or prior committee experience (Hamm et al., 2011). This sorting is stronger in state agricultural and judiciary committees than education, labor, and insurance committees partly because there are fewer legislators hailing from the latter occupations (Hamm et al., 2011). The tendency of legislatures to "tap the talents" of their members through committee assignments allows legislators to actively use their occupational backgrounds as they hear, debate, and vote on legislation within their policy area of expertise.

Francis and Bramlett (2017) provide further insight into committee and occupational congruency. In a study of first and second term U.S. House members from the 101st-113th Congresses (1989-2014), results showed that members who were assigned to committees congruent with their occupational expertise, including K-postsecondary educators and administrators who sat on the House Education and Workforce Committee, were more likely to introduce legislation in that policy area. In this case, legislators who enjoy committee congruence may have an eased ability to leverage their past experiences and insights, transforming these informational assets into increased legislative participation.

In another motivational perspective called industry-service, committee assignments and behavior may be determined by the industry connections legislators bring to the table (Battista, 2012). For example, a banking committee stacked with bankers might hear, deliberate, and vote on legislation in ways that serve their own industry-oriented interests. Battista (2012) found that state legislature judiciary and agriculture committees are heavily stacked with industry-connected legislators while education, health, and insurance committees are weakly stacked. Interestingly, on health and education committees, legislatures tend to appoint connected legislators for their expertise rather than for industry-service. It is theorized that health and education are stacked for informational purposes because all members of the body will face electoral consequences due to outcomes in these broad-sweeping policy areas (Battista, 2012).

Both Battista (2012) and his later work (Battista, 2013) on legislator connections used conflict-of-interest filings as a proxy for legislator occupational data. Battista (2013) found that the prevalence of connection-stacking in committees across state legislatures was positively associated with the employment shares of certain industries in that state. For instance, a higher employment share of agriculture in a state was associated with more

legislators in that state being connected to the agriculture industry. However, this relationship was not evident for education, health care, and finance and insurance committees. Furthermore, an analysis of campaign contributions, which may also determine legislator behavior, did not support the author's hypothesis that teachers' unions would target education-connected legislators to pressure industry-service-oriented behavior (Battista, 2013). Therefore, state education committees may be an anomaly in that they are weakly stacked with connected, expert members who are motivated to behave in ways less associated with service to the "education industry".

Other occupation-based studies were framed by class and the congruence of occupation-moderated ideology and economic policy outcomes, which includes government spending. Carnes (2012) coded U.S. House Congresspersons' occupations over the course of the 20th century into farm owners, businesspeople, other private-sector professionals (doctors, architects), lawyers, politicians, service-based professionals (teachers, social workers), and workers (industrial, farm, union). Through an examination of roll call votes, Carnes found that legislators from profit-oriented careers voted more conservatively on economic legislation than workers. Service-based professionals were on the liberal end of the spectrum, yet more conservative than workers. These findings indicate that economic policies will be skewed towards conservative preferences that serve more affluent Americans and that the underrepresentation of workers and service-based professionals in Congress could exacerbate this effect.

Grumbach (2015) built upon Carnes (2012) by analyzing the conditional influence of parental class, framing this around the assumption that ideology is formed during adolescence. The results of the study confirm Carnes's findings and add evidence to how parental class plays a role. Upper-class legislators vote significantly more liberally on policy issues that expand opportunities for lower-income individuals (e.g., healthcare,

higher education, wages) when they come from a working-class family (manual laborers, service workers) when compared to those coming from profit-oriented upper-class families (lawyer, farm owner, businessperson). Non-profit professionals (teachers, military, career politicians) also vote significantly more liberally when they come from a working-class background than those who come from an upper-class family, but this effect disappears for Republicans. The results also showed that Republicans overall are less likely to be influenced by their social class upbringing than Democrats. These findings suggest that legislators from working-class families vote more liberally, but that there is also a strong partisan influence on voting for conservatives that can mitigate parental class effects.

Another education-related study in this review examined the relationship between roll call voting for union-supported issues and either having worked in a unionized occupation or having a family member in a union among California state and U.S. legislators (Lamare, 2016). This enriches our understanding of class background, identity formation, and legislative behavior because of the socialization and group identity associated with union membership. Furthermore, in this study, K-12 teachers had the highest probability of union experience after union officials. Lamare (2016) found that experience with unionization is associated with voting favorably on union policy, even after accounting for gender and race/ethnicity. However, less educated Democrats were more likely to favor union policies than more highly educated Democrats, while all Republicans were less likely to back union policies.

Rather than directly relating legislator occupation to legislative behavior, Maske (2019) correlated legislator occupational data with race, gender, and party affiliation and analyzed the relationships of legislator occupation with district characteristics, leadership attainment, and ideology. Maske (2019) found that women and Democrats are more likely to have a background as an educator or politico (those with a primary career dealing in

politics, such as advocacy, lobbying, community organizing, or being an elected official). Males and Republicans are more likely to come from business, attorney, insurance, public safety, and farming backgrounds, and attorneys and businesspeople are significantly more likely to become leaders within legislative bodies. Educators are also more likely to serve in highly professionalized legislatures, such as those that operate longer sessions and provide higher legislator salaries, as these limit institutional barriers to service. The majority race of a legislator's electorate also relates to profession – educators are more likely to be elected in majority-Black districts while politicos are more likely to be elected in majority-Hispanic districts. Lastly, those in careers that directly serve others, such as social work, teaching, law, medicine, government, and politicos are more liberal than their party mean, while those in private careers such as farming, business, contracting, and engineering are more conservative.

These studies suggest that educators provide informational expertise within education committees and legislative bodies and are also a source of socioeconomic representation. The findings also reinforce the importance of considering that legislative behavior is subject to party pressures and that any effects observed for educators may differ within and across parties. Lastly, an occupational background in education has important interactions with other legislator characteristics. Educators may be more likely to serve in professionalized legislatures, be female, Democrat, elected from majority-Black districts, and behave more liberally than the party they are affiliated with.

Other Occupational Background

The broader study of occupational background provides context and nuance to the diversity of experiences each legislator may have accrued throughout their lifetime. For example, a legislator may have once been an educator who then became a lawyer, business

owner, or non-profit corporate executive. The motivations for legislative behavior in occupations other than education were similar to those found in the education-related articles.

Because business is the most prevalent occupation of state legislators across the country (Kurtz, 2015), it is important to understand how a business background impacts the meaning making of legislators and the wider consideration that a business-mindset may shape the policy outcomes of state legislatures. Witko and Friedman (2008) studied the corporate political action committee (PAC) campaign contributions, pro-business roll call voting, and anti- and pro-business-related legislation sponsorship of U.S. House members with business backgrounds. A business background significantly influenced corporate PAC campaign contributions and pro-business roll call voting and legislation sponsorship (Witko & Friedman, 2008). This effect was particularly strong for those who transitioned directly from business to political office, rather than individuals who had intersectional careers in politics and business. Since campaign contributions from corporate PACs are significantly higher for legislators with business backgrounds, these legislators may serve corporate interests in order to remain in office. The motivations of business-oriented legislators are thus like the industry service theory of behavior (Battista, 2012, 2013) in that the legislator is connected to business via corporate PAC contributions.

The second most common occupational background of state legislators is in law (Kurtz, 2015). Matter and Stutzer (2015) analyzed the impact of lawyer-legislators at the federal and state level on roll call votes dealing with tort reform. Tort reforms alter the scope of liability or the damages incurred in civil liability cases in which an individual is harmed or when their legal rights are "injured." Republicans typically receive campaign contributions from the defense side of the suit while Democrats have historically benefitted from contributions from trial lawyers (representing the plaintiff). At both the federal and

state levels, lawyer-legislators are significantly less likely to support reforms that restrict tort law (Matter & Stutzer, 2015). This aligns with the authors' hypothesis that lawyer-legislators will act in the interest of their trade, which would be to keep tort cases plentiful so that lawyers can continue to profit from them. Additionally, Republicans were more likely to support tort reforms that benefited the defendant, which is consistent with historical campaign contribution trends. The motivations of lawyer-legislators may therefore be self-serving for both professional and political reasons.

While roll call votes are a valuable indicator of legislators' positionality regarding occupation, it is important to remember that only a select few bills make it to this stage. Analyzing bill sponsorship allows for a wider view of the aggregate legislative agenda of a legislative body, capturing legislators' intent before contextual factors and time take their toll. Looking at sponsorship of bills and amendments from 30 state legislatures, Hansen et al. (2019) found that legislatures with more legislators from the insurance industry have less legislation related to insurance, which suggests that insurer-legislators seek to limit government regulation of the industry. Of the insurance legislation that was considered in state legislatures, the majority were introduced by insurers. Insurer-introduced legislation was marginally more likely to be industry-friendly than the legislation of their non-insurer counterparts. These results add complexity to the analysis of legislator occupation and legislative outputs. While occupation has a definite impact, the effects of experience in insurance are not as clear-cut as with business and law. Additionally, in the case of insurance, the absence of legislation is considered friendly, which makes measurement difficult.

Not all professions are alike, and some, such as being in the military, come with severe consequences that may motivate a legislator to behave with less consideration for personal or political profit. Lupton (2017) found that veterans, females, Democrats, as well

as U.S. House Representatives with higher casualty rates in their districts were more likely to vote in favor of increased oversight of Afghan and Iraqi war operations and to limit the deployment of troops. Being a veteran raised the likelihood of these votes for both Republicans and Democrats, with a stronger effect for Republicans. Since the data for the study spanned both the Bush and Obama era, the findings also revealed that veterans significantly impacted policy outcomes despite presidential politics. Thus, veterans bring informational expertise to Congress that impacts their perception of the utility of war in a way that transcends party affiliation and political context.

Personal Identity

Race, class, and gender appear in a variety of ways among the occupational background literature and are typically used as controls rather than a central point of inquiry. However, these demographic variables deserve their own discussion, as they provide a foundation for considering the personal roots of legislator behavior. In contrast to the occupational literature, many studies frame race, class, and gender in terms of how they impact legislative decision-making and the subsequent raced, classed, and gendered policy outcomes, rather than how they may directly influence or motivate behavior.

Gender can affect attitudes towards policies such as abortion and same-sex marriage (McEvoy, 2016; Swers, 1998). As for the effects of race, legislators of color are more attentive to issues that affect populations of color (Griffin, 2014; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012). Class, which is intricately linked to occupation, impacts legislators' support for policies that benefit the wealthy (Carnes, 2012). Race, class, and gender also interact with partisan identity, as female, working-class, and legislators of color tend to be members of the Democratic party (Carnes, 2012; Dittmar, 2017; Kurtz, 2015). Lastly, increased

education levels among world leaders positively impacts economic growth (Besley et al., 2011).

Race

The literature measures and traces the behavioral effects of the legislator's race in a variety of ways, mostly through quantitative analyses of roll call votes. Only one article attempts to ascertain the underlying meaning of race for legislators in the decision-making process using qualitative methods. Much like in the occupational literature, party affiliation is consistently a strong mitigating factor, regardless of race. Additionally, party affiliation seems to be tied to racial bias and specific policy positions related to race.

Mendez and Grose (2018) examined state legislators' responsiveness to Latino and white constituents in relation to whether the legislator voted in support of or sponsored/co-sponsored voter identification laws. Using an experimental audit study, the authors found that legislators were biased against a constituent with a Spanish name. This imaginary "Latino" constituent received much lower response rates from legislators who supported voter identification laws than a "White" constituent with an English name. Republicans who supported voter identification laws were significantly more likely to respond to the White constituent over the Latino constituent. The effects persisted for Democrats, but the number of Democrats who voted for voter-identification laws was too small to allow for statistical significance. Since Republicans are overwhelmingly represented among those casting votes for voter-identification laws, party affiliation is a strong factor that is intertwined with behavior. Furthermore, racial bias is evident among legislators who ignored constituent inquiries and is related to affiliation with support for voter-identification laws, which is in turn correlated to affiliation with the Republican party.

Affiliation with the Republican party also plays a substantial role in moderating ideology, regardless of racial and ethnic background. Juenke and Preuhs (2012) investigated the relationship between state legislator's roll call votes and their proportion of Latino or Black constituents, racial/ethnic background, and ideological distance from the median ideology of their chamber. The authors controlled for district-level characteristics (unemployment rate, median household income) and chamber-level information (majority party, percentages of Black and Latino members). Latino and Black Democrats were significantly more liberal than their White counterparts, but Republican racial/ethnic minority members were not significantly different than other Republicans. Additionally, the authors found that the proportions of Black and Latino constituents were directly related to liberal political beliefs.

Party affiliation has been found in other studies of race to be a strong mitigating factor. Hero and Preuhs (2010) examined the roll call votes of Black and Latino Congresspersons in relation to minority advocacy group issues and priorities, as assessed by the scorecards of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA). Black Democrats and Latino Democrats were rated overwhelmingly high by the NAACP and NHLA, while White Republicans were rated the lowest by both organizations. Overall, the study found that there is broad cooperation and unity amongst Latino and Black Congresspersons, especially on issues related to civil rights and voting rights. Additionally, though race was an important factor, party affiliation was found to be the most consistent explanation for support of NAACP and NHLA policy interests.

In the only instance of qualitative inquiry in this literature review, Brown (2011) used interviews to understand how intersecting race and gender identities impact the political and legislative behaviors of Maryland state legislators. Brown found that Black

women understood their gendered and raced identities to be multifaceted and intertwined as they undertook their legislative work. Black male legislators, however, only saw themselves as raced. Both Black men and women expressed that their racial identity and understanding impacted the ways they approached legislative decision-making. In contrast, both male and female White legislators stated that identity mattered in the legislative decision-making process but did not articulate this in terms of race or gender. In fact, in the absence of race and gender, the White legislators often cited their profession as most salient to their decision making. A couple of White legislators denied that identity should have any impact on their legislative behavior. The findings suggest that the more marginalized an individual is, the more that the parts of identity which are subordinated (being Black, being a woman) become integral to legislative behavior. This provides support for previous findings that legislator race matters for determining behavior in favor of race-based policies but does not explain how Republican party affiliation seems to blur these effects.

Gender

The literature on gender and legislative decision-making grappled with various assumptions of what "women's issues" are. Similar to the findings for race, ideology and party affiliation were strong factors when considering the effects of gender on voting within certain issue areas. Because the methodologies used were quantitative and focused on roll call votes, the findings do not shed light on how gender impacts understanding.

The studies on gender focused on legislative behavior regarding "women's issues", which were determined in the literature in multiple ways. Volden et al. (2018) define women's issues by analyzing legislation that women introduce significantly more than men, which are civil rights and liberties; health; law, crime, and family; education; housing

and community development; and labor, employment, and immigration. Jenkins (2012) used the effects of gender on voting behavior to classify abortion, gun control, lottery/gambling, and legislative procedures (how bills are to be considered) as women's issues. Finally, Washington (2008) defined women's issues as constructed by three different interest groups (NOW, AAUW, and the National Right to Life Coalition). Though different, these methods of choosing which issues are women's issues yielded similar results among the literature.

The finding that legislative procedure is a women's issue by Jenkins (2012) is significant, given that over the past 40 years, legislation on women's issues has consistently been less likely to pass, especially when sponsored by a female legislator (Volden et al., 2018). Volden et al. (2018) studied bill passage in the U.S. House of Representatives from the 1970s to present and found that men have a greater rate of passing bills overall than women, even in women's issues areas. In the areas of health and education, sectors of the economy that tend to employ high numbers of female professionals (nurses and educators), men are statistically more successful than women as sponsoring legislation that becomes law. Additionally, legislation on women's issues has half the passage rate of all bills, which is related to the fact that women-sponsored legislation and legislation on women's issues suffers greater reductions as it moves through committee and to the chamber. Unlike many of the other studies in this review, these effects were pervasive across partisan lines.

Partisanship has consistently been an important factor to consider throughout the legislative behavior literature. Frederick (2009) found that while gender plays a role in predicting liberal roll call behavior, party has a larger impact. Similarly, Jenkins (2012) found that gender influences voting decisions on women's issues indirectly through party affiliation and ideology. However, as political contexts and electoral trends change, the effects of partisanship may also shift. While female legislators on average are more liberal

than their male counterparts, there are heavy divisions along partisan and ideological lines amongst women that have increased over time (Frederick, 2009).

Since the 108th Congress (2003-2005), Republican women have not been significantly more liberal than their male counterparts. On the other hand, Democratic women, who were once not any more liberal than their male counterparts, have become significantly more liberal than Democratic men. This occurred during a time of political polarization, as moderate women departed both parties and more conservative Republican women and more liberal, Democratic women of color were elected. On women's issues, women in both parties were more liberal than their male counterparts in earlier Congresses, but these differences have become less prevalent as Democratic males are now more supportive and Republican women less supportive of women's issues (Frederick, 2009).

Many of the gender studies aimed to determine if being a woman made a legislator more liberal, but Jenkins (2012) took the inquiry further by using survey data of the personal beliefs of the legislators to compare against their gender, party affiliation, and ideology. Personal beliefs can trump party affiliation and ideology, especially regarding issues that may be intertwined with an intense personal experience (having had a child) and religion. By incorporating personal beliefs, Jenkins found that gender becomes insignificant for the issue of abortion but is still significant for gun control. In fact, on gun control, regardless of party or personal beliefs, women voted more liberally. For abortion, the observed insignificance of gender is due to conflicted, Republican, female legislators, who voted based on specific beliefs rather than party or ideology. Gender, in this case, feels effects based on biological sex, as only women hold personal beliefs based on a lived experience such as pregnancy and childbirth.

Personal relationships, such as having a daughter, also impact legislative behavior. Washington (2008) studied how having a daughter affects male legislator's voting on

women's issues over four Congresses. The study used the raw votes of all legislators and voting record scores constructed by three different interest groups that report on women's issues. Overall, a legislator's propensity to vote more liberally on women's issues increased with the number of daughters parented, regardless of party. Using the three groups' scores of legislators, significant effects of having daughters were found for the reproductive rights issue area. Using the entire roll call votes of all four Congresses and a regression analysis, Washington found that daughters predict liberal voting for the majority of women's issues, and more often for reproductive rights than for any other issue. The effects of personal relationships, therefore, cannot be overlooked.

Class

Just as women's issues were defined in the literature in varying ways, the literature on class approaches the concept from different angles. Carnes (2012) analyzes class through the lens of occupation, Grumbach (2015) uses occupation and parental class, Kraus and Callaghan (2014) use a measure of social status, and Thiele et al. (2012) use educational level. All studies share the goal of determining how class influences legislative behavior with regard to economic policy. As aforementioned, legislators from working-class and service-based backgrounds tend to vote more liberally, including on economic policy (Carnes, 2012; Grumbach, 2015; Maske, 2019). The following studies contribute additional depth to these findings.

Party affiliation strongly mitigates the effects of class, as Republicans tend to stick with their party regardless of their class background (Grumbach, 2015). Kraus and Callaghan (2014) found similar effects in their investigation of the relationship between a U.S. House of Representatives member's social status (in terms of average wealth, race, and gender) and sponsorship of legislation impacting economic inequality. Republicans

supported legislation that increased economic inequality, regardless of their wealth, gender, or race. In contrast, high-wealth Democrats, White Democrats, and male Democrats were more likely to support economic inequality than their respective Democratic counterparts. The cohesiveness and party loyalty felt by Republicans compared to the diversity of behaviors demonstrated by Democrats was a recurring theme in the literature.

Educational level and whether a legislator attended public school is an interrelated factor when considering the effects of class on legislative behavior, particularly in relation to public education spending policies. Thiele et al. (2012) used educational level to study the effects of class and state spending on education. States with a higher percentage of members with public postsecondary degrees (both in-state and out-of-state) are positively related to higher spending on public higher education. Interestingly, in cases where the percent Democrat was significant, the authors stated that causality was not clearly established and could be a function of Democrats simply being elected more in states that spend more on public education. The link between issue position and party affiliation is therefore important to parse out when looking at personal factors such as educational background.

Political Identity

Political background, including party affiliation, is a key factor in the analysis of legislative behavior. The literature shows that party politics play a significant role in mitigating the behavior of Republican legislators, often overshadowing the effects of other factors such as race, gender, and class. The following literature provides further insight into the role of partisanship.

The party that controls a legislature impacts the behavior of legislators as they aim for certain electoral outcomes. Kirkland and Slapin (2017) studied the effects of party control on the roll call voting behavior of legislators who were ideologically moderate and extreme. They found that party loyalty decreases for those who are ideologically extreme when their party is in the majority, whereas those who are ideologically moderate increase in party loyalty when their party becomes the majority. Extremists are more likely to be strategically disloyal when in the majority for purposes of "creating a brand" or making a name for themselves amongst their constituents. These results were stronger for Republicans. The grandstanding efforts were linked to electoral politics, as majority party extremists had better outcomes in subsequent elections due to the "policy purity" (Kirkland & Slapin, 2017, p. 36) demands of their constituency.

A member's constituency is a vital component of their reelection prospects and each member should theoretically represent their constituents in order to get re-elected. Hansen and Treul (2015) studied the impact of a lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) constituency on members of the United States Congress. The authors did not explicitly include transgender and questioning individuals (TQ). Because LGB Americans are a minority group, they are subject to the majority opinion on LGB policy. Members are motivated by reelection and thus act on majority opinion, but it also stands to reason that a larger population of those in the minority can impact behavior. The authors found that the LGB population of a district has a statistically significant, positive effect on higher-risk substantive representation by the member (bill sponsorship), even after controlling for member and district partisanship. However, when the majority opinion was favorable towards the minority (i.e., a district that actively celebrates LGBTQ Pride), a larger population had no effect. Additionally, factors such as campaign contributions and party

affiliation impacted a member's propensity to provide lower-risk symbolic representation (casting a floor vote or co-sponsoring a bill).

Legislators must also take careful positions on issues of high salience to their constituents in order to satisfy the electorate. On these issues, such as health, education, taxes, and crime, legislators' personal beliefs may serve as proxies for constituency opinion and thus their behavior may not always align with their party (Jenkins, 2010). For instance, rural Republicans may vote against school vouchers because it does not benefit their constituents, whereas other Republicans may support the issue. Other contextual factors, such as chamber type, party competition, and the resources available to legislators also influence legislator behavior regarding salient issues. As for non-salient issues, party is often the dominant influence, which indicates that members vote the will of their party on legislation that is more mundane (Jenkins, 2010). Therefore, while party is certainly important, it is also crucial when investigating behavior to determine if an issue is salient and what other contextual factors exist in the political space.

Interactions with Electoral and Party Politics

Legislator identities lead to behaviors through the meaning making that occurs as a result of experiencing the world. Underlying meanings that are developed through meaning making are manifested in things like values, ideologies, and beliefs, which in turn motivate behavior. In the following section, I discuss two additional motivating factors of behavior, party politics and electoral politics.

Electoral Politics

According to the literature, legislative behavior in the area of education policy has unique outcomes, such as the tendency for educators to be assigned to education

committees based on expertise (Battista, 2012) and the related lack of profit-oriented behavior demonstrated by educator-legislators (Battista, 2013). While this professional distinction could account for some differences in behavior regarding education policy, the topic of education itself impacts all legislators as a highly salient issue to voters that may even cause a legislator to break ranks with their party (Battista, 2012; Jenkins, 2010). The broader consideration of a legislator's constituency and the associated electoral consequences is essential for making sense of legislative behavior.

A legislator represents their constituency in terms of constituent characteristics (Lupton, 2017; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012) and ideological match (Hansen & Treul, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017). For example, a conservative legislator who breaks ranks with other Republicans to vote against school funding may experience better election outcomes by demonstrating a commitment to ideological purity to their core constituents (Kirkland & Slapin, 2017). While these legislators focus on their base, others are motivated to appease the majority (Hansen & Treul, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012). In some cases, legislator behavior predicts treatment of the constituent. For instance, Republicans' preferential treatment of White constituents and parallel support of voter identification laws demonstrates a bias against the Latino vote (Mendez & Grose, 2018). The common thread between these behaviors is a goal of reelection.

Electoral politics are also impacted by campaign contributions. A legislator's occupational background is directly affected by campaign contributions, especially for businesspersons (Witko & Friedman, 2008) and lawyer-legislators (Matter & Stutzer, 2015). In this case, behavior is motivated by both a commitment to the continued profit of the occupation, as well as to the continued fund balance of the campaign account. Interest group politics such as these are also evident based on specific policy issues, regardless of occupation (Hansen & Treul, 2015).

Party Politics

In many cases, a legislator's party affiliation impacts their behavior, with distinct effects for Democrats and Republicans. In particular, the observed effects of race, class, and gender on legislator behavior seem to disappear in many cases for Republicans. Additionally, the influence of partisanship is moderated by the broader political context, as well as the internal ideology of the legislator.

Our electoral system is built upon the presence of parties. Legislators identify themselves with a party to signify their beliefs and positions, as well as to gain membership and security with like-minded politicians. For some policy issues, especially those that are non-salient, this loyalty creates patterns and predictable party outcomes (Jenkins, 2010). For example, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to vote in favor of increased wartime oversight and limited troop deployment (Lupton, 2017), while Republicans were more likely than Democrats to support voter-identification laws (Mendez & Grose, 2018) and tort reforms benefitting the defendant (Matter & Stutzer, 2015). Party affiliation was also the main predictor of support of NAACP and NHLA policy interests (Hero & Preuhs, 2010) and liberal roll call behavior (Frederick, 2009).

Perhaps because there is less diversity overall within the Republican party (Grumbach, 2015), Republicans tend to vote as a bloc whereas the Democratic party experiences intraparty effects due to heterogeneity. For example, being a member of the Republican party trumped the effects of race (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014), social class upbringing (Grumbach, 2015), wealth (Kraus & Callaghan, 2014), gender (Frederick, 2009; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014), and having a union background (Lamare, 2016). On the other hand, race, class, gender, occupation, and educational level create differential effects on legislative behavior within the Democratic party (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016, Maske, 2019). Though none of

these findings explain why the "Republican effect" exists, they do illuminate party loyalty and intraparty diversity as a particularly important aspect of party affiliation.

Conservative or liberal ideology is a fluid facet of partisanship that can be predicted by a legislator's background, apart from the aforementioned cases of the "Republican effect". Legislators who come from working-class, service-based, or non-profit backgrounds and those with working-class parents tend to vote more liberally (Carnes, 2012, Grumbach, 2015, Maske, 2019). The likelihood of behaving more liberally is also increased by being a Latino or Black Democrat (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012), having a higher percentage of Latino and Black constituents (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012), being a woman (particularly in the area of gun control) (Frederick, 2009; Jenkins, 2012), and having daughters (Washington, 2008). If party is one of the most dominant determinants of legislative behavior, it is important to consider these additional factors that might moderate intraparty behavior.

The intensity with which a legislator exhibits partisanship is a function of the political context that they are situated in. For instance, a Republican's behavior is dependent on whether they are in a red, blue, or purple state. This can be evidenced through party loyalty, which increases for moderates and decreases for extremists when their party becomes the majority (Kirkland & Slapin, 2017). In "purple conditions," legislators may conform to more moderate policy positions in order to satisfy the electorate, especially in contested districts (Jenkins, 2010). As an exception to the rule, presidential party did not impact Republican and Democrat military veteran-legislators, who have a very distinct life experience, in their roll call response to wartime politics (Lupton, 2017). Therefore, while political context does influence the ideology and partisan interactions of legislators, there may be factors that impact legislators outside of party trends.

In several instances, party was overruled by other factors. Institutional sexism within the legislative process dominates party trends as male legislators of both parties had higher rates of passage than women, even on legislation relating to women's issues (Volden et al., 2018). Distinct life experiences such as parenting a daughter (Washington, 2008) or having fought in a war (Lupton, 2017) also impact legislator behavior across party lines in related policy areas (reproductive rights and wartime oversight). And, despite the strength of the Republican party in many other areas, female Republicans matched female Democrats in behaving liberally on the polarizing issue of gun policy (Jenkins, 2012). Some have suggested that this effect is related to the lower numbers of female gun-owners and the tendency of Republican female gun-owners to support regulations that reduce gun violence (Horowitz, 2017). Lastly, legislators in both parties with higher numbers of LGB constituents were more likely to support pro-LGB policy (Hansen & Treul, 2015), which is on trend with increasingly favorable majority opinions of the LGB community. Embedded discrimination, highly impactful life experiences, "life or death" policy issues, and low-risk considerations for constituent factions all contribute to unique cases in which party is not a dominant determinant in policy outcomes.

Educator-Legislators

The literature on legislators with an occupational background in education is sparse and is blended into studies focused on other occupational backgrounds. These studies show that, across most professions, legislators support legislation that creates a more favorable environment for their profession (Carnes, 2012; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Witko & Friedman, 2008). However, in the case of education, only one study corroborated these findings – state legislators with an occupation in higher education have been found to "serve the industry" by increasing appropriations to their institutions (Couch et al.,

1992). In this section, I present an analysis of specific findings related to studies that included educator-legislators.

Committee assignments allow for legislators to leverage their expertise by impacting specific policy areas. Educators, however, are weakly sorted into education committees (Hamm et al., 2011), which are weakly stacked with education industry-connected legislators, as compared to agriculture and judiciary committees (Battista, 2012, 2013). This could be due to fewer numbers of educators in legislatures (Hamm et al., 2011) and the resulting disproportionality of the employment share of education to education-related legislators (Battista, 2013). Educators who *are* sorted into education committees may serve a more informational rather than an interest group or industry-service purpose (Battista, 2012), especially since they do not appear to be beholden to teachers' unions (Battista, 2013). Furthermore, when educator-legislators are on committees congruent with their profession they introduce more legislation on the topic and have greater leadership capacity (Francis & Bramlett, 2017), though other studies have found no significant impact of having been an educator on leadership attainment (Maske, 2019). Therefore, committee assignments of educators may have implications for the quality and quantity of education legislation introduced and passed.

Class, ideology, and party affiliation play an interrelated role with the effects of occupation on legislative behavior. Service-based or non-profit professionals, such as educators, tend to vote more liberally (Maske, 2019), and more liberally on economic policy specifically if they come from a working-class family (Carnes, 2012; Grumbach, 2015). However, partisanship tends to trump class-related occupational effects, as Republicans are more likely to vote with their party despite their background (Grumbach, 2015). Similarly, Republicans with a union background are less likely to back union policy than their Democrat counterparts (Lamare, 2016). Therefore, education professionals are

potentially blocked within a particular socioeconomic class that tends to behave more liberally but are not shielded from the effects of partisan affiliation.

Educator-legislators are also subject to the effects on behavior of other aspects of personal and political background, as they tend to be female, Democrat, elected from majority-Black districts, and more liberal than their respective parties (Maske, 2019). Legislatures were created by males for male legislators and are still predominantly male today, which creates an unequal power dynamic that allows for men to sponsor and pass more legislation than women, especially in the female-dominated profession of education (Volden et al., 2018). Likewise, the failure to recognize race and gender as salient aspects of identity results in policymaking that is absent in consideration for marginalized people (Brown, 2011). Whether a legislator has a postsecondary degree and whether that degree was from a public institution may also impact legislator's favor for public higher education spending, which has implications for education in terms of educator preparation programs (Thiele et al., 2012). Thus, the act of making education policy with limited concern for these dynamics has implications for both the teaching profession and the student body, as the makeup of both stands in contrast to the composition of the political institution.

Summary

The impact of a legislator's identity, which is intersectional, predictably impacts behavior, including committee assignments, sponsorship and co-sponsorship of legislation, roll call votes, and responding to constituents. The literature suggests that a legislator's background provides them with informational expertise and experience that causes action in favor of their identity or those they identify with. However, members of the Republican party exhibit particularly high loyalty and homogeneity of behavior, which often masks the influence of occupation or personal background. Additionally, within and outside of party

affiliation, electoral politics and party politics are fluid factors that mitigate behavior. Considerations for their constituency and campaign donors impact a legislator's "display" of ideology and alignment to their party, as do highly impactful aspects of identity or life experience. The literature on legislative behavior helps to paint a picture of the motivations and preceding factors of some of the policy outcomes we have today (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Map of the Literature

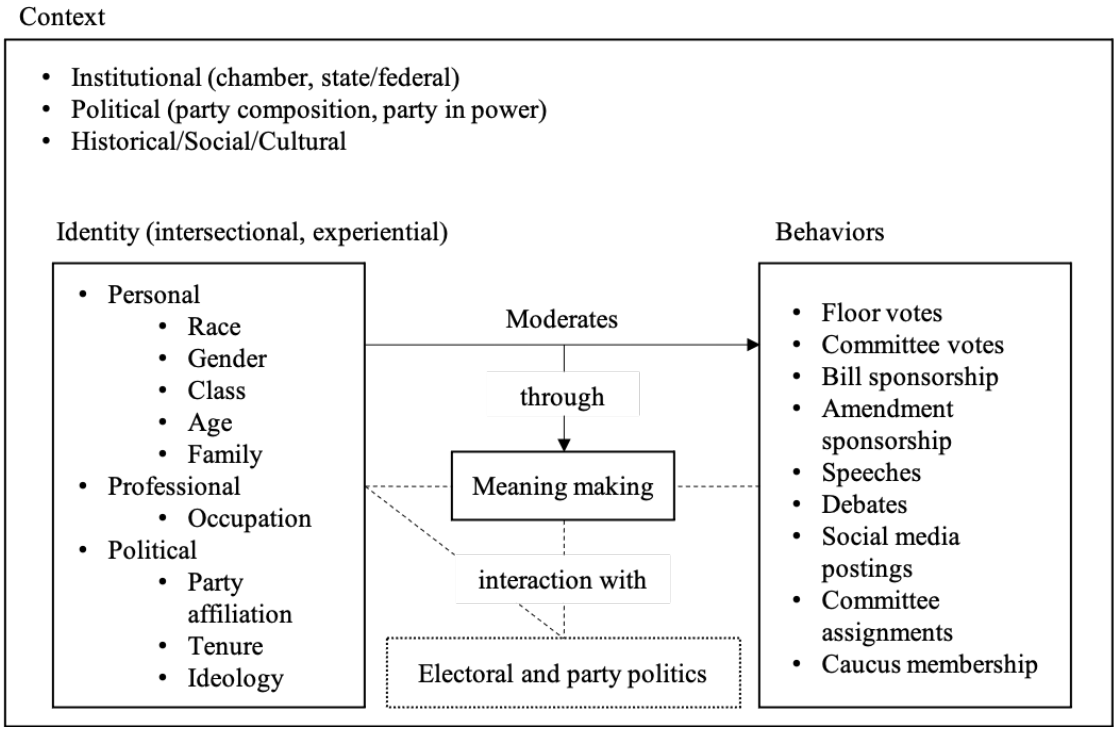


Figure 1 shows the relationships between the concepts that emerged from the literature, as well as some behaviors that were not explicitly touched on in the literature but may be important variables to consider (age, tenure, and social media postings). A legislator's identity is situated within an institutional, political, historical, sociocultural context, which makes the consideration of partisan composition, chamber, and society

important in this study. Additionally, electoral and party politics will inevitably impact the lens through which the legislator makes meaning of education, as they attempt to align to the expectations of party or constituency. The conceptual map laid the framework for how I approached the big ideas of the study.

DIRECTION FOR RESEARCH

The literature on legislator characteristics and behavior paints a broad-strokes picture of why some policy outcomes exist but lacks depth and explanation of *why* certain characteristics inspire particular behavior. This is a black box-type conundrum: the inputs and outputs are known, but how the input becomes the output is unknown.

The use of qualitative methods is needed in this area of inquiry in order to balance the heavy reliance on quantitative methods, which are typical of political science studies. Only one study within this review used quantitative methods to elucidate how a characteristic led to certain beliefs and understandings that impacted legislators' decision-making process (Brown, 2011). Many of the other studies used large datasets involving legislator characteristics, including factors such as constituency demographics, roll call votes, political context, and widely used ideology scales such as DW-NOMINATE. Including a multitude of factors allowed for the authors to use robust controls and provide results with the guarantee of statistical significance. Yet, each study concluded with speculations that left the reader wondering "how" and "why."

The study of how a former or current occupation impacts legislative behavior is also lacking in diversity. While studies that focus on business, law, and agricultural backgrounds are reasonable given the abundance of these individuals within the legislative sphere, more inquiry is needed on professions such as education and health – two of the most salient policy issues to voters. As evidenced from this literature review, the study of

a background in education without consideration for other factors would be incomplete. Educators are layered in many of the aspects covered in this literature review, such as gender, race, and class, and are represented in both the Republican and Democratic parties. Thus, the qualitative study of how a former career as an educator impacts education policy outcomes, complete with former and current legislators from both parties, would add great depth and clarity to the literature. In the next section, I describe the conceptual framework that drove my understanding of meaning making.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Meaning making is the process of constructing reality (Crotty, 1998) and making sense of the world (Weick, 1995). How individuals make meaning of their experiences is important in fully understanding how a certain characteristic, such as having been an educator, impacts behavior (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Crotty, 1998). In order to guide the design of this study, I chose Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework as an overarching theory and Lofland et al.'s (2005) conception of cognitive aspects or meanings. Both of these theories rest on the construction of meaning within social settings and organizations.

Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking refers to how people engage in a cyclical process of comprehension and prediction in response to stimuli around them. Weick argues that sensemaking involves putting stimuli into frameworks, comprehending, creating new conceptions in response to surprises, constructing meaning, interacting with others for mutual understanding, and patterning. Thus, sensemaking is not simply interpretation of an experience, it is also the invention of a plausible meaning of that experience.

In their professional experience, educators are often met with chaos, which Weick (1995) states is the start of sensemaking. These puzzling and surprising situations in professional life require sense to be made of uncertainty and when educators encounter a

subsequently troubling event, they must enter the cycle again of sensemaking. Therefore, sensemaking is about action and the process, within a context, an individual undergoes to generate meaning.

Weick (1995) describes the framework of the sensemaking process through seven characteristics. Sensemaking is 1) grounded in identity construction, 2) retrospective, 3) enactive of sensible environments, 4) social, 5) ongoing, 6) focused on and by extracted cues, and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Sensemaking begins with an individual that is simultaneously developing and adopting identity as they derive cues from a situation. As the individual moves past a situation in time, they build narratives to understand what happened. Sensemaking therefore occurs before, during, and after an individual encounters an event and is deeply intertwined with who the individual is.

Weick's (1995) framework helps to organize the process that educators who are legislators underwent during their years in the classroom and explains that their sensemaking of education is ongoing into present time. The identity of the legislator continued to develop since their teaching career, which shifts their retrospective accounts into what they believe to be most plausible meaning given the current context. Likewise, the social and interpersonal cues legislators received as educators and continue to receive as educator-legislators are inputs in the process of making meaning of their jobs, roles, and selves (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Therefore, the meaning making of education that legislators who were educators possess is ongoing and contextualized within the policy environment.

Meaning is an abstract concept that requires concrete tools in a study. In order to extract the facets of meaning, Lofland et al. (2005) provides a helpful breakdown of what meaning is constituted of. Lofland et al. describes meaning as manifested in ideologies and kindred concepts, rules or norms, and self-concepts and identities. These artifacts of

meaning are useful in understanding how legislators who were educators might narrate their experiences. Additionally, the manifestation of meaning within identity circles back to the grounding of sensemaking in identity formation (Weick, 1995), which makes these two theories helpful and complimentary in understanding meaning making and developing an appropriate study.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I detailed findings from the literature into three broad descriptive categories: the impact of personal, political, and professional identity on legislator behavior, the interaction of electoral and party politics with identity and behavior, and specific findings regarding educator-legislators across the literature. I then presented a conceptual map linking identity with meaning making and behavior. Based on the literature, the path from identity to behavior complex. Not only do identities intersect and interact, but other factors like considerations for constituency and political context, also play a role in determining behavior.

I also detailed my conceptual framework in this chapter, which offers a theoretical basis for understanding meaning making and a practical understanding of how to identify meaning making. Both the conceptual map derived from the literature and the conceptual framework offer a jumping-off point for this dissertation, outlining the relationships to be explored, factors to be aware of, what types of information to collect, and a roadmap for analysis. In the next chapter, I detail my methodology for filling in the content and methodological gaps identified in the literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to build an understanding of how legislators' engagement with the world as an educator has influenced their meaning making of education and their education-related decision-making process within the policy context. Previous studies built numerical models showing the relationship of legislator characteristics with legislative behavior, without contributing to knowledge of how occupational identity impacts the thought-processes that precede behavior. I specifically wish to explore the void of understanding about the meaning that legislators attribute to their former occupation as an educator.

To accomplish the goal of the study, I hold an epistemological orientation of constructionism, which provides that truth is not objective and that individuals make meaning as they interact with the world around them (Crotty, 1998). Within the epistemological view of constructionism, I adopt the interpretivist theoretical perspective of social constructivism. Social constructivism assumes that individuals' interpretations of the world and the meanings they make for certain experiences are formed through interactions with others within a historical and social context (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, I follow one of the historical threads of interpretivism, social interactionism, which assumes that individuals act towards things based on the meaning they have attributed to them (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Crotty, 1998). Given that theoretical perspectives drive the assumptions behind methodology choice, social constructivism's focus on understanding, meaning, and process is a fitting choice when situating this study to appropriately answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998).

Social constructivism has several important assumptions (Creswell, 2007). First, the researcher seeks to understand the complexity of varied subjective meanings attributed to a certain experience, which in this case would be a legislator's former occupational

experience of education and its interaction with policy work. Second, meanings are constructed through interactions with others and by historical and cultural norms and specific contexts. Legislators who were educators constructed a meaning of education starting with their first experiences as students, to when they were educators, to their work in policy. Additionally, social constructivist researchers allow theory to emerge from the data rather than starting with a solid theory, as most studies relating to the topic of legislator occupation and behavior have done. Lastly, I acknowledge that this study is interpretive and will be colored by my interaction with participants and the data, both of which are impacted by my background, biases, and positionality. These assumptions are crucial in choosing an appropriate methodological approach to answering the research questions.

Qualitative methodologies are well-suited to generate theory and meaning in an under-developed area requiring exploration and detailed findings (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2008). Qualitative case studies are defined by research that includes one or more cases, where each case is a bounded system that is focused on a particular phenomenon. Each case provides thick, literal description, and heuristically brings forth new understandings (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, the flexibility and recursive nature of a qualitative case study approach allows for constant checks against personal biases, emergent themes and the chance to discover new phenomena (Maxwell, 2013). Using a qualitative multi-case study method and instrumentation techniques such as interviews and content analysis, I gathered varied interpretations of study participants that led to rich, contextual case descriptions, common themes across cases, and a theory and final assertions about the research questions (Creswell, 2007).

Reflexive Role of the Researcher

With the adoption of the social constructivist approach, it was important to first disclose my relationship with data and the subjects of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Due to my own past and present experience, I brought a layer of understanding that interacted with the meaning making elucidated from my participants. Therefore, the final interpretation of the phenomenon of how the former occupational experience impacts a legislators' understanding was filtered through my lens (Merriam, 1998). In order to explicitly identify my biases, I engaged in reflexive comment on my past experiences and how these past experiences may shape my interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2013).

As I struggled to be successful in my first year of teaching, many of the obstacles I faced led to policy questions. I wondered if policymakers had ever been in the classroom or asked teachers what they thought would improve education. I researched who was on the education committees in the Texas House and Senate, only to find that there were very few legislators with an occupational background in education making the decisions that directly impacted my profession. I realized that I felt acted on by the system rather than an active part of it and charted a course of action, starting with graduate school. As I learned the complexity of the policymaking process, my negative bias towards policymakers lessened. I stayed aware during this study that an occupational experience in education does not necessarily lead to an interpretation of educational solutions that aligns with my views. Additionally, while my interpretation of education problems and solutions focused on ways to reform state mandates and enhance the profession, it may be the case that others' interpretations are student-centered, resource-centered, community-centered, etc.

At the start of my doctoral program, I dove into policy at the Texas Capitol as a staffer for a Democratic legislator who sat on the House public education committee. I worked one legislative session in this role, writing and analyzing legislative proposals from

the perspective of an educator. In my second legislative session, I worked in my current role as a lobbyist for a teacher association, analyzing hundreds of education bills and amendments and meeting with legislators on behalf of teachers across Texas. This work in policy allowed me to see that the policy actors and process I had criticized as a teacher involved many elusive variables, such as the reasons that legislators author bills and the prevalence of behind-the-scenes brokers. The bias I bring from my policy work is likely to lead to skepticism that my participants are not sharing the whole story, which would be detrimental to a healthy, trustful relationship between researcher and subject. Politics is messy business and I think my study will be limited by my role as an active lobbyist who, in the case of current legislators, works with these individuals on policy and is part of campaign donation decisions. These power dynamics must be carefully considered and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

As a teacher "on the outside" and a policy actor "on the inside," I have a unique perspective of the policy process and its impact on education policy outcomes. I bring with me to this study my initial impetus for being a teacher, which was a calling to serve children, and my experiences from both charter and traditional employment settings. However, I understand that my feelings about being a teacher are not universal and that my understanding of education is limited to my own experiences. Additionally, my experiences in the Texas Capitol as a staffer and a lobbyist are constrained to specific people and events. Therefore, while I believe that the overlap in experiences between myself and my participants will allow for a deeper understanding, I do believe it is possible that my participants may have an entirely different meaning of education than I. To incorporate reflexivity into this study, I engaged in ongoing analytic memo-writing that included reflections and self-policing to make sure that my personal experience was not interfering with my interpretation of the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Case study designs allow the researcher to use a case or cases as specific examples that lead to an understanding of an issue or problem (Creswell, 2007). In designing my case study, I sought out seminal methodologists such as Yin (2003), Stake (1995), and Merriam (1998) and leaned on the analyses of others to make distinctions about which methodologist shared my epistemological orientation (Creswell, 2007; Yazan, 2015). I found Merriam (1998) to be the most aligned to my own beliefs and intellectual needs, as she lays out a purely constructivist justification for case study design and orients herself towards the field of education.

Merriam (1998) states that the purpose of a case study design is to engage in in-depth discovery of process and context, rather than to confirm certain outcomes or variables. Since the concept of legislator meaning making is unfamiliar and understudied, I believe a case study is an appropriate exploratory tool that will allow for emergent themes and reflexivity (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998).

In this study, I used multiple cases with each case defined as a single person. By using a multi-case study design and bounding the cases to Texas legislators who have a former occupational experience in education, I built a deeper understanding of a very particular phenomenon, a rich description across cases (Merriam, 1998), and developed an idea of locally-grounded causation (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, I bound the cases in time to narrow the study by focusing on how the legislator's former occupational experience impacts their understanding of education within the legislative setting.

Using multiple data sources, a crucial aspect of case studies (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998), I developed holistic and detailed descriptions of each case and conducted within-case and cross-case analyses to build an in-depth understanding of the concept (Creswell, 2007). Ultimately, the overall multi-case study design provided for an

interpretation of how a former occupational experience in education impacts a legislator's understanding of and interaction with education within the policy context.

SAMPLE

Case studies characteristically involve purposive sampling because the intent of the study is to build detailed descriptions of specialized phenomena rather than to generalize, which would require probability sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). In order to provide detail bounded by a specific setting, I intentionally chose Texas House and Senate legislators, past and present, who were former educators in the K-12 public education system for my sample pool. Choosing Texas legislators tapped into my familiarity and pre-existing relationships with legislators and the Texas legislative process. Although all interviews were done remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this familiarity improved rapport, trust, and my ability to probe more effectively during interviews. Additionally, the variability across cases in partisan affiliation, race, gender, seniority, religion, and age, allowed for increased confidence in the findings across and within cases (Miles et al., 2014).

At a minimum, five richly studied cases are necessary in a multi-case study and more than ten cases involves too much data (Miles et al., 2014). I identified 15 subjects fitting the criteria by researching legislator occupations and word of mouth. Though I initially planned to use a snowball sampling technique, in which participants inform me of other potential participants as interviews progress (Miles et al., 2014), this was not necessary.

I contacted seven legislators from my list and was successful in obtaining interviews from five. All of the legislators are current or former members of the Texas House of Representatives and their tenures range from 15 to two years. Male and female

legislators as well as Republican and Democrat legislators are represented. Additionally, all have a graduate degree. For confidentiality reasons, especially because these are five individuals from a small pool of 13 possibilities, I chose not to create a table outlining the characteristics of the legislators. Instead, each legislator is described in narrative form in my results section.

Due to confidentiality considerations and because race was not central to my epistemology or research questions, I chose to not explicitly state the legislator's racial identity within each narrative, but I did talk about race if the legislator brought it to light. My fear is that there are too few educator-legislators to disclose any more information than I already have without making them easily identifiable. While I believe that race is pervasive in our society, my dissertation aims to build a broad, foundational theory about meaning making based on professional background as an educator. I believe that a study devoted to the interaction of race with meaning making of education should be a future, separate study and fully acknowledge the limitations of this dissertation due to the absence a consideration of race.

Cases must provide rich detail and it is imperative that researchers use other data sources to complement interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Within each case, I used a theoretical sampling technique (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014) to collect documents, audiovisual material, and other content before and after the interview process. Theoretical sampling is a flexible technique that allows the researcher to gather data based on an emerging concept as the study progresses (Miles et al., 2014). The content included speeches, interviews, newspaper articles, press releases, floor debates and remarks, committee hearing activity, candidate surveys, and the authorship of legislation, all of which are publicly available.

DATA COLLECTION

This multi-case study aims to generate setting-specific hypotheses about how legislators with a former occupational background as an educator bring their understanding of education into the policy context. Due to the lack of knowledge about this phenomenon, the study is exploratory and inductive and involves multiple cases so that cross-case comparisons can be made to derive richer themes. Therefore, while it is desirable for purposes of flexibility and freedom of discovery that the data collection methods are not close-ended, they must not be fully open-ended either, otherwise comparison would be inappropriate (Miles et al., 2014). For this reason, the interview component of this study was semi-structured (Merriam, 1998), with pre-determined questions supplemented by the ability to use open-ended probes and follow-up interviews (Creswell, 2007).

As the instrument of data collection, I drove interviews towards answering the research questions by asking well-worded questions and piloting the interview through informal conversations before beginning the research study (Merriam, 1998). Before and after interviews, I used theoretical sampling (Merriam, 1998) to gather documents and other publicly available content to build a rich description of each case. By collecting this data before each interview, I was also able to build foreknowledge about each legislator, learn their talking points and common language, and get an idea of their policy focus areas. This facilitated more effective probing, clarity, and depth (Merriam, 1998), and comprehension during the interview.

During the interview, I was conscious of how the interaction between researcher and participant can lead to a "co-authored" interpretation of meaning (Miles et al., 2014), and made sure to avoid conversation. I also used member-checking during the interview to allow participants to verify my interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). After each interview, I continued to collect data for content analysis. I added to the previous collection, especially

if the participant mentioned critical bills, amendments, floor debates, speeches, etc. that I had not already collected.

Interviews

The study included one, 60-minute maximum, semi-structured interview per participant (Appendix) with a potential follow-up interview for member checking (Miles et al., 2014). Due to the busy schedules of legislators and the proximity of the interview and data analysis to the legislative session, only one interview was reasonable. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and cleaned. During each interview and immediately after, I wrote reflective notes containing descriptions of the place, participant, how the interview went, and any other emergent thoughts (Merriam, 1998). These were placed in each legislator's memo.

In order to gather relevant data, I used the research questions to develop carefully-worded, open-ended, non-leading interview questions that used language familiar to the respondent (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). The interview guide (Appendix) includes questions in several different styles (Merriam, 1998; Strauss et al., 1981). The questions elicited descriptions of actual experiences, personal opinions and feelings, and information that goes beyond what could be uncovered with simple questions such as a yes-or-no or, "How do you feel about X," questions. Out of respect for the respondents' schedules, I limited the interview guide to one icebreaker (Creswell & Creswell, 2013) and two sets of three questions, one set for each research question.

I began each interview by explaining my background, what the study is about, and how I planned to protect the participant and reduce bias. The first question, "Tell me about yourself," will help to establish comfort and rapport in the interview process. I did not

expect to gain any substantive information related to the research questions with this introduction but did use some of the data in the identity section of each narrative.

The research questions involve the concept of meaning making, which refers to how individuals construct understanding of the world around them. According to Lofland et al. (2005), meaning can be manifested in ideologies and kindred concepts, rules or norms, and self-concepts and identities. Using these three facets of meaning, I constructed three interview questions for each research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). When necessary, I used probing questions such as, "Tell me more," and, "Could you explain what you meant by X," to gain more clarity and depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2013).

The first research question aims to uncover how educator-legislators make meaning of education within the policy context. To gather information related to the identity of the legislator that ties together their complex experiences in both the education and policy worlds, I first asked them to walk me through their educational journey from becoming a teacher to becoming a legislator. I then asked how their journey or classroom experience shaped their thinking as a political figure. This question provided information about the legislator's self-concept, as well as their beliefs and values related to education and other policy areas important to them. The last question asked the legislator to describe the ideal relationship between government and education, which provided information about meaning by delving into the legislator's conceptions about rules regarding the educational system within the policy context.

The second research question relates to how the educator-legislator's understanding of education impacts their legislative behavior. The following set of three interview questions differs from the first set in that they aimed to elucidate information specifically regarding processes and actions rather than the broader context of policy. The first question drew on the interactionist assumptions of social constructivism and asked the legislator

how they felt their experience as an educator impacts their relationships with other policy actors in terms of education policy. The question garnered information related to the legislator's identity as an educator and how that identity influenced their interactions with actors such as other legislators, lobbyists, advocates, executive branch leadership, etc. The next question asked the legislator to take me back to a critical decision they made in the legislature relating to education, providing that this could be a bill, speech, debate, committee membership, or any other event. This question brought forth the legislator's beliefs and values about which education topics are most important and meaningful, as well as the process they underwent during this event. The final question asked for more detail on the critical decision and asked the participant to help me understand why they behaved the way they did in that instance.

Content Collection

To complement the interview data, I collected qualitative documents and material related to the legislator's behavior while running for office or in office, both pre- and post-interview. By including qualitative data beyond interviews, I gained background knowledge on the participant, familiarity with their voice, and useful information that might otherwise go untouched in an interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). These additional data sources were also used to build detailed case narratives for each participant.

I used several government websites as sources of information for content analysis. Through the Texas House of Representatives (house.texas.gov) website, I found publicly available text-searchable journals of daily proceedings in the House and Senate, including limited transcripts of floor debates and speeches. I also found archived audiovisual recordings of floor, committee, and press conference activity conducted within the Capitol, and archived press releases. Using the Texas Legislature Online (capitol.texas.gov)

database, I gathered data related to amendments and legislation primary-authored and joint-authored. Lastly, I used the Legislative Reference Library (lrl.texas.gov), which is a searchable database that houses archived articles, news, committee assignments, biographical sketches, tenure, and legislation.

In the Texas House of Representatives, there can only be one primary author on a bill and a primary author can authorize up to four joint authors, who must be of the same chamber as the author. While coauthors also have to be authorized by the primary author, the number of coauthors is unlimited. To enhance the significance of legislation included in the content analysis and keep the volume of data manageable, I only included authored and joint-authored bills. Furthermore, I did not include in my analysis simple resolutions that were congratulatory or honorary in nature.

In addition to government websites, I used specific search terms ("legislator name" or "legislator name" AND "education", sometimes also using the term "Texas") to find content on Google News (news.google.com), Google Video (video.google.com), and YouTube (youtube.com). I also used the search engines for news media outlets that cover Texas politics, such as the *Houston Chronicle*, *Texas Tribune*, *Austin-American Statesman*, *Texas Monthly*, Spectrum News Austin, KVUE Austin, and KXAN Austin. Additionally, I looked at each legislator's Facebook and Twitter pages for relevant videos. In all cases, I exhausted all search results before moving on to a new set of search terms. Since this is a wide swath of content, I also purposely asked the legislator for specific examples of events to supplement my own research and investigation. Additionally, I did not use participants' social media content other than posted videos due to the potentially unreasonable volume of data that would have resulted. Furthermore, it is my experience that staffers tend to heavily manage legislators' social media accounts, which could muddle the purity of the data.

At the completion of data collection, I accumulated 245 artifacts across all five cases, ranging from 22 to 62 additional pieces of content per legislator. This does not include documents downloaded from the Legislative Reference Library and Texas Legislature online databases, which provided aggregate listings of bills filed for each legislator across all applicable legislative sessions. Out of all bills and amendments filed by the study participants, as well as remarks recorded in writing in the Texas House of Representatives journal, 461 were relevant to the study and analyzed. Legislators ranged from having 51 to 166 bills, amendments, and remarks attributed to their case.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, I used a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), using initial coding to avoid forcing the data into pre-determined categories or themes (Saldaña, 2016). Grounded theory is a useful approach to this data because of its ability to allow themes to emerge and theories to develop through the constantly comparative process of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because of this approach, I used a multi-step process to code the entire corpus of data first and then applied strategies in the second cycle of coding to condense and pattern the codes based on the goals of my research questions. I then wrote narrative summaries to answer the research questions for each participant (see descriptive findings in Chapter Four). Finally, I coded the narratives and created individual and holistic concept maps to explore broader themes within and across cases to answer the research questions (see analytic findings in Chapters Five and Six).

Coding Strategy

Using the qualitative coding and analysis software NVivo, I began the first cycle of coding with the five interview transcripts and an inductive method (Miles et al., 2014) of initial coding or "open coding," which included in vivo, process, emotion, and descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding uses the language of the participant to generate codes that can then be grouped into broader categories and is helpful for identifying behaviors and processes. Process codes are gerunds and captures routines, rituals, pauses/interruptions that occur for the purposes of achieving a goal. Emotion codes capture emotions and descriptive codes are simply used to categorize data at face value. Thus, during this first stage of coding, I combined elemental and affective coding strategies in an overall initial coding method (Saldaña, 2016).

While I employed an initial coding strategy, I also considered the theoretical foundations of my research questions, which helped to focus my efforts on what was valuable to code and what codes may provide answers. Meaning making is manifested in ideologies, values, beliefs, rules, roles, relationships, and identities (Lofland et al., 2005). Throughout the coding process, I looked for these aspects and used specific coding strategies, such as values coding, to ensure that I was pulling out key data related to meaning making. Values coding is specifically related to coding chunks of data that show a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs towards a particular concept (Saldaña, 2016).

Some of the initial codes generated were also based off of concepts I noticed while interviewing and cleaning transcripts. These included identity and self-concept, tendency towards bipartisanship, engaging in student-centered policymaking, having a political savvy, apolitical beliefs, relationships with other members, running on a public education platform, articulating systemic views of education and other institutions, being a lifelong learner/adaptive to new knowledge, and expressing core beliefs.

I generated 84 codes after the first round of initial coding of the first interview, which I then condensed to eliminate duplicate ideas. I analyzed the first interview transcript a second time to focus and group the initial codes and created top-level codes for values, beliefs, and attitudes. I re-coded previous codes if they were related to values, beliefs, or attitudes and went through the interview again to capture other values, beliefs, and attitudes on emergent categories, such as those about education or partisanship. Then, using a focused coding strategy (Saldaña, 2016), I reorganized the codes into new top-level codes or into other existing top-level codes as it made sense. After a third round of coding on the first interview to ensure I captured all emergent ideas and had sufficiently sorted them, there were 12 top-level codes and 46 child codes, some of which had their own child codes.

Coding the second interview required care in ensuring that I was not forcing the second participant into codes and ideas created for the first participant. Codes were added, modified, and generalized to capture ideas between the two participants without diminishing prior work. This process was repeated for the remaining participants. For each code added, I returned to previous participants to add data from their interview to the new code. I also engaged in analytic memo-writing while coding each interview to document thoughts about codes and kept a research journal to document steps taken (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, I made jottings within NVivo using the "annotation" feature to capture thoughts and interpretive meanings of coded data.

After coding all five participant interviews, I created a preliminary codebook in my analytic memo as an intermediate analytic strategy. Saldaña (2016) describes this effort as "code charting" (p. 229), in which the researcher creates a table of codes and their meaning across participants with the goal of condensing and clarifying. In this transitional stage of coding, I revisited the data across all cases for each code to write descriptions, make modifications to code names, consolidate similar ideas, create top-level codes, eliminate

codes that were irrelevant or unfocused, and even recode or uncode data that didn't belong where it had ended up. In my analytic memo, I documented action and thoughts regarding this second stage of the coding process, as well as ideas about emergent themes.

Coding the interviews laid the foundation for content analysis. For each participant, I coded content that was a direct quote from the participant or that was written in the first person (e.g., an "About Me" portion of a campaign website). While someone else could have written the content, it was presumably edited and approved by the legislator as an accurate representation of their voice. At this stage, content was coded based on existing codes resulting from the first and second-cycle coding strategies. I also descriptively coded the caption of each bill and content of each amendment authored by the legislator, as well as any remarks recorded in writing in the House journal. Codes were further modified, reorganized, and focused during this step.

Ultimately, the data analysis stage resulted in six top-level codes: behavior and beliefs regarding specific policy areas, being a policymaker, identity, meaning of education, reconciliation, and voice of an educator. Each of these had multiple child codes, some of which had their own children as well. These codes and child codes each consisted of various manifestations of meaning making and behavior and were not discrete in their boundaries or applications to the research questions. Therefore, I drew on the codes in slightly different ways for each participant to answer the research questions within their narrative.

Writing the Narratives

To write each participant's narrative, I first analyzed how the codes provided answers to the research questions. Writing the narratives and answering the research questions for each participant followed the same general pattern of code usage with slight

variances. For instance, some codes may have been helpful in answering both questions, while another code was useful for the first question in one legislator's narrative and useful for the second question in another's.

The first research question seeks to answer how current and former Texas state legislators with an occupational background as an educator make meaning of education within the policy context. Answering this question means first understanding the legislator's personal, professional, and political identities as underlying and intertwined with their meaning making (Weick, 1995). It also means understanding the legislator's beliefs about the meaning and purpose of education, including their beliefs about the roles of teachers and what teaching is. Lastly, it is essential to understand the legislator's beliefs about the relationship between government and education, what the role of government is, and what rules and values the legislature should follow and uphold.

Meaning making involves the values and beliefs the legislator holds about policymaking, such as their own decision-making considerations and the interaction of partisanship and elections with the process. It is also important to understand the legislator's perceptions and beliefs about the importance of educator voice within the policy process, be it their own voice or educators in general, and how this voice balances the voices of non-educators in the legislature. How the legislator reconciles their past beliefs as an educator with their new beliefs as a legislator also shows how they have incorporated their professional background into their political background, adapting it into the policy context. Lastly, the legislator's beliefs and values about specific education policy areas are a direct translation of their classroom experience into the policy context, acting as a conceptual bridge to how their meaning making of education impacts discrete legislative behaviors such as authored legislation.

The second research question deals with how the legislator's understanding of education impacts their legislative behavior. Answering this question involves looking at descriptive components of the educator-legislator's legislative experience, such as committee assignments, and analyzing other aspects of behavior such as authored legislation, remarks given on the House chamber floor, and critical policy decisions made regarding education. It is also important to understand how the legislator uses their voice "as an educator" during the policymaking process, and when they use this voice to support certain actions and beliefs. The impact of meaning making on legislative behavior is ultimately tied back to the foundational identities of the legislator and their meaning making of education, making it important to state connections between these two concepts in the narrative.

The general format of the narrative was to first lay out the identity of the participant and then to answer the research questions. I answered the first research question using codes related to beliefs and values and answered the second question using codes related to behaviors and actions. Using NVivo, I created matrices for each participant that included the codes I needed to write the narrative sections. Initially, I pulled multiple codes relevant to each section to scan for any data that needed to be included. For this reason, each participant's narrative follows a slightly different path, as some codes were relevant to a particular concept for some legislators and not for others. As I wrote each narrative, I created a visual conceptualization of the relationships emerging from the data.

Within-Case and Cross-Case Analyses

To conduct within-case and cross-case analyses, I first identified concepts and relationships in the narratives through a concept coding strategy (Saldaña, 2016). In addition, I consulted a list of potential themes in my analytic memo that were collected

while coding and writing the narratives. With these themes in mind and using each narrative, I created a concept map for each participant with directional arrows while adding to my list of potential themes. Miles et al. (2014) alternatively refer to these maps as "network models."

After creating each concept map, I wrote a detailed summary of the relationships between concepts for each participant. These are described in Chapter Five as within-case findings. Then, I simplified each participant's concept map to only show the relationships between concepts, rather than relationships between subcomponents of concepts (e.g., "experiences with students" within professional identity), and combined these simplified maps to create a holistic overlay of all five participants. Arrows denoting relationships for each participant were color coded. I simplified the concept map further by using color-coding to denote relationships that were evident for five, four, three, two, or only one participant. All iterations of concept maps were retained for reference.

The relationships present in the holistic overlay showed how identity moderated meaning making, how different aspects of meaning making interacted with each other, and how meaning making moderated behavior. For each relationship, I coded the narratives using NVivo to organize the data, create matrices for each theme across participants, and to generate the themes that ultimately led to the analytical cross-case findings in Chapter Six and the overall theory in Chapter Seven.

STRATEGIES FOR VALIDATING FINDINGS

In any study, it is important that the quality of conclusions drawn is ensured through multiple strategies of validation (Miles et al., 2014). This is due to the inherent threats of researcher bias and reactivity, which impact the ways that data are interpreted and the interactions with participants (Maxwell, 2013). Internal validity relates to the credibility of

the results whereas external validity relates to the ability of the conclusions to be transferable or objectively true in different settings. There are many strategies that can be used to enhance validity and ensure reliability of the results (Merriam, 1998).

By explicitly stating my personal assumptions, values, and biases, and how they come into play during the study, I enhanced objectivity and external validity (Miles et al., 2014), though this is a qualitative study and is by nature subjective. Multiple forms of data and analytical techniques across multiple cases allowed for rich, thick description that included the variability important for thinking about how the conclusions could extend to other situations (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014). Thick, meaningful descriptions are also used for establishing internal validity because of the inclusion of multiple sources of evidence to support an idea.

To enhance internal validity, I triangulated the data using multiple sources, conducted member checks to ensure that my interpretations were plausible, and disclosed my biases at the outset of the study. I also employed triangulation in this study through multiple methods of data analysis, which helped to enhance reliability (Merriam, 1998). I also increased reliability by explaining my role related to the participants and the assumptions I have regarding the study. By using an audit trail, which is like the laboratory notebook of a scientist, I further enhanced reliability and ensured that the process of the study was consistent (Creswell, 2007; Miles et al., 2014).

ANTICIPATED ETHICAL ISSUES

This study was approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants signed an informed consent form prior to interviews, in which they agreed to the purpose and provisions of the study.

It is important that the research problem be beneficial and that the study benefits the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). This research problem, which is defined by a desire to fill in the gaps around our understanding about how occupational experience impacts meaning making, is beneficial for scholars who have only investigated how occupations impact legislative behavior through qualitative means. Participants benefitted from the study by engaging collaboratively through member-checking and will have access to the results, which may enrich their own legislative careers. In fact, most, if not all, participants asked to read the study when completed.

Participant data was kept confidential and privacy-protected. Pseudonyms were given to each participant and other identifying information was masked. Data that is personal or harmful was treated with the utmost care, never to be disclosed to others. Additionally, raw data will be maintained on a secure hard drive for five years, after which it will be destroyed. The data will not be duplicated for usage in other publications, unless new material is also collected with new analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2013).

LIMITATIONS

Certain factors must be considered when drawing conclusions and commenting on the plausibility and validity of the results. This study is descriptive and interpretive and is thus limited in its ability to generalize about the observed phenomenon or make any predictions outside the scope of inquiry (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, the study seeks to understand a limited slice of how being a former educator impacts a legislator's policy life and is not meant for broad conclusions about educator-legislators or legislators from any other profession.

The data collected are also limited by the participants' ability to trust me with the information they share, given my position as an active lobbyist. Based on the interviews,

there is evidence to believe that the participants did not always feel that they could speak freely, that some repeated talking points from other speaking engagements, and that some considered my position as a lobbyist. Some participants also commented on parts of their interview that they wanted to make sure I included in my dissertation, which means that they were conscious of the fact that it would be published and read by others and felt the need to emphasize content they wanted others to see.

Additionally, the data collected for content analysis is limited in that I did not include floor or committee votes on education legislation. This would have required a set of assumptions about what is "pro-education" and what is not, which was not a values-based debate I wished to enter into in my dissertation. I also did not include co-authored bills, which would have likely significantly increased the volume of data that required analysis. Additionally, any speeches or debates included in the data are limited by whether they were recorded and accessible to me. I also did not include campaign contributions, which would again require value judgements about pro-education entities, or district demographics.

Lastly, the study is limited by me. As the instrument of data collection, my biases and lack of experience in interviewing limit the interpretations. During interviews, analysis, and writing I also found myself constantly imagining each legislator reading their narrative or my interpretation, worrying that they would hold my writing against me or find it to be incorrect. I fought the feeling and to the best of my ability only wrote statements that were supported by evidence, using participant language as much as possible and avoiding false linkages between ideas or events.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the methodological approach employed in the study, which aims to build understanding and theory about a very understudied phenomenon. Using a qualitative multi-case study design, I used interview data and collected content of five Texas legislators, current and former, who were educators in the Texas elementary and secondary public school system. Multiple data sources and other strategies for data validation, including an intentional disclosure of bias on my behalf, help to ensure the reliability of the study. Analysis involved multiple stages of coding and within-case and cross-case analyses to generate a theory about how an occupational background as an educator impacts a legislator's behavior within the policy context. In the following chapter, I present each legislator's narrative, which constitutes the descriptive findings of the study.

Chapter Four: Descriptive Findings

This chapter details the descriptive findings for each educator-legislator through narrative summaries. Each narrative pulls from the entire corpus of data, which included each participant's interview and content from collected news media interviews and panels, speeches and debates, and legislation. The narratives are organized to answer the research questions, which are: (1) How do current and former Texas State legislators with an occupational background as an educator make meaning of education within the policy context? (2) How does this meaning making of education impact their legislative behavior?

Recalling the conceptual framework, in which identity moderates behavior through meaning making, each narrative is organized by identity, meaning making, and behavior. First, I lay out each legislator's personal, political, and professional identities, which were all coded as elements of who they are, bounded by time and context. To answer the first research question, I then describe the participants' meaning making of education within the policy context. This included their conceptions of the meaning of education, such as who teachers are, what teaching is, and the purpose of education. The purpose of education is tied to the role of government and the legislature in relation to education, which I also describe in this section. Next, I detail the legislator's process-oriented beliefs, such as their values, attitudes, and beliefs about the policy process (including their decision-making considerations), the importance of educator voice, interactions with partisanship and electoral politics, and their views on specific education policy issues. Lastly, to answer the second research question, I provide a descriptive analysis of legislative behaviors, such as how the legislator used their voice as an educator, critical decisions the legislator made, and their specific actions related to education policy areas. I left a discussion of committee assignments for Chapter Six in an attempt to mask participant identity.

Quotations attributed to participants are drawn from the interview data unless derived from an audio source, such as a video or radio interview that was not transcribed by its creator. Any quotations from written content are limited to one or two words. Additionally, any legislation attributed to the participant is described in as generic of terms as possible, while maintaining the purpose of the legislation and its impact. All legislation noted as "joint-authored" can be assumed to be with a member of the same party as the participant unless otherwise noted as bipartisan. These efforts are to protect the participants' identities by inhibiting readers' ability to conduct word searches online.

NARRATIVE: HONORABLE MICHAEL CLANCY

Representative Michael Clancy is a former public school teacher and a legislator in the Texas House. His personal, professional, and political identities and experiences provide the foundation for his beliefs about the meaning of education, the role of government, and specific policy areas. A background of service and particular experiences with students drive Clancy's policy work and behavior in the legislature, where he believes his voice as an educator is essential to sharing these experiences with others to influence policy outcomes for students.

Identity

Representative Clancy draws on his Christian faith in his work, often referencing biblical concepts in speeches. He is young and may make his age the centerpiece of jokes, openers, or icebreakers, while at the same time valuing his place in the legislature as a representative of his generation. Clancy feels that those who lead through service are the best leaders. As such, he began his engagement with the legislature early in his college years, advocating against cuts to education and through involvement in student

government. He is product of public schools in the district he represents and attributes his academic success to his teachers. Clancy surpassed the educational attainment of his parents and has a graduate degree related to education.

Clancy decided to become a public school teacher because of the positive impact his teachers had on his life. While Clancy's teachers changed his life, he says his experience teaching changed his life yet again. Upon meeting his students and parents and being "shocked [to the] core" by their academic and personal situations, he decided to make remediating the issue a life goal. Even though he felt effective as a teacher and loved his students, fellow teachers, and community, he also felt defeated by his limited impact.

Clancy left the classroom to pursue higher education and professional opportunities that he thought would allow him to "really make a difference." He intended to "fight" for his students, especially those who he knew did not experience academic success. After this change, he was still unsatisfied, feeling as though he was "in a position where [he] was just kind of working around the edges to improve a bad system."

Clancy wanted to "make the system better itself" and felt that the Texas legislature was "the only place that could happen." Through his teaching experience, graduate degree, and post-graduate professional experiences, he was able to build financial security, create relationships with a "network of future donors," and "[build] up [his] resume in a way that allowed [him] to have more credibility." He was motivated to run for office by an interest in continuing to serve his students by working on "dismantling a deeply inequitable public education system," but also by a desire to see more educators involved in education policymaking in the legislature. Clancy ran for office "explicitly on being a teacher" and made "fixing school finance" the "centerpiece" of his policy platform. As a legislator, he is "blessed," "honor[ed]," "thrilled," and "proud."

While Clancy says he is a "proud Democrat," his political identity is defined by a resistance to partisanship. He sees partisan division and polarization as barriers to serving people through policy. Clancy's constituents drive his decision-making more than following his party's platform. He also "carries the ethos of being a teacher" into his role as a legislator in ways that make him "a different kind of politician." Elaborating on this, Clancy explained that with his teacher-derived "growth mindset" he is able to build relationships with those on the other side of the political aisle. Furthermore, Clancy consistently prioritizes the student experience in his legislative work, using student stories to ground policy proposals and even breaking with teacher groups (that fund his campaign) in support of legislation focused on students.

Meaning Making of Education in the Policy Context

As members of "the most important profession," Clancy believes educators pave the way for all other professions and says teaching is "how we grow as a community." Educators have "an incredible responsibility" for the lives of students and are life-changers who "[create] human beings." Being an educator is a "spiritual role" and a "really difficult and personal journey." He believes educators want to be good at their job and have a "fierce belief" in students' "ability to get better and be able to thrive." However, he says educators must do this while fulfilling multiple roles within limits on time and pay.

From a systemic viewpoint, Clancy believes that justice and equality are derived from an equitable education system and articulates multiple goals of public education. These include freedom, teaching and nurturing children, and serving democracy. In fact, he says he struggles to "reconcile" why something as central to democracy as public education has been deprioritized by government.

Clancy believes that public education should be (but is not) a policymaking priority for the legislature and the government. He believes that Texas made a "promise" to educators and students through recent education funding legislation and that the state is obligated to spend its "fair share," especially after financially "depriving" education for a long time. Clancy says that even though politicians don't want to talk about raising revenue, there shouldn't be any limits in the legislature's discussions on how to support students and teachers. He also believes that the legislature should uphold the value of "local control," extending this concept into the school system by admonishing unfunded mandates and efforts to micro-manage classrooms and teacher salaries.

As aforementioned, Clancy is resistant to party politics and articulates that party loyalty is less valuable than state, community, and solutions that are simply "right." A proud Texan, Clancy adopts the ideology that Texas as a whole is not well-served by one party or another. In many ways, he bears the ideology of a non-partisan civil servant, as he makes policy decisions based on what is "good public policy," which is neither "red" nor "blue." He laments those who resort to displays of party loyalty just to appease their base or become temporarily famous, saying that this takes away from spending time on pressing needs like public education and higher education. Clancy acknowledges the influence of electoral politics on political behavior, saying that a more competitive, "purple" Texas causes legislators to move to the "middle" and be more "pragmatic." Clancy believes that working in a bipartisan fashion, using values such as compromise, compassion, and collaboration, is best for solving policy problems in ways that students and teachers deserve.

In his personal policymaking considerations, Clancy values reason, logic, data, and research and is wary of solutions that are based on an "emotional" response. He also puts a high value on being transparent with his constituency and gathering feedback from

educators, which complements the influence of his own classroom experience on his policymaking. He articulates an independence from lobbyists and teachers' unions and associations, in some cases explaining that "adult egos" or "agendas" inhibit his ability to serve students or make progress in areas such as finding revenue streams for education. Instead, Clancy's greatest motivation and "the yardstick by which [he] measure[s] success" is his students, as they are "the whole reason" he is doing policy work.

Clancy believes the influence of non-educators also plays a role in the policymaking process, often to the detriment of education. Outside of the legislature, he believes that there are individuals far-removed from the classroom who want to dismantle public education at the expense of children. Within the legislature, he expresses that there is a difference between a non-educator legislator making policy decisions about education and one who is an educator, sharing that professional background knowledge in areas such as child development can make a difference in perception about the value of a policy. Furthermore, Clancy argues that if he was a non-educator legislator "who cared about public education in the way that we all say we care about it," he would have let certain proposals "slide."

Clancy's beliefs about the importance of his own voice in the legislative process extend to a greater theoretical viewpoint about educator voice, both within and outside of the Texas Capitol. In the legislature, Clancy sees educators and other service-based professionals as important voices for their communities yet underrepresented amongst legislators. Having teachers "at the table" helps in the crafting of education policy because they are "more tied to the outcomes" and because of their knowledge of "how policy impacts lives […] of educators, but more importantly of students." Clancy reiterates his focus on students in talking about the importance of educators' involvement in voting for

"pro-public education" candidates, viewing this as a way of standing up for themselves and, "most importantly," their students.

Clancy articulates his meaning making of education within the policy context in his views on certain policy issues. Student well-being is what Clancy is "most passionate about," and he uses real student stories from his own experiences to ground much of his policymaking in this area. He believes lawmakers are "obligated" to meet students' academic *and* human needs through a "whole child" approach and that students need more social workers, counselors, mental health specialists, and curricula that incorporate social-emotional learning, sex education, and civics. He values this approach in the area of school safety as well, rather than relying solely on school hardening measures.

Clancy's "whole child" approach seeps into his views on student discipline, where he aims to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline by ensuring that juvenile justice and disciplinary approaches don't harm students' chances at academic and life success. Clancy's values for what is most important in education are most evident in his explanation that when he was a teacher, he often didn't have the time, space, resources, or training "to have the most important conversations with [his] students," like "how to live a successful life" and "find peace and fulfillment." Clancy also says he was a teacher during the Sandy Hook shooting, which impacted him "every day" as he thought about what he would do in that situation. He argues that the best way to keep kids safe is based on research – having healthy school climates and strong relationships between student and adults rather than "police officers in every classroom."

Clancy was motivated to run for office partly on the issue of school finance, which is a "top priority" policy area as well. He believes it is the state's responsibility to fund public schools "50/50" with local communities, not only to promote success in schools, particularly student success, but also to relieve local property taxpayer burdens.

Additionally, he doesn't think money alone will ensure student success and says that systemic aspects of Texas school finance such as recapture (a property tax wealth equalization mechanism) *and* programmatic approaches are necessary. For instance, he values recent Texas school finance reforms that fund full-day prekindergarten, a focus on reading, and target money towards needy students. In fact, Clancy frames funding for high quality early childhood programs as the best "investment" Texas can make in education policy. He complements his position on increasing and targeting school funding with a commitment to finding revenue and a rejection of voucher proposals that send public dollars to private institutions, saying they are "unaccountable."

Clancy's views about teacher pay and teacher health care and retirement are grounded in a belief that teachers should be treated like professionals and honored for their dedication to children. While Clancy agrees that the base pay for teachers in Texas should be raised, he also argues that teachers should be paid differentially based on effectiveness and that pay structure decisions should be made locally, not by the legislature. Effectiveness, he says, should not be solely based on standardized test scores, but could incorporate student academic growth and student evaluations of their teachers. Clancy believes that reforms to teacher pay will increase the respect for and prestige of the profession. As for health care and retirement, Clancy cites the state's responsibility in funding its obligation to meet educators' health insurance and retirement plan needs.

Clancy grounds his views on assessment in the idea that teachers apply testing as a part of good teaching and learning and that data is necessary to understand how to direct resources. He cautions that Texas's standardized tests have flaws and should not be used for high-stakes purposes or to punish teachers and schools. Instead, Clancy believes testing is a tool to improve schools. Similarly, Clancy says that the state public school accountability system, which rates public schools and districts on a scale of "A" through

"F," should help in identifying which schools are in need of more resources, much like how educators use diagnostic tools to support growth in the classroom.

Clancy also expresses views on charter schools and regulatory exemptions for public schools. He believes that there is value in charters from an innovation perspective and that good practices developed in charters can be applied in traditional public schools. Clancy also wants to ensure that charters are of high quality and is concerned with policies related to discipline and expulsion practices in charters. Clancy believes the legislature should provide flexibility and local control for school districts, but also believes that some government oversight is necessary, such as for class size limits.

Impact of Meaning Making of Education on Legislative Behavior

Clancy uses his voice as an educator extensively – not only in committee, but in interviews, news articles, campaign materials, and House chamber floor debates. He often makes his points about certain beliefs or actions by starting with, "as a former teacher." In these statements, he shares direct stories about particular classroom experiences and students to demonstrate "the impact that these proposals have on people's lives." In comments about being an educator, he also shares what it feels like to be a teacher, what the experience teaches you, and the importance of being recognized as a professional, especially in terms of compensation. Specifically, in committee and on the House floor, Clancy refers to moments where he felt compelled to "speak up" to correct a misconception or to explain the practical, classroom implications of policy in an effort to protect students.

Clancy's attitude towards bipartisanship and related beliefs about having a "growth mindset" towards other legislators and policy actors who are different than him are directly tied to his identity as an educator. In a critical decision about a bill he believed would harm students, Clancy drew on his value of bipartisanship to work with legislators in both parties

to prevent the bill from gaining House approval. He gave a floor speech against the bill, citing his experience as an educator, breaking with teacher unions and associations who supported his campaign and the bill, and in defiance of the education committee chairman. Previously, Clancy worked with legislators in both parties to amend the bill and asked the Texas House Speaker to be on the bill's conference committee. After being appointed to the conference committee, Clancy said the conferees never convened and his input was not considered. Clancy considers taking a risk to stand up for his students in this critical decision a "moral and ethical test" that shows he hasn't "lost [his] soul yet."

Clancy's legislative behavior also includes the bills and amendments he authored and joint-authored. Just as student well-being is the issue he is most passionate about, his legislative actions are most concentrated this area. Much of Clancy's legislation focuses on increasing mental health professionals, supports, and services in schools. This includes a bill requiring the state to develop mental health training for teachers and a bill to strengthen suicide prevention training for teachers, including those in charter schools. Clancy also authored bills relating to the number of mental health professionals in schools, requiring that districts have a minimum number based on student population in one bill and based on the number of law enforcement officers also present in the school in another bill. Lastly, Clancy joint-authored legislation to create a special education educator certificate.

Clancy's legislation dealing with curriculum also reflects his beliefs about teaching the "whole child," as he authored and joint-authored several pieces of legislation that focus on non-core academic content such as mental health, financial literacy, sex education, college preparation, civics, voting, and fine arts. Clancy also joint-authored bipartisan legislation relating to digital literacy and digital citizenship curriculum and instruction and authored legislation relating to training for educators on mental health and civics education. Clancy even attempted to amend a healthcare-related bill with language relating to sex

education courses provided in schools. Many of these curricular efforts focus on district mandates to include these courses in the required curriculum, while others direct the State Board of Education to take action.

Related to a "whole child" approach and Clancy's focus on remediating rather than punishing students, a number of his bills are related to student discipline. The content of these bills seems to aim towards reducing the negative impact of disciplinary actions on students, such as lessening the impact of missing instruction while in an alternative education setting by requiring districts to provide curriculum to students. Some bills make systemic changes to the process and school policies through which disciplinary action occurs, such as altering school counselors' duties to include involvement in the review of student discipline and requiring districts to use alternatives to suspension. Clancy also authored legislation limiting the suspension and expulsion practices of charter schools. Clancy's school safety legislation focuses on services to students and reflects a student-centered approach to increasing the preparedness of schools in responding to threats.

The rest of Clancy's legislation is scattered. He authored bills to reduce the impact of public school accountability sanctions and to find state revenue for education. Clancy also authored a bill to reduce the financial impact on teachers who purchase their own supplies. In a different sense of school safety, he also authored bills to protect student data and to increase the building standards of schools, which could reflect his own experience of teaching in an older school.

Summary

In his prior work as an educator and current work as a legislator, Representative Michael Clancy is oriented towards making a difference through system-level changes. While approaching policy through a systemic lens, Clancy grounds his policy in student

experiences and stories, which often means he is resistant to the party politics he sees as a barrier to serving students. Though Clancy sees school funding as a fundamental policy issue, he also works extensively to apply a "whole child" approach across his policy work. Ultimately, Clancy believes the voice he brings to the legislature is a necessary asset to ensure that policies are developed with education expertise and insight into their impacts on the lives of students and teachers.

NARRATIVE: HONORABLE CLAYTON GRANT

Dr. Clayton Grant is a former public school teacher and a member of the Texas House of Representatives. His professional experiences drive much of his policymaking considerations and behaviors, as he focuses heavily on school funding, school operations, and testing and accountability. His political identity also influences his behavior, while also causing some conflict amongst colleagues due to his beliefs about certain education policy areas.

Identity

Grant comes from a small, Texas community and has an agriculture background. Grant articulates that his upbringing is what motivates him to strive to make the world better. He also expresses the importance of faith in his life, identifies as a "Christian conservative," and is involved in his local church. Grant comes from a family of several educators and has a doctoral degree in an education-related field.

Grant graduated college "fired up" as an aspiring teacher and "loved the classroom, loved [his] students." After teaching for several years, Grant felt his family was "barely getting by," which led him to pursue higher education and an administrative role. Grant's decades-long career in education was a "learning opportunity" during which he felt

"blessed" with "very positive experiences." Grant now identifies as a retired educator, carrying with him into his legislative role an understanding of "students who come to school that are struggling in all different ways," and a conviction that "we need to do everything we can to support [educators]."

Towards the end of his career as an educator, Grant "became very frustrated with what was happening in the legislature as far as education policy." As an administrator, he was "left to deal" with severe budget cuts and "felt like there were better options" that the legislature could have passed. The frustration led to an internal decision-making point at which Grant told himself, "'I can complain, or I can try to replace [the incumbent].'" Grant says the decision to run for office "just hit [him] one day" when he had a "real epiphany that [he] could retire […] and serve in the legislature." Grant was also motivated to run for office by a love for Texas, saying he is "truly a lover of Texas and [has] always been very interested in the legislative process, especially as it affects educators."

The district Grant ran in included all of the school districts he had worked in and the town he grew up in. With these relationships, Grant says he ran as an educator, noting, "that's who I was." He also ran as a "local person" and someone "with rural roots, and especially rural education." In his bids for reelection, Grant identified as a retired educator rather than a politician and expressed a commitment to local communities and public schools.

Grant identifies politically as a "conservative Republican" but says the rural community he grew up in was once dominated by Democrats and therefore he has voted in Democratic primaries. His conservative principles, along with the wishes of his constituents, drive his decision-making in the Capitol. While he says his principles and the values of his constituency are not in conflict, he does express that there are certain education issues he "tend[s] to veer away from the party platform a little bit." This includes

his position against public school vouchers, which causes some of his Republican colleagues to see him "as a stumbling block […] to getting where they would like to see us go." Nevertheless, Grant says he is "proud" and has had "a lot of personal satisfaction" in his legislative work, even if it is "challenging" and "frustrating at times."

Meaning Making of Education in the Policy Context

As a teacher who participated in extracurricular activities with students, Grant says he had "an awesome experience" and "got to know [his] students at a level that you just don't have the opportunity to have when you're just in a classroom only." His experience in education made him "very keenly aware" that for many students, "we don't realize what it took for them to get to school that day." Grant elaborates, "many of them come hungry, many of them are not very clean, many of them are wearing the same clothes for several days." As an administrator, Grant was uncomfortable at first to switch from working with older to younger children. However, he says he grew professionally from the transition, reminiscing that it was a "unique opportunity to get to see those children at such a young age and just such bright minds, bright-eyed, just ready to learn, ready to just soak in."

Grant says that he knows there are teachers who are responsible for the life he enjoys today. In his professional experience, he worked with "some very good educators," which he admits is not to say there wasn't a "very small minority" "who probably should've been doing something else." Overall, Grant believes that "we really have some wonderful professional educators in the field," who should be "seen as the local expert and [whose] opinion matters." Grant's personal teaching experience allowed him to see the things "that the teachers and other staff are going through to try to provide a good education" and that teaching and learning is "a growth process."

Grant believes that the goal of education, even if "a bit idealistic," is to "educate the children of today to be productive citizens and to meet their full potential tomorrow." He believes that public education is a "basic need" of the state, gives Texas children a foundation, and helps to develop a strong workforce. Something he doesn't understand is why there are "some people" who are trying to "demonize" and "starve" the public school system into failure in order to spend money on private schools. Grant says that in his area, there are "excellent" and "efficient" public schools who work very hard to serve students. For example, Grant refutes arguments claiming that schools attempt to replace parents, saying, "the school is the parent in some cases." Overall, Grant says that the public school system is the best use of state dollars for providing a quality education to children and doesn't "buy" the rhetoric that public schools are "massive failures."

In Grant's view, the government has a "duty to the children and to the families of the state" that includes funding the "pressing need" of public education in Texas. If educating our children is to be a top priority, then the state must be "mutually respective" and "mutually focused on the goal" of education. This includes ensuring that the state keeps its "promise" to current and former teachers by creating stability in their healthcare, providing what it "owes" to retired teachers to safeguard a decent living, and doing "everything [it] can to support [educators]." Lastly, Grant believes the state must prioritize investment in public schools and equip them with the tools to ensure students are learning, and that schools should be freed from bureaucracy by appropriately relegating decision-making, seeing local control and independence as Texas values.

Grant's policymaking is driven by Texas public schoolchildren, improving schools, and getting policy "right" for students. In addition to these considerations, he draws on his conservative values and a commitment to his constituents when making decisions. For instance, he couches his argument against private school vouchers as conflicting with the

value of limited government and says that his constituents don't want vouchers. As someone who "vote[s] [his] district," Grant says the process has taught him that having his name on legislation doesn't matter; what matters is getting language passed to "improve public education" and his community, which he says *is* the public school.

Grant's values, attitudes, and beliefs about the policy process also include a willingness to work across the aisle towards a common goal and a conviction that participation in elections and the legislative process matters. He believes that when voters have a common priority, such as public education, that priority will translate into a common priority for a greater number of decision-makers inside the Texas Capitol. Similarly, Grant encourages educators to vote against legislators who take anti-public school actions such as promoting private school choice.

In addition to voting, Grant believes that educators should be involved (and given the opportunity to be involved) in policy development to avoid unintended consequences. Grant says using educators as "local expert[s] in the field" is important, as some policy actors think "schools are pretty much like the experience they had" several decades ago or that "because they went to school, they know all about education," when we know "simply attending school […] does not make you an educator."

Just as Grant viewed the challenges of his education career as opportunities for professional growth, his identity as a "lifelong learner" has led him to feel that he has "probably learned as much as [he's] taught throughout the processes of each position in education and in the legislature." He says he is "a lot more informed and prepared now than [he] was when [he] entered the legislature," and that he hopes to "learn from [his] mistakes and learn from [his] setbacks and be able to continue to move the dial forward a little bit." The work of the legislature is "worthy" and work that "we need to do," and Grant

is “glad that we have so many legislators who truly want to do the right thing for Texas students.”

Grant believes that Texas has the resources to adequately fund public schools, but that funding has to be a state priority to meet growing needs and give “students the opportunities they deserve.” Grant grounds his argument for increasing funds to schools in a growing Texas population and economy, which brings students and families to public schools. He adds that the state has a “proper share” of funding due to schools but is reluctant to advocate for any one solution, only saying that we should not be so dependent on local property taxes, which creates a flawed and inequitable system.

In his push for more funding for schools, Grant argues that the legislature has no place in dictating how school districts spend on programming and should provide the resources to lift schools up that need the attention. He argues that “throwing money at any problem is not the answer,” but that we need to invest more money in public schools in a “very thoughtful way” that “has some accountability to it.” Grant also believes that the state public school accountability system should have robust input and should be used to identify where resources need to be directed. He believes that sanctions and interventions should only be applied after resources have been provided to struggling schools.

While Grant supports school choice and a parent’s right to choose a private school or homeschool, he does not support voucher programs or tax systems that send public funds to these entities. One of the reasons he is against public school vouchers is because of the conservative value of limited government – that when private schools take public money, then “government is involved and that’s supposed to be the reason you have [private schools].” Grant’s reasoning is built upon a “core belief that private schools are private for a reason,” which is to “do things that you can’t do at public school.” In addition, he believes that voucher programs pull resources and students from public schools by directing them

instead to private schools, harming communities like the one he represents. Furthermore, Grant says his constituents are not in favor of voucher programs. He argues that anything that takes resources away from public schools rather than improving them is "not good policy." Ultimately, Grant argues that private school voucher programs are not fiscally conservative, against Republican ideals of public accountability, bad for public schools, and "bad for Texas."

Grant's beliefs about how policy should address teachers tie into his views on school funding. One of Grant's longstanding priorities is to permanently "fix" the Texas teacher retirement system and its healthcare component through thorough funding. In addition to believing teachers deserve a secure retirement and affordable healthcare, Grant also believes teachers deserve a baseline salary that provides a stable expectation of income. He argues that a financially sound retirement and a competitive salary both help to attract and recruit individuals into the profession.

Grant believes that teachers are "professionals" who have a "God-given" ability to teach. As such, he is opposed to a public education system that is overly dependent on high-stakes testing, saying that it inhibits teachers' ability to apply their talents and takes away from instruction and learning. High-stakes testing refers to systems that place serious consequences on test results, such as school sanctions, student promotion decisions, and penalties (or lack of rewards) on teacher compensation. Grant is also opposed to using high-stakes standardized testing to evaluate teachers, saying that teacher evaluations should include student growth measures that "truly" reflect instruction as well as other factors impacting children's learning. An inaccurate assessment is "unfair to our teachers," "unfair to our students who have their academic careers hanging in the balance," and shouldn't be "what we want to do in the state of Texas."

Grant wants to reduce the emphasis placed on testing in the Texas public school system, saying that it causes stress for teachers and students and that the money spent on testing could be going into the classroom instead. Furthermore, Grant thinks high-stakes standardized testing quashes children's curiosity and desire to learn. He questions whether standardized tests are designed to accurately measure students' ability levels. He is also concerned that questions assessing for content and ability above grade level will incite frustration in children as they take the test, which could impact their test-taking success. He believes that schools already have practices in place that allow parents, students, and teachers to understand student performance. His attitude towards standardized testing is that students should only be tested on what is federally required to keep the focus on learning in the classroom.

As for state policies relating to school operation and safety, Grant strives to ensure that school districts have flexibility under state laws but also wants to maintain certain protections such as statutory class size limits. He questions if topics like which bathroom transgender students can use are just "political issues" or truly about protecting people, noting that he trusts his school districts to handle these matters over a state mandate. He is also interested in providing districts with the resources necessary to maintain data privacy, especially student data.

Impact of Meaning Making of Education on Legislative Behavior

Grant believes that members of both parties lean on him (and other educators in the legislature) and rely on his expertise on education matters. He is "pleased" and "surprised" that "a number of" his colleagues come to him for advice on education bills, questions, or even issues that their school districts bring up. They ask Grant questions like, "What do you think? What should I tell them? What do we need to do on this?" In this sense, Grant

has had a positive experience with other legislators and has been able to help them "understand education policy" and help them "deal with their school districts and understand what it is their school districts are asking of them."

Grant says that the "downside" of his education experience is that some of his colleagues in his own party see him "in a less favorable light," particularly on issues such as school funding, accountability, and vouchers. He says a minority of his colleagues think he is a "whining" administrator and "just one of those educrats," a term he says he hates. He feels some accuse him of "just want[ing] to throw more money at the school system" and that some think because he is an educator, he is "just a bleeding heart that doesn't see the reality of where we are in education." However, the majority of Grant's colleagues "truly want to do the right thing with education and come to [him] as a resource."

In Grant's communications with his constituents, the media, and in floor debates, he makes his expertise as an educator known. To his constituents, Grant says, "as you know" and "as you might imagine" when explaining that public education is "near and dear" to him, something he puts emphasis on, and that many of the bills he filed had to do with public education. With the media, Grant uses phrases like "as a retired teacher" and "with my background" to reiterate that he brings a deep understanding of how education works, including aspects like educator preparation and school operation. Furthermore, he uses these phrases to underscore his understanding of the importance of education to the future of Texas. In his interactions with the policy process, such as on the House floor, he specifically uses his background to demonstrate an intimate understanding of how teachers prepare students for standardized testing and what the resulting impacts are on learning.

In a couple of public speaking appearances, Grant highlighted recently increased funding for prekindergarten programs, telling his constituents he was "very excited about that." As an important caveat, in his discussion of prekindergarten with his constituents,

Grant made sure to explain that the new funding did not "increase the eligibility for pre-K" and that there were still "reporting requirements" to go along with it. He also explained school funding to his constituents, as justified by enrollment growth, and funding for the Texas Teacher Retirement System, which he supported by saying that he suspects everyone in the room could say there were some teachers responsible for their life success.

The majority of Grant's legislative actions are focused on school funding, school operations, testing, and accountability, which reflect his policy priorities and his specific expertise as a teacher and administrator. Grant's actions in these areas include his own bills, joint-authored legislation with other colleagues, some bipartisan, and amendments to the budget omnibus bill and other legislation.

Grant's work on school funding often includes increased funds for districts, particularly small and rural districts, and increased flexibility in how districts can use funds. Grant offered a bipartisan amendment to another legislator's bill to include a study of the cost of special education. He also joint-authored several bills to boost funding for career and technical education, rural schools, special education, and joint-authored bipartisan legislation to increase funds for community schools (a model incorporating wraparound services and other community supports to improve struggling schools) and programs for students who are at-risk of dropping out. Grant also authored bills relating to how districts' tax rates are calculated and to expand how school districts can use their state funds for instructional materials.

One of Grant's critical decisions in the legislature relates to his rejection of voucher proposals. Grant describes feeling "held hostage" by some groups that had a "powerful backing" and "saw an opening." He said, "It seemed that [vouchers were] just going to be ground down our throats that session" and that the Senate chamber was making any passage of an education bill contingent upon passage of a voucher bill. In a "great bipartisan effort,"

Grant was able to take voucher proposals "off the table" through a legislative action. In this critical decision, Grant says he felt like he "made a difference" and that he got "a lot of personal satisfaction" out of it. Grant says that some policy actors "want the money without the strings […] but that's not the way it works, unfortunately."

Given his background as an administrator, it is unsurprising that Grant's legislation on school operations includes bills and amendments impacting district purchasing and contracting, student electronic recordkeeping, special education proceedings, and allowable uses of instructional materials funds. Grant also joint-authored legislation eliminating a wide swath of requirements and mandates placed on school districts. Additionally, he spoke out on the House floor chamber to clarify another legislator's legislative intent, asking for confirmation that school districts would not be mandated to adhere to a certain operational restriction under the bill being considered.

Grant also joint-authored several bipartisan pieces of legislation relating to school operations. These included efforts to create flexibility for schools to donate surplus food, give grace to students with insufficient school meal balances, and to alter attendance policies so that students are not penalized for participating in extracurricular activities. Grant's bipartisan work in this area also includes legislation to gather operational data from districts on prekindergarten, such as class size and whether the program was full-day or half-day, and to make it easier for children to enroll in prekindergarten programs.

Grant has taken several actions relating to charter schools, many of which are focused on operation and are bipartisan in nature. He joint-authored bipartisan bills to create parity between how charter schools and traditional public schools operate with regard to charter disciplinary practices or admission requirements, and joint-authored a similarly-oriented bill related to how the governing body of a charter school operates. Grant has also taken actions to amend others' legislation to ensure that traditional school districts

are not harmed or limited by charter policies and procedures. Grant has also authored and joint-authored legislation to use the charter school model for non-traditional, adult students.

Grant's legislative work on testing and accountability focuses on reducing the high-stakes nature of the state testing system, providing additional testing options, and increasing flexibility within the public school accountability system. Grant authored several amendments providing testing flexibility and related considerations to other legislators' bills and engaged in floor debates on testing to clarify intent. Grant authored legislation that relates to adding a remediation protocol for students who didn't perform satisfactorily on the test, adding additional test options for students to meet graduation requirements, eliminating some tests altogether, and creating alternative methods of assessment for students. Grant also joint-authored legislation to provide student tutorials for state-required end-of course exams. On accountability, Grant authored legislation to expand the criteria used to determine public school accountability ratings, joint-authored bipartisan legislation to allow the adoption of a community school model as a campus turnaround option, and authored an amendment to ensure that educator input is included in the development of the accountability system.

Regarding teachers, Grant joint-authored legislation to ensure that educator preparation programs are high-quality and incorporate measures of teacher satisfaction and success. Additionally, Grant joint-authored legislation to strengthen educator misconduct reporting systems, bar standardized tests from being used for teacher appraisals, and to adequately fund the teacher retirement and healthcare system in Texas. Grant also spoke out in the House chamber to ascertain legislative intent from another member, asking whether educators would be included in the development of state assessments. These efforts reflect Grant's beliefs about maintaining the professionalism of the education

career, how standardized tests should be used, the importance of teacher retirement, and the importance of including educators in the policy process.

Some of the policy areas aforementioned have a specific focus on students, such as creating an alternative form of assessment for students or providing school meal balance grace. Grant's other student-focused policies are all joint-authored with members of his party and cover a wide range of issues, including efforts to strengthen drug addiction and abuse programming in schools, expand eligibility for who qualifies for compensatory education, and collect information on dropout prevention. These also include efforts to protect student data, which he spoke on before members in the House chamber, and to provide student health screenings. These legislative actions may tie back to Grant's beliefs about doing what is "right" for students and the state's obligation to children.

As a former educator, Grant's expertise about curriculum and instruction may have some impact on his authored legislation. He joint-authored legislation updating career and technical education curriculum standards and providing flexibility to how students sequence their high school courses, as well as bipartisan legislation that would establish civics instruction in public schools. Additionally, Grant authored an amendment to another's legislation to protect curriculum standards from being unnecessarily eliminated, which would have likely been an unintended consequence of the bill.

Summary

Representative Grant's experiences and beliefs about education impact his behavior in predictable ways, such as his beliefs in the centrality of education as a need of the state and the state's fiscal responsibility to fund public education for the benefit of teachers and students. His background also permeates into his political identity, as his views and actions in certain areas such as testing, accountability, and funding may differ from his party

platform. Nevertheless, he holds steadfast in his convictions that public education should be respected and adequately funded (including funding for teacher retirement), that testing is excessive and inappropriately applied, and that accountability measures should lead to improvement rather than punishment.

NARRATIVE: HONORABLE JESSICA KELLY

Dr. Jessica Kelly is a former public school educator and member of the Texas House of Representatives. She draws extensively on her professional background and identity as an educator in her interactions with other legislators as well as in her beliefs about education policy. Kelly is driven by her commitment to public education as defined in the Texas Constitution, which causes her to sometimes be in conflict with her own party.

Identity

Representative Kelly identifies as a Christian and is a mother. She has distinct reflections on being a female legislator that include examples of how she navigated interactions with her male colleagues, which never included "any form of sexual harassment" or "bashing," and her beliefs about the importance of women's involvement in the political and legislative processes. She has a master's degree and a doctoral degree in an education-related field, which she feels have helped her "establish credibility" and are an important aspect of her value in the legislature.

Kelly is an "award-winning classroom teacher" who started out her educational career "making $13,000 a year." Due to her advanced degrees, her teaching repertoire eventually included every level from elementary to college students. As someone who "literally wore the jumpers and the apple earrings," Kelly loved being a teacher and felt that her students made teaching "such a joy."

Kelly feels “blessed” to have been a teacher and considers herself, “first and foremost, an educator and a teacher at heart.” She explains that being a teacher is her “nature” and “what [she] value[s] the most” as part of her identity. She has “always been a loving, nurturing kind of person” and teaching gave her the feeling of making a difference.

As a teacher, Kelly focused on her responsibility to her students. At the start of her career, Kelly had an epiphany when her students struggled to learn. She decided that “the problem was not with [her students],” but rather that she “didn’t do a good job.” She thought to herself, “’by God, my kids can learn’” and decided to “put the teacher manual down” and try her own teaching method. Kelly says that when she “let [herself] be creative,” and experienced the subsequent success of her students, “it’s like a teacher was born from that.” She eventually went before her school board to advocate for using gifted and talented teaching strategies for traditional students, which again resulted in increased student achievement.

Kelly’s work with students went beyond academics, as she believes that respect “signifies the most important thing for learning.” When Kelly worked in a disciplinary alternative education school, she had “a big ‘R’” on her classroom wall. She taught her students to respect and “become a priority” to themselves. Kelly told her students, “do your homework” and get “good behavior” to have an “amazing year,” “excel,” and to “remember, ’I got it.’” Kelly instilled self-respect in her students to increase their self-efficacy and independence.

Before Kelly left the classroom, she was already in the mindset that she could have a greater influence on education by getting into broader roles, such as teaching teachers. In addition, Kelly held some community-based positions and one elected position before running for the Texas House. She was compelled to run for the elected position prior to the House because she didn’t agree with the approach of the person currently holding the seat

and their views on education. The person, who Kelly eventually unseated, did not visit with the campuses and schools in her district and was focused on instilling Christianity in public schools. This conflicted with Kelly's view that teacher input should be valued and that, even as a Christian, the role of the public school was "not to instill or support [her] religious views," but rather to fulfill the Texas Constitution. Kelly says she "loved" this role and that it was "a complete joy."

Kelly's prior elected role served as a mediating step in her political career that helped her realize, "I [can] do this" and gave her greater access to donors. She realized the importance of having educators in policymaking positions, because "you need someone who respects, and cares, and values, someone who's been behind that teacher's desk, someone who's worked with students." When the "opening came to be in the House, [she] realized the best way to make an impact was in the Capitol." She says the reason she ran for office was that she is a "very strong public school proponent." With the financial assistance of family members and her community, she was able to garner enough funds to have a competitive race. Kelly says, "unless you have financial support, you can't do it. You cannot do it."

Kelly ran "as the thumb on the pulse of [the] community and the heart of that was [the] schools." She says she "never once shied away from saying, 'I'm an educator and I know what works.'" Kelly presented herself "as the expert in education and [she] believed it." Reflecting on the teacher she once was, Kelly says she still hugs, but she is "very much self-assured and confident about what [she] bring[s] to the table," she believes in her "competency as an educator," and knows that she "bring[s] value to the legislature." Reflecting on her tenue in the legislature, Kelly says "everything was perfect" for her, although there were "very frustrating" moments.

Kelly identifies politically as a Republican and as a "pro-business," "common sense conservative." She believes that her party "leads the charge" on transparency and that accountability and "transparency need to follow" entities that take taxpayer dollars. However, Kelly says that the issue of transparency and accountability, particularly with regard to private school vouchers, has led to "infighting" within her party. She has strong convictions about following the Texas Constitution and says she "would like to see people who are more committed to the Texas Constitution." This conviction ties back to her mantra of putting policy first.

Meaning Making of Education in the Policy Context

Kelly believes that "there is no other profession, outside of the medical profession, that transforms lives like [teachers] do." She believes that teachers need "the flexibility to be a teacher" and "latitude and freedom" to accommodate the variances within every year and every group of students. Kelly says that if teachers just "go by the manual, the school needs to hire somebody for $15 an hour who can just read, and point, and pass out, and grade." She explains, "that's not what we are," teachers "convey information in a way that's meaningful."

Kelly loved teaching and thinks highly of teachers but doesn't think that teachers are given much respect. She believes that the lack of respect, which "trickles down" from the federal level, is intertwined with a lack of trust. To demonstrate the lack of trust at the state level, Kelly gave the example of the current Texas Education Agency commissioner who said, "'If it's not tested, it won't be taught.'"

Kelly thinks part of the reason teachers aren't treated like professionals is "because we don't act like professionals," which includes the behavior of educator unions and associations. To act like professionals, Kelly says educators need to "be proud" and not

"meek and mild." Educators need to "embrace [themselves] as being experts" in education and "act like, behave like, speak like" professionals. Kelly also says there is a "disdain and a lot of animosity towards teacher educator groups" and "union groups," who are "pretty much hated by the legislature because they're argumentative and they come across as rude." The result is that some teachers and teacher advocates like Kelly have to "separate" themselves from "teacher educator groups" so that certain legislators will listen to them or even let them into the office. Kelly suggests that groups representing educators need to "be less combative and more pro-message."

Despite the complications presented by educator groups, Kelly is convinced of the importance of educator voice in the legislative process. She elaborates that educators "need to be able to write op-ed pieces," "to testify," and "to realize that we must stand up for those who aren't speaking up," such as "our kids" and "our public school system." She realizes that politics may be "repellent" to some but wants educators to understand that "it impacts your room, your teaching in your classroom." Therefore, Kelly encourages "everyone to be active" and to use their voice because, "by God, if we don't stand up, who will?"

While Kelly believes it is "excellent" that there are superintendents, former principals, and "a lot of school board members" in the legislature, she "firmly believe[s]" that "we need more educators in the legislature." Kelly says that "other legislators need to hear from educators […] because we're the voice for thousands of other educators, children, and families." Unfortunately, educators who may otherwise become legislators face personal "perception" barriers from not "believ[ing] in themselves" and thinking "they can't rise to the point to" run for office. Additionally, Kelly acknowledges that financial barriers make educator-legislators a "rarity" even though they "provide a very valuable insight." However, without educators at the table, the legislature is left with those who do

not have classroom experience and sometimes vote "based on their limited personal experience instead of realizing this is going to impact 5.4 million kids."

As for the education system, Kelly believes that "public education is the foundation of everything we do well here in Texas" and that "we change lives when we empower children." Kelly's dedication to the Texas Constitution is strong and, in her view, the role of public schools should be consistent with the Texas Constitution, which references "an efficient system of public free schools." "'Public free schools' matters," she says, because "the common good is to elevate every child, not just those who want to go." Public schools should "elevate everyone up to the status of being able to enjoy the rights and privileges of their personhood, being a Texan, being a citizen."

Kelly says the ideal relationship between the government and education should be "one of respect and trust." The Texas Constitution lays the foundation for what Kelly believes should be the role of government in public education. Article VII, section one says, "It shall be the duty of the legislature of the state to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools." Kelly believes that while "efficiency" refers to "financial distribution," it could be stretched to include curriculum, but maintains that curriculum is the purview of the State Board of Education, an elected regulatory body in Texas. Finally, Kelly believes the legislature should ensure schools have the resources and support they need to meet students' needs because "those kids deserve it" and "we must provide that for them." In fact, she told a group of students during a speech that they were the "centerpiece of all that we do."

Along with deriving guidance from the Texas Constitution, Kelly is also influenced by her constituents, especially over other partisan policy actors. She is committed to meeting with her constituents, particularly school district leaders. She says she likes to hear their thoughts on policy proposals and regularly gets their input to see what they think. She

worries less about adhering to partisanship and partisan policy actors that rate lawmakers based on their voting records.

Kelly's dedication to the Texas Constitution is part of what drives her policy views on private school vouchers. Kelly believes that the legislature has a constitutional duty to provide free public schools, which cannot discriminate amongst students and "have to take everyone." As aforementioned, Kelly believes that "free is in there for a reason" because schools that aren't free, (e.g., private schools) can exclude students for reasons including religion, income status, disability, attendance, discipline, or transportation needs. "Unless you have a pretty little blonde headed girl with braids who smells good and whose dad drives up in a BMW, [a private school can say], 'I'm sorry, we can't take you,'" explains Kelly.

Kelly's views on private school vouchers also tie into her beliefs about taxpayer accountability. Kelly supports the rights of parents to choose what is "in the best interest of their child," whether homeschool, private school, charter, magnet, or traditional public school. She also supports the rights of private schools to set their own standards and admission requirements. For this reason, Kelly believes that the needs of the population of students in failing schools would not be met by private schools, who don't have to serve all students like public schools do. Furthermore, Kelly is concerned that when private schools take public taxpayer dollars, public accountability should follow. This puts the ability of the private school to operate in a private manner "at risk."

Additionally, Kelly believes the argument that vouchers will help kids in "failing schools" is faulty and driven by "anti-public school sentiment by a group, for whatever reason." While she agrees there are a "small number" of public schools that are struggling, Kelly says the public school "A through F" rating system, which assigns a letter grade to districts and campuses, is "punitive" and "it's all part of the thing to introduce vouchers

into our school system." She elaborates that the rating system is "meant to focus on the negative" and is "not meant for the benefit of children." Kelly argues that for struggling schools, "a lot of times" there are factors in the community, like crime and poverty, that impact the "economic setting" of the school and its "academic potential." Kelly believes students want to stay in their "home school" and would rather invest resources and make changes there than offering a voucher to get from "place A to place B" to really "make a difference" in the child's educational situation.

Fundamentally, Kelly believes it is important to "adequately and appropriately" fund public education and is concerned when cuts are made to education. She also believes that mandates from the legislature should be met with funding and that there are "too many regulations on our schools." When scores on state standardized tests impact accountability and intervention in "failing schools," Kelly says those schools should be supported with things that meet their needs, including regulatory freedom. Regulations, testing burdens, and the "A" through "F" accountability system "have sucked the life out of [schools'] ability to be creative." Kelly believes that lessened regulations on schools will give "teachers and districts freedom to meet the needs of their kids" and was "excited" to work on legislation related to this.

School funding also ties into Kelly's views on the importance of prekindergarten. Kelly reasons that studies show high returns on investment in prekindergarten, as well as reduced special education referrals later in a child's educational career. She is frustrated by others who conflate high-quality prekindergarten with day care programs or "babysitting." In fact, Kelly says she believes teachers of lower grade levels "deserve a stipend" because it is much more than "helping children go to the bathroom and take a nap." She knows this from the observations she conducted as a teacher educator.

As for what students are taught and tested on, Kelly believes the State Board of Education should determine "our essential elements," also known as standards. Kelly has specific opinions about math standards and says at one time, "there was no prioritization on any of the standards," and things like telling time were given the same weight as memorizing multiplication facts. Kelly believes that "algebraic thinking and reasoning foundational elements" should be prioritized because that knowledge "opens you up to all of the upper levels of math, which opens you up to all the higher paying jobs." Kelly's "classroom experience led to knowing [these skills] matter." Furthermore, when Kelly was an educator, she taught parents for free at night on how to reinforce basic math skills at home with their children, which led her to also believe in the importance of personal financial literacy as a curricular topic for students, because she "saw it was lacking in parents."

Kelly believes the state's approach towards standardized tests should be changed, saying, "If it is essential […] it should be tested." Kelly argues that current tests cover additional standards that can be "below" or "above" grade level. She also believes that there is an "overemphasis, [an] inappropriate emphasis" on the state standardized test in Texas and that it is "punitive instead of being diagnostic." Kelly thinks it is important that tests measure "true growth in our kids," potentially by using the same test at the beginning and end of the school year, adding "you don't need to spend millions of dollars on that test." She believes this method would be more appropriate for teacher evaluations, rather than a "test someone else made" that uses "different terminology" than teachers use, and a "true way to diagnose" student learning and close gaps.

Impact of Meaning Making of Education on Legislative Behavior

Kelly says her accolades as a teacher and advanced degrees gave her credibility amongst her fellow legislators and gave her the ability "to speak with authority on an education-related bill." In addition to providing practical insight, Kelly used her education background when approaching other legislators. Just like the values she instilled in her students, Kelly says that her "nature is always to respect, always be researched, ready." On educational issues, Kelly says she did her "homework" every time and "knew all of it." She offered her expertise and her staff to other legislators because "being accommodating and supportive makes a big difference." In fact, she says, "relationship building is everything, just like it is in your classroom."

Kelly believes her background as an educator "was huge" because she understood how to "read" and approach other members just as teachers do with their students. Being able to navigate these relationships required that Kelly was always "researched" on another legislator's background and "knew how to relate." To encourage other legislators to reach out to their school superintendents and districts, Kelly asked questions like, "Have you spoken with your superintendent? Well, why don't you give them a call?" She also used the influence of electoral politics to spark a legislator's interest in communicating with educators, "Do you realize how many employees there are in your school district? And let's just say if even half of them vote, you need to talk to them. You need to listen to them. Hear what they have to say."

Kelly also used her voice as an educator in media interviews and speeches. On a panel, she discussed the impacts of public education funding cuts by framing school districts in a positive light, saying that they "have done an admirable job of working on less when they were accustomed to having more." During a speech, she invited individuals to share public education news with her for her newsletter, which aimed to recognize the

"good things going on in our public schools [that] are not going to make the headlines." Kelly also played a role in forming an "education caucus" in the legislature.

One of the areas Kelly is most legislatively active in is curriculum and instruction, which relates to her doctoral studies. Kelly authored and joint-authored numerous amendments and bills on a variety of curriculum related topics, including those that would give students flexibility in fulfilling credit requirements for fine arts and advanced mathematics, increase the number of approved career and technology courses available to students, and ensure that teachers are trained in certain math instructional techniques. Kelly also led several efforts to implement personal financial literacy courses for students and joint-authored legislation to expand virtual course offerings to students. Kelly's views connecting curriculum standards and testing are most evident in a joint-authored bill that both requires the State Board of Education to limit the standards addressed in each subject and grade level and significantly de-emphasizes testing.

Kelly also took several actions related to public school accountability that reflect a desire to lessen the burden of accountability on public schools and to increase the flexibility of the system. These included amendments and legislation making special consideration for dropout recovery schools within the accountability system. Additionally, Kelly joint-authored a bipartisan bill to allow districts to use a community schools model in lieu of receiving standard accountability interventions. Kelly also authored legislation that would prevent changes to the accountability system made during the school year from impacting schools, protect school districts in the event the data used for their rating was compromised, and include community engagement aspects into district and campus accountability ratings.

Regarding teachers, Kelly's legislative actions are focused on professional development and compensation. Through an amendment, Kelly ensured that college and

career readiness training for educators included that educators learn about mentorships and business partnerships. In other legislation, she made efforts to ensure that educators of younger grades would receive training in certain math instructional practices. Kelly also authored legislation that would establish a floor for teacher salaries and a teacher evaluation system, created with the feedback of teachers, that incorporated student growth measures. Finally, Kelly joint-authored legislation, some with members of the opposite party, that would raise teacher salaries across the board. These actions mirror Kelly's beliefs about the professionalism of teaching – ensuring that educators are properly trained, consulted, evaluated, and compensated.

Kelly worked on several bills and amendments that impact how school districts are funded, including funding for prekindergarten. These included efforts to alter how school district tax rates are determined, to increase funds towards small school districts and career and technical programs in schools, and to give school districts increased ability to borrow money for small projects. On legislation involving prekindergarten, Kelly gave remarks on the House chamber floor in support of the importance of high-quality prekindergarten as an investment that will pay off educationally and economically. Additionally, on the House floor, Kelly refuted a Republican legislator's claim that prekindergarten was daycare, instead framing it as an investment. Kelly also joint-authored bipartisan legislation to implement full-day prekindergarten programs in Texas, as well as an amendment to a prekindergarten bill to include a plan for parental engagement strategies in early childhood education.

Kelly's legislation relating to school operation impacts a variety of areas, including special populations of children and charter schools. In addition to these areas, Kelly's legislative efforts include giving school districts more tools to protect students in health emergencies and to increase the emphasis on mental health supports in schools. While these

gave schools more resources, some of Kelly's other legislation implements requirements. For instance, Kelly joint-authored bipartisan legislation that would implement reporting requirements for districts that received class size waivers.

Kelly's school operations legislation that impacts special populations of children also mainly focuses on requirements for districts. For example, she joint-authored legislation that would require school districts to coordinate with other entities to develop a statewide database of best-practices for serving children with autism spectrum disorder. Additionally, she authored legislation that would require districts to coordinate educational services for students in foster care and to report information related to placements of students in disciplinary settings. It is important to note that, while not directly education-related, Kelly also authored several pieces of legislation related to child abuse and neglect.

Kelly's legislative work on charter schools includes bills that would create operational parity between charter schools and traditional public schools in various areas, such as immunity and liability. Additionally, Kelly joint-authored and authored various bills that would make the revocation, expansion, and renewal and denial process for charter schools dependent on academic and financial performance and accountability measures. Kelly also joint-authored a bill to create a charter school for non-traditional adult students. These efforts suggest a desire to ensure that charter schools and traditional public schools are held to the same high standards, but that there are special purposes that charter schools could be used for.

While some of her legislation on school operation increased reporting requirements, particularly in areas directly relating to students, Kelly has strong beliefs about giving regulatory freedom to school districts and was "excited" to author a bill that would do just that. Unfortunately, her bill became tied up in the struggle for a different education-related bill relating to accountability that Kelly did not and still does not support.

Because her “good bill” was being “held hostage in the Senate,” Kelly eventually decided to take a vote for something she “hoped would die” and “did not believe in.” In this critical decision, Kelly says that “the arm-twisting was so powerful and so much was at risk from what we could offer districts.” Even though the vote “hurt [her] stomach,” she felt her bill was “so critical” for school districts and that she had the goal of the “greater good” in mind.

Summary

A teacher at heart, Kelly maintained a commitment to students, children, and public schools while in office. In her legislative work, she focused heavily on curriculum and instruction and providing regulatory freedom for school districts. Especially on issues that cause infighting within her own party, Kelly refers back to the Texas Constitution to bolster her identity as a conservative. Because of her classroom experience and advanced degrees, Kelly gained credibility among her colleagues as an education expert, sharing her experiences during the policy process. Kelly sees immense value in the perspective she brings and thinks that educators must enhance how others perceive them and be a stronger voice, while elected officials must lend more respect and trust to educators.

NARRATIVE: HONORABLE AUDREY SMITH

Dr. Audrey Smith is a former public school teacher and a member of the Texas House of Representatives. Smith has extensive experience in education and links her understanding of students to her beliefs about the public education and criminal justice systems. Her education policy focus areas are teachers, curriculum and instruction, and student well-being (including disciplinary aspects). She has strong beliefs about the importance of educator participation in voting and the legislative process as necessary to ensuring that the educational needs of the state are met.

Identity

Representative Smith's "whole family is in education." Not only was Smith's husband an educator, but so are her children and even some of her grandchildren. Smith had her bachelor's and master's degrees by her mid-twenties and her "dream" was to have her doctorate by the age of 30. At nearly 50, Smith said, "'I have not accomplished my dream,'" and went back to school to earn her doctorate in an education-related field. Because Smith told her children "they always have to do ten times better than [her]," they joined her in the program. Since she is "the mommy and [has] to do the leading," Smith got her doctorate first.

Education is Smith's "passion." She was a teacher and an administrator for nearly forty years, with many of these years at a school where the average family income was "$13,000," and also worked as a professor. Even though she is no longer in the classroom, Smith still considers herself a teacher and an educator, especially when it comes to educating her constituents and other teachers about being involved in elections. Smith says, "When I go out and talk to my constituents… I'm an educator, so I try to educate them on what the process is like." Smith continues, "And don't give me an opportunity to talk to teachers, because then, I will educate them on the process."

Smith held some community-based positions and one other elected office before becoming a state representative in the Democratic party. Though this initial elected position "was not [a] high priority" to Smith, she ran for the office because she was an educator and due to "pushing from people." Smith says she "was really, really interested in educating [her] children" (her students), but her dissertation chair told her, "'You need to go now. You need to do something else.'" Smith says serving in this first elected position was "one of the best things" she has done and that she is a "better person with that background" because she now knows "how things are done and why education is the way it is." This

includes “how education is funded” and “how politics plays a big role in education […] particularly in the state of Texas.”

Holding an elected office prior to being a member of the legislature was a “benefit” to Smith and how she “got in.” Smith says, “I don’t know what hit me, but I just decided that, at one point, I was not very happy with the person who was holding our state legislative position.” After an initial defeat for the state representative position, Smith “was not going to run again.” Her opponent then “tried to draw [her] out of the district” through the decennial redistricting process. However, when Smith got her voter registration card, she was still in the district and decided, “‘Well, I’m just going to try it again,’” winning the district. In Smith’s recent campaigns, she frames herself as “a strong advocate” for education, economic development, and transportation and as someone who is concerned for the “well-being of our senior citizens.”

Reflecting on her experiences, Smith says, “I’m amazed, as an educator.” She says that when she was a teacher, she “really didn’t think much about what happens at the upper level in politics.” She didn’t realize that “what happens at the state legislature, what happens at the State Board of Education, what happens at the local board […] trickles on down to the schoolhouse, down to the classroom where [she] was.” By serving in her elected positions, Smith “learned a lot” and feels that the experiences have really “changed [her] thinking” and understanding of education.

Meaning Making of Education in the Policy Context

In Smith’s view, “teaching is a very, very important job.” She believes that educators want “society to get better” and that they “have to change with society,” even as “society imposes so much on [them].” Smith says because “the world changes” and “education changes,” teachers “need to teach everything. You need to teach the changes.”

For example, “we used to learn from the hornbook, and we had one-room schoolhouses. We don’t have that anymore.” For this reason, she believes that educators should always be “in a learning mode.” The value Smith places on educators staying current ties into her beliefs that teachers should get doctoral degrees, to “see things from a different perspective.”

Just as Smith wasn’t aware of the connectedness of politics and education when she was an active educator, she believes that when she sees “educators or teachers now, they don’t understand either.” To address this issue, Smith says, “in a dream world, I’d like to see teachers participate.” She’d like to see teachers “vote every year,” to “hold their legislators’ feet to the fire,” to “come up and participate in committees,” and to “bring laws that [they’d] like to be passed to committee.” One of the most important things Smith encourages of all people is to become a voter, that “we cannot take it for granted.” But Smith says, “teachers have a low voting rate” and “a reputation for not getting involved in the political process.” Ideally, Smith says she wants teachers to get involved and educate themselves, “up and down the chain of command,” so that they know the whole process, from the classroom, to the state, to the legislature, to the State Board of Education.

Smith believes that the lack of teacher participation and lack of educator voice in the legislative process leads to negative outcomes for education policy. She argues that if teachers don’t “participate in the process, they get very little attention at the state level,” especially in terms of money. Furthermore, “the majority of people that serve in the state legislature are lawyers,” with few educators serving alongside them. Because of this, “education becomes a not-so-popular entity in terms of funding, until you get some educators in,” even though “everybody runs on an education platform.” So, even though education is “important,” Smith contends “that’s not what the other side is thinking.”

Smith believes that the purpose of education in Texas is to "prepare our state for a workforce that's needed" and to "prepare people to be involved in the economy." Smith says, "If you're educated, you educate other people," adding that education "makes a difference in the livelihood of every person in the state of Texas." Furthermore, education has "a trickle-down kind of impact on people." Those who are educated are "going to get a better job," "going to have a longer lifespan," going to have children who are more educated, and have a lower likelihood of incarceration. For these reasons, education is "vital," "so important," and "a must."

Smith believes that "the impact of politics on education is great" and that this is evident in a variety of ways. For instance, Smith articulates that party politics in the Texas legislature isn't just Republicans and Democrats, there are also schisms that divide Republicans into "Christian rights" and the "tea party." The partisan dynamics of the house impacts which members are appointed to which committees and what the party makeup of each committee is. Smith's committees are "stacked" with Republicans for this reason. In fact, Smith says that, as a new legislator, she "did not have a choice" of committee assignment because she campaigned against private school vouchers and her party was in the minority. Now that she is on the committee of her choice, partisan politics still play a role in whether her bills are heard because "the chair of [the] committee is not of [her] political persuasion." However, even though Smith has "always been in the minority party," she says she has "seen things really change." She attributes this to elections and being "a participant at the polls."

Smith also describes the politics of education as embedded in funding. She says, "the money always impacts […] if you've got a problem in education, you need to follow the dollar." Even though funding education is inherently political, Smith echoes the Texas Constitution in her belief that the government has a "duty to provide" a "free public

education." This includes a responsibility to "educate the children that you have," "plus the new kids" who come to Texas. Smith says the state "has not put any new money into education since 2006," but new funding passed in the most recent legislative session "is going to make a big difference."

In addition to funding a free public education, Smith believes that the role of government is to "solve problems" and that members of the legislature have a responsibility to their constituents in the work they do. Smith "[keeps] all [her] constituents in mind" in her legislative work, ensuring to work on bills "for all the things that we are concerned about in [the district]." In addition to problems close to home, Smith believes that the legislature needs to solve problems linked to education, like teen pregnancy and incarceration. Furthermore, Smith believes the state can provide revenue for education by addressing tax loopholes for businesses.

As an educator, Smith's colleagues "depend" on her as the "education person in […] the Democratic party," someone to tell them "what bills they should support and which bills they should not support." Smith is asked by her colleagues if a bill is "good for education" or if it is "detrimental to the progress of education in the state of Texas." Smith and her colleagues engage in meetings to discuss education legislation. Smith says that, to her colleagues, she has "become their little education guru."

Smith's views on education funding focus on reflecting the needs Texas public school students. Beyond the need to invest money into public education to meet enrollment growth needs in Texas, Smith thinks it is important that state-level education funding "meet the needs" of low-income children and children of color, particularly because the "majority" of public school children in Texas are "African American or Hispanic." Smith also believes that it is important for funding to address particular situations facing students,

such as the need for safe transportation to school in high-crime neighborhoods and programming for low-income students.

Many of Smith's beliefs about teachers are tied to education funding. Smith believes not only that teachers need a pay raise, but that everybody working in a school should get a raise. She says, "a school does not function without the janitor, the custodians, the kitchen help, the bus drivers, everybody." Smith also believes in helping teachers "along the way" by funding teachers to get the education necessary, such as a master's degree, for other educational placements. She argues that "many of these teachers don't have the money" to undertake such endeavors. Furthermore, Smith believes that there has "not been enough [funding] to do staff development for teachers," which keeps educators from "keeping up with what's going on out in society."

Smith's other beliefs about teachers include efforts related to how teachers are treated as professionals. Smith believes that a defined benefit pension plan provides security and superior coverage for educators, which is important for future educators to understand. Additionally, Smith believes that class size limits are essential for providing "quality" and "individualized time" with students. Lastly, Smith does not believe that tying teacher evaluations to student achievement on standardized tests accurately measures a teacher's job performance.

Smith is adamant in her opposition to privatization of the public education system. She says that privatization is a way to avoid the "real problem," which is an inadequately funded public education system. She says there are "outside entities" and a "movement" trying to "dismantle" and "take over" public education in favor of privatization. Smith elaborates, "if you take the money away, it will just completely dry up." She believes that vouchers, tax credits, and scholarship mechanisms for sending public money to private schools are meant to "divert money" into the private sector that is then "unaccounted for."

In addition to vouchers, Smith rejects attempts to allow private entities, including charter schools, to take over low-performing schools under the state's accountability system, saying that the state and school districts should instead provide such campuses with the resources needed to succeed. She believes it is important for school boards to recognize and pay attention to which of their campuses are neglected, "particularly in minority communities." Smith also argues that charter schools have not been as successful as some may believe and that, rather than providing traditional school districts with flexibility, the state continues to allow for the expansion of charter schools. Charter schools are inherently more flexible given their exemptions from many state laws. Smith says that rapid expansion of charter schools could lead to increased numbers of ineffective charters in Texas.

Regarding curriculum and instruction, Smith believes it is important that educators, those with a degree in education, and even those with a doctorate in education should be involved in the adoption of textbooks by the State Board of Education. Smith is troubled by the possibility of political influences on what is included or excluded from textbooks, such as allowing members of the State Board of Education to "inject their own ideology" by giving them a say or letting them appoint people to textbook approval committees. Reflecting on her own life and the importance of storytelling on Juneteenth, Smith says that it's important to know your history because "they don't write it in the history books."

Smith has strong views about reducing teen pregnancies because of the subsequent negative impacts on teen mothers and their children. Smith says, "it's a serious problem, and Texas must do something about it." In her experience, Smith says that many teen mothers live in poverty, live alone, and may even be homeless. A solution Smith implemented was to have "parenting classes, and ways to find resources for those mothers to feed their children, clothe their children, anything we could do to help them be

successful." Smith says teen pregnancy can lead teen mothers and their children to have higher rates of incarceration because "it's generational" and "they do what they have to do to survive." Smith believes that the state should implement measures to help students stay in school, like clinics in schools, nurseries on campus, issuing condoms, sex education or "whatever you need to keep from getting pregnant."

Smith believes that education and incarceration are intricately linked, "If we don't educate our children, they will end up in the penal institutions or some other institution that's not good for their success." What happens in schools is important to breaking the school-to-prison pipeline and Smith believes that schools should be "happy places" and a place where children feel "motivated," not a place where they are beaten. Educators should try to understand why students misbehave and treat each student "as an individual," rather than resorting to corporal punishment, which Smith views as a remnant of slavery that disproportionately impacts Black boys.

From her experience in schools, Smith understands that children come to school with a variety of family backgrounds, including those who have incarcerated mothers and fathers, which could lead to misbehavior. These children need mental health supports in school, like structured play time and recess. The system should not "push our children to the street" and create situations where children grow into dangerous adults.

Just she views corporal punishment is a vestige of slavery, Smith sees the penal system as a form of modern day slavery because it subjects people to forced, unpaid labor. Unfortunately, Smith points out that being in the penal system has a domino effect not only on the convicted but on their children as well. For instance, a simple misdemeanor could impact an adult's ability to get a job, housing, and education, which has secondary impacts on a child's education and well-being. As such, it is important to Smith to close pathways to incarceration while students are still in school, such as reducing teen pregnancy. For

children who do end up incarcerated, Smith believes it is important that those children have someone to help "usher them back into the school setting" once they have served their time. These children must "be successful in school so that they can graduate."

Impact of Meaning Making of Education on Legislative Behavior

Smith uses her professional background to educate others on the legislative process, about voting and elections, and about laws that have been passed. For instance, in an interview, Smith made sure to remind educators about recent legislation on inappropriate teacher-student relationships "that can garnish you a jail sentence," telling educators, "be a professional." In the same interview, she urged children to "pay careful attention to what they do" to avoid going to jail, which will "ruin" their life. She also uses her public speaking opportunities to explain the importance of voting, how to vote without straight-ticket voting, and how redistricting will impact politics, saying, "we've got to educate our people" and urging others to "spread the word." She feels "excited" about her professional and political experiences and what she has learned, which is why "anytime [she] gets the opportunity to do a presentation on the impact of politics in education, [she] takes advantage of that opportunity."

In her legislative work, Smith speaks directly to her experiences as an educator and what they have taught her about the circumstances facing children. In news media, Smith referred to "every child" who was in her school building or classroom to explain that all children are different and should be treated as such. Referencing her years of experience in a press conference, Smith said she has "seen many children come under [her] privy," and has experienced the gravity of situations facing them. In floor speeches and debates, Smith again referred to her teaching and administrative experience to share with others that many

of the children she had were born to teen mothers, who were children themselves and faced a "very difficult situation."

Smith is very active in teacher policy and many of her efforts aim to increase the financial benefits of being a teacher. She authored amendments to other legislators' bills to account for situations involving teachers, including clarifying the definition of a teacher and eliminating a requirement that professional development be linked to an educator's appraisal. Smith persistently authored legislation to increase teacher salaries and retirement benefits and add a cost-of-living adjustment within the teacher retirement system. Smith also joint-authored bipartisan legislation to implement an "innovation" program to allow districts flexibility in teacher pay, mentoring, and professional development. To reduce educators' out-of-pocket expenses, Smith worked on bills to lessen the personal financial burden on teachers who purchase their own supplies and to allow the children of educators to be eligible for free prekindergarten in public schools.

Smith authored and joint-authored many other teacher bills, ranging from professional growth to higher education benefits to employment aspects. Smith authored and joint-authored bills relating to professional development in early reading, teaching educators about health and wellness, and leadership training for principals at low-performing schools. She also joint-authored bipartisan legislation relating to training teachers on suicide prevention. Smith's work on educator preparation focuses on higher education benefits for educators (e.g., loan repayment, tuition and fees exemptions) and also includes a bipartisan effort at a residency program for aspiring teachers. Lastly, some of Smith's legislative actions focus on defining the profession and protecting educators, such as implementing a statutory outline of the responsibilities of students, parents, and educators, protecting educators' certificates from state-level administrative processing delays, and providing flexibility and clarity regarding the use of personal leave. These

reflect Smith's beliefs about treating educators as professionals and supporting educators in higher education pursuits.

Smith authored many bills related to student discipline and is featured in news media frequently on the topic. Her legislative efforts emphasize holding districts and the state accountable while decreasing the impacts of discipline on students. Smith authored legislation requiring that all school district campus improvement plans include practices that address student mental and emotional well-being, as well as legislation increasing school district reporting on student discipline actions. She also authored state-level efforts to limit and eliminate the practice of corporal punishment and to require a state-led review of disciplinary practices across Texas. Lastly, Smith authored legislation to allow bus drivers take disciplinary actions against students engaging in serious offenses, emulating the teacher's authority in the classroom.

Smith also worked on student discipline from the student perspective. In a bill Smith classifies as "critical," she authored an effort to ease students' transition from disciplinary settings back into the classroom. Smith says she is "proud" of the bill, "to help those children get along." Additionally, Smith joint-authored legislation to decriminalize certain activities for children under 13 and offered an amendment to another legislator's bill to incorporate a consideration for children in the juvenile justice system, including those with disabilities. With few exceptions, the focus of her legislation is largely to monitor and mitigate the use of student discipline, which Smith may view as a negative aspect of schooling based on her belief that schools should be "happy" and motivating.

Smith's work on legislation that impacts children broadly ties into her beliefs about the interconnectedness of education and incarceration. She engaged in extensive debates on the House floor regarding teen pregnancy, sex education, and adoption assistance, tying these to discussions about abortion. On teen pregnancy in particular, Smith argued that the

issue has negative educational, social, and economic effects on teen mothers *and* on their children, who are in public schools. She authored an amendment to an abortion bill related to addressing teen pregnancy. Related to the domino effects of incarceration and Smith's belief about the importance of education on adults and their children, she also authored legislation that credits incarcerated individuals for participating in educational programs.

Smith's other work related to children covers a variety of topics, such as foster care and adoption, health, and efforts related to parents. On adoption assistance, Smith argued on the House floor for the importance of allowing children, particularly those with special needs, to be placed in homes. Smith also authored efforts to place child victims of trafficking in secure foster homes, to restrict the hours of employment for children, and to study the use of certain drugs on children. As for involved adults, Smith authored legislation to allow caregivers to enroll children in school and to require courts to consider whether someone is the primary caretaker of a child before making determinations about probation. Finally, Smith joint-authored legislation to ensure employee rights and protections to participate in activities of their children (e.g., a school play).

Many of Smith's bills regarding special education start at the district level, reaching teachers and parents through mandates. She authored bills to specify, and give districts the flexibility to reject, who can serve as a representative in a special education impartial due process hearing. She also authored legislation to increase requirements for districts, such as an annual review of behavior intervention or behavior improvement plans and that districts adopt specific planning procedures for special education transition-to-adulthood services. Smith authored efforts to require the support and inclusion of teachers during the individualized education plan (IEP) and admission, review, dismissal (ARD) processes and to require that teachers are trained and supported in the instruction of students with disabilities. Lastly, Smith authored legislation to ensure that districts increase parents'

access to information regarding special education processes and when restraint and time outs are used. These efforts may show the influence of Smith's experience as an administrator and someone who would be intimately aware of special education processes in districts. Additionally, her legislation suggests that she wants to ensure districts are held accountable to students, parents, and teachers during the special education process.

At the state level, Smith's legislation on special education includes creating statewide criteria for the development of IEPs and changing how districts are funded for the transportation of students with disabilities. Additionally, Smith's state-level bills include those that would extend the length of health benefit plan coverage for children with autism spectrum disorder and limit how long parents can wait to have an impartial due process hearing. Finally, Smith joint-authored a bill to prohibit a school district monitoring system indicator or "special education cap" based on the percentage of students in special education. In 2018, Texas was infamously found in violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by the U.S. Department of Education for implementing such a cap (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019). These state-level bills appear to focus on statewide consistency and compliance, as well as the state's responsibility to students with disabilities.

Recently, Smith became more active in school safety legislative efforts, many of which focus on training requirements. For example, Smith authored several bills regarding law enforcement who work in school settings, including requirements for school safety training, that school law enforcement training happen over a shorter timeframe, and that districts to adopt a training policy for these individuals. She also authored legislation requiring school safety training for school district trustees and charter school governing board members. Lastly, Smith joint-authored legislation requiring districts to have an active shooter emergency protocol and that school law enforcement receive active shooter

training. Smith's legislative strategy of implementing training requirements for school law enforcement is similar to her efforts for teachers and reflects her value of continuing education.

Smith's school safety legislation also focused on compliance and establishing roles and authority. For instance, Smith authored legislation requiring that school district trustees set the duties of law enforcement and prohibiting districts from placing routine student discipline or administrative tasks on school district law enforcement. Smith joint-authored bills to institute a law enforcement to mental health professional ratio and to establish threat assessment teams in schools. She joint-authored bipartisan legislation to require notice to superintendents of threats of school violence and to create a reporting process and penalties for districts that are out of compliance with school safety policy and planning requirements. These bills reflect an effort to increase school safety readiness and prophylactic measures intended to curb school violence.

Smith believes that school funding is political and is proud of a bipartisan, omnibus school finance bill she joint-authored to increase funds for public schools in Texas. In fact, Smith argues that working on this bill was a critical decision to her. She said, some of her colleagues "who didn't understand education were kind of like, 'Are we putting our people up for higher taxes? Is this good for education?" Smith told her colleagues the bill was one "we must support, even though it's sponsored by the Republican party," and that they must "work across the aisle to get it across." The bill was important to her not only because of the increased funding for schools, but because of its specific programmatic aspects, such as full-day prekindergarten, afterschool programs and tutoring, summer school, and a raise for teachers. Smith says that she is "proud of that bill as it impacts children."

Smith's school funding legislative work also includes an amendment she offered on another legislator's bill to prohibit public funds from going to private school students

or schools (vouchers), as well as other bills with joint-authored with members of her own party to increase funds to districts. These include a bill to include charter school students in traditional school district funding calculations, thereby increasing funds to the district, and a bill to allow students in flexible school day programs, who are typically in school for less time, to be funded at a full-day rate. In addition to these student-based efforts, Smith joint-authored legislation to increase funding for new instructional facilities in school districts and for school district bond obligations related to facilities. Additionally, she joint-authored bills to create dedicated funding for instructional materials and to establish a fund for school district equipment and improvement, including the improvement of facilities. While not directly tied to funding, Smith's school facilities legislation also includes an effort to allow for the investigation of air quality in school buildings, which could presumably lead to funding for improvements. Smith's work on school funding reflects her belief in the importance of increasing funding to public schools and rejecting vouchers, while also shedding light on how she may view the importance of school facilities.

Smith's legislation related to public school accountability and school improvement appears to add protections, exceptions, and compliance considerations for who should be included in decision-making about schools. For instance, she authored a bill that would provide opportunities for districts to have lessened sanctions associated with performance ratings. She also authored legislation to provide exemptions from accountability ratings for charter schools serving special populations of students, such as those confined to a residential program under court order. Additionally, Smith authored a bill to protect charters from revocation if their performance rating was only unacceptable due to a data error. Smith also authored legislation to require districts to annually certify that they have followed law regarding the composition of statutory district-level and campus-level

committees, which consist of parents, business representatives, and other community members who work on district objectives.

Smith has strong views about the State Board of Education's (SBOE) role in determining curriculum and the importance of protecting curriculum from ideological or political influences. In fact, Smith joint-authored bills to make SBOE elections non-partisan and, as a form of additional oversight, to require a panel of higher education experts to weigh in on curriculum up for review before the SBOE. Similarly, Smith offered an amendment to another legislator's bill that would require the inclusion of higher education content experts on curriculum review teams and exclude individuals who work for companies of textbooks under consideration. She also engaged in floor debates about the importance of factual instructional materials, giving the example of false information that was previously included in Texas-approved history textbooks and inaccurate information included in sex education courses. Accordingly, Smith joint-authored bipartisan legislation to increase district authority, flexibility, and options regarding instructional materials, and authored legislation to include teachers and district employees in the adoption district curriculum initiatives.

Smith's views about how and what students learn is evident in the bills she worked on related to particular curriculum and instruction requirements. Smith authored legislation to study how students of limited English language proficiency are served in schools. She also authored legislation that would require a health education credit for graduation and increase students' exposure to physical activity and structured playtime. Smith joint-authored bills that would require a fine arts credit for graduation, implement medically-accurate sex education curriculum, and require information about voting be included in social studies curriculum for students. These efforts reflect Smith's statements about the

importance of supports for student well-being, including mental health, factual sex education, and participation in elections.

Smith's legislative efforts also included testing and academic success with students in mind. For instance, Smith authored bills to de-link standardized testing from a student's ability to graduate or be promoted to the next grade, to expand options for students under a court order to take their high school equivalency examination online, and to create a pilot program to provide information to students on postsecondary education paths. Smith also joint-authored a bill to require the state to fund federally-mandated SAT and ACT exams for certain students. Smith joint-authored bipartisan bills to require the state education agency to provide school districts with free electronic tutorials for certain end-of-course assessments required for graduation and to allow dual credit courses to have a higher weight in a student's grade point average. These student-centered legislative efforts reflect a desire to help students graduate and move on to postsecondary options.

As aforementioned, Smith's work on charter schools included efforts to provide consideration in other laws for charter schools that serve special populations and to make tweaks regarding charter revocation. While Smith argues that the purpose of charter schools is to provide flexibility, her legislation relating to charter schools suggests that there are some areas where she believes parity between charters and traditional public schools should be maintained. Smith authored and joint-authored legislation to ensure that charter school employees have the same rights as traditional public school employees and that charter schools cannot implement admissions policies that exclude students based on their disciplinary history. Smith also joint-authored bipartisan legislation requiring charter schools to follow school safety policy and planning requirements, just as traditional school districts do. The focus of these bills is consistent with Smith's legislative activity regarding

teachers, student discipline, and school safety, and is also consistent with her beliefs that charter schools should be effective.

Smith authored bills many related to district operation and policy. While some of these imposed requirements on districts across other policy areas important to her, such as teachers and student discipline, her other school operations legislative efforts protect and expand the abilities of schools. These include bills to keep school district audit documentation private and inaccessible by the Texas Public Information Act, to allow for school bus monitoring systems that record images, including those of vehicles that pass a stopped school bus, and to expand the capability of schools to donate food to non-profits. These reflect Smith's experience as a school administrator and someone who is concerned with privacy, safety, and flexibility in operation.

Summary

Representative Smith is a lifelong educator who brings her value of educating others into her work as an elected official. She also brings an intimate knowledge of the various situations facing students and a driving force that education and incarceration are strongly linked. This translates into myriad bills that directly impact children through increased protections, supports, and flexibilities and indirectly impact children through district- and state-level mandates. Smith also holds a conviction that teachers must be involved in order to be seen and to cut through the politics of education, which is embedded in battles over money. She educates those within and outside of the legislature to vote, to participate, to change and adapt, and to be aware of how laws and policies impact adults and children.

NARRATIVE: HONORABLE MATTHEW DAVIS

Dr. Matthew Davis is a former public school teacher who serves in the Texas House of Representatives. He has distinct experiences as an educator but is adamant about continuing to listen and learn as a legislator in ways that continue to inform his policymaking. Davis uses his conservative principles and the Texas Constitution as his guide, while also drawing on his faith and beliefs in the interconnectedness of the public education and criminal justice systems. As such, he is particularly active in the areas of juvenile justice.

Identity

Representative Davis considers himself a "Texas-bred, Texas-product of public schools" starting in kindergarten and ending with his doctoral degree in political science. He says he is "proud" to be a product of public education and considers the education he received to be "high quality." When describing himself, Davis says, "it's just real simple," he is a "schoolteacher by trade," a "former infantry officer," a "small produce rancher," a "coach," and, "most importantly, [he is] a Christian." Davis's wife is also a former teacher.

Davis says he had "great schoolteachers that inspired all types of interests" and was "involved in politics his entire life." In fact, he "took the mantle as the class president" as a young boy, even acting as a play "tax collector and an appropriator" to raise money for outings with his friends. When talking about his grandparents, Davis says that, though they never talked about "political philosophy or economic philosophy," he learned from them about "standing on the faith of God" and to follow the ideal, "don't spend more than you make and don't spend more than you have." In college, Davis was also class president.

Davis started his path in the military in high school but also has a legacy of service in his family. His uncles served in Vietnam and he considers them to be his role models –

the “Black men that [he] looked up to.” In high school, he also looked up to “two strong Black men that were leaders in [the army ROTC] program.” This program gave him the “foundation” of where he is now. Davis went to college because of his desire to serve in the military and served for several years after earning his bachelor’s degree.

Davis didn’t plan on becoming a teacher, rather, he “was just straight off the streets […] to the classroom.” When he returned to Texas after serving in the military, he thought he might work in a finance-related position. Instead, he was encouraged by those in his “old neighborhood” to “walk across the street” and interview at the local school because they were “looking for some folks to teach” and coach sports. Davis had a successful interview, became certified, and taught at the middle school level. He soon learned why people say, “’If you can teach middle school, you can teach anything,” as he found his position to be “one of the more challenging, but also at the same time, one of the more rewarding levels of teaching.” Davis taught in public schools at the middle school, high school, and collegiate levels for nearly two decades and says, “it was a great experience.”

At the time that Davis decided to run for office, he was a high school government and economics teacher, experiencing the societal issues impacting his students and often having “tough discussions” with them about their future. In addition to having an academic background in political science, Davis was also (and still is) “actively involved” in “community projects” and “grassroots politics.” At the time, it was “shaping up to be a change election year,” a time when the party that controls the White House “usually has a tougher time in congressional and down-ballot legislative seats.” Davis says there were also “just some other issues going on in the political environment that exacerbated” conflicts with the party in control. Because of these factors, Davis “made the decision to put [his] name in the hat.” Davis says his “race was one of the first, if not the first race to be called that November.”

Davis ran on a platform that included the ideas of "pro-liberty," "pro-constitution," and "pro-rule of law." On the campaign trail, he discussed "the issues that are really eating at our hearts as Americans," which "is the idea that the people that are in charge are now robbing us of our American character." At a campaign event, Davis said the reason there is a "fiscal deficit" is because "we have a deficit in morality, and we have a deficit in liberty." Davis ran on reducing taxes, rejecting new taxes, and rejecting new ways to regulate Texas businesses and individuals. He also ran on immigration and the idea that the state and federal governments should enforce the "rule of law," adding that those who come to the country should, "come in the right way," "respect our laws," and "assimilate by learning the language."

Though Davis belongs to the Republican party, he has taken a stance against other Republicans through a vote for Speaker of the Texas House. His principles include "conservative balance" and policymaking "in a more efficient, constitutional, data-driven, compassionate way." While Davis has said his "purpose is to expand individual liberty," he also believes in "ordered liberty" and the idea that liberty is "not an excuse just to do whatever you want to do, because you can do it." Rather, Davis says that "we're all virtuous beings ultimately responsible to our higher power, that's God."

Meaning Making of Education in the Policy Context

Davis believes that the job of a teacher is "very, very important" and that teachers are "essential workers, no doubt." Davis agrees that what teachers do is "life-changing, life-enhancing." Thinking back on his own experience, Davis says that teachers are "the ultimate as far as being in the midst of every type of societal challenge that's going on." For Davis, teaching was an opportunity "to grow, become sensitive, and understand the

plight of common everyday folks." Every day as an educator, Davis learned the "conditions of humanity by being in a classroom."

Reflecting on both his professional and political backgrounds, Davis says, "one thing about probably education and politics as academic endeavor, you can actually engage in live lab experience." Davis says the legislature can be "an informative and humbling experience," through which he "realized there were probably some practices […] that probably were not the best-informed." In fact, Davis says he is now "more prepared to go in the classroom than [he] was before." Looking back on his students, Davis says he "can connect the dots that definitely many of them had some dyslexic situations" and some "were on the spectrum." Being in the legislature has allowed Davis to "learn new information" and understand his students' situations better.

As an educator-legislator, Davis doesn't believe that his colleagues "lean on educators that are now legislators enough." From Davis's point of view, when there is an "oil and gas [issue], [he] will talk to somebody on the floor about oil and gas," and says the same of veterinarians for veterinary issues and of doctors for medical and health issues. Davis says, he "may not agree with them, but [he's] at least going to get the basic information." He thinks that educator-legislators aren't consulted, or are disregarded when they are consulted, because "everybody's done K through 12 once in their life, [so] they think they know it." However, Davis says "there is a perspective that [educator-legislators] are coming with that [other] members will never be able to replicate."

Davis says that, for educator-legislators, "It's a perspective" and "that perspective doesn't change with regard to your audience." For instance, with reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, Davis says you have to consider "what situations are you putting teachers in" when "they have to make the decision between [a] kid's face mask down a little bit […] and the student-teacher relationship, the distraction from the educational

environment, all of that." Ultimately, for Davis it is "the perspective of being in a classroom, knowing what that really means," and considering that "at the end of the day, it's about that student, more importantly about the student-teacher relationship and how parents feel about it." In sum, Davis says the classroom experience doesn't "change your principles or your values," but rather your "approach" changes.

Of the several former school board members in the legislature, Davis says that "there's a distinct difference between being a board member and an actual educator." Davis believes that the number of former school board members in the legislature is "one reason it took us so long to get to some substantive agreement on school finance." He adds that "in both chambers, a lot of school policy has been driven primarily by [school board members]." While these individuals bring a "very good" background, such as "having to balance a budget," "at the end of the day," a lot of the recent significant school finance reforms are "classroom-driven" and things that "we could have started on […] several sessions ago."

Davis believes that the role of public education "is to develop people […] who know their rights and responsibilities as free people in a Republic" and "their role as a citizen." Davis also sees education as one of the "underpinnings of the country," along with faith. While Davis thinks that "getting people ready for a job" is "part of being a citizen" and part of "being economically viable [and] self-sufficient," he doesn't believe that developing people "for industry" is the only thing education is for. It is also important to understand things like "showing up on time, being able to perform, thinking on your feet" and being able to "do a little group activity without cowering in a corner."

Davis believes there are three major institutions of civilization: "the family, government, and the church." As for the role of government, Davis says the state has a "moral responsibility" and, under the Texas Constitution, a "mandate to provide for

[education].” Davis thinks about the education system in economic terms and says that “if you look at all the programs we have on the table, it’s probably the best, [most] efficient one we got in our society,” where “for a little bit of money we are able to get a pretty significant bang for the buck.” Additionally, Davis connects education to his faith, saying that “God loves wisdom” and therefore the legislature needs to “support our education and make sure it’s efficient and effective.”

Davis believes that the government is “charged with spending other people’s money” and should focus on “core government activities.” These are education, public safety, transportation, and “protecting those that can’t protect themselves,” such as seniors and children in child protective services (CPS) and foster care. While on a panel, Davis defended foster care reforms that would expand who can receive kinship care payments, reiterating that the change was “not an expansion of welfare.” Davis also believes that criminal justice sits at a nexus with these core government activities and issues areas like CPS, mental illness, government services like jails, and education. In fact, Davis says “the reason [he’s] interested in education policy is because of [his] work in criminal justice.” He says, “if we fail to fund public education and support our young people, especially young people that are facing daily challenges,” then “we’re going to strike out in incarceration.” For instance, in the case of school truancy, Davis says rather than “knee-jerk criminalizing the student,” other responses could be employed first to approach the situation from a perspective of efficiency, the constitution, data, compassion, and being “a little bit more thoughtful.”

In addition to his beliefs about the roles of education and government and sticking to his principles and values, such as conservatism, there are several other factors that impact Davis’s policymaking. He believes that “you have to listen a lot” and learn. As such, Davis “look[s] at [his] district” when making decisions and is connected with

stakeholders in his district. Davis also believes that it's not "enough to come up with a piece of policy that [an organization] has sent over to you," it has to "make sense for the student" and policies need to be "data-driven" so that there is evidence to show their impacts. Davis says that when he looks at a bill, he asks, "Is it moral? Is it constitutional? Is it right, fiscally?" He also asks, "How much money and what problems does it solve or create in the future?"

Davis's views on school discipline, juvenile justice, and the overlap of the public education and criminal justice systems are persistently featured in news media and were a focal point of his interview. One of the areas Davis has worked most in is truancy. In fact, he believes that "imprisoning children for truancy" is a form of "criminalizing poverty." Rather than "locking a kid up" and having offenses go on the child's permanent record, Davis believes schools and the juvenile justice system should address the reasons students are not going to school and that the government should provide the tools to do so. Davis uses the same "integrated approach" in addressing the criminalization of children dealing with mental illness, saying that involving multiple stakeholders "around the table" is more appropriate then "just 'boom' to the criminal justice system."

As a teacher, Davis would have thought it "crazy" to decriminalize truancy but, since becoming a legislator, he has learned more about why truancy happens. A student might be "caring for a very sick adult family member" or have a parent who has a flat tire or who needs a battery in their car. A child could be missing sleep because their mom is "getting the crap beat out of her" or, even worse, the child was being "human trafficked" or "sexually assaulted and trying to prevent themselves from being assaulted [by] staying up all night." Davis says others comment, "I could have fought my way through that,'" and, "All [the mom] had to [do was] get on the phone [and] call somebody.'" Davis believes that adults "don't just show up and say they're being sexually assaulted," and this

commentary puts the same or even higher expectations on youth. Even "kind of insignificant economic issues," like a mother who can't pay to have a flat tire fixed, are actually "game changers" and "the bridge between not going to school and having a level of academic achievement." For these reasons, it is important to Davis to be "thoughtful" in his approach to truancy.

Davis's beliefs and attitudes towards the juvenile justice system go beyond truancy, extending into his beliefs about over-criminalization. He recalls being "frustrated" with certain students as a teacher, whether it be because they missed athletics practice often due to their involvement in the juvenile justice system or because they were sleeping in class. In a visit to a correctional facility in his district, Davis encountered a former student who, in an escalation of emotion between student and adults, was told to leave an extracurricular activity that Davis was involved in. The moment "sobered" and "moved" Davis. He spoke with the student, shook his hand, hugged him, and told him he "loved him" and "believed in him." Reflecting on the experience, Davis says when students make mistakes at school, we have to get out of the mentality of rejecting them. Furthermore, "when you suspend kids, when you take kids out of the program," it necessitates that we "understand when they get out, where are they getting in?"

Davis's change in beliefs about school truancy showed him that "what you thought was conservative or limited government […] wasn't too limited." Instead, it was a "big old state truancy program" that was "telling school districts," who "knew that there were other challenges going on these children's lives," that they had to "file in court." School districts "were just following state statute." Davis's emphasis on removing state mandates from school districts in the case of truancy reflects a desire to give local flexibility and to serve students.

Davis applies his value of local control to other policy areas, as well. For instance, he believes that school boards hire teachers and should thus control their evaluation, adding that the state should provide discretion to districts in this area. In other school operations, Davis believes that decisions about which bathrooms transgender students can use should remain at the local level, especially because educators "have always dealt with these challenges in our schools."

Davis also believes that school improvement measures tied to the public school accountability system should "be the concern" of locally elected school boards, rather than of the state. The state should provide multiple alternatives for campus improvement instead of "trying to discredit public education." On the notion of transferring struggling traditional public schools into the hands of charter school operators, Davis argues that, although "there are some successes" among charter schools, they must have accountability and measurable metrics. He adds that he is "very concerned" about "improving and uplifting" existing campuses, regardless of if they are a charter or traditional campus.

There are some areas of education policy that Davis does not apply local control. For instance, on the state regulation of minimum class size, Davis says, "as a former schoolteacher," "size does matter." The state should also maintain its facilitation of the "successful" defined benefit within the Texas Teacher Retirement System as a way to attract new teachers and continue its agreement with "hard-working, middle class educators." Additionally, Davis says that the state's action on school safety is "imperative" for ensuring the safety of Texas students and educators and that schools are a place of learning.

As for school funding, Davis believes that recent omnibus legislation to reform Texas's "broken" and "dysfunctional, archaic public school finance system" was "great social policy, if we can keep it." In addition to the impacts of school finance policy

decision-making being led by school board members, it may have taken so long to come to an agreement on funding reform because of the "the political drama, you got to have a big pot of money over here to buy people off that may believe they are losing." However, Davis believes there is a need to "thoughtfully" increase funding to public schools to match student enrollment growth in Texas and adds that the revenue for such an increase should come from boosting the economy and creating jobs. Davis also believes in "classroom-driven" funding and ensuring that "educational dollars" go to "teachers and students" rather than unfunded mandates and bureaucracy. As for teacher retirement, Davis draws on his political principles, saying that, it is "conservative" and "fiscally prudent" to ensure that teacher pension programs are actuarily sound, which requires an infusion of funds. Lastly, Davis believes that there should be increased equity in the school finance system and that funding public education is essential to curbing incarceration.

Davis believes that the legislature should spend more time on "fixing finance in the public school system and not so much time starting new programs dealing with education," such as private school vouchers. Davis says when he looks at his district, "maybe more than 97% of the students" are in the public school districts. To Davis, private school vouchers don't have "any upside" on his public school districts. Additionally, Davis believes that Article VII, section one of the Texas Constitution "does not allow" vouchers and that vouchers "endanger the freedom" of private schools. Therefore, Davis is a "no" on voucher proposals but supports giving "locally elected" school boards the flexibility to use their funds to create choices that their "communities" want.

Impact of Meaning Making of Education on Legislative Behavior

Davis explicitly talks about his experiences as an educator, drawing on the phrase "as a former schoolteacher," in public speaking appearances and on the campaign trail. For

instance, during a press conference, Davis said being a middle school teacher is good preparation for the legislature. At a campaign event, Davis said he would "keep it simple" as a legislator, no "2000-page solutions," because that is what he did as an athletics coach. On a panel, Davis compared the preparedness of the legislature to address school finance to being a teacher, saying "you never start the school year with all of what you have," and, on the issue of transgender students and bathroom use, specifically referenced his professional background to support his reasoning that this issue should be left at the local level. In multiple speaking engagements, Davis also referenced a powerful story with one student that reinforces his position on truancy policy.

Davis also refers to his professional background in conversations with other legislators. When his colleagues question why he works to be "right on crime," he responds that if they "had the experiences I've had as a legislator and as a schoolteacher," they might understand. In another situation, Davis's colleagues referenced research from a "very culturally, ethnically, racially monolithic" country to argue that "'class size is not a variable.'" He responded that he "noticed a difference from teaching 35 in a sixth grade social studies class in one of the more challenging educational environments" in a large urban district, "versus teaching in [a much smaller, rural] high school with maybe 12 to 15 kids." Davis "definitely understood and felt the difference as a classroom teacher and the difference [was] for the better."

Davis is most active legislatively in the areas of school truancy, juvenile justice, and vulnerable populations of children. Many of Davis's actions in other policy areas, such as charter schools, school district operations, and student discipline, tie into these. This reflects Davis's belief in the nexus of criminal justice with areas such as child protective services, foster care, mental illness, government services like jails, and education.

For Davis, working with a Democratic Texas senator on truancy was "profound" and critical. The idea that decreasing parent and student convictions for truancy would increase attendance was "totally counterintuitive." However, "for too many of our students that are in the public school," truancy has a tangential impact on "so many issues." The data showed that the "first year [the bill] was in effect […] there was a negligible increase in school attendance as student convictions and parental convictions decreased." In other words, decriminalizing truancy didn't cause increased absences. The "situation taught" Davis about the importance of "data-driven" policy because it helped to dismiss the notion of "this thought – truant kid that's sitting under the bridge, sitting under the highway underpass all day, smoking weed, drinking beer, and getting ready for prison."

Davis worked to decriminalize truancy through a variety of legislative actions, including authoring "standalone bills" that had single aspects of his larger omnibus legislation. These included repealing several interrelated statutes establishing the offense of failure to attend school and the resulting consequences, as well as removing school absences as a reason for supervision in the juvenile justice system. Davis's efforts also included allowing students involved in truancy issues to have their record cleared, reducing truancy-related fines for parents, and providing options to dismiss truancy-related charges against a parent. In his work, Davis also maintained school district requirements to refer children for absences over a certain frequency, while requiring districts to apply progressive sanctions before referring a student to juvenile court. These actions reflect Davis's beliefs that there are many extenuating circumstances impacting both children and adults that can contribute to absenteeism, as well as his beliefs that supporting education will decrease incarceration.

Davis authored other legislation relating to truancy that is similar to the aforementioned work. He authored a bill to lower the maximum fine for an offense of

failure to attend school and to require courts to waive fines, fees, or court costs in truancy cases if the court finds that the payment would cause financial hardship. Davis also authored bills to change the definition of what it means to not attend school for part of a day and to prohibit the confinement of individuals for failure to obey a court order related to truancy. Lastly, Davis authored legislation to create a school district employee position to apply truancy intervention procedures.

Davis works extensively on legislation involving vulnerable children, particularly children in foster care. His authored bills in this area include efforts to assist children in foster care with applying to institutions of higher education, requiring the state agency that oversees family protective services to facilitate increased emergency foster care placements of children, and requiring the state agency overseeing health and human services to ensure continuous medical care for children who are adopted out of the state foster care system. Additionally, Davis authored legislation making it easier for foster children, homeless children, and unaccompanied youth to obtain personal identification. Lastly, Davis authored a bill allowing grandparents additional rights regarding access to or possession of their grandchildren.

Davis also authored several statewide efforts regarding vulnerable children. He authored bills to coordinate state agencies and make recommendations regarding parent engagement and education programs and to coordinate services for minors who are dealing with emotional disturbance. Davis also authored legislation to make homeless youth and young adults eligible for the state's low income housing plan. These efforts may improve the state's ability to provide benefits for vulnerable children and to limit the negative effects of each child's situation.

Davis's work on student discipline covers vulnerable populations, while also spanning into other areas such as charter school policy. Davis authored bills prohibiting

districts from placing students experiencing homelessness in out-of-school suspension and requiring districts to consider a student's foster care or homelessness status when determining disciplinary actions that would result in removal from the school setting. Davis joint-authored bipartisan legislation to increase charter schools' parity of operation with traditional public schools regarding suspension and expulsion and to assist in a public school student's transition from an alternative education program to a regular classroom. These appear to focus on eliminating any compounding effects of student discipline students and creating considerations for special populations.

Davis also works on policy impacting children's entrance and exit into the juvenile justice system. Davis offered an amendment to another legislator's bill to establish a youth diversion process from the justice system for certain children undergoing criminal or juvenile procedures and authored a bill to establish the voluntary diversion of young offenders to community services. Davis joint-authored bipartisan legislation impacting juvenile court's jurisdiction over young offenders, including increasing the age at which a juvenile court has jurisdiction over a child. Davis also joint-authored legislation provide options for reducing the length of confinement for certain juvenile offenders in residential programs. Davis's work in this area seems focused on limiting children's exposure to the juvenile justice system.

Davis also focuses on making sure incarcerated individuals have continued access to education. For instance, Davis authored a bill enabling incarcerated students to earn credit towards high school graduation and joint-authored bipartisan legislation to provide certain incarcerated individuals an educational program comparable to what public school districts provide. Davis joint-authored legislation directing the state agency overseeing criminal justice to develop a pilot program focused on the provision of services, including educational services such as earning a high school diploma, to incarcerated individuals. He

also authored legislation allowing for the establishment of a charter school consisting of certified teachers, social workers, and specific programming, among other things, to educate children who engaged in delinquent conduct or conduct necessitating supervision.

Davis's other work on academic opportunities for incarcerated and non-traditional students covers a variety of approaches. For instance, he authored an amendment to another legislator's bill to expand options for court-ordered community service to include service done for an educational organization. Davis also authored bills to include formerly incarcerated students or students who have incarcerated parents in the Texas public school definition of "at-risk" of dropping out, which allows for the provision of certain academic support services, and to create a task force to identify educational and academic opportunities for inmates. Davis's other work includes authorizing a new apprenticeship training program in adult career and technology education, codifying an adult high school diploma and industry certification charter school program, and removing the cap on the number of students who could attend such a program. Davis's work in this area suggests a commitment to encouraging education in any situation, at any age.

Davis's work on student safety and well-being is tangentially related to his other work on student discipline, juvenile justice, and vulnerable children. He authored legislation to require school district superintendents to report to parents and to the state on student arrests and the use of restraints by school district law enforcement. Davis also joint-authored legislation that included several provisions, such as teacher training, curriculum requirements, and health care services related to mental health. Lastly, Davis joint-authored bipartisan legislation to implement a mental health professional to law enforcement ratio in schools. These suggest that Davis wishes to ensure that school safety measures are appropriate and balanced by mental health considerations.

Regarding school operations and policy, Davis authored legislation providing flexibility to districts in some areas, while creating requirements in others. As for freedoms, Davis's work includes efforts to exempt districts from "unfunded" state mandates and to create a sales tax exemption for concessions and merchandise sold by school booster clubs and other support organizations. On the other hand, Davis joint-authored legislation to require a three-point seat belt requirement on new vehicles used by school districts. Davis also authored bills to require a member of a charter board or governing body to be a "qualified voter" and to allow parents to petition a school board to be granted a charter for a campus that is rated unacceptable in the public school accountability system for two years. These reflect a desire to free districts from burdensome requirements, while also ensuring school operations are safe and democratic.

Davis's other legislative actions on school operation and policy are student-focused. He joint-authored bipartisan legislation to require that school district trustees establish a grace period policy to continue giving meals to public school students with insufficient school meal balances and to allow unpaid balances to be paid through private donations. Davis joint-authored another bipartisan bill to require school districts to adopt and implement a policy on using epinephrine auto-injectors to students who are reasonably believed to be in need of anaphylactic treatment. Lastly, Davis authored legislation to require that school counselors inform high school students about college credit awarded by institutions of higher education for experience obtained during military service. These policies are reminiscent of Davis's other work regarding vulnerable children with extenuating circumstances, as well as his own military background.

Davis authored substantial legislative attempts to reform school finance and school district taxation in Texas, as well as smaller tweaks to the system. Davis's large school finance bills include provisions such as teacher pay raises, an inflationary factor, increased

weights for bilingual students and educationally disadvantaged students, requiring districts to remit excess collected funds, and restructuring the funding formula. Davis's finance efforts also include increasing base funding for districts, funded by repealing certain state aid and discounts to districts. Other efforts would impact the property tax exemptions while ensuring districts don't lose revenue and increase the sales tax to reduce or replace school district taxes. Smaller efforts include allowing for full-day prekindergarten funding based on the number of students in a district who graduate high school early and including certain homeschool students in the way district funding is calculated. Davis's efforts appear to simplify school finance in Texas while maintaining a "conservative balance."

Davis's legislation relating to curriculum and instruction includes limiting factors and one instance of flexibility. Davis authored (and joint-authored) legislation prohibiting the usage of "common core" in Texas and joint-authored legislation prohibiting instruction about abortion in human sexuality classes. Davis also joint-authored legislation to allow the State Board of Education to set standards for districts to select and purchase non-state adopted instructional materials. Davis also authored legislation to allow school districts to offer high school students an elective course on firearm safety, training, and history. These actions reflect core conservative platform values regarding the regulation of what is taught in public schools and upholding gun rights.

Davis authored several legislative efforts related to teacher employment and retirement. He offered an amendment to another legislator's bill to add provisions regarding the circumstances of notification of teacher contract renewal. He also authored a bill to allow uncertified individuals with professional qualifications (holding a license) to teach introductory courses if approved by the board of trustees and joint-authored a bill to allow school districts to issue a school district teaching permit to those who teach career and technical education courses under certain conditions. Davis also joint-authored

bipartisan legislation to create exceptions to the limitations placed on the retirement benefits of public school retirees who continue working in public schools. These efforts may reflect Davis's own path to teaching through alternative certification and his beliefs about supporting educators as part of the middle class.

Davis's work on testing and assessment policy focuses on eliminating tests and providing testing flexibility. He authored bills to eliminate a state-mandated college readiness assessment and non-federally required assessments. Davis also authored legislation requiring the state education agency to study the validity and reliability of state standardized assessments and prohibiting the agency from using assessments related to common core standards. As for student academic success, Davis authored bills to provide flexibility in how assessments or dual credit can fulfill required end-of-course exams and to repeal a requirement that districts use the results of an end-of-course exam as a certain percentage of a student's grade in that course.

Lastly, Davis authored legislation creating an interstate compact relating to elementary and secondary education. The compact would require at least two participating states and that Congress agree to its establishment. Once the compact was agreed to, responsibility for the regulation of public education would fall on the compact member state legislatures, removing this duty from the federal government.

Summary

Representative Davis holds strong convictions about the interconnectedness of the public education and criminal justice systems, which drive his policymaking. He also holds a systemic view of how children can make the progression to incarceration, which impacts his focus on vulnerable populations, while continuously maintaining the importance of education even for those who are incarcerated currently. As such, Davis's legislative work

tends to focus on prophylactic efforts to limit the negative effects of disciplinary action and the juvenile justice system on children.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the descriptive findings for each study participant. The corpus of data in each legislator's case was weaved together to create each narrative. Using my final codes, I organized the narratives according to the conceptual framework, with each legislator following a slightly different path through the codes. I first described aspects of the educator-legislator's identity, followed by information relating to their meaning making of education within the policy context and the impact of their meaning making on their legislative behavior.

Professional identity is a key player in each educator-legislator's meaning of education. As former educators, they draw on characteristics that are typical of those who have been in the classroom – a lifelong learner and teacher at heart, and someone who wants to make a difference, continues to grow others, and who listens and has a growth mindset. Most impactfully in this study, each legislator brings with them to the policy context a unique and deep understanding of students and student experiences.

Being an educator was a reason to run for office for the participants, which ties into their political identity. However, the political identity plays less of a role in their meaning making of education, unless it deals with particular principles, such as following the Texas Constitution or giving deference to constituents. Some participants referenced conflicts between their partisanship and other members of their party, particularly on issues such as vouchers for members of the Republican party. On other issues, such as those that dealt directly with supporting and protecting students, legislators often took a bipartisan route.

Having experiences with students is a grounding aspect of being an educator that often ties into the legislators' beliefs about what is important in the policy process, the purpose of education and role of government, and specific policy beliefs. In addition, the legislators grounded their policy beliefs and actions in student experiences that were impactful to them. This extends each legislator's focus into many issue areas that are beyond education and that acknowledge the trickle-down impacts of issues such as incarceration on adults and their children. The importance of the voice of an educator is therefore important for ensuring that student experiences are shared and that children are advocated for, which means that educators outside of the Capitol must be involved as well.

The educator-legislators' approach towards solving policy problems is often prophylactic, such as preventing students from entering the discipline and juvenile justice systems, or ameliorative, such as providing an adult education option. Additionally, there is an idea among the legislators that education for students is more than academic content, but human growth and development content as well. This approach indicates a systemic view of the education system as intertwined with other systems, like the criminal justice and foster care systems. In addition, the approach is conscious of education not only as something that holds purpose for K-12, but as an institution of society that impacts people and communities in a variety of ways.

The legislators agreed that education is a basic need of the state and that school funding as a fundamental issue, especially under the Texas Constitution. From school funding often emanated a variety of other policy issues, like teacher pay and retirement, prekindergarten, accountability, and vouchers. If one considers any mention of "resources" to likely necessitate funding, then the list of policy areas tied to school finance widens even more. On private school vouchers in particular, the educator-legislators were united in their

rejection of the concept for reasons of accountability, disservice to students, and lack of fidelity to the Texas Constitution.

Other popular policy areas of interest include curriculum and instruction, student well-being, school discipline, and testing. In some areas, the legislators aimed to increase or maintain regulation of school districts, especially on issues involving special populations or class size. In other areas, the legislators wanted districts to have flexibility or to be deregulated, such as with school accountability measures and standardized testing. Interestingly, the legislators often used school district operation as a locus of educational change rather than the profession itself, other than teacher training efforts and some educator preparation legislation.

Educator voice was a defining aspect of meaning making for the participants. They agreed that the profession should be respected, and that educator voice is essential to the process, as there are those in the legislature who don't have the necessary practical perspective. The educator-legislators actively shared their experiences both within and outside of the Texas Capitol, which often meant sharing specific experiences about students. The participants also expressed beliefs about the importance of educator involvement in the legislative and electoral processes, noting that stronger educator voices will prompt elected officials to make education a higher priority. In Chapter Five, I present within-case analytical findings to answer the research questions for each participant.

Chapter Five: Within-Case Analysis

In this chapter, I present the within-case analytical findings. As outlined in Chapter Three, the within-case findings are derived from concept maps for each legislator. Creating the concept maps clarified where and how meaning making exists between identity and behavior, as well as the relationships between identity, meaning making, and behavior.

CONCEPT MAPS

Each legislator's concept map included three facets of identity, personal, political, and professional. The legislator's personal identity included their self-descriptions of faith, wealth and class, race, sex, educational attainment, family, and upbringing. Their political identity included aspects such as their reason for running for office, what issues they campaigned on, prior elected offices held, and their core political beliefs (e.g., limited government, following the Texas Constitution). The legislator's professional identity included their personal experiences with students and teachers, as well as aspects of their identity that they described as being derived from or directly connected to having been an educator, such as having a growth mindset or wanting to make a difference.

While some argue that professional identity is a type of social identity that includes expectations of the others in the profession and what is important in the profession (Göncz, 2017), I chose to place these beliefs within the legislator's "meaning making." Weick (1995) includes identity as a part of meaning making, due to the emphasis on interaction, relationships, role, and beliefs that constitute meaning making. Therefore, in my analysis, I tried to filter core beliefs that pertain to the individual, as expressed by the participant, from general beliefs that apply to social groups. I did this in an attempt to avoid making erroneous assumptions and extrapolations about what my participants believed.

As moderated by identity, each concept map also included the four emergent aspects of meaning making. These encompassed the legislator's beliefs about education policy areas, such as school funding or student discipline. Additionally, meaning making included the meaning and beliefs that the legislator attributed to education, which involved their beliefs about the purpose of education, beliefs about teachers and teaching, and beliefs about the role of government in relation to education. Another aspect of meaning making was the legislator's values, attitudes, and beliefs about the policy process, which were dominated by their decision-making considerations like prioritizing constituents or doing "what is right." Lastly, another aspect of meaning making that emerged was educator voice and why it is important for educators to be involved in elections and to be legislators.

The influence of the legislators' beliefs about electoral politics or partisanship fluctuated amongst participants between their meaning of education, beliefs about the policy process, and beliefs about educator voice. In some cases, electoral politics was an important part of their values about the policy process due to strongly held beliefs about voting. Beliefs about partisanship were sometimes in the legislator's meaning of education, where they believed that party politics played a big role in determining the state of education in Texas.

The final category of key concepts that emerged from the data is related to legislative behavior: specific policy actions, interactions with colleagues, and committee assignments. Committee assignments and specific policy actions, such as legislation authored, speeches, and debates, are straightforward and align with literature on legislative behavior. Interactions with colleagues, however, are not present in the literature and therefore represent a new category of behavior to explore. These relationships and conversations with other legislators are important ways that educator-legislators use their voice in the policy context.

WITHIN-CASE FINDINGS: ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL EDUCATOR-LEGISLATORS

In this section, I provide a within-case analysis of how each legislator's identity interacts with their other identities, how those identities moderate their meaning making of education within the policy context, and how their meaning making impacts their legislative behavior. Each analysis describes the relationships present in the legislator's individual concept map.

Representative Michael Clancy

While Clancy's personal identity influences his beliefs about the meaning of education and connects to his professional and political identities, mainly through educational attainment, his professional identity as a former educator takes center stage. Clancy's experiences with students, the development of his growth mindset, and his driving force of wanting to make a difference through education, is the greatest influence on his meaning making of education in the policy context. His professional background touches all aspects of meaning making, including his attitudes towards partisanship, how he makes decisions and uses his voice, and his beliefs about the meaning of education and specific policy areas, and directly impacts his committee assignments and interactions with other legislators. Much of the impact of his professional identity stems from his focus on students, which could be due to the personal relationships and profound experiences he had with students while teaching, similar to concepts found in the literature (Lupton, 2017; Washington, 2008).

Clancy's professional identity and political identities interact to influence his perception of himself in terms of credibility, his decision to run for office, and his beliefs about partisanship. For instance, Clancy's growth mindset, which is part of who he is as an educator, impacts his relationships with other colleagues indirectly through his beliefs

about partisanship and doing what is "right" over what is politically acceptable. His political identity, in particular the importance he places on his constituency over partisan politics, also impacts his decision-making considerations. Because Clancy resides in a competitive district, his aversion to partisanship could be a strategy to moderate his own behavior and public appearance for purposes of reelection (Jenkins, 2012).

In some cases, meaning making points back to identity, which is why it appropriately sits at the nexus of identity and behavior. For Clancy, his policy beliefs about school funding, which are a product of his beliefs about the role of government, tie into one of his primary campaign platform issues. Similarly, Clancy's beliefs about the importance of having the voice of educators at the table is part of why he ran for office.

In other cases, the aspects of meaning making point to each other. In addition to the way that Clancy's beliefs about the role of government impact his specific policy beliefs about funding and student well-being, his beliefs about the importance of the profession influence his views on teacher policy issues. The importance of the profession also influences Clancy's beliefs about how educators should be involved in policy not only as legislators, but in elections as well.

Ultimately, Clancy's professional identity lays the groundwork for his meaning making of education and the impact of that meaning making on his legislative behavior. His background as an educator, specifically his focus on students, directly impacts his decision-making considerations, which impact his policy actions. The meaning of education and Clancy's views about the role of government are centrally-located in their influence on his specific policy beliefs and how he uses his voice, which both tie into his specific policy actions as well. Furthermore, Clancy's meaning of education directly connects to how he interacts with his colleagues and his committee assignments, which

point to his positionality as a source of informational expertise within the legislature (Battista, 2012; Hamm et al., 2011).

Representative Clayton Grant

Grant's professional identity is the strongest moderator of his meaning making of education in the policy context, especially through his enhanced understanding of students and teachers. His background as an educator impacts all aspects of meaning making and directly impacts his relationships with colleagues, who mostly lean on him for his expertise while a small few may criticize him. Grant's experiences with and understanding of students drive his values, attitudes, and beliefs about what is "right" and important to consider in the policy process, as well as specific beliefs about policy areas such as testing. Similarly, his understanding of who teachers are impacts his beliefs about teachers within the broader meaning of education, which has specific implications for his beliefs and actions regarding teacher policy.

Grant's personal identity plays an influential role as well in moderating his meaning making of education within the policy context, both directly and through its interaction with his political and professional identities. Grant has a personal connection to education through his former teachers and his understanding of the public school as part of the community that he is tied to. This connection impacts his meaning making of education. In addition, his personal attributes of being a Texan and his upbringing connect to his political and professional identities, respectively.

Grant initially ran for office because of his educator background and because of his love of Texas, which connects his political identity back to his professional and personal identities. His political identity seems to have a smaller span of influence on his meaning making of education. Grant relies on his conservative principles and connections to his

constituency in his interactions with the policy process and his specific policy beliefs, particularly about private school vouchers. As his position on vouchers goes against members of his party, Grant's consideration of his constituency in his rejection of vouchers indicates that his position serves as a proxy for the opinion of his district (Jenkins, 2010).

Grant's background as an educator is a strong influence on his beliefs about the importance of educator voice and involvement in the policy process. This aspect of meaning making impacts how he interacts with his constituency and his calls to educators to participate in elections. Additionally, this influences how Grant incorporates efforts to include educator voice in legislation and how he speaks out on certain policy issues before his colleagues. Grant's ability to work with others in the legislature and provide informational expertise supports the theories of Battista (2012) and Hamm et al. (2011).

The meaning of education for Grant relies heavily on his views of teachers and teaching, the purpose of education, and the role of government in ensuring certain aspects of education while giving flexibility in others. The role of government impacts many of Grant's specific policy beliefs, such as those about funding, teachers, vouchers, and school operations. His beliefs in these main policy areas have tangential effects on his actions in other areas like prekindergarten, student well-being, accountability, testing, special education, educator preparation, and charter schools. In addition, his policy beliefs about testing, accountability, and vouchers sometimes put him at odds with members of his own party, which impacts his relationships within the legislature. Overall, many of Grant's policy actions suggest an industry-service oriented motivation to behavior (Battista, 2012).

Representative Jessica Kelly

Representative Kelly's personal identity connects to her political and professional identities through her educational attainment, which allowed her to expand her professional

opportunities and helped her build credibility as a legislator. Kelly's professional identity also helped her establish credibility as a politician and was a reason for running for office. Additionally, Kelly's desire to make a difference, which is a feeling she developed as a teacher, was a reason to seek elected office.

While Kelly's professional identity is highly influential in her meaning making of education within the policy context, her personal and political identities also play a role. Kelly's professional experiences with teachers impact her beliefs about prekindergarten and educator voice, while her professional, personal, *and* political backgrounds interact to influence her specific policy beliefs in areas such as curriculum. Likewise, Kelly's identities interact to influence her beliefs about the meaning of education. Her professional identity dominates in determining her beliefs about teachers and teaching, but her personal (Christian) and political (adherence to the Texas Constitution) identities influence her beliefs about the purpose of education. At the same time, her professional background and resulting tendency to be children-focused interacts with her "constitutional" political identity to impact her beliefs about the role of government in providing public free schools.

In Kelly's concept map, her professional identity looks like a fan, reaching out into all aspects of meaning making. In addition to its influence on her specific policy beliefs and the meaning of education, Kelly's professional background impacts her beliefs about the policy process, particularly those about the value of respect and the value of consulting her constituents and school district leaders. Additionally, Kelly's personal identity as a female and professional identity impacted how she strategically approached interactions with other members, which reflects the findings of Volden et al. (2018) that women face process-related hurdles within the legislature. Kelly's professional identity also plays heavily into her beliefs about the importance of educator voice, especially in terms of how

educators are involved in the policy process. Her prior office, which ties into her political identity, reinforced her beliefs about educator voice.

Like other participants, Kelly's aspects of meaning making are not discrete buckets. Her beliefs about the importance of educator voice, both in terms of having educators as legislators and of having educators involved in advocacy, tie into her beliefs about the policy process. Additionally, her beliefs about the meaning of education, particularly about teachers and teaching, tie into specific beliefs about teacher policy. Likewise, her beliefs about the role of government interact with her beliefs about school funding, private school vouchers, and loosening regulations on schools. These specific policy beliefs led to legislative behavior, particularly legislation authored, that may be viewed as industry-service (Battista, 2012).

These aspects of meaning making impact Kelly's legislative behavior in other specific policy actions, her committee assignments, and her relationships with colleagues. Her beliefs about the importance of educator voice and beliefs about the process, namely her value of respect, understanding how others learn, and her dedication to consulting with constituents and district leaders, impact her relationships with her colleagues and how she uses her educator experiences to influence their decision-making. Tapping into the importance of educator voice and actively using her education background in her committee assignments also impacted Kelly's behavior, which bolstered her positionality as a source of informational expertise in the legislature (Battista, 2012; Hamm et al., 2011). Lastly, Kelly's specific policy beliefs and the importance she placed on using her voice as an educator influenced her specific policy actions, such as legislation authored and speeches and debates she engaged in in front of her colleagues.

Representative Audrey Smith

As in the analyses for other participants, Representative Smith's identities interact. Her professional and personal identities interact through her educational attainment, which was a result of her profession but also a reason for her continued teaching experience at the post-secondary level. Smith's professional identity also interacts with her political identity as the reason that she ran for her prior office. Additionally, Smith's identity as an educator permeates into her political identity as she takes opportunities in her position to actively educate her constituents, educators, and others on the policy process and the importance of voting.

Smith's professional identity affects all aspects of her meaning making, such as her beliefs about the importance of educator voice and the meaning of education. Not only does she find it important to actively engage her educator identity in educating teachers about the policy process, but she also thinks it is important for educators to be voters and advocates. Additionally, Smith built an understanding of community through her professional experience, which ties into her beliefs about the meaning of education and the connection of education to other systems, such as the criminal justice system.

Smith's focus on children within her professional identity ties into her policy beliefs, which often serve the interests of children and have a "student well-being" angle. Smith's prior office, which is part of her political identity, also touches her specific policy beliefs, such as school funding, and her meaning of education, particularly her beliefs about the politics of education. Lastly, Smith's professional experiences relating to children and her understanding of communities and teachers interact with her political experiences and value of her constituents to impact her decision-making considerations and her beliefs about what is right in the policy process.

As is the case in other legislator's concept maps, Smith's aspects of meaning making interact with each other. As aforementioned, Smith's beliefs about the importance of educator voice interacts with her beliefs about the policy process and the belief that educators must be more involved in elections and the legislative process. Additionally, Smith ties this belief about the importance of educator voice to specific policy beliefs about funding.

Smith's beliefs about the meaning of education, namely its connection to other systems, impact her specific policy beliefs. The connection of education to other systems, such as the criminal justice system, impacts her beliefs in areas such as discipline, student well-being, school operation, and funding. Smith's beliefs about the role of government with regard to education directly impact her beliefs about school funding as well. Smith's beliefs about teachers are also part of her meaning of education. Her belief that teachers need to keep up with society impacts her policy beliefs about teachers, which include efforts to help teachers continue their education. Lastly, Smith's beliefs about partisanship interact with her meaning of education and has specific impacts on her policy beliefs about curriculum. These actions could be seen as industry-service motivated (Battista, 2012), though the actions have no personal benefit to Smith and, in fact, increased training requirements for educators are typically counter to the efforts of teachers' associations.

The impact of Smith's meaning making of education on her legislative behavior plays out in a variety of ways. Her policy beliefs and beliefs about the importance of educator voice directly impact her policy actions, such as bills authored and speeches and debates engaged in, which appear to focus on students. She specifically uses her experiences as an educator through her voice in her policy actions and in her relationships with her colleagues. These uses of her voice provides a strong informational expertise to the other members of the legislature (Battista, 2012; Hamm et al., 2011). Smith's

committee assignments are impacted by several things, including her specific policy beliefs about vouchers and her professional identity. She also believes that her actions on the committee are impacted by political context but maintains that she is there to right wrongs, which is part of her values and beliefs about the policy process.

Representative Matthew Davis

Representative Davis's personal, political, and professional identities interact with each other. Davis's professional background as an educator impacted his political identity and reason for running for office, while his political identity and legislative experiences have since impacted his perceptions and reflections on specific experiences he had with students. Additionally, Davis's personal identity has several effects on his political identity, including his political philosophy and his reason for running for office.

While Davis's personal identity plays a small role in his meaning making of education, as being a Christian appears to impact his beliefs about the purpose of education, his professional and political identities are the true competitors for influence over his meaning making. Davis's political philosophy impacts his values and beliefs about the policy process, while his staunch deference for the Texas Constitution impacts his beliefs about the role of government and his specific policy beliefs about funding. Davis's political identity and commitment to conservatism also impacts his beliefs about the purpose of education and his specific policy beliefs about what should be addressed and how.

Much of the impact of Davis's professional identity stems from his experiences with students as an educator. These experiences have impacts on his beliefs about the importance of the perspective and voice educators bring to the legislature and his beliefs about the policy process, specifically on how being an educator changes your approach. Additionally, Davis's experiences with students impact his specific policy beliefs,

particularly about how to approach areas like truancy and discipline. Similar to Clancy's situation, these experiences could impact his behavior analogous to the effects of distinct experiences and relationships suggested by Lupton (2017) and Washington (2008). In addition to these student-focused impacts, Davis's understanding of society that is part of his professional identity as an educator impacts the meaning he attributes to education, specifically his beliefs about the purpose of education and his beliefs about teachers and teaching.

Davis's aspects of meaning making interact with each other, much like other participants. His beliefs about the importance of educator voice ties into his beliefs about the policy process and that educators should be leaned on more. Davis's beliefs about the role of government and his views on the interconnectedness of systems including education are part of his meaning of education and impact his specific policy beliefs. In particular, these components of his meaning of education impact his belief about juvenile justice, school operation, and school funding, which could be seen as industry-service oriented (Battista, 2012), although, again, the personal benefit from this is questionable.

Davis's aspects of meaning making impact his legislative behavior through his policy beliefs, his meaning of education, and his beliefs about educator voice. His policy beliefs predictably impact his specific policy actions, which are also impacted by how he uses his voice as an educator. Davis also shares his own specific experiences about education with his colleagues, which impacts his relationships within the legislature and allows for his informational expertise to spread (Battista, 2012; Hamm et al., 2011). His committee assignments are impacted by his beliefs about the purpose of education and his systemic view of education and criminal justice. Interestingly, Davis's specific policy actions on truancy also taught him about valuing things like data-driven policy in the policy process, causing his policy actions to interact back with his meaning making.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I outlined the relationships between identity, meaning making, and behavior for each participant. Consistent with the conceptual framework (Weick, 1995), the analyses show that there are numerous interactions and overlaps between these facets of the study and that the "buckets" of identity, meaning making, and behavior are not discrete. Additionally, the participants appear to all serve an informational purpose in the legislature, while also benefitting the public education system in a way that could be seen as industry-service oriented behavior. While each educator-legislator is unique, it is important for the theory-building aim of this study to understand what thematic similarities exist across participants. In Chapter Six, I present the findings of the cross-case comparisons.

Chapter Six: Cross-Case Analysis

To conduct the cross-case comparisons, I created a holistic overlay of the legislators' concept maps to show the overall relationships between identity, meaning making, and behavior. To focus on the strongest relationships across all legislators, I progressively eliminated connections that were not present in all cases. However, I maintained the holistic overlay showing all relationships across all cases as a background for my analysis, particularly because one of the areas of legislative behavior I identified – interactions with colleagues – was approached by each legislator in different ways. I did not want to lose that observation in my analysis simply because there was not a clear trend or theme regarding how meaning making impacting a legislator's interactions with others.

In this chapter, I analyze identity, how identity moderated the participants' meaning making of education within the policy context, and how this meaning making of education impacted legislative behavior. Within each section of analysis, I present thematic elements that will contribute to an ultimate theory of how identity moderates behavior for the educator-legislators in this study (discussed in Chapter Seven).

"I'm an Educator": Identity is Fluid but Focused on the Professional

My cross-case analysis of meaning making begins with identity. It is important to start with identity because an educator theoretically makes meaning through the experiences they internalize and the relationships and identities they create through their occupation (Carnes, 2012; Caza et al., 2018; Keely & Tan, 2008). This theory builds upon the idea that the legislator's meaning making is based on their interactions with the world around them (Crotty, 1998), which includes all of the occupational aspects they encounter, as well as how they have built their personal and political identities over the course of their life. An analysis of the data shows that, while there are some common themes within a

professional and political identity, the legislator's identities also overlap and interact with each other.

The participants' professional identity included aspects commonly attributed to educators, such as the self-concept of being a lifelong learner or having a growth mindset. Clancy referenced his growth mindset as being a result of his professional experience, while Grant and Davis characterized their teaching background as "opportunities" to grow, learn, and listen. Kelly emphasized the concept of growth in education and articulated realizations about herself that show she constantly engages in a process of self-reflection and course correction. Likewise, Grant and Smith expressed what they have learned along the way about the policy process, like not needing to have your name on a bill or that the politics of education is very influential. Smith also grew in her thinking about education over the years, both from her doctoral degree and previously held positions. Furthermore, the advanced educational attainment of all participants, the only common aspect of personal identity in the study, is evidence that learning and a commitment to education is a priority. Overall, the participants' identity includes a willingness to approach processes, relationships, and challenges as learning opportunities.

In both their personal and professional identity, the educator-legislators often expressed some form of wanting to make a difference. While Clancy and Kelly both found satisfaction and the feeling of making a difference as teachers, they both eventually pursued different opportunities in search of a broader impact. Smith discovered her broader impact to education at the urging of another, but soon discovered that the policies she helps enact in her political role in the legislature can "make a big difference." Grant's upbringing motivated him to "make the world better" and he has taken actions in his political role that "made a difference" and that he feels personally satisfied about. Wanting to make a difference is another commonly understood characteristic of educators and could be an

attribute that cuts across all three identities simultaneously, even if mentioned by the participant only in the context of one identity or another.

The legislators also told stories about their relationships and specific experiences with students that I included in their professional identity. Clancy, Davis, and Kelly, each told detailed stories about profound interactions they had with students, particularly those with non-academic needs or who were in disciplinary settings. Though Smith and Grant shared more general experiences with students, they also had a clearly developed understanding of the circumstances impacting students that are outside of the school's control and that create needs for students beyond academics. These personal experiences and relationships with students may be similar to the strong impacts to behavior of distinct life experiences found by Lupton (2017) and Washington (2008).

In some cases, the legislators also shared specific experiences relating to other educators that I included in their professional identity. Grant mentioned that in his work he worked with a spectrum of educators, but nevertheless argued that they are experts and should be respected and included in the policy process. Smith draws on her identity as an educator to actively continue teaching teachers about the policy process and encouraging them to vote. Kelly also has past and present experiences teaching teachers and shared about her recent work guiding educators in their advocacy. Across these participants, their goal is to raise the professionalism and respect afforded to the profession, especially through increased educator participation in the process.

The participants' political identities were defined by their party affiliation, prior offices held, aspects of running for office, self-concept of credibility, and their political convictions as an officeholder. In the cases of Kelly and Smith, their prior office gave them unique perspectives about certain education policy areas and served as a stepping stone to the legislature. Kelly and Clancy also specifically mentioned how they felt they had proven

their credibility as an elected official through their accomplishments. All participants also had political philosophies and convictions that defined them in their political role. These included values placed on constituents, the Texas Constitution, Texas, and other principles like limited government. I also included declarations of independence from their party, such as Grant's admittance that there are issues he veers away from the party platform on and Clancy and Kelly's beliefs about the importance of policy rather than party.

Across all cases, professional identity interacted with political identity, especially in terms of electoral politics. Being an educator was a reason to run for office for the participants, which made their professional identity a part of campaign efforts and likely set up education as part of their platform. For instance, on running as an educator, Grant said, "That's who I was," and Kelly said she "never once shied away from saying, 'I'm an educator.'" Clancy, Smith, and Davis also all referenced themselves as educators on the campaign trail. In some cases, factors within some participants' personal identity, like upbringing, influenced their reason to run for office as well.

The importance of the relationships between identities lies in the fact that the professional and personal identities have the clearest impact on political identity. While it is predictable that an educator's professional and personal identities would precede the development of a political identity, as these experiences came before the political experience, it is worth questioning whether this relationship would exist for other legislators from other occupations that deal with less salient issues for voters (law or insurance). Because the legislators made their educator identity part of their political identity and election efforts, the interaction also begs the question of which occupations are meaningful to voters, if at all, and whether the salience of a policy issue like education (Jenkins, 2010) would cause voters to value related experience in a candidate.

The centrality of the professional and personal identities to the political identity for the participants also has implications for the future analysis of how political identity impacts the legislators' meaning making of education. In particular, it is important to consider that political identity indirectly intensifies the impact of the educational background on meaning making. How identity moderates meaning making is described in the next section.

MEANING MAKING OF EDUCATION WITHIN THE POLICY CONTEXT

Across every case, the educator-legislators' professional identity impacted all aspects of their meaning making of education in the policy context. Political identity also played a role, particularly in the participants' beliefs about the role of government. In this section, I describe several themes that emerged from the data across the four identified aspects of meaning making: educator voice, beliefs about the policy process, meaning of education, and policy issue area beliefs. Within each theme, I describe the relevant moderating identities, the theme's most salient characteristics, and any interactions with other aspects of meaning making that also played a role.

Education and Educators are "Life-Changing" Beyond Academics

Stemming from their professional identities, a common thread across the participants was that the education profession is unique in its ability to change lives. Not only is the profession "the most important" and a "very, very important job" that paves the way for all other professions, but educators are also immersed in "every type of societal challenge that's going on." Similar to Clancy's argument that teaching is "how we grow as a community," Smith believes education has "a trickle-down kind of impact" that "makes a difference in the livelihood of every person," including job outcomes, more educated

children, and lower rates of incarceration. As Smith says, educators want "society to get better" and, for all of these reasons, the participants agree that education is transformative for students.

Participants' personal identities also played a role in their conception of educators and education as life-changing. Clancy, Grant, and Davis expressed the positive impact of teachers and education on their own personal success and achievements. This is consistent with the social constructivist assumption that meanings are constructed through interactions with others (Creswell, 2007) and the extension of this into an idea that educator-legislators meaning making will include their own experiences as students. It is worth noting that Clancy also believes the act of teaching changed his life, and not unreasonable to assume that the other participants may agree with the life-changing impact of teaching given their growth mindsets and articulation of the teaching experience as being a learning opportunity.

The participants' connection between education, personal livelihood, and society ties their conception that education is more than academics with their policy beliefs in areas such as testing, accountability, and student well-being. Grant said that sometimes "the school is the parent" and Kelly recalled teaching parents how to reinforce math skills with their children. Similarly, Clancy said he often couldn't have the "most important conversations" with his students, like how to live successful lives, and Smith and Davis both voiced an understanding that children come to school with daily challenges like incarcerated parents. Similarly, Grant and Kelly stated that standardized testing should include growth measures to accurately reflect instruction and the other factors impacting children's learning. Clancy actively applies a "whole child" approach in his policy work to meet students' academic and human needs, while Smith and Davis focus on juvenile justice, discipline, and the criminal justice system. Participants' understanding of the

systemic linkage of society, community, education, and livelihood therefore draws from their professional experience, through their meaning of education, into specific policy beliefs.

The personal and professional connection to what it means to be an educator and what education means to society and students is central to the participants' meaning of education. The vital importance the participants place on education and the idea that education and educators deal with much more than academics likely feed into participants' convictions about the importance of funding education. In addition, the participants clearly were exposed to the impacts of class on society through their work, which could influence their behavior (Carnes, 2012). In the next section, I discuss participants' conceptions about the purpose of education and the role of government, which lead to specific beliefs about education funding.

Supporting Public Education as a "Basic Need" of the State

Participants' political and professional identities merged to moderate two key aspects of their meaning of education: their beliefs about the purpose of education and the role of government. These beliefs tie into the participants specific policy beliefs about how schools should be funded, the inappropriateness of private school vouchers, and where the state should and should not regulate schools.

Participants' professional identities are intricately intertwined with their beliefs about the education profession and the importance of education. As such, all participants agree that the role of government is to fund public education and that the state has an obligation to meet students' needs beyond academics. Clancy and Grant also argue that education should be a top policy priority of the state and that the state made a "promise" to students and educators through funding, especially in terms of teacher pay, retirement, and

healthcare benefits. In addition to the impact of professional identity, political identity moderates the participants' views on the role of government in relation to education. Kelly, Smith, and Davis draw on political convictions in referencing the state's duty to provide "public free schools," which is outlined in the Texas Constitution.

The connection of participants' professional identity to beliefs about the importance of education and the profession also links to their beliefs about the purpose of education. They believe in multiple roles of education, including serving democracy and developing citizens who know their rights and who can participate in the workforce. The role of education is also children-centric, including teaching, nurturing, empowering, developing, and providing a foundation for children to meet their potential. Overall, the participants frame education as "central," "vital," foundational, a "common good," and a "basic" and "pressing need" *of the state*.

Drawing from Labaree's (1997) goals of education, the participants' views of public education suggest an alignment with the goals of democratic equality (citizens) and social efficiency (workforce), which are connected to the public good of education. The participants are not aligned with the Labaree's private good of education, social mobility, which situates education as a commodity and is therefore commonly associated with efforts to privatize education. The centrality of public education to the state and the absence of a private goal of education are important considerations when analyzing the participants shared views on funding and private school vouchers.

The participants viewed education and educators as life-changing for students in ways that go beyond academics, making the purpose of education not only about children and the economic stability of the state, but also about the democratic stability of the state. Due to this essential role of public education, the participants focused on the role of government in providing school funding and in meeting students' needs. Altogether, these

beliefs predominantly originate in the professional identity, with influences from the political and personal identities. In the next section, I discuss school funding and the participants' view of education as a public good in more detail.

School Funding as an Investment and Rejection of Vouchers

The participants' views on education funding are tied to their beliefs about the centrality of education to the role of government, such as the obligation to provide "public free schools," and the purpose of education, as they all frame education funding in terms of children and mostly all frame funding in terms of teachers. For example, Davis says dollars should be "classroom-driven" and should go to students, Kelly and Grant frame resources as something children "deserve," and Clancy and Smith talk about meeting students' needs through funding. Grant, Clancy, Smith, and Davis also frame funding as important for teacher pay and benefits, particularly teacher retirement, which Grant says the state "owes" to retired teachers.

In some cases, the participants framed school funding in economic terms. Grant and Davis frame school funding as the "best" investment of state dollars, and Clancy and Kelly specifically frame early childhood education as an investment with high returns. Clancy, Grant, Davis, and Smith also reference the growing population of students in Texas and the need to match that growth with public school funding. Some participants also reference the connection of school funding to taxpayer relief and its ability to create savings in other areas like criminal justice. For instance, In fact, Davis said that the "best down payment" the state can make to avoid paying billions for the penal system "is to make sure that we do the right things from the pre-K to the 12th grade."

Especially for the Republican educator-legislators, framing school funding in terms of an investment, necessary to match student enrollment growth, and as taxpayer relief is

likely important to avoiding criticism that they are not conservative enough. As Grant said, he feels accused by some of simply wanting to "throw more money at the school system" because he is "just a bleeding heart." In fact, the Republican participants' support of increased school funding refutes findings in the literature that being a Republican precludes support for union-backed policies (Lamare, 2016) and policies that expand opportunities for low-income individuals (Grumbach, 2015). If this is the trend on a broader scale than the Texas House, then the educator-legislators in this study could certainly be opening themselves up to criticism through these beliefs (and subsequent actions).

Recall that Grant defended increased funding for prekindergarten in front of his constituents and assured them it was not an expansion of eligibility, that Kelly similarly defended the merits of prekindergarten against a Republican colleague as an investment to save money down the road on special education, and that Davis defended increased funds for foster care against claims that it was an expansion of welfare. For the Democrats who operate within a majority Republican context, they may also use these economic terms to attempt conservative appeal. In any case, the participants' backgrounds as educators may make them subject to criticism from their colleagues, especially within the Republican party, given that those from working-class, service-based, or non-profit backgrounds tend to vote more liberally (Carnes, 2012, Grumbach, 2015, Maske, 2019).

Every participant described some way in which they felt public education was being harmed by another entity, whether that entity was the state or "some actors" outside of the legislature. Clancy said the state has been financially "depriving" education for a long time and that there are "far-removed" entities who wanted to dismantle public education. Smith went further by linking the lack of funding to "outside entities" and a "movement" to "dismantle" and "take over" public education in favor of privatization. Grant connected funding and accountability by referencing "some people" who want to "demonize" and

"starve" public schools to cause their failure in order to justify privatization. Kelly also thinks there is a "group" driving a "failing schools," "anti-public school sentiment" that is "all part of the thing to introduce vouchers into our school system." Davis also referenced accountability but focused on the state, saying it should provide alternatives to schools for school improvement instead of "trying to discredit public education." The Senate chamber was also mentioned in negative terms, as an entity that held good legislation "hostage" during the policy process.

The feeling of being attacked could suggest a few different things. The belief that there is a threat to public education could be a reflection of feeling protective of education, which is a reasonable assumption given the high regard participants hold for education and its role in society. The feeling also suggests that education is vulnerable and may reflect a positionality of the educator-legislators that is marginalized due to their profession, much like the legislators expressed that educators needed to be listened to and respected as professionals because they are not currently. This could be why the participants feel they have to "take a stand" or "speak up" or be a voice for others, because they are trying to lift up something they feel is in an inferior position. If this is the case, then it would be similar to the findings of Brown (2011), in which the legislator's most marginalized identities were the most salient to their decision-making.

The participants' arguments against private school vouchers vary by the legislators' partisan affiliation. As Kelly said, there is "infighting" within her party regarding school vouchers and Grant says his position against vouchers has led to some of his colleagues seeing him as a "stumbling block." In their opposition to vouchers, Republicans Kelly, Grant, and Davis cite multiple justifications, including private school rights and their political principles like limited government, taxpayer accountability, or following the Texas Constitution, which Kelly and Davis argues does not allow vouchers. Consistent

with Jenkins's (2010) proposition that legislators act as a proxy for their constituency on high-salience issues like education, Grant and Davis also reference their districts and constituency as not benefiting from or not wanting vouchers. In contrast, Democrats Smith and Clancy both simply agree that vouchers send public money to private entities that are unaccountable. The partisan difference in how the participants articulate their opposition to vouchers suggests that the pressures of party loyalty are greater for Republicans, as found in the literature (Frederick, 2009; Grumbach, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016), but that the issue of vouchers is salient enough to the participants not to bend to party pressures.

While all participants frame the importance of school funding in terms of students, consistent with their children-centric beliefs about the purpose of education and their funding- and student-specific beliefs about the role of government, there are differences in how the push for funding is framed. To appeal within a conservative context, school funding is framed as an investment or as constitutionally required. In addition to other conservative-based reasons, especially for the Republican participants, these talking points bleed into the participants' adamant defense of public education against privatization, which is consistent with their views of public education as a public good. The participants' articulation of feeling defensive could be a reflection of a profession in education as marginalized in society, which further supports the salience of the profession in their decision-making. In the next section, I discuss the participants' views on public school accountability and local control.

Replacing Punishment and Regulation with Resources and Flexibility

In addition to lamenting the connection of academic accountability to punitive measures that are meant to "dismantle" public schools in favor of privatization, the

participants also voiced beliefs about what responses *should* follow accountability. In their framing of accountability, the participants often used words indicating that they felt the current system punished or harmed teachers, schools, and students. Instead, the participants felt that accountability policies should lead to an investment of resources to help struggling schools, rather than takeover by the state or a private entity or to justify private school vouchers.

The participants' views on public school accountability were intricately linked to their views on standardized testing, which is a key input into accountability ratings. Again, Clancy and Kelly framed standardized testing as punitive, but agreed that testing is a regular part of teaching. Grant, Kelly, Smith, and Clancy also all agreed that teacher evaluations should incorporate measures of student academic growth and Davis argued that local school boards should control teacher evaluation. Grant, Clancy, and Kelly argued that the current testing system doesn't truly measure a teacher's effectiveness due to flaws in design. This testing-based facet of participants' views about accountability links back to their beliefs about the importance of the profession and their professional identities.

While the participants had a lot to say about what the state should be doing, they also expressed areas in which they felt the state should allow for local control. In general, they agreed that the state needs to give districts the flexibility to successfully serve teachers and students by freeing them from bureaucracy, regulation, and unfunded mandates. This includes not dictating how districts spend money on programs or implement teacher evaluations, eliminating testing burdens, leaving school improvement measures up to local districts, and not regulating which bathrooms students use. On the other hand, all participants but Kelly mentioned that the state should continue to impose class size limits (which is not to say she doesn't believe this, it just wasn't in the data). As Davis said, "size does matter." While maintaining class size requirements that are important to teacher

professionalism, these beliefs on loosening regulations and reducing burdensome requirements relate to participants' political identity and philosophies about local control and also have implications for where the participants focus their legislative efforts – either at the state or the district-level.

The participants agree that resources and local control are superior to policy methods like testing and accountability that unfairly impact teachers, students, and schools. Furthermore, they agree that school districts should be freed from unfunded mandates and given flexibility in a variety of areas, other than class size limits, in order to serve teachers and students effectively. These beliefs point back to the participants beliefs about the role of government in funding education and meeting students' needs, and also draw on the participants' beliefs about the importance of the profession and its reach beyond academics. In the next section, I discuss the participants' views on the importance of educator voice in the policy process.

"It's a Perspective": Educator Voice is Paramount to the Process

The participants expressed beliefs about the importance of educator voice, both in terms of their involvement as educator-legislators and in terms of educators' participation in advocacy and elections. Additionally, participants shared beliefs about those in the legislature who are not educators and the impacts of not having an educator's perspective of practical implications during the policy process. These beliefs about educator voice were generally derived from the participants' professional identity.

The participants all stated the importance of their involvement in the legislature as education experts. All participants shared sentiments about the importance of being able to help others, including their colleagues in the legislature, understand the impacts of education policy and to serve as counsel as to whether a proposal is "good" or "bad."

Clancy said educator-legislators are more "tied to the outcomes" and Clancy and Davis agree that being an educator means you understand the practical implications of education policy proposals. As Kelly said, it is important to have educators in policymaking positions because they have been behind the teacher's desk and have worked with students. Similarly, Davis said the perspective of an educator can't be replicated and that it impacts your approach to policy, but not your principles. From a more philosophical perspective, Clancy and Kelly argued that educators are a voice for teachers, children, families, and their communities. The representation and informational expertise afforded by educator-legislators and their influence on the behavior of their colleagues in the legislature cannot be overlooked as an outcome of having educator-legislators in policymaking positions, especially in terms of expanding our definitions about what constitutes legislative behavior to include interactions with other members.

All participants also shared about the impacts of having non-educators in the legislature. The participants argued that non-educators have a generic understanding of education that might be based on "limited personal experience" or an experience that happened several decades ago. Smith said the lack of educators in the legislature means education becomes "not-so-popular" in terms of funding and Davis argued that the reason it took so long to come to an agreement on school finance reform was because it was driven by non-educators. Kelly added that some legislators vote on policies without realizing their impact on "5.4 million kids" and Clancy said he would have let some policies "slide" if he hadn't been an educator. Kelly and Davis both turned their sights on school board members who serve in the legislature, saying that their lack of classroom experience makes a difference in understanding education policy and moving the needle forward in a substantive way. According to the participants, in addition to the numerical

underrepresentation of educators in the legislature, the impacts of those who falsely think they know "all about education" has detrimental effects for education policy.

In light of these beliefs about what happens in the legislature, all participants except for Davis shared opinions about the duties of educators outside of the legislature. Clancy, Grant, and Smith encouraged educators to vote, particularly by holding legislators accountable and supporting "pro-public education" candidates. Kelly and Grant framed educators as "experts," and Smith joined them in agreeing that educators should be involved in the policymaking process. By participating in elections and policy, such as advocacy efforts, they argued that educators will have a chance to stand up for themselves, the public school system, and students, and receive more attention in the legislature.

This stance on educator involvement speaks to the participants' beliefs about the importance of the profession as essential to people's lives and society. Within the legislature, they see their role as spreading informational expertise to those who might otherwise make uninformed decisions, consistent with Battista (2012) and Hamm et al. (2011). The importance they place on their own involvement and their urging of other educators to become involved also suggests a desire to see the role of government in education fulfilled, especially in terms of ensuring that education is a top priority for lawmakers. In the following section, I expand on the participants' decision-making and approach to the policy process.

Making (Politically Risky) Decisions that are "Good" and "Right"

The participants' values about the policy process included articulations of what is "right" and "good" that incorporated interactions with partisanship, core beliefs, and considerations for the participants' constituents. The concepts of right and good suggest that the participants view some policy problems and solutions as independent of other

factors or as things that should be universally accepted by others. By analyzing the participants' descriptions of good policy problems, solutions, critical decisions, and preferred approaches, we can try to make sense of this concept.

In their descriptions of policy problems, participants often referenced their top policy priorities and, in some cases, voiced what they thought the legislature should be doing instead of something else. For Grant, inaccurate testing is "unfair" to teachers and students, and for Smith, Davis, and Grant, school funding should be addressed instead of new programs like vouchers. In Grant's questioning of whether which bathroom a student can use was a political issue or not, he implied the question of whether it was a real policy problem. Smith also added that teen pregnancy is a "serious problem" due to the circumstances like homelessness and cycles of poverty that impacts those students and their children. Clancy's mantra that students are the "yardstick" by which he measures success and suggests that he identifies real problems based on their impact to students.

The participants' attitudes towards what problems are indicate that individual top priorities, which are based on the participants' professional experience and beliefs about the purpose of education and role of government, may translate into "real" problems in the participants' minds. These often seem to tie back to students. Though this is a straightforward and predictable relationship, the key is that there is an absence of discussion about whether a real policy problem is connected to a party platform. Likewise, there are no clear patterns or indications that any of the problems presented by the participants are derived from one party's platform or the other.

An analysis of the policy solutions described by the participants provides further insight into the concept of good and right. Clancy, Davis, Grant, and Smith agreed that policy solutions should make sense and be right for students. Clancy believes that there are solutions that are simply "right" rather than tied to a specific party, and Clancy and Kelly

both believe that good policy has a greater value than party loyalty. In a similar way, Smith believes that partisanship should be avoided in curriculum policymaking, one of her top issues. Davis and Clancy also articulated a separation from teacher groups, with Davis saying it's more important that the policy make sense for students than to just be supported by a teacher association and Clancy opposing teacher group-supported policy in favor of students. Grant described "bad" policy as anything that takes resources away from public schools rather than improving them, especially in top policy issues like funding. Davis also asked questions of morality in his decision-making and argued that education is a moral responsibility. As such, Davis referenced school finance reforms to increase funding as "great social policy." These beliefs suggest that "right" is beyond partisanship and is tied to core beliefs about the role of government in education, beliefs which they may see as objectively true.

All participants shared the value of acting on solutions based on their constituents, even if this meant straying from their party, which is consistent with the literature (Hansen & Truel, 2015; Jenkins, 2010; Juenke & Pruehs, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017). Kelly, Grant, and Davis's values include conservative principles commonly associated with Republicans in their decision-making, like the Texas Constitution and limited government. Ironically, the usage of these beliefs as applied to an issue like vouchers put them at odds with their party. The participants' views of what constitutes "good" policy focuses on their beliefs about the role of education for students and their top policy priorities, as well as how it aligns with their constituents and their political principles. Again, the thread of partisanship is present, with the participants either rejecting partisanship in their definition of good or using core political beliefs to justify what is good in situations of partisan risk.

Understanding what is good and right also involves understanding how the participants approach the policy process. As Davis said, being an educator changes your

approach, but not your principles. All participants placed value on working with members of the opposite party. Clancy said working on bipartisan policy is best for solving problems in a way students and teachers deserve and Smith, Clancy, Davis, and Grant voiced the importance of working across the aisle on priority issues. Clancy, Davis, and Grant also mentioned values like compassion and thoughtfulness, rather than "knee-jerk" and emotional approaches that might harm students. The participants' willingness to work with members of the opposite party, especially on priority issues, is evidence of the value they place on those issues, as it might be seen as a political risk to engage in bipartisan work.

The participants' articulations of what was a "critical" decision pull together what they perceive to be the most important aspects of policymaking and what behaviors constitute good and right. For Clancy, Smith, Davis, and Grant, their critical decisions revolved around policy priorities and core beliefs and all involved working with members of the opposite party towards solving a policy problem. For Clancy, it was taking a stance against a bill he thought would harm students and getting Republican members to join him in voting against the bill, even in opposition to those who had funded his campaign. For Grant, it was a bipartisan amendment to stop vouchers. For Smith, it was joint-authoring a Republican's bill on school finance and telling her colleagues to vote for the bill, even though it was a Republican proposal. For Davis, it was working across the aisle and across the Capitol with a Democratic senator to pass a bill decriminalizing truancy, which he said he realized was not limited government and had negative effects on students. For Kelly, the critical decision once again involved a policy priority, giving regulatory freedom to districts, but centered on taking a vote for something she hoped would "die" in exchange for district flexibility and the "greater good." These critical decisions all point back to the participants' beliefs about the purpose of education and role of government and further suggest that issues of high importance are worth the risk to their partisan identity within

the policy context. They also highlight the feeling of high-stakes that the participants may experience in their decision-making, which relates to a potential positionality of vulnerability as discusses in the school funding section.

While the participants draw somewhat on their political identities to determine what is right and good, their articulation of the mere concept of right and good implies that they believe there are policy problems and solutions that are independent of partisanship. Furthermore, their descriptions of "real" policy problems and critical decisions are tied to issue areas that are of top importance to them and especially those that are tied to their beliefs about the role of government and the purpose of education, suggesting that they are willing to take political risks on issues of high salience to their professional identity. Indeed, in the participants' approaches in areas that are critical and high-stakes are often characterized by bipartisan behavior.

Summary

In this section, I described the themes that emerged from the data related to how the participants make meaning of education within the policy context. The participants' meaning of education is grounded in their beliefs about the importance of education and educators for society, the purpose of education as a public good, and the role of government in funding education and ensuring that students' needs are met. This meaning making is strongly derived from the participants' professional identity but is also impacted by their personal and political identities. From the meaning of education radiates beliefs about what is right and good and core beliefs about specific policy areas. Because the participants treat these top policy areas as high-stakes priorities, they may approach them in ways that are bipartisan or even nonpartisan, which may at times put them at odds with other partisan

actors. In the next section, I discuss the how the participants meaning making of education impacts their actions in the policy context.

IMPACT OF MEANING MAKING OF EDUCATION ON LEGISLATIVE BEHAVIOR

The connection between the participants' meaning making of education and their legislative behavior is founded in the theory of social interactionism, which assumes that individuals act towards things based on the meanings they have ascribed to them (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Crotty, 1998). In this study, I identified the following areas of legislative behavior: specific policy actions (legislation authored, floor debates and speeches, legislative press conferences, etc.), committee assignments, and interactions with other legislators. I also identified behavior in the media, which I believe is relevant because it is part of the legislator's public persona while in office and helps to drive narratives about policy topics. In each of the following sections, I describe an emergent theme from the data regarding the impact of meaning making on behavior. Because behaviors are much easier to identify than artifacts of meaning making, each section is more discrete in description, with less overlap to other areas of behavior.

"Immersed in Education": Background and Meaning Feed Committee Assignments

The literature suggests that legislators are appointed to committees based on their occupational experience or prior committee experience (Hamm et al., 2011), which implies that educator-legislators would be appointed to education committees and stay on those committees for multiple legislative sessions once appointed. Furthermore, educators who are on education committees may serve an informational purpose rather than an interest group or industry-service purpose, which means that they are not serving simply to benefit

the “education industry” or the interests of groups such as teacher unions and associations (Battista, 2012, 2013).

As background, Texas House members can request three committees that they wish to serve on, in order of preference. They are entitled to use their House seniority for appointment on their committee of highest preference if there is a vacant seniority position on that committee. No more than one-half of each substantive committee, like the education committee, can be seniority appointments. All other members of the committee are appointed by the Speaker (Legislative Reference Library, 2019). Some of the participants may have used their seniority to remain on the education committee, while others have clearly been appointed by the Speaker because of their lack of seniority at the time. In any case, all participants who serve or served on the education committee requested the placement and likely continued to request it, as they remained on the committee for multiple sessions. In fact, one participant said it’s a “plum seat” and not one they plan to give up.

Many of the participants have served or serve on the education committee. One participant expressed that being on the committee allows them to bring their experience as a teacher “front and center” and to represent the voices of students in a more influential way, directly sharing student stories and classroom experiences as education policy is debated with stakeholders and other committee members. Another said that being on the education committee allowed the participant to be “immersed in public education and public education policy” and to more readily move priority legislation. For another participant, being on the education committee “worked out extraordinarily well” because they were “familiar with every aspect of everything” and “had relevant experience at every level,” which meant that they could say to other legislators, “I know this works and that doesn’t work.”

All of the participants' appointments support Hamm et al.'s (2011) finding that legislators are appointed to committees based on their occupation or prior committee experience. One participant was appointed to the committee because of their professional background, while another had to request being on the committee after waiting several years and cited their professional background as justification. Some participants were able to fulfill their priorities by being on the education committee, like speaking up for students, working on testing legislation, or "righting the wrongs that are there." Participants also talked about the congruence of their backgrounds with their committee assignment, which allowed them to directly share their practical knowledge or more readily move legislation through the increased authority and voice being on the committee provides. One participant served on another committee that they believe is intricately linked to education and appears to introduce more legislation tied to this committee than to education directly, which is consistent with the findings of Francis and Bramlett (2017).

Without a full examination of committee votes, campaign contributions, committee proceedings, and direct interview questions about committee assignments, it is hard to draw conclusions from this information that would confirm or deny the literature. What is clear is that the participants who are on the education committee place a high value on that assignment, especially since all have continued to request placement on the committee. The education committee is of high power and importance to the legislature, especially since all legislators face electoral consequences as a result of the committee's actions (Battista, 2012), and many members likely want to serve on it for its high profile.

The choice of multiple different House Speakers over time to place the participants on the committee suggests a desire to benefit from their informational expertise in these important positions, especially since being able to share their expertise through committee membership is a key benefit to the participants. This is consistent with Battista's (2012)

findings that education committees are stacked for informational purposes. However, one participant also discussed that partisan politics also play a role in committee assignments. As for the participants' behavior, their decision to be on the education committee (or a committee dealing with a related issue) demonstrates their beliefs about the importance of educator voice, fulfilling the priorities of the role of government and purpose of education, and being able to act on areas of top priority. In the next section, I describe how the participants' used their voice in the policy context.

Influencers "At the Table": Acting on Educator Voice

As seen in the participants' meaning making around educator voice, they view their own voices and the voices of educators as very important to the policy process, even essential. They place value on helping their colleagues understand the practical implications of policies and serve as counsel, even telling their fellow members how to vote on legislation. There is a perception amongst some of the participants that there are not enough educators in office and that there is not enough attention paid to educators and education issues within the legislature, which is why educators must be more active in advocacy and elections. Of course, the importance of educator voice ties back to the participants' beliefs about the life-changing importance of education and the legislature's role in fulfilling the purpose of education. All of these aspects of meaning making influence the participants' use of their voice in their legislative role.

The participants often prefaced statements in multiple venues using phrases like "as a former teacher" or "as a retired teacher." This self-description is likely important for attributing credibility to themselves, which Clancy and Kelly specifically pointed out as an important aspect of their political role. Grant also used phrases like "with my background" to reiterate his understanding in front of colleagues and "as you might imagine" to justify

his legislative emphasis on public education to his constituents. Smith underscored her decades of experiences to colleagues on the House floor by mentioning that "many children" had come under her "privy." Of course, naming their background was central to the participants' election efforts as well. Using these phrases or referencing their experience makes the participants' expertise known to others, reminds the audience of their background, and provides a justification for why they may have certain positions on education issues, while also reinforcing their expertise on anything education-related.

When the participants used their voice, either in news media or in their legislative work through press conferences and public speaking appearances, they were able to educate others on important aspects of education and being an educator. Clancy and Davis both recalled stories about students and their experiences as educators, even the emotions involved. Clancy also shared what you learn as an educator and the importance of treating educators like professionals. In speaking appearances, Grant shared his practical knowledge and spoke with his constituents about school funding reforms and prekindergarten and teacher retirement funding, grounding each of these in an explanation of their importance and practical implications. Smith also took the opportunity to educate others in her speaking appearances, sharing her own meaningful experiences as an educator but also focusing on trying to help others understand the legislative process and what laws had been passed (especially educators). In news media, Kelly framed school funding in a positive light and praised districts for how they operated, even under budget cuts.

In these instances, the participants used their voice to educate others about being a teacher and important aspects of education like real student experiences, treating teachers and teacher retirees like professionals, the practical implications of policy work in priority areas, and the importance of being involved and educated about the process. These efforts reflect their meaning making around the importance of educator voice, which is intertwined

with beliefs about electoral politics and being involved. The participants' meaning making around educator voice is a function of their beliefs about the life-changing aspects of educators and education and the resultant important purpose of education and role of government in serving educators and students.

In interactions with their legislative colleagues, the participants served as counsel and an influence on others, while continuing to educate. All of the participants shared their practical understanding of policy proposals with their colleagues, whether in private conversations or in front of the entire House, often citing their experience as a teacher on policy priorities. Grant also engaged in opportunities before the House to clarify the legislative intent of other members on priority policy proposals in areas like testing and including teachers. Additionally, multiple participants engaged in debates before the entire House with their colleagues on priority policy areas, even those from the same party. Grant and Smith explained that they are leaned on by their colleagues as counsel on bills and, for Grant, this includes members in both parties. Kelly described how she reached out to others in addition to being consulted for her expertise, offering her staff to other legislators and encouraging members to reach out to educators in their own House districts. These interactions with colleagues are not captured in the quantitative, often vote-based literature, but provide a rich picture into how educator-legislators have an impact on how others perceive and vote on issues such as the participants' priority areas, which ties back to their meaning making around the purpose of education and the role of government.

The participants also engaged in key interactions with colleagues during their critical decisions, which shed more light on how they use their voice and what impact their voice may have on others. Recall that many of the participants' critical decisions were bipartisan in nature and that all correlated to their top policy beliefs. The key thread through the participants' descriptions of their critical decisions, apart from Kelly's, was that each

was a leader amongst their colleagues in accomplishing a goal. Clancy led a bipartisan charge to defeat a bill that he felt was harmful to students and Grant led a bipartisan effort to block vouchers, which go against his core beliefs. Smith encouraged her colleagues to help pass a bipartisan bill on school funding that she joint-authored and Davis worked with a Democratic senator to pass a bill on a priority issue that tied back to his key experiences. Subject to "arm-twisting," Kelly voted for something in exchange for moving policy forward in one of her priority areas, even though she had to explain her actions to her district education stakeholders. These critical decisions all rested on the legislators' policy priorities and their conceptions of what is good and right, which often interact with behaviors around partisanship. In these situations, participants appear to value the particular policy topic over any risks to relationships with others in their party or in their district, while also often leading other legislators along with them.

The participants' use of their voice is a key aspect of legislative behavior that is ignored in the literature. Their professional identity drives the participants' convictions about the role of government and the purpose of education, which leads to their conceptions about what is good and right and their top policy beliefs. The participants' used their voice much like an educator, continuing to educate and lead others to a certain outcome. This is consistent with the literature's suggestion that educator-legislators serve an informational purpose (Battista, 2012, 2013), but also provides new evidence that this informational purpose extends beyond the committee room.

Sometimes, the participants' leadership in critical decisions may have been associated with a measured risk to their political identity, either in terms of partisanship or re-electability. This provides some evidence for Francis and Bramlett's (2017) theory that those who are on committees congruent with their profession have greater leadership capacity, especially since the participants are clearly seen as leaders by their colleagues. In

any case, the influence of the educator-legislators on their colleagues as counsel is a behavior that impacts roll-call votes and other legislative actions. In the next section, I discuss the interaction of partisanship with the participants' behaviors.

"Across the Aisle": Bipartisanship in Practice

Across the board, the participants' behavior included authoring bipartisan legislation. As an important note, I only included bills in this category in which the participant was not the primary author. Therefore, these are bills on which the participant had to make a request of the primary author, who was of a different party, that they may be a joint-author. Signing on as a joint-author of a bill authored by a member of the opposite party is in some ways a risk, perhaps more so for Republican members, but is also a show of solidarity and commitment to a certain issue area. Therefore, it is important to analyze these bipartisan efforts, using them as a window into which issue areas are significant enough to warrant the risk and public display of bipartisanship.

The most common thread among the participants' swath of bipartisan legislation is impact to students. Efforts in curriculum reflect a desire to meet students' non-academic needs. Bipartisan legislation dealing with funding includes an omnibus school finance bill that included several student-focused programming efforts, but also smaller pieces of legislation that deal with student needs like providing wraparound services. On prekindergarten, efforts included those making it easier to enroll, increasing parental engagement, and implementing full-day programming. Even legislation regarding charter schools, a touchy subject, focused on students by aiming to create parity between charter schools and traditional school districts in areas like student discipline and admissions. The participants' bipartisan work on school operations also largely impacted students, by giving grace to students with unpaid meal account balances, creating exceptions to attendance

rules, and requiring policies to implement health and safety practices. Efforts in other areas like teacher policy, school safety, accountability, and discipline also impacted students, such as teacher training on suicide prevention, implementing a counselor to law enforcement ratio, implementing community schools as a turnaround option, and assisting with students' transition from an alternative setting back to the regular classroom.

Other bipartisan legislation focused on teachers, school operations, and school safety. The participants' bipartisan work on teacher policy focused on professionalism and included efforts to raise teacher salaries, implement a residency program, include educators in the development of the public school accountability system, and to enhance retirement benefits. Their efforts related to school operation created flexibility in the areas of instructional materials and being able to donate food but created reporting requirements in the areas of class size and prekindergarten. Similarly, on school safety, the participants' bipartisan legislation all created requirements aimed at compliance with school safety policy and protocols, including specific efforts at compliance among charter schools.

In the currently polarized political climate, it is likely seen as a risk to engage in bipartisan work, particularly for Republican legislators who are held to high standards of party loyalty. For instance, the literature showed that membership in the Republican party often trumped the effects of legislator characteristics (Frederick, 2009; Grumbach, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016), while Republicanism was less influential in other cases involving influential constituency characteristics (Hansen & Truel, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012) or distinct life experiences (Jenkins, 2012; Lupton, 2017; Washington, 2008). Furthermore, coming from a working-class, service-based, or non-profit background may lead to more liberal behavior (Carnes, 2012; Grumbach, 2015; Maske, 2019). If a legislator is uniquely tied to their constituency, especially a rural legislator, or if being an educator is a profound life experience that

impacts someone's realizations about the "life-changing" importance of educators and education to students and society, then it may be reasonable to assume that these legislators engage in bipartisan behaviors as a result (such as their critical decisions).

The participants' perceptions of what is right and good often dealt with conceptions of what "real" policy problems were, which were tied to their meaning of education and approach to partisanship. These real problems, like meeting students' needs, funding education, the importance of the profession, and giving flexibility to districts except in the case of class size, are clearly reflected in the participants' bipartisan work. School safety could arguably relate back to students and teachers as well, especially given the emotional attachment to the issue as expressed by Clancy. However, it is also arguable that school safety is a salient issue of the time given relatively recent tragedies in Texas and Florida. As a baseline of what is worth the risk of bipartisanship, it seems that a focus on students is the most justifiable cause for working across the aisle, which ties back right and good, to the role of government in meeting students' needs, even beyond academics, and to conceptions of education as life-changing. In the following section, I analyze how the participants approach policy from a regulatory standpoint and what this reflects about their beliefs.

"Too Many Regulations" or Not Enough? Flexibility Versus Requirements

The participants' legislative policies fluctuated between requiring the state to take action, imposing requirements on districts, and giving flexibility to districts. By analyzing patterns within the participants' actions and where they choose to implement restrictions or freedoms, we can build a picture of how their beliefs tie to their legislative proposals. In this section, I discuss the loci of change, whether state or local, that the participants' aimed

to impact education through and what the implications of those actions are. I reserved a discussion of policies impacting teachers for the next section.

Many of the participants' policies impacting the state level deal with increasing funds for districts through various means, which is consistent with their beliefs about the role of government in funding education. These included efforts to find revenue to pay for education, funding facilities improvements, increasing districts' ability to borrow money, and in general, authoring broad school finance reforms. Other funding efforts were aimed at increasing funds with a focus on students, such as expanding eligibility for categories of students that generate additional funds (e.g., at-risk and low-income students) and providing funding for full-day prekindergarten, mental health supports, student tutorials, and college entrance exams. The emphasis on students further supports the participants' beliefs about the role of government in meeting students' needs.

In Texas, the "pork barrel politics" predicted of educator-legislators by Couch et al. (1992), in which politicians appropriate money towards a self-interested benefit, don't apply because Texas legislators are constitutionally barred from concurrently receiving a public school teacher salary. However, one could argue that the participants' policy beliefs on funding do "serve the industry," though this benefit would only be realized by others and not by the legislator themselves. Additionally, although the position of increased funding for public schools is universal to the well-established teacher groups in Texas that may contribute to these legislators' campaigns (Texas Classroom Teachers Association, Association of Texas Professional Educators, Texas State Teachers Association, Texas American Federation of Teachers), without an analysis of education-related PAC donations I can make no conclusions as to whether the educator-legislators' policy beliefs in this area are reflective of an industry-service motivation as found in the literature (Battista, 2012; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Witko & Friedman, 2008).

In addition to funding, the participants' legislation involves other areas that they would presumably like to see the state take action. This includes curricular efforts, mainly aimed at the State Board of Education (SBOE), that would require the adoption of certain knowledge and skills standards in areas like civics, sex education, and social studies. Other SBOE-focused efforts would remove the partisan nature of the board and require the board to reduce the number of standards and to take the input of outside experts in determining curriculum. Some of Davis's curricular attempts were more direct, like prohibiting the use of common core or instruction about abortion. The participants also displayed a commitment to non-traditional and vulnerable student populations in their legislative efforts to allow for the authorization of charter schools for unique student populations and to increase the state's responsibility to students with disabilities, homeless students, children in foster care, and children suffering from circumstances out of their control. The common thread among these other areas of state responsibility is related to students – providing curriculum, schooling options, and state supports to meet students' needs even beyond academics, which again ties back to the participants' beliefs about the role of government and purpose of education.

Other state-level changes appeared to be aimed at protecting districts from the things that the participants believe are harmful, like an over-emphasis on testing, punitive accountability, overregulation, and unfunded mandates. The participants authored bills focused on creating flexibility within the accountability system, reducing its high stakes nature, protecting districts against state administrative factors out of their control that may impact their accountability rating, and lessening or creating alternative the sanctions that result from ratings. Alternatively, one participant did author a bill to make charter expansion dependent on accountability and performance. As for accountability inputs like standardized testing, the participants authored bills that created additional testing options

and methods, eliminated tests, created a remediation protocol for students, and mandated a study of the validity and reliability of the state's testing system. Other legislation loosened regulations on districts, like providing flexibility in how districts can use certain funds and widescale exemption from state laws, exempting districts from unfunded mandates and other regulatory burdens, and creating a specific sales tax exemption for use in schools. The participants' efforts to loosen state regulation for the benefit of districts reflects their top policy beliefs and reinforces their beliefs about the role of government as being centralized in funding rather than punishment, while also supporting the idea of industry service.

Other flexibilities the participants aimed to provide to districts were focused on student academics. These included legislative attempts to increase flexibility in how students complete their required coursework and credit requirements, allowing students to take certain assessments online, unlinking required testing from graduation or promotion, and reducing the impact of required tests on their course grades. Other legislation would create a pilot program to provide students with more information on postsecondary options and allow students' dual credit courses to have a greater weight in the calculation of their grade point average. Finally, some of the participants' legislation also increased the course offerings available to students, such as through career and technical education and virtual courses that may not be offered at the student's school. These legislative efforts reflect an effort to serve students that is also intertwined with beliefs about the testing system and an emphasis on ensuring that students are incentivized to learn information beyond the scope of traditional academics.

While the participants loosened regulations to protect districts and serve students, there were some areas in which created requirements for districts. Many of these appear to also be aimed at benefitting students. Some of the legislative efforts were focused on

disciplinary issues, such as requiring the district to provide curriculum to students in disciplinary settings, use alternative discipline methods and progressive sanctions before stronger actions, use a student's status as homeless or in foster care when making decisions about removal, and to report on student arrests and the use of restraints. Other district-level legislation dealt with reporting requirements and detailing policies for special populations such as students in special education. Some legislation was related to student well-being beyond traditional academics, like requiring districts to implement a grace period for student meals, provide a health education and fine arts credit, provide information to students about credit for military service, provide physical activity, adopt a policy on student health and safety, and abide by specified mental health professional ratios. In these cases, it appears that one exception to the rule of deregulating school districts is when it comes to students, particularly in terms of disciplinary practices, special populations, and providing supports to students beyond academics. Increasing regulations on school districts does not reflect a position of industry service, unless these legislative efforts would all raise student performance and the status of schools.

Other requirements for districts center on school safety or specific requirements for charter schools. The participants' legislation on school safety included various training requirements, particularly for law enforcement personnel, and requirements to adopt a safety policy, school shooter protocol, and seat belt requirements. As for charter schools, the theme of the participants' legislation is to create parity between charter schools and traditional school districts, in areas like immunity and liability, discipline practices, admissions, governing body operation, and school safety policy and planning. The participants' approach to school safety is focused on planning and practical implications rather than increasing school hardening measures, as recommended by school safety experts to be more effective (Kingston et al., 2018; Strobach & Cowan, 2019). Their

approach to charter school operating requirements appears aimed at leveling the playing field between charter schools and traditional public schools, which is complemented by some of the deregulation efforts mentioned above.

The participants sought to regulate the state in order to meet the funding needs of schools and to meet students' academic and non-academic needs, particularly vulnerable students, which is directly tied to their beliefs about the role of government and could be seen as industry-service oriented behavior. They also targeted district deregulation in top policy areas like accountability, testing, and operations, while conversely increasing requirements on charter schools to level the playing field in terms of regulation. This approach to charter schools, which are privately-run, could be a subtle reflection of their beliefs about privatization and education as a public good. The participants also used districts as a locus of change for students, on the one hand creating flexibility in several areas to serve students and promote learning beyond academics and, on the other hand, creating requirements for districts in student-focused areas like discipline, special populations, and student supports. They also aimed to impact school safety at the district level through comprehensive strategies, which may be more effective at keeping students and teachers safe than measures such as school hardening.

Put together, all of these various efforts at regulation or deregulation reflect the participants' meaning making of education and their beliefs about fulfilling the role of government in funding schools and meeting students' needs, whether through state-level or district-level focused legislation. Funding, meeting students' needs, deregulating areas of policy viewed as punitive or overreaching, and limiting private-sector competition theoretically serve the industry by strengthening the system and fostering success, which boosts the image of public education and helps to sustain it. On the other hand, regulating districts in student-focused areas, like discipline, school safety, curriculum, and special

populations suggests a motivation beyond industry-service or self-benefit, one that is perhaps focused more on what is right and good for students. In the next section, I continue this analysis and discussion by looking specifically at the participants' teacher policies.

Raising the Professionalism of the Career through Teacher Policy

Couch et al. (1992) suggested that educator-legislators aim to benefit themselves through their policymaking. Furthermore, the literature as a whole suggests that legislators tend to favor policies that benefit themselves or their social group (Battista, 2012; Brown, 2011; Carnes, 2012; Couch et al., 1992; Francis & Bramlett, 2017; Grumbach, 2015; Hansen et al., 2019; Hansen & Treul, 2015; Hero & Preuhs, 2010; Jenkins, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016; Lupton, 2017; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Mendez & Grose, 2018; Thiele et al., 2012; Washington, 2008; Witko & Friedman, 2008). While Texas educator-legislators cannot reap personal benefits from their own appropriations, tbey may serve the industry through policies aimed at the profession. In the previous section, it appears that the participants largely left their profession out of their regulation and deregulation policy efforts, focusing instead on state and district level changes to effect change. To investigate how the educator-legislators do attempt to regulate their profession and the implications of this, it is important to separately analyze the participants' legislation impacting teachers.

The participants' legislation regarding teachers can be interpreted as raising the professionalism of the career, which reflects the importance they place on the profession and the respect they would like others to have for it. This included continuing education for educators in a variety of academic and non-academic areas, such as civics, math and early reading, mental health, health and wellness, leadership, and suicide prevention. These tie into the legislators' core beliefs about education being beyond academics, beliefs about

life-long learning and growth, and perhaps the legislators' own personal experiences with advanced educational attainment.

Increasing training requirements on one's own profession seems counter-intuitive to the idea that legislators from a particular profession would act in favor of that profession, as increasing regulation and duties would increase burdens. Even though some of the training efforts were requirements for educators while others were mandates to the state to simply create the trainings, increases in training generally go against the advocacy of Texas teacher associations and unions. In my own professional work, the four teacher groups of Texas have worked in tandem to reduce and refine training requirements for educators, which is a common area of legislative action and has resulted in a long list of required professional development that leaves little time for teachers to explore their own professional growth interests. This may provide evidence that the participants are in some ways acting of their own will, separate from teacher groups, which would support the findings of Battista (2013) that teacher groups did not pressure industry-service oriented behavior from education-connected legislators.

Raising the professionalism of the teaching career also includes preparation, compensation, retirement, and other factors, which are reflected in the majority of the participants' other teacher-related bills. The participants' authored bills that would implement higher quality educator preparation programs, like a residency model, and include educators in educator preparation program evaluations. The participants also authored a variety of bills on compensation and benefits, including expanding prekindergarten eligibility to children of educators, increasing teacher pay, implementing higher education benefits, creating innovation programs for teacher pay and mentoring, creating tax exemptions for teachers who buy supplies, and ensuring teacher retirement benefits and funding. On teacher evaluation and contracts, they authored efforts to include

educators in the development of teacher evaluation systems, unlink teacher evaluations from state assessments and professional development, and require a specified notice about contract renewal. Other bills included ensuring educators' involvement in the development of state assessments, requiring districts to report on class size waivers, and strengthening educator misconduct reporting.

Including the teacher training bills, these legislative efforts raise professionalism by increasing the educational attainment of educators, the pay and "perks" of being an educator, and the retirement benefits. Additionally, teacher appraisal is tied to teacher contracts and professional growth, two key aspects of a continuing career in education. The participants' disdain for standardized testing bleeds into their policy on teacher evaluations and educator involvement. Their agreement on the importance of class size is also apparent in their teacher policy, which I included here as educators' workload and expectations for teacher-student interaction are indicators of professionalization. Educator misconduct has received more attention in recent years and is also reflective of educators' professional responsibility to follow their code of ethics.

The participants' legislative actions to raise the professionalism of the education career are indicative of their beliefs about the life-changing aspects of being an educator and the importance of the profession to society, as well as their beliefs about the importance of educator voice and that educators are respected and involved in the process. Efforts to increase pay and benefits or to alter teacher evaluations to the teacher's benefit may be seen as supporting the theory of "pork barrel politics," but these sit alongside efforts to increase the rigor of preparation, hold educators to increased training requirements, ensure educators' involvement in policy development, and let less educators get away with misconduct. In terms of teacher policy, the overall attempts to benefit the profession as a whole suggest an industry-service oriented motivation, as suggested in the literature as

pertinent to other occupations (Battista, 2012, 2013; Hansen et al., 2019; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Witko & Friedman, 2008), yet not in a way that holds a private benefit.

Summary

The participants' legislative behavior in the education policy area is highly impacted by their professional background, as it flows into their meaning making of education and beliefs about the life-changing impact of educators and education, the role of government, the purpose of education, what is good and right, the importance of educator voice, and their policy beliefs. Central to all aspects of the participants' behavior is their belief in the public good of education as it serves society and their belief in the role of government as being confined to funding education and meeting students' needs, academic or otherwise.

While they are ultimately selected for their committee assignments, the legislators first had to prioritize their committees in order to receive the appointment. This points back to the importance they place on fulfilling the role of government, taking action in their top policy beliefs, and using their educator voice. The participants didn't only act on their educator voice in committee, they also used it extensively in their interactions with their colleagues, often to provide counsel and be a leader on both sides of the aisle.

The specific policy actions that the legislators took were analyzed in terms of which areas they aimed to regulate or deregulate, which areas were important enough to work across the aisle, and what approach was taken in their teacher policies. Largely based on their beliefs about what is good and right, the participants' actions to regulate or deregulate education focused on fulfilling the role of government and top policy priories, such as providing funding, meetings students' academic and non-academic needs, reducing or eliminating ties to state policies viewed as punitive or overreaching, and limiting private-

sector competition. While this behavior could be seen as industry-service-oriented (despite the lack of profit), they also authored legislation to actually increase regulations simply to serve and protect students, which does not fit into such a motivation. Also based on beliefs about good and right, the participants' bipartisan legislation was focused on students, pointing back to the legislators' willingness to take the risk of bipartisanship on something as critical as the purpose of education in serving students, which is less industry-service oriented and seems more a question of morality and ethics. Lastly, the participants' beliefs about the role of educator voice likely led to their teacher policies, which aimed to raise the professionalism of the career and could again be seen as industry-service oriented.

While there is no self-benefit associated with appropriating money towards education or raising teacher salaries, there are some participant behaviors that appear to be industry-service oriented. These include funding increases, deregulation, supporting students' academic success, and raising the professionalism of teachers. Again, there is no profit for the legislators by pushing industry-service oriented legislation as schools are non-profit entities and the legislators are not currently teaching. Additionally, some of their behaviors focused on increased regulation of schools and teachers, which may even be counter to interest groups like teacher associations. For these reasons, it appears that the participants' behaviors are partially consistent with the industry-service motivation proposed by the literature, while fully consistent with a motivation to follow core beliefs about the life-changing purpose of education for children and society and the role of government in fulfilling that purpose.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the analytical findings across cases, as organized by research question. The cross-case comparison involved creating concept maps for each participant,

overlaying these maps, and identifying key themes and interactions that emerged among and within concepts. This included the centrality of the professional identity to the participants' meaning making of education and major themes of meaning making. The major themes were: education and educators are life-changing, education must be supported as an essential public good that government must fund, school funding is an investment that is counterintuitive to vouchers, schools should be resourced and deregulated, educator voice is paramount to the policy process, and that there is a good and right way to identify and solve education policy problems. A focus on students was a key thread through these themes in meaning making.

The impact of meaning making on behavior was analyzed through committee assignments, interactions with others, and legislative actions. The participants' professional background and meaning making drove their committee assignments, where they mainly appeared to serve an informational purpose. Through their interactions with colleagues, the participants served as counsel, fulfilling their beliefs about the importance of educator voice and leading others in their policy priority areas. This behavior stretched into their actions with members of the opposite party and shed light on policy areas that were worth the risk of bipartisanship, such as those directly impacting students. The participants' work on requirements and flexibilities also reflected their top policy priorities and showed that they focus on district and state level policies to fund schools and to loosen regulations in areas they believe are harmful to schools, while tightening requirements on areas they believe are harmful to students. Lastly, the participants' legislation on teachers was mixed in its efforts to regulate and benefit the profession, but overall centered on raising the professionalism of the career, which again points back to beliefs about the importance of the profession and increasing its status. While these behaviors are industry-

service oriented, it also appears that the legislators were influenced by core beliefs drawn from their identity.

Answering the research questions shows that the professional identity drives meaning making, with a strong influence from political identity, which inserts concepts like political ideology and commitments to constituents. The core beliefs within meaning making that come from identity drive the legislators' approach in ways that are sometimes bipartisan, sometimes industry-service oriented, sometimes informational, and sometimes based on a concept of good and right. This extends the supposition in the literature that legislators simply act to benefit their own social group. In Chapter Seven, I continue to summarize the results and how the findings contribute to the literature, as well as offer implications of the findings.

Chapter Seven: Summary, Conclusions, & Implications

SUMMARY

The literature showed that a legislator's identity predictably impacts behavior, including their committee assignments, sponsorship of legislation, roll call votes, and responses to constituents. According to the literature, a legislator's background provides them with informational expertise and experience that causes action in favor of their identity or those they identify with. However, members of the Republican party exhibit particularly high party loyalty and homogeneity of behavior, which often masks the influence of occupation or personal background. Additionally, within and outside of party affiliation, electoral politics and party politics are fluid factors that mitigate behavior. Considerations for their constituency and campaign donors also impact a legislator's behavior and alignment to their party, as do highly impactful aspects of identity or life experience.

Within legislators' organizational context, their identities are shaped through experiences and are intersectional. It means something to be a Black woman, or a Republican man with daughters, or a working-class Republican with moderate ideological tendencies. Most importantly, the literature shows that legislators tend to favor policies that benefit themselves or the social group they identify with (Battista, 2012; Brown, 2011; Carnes, 2012; Couch et al., 1992; Francis & Bramlett, 2017; Grumbach, 2015; Hansen et al., 2019; Hansen & Treul, 2015; Hero & Preuhs, 2010; Jenkins, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016; Lupton, 2017; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Mendez & Grose, 2018; Thiele et al., 2012; Washington, 2008; Witko & Friedman, 2008).

Electoral politics also interact with aspects of identity and meaning making. A legislator's consideration for their constituency – the electorate – impacts their behavior

(Lupton, 2017), sometimes even in ways that can take them out of alignment with their party (Hansen & Truel, 2015; Jenkins, 2010; Juenke & Pruehs, 2012; Kirkland & Slapin, 2017). For businesspersons (Witko & Friedman, 2008) and lawyer-legislators (Matter & Stutzer, 2015), campaign contributions and the ability to financially continue runs for reelection are also important factors of behavior. Electoral politics also play off of the political context, as party loyalty may be dependent on the party majority (Kirkland & Slapin, 2017) and "purple" conditions may lead to more moderate behavior (Jenkins, 2010).

Party politics play a dominant role, especially for Republicans, and are another moderating factor of behavior. The "Republican effect" can trump the effects of personal characteristics (Frederick, 2009; Grumbach, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016). In other cases, especially those involving distinct life experiences, party is overruled (Hansen & Truel, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Lupton, 2017; Volden et al., 2018).

The literature on legislator characteristics and legislative behavior is devoid of information on *how* individual background moderate actions. Nearly all of the studies are quantitative and, despite the important role of education to society, few focus on educators who became legislators. In addition, the literature that does include educators as part of a broader inquiry suggests that their occupational background does not lend itself to self-serving behavior, but that educator-legislators actually tend to serve a more informational purpose. Filling this gap in knowledge helps us understand the *why* and *how* of the relationship between occupational background and legislative behavior.

Knowing how a legislator's background and other contextual factors influence their legislative decision-making process opens the black box of why certain policy outcomes exist. If there are disproportionalities in legislative bodies – more men than women,

wealthier than poor, more corporate than blue-collar – we can expect policy outcomes to be skewed as well. In the case of educators, the implications are even broader, as educators may think not only of their professional colleagues but also of the millions of students served by the education system.

The purpose of this study was therefore to contribute to understanding by analyzing how the former occupational experience of Texas educator-legislators has impacted their meaning making of education and legislative behavior within the policy context. The following research questions were asked: 1) How do current and former Texas State legislators with an occupational background as an educator make meaning of education within the policy context? 2) how does this meaning making of education impact their legislative behavior?

Using Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking and Lofland et al.'s (2005) framework for understanding artifacts of meaning, I conducted a qualitative multi-case study of five participants to answer the research questions. Participants participated in one semi-structured interview, not longer than 60 minutes, which was transcribed. Additionally, I collected various content for each participants' case, including audiovisual, legislative, and news media materials.

To conduct the data analysis, both the interviews and the content were coded in the program NVivo using a grounded-theory-driven (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), multi-stage coding process. The resulting codes were used to write descriptive narratives for each participant. In the second stage of analysis, I created concept maps for each participant and wrote individual within-case analytical findings to answer the research questions. I then combined all of the concept maps to create a holistic overlay and pull out key themes and interactions between concepts across all participants. Using these themes and interactions, I coded the narratives and created matrices of the codes to write detailed cross-case

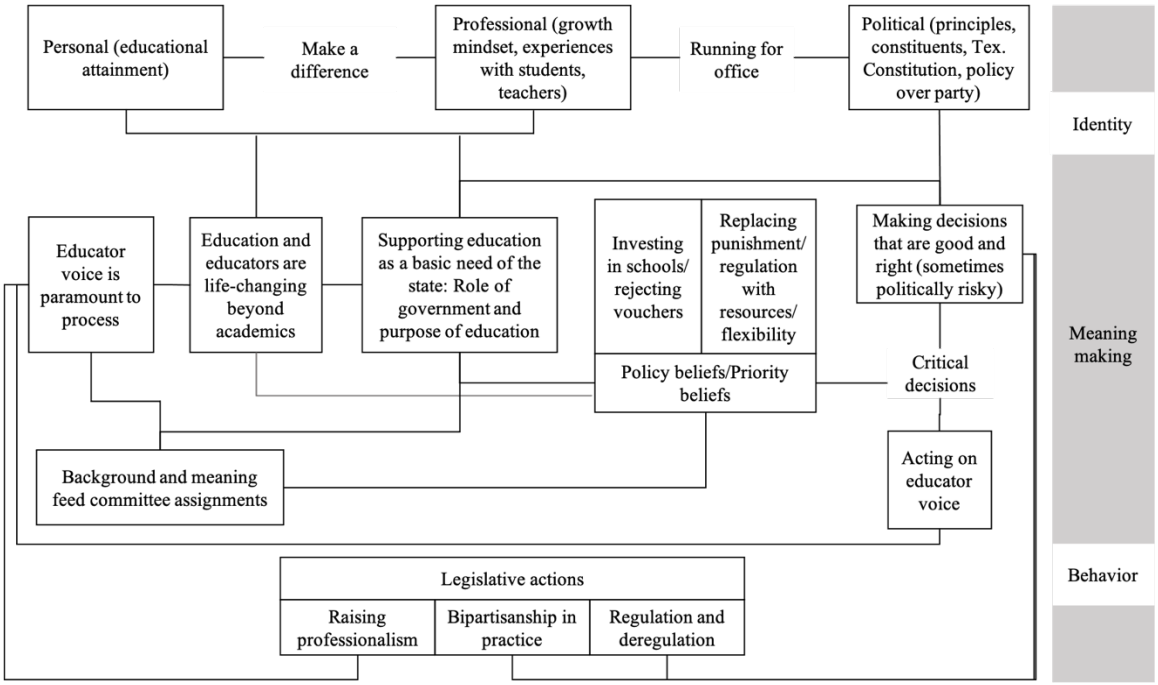
comparisons while answering each of the research questions. From this analysis, I wrote an overall theory that emerged from the data about the connections between identity, meaning making, and behavior for my participants.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings showed that the participants' professional identity was a salient and embedded determinant of their meaning making of education, impacting not only their approach to the policy process but also interacting with their personal and political identities to influence their core, driving beliefs about education, educators, and government. Before beginning the discussion of the research questions, it is helpful to view a comprehensive diagram of the interconnectedness of the emergent themes across identity, meaning making, and behavior (Figure 2). In contrast to the concept maps for each participant, the diagram in Figure 2 does not include directional arrows. I did not feel comfortable attributing arrows to the connections of the concepts because I felt they implied too much causality. Therefore, each linkage can simply be interpreted as a relationship that could be unidirectional or bidirectional.

Figure 2

Overall Theory



The first research question asked how educator-legislators in Texas make meaning of education within the policy context. Among the participants, their personal and professional identities impacted their conception of educators and education as being life-changing, particularly in terms of impacting students' lives and society beyond academics. This was driven by the participants' experiences as a student and distinct experiences with students and other teachers as an educator, which is consistent with Weick's (1995) theory that the start of sensemaking begins with the requirement to make sense of troubling or uncertain situations. Adding the participants' political identities, such as their core political principles, to their meaning making, leads to their beliefs about the purpose of education as a public good and the role of government in both funding education and meeting students' needs within and outside of education, as well as key decision-making considerations around what is good and right for education. This core framework of

sensemaking around education is therefore grounded in their identity formation and is retrospective (Weick, 1995).

The participants' beliefs about the importance and purpose of education and the role of government, which are strongly derived from their professional experience, are central to their beliefs about the role of educator voice in the policy process, their issue area beliefs, and their decision-making considerations. An important emergent aspect of decision-making is built upon the participants' perceptions of what is good and right, which goes beyond partisanship into a realm of determining what real policy problems are and using an approach that is often bipartisan. While drawing on their political identities and considerations for values like their serving their constituents and the Texas Constitution to justify what is "good" and "right," the participants seem to determine that real problems are based on their top policy beliefs, such as funding, serving students, and reducing regulatory burdens on schools. These loop back to their beliefs about the purpose of education and the role of government. Following Weick (1995), this pattern shows that the participants' meaning making is ongoing, retrospective yet dependent on cues they now receive as legislators, and subjective to their own interpretation of what is good or true in education. Professional identity is therefore central to the educator-legislators' meaning making about the impact of public education on society and the role of government in fulfilling its purpose, including beliefs about what is good and right in how the government approaches education policy.

The second research question asked how the educator-legislators' meaning making of education impacted their legislative behavior. In their committee assignments, the participants appear to be sorted based on their professional expertise and top policy beliefs, but also because of their own action in requesting their committees due to the importance they place on education and their beliefs about the purpose of education and the role of

government. In committee and in other aspects of using their voice, they serve an informational purpose to their colleagues. They use their expertise to reinforce their policy positions, educate others, and to provide counsel and leadership to their colleagues on both sides of the aisle, particularly in critical decision areas. While the participants' meaning making of education clearly impacts their behavior, it is also clear from their social interaction with others regarding education that the sensemaking process is ongoing and continually impacted by external cues in the policy context (Weick, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

The participants' actions in specific policy areas reflect their conception of what is good and right, what is important enough to act on outside of partisanship and what are real problems, and their beliefs about the importance of educator voice. These beliefs reach back into the participants' perceptions about the role of government in funding education and serving students as well as the purpose of education as an important public good for the betterment of society. Furthermore, these fundamental beliefs about government and education relate back to the participants' political values and ideology about the essential, life-changing importance of education and educators as part of a system that grows people beyond academics. Ultimately, this goes back to the participants' professional and personal identities and the specific experiences they had with students and other educators.

Because of the centrality of their core beliefs about government and education to the participants' meaning making of education within the policy context, it is difficult to fully affirm that their behavior is based on an industry-service motivation, as suggested in the literature (Battista, 2012; Matter & Stutzer, 2015; Witko & Friedman, 2008). While there are some aspects of industry-service, the lack of personal profit and the participants' commitment to their core beliefs suggests a deeper motivation. Furthermore, the participants' willingness to engage in bipartisan work in order to fulfill their core beliefs,

suggests that these convictions are beyond the purview of partisanship. This is particularly true for the Republican participants, who are likely held to high standards of party loyalty (Frederick, 2009; Grumback, 2015; Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Lamare, 2016) and also likely fight the perception that they are more liberal because of their education background (Carnes, 2012, Grumbach, 2015, Maske, 2019). The participants' committee assignments, bipartisan work, and engagement with their colleagues also support the informational purpose of educator-legislators, consistent with the literature (Battista, 2012, 2013; Francis & Bramlett, 2017). In summary, the participants' meaning making, as influenced by their beliefs about the importance of educator voice, impacts their behaviors towards others, committee assignments, and legislative actions to promote their influence as a source of expertise and service to the "education industry," though not in the same self-benefitting way as presented in the literature.

The overall theory and conclusion generated by the analyses done in this study is characterized by a reciprocal flow of identity to meaning making to behavior and back again. For this reason, there are no directional arrows. As the participants act, they build on their identities, especially their political identity and continually make sense of education through their policy work. The participants' professional identity is central to their meaning making of education, which is characterized by a web of core beliefs that drive not only their approach but their specific policy actions. The participants' behaviors are therefore mixed in motivation, drawing both from deeply-held convictions and service to education through sharing their expertise and promoting policies that serve the system, students, and raise the professionalism of the teaching career.

One of the greatest limitations of this study is that it is so contextualized within the Texas House, a chamber made up of 150 legislators that has in recent years experienced a

more even partisan split, especially compared to the Texas Senate. House members also have smaller constituencies than senators, which impacts their behavior and responsiveness to their districts. While I can draw conclusions and themes about my participants, I believe that if I were to include legislators from the Texas Senate, from a different decade, or from another state or the national level, the results might look a lot different. Given that all of the participants were non-charter, public school educators, including legislators who were charter school or private school educators might also make a difference in themes about education as a public good. Some core themes might remain, like a focus on students, but I believe the political context and factors related to partisanship would likely play a bigger role in moderating behavior as a theme across a more diverse array of participants.

I believe that the results of the study are still valid despite the obvious limitations. The study was never meant to lead to generalizable conclusions about all educator-legislators and it is my experience that the educator-legislators who serve in the Texas Senate may actually in some ways behave quite the opposite of the House participants in this study. Nevertheless, including Texas Senators in future studies would simply add to the conclusions of this study by further informing how context, particularly the institutional and political contexts, moderates identity, meaning making, and behavior.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Theory

This study was embedded in a conceptual framework of meaning making (Weick, 1995), which I used to tie together the concepts and findings from the literature review. Based on the lack of meaning making addressed in the literature on legislative behavior, this application of the theory of meaning making was novel. The extension of meaning making to a field dominated by quantitative studies allows for the confirmation of the

theory in a new context and provides evidence that its applicability to a diverse array of subject areas is valid. Furthermore, the successful use of Lofland et al.'s (2005) artifacts of meaning provides evidence that combining these two theories is appropriate and practical.

The extension of meaning making as applied to legislative behavior also provides a new framework for future researchers who may conduct similar inquiries. Using Weick (1995) and Lofland et al. (2005) combined with the concepts from the literature, I initially assumed that the components of the conceptual framework – identity, meaning making, and behavior – would be easily isolated from each other. However, the study showed that identity is intersectional, meaning making is complex, and behaviors are not limited to concrete displays like bills authored, but also include relationships, conversations, and public expressions. Additionally, identity, meaning making, and behavior are fluid in their interactions with each other so that individuals are constantly evolving over time. In addition to researchers who conduct studies based on meaning making, this new application and understanding may help to establish or extend the theoretical framework used by quantitative researchers who wish to explain their results.

This study also extends our knowledge about the theoretical motivations that may underlie the legislative behavior of educator-legislators. While educator-legislators may exhibit behaviors that suggest an industry-service motivation, such as authoring legislation to increase school funding or provide flexibility from the law for school districts, they also displayed behaviors that are outside of the predictions posed by previous studies. The theory of legislative behavior for the educator-legislator subgroup is stretched by this study to include considerations for motivations based on core beliefs about the purpose of education and the role of government that are driven by impactful aspects of professional, political, and personal identity.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the study have implications for those in the advocacy and lobbying community who work with educator-legislators. By understanding educator-legislators' motivations, their core beliefs, and their way of approaching and thinking about education policy, education stakeholders can better navigate their relationships with these policymakers. Ultimately, if a policy is presented to the educator-legislator by an education stakeholder that does not match the legislator's core beliefs, a previous campaign donation to that legislator may make no difference in their rejection of the stakeholder's proposal. This study showed that educator-legislators may have deep-seated beliefs about the purpose of education and the role of government in fulfilling that purpose. They are rarely shaken from their commitment to students, which may put them at odds with education stakeholders who solely have a teacher or administrator's interest in mind.

The study also has implications for practice in terms of the election of educator-legislators to office. There are financial barriers, constitutional barriers, and practical barriers that inhibit active educators from seeking legislative office, but this study shows that having educators in legislative discussions allows for valuable information-sharing that helps other legislators understand the implications of education policy proposals. In addition to this within-Capitol effect, educator-legislators may play an important role in inspiring other educators to become more involved in the legislative process. However, there is no widely-known political action committee in the Texas education community that focuses on assisting educators who are running for office. Campaign funders, political action committees, and other education stakeholders may therefore have an interest in providing assistance to educators who want to run for office but otherwise feel they don't have the means. On the other hand, those who wish to privatize education may have an

interest in supporting educator candidates who align with this ideal or in opposing educator candidates who don't.

Implications for Policy

This study showed that educator-legislators may have an interest in education policies that increase funding for schools and focus on students. Without educator-legislators' involvement in policy discussions, some policies that have greatly impacted education may not have been passed. Think back to Lyndon B. Johnson, a Texas educator who, as President of the United States, instituted the most influential federal laws impacting education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Or take former Texas Governor Ann Richards, a former educator who instituted the recapture law that gave Texas one of the most equitable school finance systems in the country. Both of these educators sit alongside the educator-legislators of this study in promoting educational change that has serious consequences for the system and for students. Whether they pass the laws they care about or not, they at least start discussions about them. And, in their relationships with other legislators, they influence a broader understanding of education that impacts what is passed.

The implications of this study for policy are then that, without educator-legislators, education policies may not be crafted to be truly beneficial to education. This concept extends beyond the legislature to include all policymaking bodies, such as school boards, state boards, etc. Without educators, policy discussions and actions will be devoid of the practical perspective of educators as well as the core beliefs of educators that are rooted in professional experience and oriented towards the betterment of the system. Additionally, the betterment of education for educator-legislators, in particular, is not only about the funding or operational aspects of schools, but also heavily based on what is best for students

and knowing that students have a vast set of needs beyond academics. Therefore, the policy implication of having educators present is not only about education itself, but also about the children who reside within the educational system, which has ripple effects for the entirety of society.

Implications for Future Research

The possibilities for future research in this subject area are expansive. Starting with this particular subset of legislators in Texas, more data could be gathered to dive deeper into the themes. Quantitative data would be useful for examining PAC contributions and overlaying committee votes and floor votes with the qualitative data, to more closely emulate the findings from the literature review. There is also more qualitative data that could be gathered, including social media postings, committee hearing transcripts, and floor transcripts. Including this data into this study would have made it unreasonable, but there is no reason not to choose at least one session for each participant to fully examine more of their behavior.

Additionally, not only could research be conducted on educator-legislators in different states, countries, and levels of government, but other professions could be investigated as well. Based on the mention by participants of school board members who are legislators, specifically doing a similar study about their meaning making of education would also be helpful for building a theory about meaning making of education. It would be interesting to compare educator-legislators other service-based professionals, who are believed to behave more liberally than their party mean, to build a theory about the meaning making of those who aim to serve others through their career. Including other professions, such as doctors, lawyers, veterinarians, and businesspersons would of course provide much

needed information as well, particularly because these professions are better represented in current quantitative literature.

One cannot ignore the absence of questions of race, gender, and class in this study. A specific study on the racialized sensemaking of education of the educator-legislators in the study would no doubt add a significant amount of information about their impact in the legislature, as well as information related to studies of a representative democracy. I think that there are similar questions along the lines of "does being a teacher change your life" that ask whether being a teacher changes your perception of race. Davis talked about how being an educator teaches you about the human condition and I think that the racial consciousness of educator-legislators is warranted, especially when considering the impacts of this on policy areas like school finance and student discipline.

This study also raised questions about the dynamics of interviewing a legislator. From the raw data, it seemed clear that the participants used different tones, rhetoric, and talking points for different audiences. In front of their constituents, they were more familiar. In front of media, they may have been more direct. In some cases, I found that the legislators used verbatim talking points across several different audiences. Analyses of the rhetorical aspects of having politician participants was outside of the scope of this study but is still an important consideration for future researchers.

Final Thoughts

I was inspired to conduct this study because I assumed that there was something unique about being an educator, perhaps being exposed to different types of people and the circumstances they face, that changed a person's outlook on life. After conducting the study, it appears there is some evidence to suggest that this assumption is true. The assumption may be even more true for those who teach populations of students who are

experiencing poverty, as it seems all of the participants did. Whether it is a predisposition to a career of service that predicts certain behavioral characteristics or the career itself that promotes a sense of caring for others (or both), the participants in my study all give me hope that their presence in the Texas Legislature is beneficial for education and for students. I believe that each participant holds a unique sense of care for students that translates into their policy behaviors in ways that transcends partisan affiliation, which is a breath of fresh air in our current political climate.

Appendix

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for meeting with me and sharing your personal experiences with me. This interview is confidential, and you will not be named or identifiable. The results of this study will be stored in the University of Texas Library Repositories. If at any point you feel uncomfortable in answering a question, just let me know and we can move on. Is it ok to record you with a recorder? All recordings will be destroyed after transcription.

Before we begin, I'd like to tell you a little bit about myself and what I am to investigate with this study. I am a former teacher who taught in both charter and traditional settings in the Dallas area and Austin area. I decided to study education policy to learn more about who was making the decisions that impacted my career and how those decisions were being made. I staffed Rep. Mary Gonzalez during the 85th legislative session and am currently a lobbyist with the Association of Texas Professional Educators. I acknowledge that these experiences will impact my interpretation of your story, and with that acknowledgement I will be intentionally engaging in a constant process of reflexivity and checks with you to ensure that I am building meaning as much from your story and as little from my own story as possible. This may mean that I will need to conduct a short follow-up interview with you to ensure that I am interpreting your story accurately.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Walk me through your educational journey from becoming a teacher to becoming a legislator.
3. Describe how that education journey/classroom experience has shaped your thinking as a political figure?
4. Describe the ideal relationship between government and education.

5. How do you feel your experience as an educator impacts your relationships with other policy actors when it comes to education policy?
6. Take me back to a critical decision you made in the legislature relating to education. This could be centered on a vote, a bill, speech, debate, committee membership, or any other event. What happened?
7. Let's take the ___ bill (a specific bill previously mentioned), help me understand why you voted the way you did on that specific legislation?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we didn't talk about? Any other successes, challenges, frustrations, experiences? Are there any relevant documents, events, bills, news articles related to you I should read?

Thank you for participating in my dissertation study.

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