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Connecting Schools and Communities: A Case Study of Prekindergarten Collaboration

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Dedication

Dedicated to my father, Ascencion P. Morales, for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams. I miss you.

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Connecting Schools and Communities: A Case Study of Prekindergarten Collaboration

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In an effort to increase access to public prekindergarten programs, many states are linking school- and community-based early childhood education (ECE) providers together to jointly deliver services. This strategy leverages existing ECE programs as part of the ongoing expansion of state-funded prekindergarten. Understanding how these efforts unfold at the local level is important for future policymaking that seeks to address the provision and improvement of publicly funded ECE programs. This dissertation explores how prekindergarten collaboration members work together, influence one another, and contribute to increased alignment within the field of ECE.

This research presents findings from a case study that examined prekindergarten collaboration in one Texas community. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with individuals directly involved in prekindergarten collaboration implementation or with families served through public prekindergarten. Findings show that the depth and nature of the partnerships in this effort varied by the location of services and level of support made available to collaboration members. Key program features, such as classroom structure, instruction, and curriculum, were aligned across all three programs. Based upon these findings, I discuss the potential implications for policy and practice and suggest further topics of study related to these issues.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Evidence that links participation in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs with improved cognitive and social outcomes for young children has prompted unprecedented levels of public investment in the provision of early education (Anderson et al., 2003; Barnett & Masse, 2007; Currie, 2001; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011). Within the states, policy efforts have primarily focused on establishing and expanding public prekindergarten programs targeted at serving young children considered at-risk for academic failure. Between 1998 and 2012, the number of state programs grew from 27 to 40, and enrolled approximately 1.3 million children (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012). To accommodate this rapid growth, the majority of states have devised policies that allow school districts to collaborate with external organizations as part of prekindergarten policy implementation.

This collaborative model, termed within this study as *prekindergarten collaboration*[1], varies in design from state to state and by community, but is primarily used to increase access to public prekindergarten programs through the leveraging of existing, publicly-funded community-based ECE program. Community-based ECE refers to programs that are situated and operated within the community, including center-based child care (both for-profit and not for profit), preschool education and development programs, and the federal program Head Start. Together, school- and community-based programs enroll approximately 69 percent of all four-year olds (OECD, 2013).

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[1] These are also referred to within the literature as academic prekindergarten partnerships, mixed-delivery models, and school readiness partnerships.

A second, and perhaps more ambitious, primary goal of these collaborations is to foster increased levels of programmatic and policy alignment across the three main sectors that compose the field of publicly-funded ECE (public prekindergarten, child care, and Head Start) for the purpose of promoting school readiness skills (Wat & Gayl, 2009). The concept of school readiness refers to the attainment of the skills and knowledge considered necessary for academic preparedness by kindergarten. A broad definition of school readiness spans multiple domains of development and learning, including: cognition and knowledge; social and emotional development; language and literacy; physical well-being; and approaches to learning (D.J Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Zaslow et al., 2003). Policies that support prekindergarten collaboration may encompass both of these goals, but are primarily used to increase access to public prekindergarten for eligible children. Nearly every state delivers at least some of their prekindergarten program through collaboration partners and approximately one third of all children enrolled in state funded prekindergarten programs are served in community-based settings (Barnett, 2009). In many states, prekindergarten collaboration across the three sectors is a condition of public prekindergarten funding (Bassoff, Tatlow, Kuck, & Tucker-Tatlow, 2001; Schumacher, Ewen, Hart, & Lombardi, 2005).

The goal of increased alignment across the sectors aims to address historical issues of program and policy fragmentation that contributes to uneven levels of program quality and access throughout the field of ECE. ECE programs may target a common population, but vary considerably along other dimensions, including instruction, standards, assessments, funding, teacher qualifications and pay, among others. These distinctions are due to the fact that each sector was developed individually, and is administered by separate regulatory agencies at the state and federal levels. Consequently, they are guided by separate policy mandates that often have little overlap

with one another. Prekindergarten collaborations are considered a means to address some of this fragmentation, as they present an opportunity to develop common policies and practices, combine funding sources, and create linkages among disparate programs that are expected to support the attainment of school readiness skills.

A better understanding of how these efforts unfold at the local level is important for future policy-making, given that many states and local communities have adopted or are moving towards the adoption of universal prekindergarten models that aim to serve all four-year olds. The increased demand for and availability of school-based prekindergarten will likely have implications for how the different sectors operate within this changing landscape. This study explores these issues through an examination of one school district with a long history of prekindergarten collaboration and future plans to implement a universal model. The following sections outline this study, beginning with a description of the problem that my research intends to address. I then discuss the purpose of the study, guiding research questions, and the significance of this research.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

The wealth of research from the fields of neuroscience, developmental psychology, human development, and early education regarding the importance of early learning has fueled public support for state-sponsored prekindergarten. Neurological and developmental research demonstrates the importance of a child's earliest relationships, environments, and interactions on their physical, cognitive, and social development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Brain development during the early years is crucial, as approximately 90% of brain growth occurs by the age of five. During this time, early experiences and genetics interact to create the brain's neurological architecture that serves as the foundation for lifelong development and learning. A child's experiences

and the skills developed during these years hold significant implications for future development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

A number of studies have documented early academic achievement gaps between children from high- and low-income families and between racial/ethnic minority children and their white peers (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Hart & Risley, 1995). One widely cited analysis estimated that roughly half of the Black-White test score gap present at twelfth grade can be attributed to gaps seen by first grade (Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998), while a more recent study concluded that Black and Hispanic children are less likely to be school ready than White children by 15 to 17 percentage points, respectively. Less than half of all poor children are considered to be school-ready by age five (Isaacs, 2012). A study conducted by Duncan and Magnuson (2005) used a broad measure of socioeconomic resources, including income, education, family structure, and neighborhood context, to account for half of the standard deviation of the initial achievement gaps present at the start of kindergarten (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005).

Preschool attendance is considered to be an important factor in predicting early learning gaps, as children who attend a preschool program at age four are 9 percentage points more likely to be school ready than their peers who do not (Isaacs, 2012). However, the influence of preschool participation varies according to the type of program. High-quality, center-based, early education programs are most likely to improve the school readiness of children from all backgrounds, but especially for low-income and minority children (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). A recent meta-analysis of center-based programs revealed an average effect size of 0.23 standard deviations on cognitive skills, and 0.15 standard deviations for socio-emotional skills (Camilli et al., 2010).

Absent intervention, early achievement gaps are shown to persist and eventually widen throughout a child's academic career (Stipek & Ryan, 1997; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005) and data suggest that interventions staged during preschool may be less expensive and more effective than later efforts (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev, & Yavitz, 2009). Preschool participation, however, varies considerably by SES, race, English proficiency, and location. The children most likely to benefit from preschool are the least likely to access such programs. The participation rates of children from low- and middle-income families, from Hispanic backgrounds, or of limited English proficiency are lower than those of than their non-Hispanic, English proficient peers from wealthy backgrounds (Bainbridge, Meyers, Tanaka, & Waldfogel, 2005; Hirshberg, Huang, & Fuller, 2005; Rumberger & Tran, 2006).

Prekindergarten collaboration policies are viewed as a potential strategy to meet the demand for more public prekindergarten slots, and to address the broader issue of fragmentation throughout the field of ECE. The underlying rationale for this approach is that a partnership guided by school readiness standards, and supplemented with new resources and instructional support, will influence the practices of participating organizations (Barnett, 2013; Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008). Historically, public prekindergarten programs have been understood as more academic in nature and focused on cognitive development than community-based programs, which are more often associated with caregiving and the promotion of social and emotional development (McCabe & Sipple, 2011). A number of studies have also concluded that public prekindergarten and Head Start programs tend to be of higher quality than center-based child care programs attended by low-income children (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004). High-quality programs are associated with positive effects on early learning and child development (NICHD ECCRN, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

The expansion of prekindergarten and prekindergarten collaborations has occurred within the educational policy climate created by federal legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (NCLB, 2002). This legislation has guided the field of public education for over a decade and aims to close academic achievement gaps between socioeconomic groups through the use of high-stakes, standards-based accountability measures. States have aligned key elements of their educational system to support these goals, including the content of standards, assessments, and curriculum (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2012). Similar efforts have taken hold in the field of ECE that seek to align these elements across the various sectors, and between programs for children ages 0-5 and grades K-3. Prekindergarten programs are not an official component of NCLB, but many researchers have argued that the push for children to meet certain standards in elementary school is narrowing the focus in prekindergarten programs on the development of academic skills (Fuller, 2007; Hatch, 2002).

Evidence of this shift is often attributed to the melding of instructional approaches that characterize each sector of the ECE field. Community-based ECE programs are most likely to implement a child-centered instructional approach referred to as developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). The DAP framework was designed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which is considered by many within the field as a leader in supporting high-quality early learning and development. DAP spans multiple developmental domains and emphasizes the importance of social and cultural contexts, and interpersonal relationships in supporting individual development. Child development is expected to follow a typical progression that varies by child, and the concept of play is considered integral to supporting cognitive and social development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In contrast, standards-based instruction requires the acquisition of a common set of knowledge and skills by a particular age and proficiency in meeting these standards is measured by performance on standardized assessments (O'Day, 2002). Debates abound over how to balance these two approaches and whether or not the expansion of public prekindergarten programs is nudging the field of ECE away from DAP and child-centered practices, and towards a more academic orientation (D.J Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; McCabe & Sipple, 2011). However, evidence on the impacts of both approaches is mixed (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Braun, 2004; Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Horn, Karlin, Ramey, Aldridge, & Snyder, 2005; Horn & Ramey, 2003).

Prekindergarten collaboration partners must negotiate these issues, as well as additional tensions regarding aspects of program administration, implementation, and quality. Understanding how these efforts unfold in the wake of expanding public prekindergarten is important for future policymaking. Though prekindergarten collaboration policies focus largely on increasing access to these programs, many communities also choose to include goals to address the broader goals of educational alignment and program quality improvement. This study will shed light on these issues through an examination of prekindergarten collaboration at the local level.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to examine the experiences of staff members engaged in prekindergarten collaborations in a large, urban school district in Texas. An exploration of how prekindergarten collaboration partners work together, influence one another, and address potential challenges to partnering is needed to better understand how these policies are shaping the field of ECE. It is also important to understand the viability

of prekindergarten collaborations as a prekindergarten delivery model, as well as a mechanism for linking the different sectors of ECE.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are prekindergarten collaborations developed and implemented?
2. How do the prekindergarten collaborations influence organizational purpose and practice?
3. How do they contribute to early educational alignment in Lone Star?

Significance of the Study

This investigation's focus will contribute to the knowledge base on prekindergarten collaboration policies and prekindergarten delivery systems by closely examining their implementation in one Texas school district. The local context is important to this study, as the school district of focus is poised to expand their targeted public prekindergarten program to a universal model that serves all four-year olds. At that point, it will become one of a handful of districts either implementing or considering such a move. The school district also has a long history of prekindergarten collaboration with community-based programs. Understanding how this model unfolds at the ground level in such a context will likely be useful for other communities interested in expanding their public prekindergarten programs.

To date, research on Texas' prekindergarten collaboration efforts has largely focused on the attainment of student outcomes, and only minimally on the process of collaboration (Zajano et al., 2011). Research that has examined the collaboration process has primarily focused on participants of a state sponsored school readiness initiative that includes a prekindergarten collaboration component. Funding for this initiative has

decreased significantly in recent years, and there is a lack of research that has examines prekindergarten collaboration in Texas as it occurs outside of this state program and at the direction of the school district.

This study is also relevant to current policy proposals at the federal level that aims to provide universal, high-quality public prekindergarten to all four-year olds from low- and moderate-income families through the use of federal-state partnerships. Collaboration among ECE providers is a key feature of this proposal, and would require states to partner with community-based organizations in coordinating a range of services as a condition of funding (Office of the White House, 2013).

Summary of Methodology

To address the research questions guiding this study, I conducted a qualitative study using case study methodology. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and the study sample included program administrators, teachers, and community partners engaged in prekindergarten collaboration efforts in the Lone Star Independent School District (LSISD) in Texas. The school district serves as the unit of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Summary of Theoretical Frameworks

This study relies on theories and concepts from the fields of public administration and sociology to examine prekindergarten collaboration in LSISD. Sowa's (2008) framework of interagency collaboration is used to understand the nature of LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration programs and to consider their role in the local ECE community. This conceptualization identifies three models of collaboration that reflect how organizations work together, the depth and nature of their relationships, and the extent to which these efforts are linked to the local policy context. Concepts from new

institutional theory are used to consider how the increasing interactions between collaboration partner organizations and recent policy focus on expanding public prekindergarten influence individual organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 2006).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Center-based child care: Programs licensed to provide child care services in a non-residential setting.

Community-based prekindergarten: Prekindergarten programs that are based in center-based child care, preschool education and development programs, and Head Start programs.

Continuity of care: Programs that provide continuity of care offer early education services to children in a consistent location throughout the day and/or year, to ensure a stable and nurturing early learning environment. Such care is provided by a consistent set of caregivers, with little turnover throughout the day/year.

High quality: Program characteristics related to a classroom's structural and process features that are considered to positively influence children's development and learning.

School readiness: The attainment of the skills and knowledge considered necessary for academic preparedness by kindergarten. These skills span multiple domains of development and learning, including: cognition and knowledge; social and emotional development; language and literacy; physical well-being; and approaches to learning

Public prekindergarten: State-funded early childhood initiatives to provide education-related services to children younger than five, in the years before they enter school. Most prekindergarten programs are funded through state budget appropriations to

a state agency (usually the state education department) to administer a defined program to be operated by school districts directly and/or by other entities in communities.

ASSUMPTIONS

The study assumed the following:

1. Study participants would provide honest and forthright responses about their experience as a collaboration member.
2. Study participants would be familiar with the goals and purpose of LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration efforts.
3. Study participants would be able to describe their practice and identify collaborative activities.
4. Study participants would hold common understandings of school readiness.

DELIMITATIONS

This study focuses on prekindergarten collaboration between school- and community-based programs in LSISD. Other collaborations or prekindergarten delivery systems, such as those between Head Start and child care centers or as part of the Texas School Ready! initiative, are not addressed as part of this study. Therefore, the conclusions derived from this research will be limited to the context of public prekindergarten collaboration between school districts and community-based prekindergarten programs as administered by the school district. This is a qualitative study, which limits the generalizations that can be derived from the findings of a unique, non-representative case (Yin, 2013).

SUMMARY

Increased public support and investment for ECE has expanded the provision of state-sponsored public prekindergarten for four-year olds. In this context, prekindergarten

collaboration between school districts and community-based programs has emerged as a popular strategy to deliver services and increase integration among the different ECE sectors. These linkages are expected to influence program quality and promote the attainment of school readiness skills among young children. This study examines the experiences of individuals involved in a prekindergarten collaboration effort in one Texas school district to better understand how these efforts unfold at the local level, as well as how they may influence partner organizations and ECE in the community-at-large.

The following chapter reviews the relevant literature on ECE programs and prekindergarten collaborations. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology and research design used in this study. In Chapter 4, I present the results, which are then analyzed and discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature in areas related to prekindergarten programs and collaboration by: 1) examining the evolution of the current early childhood system; 2) weighing the research on state prekindergarten, center-based child care, and Head Start; and 3) reviewing current research on prekindergarten collaboration. This review provides the background on which the basic objectives of this dissertation are based.

A Historical Overview of ECE Policymaking

A review of the literature on the historical development of early childhood policy in the US reveals several major themes that continue to be reflected today. These include an emphasis on the maintaining the privacy and centrality of families, a financial system largely rooted in the private sector, and segregated, uncoordinated policy attempts to serve families according to their income levels (Kagan, 1991). This legacy first began with the introduction of infant schools during the early 1800s, which were designed as an anti-poverty strategy in which moral and personal education for the children of poor families was emphasized. Infant schools were privately funded and short-lived, falling out of favor as societal discomfort with caregiving provided outside of the home increased (Cahan, 1989, cited in Kagan, 1991).

Organized care options for working parents reemerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the establishment of day nurseries. Operated through the philanthropic sector and based primarily in metropolitan areas, these programs served children through a mix of social, health, and nutritional services. Over time, these programs were further targeted to serve mainly poor families, which contributed to the public perception that day nurseries were a type of welfare, rather than a support for

working parents (Kagan, 1991). The advent of the nursery school during the early 1900s further reinforced this view by segmenting the populations served by the two programs. Nursery schools focused on children from middle- and upper class families and their activities were informed by the latest research generated within the then-burgeoning field of child studies (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). In contrast, the day nurseries were typically of lower quality and geared towards custodial care, as they generally lacked the funding of nursery schools. Vestiges of this arrangement can be seen today, as current ECE enrollment trends indicate that poor children are less likely to access high-quality programs focused on developmental growth than children from families with higher-incomes (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004).

It was during this era that the concept of kindergarten was first introduced (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). The programs adopted both educational and social foci, and provided similar social supports to poor families as those made available through day nurseries. The overwhelming demand for such services proved to be too much for the philanthropic sector, and by 1873 a significant portion of kindergarten programs were incorporated into the public school system. Over time, the goals of school-based kindergarten programs became more academic in nature and closely linked with learning expectations of the first grade (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000).

Significant federal involvement with ECE programming and funding did not occur until shortly after the Great Depression. At that time, a need to support the labor force led to the creation of federal funding for the expansion of nursery schools and the provision of publicly funded child care (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). This growth in ECE spending coincided with an increase in research related to cognitive development and academics, which was largely fueled by the Soviet launch of Sputnik during the late 1950s and a resulting call for a greater U.S. focus on mathematics and science curriculum

during the early years. Research findings developed during this time also contributed to the emerging deficit model approach taking shape within the field of ECE, through which programs were largely viewed as a compensatory strategy for children considered to at-risk for academic failure (Elmore, 2004).

This perspective was evident during the following decade when a number of programs were developed to support the needs of special populations during the early years, including Head Start, Follow Through, and Home Start, to name a few (Kagan, 1991). The Head Start program was a central component of the War on Poverty, and was conceived as a strategy to promote the social and cognitive development of young, poor children through a mix of educational, health, and social services that were planned and administered at the local level (Zigler & Muenchow, 1994). Federal funding was also used to provide child care subsidies for many families receiving welfare, job training, affordable housing, public health services, and free preschool instruction for low-income children were made available through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones; 2006). This unprecedented level of federal involvement not only expanded federal investment in young children, but also created a stronger public presence in what had been a predominately private market. Furthermore, the compensatory nature of the federal investments and the manner in which they were implemented ensured that public services for young children were targeted to at-risk children and located within the community, rather than the public school system (Kagan, 1991).

The events during the 1960s also laid the groundwork for how the different levels of government work together on early childhood policies, as these efforts were spread across a number of agencies and largely uncoordinated with another. This dynamic was reproduced at the state and local levels, where officials were tasked with implementing

specific policy mandates for each program that were often in conflict with one another (Kagan, 1991). This fragmented approach has had a direct influence on today's ECE programs with regard to the quality and distribution of services, and it was not until the 1990s that the federal government assumed a much more direct and significant role in child care provision for low-income families through the adoption of the Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and the At-Risk Child care Program. A new administrative department, the Child Care Bureau, was established as part of the Department of Health and Human Services to lead efforts in the design and implementation of federal child care policy (Lombardi, 2003).

It was also during this time that the accountability movement within the field of ECE began to take shape, beginning with the National Education Goals Panel adoption of the goal to ensure that "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Education Goals Panel, 1991, p. 6). Shortly thereafter, the Good Start, Grow Smart initiative was adopted and required states to develop voluntary early learning guidelines that were focused on language and literacy skills. The passage of NCLB in the early 2000s further emphasized early reading skills among low-income children, as did the introduction of a new school readiness indicator system into the Head Start program (Fuller, 2007). Accountability remains a central element of ECE policies today, particularly with regard to public prekindergarten programs that are largely focused on ensuring school readiness prior to kindergarten. The following section describes the two landmark studies of high-quality programs that are considered to have spurred the preschool movement in the U.S. and helped shape the current goals of the ECE field.

RESEARCH ON PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Landmark Studies

The first study generally cited in support of preschool programs examined the High/Scope Perry Preschool program. First launched during the 1960s in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the randomized trial was conducted from 1962-1967 and divided 123 three- and four-year old children considered to be at-risk of academic failure into two groups. One group received a high-quality preschool and home visiting program and the other received no preschool. Findings from this study indicated that preschool participation was associated with the closure of achievement gaps between poor students and their wealthier peers by the point of school entry. Over time, the cognitive skills lessened, but the effects on the achievement gap persisted through high school. A follow-up study of study participants at age 40 found that preschool attendees were more likely to graduate from high school, earn higher wages, maintain employment, and commit fewer crimes than those who did not receive preschool instruction (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2006; Schweinhart et al., 2005). A benefit-cost analysis of the Perry Preschool program estimated a $16 to $1 return on investment (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006), though a more recent study calculated a more modest return of $7 to $1 (Heckman et al., 2009).

The Chicago Longitudinal Study is the second landmark study used as evidence of the value of prekindergarten programs (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002; Reynolds, 2000). This study investigated the effects of the Child Parent Center (CPC) preschool program that operated as part of the Chicago public school system during the late sixties. The preschool program design was very similar to current high-quality state prekindergarten programs, and provided low-income children (ages 3 and 4) with a half-day preschool, kindergarten, and a follow-up component during elementary school. By

kindergarten, the effect of one year of participation in the CPC program was equivalent to 25% to 85% of the achievement gap. By eighth grade, the effect of participation remained equal to one-third of the gap. Other effects included a reduction in special education placements, grade retention, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Preschool participants were also more likely to graduate from high school (Reynolds, 2000). Economic analyses of the CPC preschool program have estimated a return on investment of $7.14 to $1 (Reynolds et al., 2002).

Quality in ECE

Although the landmark studies anchoring the evidence in support of ECE focus on small, well-funded, and intensive programs, a recent comprehensive study indicates that preschool investments in larger, less-intensive programs may also positively influence early learning and development. A recent meta-analysis examined 123 studies of both small- and large-scaled center-based, preschool programs focused on cognitive development (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010). The authors concluded that one year of preschool participation was associated with significant cognitive gains, including an average effect large enough to close at least half of the achievement gap between children from poor and low-income backgrounds and their wealthier peers at school entry. On average, these gains were found to decline slightly after school entry, but remained sizeable throughout a child's academic career. Preschool participation was also found to have significant positive effect on social-emotional development, and long-term effects included increased graduation rates, and less grade repetition and placement in special education programs. The program elements that were found to be most strongly associated with producing larger effects included small group learning and instructional approaches that emphasize individualized and intentional teaching (Camilli et al., 2010).

In general, research indicates that higher-quality programs are more likely to have a positive effect on a child's learning and development (NICHD ECCRN, 2002). The construct of program quality in ECE is typically understood as consisting of both structural and process features. Structural features refer to the aspects of a program that can be regulated, such as teacher education and qualifications, adult to child ratio, and group size. Process features are less easy to regulate or measure, and focus on aspects of daily interpersonal experiences, such as teacher-child interactions (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Process quality features have been shown to have a larger influence on children's development and learning than those related to structural quality, however, the two are considered interdependent in many ways, as structural quality is oftentimes necessary for supporting process quality elements (Burchinal, Howes, & Kontos, 2002; Howes et al., 2008a; NICHD ECCRN, 2002; Pianta et al., 2005).

Overall, most children are cared for in preschool programs in which the program quality is either poor or mediocre. One study estimated that only 1/3 of all children are enrolled in high-quality programs (Barnett & Carolan, 2013). Poor children are more likely to be cared for in settings of low quality than children from higher-income families (Barnett & Yarosz, 2004), and children from middle-class families are even less likely to access high-quality programs given that they typically do not qualify for need-based programs such as public prekindergarten or Head Start (Phillips, Voran, Kisker, Howes, & Whitebook, 1994). Program quality throughout the ECE system varies considerably according to a number of program characteristics. In general, public programs are of higher quality than those operated in the private sector. State prekindergarten programs have been found to be of higher quality than Head Start programs, which are considered to be of higher quality than the average center-based child care program (Magnuson et al., 2004). Children who participated state prekindergarten programs are more likely to be

prepared for kindergarten than those who attended Head Start or center-based child care programs (Forry, Davis, & Welti, 2013; Winsler et al., 2008). The following section provides an overview of each of the three ECE systems and their influence on developmental outcomes.

ECE Programs

State prekindergarten programs are primarily located within the public school system and primarily targeted to four-year olds, and less often to three-year olds. They generally serve a dual-purpose of: 1) academically preparing children for kindergarten, and 2) addressing the early achievement gaps between children from low-income or minority backgrounds and their peers (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson, 2005). All states have adopted either voluntary or mandatory early learning guidelines to help guide preschool instruction, but the implementation and governance of public prekindergarten varies by location (D.J Ackerman & Coley, 2012).

Despite the general consensus regarding the need for high-quality ECE programs, most states have failed to establish consistent and adequate funding streams to support public prekindergarten. Only a handful of programs are fully funded through state revenue, while the majority is supported through a less dependable mix of discretionary state and local dollars (Stone, 2006). State spending on public prekindergarten has slowed down considerably in recent years, largely due to the effects of the economic downtown beginning in 2008. During the 2011-2012 school year, funding levels for prekindergarten decreased by over half a billion dollars and there was no significant increase in the percentage of enrolled children nationally (Barnett et al., 2012). Funding stability for

public prekindergarten program is a major determinant of program access. The majority of programs are understood as "voluntary", meaning they are targeted to serve disadvantaged four-year olds considered to be at-risk of school failure as determined by a set of criteria specific to each state (R. Pianta & Howes, 2009). In 2012, a total of 1,332,663 children were served through state-sponsored prekindergarten programs, which represented a slight increase of only 9,535 children from the prior year. Overall, only 28 percent of 4-year-olds and 4 percent of 3-year olds are enrolled in public prekindergarten, and only six states (Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) offer universal or near-universal programs that provide access to all 4-year old children regardless of family income (Barnett et al., 2012).

Evidence on the effectiveness of state prekindergarten programs is derived from a mix of quasi-experimental and non-experimental studies. In one study of five state prekindergarten programs that were considered to be above average in quality (Wong, Cook, Barnett, & Jung, 2008), researchers used regression-discontinuity methods to evaluate the relationships between enrollment and cognitive indicators of school readiness, including pre-reading and early math skills. Their findings indicated that prekindergarten programs have a positive effect on cognitive skills, though the effect size varied according to state and outcome. A separate study of eleven, long-running public prekindergarten programs sponsored by the National Center for Early Learning and Development (NCELD) found modest gains in language and academic skills that correlated with the quality of instruction and level of program dosage. Gains associated with elements of program quality were observed to persist through kindergarten (Howes

et al., 2008a; Mashburn et al., 2008). Other long-term outcomes associated with state prekindergarten participation in New Jersey, Michigan, New York, and North Carolina include reduced grade retention, less placement in special education, and increased test scores in third grade (Magnuson et al., 2004; Irvine, Horan, Flint, Kukuk, & Hick, 1982; Peisner-Feinberg & Schaaf, 2010; Schweinhart, Xiang, Daniel-Echols, Browning, & Wakabayashi, 2012).

Additional research on universal prekindergarten programs indicates positive gains for students of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Evidence from Oklahoma's public program indicated positive effects for all students, regardless of family income, through gains were more pronounced among poorer students. The effect size for children from the highest income group was estimated to be 87% of that for children from the lowest income group (Howes et al., 2008). A separate study found similar evidence of positive effects on children's language and cognitive test scores, and concluded that Hispanic and Black children enrolled in full-time programs experienced the most substantial gains of all populations (Gormley et al., 2005). An examination of Georgia's universal prekindergarten program produced similar findings, concluding that participation in public prekindergarten was associated with reduced achievement gaps prior to kindergarten entry, particularly for those children who attended a program based in a high-quality setting (Henry et al., 2003).

Head Start is the only prekindergarten program that is directly administered by the federal government. The goals of the program are to improve school readiness rates among children ages 3-5 by supporting their social, emotional, and intellectual growth

through a comprehensive mix of education, health, nutritional, and social services. Programs are guided by the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning framework* (previously referred to as the Head Start Outcomes framework of 2000), which includes a set of indicators from a broad spectrum of domains related to school readiness attainment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Head Start eligibility is determined by family income. At least 90 percent of enrolled families must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level, but priority is given to those families at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level (Head Start, 2013). Families with foster children or children with special needs are also eligible for services. In 2011, the range of Head Start programs served over 1.1 million children, including 942,354 through the preschool program for 3 and 4 year-olds. Of the total population served, 41 percent of children were White, 37 percent were Hispanic, 38 percent were Black, and 8 percent were identified as bi- or multi-racial. (Schmit, 2011).

Research related to the efficacy of the Head Start program has been at the center of ongoing debates over whether policymakers should continue, expand, or end the program. Recent changes made to the Head Start program seek to improve program quality and accountability, primarily through a requirement that each Head Start classroom have at least one teacher with a bachelor's degree by September 2013 and the implementation of a new granting system that calls for low-performing Head Start programs to recompete for funds every five years. Previously, Head Start funds were renewed through a non-competitive process (Severn, 2012). These renewable grants are administered at the local level by a mix of community-based organizations, government

agencies, and school districts (a total of 1,789 of preschool grantees in 2011). Of these grants, approximately 10 percent are awarded to school districts. The federal contribution covers 80 percent of program costs and the remainder of expenses is met with local funds. Additional funding is set aside for training, technical assistance, and research activities (Severn, 2012). Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees are paid similarly to teachers in child care centers. Both are paid low wages and receive minimal benefits, if any at all, and are among the lowest paid workers in the nation. Many barely earn enough to live above the federal poverty guidelines, and these conditions contribute to significant turnover in the field at a rate between 25 and 40 percent (NACCRA, 2011).

Overall, Head Start outcomes vary according to program elements, such as design and focus. In general, Head Start programs that adopt a primary focus on education have been found to produce the largest effects on children's learning and development. The first large-scale random assignment study of Head Start (the Head Start Impact Study [HSIS]) was initiated in 1998 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The study gathered longitudinal data on approximately 5,000 preschool aged children who applied for Head Start and were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups for one year. The study participants were enrolled in over eighty programs throughout the U.S. and data was collected through interviews, child assessments, teacher reports, and direct observations (Puma, Bell, Cook, Heid, & Lopez, 2005) .

The first report from the HSIS was released in 2005 and found participation to produce small positive effects on language and literacy development Puma et al., 2005). A second report released in 2010 concluded that the program had no significant effect on

cognitive or social development and that many of the earlier positive impacts of participation had faded by the end of first grade (Puma, Bell, Cook, Heid, & Lopez, 2010). The final phase of this study, presented in late 2012, found similar results, concluding that all gains had dissipated by the end of 3rd grade and that participants, on average, were not outperforming their peers who had not participated in Head Start (Puma, Bell, Cook, Heid, & Lopez, 2012).

Findings from this national study have been scrutinized, as many experts question aspects of the research design of the HSIS that may have skewed findings (Barnett, 2013). More focused studies of local Head Start programs have found positive effects of participation, including cognitive gains, improved test scores, less grade retention, and improved health care (Abbott-Shim, Lambert, & McCarty, 2003; Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2011). Long-term outcomes of Head Start participation include increased high school graduation and college attendance, and lower rates of arrest among Black children (Ludwig & Miller, 2007; Ludwig & Phillips, 2008).

Center-based child care programs, which refer to arrangements in which a child is cared for in a group setting outside of the home by multiple caregivers, are central to the lives of many working families. Figures from 2012 indicate that approximately 26 percent of children under the age of five with working mothers are enrolled in some type of center-based care. The amount of time that they are cared for varies, but on average, preschool-age children of working mothers are in these settings approximately 35 hours per week (NACCRA, 2011).

Child care programs are typically administered by a mix of public, for-profit, or non-profit private providers. The overall goals of child care are largely linked to the types of funding that a program receives. Federal and state funding for child care primarily focuses on supporting working parents, and to a lesser degree, nurturing child development (Pianta et al., 2009) The largest source of funds for child care is the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which provides over $10 billion to subsidize child care for low-income children. A smaller percentage of government funding is used to support quality improvement activities, although states are given discretion on how to spend funds (Pianta & Howes, 2009). Despite available aid, approximately 90 percent of the cost of child care is assumed by parents .

There are currently no national child care standards in place, though states are required to maintain minimal levels of health, safety and teacher-child ratios (Huston, Chang, & Gennetian, 2002). In general, regulatory focus is placed upon ensuring minimal health and safety standards and few resources are provided to improve the quality of care and instruction (National Association for Regulatory Administration, 2009). Some states have implemented quality rating improvement systems (QRIS) that apply to child care centers, as well as other ECE programs, for the purpose of developing common quality indicators by which programs can be measured. As of 2012, 12 states had developed or implemented a QRIS system (Mitchell, 2012). Only 13 states require child care providers to have training in early education prior to working within a center, and only 33 percent of child care teachers have graduated from college (NACCRA, 2011).

Child care participation is associated with limited and short-term learning gains, especially in settings in which the program focus is on supporting parental employment versus child development and learning (NICHD ECCRN, 2002). High-quality programs are more likely to produce small to moderate positive effects on cognitive and social and emotional development, particularly for low-income families (Puma et al., 2005). In the Abecedarian study conducted in North Carolina, researchers used a randomized design to investigate a year-round, full-day, high-quality, educationally focused child care program (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). As part of the study conducted between 1972 and 1977, individuals were randomly assigned to the intervention or control group. Findings indicate that children who participated in the program had higher cognitive test scores and academic achievements than those who did not receive care. They were also more likely to graduate from high school and attend college (Campbell et al., 2008). Economic benefits of participation included increased lifetime earning and decreased schooling costs (Barnett & Masse, 2007)

More recent studies that examine child care subsidy policies indicate that these efforts may help facilitate maternal employment and higher wages, but also increase the likelihood that children are placed in low-quality care settings and spend less time with their parents (Blau & Currie, 2004; Blau & Tekin, 2007). The role of program dosage has also been examined, with one study concluding that children who attend center-based care for a significant amount of time are slightly more likely to exhibit behavioral issues around the time of school entry than their peers not enrolled in child care, although these

negative effects are lessened when children attend high-quality programs (Love et al., 2003).

The collection of research on the different ECE systems highlights the many ways in which they differ in terms of regulatory and programmatic features. These differences contribute to the disjointed and diverse nature of the ECE landscape that parents must navigate on behalf of their children. Policy efforts focused on a more cohesive approach to program delivery, such as prekindergarten collaboration, provide an opportunity to address common challenges throughout the field. The following section reviews the available literature on the process and related outcomes of collaboration.

Prekindergarten Collaboration

The integration of ECE systems that occurs as part of prekindergarten collaboration efforts is shaping a new version of the ECE landscape. School- and community-based prekindergarten collaboration is primarily considered a strategy for increasing access to state public prekindergarten programs in an efficient and cost-effective manner (Schumacher et al., 2005). For school districts, the use of existing community-based facilities and staff limits their need to increase the human and physical capacity necessary to serve additional students. This is particularly useful in communities in which prekindergarten is a new addition to the public school system or populations of young children are increasing (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, & Loeb, 2012). Given that most communities lack sufficient resources to meet the demand for public prekindergarten, the leveraging of external ECE systems is a necessity (D.J Ackerman &

Barnett, 2011). Research on the provision of public prekindergarten in community-based settings indicate both cognitive and academic gains for students comparable to those of students served in public schools (Goldstein et al., 2013; Howes et al., 2008). The following section details some of the primary issues that have been addressed within the literature regarding the implementation of prekindergarten collaborations.

Several multi-state surveys of state and local prekindergarten collaborations contribute to our understanding of these efforts (Schilder, Kiron, & Elliott, 2003; Schulman & Blank, 2007; Schumacher et al., 2005). A case study examination of partnerships in all 50 states, including 200 ECE providers, concluded that two major factors have created the current context for collaboration: 1) an increased demand for ECE services, and (2) a growing recognition of the importance of program quality in supporting improved outcomes for young children (Schilder et al., 2003). Partnerships occur in many forms, and reflect relationships among public prekindergarten, Head Start, center-based child care, and home-based child care. States support prekindergarten collaboration through policies that provide for administrative and programmatic coordination. For instance, many states have introduced incentives or policy mandates that require ECE collaboration as a condition for state funding (Schilder et al., 2003; Schumacher et al., 2005).

Providers choose to collaborate for many reasons. In general, collaborations allow for a maximization of resources, increased capacity to serve more children, and more opportunities to address issues of program quality (Clotheir, 2006; Schilder et al., 2003; Schulman & Blank, 2007; Schumacher et al., 2005). For community-based providers,

collaborations introduce new funding and resources through additional tuition revenue, consistent funding streams, and resources to support quality enhancement (Schumacher et al., 2005). The expansion of state prekindergarten has brought these issues to the fore and for many providers, as collaborations may provide additional stability in what is often a volatile market, especially at the prekindergarten level. Likewise, the continued expansion of state prekindergarten absent any collaboration with community-based programs could hold implications for these organizations. For example, child care programs largely depend on the tuition fees raised through the provision of services for preschool aged children to subsidize the more costly care required for infants and toddlers. Any significant loss of this market could hold potentially influence the overall stability of the center (Bassok et al., 2012). However, early research on this issue suggests that prekindergarten partnerships may actually strengthen the child care sector through increased enrollment in prekindergarten overall (GAO, 2004). An examination of the impact of universal prekindergarten provision on child care providers and the overall child care market in two states, Oklahoma and Georgia, indicates an increase in formal child care programs, rather than the decrease that many expected (Bassok et al., 2012). It is worth noting, however, that prekindergarten policies in both of these states explicitly included community-based programs as part of their overall implementation strategy.

Other studies reveal the potential for prekindergarten collaborations to support working families or families who could benefit from a continuum of care (Bassok et al., 2012; Clotheir, 2006; Wat & Gayl, 2009). Prekindergarten models that offer a range of program settings provide working families with additional flexibility and choices as part

of their prekindergarten selection process. School-based prekindergarten programs often offer limited hours of operation, ranging from part-day instruction, in which children are served at least 4 but fewer than 8 hours per day, to full-day instruction that lasts the entire school day. Fewer state programs operate an extended-day schedule that exceeds 8 or more hours per day or include both part-day and full-day options. Head Start program schedules vary by community and location, but close to half of enrolled children attend programs for less than a full day and fewer than five days a week (Schumacher et al., 2005). In communities in which public programs are limited to a half-day of instruction, prekindergarten partnerships often fill in the gaps with community-based programs that can provide full or extended hours of operation (Wat & Gayl, 2009). The availability of additional program options ensures that parents have the opportunity to choose a program that eliminates the need to enroll their child in two separate programs, transport their child from one program to the other during the day, or forego public prekindergarten programs altogether.

Increased options in program selection also allow for parents to choose settings in which they feel most welcome or that best meets their family's personal needs (Wat & Gayl, 2009). Similarly, the linking of newly created school-based programs with based in the community can aid in creating developmentally-appropriate and family friendly environments, as many community-based providers have a long history of serving young children and are familiar with their unique developmental and educational needs (Banks, 2004). Through partnership with existing high-quality programs, schools can minimize the need create an early childhood program from the ground up and help ensure that

prekindergarten students are served in age-appropriate settings (Schulman & Blank, 2007).

Prekindergarten collaboration may also influence organizational practice, as they include activities or resources intended to improve program quality. Many states have implemented prekindergarten collaboration policies that provide incentives to participating community-based programs, such as professional development opportunities or instructional materials. Community-based partner organizations are often required to maintain the same instructional and assessment standards of the school district. Some partnerships limit participation to ECE programs with a pre-existing focus on learning standards and assessments or an expected ability to meet criteria related to teaching, learning, and teacher qualifications (Schulman & Blank, 2007). In settings that may have previously lacked a structured program, participation in the state prekindergarten program may help orient them towards a more educational approach (Wat & Gayl, 2009).

Prekindergarten collaborations will often only occur within a few classrooms of a community-based program, but the positive benefits of this work will often extend into the rest of the center, including classrooms that serve infants and toddlers (Schulman & Blank, 2007). Evidence from programs in a number of states indicate that prekindergarten partnerships have raised the overall quality standards in partner centers by providing additional resources and guidance to improve instruction and learning. Supports range from increases in teacher pay, boosting the number of credentialed teachers in community-based settings, professional development and training, mentoring, and access

to family support services (Clotheir, 2006; Donovan, 2008; Barnett, 2013; Schmit, 2012; Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008).

Prekindergarten collaborations require normally autonomous organizations to coordinate and negotiate with one another (Schilder et al., 2003; Schumacher et al., 2005), as well as share responsibility for the common goal of promoting children's learning (Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006). Surveys of prekindergarten collaborations indicate a need for partners to establish clear leadership and roles (Dropkin, 2013), nurture open communication, allow room for negotiation, and maintain high levels of trust and respect (Clotheir, 2006; Wat & Gayl, 2009).

For many community-based programs, prekindergarten collaborations may place a strain on their organizational capacity as they deal with new administrative burdens related to center operations, enrollment, assessment, and teaching. These programs are often required to meet conflicting requirements related to eligibility enrollment guidelines, and program implementation and monitoring, all of which require significant administrative oversight. Furthermore, programs that rely on enrollment through prekindergarten partnerships may find enrollment planning challenging during times of uncertain funding levels or political support. For many programs, these challenges prove too difficult to continue collaborating (Schulman & Blank, 2007).

Finally, prekindergarten collaboration may hold implications for the distribution of high-quality teachers across the different ECE systems, particularly in those states where policies aim to help individuals move up the ECE career ladder. Some advocates fear that the highest quality teachers will be drawn away from classrooms serving

younger children and into the prekindergarten level, or reroute degreed teachers out of the childcare sector and into the public school system where they can receive better pay, benefits, and professional recognition (Ackerman & Barnett, 2009). Research on these issues is emerging, but is consistently cited by community-based programs as a potential concern of the ongoing expansion of public prekindergarten programs (Schulman & Blank, 2007; Schumacher et al., 2005).

PREKINDERGARTEN IN TEXAS

The public prekindergarten program in Texas is one of the largest in the nation, and is delivered in many communities through the use of prekindergarten collaborations (Barnett et al, 2012). The state's mix of school- and community-based ECE providers included a total of 8,300 licensed child care centers, 85 Head Start grantees, and 3,154 state prekindergarten programs during the 2010-2011 school year (Schexnayder, Juniper, & Schroeder, 2012). Public prekindergarten in Texas was first established in 1984 to provide half-day prekindergarten services to children who met one or more identified risk factors, including homelessness or unstable housing, eligibility for free- or reduced-priced lunch (FRPL), or limited English-proficiency. In 2007, these guidelines were expanded to allow provision for children whose parents are active military or injured or killed as part of their active duty, as well as any children involved with the foster care system. Under current law, school districts are required to offer voluntary, free, half-day prekindergarten services within districts where at least 15 eligible 4-year old children reside (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2013). A very limited number of school districts also offer the program to eligible 3-year olds. According to figures from the 2010-2011 school year, 224,335 students were enrolled in at least part-day services operated in 1,046

districts statewide. Approximately 96% of the children enrolled are considered to be low-income (Texas Early Care and Education Coalition [TECEC], 2011).

Efforts to promote prekindergarten collaboration in Texas began in 2003, when the 78th Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 76 (SB76). This bill created the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) (since renamed as Texas School Ready! [TSR!]), which is a prekindergarten collaboration model that links public prekindergarten, Head Start, and public and private child-care programs for the purposes of increasing access to prekindergarten and promoting the attainment of school readiness skills (TEA, 2009). TSR! partnerships are referred to as School Readiness Integration (SRI) partnerships and each community is responsible for developing and implementing a model of collaboration best suited for local needs. SRIs are built around instructional supports intended to help prekindergarten students become school ready and are encouraged to develop partnerships that allow for a range of collaboration, coordination, and program alignment, such as "streamlined enrollment procedures, strategies for the co-location and management of staff, and the development of common standards for the professional development of program staff" (TEC, nd). The TSR! initiative was later expanded in 2007 to serve additional communities and incorporate a school readiness accountability system.

In 2006, TEA amended the guidelines for the primary state funding source available to school districts interested in either establishing a new prekindergarten program or expanding an existing half-day program to a full-day schedule. These changes required grantees of the Prekindergarten Early Start Grant (PKES) (formerly known as the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant) to develop and implement prekindergarten collaborations as a condition for funding. Specifically, the guidelines required eligible school districts (those with low third-grade reading scores on state mandated standardized

tests) to leverage existing ECE programs in their community and to "consider the shared use of an existing Head Start or licensed child care program as a prekindergarten site prior to establishing a new prekindergarten program" (§29.153) (TECEC, 2011). The overall purpose of the grant was also broadened to support activities focused on school readiness, prekindergarten accountability, and the coordination of SRIs that may or may not operate as part of a TSR! program.

The PKES grant, in addition to state funding for TSR! participants, was the primary source of funding and support for prekindergarten collaboration in Texas. However, state budget issues in 2011 resulted in cuts of approximately $200 million for ECE and public prekindergarten programs. The PKES grant was removed entirely from the budget, leaving school districts without state support to provide the second half of a full day of prekindergarten. Many school districts opted to revert to half-day programming, thereby limiting the opportunities for school- and community-based providers to implement SRIs. Funding for the TSR! initiative was also decreased, which reduced the number of school districts that could potentially participate in the program. Some school districts have compensated for the state cuts by investing more local funds or creating new revenue streams specifically targeted for the provision of public pre- K in both school- and community-based settings (Cesar, 2013; Smith, 2011). In many communities, prekindergarten collaborations have continued to operate despite the lack of state funding to provide full-day programming or resources for collaboration partners.

The bulk of available evidence on the state's prekindergarten collaboration efforts largely consists of descriptive and evaluative reports related to the implementation of the TSR! initiative (Gasko & Guthrow, 2008, Texas Education Agency, 2007, Zajano et al., 2011). In a report on prekindergarten collaborations as part of the TSR! initiative, researchers concluded that partnerships could be strengthened and further explored and

suggest that additional efforts should be made to increase the sharing of resources and staff and better define the parameters of collaboration activities. The authors also cite the need for more research to be conducted in communities in which prekindergarten collaborations have been successfully implemented to help guide similar efforts throughout the state and to ensure their sustainability (Texas Education Agency, 2007; Zajano et al., 2011).

A review of collaboration models in Texas conducted by the Children's Learning Institute (2008) identified an 8-step process for communities interested in developing and sustaining prekindergarten partnerships. This guide serves as primary source of technical assistance for communities seeking help in implementing prekindergarten partnerships and also identifies the four primary partnership approaches used throughout the state. These models include:

- Stacked or Flip/Flop – model in which two programs are offered in one day to provide a full-day of instruction;
- Concurrent – model in which more than one program or service is offered simultaneously;
- Wraparound - model that includes more than one program to provide both core and supplemental services;
- Subcontracting – model in which one program subcontracts with another organization to deliver services (Gasko & Guthrow, 2008).

Case studies of local communities in which TSR! has been implemented provide a better understanding of why and how this reform is translated into local practice, (Brown & Gasko, 2012) and how it informs conceptualizations of school readiness among collaboration partners (Brown, 2013). These case studies reveal that both school- and community-based providers opted to participate in the prekindergarten collaborations

because of a mutual desire to successfully prepare their students for kindergarten. The partners welcomed the additional resources and training provided as part of the process, and noted an increased focus on program alignment and academic achievement. For some community-based partners, however, the shift towards a more academic orientation proved difficult as they struggled with a lack of capacity to implement this new approach or questioned the rationale behind changes (Brown & Gasko, 2012). Furthermore, implementation of TSR! was viewed as a means for the lead partner organization (i.e. school district) to promote its definition of school readiness to the collaborating external organizations.

SUMMARY

The body of literature presented in this chapter describes the major events in ECE policymaking that have contributed to the issues of access, fragmentation, and disparate levels of program quality that currently characterize the field. Research on the potential of public prekindergarten programs to improve children's academic outcomes (Camilli et al., 2010; Early et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2008) supports current policies to expand these efforts. However, existing levels of public investments in state prekindergarten programs fail to provide for the enrollment of all eligible children, and the majority of states have turned to alternate program delivery models that incorporate external organizations from the ECE field, including Head Start and private child care centers (Schumacher et al., 2005). Research on prekindergarten collaboration reveals these efforts to be helpful in shaping programs to be more flexible and comprehensive for the families they serve. Furthermore, collaboration efforts provide an opportunity for previously disconnected programs to share resources and align various aspects of their work. Additional research is needed to understand how the increasing intersection of the different ECE sectors will

reshape the field, and whether or not it will promote specific conceptualizations about the nature and goals of prekindergarten.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of organizations participating in a prekindergarten collaboration between a public prekindergarten program and two community-based prekindergarten programs. Specifically, the goals of this study are to explore the nature of prekindergarten collaboration and to understand how these relationships influence the policies and practices of participating organizations and the local ECE community. In an effort to meet these objectives, I conducted qualitative research that explores the experiences of one urban school district in Texas.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How are prekindergarten collaborations developed and implemented?
2. How do the prekindergarten collaborations influence organizational purpose and practice?
3. How do they contribute to early educational alignment in Lone Star?

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks and the methodological approach used in this study. Specifically, I outline the study design and describe the process of data collection and analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study uses theory from the fields of public administration and sociology as a tool for examining prekindergarten collaboration in LSISD. Sowa's (2008) framework of inter-agency collaboration is used to examine *how* prekindergarten collaboration unfolds at the local level. Concepts from new institutional theory related to organizational field formation and organizational behavior (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) is used to explain

why the organizations interact they way they do. The following sections introduce these concepts.

Framework of Interagency Collaboration

This study relies on Sowa's (2008) framework of interagency collaboration as a lens to better understand the nature LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration programs and their place in the ECE community of Lone Star. This conceptualization identifies three models of collaboration that reflect how organizations work together, the depth and nature of their relationships, and the extent to which these efforts are linked to the local policy context. It builds off earlier conceptualizations on inter-organizational relationships in the ECE literature (Kagan, 1991), and is derived from an analysis of 20 ECE collaborations between child care and state prekindergarten programs, Head Start and child care programs, and child care, state prekindergarten, and Head Start in two states. The purpose of the collaborations was to link services in order to provide full-day, full-year comprehensive ECE services. Sowa (2008) examined the collaborations along five dimensions that best capture the increasing depth of partnership: financial resources, non-financial resources (e.g, knowledge related to practice), sharing of teachers and staff, organizational rewards (e.g., additional staff, wraparound services) and community rewards (e.g, increased connections within the organization's professional context). From this analysis, three models of collaborations were devised: collaborative contracts, capacity-building collaborations, and community-building collaborations.

The collaborative contract model describes a relationship between two or more organizations that requires low levels of integration between the partners. The collaborations in Sowa's (2008) analysis that fit this model primarily shared financial resources to provide ECE services and the nature of their interaction was contractual. In

other words, the relationship between the organizations was static and did not evolve or improve over time. The recipients of the service benefit from this type of collaboration, but few additional rewards for the partnering organizations are attained.

The capacity-building collaboration model takes these relationships one step further. Services are still improved for the intended population, but the providers also receive additional, non-financial rewards through this work. These rewards contribute greater knowledge to the partnering organizations and are not simply transactional. They enhance organizational capacity that then influences the broader ECE community. Both financial and non-financial resources are shared, which expands the potential impact on the partner organizations.

The third model, community-building collaborations, are similar to capacity-building models in that organizations receive organizational level rewards in exchange for their partnerships. However, the relationships in this model also provide an opportunity for organizations to break through the "silos" that many organizations operate within, as well as create greater connections with their policy network. In Sowa's (2008) analysis, the collaborations that represented this model had greater opportunities to network with their peers in the field and strengthen their associations with one another. Through these associations, the organizations are then better able to situate their work within their community context and uncover potential opportunities for improvement with regards to their policies and practice.

This framework identifies key factors that influence the nature of inter-agency collaboration, and is used in this study to make sense of LSISD's prekindergarten collaborations, and more specifically the interactions and rewards that characterize this work. Sowa's distillation of the different variables at play in ECE service delivery collaborations is directly applicable to the Lone Star context. Understanding the depth of

collaboration between the different organizations and the types of rewards each partner receives is useful when anticipating the influence such an approach may have on each provider and the field of ECE at large. Furthermore, an examination of the collaboration model in depth can be used to inform efforts to scale-up these models.

New Institutional Theory

This study is also guided by concepts from new institutional theory, which derives from the field of sociology and provides a lens for understanding how organizations engage with and are influenced by their environment (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). According to new institutional theorists, institutions are the settings in which meaning is constructed through shared cognitive schemata and cultural scripts (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). These shared norms, scripts, and rituals form formal social structures (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), which are used by individuals to make sense of the world, and inform ideas of legitimate practice and organization (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). New institutional theory has been applied broadly across the social sciences, and particularly within the field of education. Analyses of the ECE context through the lens of institutional theory are emerging, and largely focused on the increasing intersection of ECE community-based organizations and the public school system (Casto & Sipple, 2011; McCabe & Sipple, 2011).

One of the key concepts from new institutional theory used in this study examines the interaction between organizations with similar functions and purpose. An *organizational field*, as defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), refers to "organizations that in the aggregate constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource product consumers, regulatory agencies and other organizations that produce similar products or services"(pp. 64-65). This definition extends traditional conceptions of industry by including organizations that are linked both horizontally (e.g., provide

similar services) and vertically (e.g., regulatory and support agencies) (Scott & Meyer, 1991).

New institutional analyses of organizational fields examine the interactions between practices, cultural norms, and exchanges across organizations (DiMaggio, 1983). Organizations are influenced by the broader field, as institutional environments are "characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy" (Scott, 1995; p.132). New institutional theorists consider educational organizations to be particularly influenced by these rules and norms, as they are highly institutionalized environments (Meyer et al., 1983).

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of isomorphism examines the degree to which the interaction within an organizational field influences the behavior of organizations. The authors contend that shared field interaction pushes organizations that are similar in nature to more closely resemble one another. Organizational conformance with these pressures increases the level of uniformity throughout an institutional environment. Homogeneity is achieved through three types of pressures: 1) coercive pressures (e.g., legal mandates) stemming from organizations they are dependent upon; 2) mimetic pressures to replicate successful practices during times of high uncertainty; and 3) normative pressures to adopt professional norms to legitimize the organization's practices. Isomorphism is dynamic, but heightens according to several factors at the organizational and field level, including an organization's dependence on and interaction with an organizational field, the clarity of organizational purpose, and a reliance on academic credentials in hiring practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

A new institutional analysis of prekindergarten allows for an examination of how these efforts have influenced the nature of interaction between collaboration members

and between collaborating organizations and the field of ECE. The expansion of state prekindergarten programs, the increased numbers of districts offering full-day services, and the new funding opportunities that emphasize school readiness and collaborative work have all served to redefine the ECE in Texas. The once disconnected systems of public schools, Head Start, and center-based child care are now linked through state policies that address their common technology (i.e., service) of teaching young children, specifically prekindergarten students.

New institutional analysis can also be used to understand how these relationships influence organizational behavior. The concept of isomorphism contends that increased interaction between organizations within a field will lead to homogeneity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Prekindergarten collaborations serve as a mechanism for increased contact between the three ECE sectors and the terms of partnership are generally dictated by the lead organization. In this study, LSISD is the lead partner and has identified common program elements required for collaboration participation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative Research Methodology

Given the descriptive nature of this study, I used qualitative research methods to explore the experience of prekindergarten collaboration in LSISD. Qualitative research methods provide a means for understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of others, as well as how they are used to construct meaning (Creswell, 2009). This approach allows for investigation of a social phenomenon with little interference to the natural settings that house the primary source of data. The researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection (Merriam, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Qualitative inquiry generally explores a particular phenomenon through fieldwork based at the site/s to be investigated, which allows the research to build a deeper understanding of the context in which the phenomenon occurred, and to respond and adapt throughout the study as needed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research methods are appropriate for this study because rich and descriptive data will best describe the process of collaboration and the experiences of collaboration participants within a specific context. Context is important in qualitative research as it sheds light on historical aspects of the phenomenon being studied that may influence study participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Case Study

The study makes use of case study methodology. This approach is used to describe a specific phenomenon (the case) through a careful analysis of related processes, people, and context, rather than specific outcomes or variables (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). This method produces a descriptive portrait of the phenomenon that may be enhanced by historical background information, direct quotes from related participants, and relevant documentation (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, case study inquiries rely on multiple sources of evidence and benefit from the use of theory to guide the research. They are often used to examine small group interactions and organizational changes (Yin, 2014). This study is a single-case, descriptive case study, as it seeks to describe prekindergarten collaboration in specific context in which it occurred: LSISD (Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) outlines three conditions to consider when choosing to conduct a case study: 1) the nature of the research question being posed; 2) the extent of control the researcher has on behavioral events, and 3) whether or not the study focuses on

contemporary events. Case studies address questions of *how* and *why*, consider issues of contemporary significance, and require no control over behavioral events. Therefore, case study methodology is appropriate for this study as it seeks to understand *how* prekindergarten collaboration is implemented at the local level, as well as *how* collaboration participants experience prekindergarten collaboration. This study also incorporates multiple perspectives and data sources to allow for the triangulation of findings, and is guided by the theoretical frameworks described in the previous section. The unit of analysis for this study is the school district.

Researcher Bias

In qualitative studies, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and interpretation. The roles require reflection on part of the researcher to avoid potential bias (Merriam, 2009). I previously worked within the field of ECE as an employee of a not-for-profit organization that provided funding and technical assistance to a variety of ECE programs. I hold personal views on the role of community-based programs in prekindergarten provision, the expansion of state prekindergarten, and on ECE teachers in general. I acknowledged these biases throughout the course of conducting this case study and considered their potential influence on my research (Merriam, 2009). The steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data through multiple data sources and self-reflection are presented in the next section and described throughout the chapter.

Trustworthiness of the Data

This study adheres to Yin's (2014) four tests of quality in case study research to establish trustworthiness of the data. The first test addresses *construct validity*, which refers to the researcher's ability to "develop an operational set of measures" (p. 46) and

collect data in a subjective manner. The second tests addresses *internal validity* which addresses the issue of a researcher drawing incorrect conclusions or inferences about the data. This is primarily an issue for exploratory case studies. The third test is one of *external validity*, that is, are the study's findings generalizable beyond the context of this study? The development of the case study's research questions is an important step in ensuring that analytic generalizations can be made. The final test is reliability, which focuses on the procedures used in the study. The goal is to minimize the amount of errors within the study and carefully document the procedures such that another researcher can replicate the study and arrive at the same conclusions.

PROCEDURES

Site Selection. This study was conducted in LSISD, a large school district located in an urban metropolitan area that serves over 80,000 students on approximately 140 campuses. Nearly three-quarters of LSISD's student body are economically disadvantaged and of the majority are of a racial/ethnic minority background (60.5 percent Hispanic and 24.5 percent African American). During the 2009-2010 school year, LSISD received an accountability rating of *Academically Acceptable* (TEA, 2011). LSISD operates a targeted prekindergarten, but will move towards a universal model in 2013. Figure 3.1 depicts LSISD's prekindergarten enrollment in recent years.

LSISD was chosen as the site for this study because it is considered a leader in prekindergarten collaboration in the state and has provided mentorship to other districts interested in implementing similar efforts. It is one of a handful of districts whose prekindergarten collaboration models have been shared in materials distributed by TEA. LSISD's collaborations have been highlighted as a potential template for other

communities interested in developing prekindergarten collaborations of their own (Gasko & Guthrow, 2008).

The district currently serves over 4000 prekindergarten students and operates prekindergarten collaborations with four community-based child care programs, seventeen school-based Head Start programs, and three community-based Head Start programs. LSISD first implemented prekindergarten partnerships with Head Start and community-based child care centers beginning in 1993 and 2003, respectively. The district was affected by the state budget cuts in 2011 that dismantled much of the available aid to provide full-day prekindergarten. However, the district has continued to operate a targeted, full-day program for four-year olds.

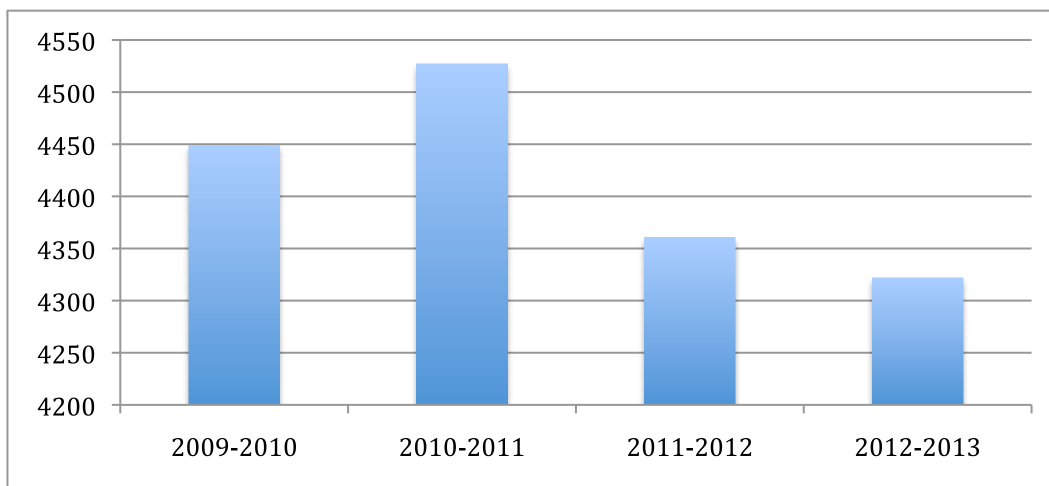

Figure 3.1. LSISD Prekindergarten Enrollment 2009-2011
Note. From*: Standard Reports, 2013*. Texas Education Agency.

Prekindergarten collaboration in LSISD is offered through two models. The first is the *Good Start* collaboration, in which LSISD and school-based Head Start programs share a prekindergarten certified, LSISD teacher. This teacher provides a half-day of cognitive instruction, focused largely on literacy. The other half of the day's instruction is

provided a Head Start teacher who focuses on cognitive, social, physical, and emotional growth (LSISD, nd).

The second collaboration occurs within LSISD's prekindergarten partner sites, which can be located in either child care centers or community-based Head Start programs. Similar to the Good Start collaboration, a LSISD certified teacher provides a half-day of cognitive instruction. A teacher employed by the community-based program supplements and extends instruction for the remainder of the day. There are currently six prekindergarten partner sites, four of which began in 2013. Approximately 260 students in 13 classrooms are served through this collaboration (LSISD, nd).

One Good Start collaboration and one prekindergarten partner site were selected for this case study at the recommendation of staff of the LSISD ECE department. Both sites have been in operation for a several years and are considered to be good examples of prekindergarten collaboration. The Good Start collaboration is located on the Wood Hollow Elementary campus, where 94 percent of the student population is economically disadvantaged. Approximately 43 percent of students are Hispanic and 28 percent are African American (TEA, 2011).

The prekindergarten partner site of focus in this study is Bluebonnet Child Care. This center is operated by a large not-for-profit organization that provides a variety of community services, including child care. Care is provided on a sliding-scale basis and a significant portion of their student population is economically disadvantaged and a number of students are residents of a local homeless shelter. The center is located within an inner-city neighborhood of Lone Star.

Sample Population

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), purposive samples are chosen to ensure a variety of subjects are included in the study. These subjects are selected "because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (p. 65). The individuals included in this study are directly involved with the administration and implementation of LSISD's prekindergarten collaborations or with the families served by the district. Snowball sampling was used to identify potential interviewees. This approach involves asking particular individuals within an organization to recommend potential participants who meet certain criteria for inclusion in the research study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Two interviews were conducted during the design phase of this study that helped me to identify the final sample for my research. The first interview was done with Betty Parish, an ECE Program Specialist with LSISD who provided me with basic information on the prekindergarten collaborations and the district's process for granting external research projects. Ms. Parish then referred me to the Director of ECE for LSISD, Dr. Maria Garza. I interviewed Dr. Garza after I was granted permission by LSISD to conduct my study, and she identified two potential collaboration sites and one additional contact within her department for my research.

The final sample population selected includes individuals that can provide insight as to how these policies operate on the ground. A total of seven interviews were conducted: two with prekindergarten collaboration administrators, four with prekindergarten teachers, and one with a community partner. The LSISD administrator included in this study referred me to an administrator with Child Care Project (CCP) (the organization that administers Head Start in Lone Star) and identified two potential prekindergarten partner sites for interviewing. One of these sites is included in this study. The CCP administrator later identified several potential Good Start sites, one of which

was ultimate chosen for this study. The community partner was first mentioned in one of my interviews with LSISD, and I initiated contact with her towards the end of my study to get her perspective on the district's community connections. I attempted to interview additional staff from CCP to gain a historical perspective on Head Start in the Lone Star community, but did not hear back from the individuals I contacted. I also requested an interview with the Director of Bluebonnet Child Care, but was ultimately unsuccessful.

As part of the data collection process, I completed the IRB review application process and secured approval from LSISD to conduct external research (Berg, 2009). Both were completed by April 2013. I piloted an early version of the interview protocol during my interviews with Dr. Garza and Ms. Parish, and used their responses to refine my questions. Finally, each participant was sent an invitation to participate via email (Appendix A), and all of the interviews were conducted in late-January and early-February 2014. One follow-up interview was conducted in early March 2014.

Data Collection

Interviews. Qualitative research relies heavily upon in-depth interviews as a source for data collection (Yin, 2013). Interviews with the prekindergarten collaboration members and a community partner were valuable for exploring activities that cannot be directly observed by the researcher (Merriam, 2009) and allowed the study participants' own voice and views to inform the study. Data for this study was gathered through individual, semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol (Appendix B). The interview protocol contains a pre-established list of questions to explore with the interviewee through "guided conversations" (Yin, 2013), though unscripted questions were asked to clarify or probe the participants' responses as needed (Merriam, 2009). The

protocol was informed by concepts drawn from the literature base reviewed in Chapter 2 and from the theoretical frameworks discussed at the start of this chapter.

Five of the interviews were done in person and generally lasted one hour in duration. These were conducted at the participants' place of employment. Two of the interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted no more than twenty minutes. One of the telephone interviews was followed up with email correspondence, and one in-person interview was followed up by telephone. Verbal consent was given at the start of each interview, which were then digitally recorded.

Documents. Documents add additional information to the study that might not be captured through the semi-structured interviews. They are often easily accessible and provide an unbiased look at the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Dr. Garza suggested that I examine a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between LSISD and a prekindergarten collaboration partner that outlines the terms of partnership between the organizations, as well as the state's prekindergarten guidelines. This review helped me to gain a preliminary understanding of the district's efforts. I also reviewed LSISD school board and town hall meeting minutes to learn more about the process leading up to the November 2013 bond vote related to the implementation of a universal prekindergarten program. Finally, I combed through annual reports for the not-for-profit organization that operates Bluebonnet Child Care to find data related to program quality and outcomes.

Field Notes. My notes and thoughts were written as field notes throughout my study. I used these to keep track of any connections I made between interviews and to help weave a coherent narrative and analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Case Study Database. In accordance with Yin's (2013) principles of data collection, I maintained a case study database in which all relevant data, documents, and materials pertaining to my study were organized. This included interview protocols,

transcripts, research authorizations, and records of correspondence with study participants. A chain of evidence was also developed in an effort to clearly link the study's conclusions, the evidence supporting them, and the research questions. In this study, the literature base and theoretical frameworks contributed to the development of the research questions, as well as the examination of the findings. Maintaining a chain of evidence in a case study allows the reader to follow the connection between the research questions explored and the conclusions drawn by the researcher as presented in the final case study report (Yin, 2013).

Data Analysis

Interview data was analyzed through a process of *open coding* in which the data is pulled apart and organized into concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Codes are labels used to assign meaning to the descriptive or inferential information gathered through research. Through this process, the different dimensions of the data are revealed, allowing for comparisons and contrasts to emerge that can be used to describe the phenomenon. These are woven together to create a "coherent explanatory story" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 197).

Coding was completed in several rounds. During the first round, descriptive codes that summarized the data and in vivo codes of direct text were created (Saldana, 2009). This initial process yielded 89 codes. I then completed subsequent rounds of coding in which the codes were refined and categories were related to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Emerging categories were compared with the theoretical frameworks guiding this study and coded accordingly. Specifically, I looked for categories that described organizational behavior and the process of collaboration. This method helped me to understand the nature of prekindergarten collaboration in LSISD and pull apart the

interactions between participating organizations. The use of the theoretical frameworks in this qualitative study provided a "guided approach to research" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 42). Ultimately, the themes that emerged through this analysis fit easily within the three research questions posed in this study, and my findings are organized as such in Chapter 5.

Prior to beginning the coding process, I transcribed the interviews and loaded them into the coding software ATLAS.ti. I then read through the transcripts, documents, and field notes in an attempt to establish my initial impressions of the data. After the data analysis was completed, I used two techniques, triangulation and member checking, to strengthen the validity of my conclusions. Triangulation is a method for confirming your findings through multiple sources of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study, I compared interview responses with relevant documents related to collaboration activities and LSISD's plans for universal prekindergarten. I also attempted to share the findings of this study with three of the study participants. Only one individual responded to my request and she confirmed that I accurately represented her comments. Confidentiality is maintained for the community-based organizations and teachers included in this study through the use of pseudonyms for the settings and interviewed staff. This was done in an effort to allow the collaborating partners to speak freely without repercussions. The data were securely stored.

Limitations

Limitations of my study concern the study sample and data collection process. First, I was unable to secure participation from several individuals who could provide important insight regarding the development of the prekindergarten collaborations or about the changes in the ECE field in Lone Star over time. Given that my research

questions focus on these issues, such perspectives would have improved the strength of my results. Related to this issue, four of the individuals included in this study were relatively new to their roles within the prekindergarten collaboration, having only begun within the last 1-2 years. Consequently, my findings lack a clear understanding of changes in policy and practice within the prekindergarten collaborations.

Finally, the two interviews conducted by telephone were significantly shorter than those conducted in person, which influenced the extent to which those individuals are represented in my findings and the diversity of the views that are presented.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of staff members engaged in prekindergarten collaborations among school- and community-based ECE programs. Recent policy efforts focused on expanding public prekindergarten have increased interest in this approach as a viable public prekindergarten delivery system and as a means to begin to address historical disparities between the different sectors. The review of the literature presented in Chapter 2 suggests that LSISD's prekindergarten collaborations present an opportunity for the partnering organizations to address issues of access, program quality, and educational alignment at the organization and district-levels. This case study used interview data collected from seven individuals involved in different aspects of the collaborations to understand these issues from their perspectives. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How are prekindergarten collaborations developed and implemented?
2. How do the prekindergarten collaborations influence organizational purpose and practice?
3. How do they contribute to early educational alignment in Lone Star?

This chapter presents the findings derived from seven semi-structured interviews with early childhood professionals either directly involved in or familiar with the school district's collaboration efforts. I begin with a brief introduction to the study participants, including descriptions of their professional positions and their roles in the collaboration. I then present the major findings that emerged from the interviews, organized by themes and in accordance with the research questions guiding this study. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the chapter and an overview of the analysis to be presented in Chapter 5.

Study Participants

This case study is informed by the perspectives of six early childhood professionals directly involved with LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration. Five of the individuals are staff members directly involved with the implementation of the collaboration. The sixth individual is the program manager of an employee of an early childhood program run by the City of Lone Star. A brief biographical summary of each participant, including a description of her role in the collaboration and professional background, is also provided.

Administrators

Two program administrators were included as part of this case study. The first was Lina Jones, who is the Early Childhood Education Coordinator for LSISD. She has served in this role for one year, but has been with the district for 22 years. Her duties focus on providing support to the district's prekindergarten teachers by coordinating the prekindergarten and kindergarten curriculum, managing teacher professional development, and overseeing prekindergarten collaborations in community-based settings, including child care programs and non-school based Head Start programs. She also oversees two curriculum specialists that provide mentoring and monitoring to teachers.

The second administrator interviewed for this study is Mary Booth, ISD Liaison for Child Care Project, which is the organization responsible for administering Head Start in Lone Star. In this role, Ms. Booth oversees the Head Start prekindergarten teachers that are placed on ISD campuses in multiple districts, including LSISD. She provides mentoring and monitoring to Good Start collaboration teachers.

Teachers

Four interviews were conducted with prekindergarten teachers, including two co-teachers from a Good Start program and two from a prekindergarten partner site. The prekindergarten partner teachers include Rachel Johnson, who is employed by LSISD and teaches in two community-based programs, including a Head Start center and Bluebonnet Child Care center. Ms. Johnson, who holds a BA, has been involved in the collaboration since 2008 and was placed at Bluebonnet at the start of the 2013-14 school year. Ms. Johnson's collaborating teacher, Sara Lewis, was also interviewed for this study. She is an employee of Bluebonnet Child Care and also joined the center in late 2013. She holds an associate's degree in Child Development.

Perspectives from two Good Start collaboration teachers also informed this study. The first teacher, Adele Rivers, is a degreed, Head Start prekindergarten teacher based at Wood Hollow Elementary School. She has been employed by Child Care Project for sixteen years and as a prekindergarten teacher for twelve years. Ms. Rivers' collaborating teacher, Linda Terrance, was also included in this case study. Ms. Terrance is a dual-language, degreed, prekindergarten teacher with LSISD. She entered into teaching through an alternative certification program four years ago.

Community Partner

Finally, Myra Song, Early Childhood Coordinator for the City of Lone Star's Early Years program, was also included as part of this case study. In her role with the city, Ms. Song manages a number of neighborhood resource centers throughout the city that are aimed at supporting families with young children through educational programming. Many of the children served through this program also attend public prekindergarten programs or will eventually enroll in LSISD. She is also actively involved in ongoing community efforts to strengthen the alignment of Lone Star's early education planning and programming. These activities are supported in part by a

technical assistance grant recently awarded to the City of Lone Star that Ms. Song coordinates.

Figure 4.1 depicts the study participants and their roles as part of the collaboration.

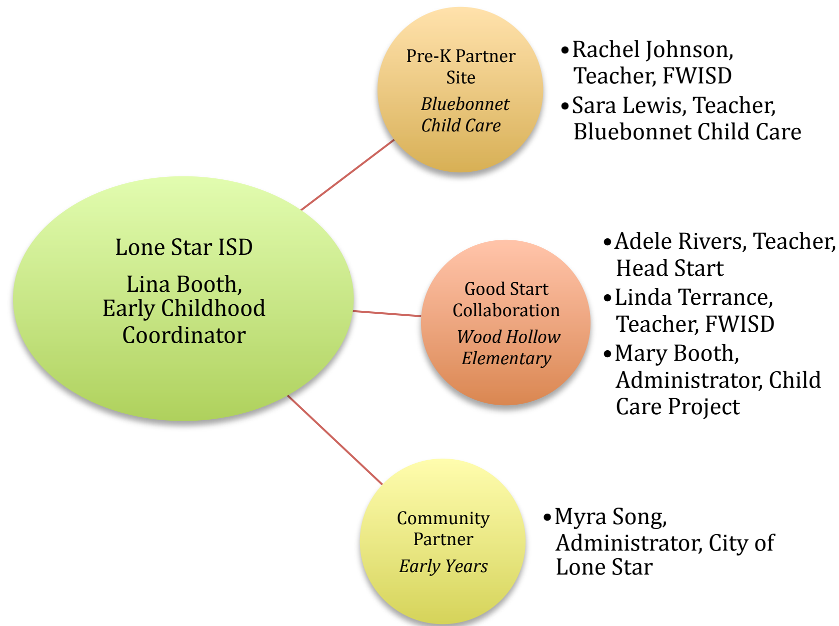

Figure 4.1. Study Participants

The perspectives informing this study indicated a general consensus on the goals and implementation of the prekindergarten collaborations. Increasing access to public prekindergarten programs and promoting the attainment of school readiness skills were reported to be the major drivers of this work, and exchanges between organizations were found to occur primarily at the classroom level and between partnering teachers. The Good Start collaboration members indicated higher levels of coordination between the partner organizations than in the prekindergarten partner collaboration. Additional key

differences between the collaborations related to parent engagement, program visibility, and program monitoring were reported. Finally, the role of the collaborations in supporting alignment at the community level was found to be minimal and it was unknown how they will be incorporated in the district's future universal prekindergarten model. The following discussion presents these findings in depth.

PREKINDERGARTEN COLLABORATION IN LSISD

This section presents the findings that inform the first research question of this study: *How are the prekindergarten collaborations developed and implemented?* As discussed in the previous chapter, LSISD has a long history of partnering with community-based collaborations to deliver public prekindergarten. Their efforts began in 1993, when LSISD and Child Care Project, the administrator of Head Start in Lone Star, first partnered together. Collaboration with child care centers were first initiated by the district in 2001 and then expanded through their participation in the TSR! initiative in 2003. The partners all cited similar goals and motivations for initiating collaboration with one another that continue to be reflected in their work today. The following section describes key aspects of the collaboration model and the overarching goals guiding this work.

Collaboration Models. The Good Start collaboration provides for a Head Start teacher to be located on a school campus and partnered with a prekindergarten certified teacher employed by the school district. The ISD teacher provides 3 1/2 hours of daily cognitive instruction and the remainder of the day is taught by the Head Start teacher, who is expected to address social, physical, cognitive and emotional growth. Their classrooms are located adjacent to one another, allowing for an easy transition for the

students who move from one classroom to another. The students served through this collaboration are co-enrolled in the Head Start and LSISD programs.

The district's second prekindergarten collaboration model, the prekindergarten partner program, focuses on learning in community-based child care and Head Start centers. Similar to the Good Start model, the prekindergarten partner collaboration includes a LSISD-certified teacher who provides instruction within the center for at least three hours a day. A child care teacher provides the remaining hours of instruction, which is expected to supplement the ISD teacher's work. In this model, the students remain in one location and it is the teachers who rotate classrooms. The students served in these community-based settings are co-enrolled in LSISD's prekindergarten program and the child care center.

Participation in both the Good Start and prekindergarten partner programs depends largely on the organizations' need to enroll additional students. According to Ms. Jones, the district is typically approached by child care centers interested in becoming a Satellite partner. She explained: "Generally, they initiate and suggest. This year we added three, and it was them coming to us. We added a YW[CA] and a YM[CA] and then Child Care Project. We added those, the Rosedale sites." Overall, there are seven prekindergarten partner programs.

Good Start collaboration sites are usually added upon the school's request and according to classroom availability throughout the district. Once a school-based partnership is established, CCP and LSISD share responsibilities for different aspects of the program. For instance, they each provide the curriculum for their respective classrooms, the school district provides the furniture, and CCP supplies many of the classroom materials. This joint approach was particularly useful at the start of the 2013-

14 school year when lack of funding due to the government shut down left many Head Start programs without the necessary monies to operate.

Children are enrolled in the Good Start collaboration during LSISD's "Prekindergarten Round-Up" event held during the spring semester. During the event, students are assessed for eligibility into either the Head Start or public prekindergarten program, as each maintains different eligibility guidelines. Students are then assigned to one accordingly. In contrast, enrollment in the prekindergarten partner program is managed by the collaborating community-based center. According to Ms. Johnson, the ISD teacher placed at Bluebonnet Child Care, all eligible four-year old children, as well as older three-year olds, are assigned to her classroom.

Collaboration Goals. The school district's collaborations with community-based prekindergarten programs have varied in scope and purpose in accordance with the resources available for these efforts. The study participants overwhelmingly agreed that the primary goal of the prekindergarten collaborations is to increase access to public prekindergarten programs in order to promote school readiness skills among four-year old children considered to be academically "at-risk". According to Ms. Jones, the collaborations allow the district to "serve more children, to have more community awareness, and [promote] school readiness and kindergarten readiness." She cited anecdotal evidence from LSISD kindergarten teachers who consider students that have participated in a public prekindergarten or Head Start program to be better prepared for the rigors of kindergarten than those that do not.

Members of both collaborations cited the advantages of locating prekindergarten programs outside of the schools and within the community, viewing it as a means to reach previously underserved families. Ms. Johnson stated:

> I think it's a great way to reach more kids that are at-risk, that we consider at-risk, that need that extra help, cognitively and socially, so they can be ready for kindergarten next year. It gives us a way to connect with the community. Instead of just being in schools, we can come out in the community and see different families and serve different families.

The administrators included as part of this case study also pointed to more specific benefits of the collaboration in support of this goal. For CCP, one of the initial advantages of partnering with the school district was to access teachers with bachelor's degrees. As Ms. Booth explained:

> With the collaboration, especially when it started, I think that's been many years, at that time it was not a requirement for a Head Start teacher to have a degree. So there was an advantage for us in that if we had a teacher in an ISD, then our children were getting at least a half a day with a degreed teacher.

She went on to add that the new Head Start rule requiring at least one degreed teacher in all classrooms by 2013 has altered their needs slightly. She considered the current benefits for the collaboration to center largely on their ability to maximize resources. She stated: "I see it as a winning situation for both of us because it prevents us from having to build buildings [to serve more children] and we have the extra piece of the ISD. For them, we are paying them salary that they don't have to pay."

Similarly, the collaboration provides Bluebonnet Child Care with their sole degreed teacher, Ms. Johnson, as well as a boost in enrollment. The extended hours provided by the child care allows for many families to participate in public prekindergarten who may not have done so otherwise because of their need for full-time care. Through this approach, the children are cared for in one setting throughout the day. However, the parents at Bluebonnet must pay for the care their children receive outside of the LSISD instruction, but the center charges for this service on a sliding-scale basis in accordance with family income.

LSISD was an early participant of the TSR! initiative. Through this program, the district was able to work with additional child care centers and focused on improving program quality in all of the partner settings, through the aid of mentors and professional development opportunities. As discussed in Chapter 2, state funding for the TSR! initiative was significantly reduced in 2011, and as a result LSISD is no longer a participant. The loss of funding and resources through this grant has caused the district to scale back the professional development component of the prekindergarten partner model, as Ms. Jones explained:

> The drawback of not having those grant funds is not having the mentors because we try to get out and mentor these teachers in our collaboration but district concerns, with our huge numbers, and writing curriculum, and those duties keep us from having this more one-on-one than we when we would like, especially when we have a new teacher in the program.

She went on to add that the school district does not hold specific quality standards as part of a condition to participate in the Prekindergarten partner program. LSISD does not ask for proof of quality accreditations from the centers nor do they monitor quality levels themselves. She admitted that this might be an area where the school district could improve communications and focus their efforts. The lack of program monitoring in the prekindergarten partner sites is also discussed in the following section. These issues were not reported to be present within the Good Start collaboration, as the Head Start model provides mentors to support quality instruction.

Comprehensive Services. All of the administrators and teachers cited the collaborations' value in connecting families with social services and resources. Both Head Start and Bluebonnet have a family advocate on staff that is responsible for linking parents with any necessary services they may need to address a variety of issues,

including health, nutrition, housing, among others. Head Start teachers also interact with parents regularly and serve as an additional resource to families.

INFLUENCE ON ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE AND PRACTICE

The goals outlined in the previous chapter are directly reflected in the implementation of the collaboration; however, the degree to which they are successful was reported to vary by location. Overall, the data gathered through this case study indicate that the collaborating organizations are primarily in agreement about the goals of their partnerships and the means to achieve them. There is considerable alignment in key aspects of teaching in each of the participating classrooms, primarily at the direction of the school district. The sum of the findings indicates a fairly "loose" approach to the implementation of the collaboration, particularly for the prekindergarten partner model, and it is unclear to what degree the collaborations are fully included as part of the prekindergarten delivery system. There is little awareness about the models outside of the participating organizations, including among the communities in which they serve. The following section presents the findings that address the second research question of this study: *How do the prekindergarten collaborations influence organizational purpose and practice?*

Focus on School Readiness. As mentioned in the previous section, the organizations included as part of this case study all share an overall focus on supporting school readiness. The teaching partners and administrators all believed that collaboration members shared similar definitions of school readiness that encompass multiple domains. Ms. Johnson explained how this common starting point made it easier for the school district to operate in child care settings. She stated, "I think a lot of day care nowadays are understanding how important early childhood education is in their program. Seeing

that these kids need to be ready, school ready." Her co-teacher, Ms. Lewis, agreed that school readiness was the primary focus of her work. Ms. Rivers and Ms. Terrance of Wood Hollow Elementary, echoed these views and cited the shared goal of school readiness as important in keeping their work focused.

Collectively, the case study participants considered LSISD to be the primary leader in the collaboration efforts, although the Head Start respondents indicated a certain level of autonomy in carrying out their work. Overall, the major components of the collaboration, including curricula, classroom management approach, and learning standards are dictated by LSISD. The degree to which the different programs are integrated with one another or that teachers collaborate varies by collaboration model. The following sections detail the various aspects of the collaboration efforts that were considered important by study participants.

Teacher Adaptation and Integration. There was agreement among all of the interviewees that a collaborating teacher needed to possess certain traits that would allow them to adapt and flourish in an unfamiliar environment. Ms. Jones explained that her department had developed a special agreement with the school district's Office of Human Resources that allowed them to play a more significant role in the selection of potential teachers for the prekindergarten collaborations. With an available pool of 800 possible candidates, the Department of ECE makes a concerted effort to select the right type of teacher for these arrangements, particularly for the prekindergarten partner program. Ms. Jones stated:

> I've heard Dr. Garza speak to the fact that a teacher who has been with the district for several years has had a hard time adjusting into the day care setting… maybe the fluidity that you have to have for daycare? You're not used to that because of the structured regime of the campus. That's one thing when hiring, we try to look for someone with lots of daycare experience.

Ms. Johnson echoed the need for flexibility and prior experience in community-based settings. She considered the environment at Bluebonnet Child Care as a likely challenge for most teachers due to the fact that all of the children, regardless of age, were being served in a single communal space. At different points throughout the day, some students will nap on one side of the room, while another group receives instruction on the opposite end. She explained that it had taken some time for her to adjust to the setting despite the fact that she had previously worked in a child care setting:

> I bet someone that's never been around this kind of environment would have a hard time. I mean, it's been working. For me, it's a noise thing and the whole concept of not having your own defined space. It's hard.

Ms. Johnson also spoke of the challenge of being on her own as the sole LSISD employee in the two community-based settings in which she teaches. She reflected that her status requires her to advocate for herself when disagreements arise between her and her co-teacher or the center director. Although she did feel that she could ask for assistance from the LSISD Department of Early Education staff if necessary, she reported that their help is not always timely, given their considerable workload of serving all prekindergarten teachers throughout the district. In general, Ms. Johnson considered the collaboration sites to be of low priority to the district, and believed her success in this work was due to her ability to be resourceful and self-reliant.

Ms. Johnson's feelings of invisibility could also be attributed, in part, to the lack of knowledge about the prekindergarten partner program throughout the district. She explained that she often has to confirm her status as a LSISD teacher to other district employees who are unaware of the program. This unfamiliarity with the model also extends to the feeder schools that serve the students enrolled in the collaboration. Ms. Johnson, Ms. Jones, and Ms. Song, with the City of Lone Star, all agreed that many

schools have no idea that a prekindergarten collaboration is occurring in their neighborhood. Ms. Jones conceded that the district might have work to do in promoting the program to the feeder schools and to other LSISD staff. A first step towards this goal was implemented recently through the establishment of joint meetings between prekindergarten partner and Good Start teachers for the purposes of information sharing and learning. Meetings are held at different sites, including elementary schools, to allow teachers to visit and learn from each other's classrooms. These efforts are recent, but both Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivers hoped that the increased interactions would help address bring the collaboration models to light and introduce them to other LSISD staff.

Both Ms. Rivers and Ms. Terrance cited the role of the principal in facilitating integration of the Head Start program onto LSISD campuses. In their experience, the leadership set the tone for how other staff responded to the program. This is particularly important as Head Start teachers may face challenges to collaboration even prior to setting foot into the classroom. Ms. Rivers spoke of the preconceived notions that she encountered from many LSISD teachers regarding her ability to teach and meet accountability standards. These views were based on confusion over Head Start teachers' teaching credentials, although Ms. Rivers thought this was changing. She explained:

> I think it's a little better now, because they know that Head Start teachers have to have degrees. We have to get them. I think that makes them a little more comfortable with accepting us, because when I first started we didn't. And they…it was a little difficult. And it still is, because just talking to some of them will say, "well, this Head Start teacher…we're accountable for this, we're accountable for that…" Not realizing that we're accountable too. I see our data, and say, "why did this kid drop?" I mean we are accountable. Most of us that's in the collaboration want the kids to be successful.

Ms. Rivers also spoke of the need for Head Start teachers to adapt to the LSISD culture by adopting a more professional appearance and conduct than they might be used

to as employees of the community-based centers. She said: “I don’t look any different than the other teachers. That’s where Head Start…that’s how we have to be. We can’t look any different. And that goes as far as dressing, speaking, just the way we carry ourselves. I think that’s really important.” She credited her ability to adapt as important to her overall success in fully integrating into the LSISD culture, and noted the fact that she has been voted into the role of grade level chair for two years in a row as confirmation of gaining the respect and trust of her peers.

Classroom Instruction and Structure. In general, the joint decision to follow the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines seemed to eliminate any real tensions between the organizations regarding instructional content and learning standards. In addition, all three collaborating organizations use the same curricula, including Frog Street and Conscious Discipline, per the direction of the school district. Ms. Jones considered this alignment to be a key component of the collaborations:

> What has helped kind of glue it together is the Frog Street Curriculum…that's our district adoption, so we're using that. So then, a lot of the day care centers are using it also, and we provide training in that. And with Frog Street comes Conscious Discipline, and so either they've had a little bit of taste of Conscious Discipline through Frog Street training or some of the centers on their own have had deeper Conscious Discipline training. So that's been a good tool to have.

It was unclear from the interviews, however, to what extent the curricula are actually aligned between the child care centers and LSISD, or if this alignment only occurs with the participating prekindergarten classroom within the center. For instance, when Ms. Johnson was asked if the toddler classes at Bluebonnet are also taught with Frog Street curriculum, she was unable to say so, citing her lack of coordination with that particular teacher. Ms. Jones also cited curriculum training in Conscious Discipline

offered by community partners to prekindergarten partner sites, but did not indicate whether the district had participated in planning or encouraging these efforts. Ms. Song recounted her experience of discovering that three organizations, LSISD, Head Start, and the local Camp Fire, were all using the same Conscious Discipline curriculum as her program, Early Education Matters, but that there had been no communication or coordination to do so. She remarked:

> But we only found out about it by accident. That kind of thing needs to be intentional, because how much more powerful for the child to experience it at home, at Early Years, and at prekindergarten and at every place that they go, and into the school. They would be so familiar with these approaches, plus they work!

LSISD shares their primary instructional planning materials, the prekindergarten scope and sequence (the outline of learning standards and teaching order) and curriculum framework, with collaborating partners. However, only Good Start partners have been given online access to these materials. LSISD requests that the school district teachers placed in child care centers share these materials with their collaborating teacher, but Ms. Jones was unable to say how this sharing actually occurs and to what degree it translates into shared planning. Ms. Johnson reported sharing these materials with her co-teacher and using them to guide their work. She stated: "Because I want them to be on the same point. I mean, I don't use it as an option. This is what we're doing." Her co-teacher, Ms. Lewis, agreed that Ms. Johnson typically takes the lead in their planning efforts and noted her appreciation for the help.

In the prekindergarten partner sites, the ISD teacher is responsible for literacy instruction, while the collaborating child care teacher handles math and science instruction. The Good Start collaboration divides instructional responsibilities in a

similar manner, although Ms. Booth noted that the majority of teaching is "integrated." Ms. Rivers described their approach at Wood Hollow Elementary:

> Yes, I teach math and Ms. Terrance teach (sic) Language Arts and Spanish. So she's part of the dual-language program. Yeah, we do. We do flip flop. Like I said, I teach math all day. So I plan to where I can integrate the literacy part also. So a lot of times instead of them getting it once a day, they get it twice a day. And Ms. Terrance does the same thing with math in her room. If she's talking about letters, she might say "How many letters are in your name? Name the letter." And we do that, so that's how we plan.

The prekindergarten partner teachers noted the lack of time for them to jointly plan with one another. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Ms. Johnson teaches at two different centers. In order for her to plan with Ms. Lewis, Ms. Johnson must find time to do so during her lunch time or make arrangements to meet her at the end of her workday, around 6 pm, long after Ms. Johnson has gone home. The teachers reported planning at least one week in advance. In contrast, planning time is built into the daily schedule for Good Start collaboration members and is done at least two weeks in advance.

Several of the interviewees noted the school district's recent focus on social and emotional development and all of the teachers mentioned the role of social development in supporting cognitive development. This expanded view of children's learning is representative of the Head Start approach, and interviewees from the organization reported only minor disagreements with their school district counterparts related to the amount of time or focus given to the different domains. Ms. Booth described one such instance:

> I know a teacher, she was new, and she said, "You know, they've been counting a 100 every day and they're doing these bundles of 1, 10, and 100. They're doing place values with the calendar." And I said "No, that's interesting you're saying that, but no…you have permission not to do any of that." Can you imagine? Place value? And it takes a long time to count to a hundred. Think about it. How many stories could they have heard and what other things could they have done in the

> time it took you to do that? And when they can't do this [counts to three on her fingers] and come up with the right number? How are we spending our time?

Ms. Booth also stressed the importance that Head Start places on play in learning and how that may contrast with the school district's approach. She explained: "Our expectations are that, well, Head Start does not want prekindergarten to be a dress rehearsal for kinder. It is its own entity. It is it's own year. We do believe in learning through play and manipulating objects, and not worksheets. So there's maybe a little difference in philosophy there."

Classroom structure was also reported to be uniform across the settings. Each of the collaborating partners were trained in the Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) Preschool Early Language and Literacy Training model and subsequently adopted it for use in their program. Ms. Rivers recalled the early days of the school district's adoption of the CIRCLE model:

> I remember when I first started, the ISD teachers did not have to do centers. Then they started doing the CIRCLE model where they had to do the different centers and set up the room a certain way. I had experience in it because that's what we did at Head Start. We did centers and we called it CIRCLE. It might have been called something else but the model was just like CIRCLE. I had that experience. They would come and say, "How do we integrate this?"

Ms. Johnson reported that Bluebonnet Child Care had adopted the CIRCLE model prior to her arrival, which allowed her to more easily transition into her role. Ms. Lewis joined Bluebonnet a few months later, and the center director has instructed her to continue the routine that Ms. Johnson had already established. Neither teacher reported any issues with this arrangement.

Assessment, Data Sharing, and Accountability. The collaboration partners revealed similar alignment with regards to assessment, as community-based partners are

expected to follow the same assessment policies used in non-collaboration classrooms. Ms. Booth noted a small difference between the Head Start and LSISD assessment process:

> We assess the children three times a year. It's using C-PALLS [Circle Phonological Awareness Language and Literacy Screener]. Different vendors have the same test. MCLASS or Wireless Generation has CPALS on their instrument. We use that within our Head Start centers and our satellites. But LSISD uses Tango, so wherever they are involved, we are using Tango. It's the same test, exactly the same test from the UT-Health Science Centers…same test but on different providers. We assess those needs and then we plan our instruction, both whole-group and small group, based on the findings from those assessments. And observations, they take anecdotal notes and what they see their children doing.

The majority of the teachers interviewed reported receiving no formal feedback related to their students' performance once they entered kindergarten. Ms. Jones noted the district's limits on data sharing, but explained that the district's online data dashboard will soon be equipped to capture information regarding a student's experience prior to enrolling in kindergarten (e.g., Head Start, child care, etc.), thereby making it easier for the district to provide that information to collaboration partners. She added that they do share some data through other community collaborations, but that those efforts are limited and initiated by outside organizations. Ms. Song shared her own experience of accessing data regarding student performance for those children who participate in the Early Years program. She explained:

> And we, the Early Years program, just got our very first report. In all these 8 years that we've been operating, we've been trying to get reports about how our kids do when they get to kindergarten. And we just got our first one like a month ago. It was a huge. I was so excited!

Ms. Booth also expressed her desire for this feedback, but seemed unfamiliar with the data sharing agreements between LSISD and Head Start. Ms. Rivers reported

receiving positive feedback about her student's performance, but did not make clear whether the information she was referring to originated from Head Start or LSISD.

The current accountability climate in education policy was mentioned several times through the course of the interviews. Both the administrators and the teachers noted the changing nature of early childhood education in the face of increased accountability standards at the K-12 level. Overall, the responses indicated an acceptance of this policy, as illustrated by Ms. Johnson who stated "Kindergarten is like a first grade now, so you want those kids to have those skills so they can be ready to follow expectations in the classroom." Ms. Booth was the sole interviewee to offer a counter perspective on the issue:

> …I'm a former public school teacher. I think accountability is very, very important. But what you test sometimes drives your instruction, and so we get the teaching to the test, which isn't always good. I don't know. My feeling is there is way too much testing. There is too much of the school year spent on getting ready for tests and then actually taking tests. I know even our test takes a bit of time out of the instructional day because there are many parts to it and I think we could do with less…It needs to be very holistic, it needs to be designed, instruction designed to fit the particular classroom of children that you have and you do need assessments but I guess what I worry about, what I'm trying to say, in some cases, you get into teaching items…this one item, particular item, instead of holistically.

Collaboration Workload & Turnover. All of the administrators and teachers with both LSISD and Head Start spoke of the increased workload associated with participation in the prekindergarten collaborations. The collaboration model of switching students for half a day results in each teacher serving approximately 40 students each day, rather than the 20 students they would teach in a traditional classroom. For Head Start teachers, the extra students also translate into 40 parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and portfolios. LSISD teachers must also maintain portfolios and report cards for the same number of students. When asked how she manages to fit in all of the required

parent contact into her schedule, Ms. Rivers responded: “I schedule it during my vacation time. During Christmas and Spring Break.” Her partner, Ms. Terrance, considered their partnership fairly equal, but felt that she was responsible for more instruction, while Ms. Rivers handles more paperwork.

Ms. Jones was able to recall a number of comments from LSISD collaboration teachers who felt they should be paid additional wages for the increased workload. The Good Start interviewees expressed similar views and cited the fact that Head Start teachers are paid less than their ISD counterparts despite their shared educational levels and workload expectations, as well as their additional work with the parents of their students. This disparity has contributed to increased issues in retaining Head Start teachers, as described by Ms. Booth:

> I wish we could pay them what the ISD…To me, that's a little bit difficult. You're in a school and you're doing everything. You're in the school, and doing the same thing that this teacher is doing next door. You know you're switching children. If you were working in a Head Start center you would have 20, but now you have 40. But your pay is not equal to that of the ISD teacher. So, that's my dream is that Head Start will bring those salaries up…The hard part of my job this year is staffing, because if you don't pay them and they get a better opportunity. I mean I feel like that's part of, our whole goal is lifting people up, lifting families up, lifting children up, so I'm lifting teachers up too. To go on to something that pays better for their family. I don't like the turnover, and I don't particularly like it mid-year. It's not good for the children…the [lack of] continuity.

Ms. Jones agreed that these issues are a challenge to the success of the Good Start collaboration and added that the placement of the Head Start on school campuses has made it relatively easy for them to learn about and take advantage of open teacher positions with the school district. She did not think this was as much of an issue in the prekindergarten partner centers. There are no current plans to address the wage disparities between Head Start and LSISD teachers in the collaboration, but Ms. Rivers

provided some insight into as to what might entice a Head Start teacher to remain in the collaboration:

> I'm just one of the few that have been with HS for 16 years. I do have my degree. I just choose not to leave Head Start. That's a personal thing. I have considered it, but I really like what I do. I like the fact that from year to year, I know where I'm gonna be. I'm gonna be in prekindergarten. I'm not gonna be in fourth grade. I'm not gonna be moving around. I like that. A lot of our Head Start teachers do leave and go to LSISD, or any ISD.

The interviewees involved with the prekindergarten partner program did not identify teacher turnover or issues of teacher continuity as major challenges to their work, but Ms. Johnson and Ms. Lewis are both relatively new to Bluebonnet, having only arrived within the last year. Ms. Johnson reported having a longer partnership with her second co-teacher at the community-based Head Start. She also pointed out that one of the advantages to working in a community-based setting is that the children often get to experience greater continuity through their toddler and preschool years, as Bluebonnet serves both age ranges but most LSISD prekindergarten sites are limited to four-year old programs. While the children at Bluebonnet may not have the same teacher throughout all the years they are enrolled, they will still experience the same environment and interact with many of the same staff members over time.

Connecting with Families. The two collaboration models each offer unique benefits to the participating families. It is unclear, at least with the Prekindergarten partner program, to what extent parents self-select into the program. When asked if collaboration parents are familiar with the program, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Jones, and Ms. Song expressed doubt that all of the parents were aware of it prior to, and sometimes during, their child's enrollment in Bluebonnet Child Care. This lack of understanding may be due in part to LSISD's lack of intentional parent outreach efforts. Ms. Jones recalled seeing signage at one of the collaborating center's "Family Fun Nights" that

touted their partnership with LSISD and wondered why the district has not been more aggressive in promoting these partnerships to parents. She stated:

> You know, just this year I've been noticing that [the signs] and thought "well, I wonder why we don't have that at all of them?" Why haven't we publicized more? I wonder if the parent doesn't go to the center first because of location and then "Oh, you're with Lone Star [ISD]? Oh, you have a certified teacher here? That's nice." I don't know that it draws them.

Ms. Johnson also recounted past experiences in which some parents seemed surprised to find out that their child was enrolled in LSISD's prekindergarten program, despite having completed district paperwork at the start of the year. She expressed doubt that all the parents were uninformed, however, and thought that at least some were attempting to feign ignorance as an excuse for not meeting LSISD policies regarding daily attendance. According to Ms. Johnson: "You still have those parents, even after explaining that they are in this program, they'll still act like they don't know." She reported using these instances as an opportunity to remind parents of the structure of the public school awaiting them the following year and encourages them to adopt a routine during prekindergarten to prepare for the transition. Ms. Booth also acknowledged the challenge that her schedule poses to regularly connecting with families, particularly at Bluebonnet where she teachers from 11:30 am to 2:00 pm and misses the parts of the day she would mostly likely be able to connect with them: drop-off and pick-up.

Communication and connections made with families through the Good Start program were reported to be more frequent and meaningful than those made through the prekindergarten partner sites. This finding is expected, given that Head Start requires a certain level of family participation as a condition of enrollment, and provides a range of family-support services. Nearly all of the respondents mentioned the value of Head

Start's family services and cited them as a missing component from LSISD. Ms. Booth explained:

> I love what Head Start does because we really focus on the family. You know if there's a need, if we can help them get in school, get a job…if we can refer them to some agency that can help them. The children need glasses or clothing…we really try to be there for the families. Maybe it's almost like having a social worker, I know some of the LSISD schools love having us because of our family services advocate (FSA) that's attached to each of our schools. She can help where there are great needs.

Ms. Rivers and Ms. Terrance also reported developing a close rapport with parents through various Head Start engagement activities, including volunteering in the classroom, home visits, and parent-teacher conferences. Over the years, these interactions have developed a positive reputation for the Good Start collaboration, to the extent that parents have begun requesting their children be placed within the Good Start collaboration. Ms. Rivers explained:

> They are more comfortable coming to me than going to the school counselor. They come to me for food, rent. They just feel more comfortable. When we go on home visits, we let them know, it's confidential. And they feel better in the home visit because when they're here [at school], they're gone. In a home visit, we sit down and they're able to tell us. And then I come back, email our FSA, and then she gets to them.

Ms. Terrance reported a similar familiarity with the parents despite her status as a LSISD teacher and the fact that she has fewer opportunities to meet and work with parents. She explained that her position as a dual-language teacher has helped facilitate communication between many Spanish-speaking parents and Ms. Rivers, who does not speak Spanish. The two teachers also reported meeting with one another prior to Ms. Rivers' home visits and parent-teacher conferences in order to share information and concerns. This approach has ensured that parents receive coordinated feedback from the teachers.

The Good Start teachers also described how inviting parents to volunteer within the Head Start classroom has helped motivate some to pursue their own goals of becoming a teacher. Ms. Rivers stated: “A lot of these parents see us in the classroom, see what we do and say, ‘Oh, I want to be a Head Start teacher.’” By requiring parents to participate in their child’s education, the program may also help create concrete connections to the parent’s own aspirations by providing them with the experience of working in a school setting.

Ms. Johnson also reported helping parents connect to resources for their children provided by LSISD, including speech or behavioral therapy. She explained that securing these services early on for her students is important to setting them up for success at the new campus for kindergarten. She hoped that by doing so, she would help them avoid getting “pushed out” by the school district. Bluebonnet also has a family services advocate on staff who provides support and resources to enrolled students.

The Good Start collaboration members also spoke of the value of a school-based Head Start program in helping transition students from prekindergarten to kindergarten. Ms. Booth detailed the activities that help students become comfortable in the public school environment:

> It is easier when they actually go to school in the building because the child learns to eat in the cafeteria, they know what it’s like to carry a tray. You know, we do that in many of our Head Starts toward the end of the year. We want family style dining in the beginning. Toward the end of the year if they're going to kindergarten, we give them trays and they begin to learn what it's like to carry a tray and put a tray down and so on. They get that in the school, they know what it’s like to go in a hallway and what a library is and what it's for. They do go into the library, outside recess time, going to the gym… knowing about a school nurse and where the office is. So the transition is probably much, much easier for a child who's attended a collaboration classroom.

CONTRIBUTION TO ALIGNMENT IN EARLY EDUCATION

As described in Chapter 2, alignment in early education aims to address the lack of alignment among public school systems, Head Start, and private child care that pose challenges to program access and the provision of consistent, high-quality learning environments across the various ECE sectors. Key elements of educational alignment include aspects of educational planning and delivery (e.g., common goals and standards, coordinated resource allocation, shared curricula, assessments, and teaching practices) that facilitate improved rates of school readiness skills attainment and successful transition into the public school system among young children. Overall, the findings described in the previous section indicate certain levels alignment between collaboration partners, particularly with regards to programs goals, curriculum, standards, and assessment. This section details the findings that surfaced from the interviews that relate to the study's third question: *how do the prekindergarten collaborations contribute to increased alignment within the field of ECE?* Participant responses' indicate that prekindergarten collaborations play a very limited role in supporting early educational alignment throughout Lone Star, and, at present, are largely absent from the school district's future plans to expand public prekindergarten.

Scope and Community Awareness. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the prekindergarten collaborations are relatively unknown outside of the participating organizations and campuses. In the case of the prekindergarten partner program, the collaboration was even reported to be unfamiliar to some the families of children enrolled in collaborating centers or to other Bluebonnet program staff. Both the prekindergarten partner teachers indicated little to no coordination with either the elementary schools that will receive their students in the future or with the other teachers in their center. In contrast, the Good Start participants considered the collaboration to be well integrated as

part of the Wood Hollow community, and highly visible among teachers, staff, and parents. Beyond the targeted collaboration campuses and community-based centers, however, these efforts are not intentionally coordinated with other early childhood organizations or focused on more global issues such as program quality improvement. The Good Start collaboration also has a wider reach, as it is based on approximately 17 campuses. The prekindergarten partner program is only at 7 community-based Head Start and child care centers. Prior to the 2013-14 school year, it was based at only three locations. The Good Start collaboration has remained steady over the last several years, but only two community-based Head Start programs are a part of the prekindergarten partner programs.

Another factor that limits the influence of the district's collaboration efforts is the gradual narrowing of the their focus to primarily help facilitate increased enrollment in LSISD's public prekindergarten program. The absence of state funding for collaboration activities has led the district to operate the two collaboration models as distinct initiatives that lack a strong professional development component. This approach has resulted in a need for more overall coordination that would help facilitate stronger relationships between collaboration partners and ongoing program improvement. As mentioned earlier, mentoring and monitoring are important aspects of the Good Start collaboration, but not necessarily of the prekindergarten partner collaboration. Ms. Song argued that LSISD's collaboration efforts do represent "true" collaboration. She contrasted her past experiences working in the state of New York to explain:

> [It] was a program, a community-based program, with prekindergarten, Head Start, and child care, subsidized child care. All in one setting. So they had all the money, combined into one program. You walked into a classroom and you had no idea which kids were Head Start kids or which kids were prekindergarten kids. They just made it work. All the same staffing requirements, all the same barriers that we still have to collaboration. But they just made it work. To me, that's

> collaboration…So, all these other models that are raised up as wonderful examples, to me, are for some other need. It's not really about seamlessness for families or communities, or children even. It's for how to we get to count these kids and get that funding.

She further described the lack of "seamlessness" for families in her discussion about parent engagement and the school district. The study participants' insights regarding the parents' lack of familiarity with the Prekindergarten partner program, or with the public prekindergarten program in general, rang true to Ms. Song, who oversees a community program focused on supporting families with young children. She relayed an overall feeling of disconnection and distrust towards the school district among many of the families she serves. Ms. Song stated:

> When we send our families off from our project to the elementary schools, some of them are welcomed with open arms and some of them meet just all kind of exclusionary practices. I would like to think that it's a priority of the schools to take down those barriers but I don't really see that.

LSISD's academic performance and reputation among parents was also cited as a barrier to parent engagement with the school district. Ms. Song acknowledged LSISD's recent success in raising accountability ratings at several struggling schools, but noted that it still has some work to do before many parents will look forward to enrolling their children in the school district. She described the recent accomplishments of local charter schools in recruiting more parents to their programs due to their persistent outreach efforts and ongoing community engagement. She stated:

> The growth of charter schools is really having an impact. Yes, because the school district has a bad reputation and because the charter schools did a lot of marketing…a lot of marketing. And some of our families have actually pulled their children out of those schools and put them back in public schools because they were unhappy. But for the most part they are sticking with it. There is one of the charter schools that has been disappointing to the families. In fact, we've also seen the reverse happening. We've seen a couple of people pull their children out of public school prekindergarten and move them to the charter school. They're hearing from their friends that it's a good program.

Despite concerns related to parent engagement and community outreach, several of the study participants noted the school district's overall strong commitment to prekindergarten and early childhood education in general. This support is considered to come from all levels of the organization, including the district leadership, and is evidenced by the recent decision to implement a universal prekindergarten program to serve all four-year olds. The following section describes the preliminary plans and questions related to this recent effort.

Universal Prekindergarten in Lone Star. In late 2013, a measure to expand LSISD's prekindergarten to provide universal access was one of three propositions included as part of a school district bond election. The nearly half-billion dollar bond was easily passed, and an estimated $24 million in new revenue will be used for the construction of 82 new prekindergarten classrooms at 15 LSISD campuses. Nearly every elementary school within the district will have a prekindergarten program as a result. The additional capacity will allow the district to expand prekindergarten enrollment from the current 4,000 to 7,000, beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. The district anticipates a need to hire 175 additional early childhood certified teachers to staff the additional classrooms (Smith, 2013).

Ms. Jones stated that the roll out of the district's universal program would be gradual. Beginning in 2014, enrollment will be expanded on approximately 22 campuses with the existing physical capacity to take in additional students. Enrollment priority will be given to those students who are eligible for state-sponsored prekindergarten. Any remaining space will be given to other families on the wait-list who do not meet state eligibility guidelines. Construction on the new facilities will begin in 2014 as well. Ms. Jones admitted that the district does not know how the public will receive the program. She acknowledged the likelihood of push back from families who voted for the measure

but will not be given a spot in the program right away due to a lack of space. She also noted the potential barriers to enrollment for families who are unable to participate in a program that ends at 2 pm.

Several of the study participants mentioned the likely impact that universal prekindergarten will have on community-based programs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the expansion of public prekindergarten is often feared to potentially impact community-based prekindergarten programs by recruiting away 4 year olds. The revenue generated through serving this population is considered to be crucial to the viability for many of these programs. When asked how the prekindergarten collaborations will be incorporated into the universal model, Ms. Jones was unable to provide specifics. She explained that the district would like to continue the programs, but there are currently no firm plans that would indicate how they would be integrated. She acknowledged concern from the community-based programs and described the district's position at this time:

> We're trying to see how that will affect the day cares and Head Start. They are worried that it will take away from…children away from their sites. We have no cap and this year when we added three, our chief academic officer said, "Ok, I think we can give you so many more slots." I think we opened…he said 8. So we did 3 regular prekindergartens on campus and then the others went to satellite centers. Then someone went somewhere else...But that way, Dr. Garza kind of spread the wealth…Dr. Garza has said we have no plans to change: "You might want to look at your numbers, here are the schools that next year will have an additional prekindergarten. So, uh, in your planning you need to know that JK Stephens will have an extra four-year old class." But, you know as a parent that I think, well, they are still going to need day care, afterschool care. And only one of our schools offers after school care to four year olds. It will be interesting to see how the public responds, if they will keep them in a place where they can go from 6-6.

Ms. Booth agreed that the district's plans to expand their prekindergarten program have potential implications for Head Start's enrollment. She was not included in the planning process leading up to the bond election and remains unclear of the district's

plans for the Good Start collaboration. She expressed her belief that the collaborations will remain largely intact, but acknowledged her uncertainty:

> Well, we did talk about the fact that it could affect, not all of our schools, because we're already serving the population in some areas. But it might in some areas of Lone Star, if they built a Prekindergarten/Kinder building and that would pull out a lot of four year olds, that might mean we couldn't fill our classrooms. We'd have to find enough three-year olds. Which might not be that easy to do. I don't know how that'll all shake out, to be honest. We'll have to see. You would think that would have a lot of effect on child care centers as well.

Ms. Song agreed with this assessment, and recalled a discussion she had with a LSISD official in which they agreed it was likely that community-based programs will eventually be included as part of the universal program in order for the district to meet demand. Ms. Song doubted the feasibility of this approach, however, due to the considerable difficulty in finding enough child care centers with the capacity to deliver high-quality prekindergarten. She explained: "One of the challenges that I see in Texas of doing really successful collaboration is that our community-based child care programs are so bad. The quality is just so low that to get people up to a level where they could collaborate effectively takes a lot of work and a lot of resources."

The study participants from the community-based programs described the move by LSISD to a universal prekindergarten model as somewhat unexpected, given that the community was not significantly involved in the planning or development process of the proposal. LSISD did, however, hold an extensive series of town hall meetings during the months leading up to the bond vote. During the meetings, a district representative answered questions regarding the proposal and noted feedback from community members. It remains to be seen how the district will proceed with the implementation of this policy, and whether or not it will be used as an opportunity to further the goals currently guiding the prekindergarten collaborations. The next section contextualizes

universal prekindergarten within the community-level efforts that focus on strengthening connections in early education policies, programming, and funding.

Community Planning Efforts. Lone Star is one of six cities throughout the U.S. recently awarded a grant to support planning efforts related to early educational alignment. Through this grant, a national non-profit organization will provide technical assistance to the selected communities for "alignment efforts on behalf of young children from birth to age eight that go well beyond the classroom to include strengthening connections within their communities and linking families to a broad range of supports and opportunities that help them thrive" (NLC, 2013, p. 1). Ms. Song explained that the grant would be used to further similar work that was first initiated in 2003. She is part of the city leadership that will guide this work moving forward.

The NLC published a list of what it considers to be the ten most important elements of an aligned educational system. These include:

- Formal partnerships or governance structures;
- Access to quality early education;
- School quality and organization;
- Communication and data sharing;
- Qualified teachers and administrators;
- Alignment of standards, curricula, teaching practices and assessments;
- Parent engagement and family supports;
- Programs to facilitate smooth transitions to school;
- Public awareness of the importance of early education; and
- Creative funding strategies (NLC, 2013, p. 2).

According to Ms. Song, the Lone Star community has identified three elements from this list to address, including data sharing, professional development, and family

engagement. The school district was reported to be a partner in these efforts and supportive of the overall goals. The project is still in the early phases, but Ms. Song was hopeful that the NLC project and the district's universal prekindergarten program would be linked in a meaningful way that will strengthen the reach and impact of both efforts.

SUMMARY

Overall, collaboration members agreed that participation in either the Good Start or prekindergarten partner programs brought about mutual-benefits for both the community-based organizations and the school district. By leveraging each other's resources, including facilities, staff, and support services, the partners are able to serve additional children, support early learning, and engage parents. Other potential collaboration goals cited as part of the literature review in Chapter 2, such as program quality improvement or a more comprehensive blending of funds and services, were not mentioned as important goals of these efforts.

Collaboration implementation varied between the two models, although the partner organizations differed very little in their approach to teaching and learning. Key components of a prekindergarten program, such as curriculum, classroom structure, assessment, and learning standards, varied little between the partners. The Good Start collaboration teachers reported strong relationships with each other and the other prekindergarten teachers at their school. They reported ample time to jointly plan their instruction and discuss any issues regarding their students. Ms. Rivers also received ongoing feedback and instructional support from Head Start. In contrast, the teachers at Bluebonnet reported fewer opportunities to plan together and felt they received inconsistent support or monitoring from LSISD. In general, the Good Start collaboration model was considered better structured than the Prekindergarten collaboration model and

more likely to facilitate integrated planning and instruction. Both models were believed to engage and support parents that may not have participated in public prekindergarten otherwise.

Several of the interviewees felt that the prekindergarten partner collaborations were relatively unknown within the school district and the broader ECE community, possibly due to the school district's lack of effort to publicize the program. The Good Start collaboration was considered more visible due to its implementation within schools.

In Chapter 5, I discuss these results in light of the literature base and the theoretical frameworks described in Chapter 2. I also detail how these findings can be used to inform future policymaking and research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide an understanding of prekindergarten collaboration implementation as it occurs more than a decade after the state's initial push for the co-delivery of public prekindergarten between school- and community-based programs. The context of this study is important, as LSISD has a long history of supporting ECE and prekindergarten collaboration and is on a path towards implementation of universal prekindergarten. The district is also a former participant in the state's TSR! initiative, which provided prekindergarten collaborations with a range of supports, including professional development and ongoing program monitoring. LSISD has continued their prekindergarten collaboration with community-based partners without the additional state aid provided through the TSR! initiative and PKES grant, but the loss of these resources has influenced the nature of their partnerships. This chapter examines these findings with reference to the literature base and the theoretical frameworks used in this study. I also discuss the potential policy implications uncovered through this study, as well as possible considerations for future research.

Restatement of the Purpose

The main objective of this study was to examine the experiences of staff members engaged in prekindergarten collaborations in LSISD. An exploration of how prekindergarten collaboration partners work together, influence one another, and address potential challenges to partnering is necessary to fully understanding these policies. It is also important to understand the viability of prekindergarten collaborations as a prekindergarten delivery model, and as a mechanism for linking the different sectors of ECE.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Prekindergarten Development and Implementation

LSISD as the "Hub" for Prekindergarten Delivery. The findings of this study reveal how LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration efforts are shaped and implemented. The two models of collaboration, Good Start and prekindergarten partner sites, were similarly described. Both were characterized by the sharing of facilities and staff, but the Good Start model operates on school campuses rather than within a community-based setting. The community-based centers were reported to be largely responsible for the implementation process of new satellite sites. They initiated contact with LSISD to begin the relationship, identified the eligible students, and handled the enrollment process. In contrast, the Good Start collaboration implementation is primarily integrated into the existing LSISD prekindergarten enrollment process. Both of the sites included in this study have been in operation for many years and were reported as having a well-established process for collaborating.

LSISD's models mirror those found in other communities (Schilder et al., 2003). Various typologies to describe these prekindergarten collaborations are scattered throughout the literature (Kagan, 1991; Schulman & Blank, 2007; Sowa, 2008) but LSISD's collaborations can be simply described as cooperation between two or more organizations that blends a range of funds together to provide public prekindergarten in varied settings. Blended funds include federal and state education funding sources, Head Start monies, child care subsidies, parent tuition, and other local revenue. LSISD serves as the *hub* for program delivery, with Head Start and other community-based prekindergarten programs providing a portion of services (Barnett & Ackerman, 2011). The school district sets the terms for participation and defines the nature of collaboration. The district also has plans to move forward with scaling up their prekindergarten program

to a universal model, but has not yet communicated a clear vision for how their community-based prekindergarten collaboration partners will fit in this model. In short, LSISD is the lead organization managing these efforts.

The study participants were unanimous in their belief that the overarching goal guiding this work is to address school readiness attainment among children considered to be at-risk for low academic achievement. This aligns with the policy context described in Chapter 1 in which programming for publicly funded ECE programs is increasingly focused on meeting academic outcomes as measured against school readiness standards (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005). The majority of the collaboration members also cited the value of community-based collaborations for meeting the needs of underserved families. As described in the previous chapter and in the review of the literature, the option of varied public prekindergarten providers gives parents more choices to best suit their needs, as they may need longer hours of care than LSISD provides, or they may prefer a community-based program with staff and environments that make them feel comfortable and welcome (Gilliam, 2008; Schulman & Blank, 2007; Schumacher et al., 2005). None of the study participants specifically identified greater cultural competency as a reason for placing public prekindergarten in community-based settings, but they did mention strong relationships between Head Start and Bluebonnet staff. Research suggests that public school teachers are less likely than community-based programs to reflect the same cultural and linguistic background as their students (Abbate-Vaughn, 2008), which may influence the degree to which parents feel comfortable engaging with schools.

Finally, all of the respondents noted the comprehensive services available for families enrolled in Head Start, and family support services offered to families by Bluebonnet child care, as important aspects of the collaboration models. Head Start is

generally understood to provide more comprehensive services for families than public schools, related to developmental and health screenings, nutrition, family well-being, and parent involvement (Gilliam, 2008).

Sharing of LSISD Teachers. Community-collaboration participants also cited the value of sharing a degreed, certified teacher with LSISD. Their views, as well as the basic structure of the collaboration, reflect the underlying assumption that a teacher with a B.A. is an essential ingredient for quality instruction. However, recent research has failed to find a consistent link between a B.A. and improved child outcomes or teacher quality (Early et al., 2007). Other research finds teacher education levels to matter most in settings in which there are few other resources and supports, such as in child care centers (Vu, Jeon, & Howes, 2008). This suggests that the presence of the LSISD teacher may be more valuable in the prekindergarten partner sites than in the Good Start collaboration, particularly now that Head Start has implemented a new requirement that at least one teacher in each classroom holds a bachelor's degree (Severn, 2012).

Ongoing professional supports for teachers, such as mentoring or coaching, have been found to help improve classroom quality and child outcomes (Dickinson & Caswell, 2007; Mashburn et al., 2008). Furthermore, ample supervision and mentoring for teachers are widely considered hallmarks of an educationally effective program (Frede et al., 2007). LSISD provides contracted mentoring support for the prekindergarten partner teachers through an external party, but that support was not mentioned by Ms. Johnson, the LSISD teacher placed in Bluebonnet child care. In fact, she expressed her desire for more support and monitoring from the district than what she currently received. In contrast, the Good Start collaboration was described as being well supported, as CCP has dedicated staff that work specifically on the collaboration efforts. LSISD does not

employ any staff to solely focus on their community collaborations; rather, collaboration oversight is just one of many duties for the small LSISD ECE staff.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the school district was previously a participant in the TSR! initiative and received teacher mentoring support and ongoing professional development through their involvement. Once their participation ended, the district attempted to continue the teacher supports by contracting with a former TSR! mentor. The disconnection between Ms. Johnson's experience and LSISD's efforts is notable, given that the placement of a LSISD teacher to provide high-quality instruction in child care settings is a central component of prekindergarten collaboration implementation efforts, per state and district policies. LSISD has attempted to maintain some of the TSR! components that were considered to be successful in supporting teachers, but they may lack the capacity, structures, and internal/external support necessary to sustain these efforts in a meaningful way (Datnow, Hubbard, Mehan, 2002; Fullan, 2001)

Collaboration Influence on Policy and Practice

Collaboration in the Classroom. The findings of this study indicate a common adherence to key aspects of teaching, learning, and classroom structure throughout the collaborating organizations. Due to the lack of historical knowledge on part of the administrators that were interviewed, the findings did not reveal much regarding the timing of and rationale for adopting these practices. There were, however, some clues to indicate that LSISD's participation in the TSR! initiative has influenced their practice today, and consequently, that of their collaborating partners. For instance, Ms. Rivers noted her experience of helping LSISD teachers incorporate the use of centers, or learning stations, in their classroom structure. She was already familiar with the concept of centers through Head Start, but many school districts did not adopt this approach until

they were introduced to the CIRCLE model promoted through the TSR! initiative. Learning centers are a key feature of the CIRCLE approach and each of the collaborating partners mentioned their use of this model. A second example is the teacher mentoring provided by LSISD to the prekindergarten partner sites. Ms. Jones specifically cited this tool as one of the aspects of their TSR! participation that the district opted to continue, if only on a contract basis.

Research reveals differences in how professionals from the different sectors of ECE define school readiness (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). However, none of the study participants noted any significant disagreements on this issue. The interviews did not uncover how the partner organizations arrived at their definitions of school readiness, but each of the collaborating partners emphasized both academic and social skills. This agreement may be a holdover from the organizations' shared experience of participating in the TSR! initiative (Brown, 2013), or just a common adherence to the state's voluntary prekindergarten guidelines, independent of the partners' work with the collaboration. The state guidelines emphasize a developmental approach to school readiness preparation and outline multiple domains to be addressed (TEA, 2008).

In general, the collaboration members noted the multi-dimensional nature of school readiness. Many specifically addressed the importance of children's social and emotional development to learning (Raver, 2008), though it was Ms. Johnson, the LSISD teacher placed in Bluebonnet Child Care, who spoke on this topic at length. Her focus on supporting multiple domains of development indicates evidence of school-based professionals blending the instructional approaches of standards-based reform and DAP (Clotheir, 2006). Ultimately, the collaboration members align their conceptualization of school readiness with that of the lead organization, LSISD, and the state (Brown, 2013).

Ms. Booth, the CCP administrator, noted a few instances in which collaboration members from LSISD and Head Start disagreed on instructional focus or teaching strategy, but considered those to be uncommon. She also noted the importance of play-based learning as part of the Head Start model, but thought it to be less emphasized in LSISD's prekindergarten program. Play-based learning encompasses both free play and guided play and is considered integral to children's learning and development (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Ms. Booth also contrasted Head Start's comprehensive approach to child wellness, and in turn, school readiness, with the more academic approach of the school district but did not consider their goals compromised in any way as a result of their collaboration.

Finding a Place in the Collaboration. The collaboration teachers reported good working relationships with one another. The Good Start collaboration teachers noted an exchange of ideas and talents between them that serves to balance their shared workload. The Bluebonnet partnership had less of an exchange, but both teachers seemed pleased with the arrangement. Ms. Rivers, the Head Start teacher at Wood Hollow Elementary, described how her current partnership was a departure from her first experience as part of the school district, during which she encountered preconceived notions about her abilities to perform on par with the LSISD teachers. Mutual trust and respect among partners are considered to be important elements of a successful prekindergarten collaboration (Clotheir, 2006; Schumacher et al., 2005), which Ms. Rivers felt she earned over time by conforming to the norms of the public school system and performing her duties well.

Ms. Johnson described a different type of disconnection stemming from her placement in a community-based site. Despite the strategies LSISD has developed to nurture a sense of belonging and camaraderie among the satellite teachers, Ms. Johnson still expressed a feeling of isolation from her peers, describing herself as "invisible"

within the district. She also faced the added challenge of teaching in two different community-based sites, which likely contributed to her need for additional support and community. Evidence from successful prekindergarten collaborations in other states point to the need for collaboration teachers to be continually engaged with other collaboration members and professionals throughout the field (Holcomb, 2006; Clotheir, 2006). Ms. Lewis, the child care teacher employed by Bluebonnet Child Care, seemed to be most influenced by her participation in the prekindergarten collaboration. She was reported to have adopted Ms. Johnson's schedule and structure during her portion of the day's instruction, and Ms. Johnson was said to take the lead in their co-planning. Some of this influence may have been a result of her recent arrival to Bluebonnet, but the interview conducted with her was unable to explain the nature of her participation in the collaboration.

Not surprisingly, where teachers are located as part of the collaboration has an impact on the degree to which they interact with their peers. For example, both Ms. Jones and Ms. Rivers noted the role that proximity plays in facilitating the ability of Head Start teachers to learn about and transition into teaching positions with the school district. Ms. Booth described her difficulty in keeping degreed teachers with Head Start when they are given the opportunity to earn higher wages with the school district. Recent figures indicate that degreed Head Start teachers are paid 53% of the average public school teacher's salary (Gillian, 2008), and that the spread of public prekindergarten has made it more difficult for Head Start to retain teachers (Ackerman, 2004; Bassok et al., 2012; Bassok, 2012). Unlike the collaborations models being implemented in other states, such as New York and New Jersey, there are no plans in Texas to raise Head Start teachers' wages on par with those of public school teachers (Holcomb, 2006).

Integration with LSISD. LSISD's collaboration models differed in the degree to which they are integrated as part of the school district. Good Start collaboration members, by virtue of being located on school campuses, reported several opportunities to facilitate children's transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. These included conversations with kindergarten teachers regarding their expectations, feedback from teachers in other grades regarding student performance, and the ability to introduce and acclimate students to life in a public school. In contrast, Ms. Johnson of Bluebonnet Child Care reported very few opportunities to connect with neighborhood elementary schools. Helping children transition into the public school system by nurturing connections between the family and school, aligning standards, curricula, and assessment between preschool and kindergarten, and providing follow up transition services is considered crucial to maintaining the positive effects of preschool participation (Reynolds, 2003; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003, Takanishi, 2010). The Good Start collaboration seems particularly suited for this goal, given the high levels of parent contact and engagement described by the study participants. Although improving the transition to kindergarten for children was not described as an explicit goal of LSISD's collaboration efforts, it may be one area in which the collaborations could have considerable impact.

Finally, the role of LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration in supporting high-quality environments and improved student outcomes is unclear because of the district's inability to parse out student data by their early education experience. Collaboration partners cited a lack of data sharing between organizations, but LSISD indicated future plans to make these more readily available. Understanding the impacts of prekindergarten collaborations is important for nurturing and improving these efforts (Gilliam and Zigler, 2004). A better understanding of the partners' contribution to the goals of LSISD's

prekindergarten program would be useful as the district prepares to expand from a targeted to a universal model. Evidence from the literature indicates that public prekindergarten programs support improved academic outcomes, even when they are delivered by community-based programs or in community-based settings (Goldstein et al., 2013; Howes et al., 2008).

ECE Alignment in Lone Star

ECE programs are widely considered to operate in silos with little coordination from one program to the other. State prekindergarten is viewed by many ECE advocates as an opportunity to coordinate, integrate, and align policy and practice across the three sectors (Schumacher et al., 2005; Wat & Gayl, 2009). The district's collaboration efforts reflected several aspects of instructional alignment among the partners at the classroom level, but did not address more structural issues facing the field, such as wage disparities among teachers. LSISD's focus on increasing the *quantity* of prekindergarten slots, versus improving the *quality* of ECE programs via their prekindergarten collaborations is reflective of current policy efforts and debates regarding the expansion rather than the improvement of ECE options for families (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). In other words, in an environment with scarce resources, such as public education in Texas, should districts focus on expanding access to prekindergarten or should they to help to improve the existing supply of programs, particularly child care centers? Ms. Song noted the immense challenge of this task, given the overall low levels of quality found in Texas' child care sector. As of 2013, only six child care centers in Lone Star held NAEYC accreditation, which is widely considered to be the highest standard of quality. The state's TSR! initiative is intended to help communities address quality goals through coordinated professional development and mentoring aimed at promoting school

readiness attainment in all ECE settings. However, LSISD's experience post-TSR! suggests that it is difficult for school districts to maintain this level of instructional reform, even in a district committed to partnering for prekindergarten delivery, without the necessary state and district resources to do so (Coburn, 2003).

The prekindergarten collaborations were not considered linked to any broad efforts of community-level ECE alignment. The interviews did, however, reveal opportunities for further coordination between the school district and the field of ECE in Lone Star. For example, Ms. Song, the program administrator with the City of Lone Star, noted her surprise when she learned of the shared, yet independent, adoption of the *Conscious Discipline* curriculum among the city of Lone Star, Head Start, LSISD, and other ECE organizations throughout the district. She considered this a missed opportunity to intentionally plan how educators, families, and students experience the implementation of the curriculum. A second goal for alignment in Lone Star is to improve parent engagement in early learning. The prekindergarten collaborations offer a mechanism for engaging families and aiding them in the transition to kindergarten; therefore this one area in which the district can align their efforts with those of the broader community. The expanded reach of universal prekindergarten will better position the school district to work with more community-based providers and the families they serve. Thus, LSISD is an important potential conduit for implementing the city's alignment strategies.

Finally, several of the study participants commented on the potential for LSISD's universal prekindergarten to alter Lone Star's ECE landscape. Specifically, how might the school district's increased capacity impact enrollment for community-based programs? This is a commonly cited issue in policy debates regarding the scaling up of public prekindergarten, though evidence from two states operating universal

prekindergarten models suggest little negative impact on community-based centers as a result of the expansion (Bassock et al., 2012). Similarly, research that examined the impact on Head Start in the wake of expanding state prekindergarten found no evidence to suggest the program experienced enrollment declines, but instead a shift towards serving more children ages three and younger (Bassok, 2012).

APPLICATION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Framework for Understanding Interagency Collaboration

Sowa's (2008) framework for understanding interagency collaboration is used to explain the implementation of prekindergarten collaboration in LSISD through an examination of the resources and rewards acquired through participation. Through this lens, the LSISD collaborations were examined along five dimensions of sharing among the organizations: financial resources, non-financial resources, sharing of teachers and staff, organizational rewards, and community rewards. Models of collaboration can be distinguished from one another by the extent to which they reflect these dimensions. An application of this framework to the prekindergarten collaboration models examined in this study allows us to clearly identify the exchanges and rewards that occur as part of their work.

In a *collaborative contract* or *shallow* model, the relationship between the partner organizations is simply contractual. Financial resources are shared, but there is no ongoing interaction between the organizations that changes their relationship over time. Sowa (2008) explains that this model is often adopted when the lead agency is averse to relinquishing any control over the relationship for fear that their reputation or their ability to meet program mandates might be threatened by doing so. The collaborating organizations included in this study all exchange a range of financial resources through

their participation in prekindergarten collaboration. First, all three organizations benefit by sharing the costs of providing a full day of prekindergarten instruction. Second, CCP is able to use existing classroom space to provide their program, which eliminates the need to rent or purchase operating space elsewhere. Third, by partnering with LSISD CCP is able to meet Head Start grant requirements that prioritize community collaboration and draw down those funds. Finally, as a prekindergarten partner site, Bluebonnet Child Care is able to charge tuition for the services they provide outside of LSISD's instruction.

The next level of collaboration is conceptualized as a *capacity-building* or *medium* model, which reflects an increased level of shared rewards (organizational) and resources (non-financial and staff). In the prekindergarten partner site, the school district benefits from the provision of family support services offered by Bluebonnet Child Care. In turn, Bluebonnet receives professional development for the collaborating teacher (e.g. curriculum training). The participating teachers also receive occasional mentoring from a professional contracted by the school district. Similar exchanges are present in the Good Start collaboration model, but LSISD also receives professional development opportunities for their teachers from CCP. The exchange of these resources produces a reward of increased knowledge for practice. In some cases, this knowledge may be extended throughout the organization, beyond the collaborative classrooms, which would produce community-level rewards, as other students not served through the collaborations would benefit. However, it was unclear from the interviews if this occurs.

Shared staff is the second type of non-financial resource exchanged as part of the collaborations. In both models, a degreed, certified LSISD teacher provides a half day of cognitive instruction, and teachers from the community-based programs provide the remainder of the day's instruction. In the prekindergarten partner model, the center-based

teacher also provides instruction after school hours until 6:30 pm, allowing for additional scheduling flexibility for working parents. For Bluebonnet Child Care, the presence of a LSISD teacher is considered to support program quality through high-quality instruction. The Wood Hollow Good Start collaboration receives similar benefits, although their teachers hold the same credentials. They do, however, benefit from the pairing of a dual-language LSISD teacher with the Head Start teacher profiled in this study, as the program serves a large number of monolingual Spanish-speaking families.

The community-based organizations also provide support staff to the collaborations through teacher assistants and family advocates, the latter of whom are available to help families navigate and access social services. Although similar services can be accessed through the school system, it was noted that it could often be difficult for families to do so given the significant workload facing school counselors and family support staff in the district. Ultimately, the sharing of teachers and support staff allows the collaborating partners to offer a full day of instruction provided, at least in part, by a degreed and certified teacher, that is supplemented with a family support component. At Bluebonnet, the families can also access after-school care.

Finally, the third model of interagency collaboration that Sowa (2008) describes is *community-building* or *deep* collaboration. In this model, the level of exchange among partners, particularly at the management level, is such that it contributes to the organizations' understanding of their role in the ECE field, both as a provider and as a component of the policy landscape. This facilitates increased participation in community-building efforts and interactions with other ECE professionals. In this study, LSISD and CCP were both identified as important partners in ongoing community-planning efforts focused on ECE alignment in Lone Star and convened by an external organization. While these activities may not be a direct result of their collaboration, the two institutions

are considered as significantly linked with one another at the ECE level because of their partnership. Furthermore, the two administrators included in this study indicated a strong working relationship between them and had recently implemented new ways for the Good Start collaboration teachers and the LSISD satellite teachers to network. These opportunities, however, were not said to extend to the satellite teachers employed by the child care centers.

Through the application of this framework, we can conclude that the prekindergarten partner collaboration examined in this study is representative of a *capacity-building m*odel, whereas the Good Start collaboration reflects a *community-building* model (Sowa, 2008). *Table 5.1* presents a summary of the collaboration activities. It is important to note, however, that this study did not examine the relationship between LSISD and the organization that administers Bluebonnet child care and therefore may have failed to fully capture the nature of exchanges between the organizations. Nonetheless, this framework is useful for understanding how collaborations exchange resources and rewards and for identifying how they might be used to address community-level goals related to the provision of ECE.

Table 5.1

Interagency Collaboration in LSISD

	Good Start		Prekindergarten partner	
Resources & Rewards	***LSISD***	***CCP***	***LSISD***	***Bluebonnet***
Financial Resources	Shares cost of providing full-day of instruction	Shares cost of providing full-day of instruction; shares ISD facilities; fulfills grant obligations	Shares cost of providing full-day of instruction	Shares cost of providing full-day of service; receives additional tuition revenue
Non-Financial Resources	Supportive services for families; professional development & training	Professional development & training	Supportive services for families	Mentoring for teachers; professional development & training
Sharing of Staff	HS teacher and assistant; Family advocate	LSISD, dual-language teacher	Additional teacher and assistant; Family advocate	Degreed, certified ISD teacher
Organizational Rewards	Comprehensive services for families; increased knowledge for practice	Increased knowledge for practice; Bilingual support for parents	Expanded services for families; After-school care for families	Increased knowledge for practice; Support for improved program quality
Community Rewards	Participates in community planning efforts	Participates in community planning efforts	None reported.	None reported.

New Institutional Theory

The application of new institutional theory to the current study helps explain why organizations choose to collaborate and adopt certain policies and practices. In the absence of comprehensive structures or policies to guide the field, the three sectors have

primarily existed as their own organizational fields, or as set of organizations with similar purpose and goals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). State policies that promote the co-delivery of services, sharing of resources, and linking of funds have nurtured the emergence of a new organizational field centered on the common technologies of teaching and school readiness at the prekindergarten level. It is a complicated field in which federal, state, and local, and public and private interests intersect.

Organizational fields are considered to hold a common set of agreed-upon norms and regulations that influence organizational policies and practice (Scott, 2000). In the context of LSISD's prekindergarten collaborations, the partner organizations all agree on the major aspects of teaching and learning as they occur under the broad goal of school readiness. The push to support early academic achievement exists in all three sectors, independent of collaboration policies, but one can argue that the state's support for *school readiness integration* between the three sectors has produced a shared conceptualization of this issue at the prekindergarten level. This understanding emphasizes cognitive instruction and the use of a degreed and certified teacher to implement state learning standards. It prioritizes the acquisition of skills and a one-size fits all approach to working with young children.

New institutional theory maintains that increased interaction among organizations will encourage the adoption of certain practices, or "rituals" (Meyer and Rowan, 1978), even if they are not proven to improve practice. In this study, the lack of long-term outcome data for the students served through the collaborations makes it unclear if this policy is in fact supporting school readiness. Similarly, the shared use of the LSISD teacher is assumed to facilitate program quality, though it was unclear if and how the teachers are implementing instructional practices that contribute to a high-quality learning experience.

New institutional theory would suggest that the use of degreed teachers in ECE programs is a means to convey their organization's legitimacy to the public and policy makers (Meyer and Rowan, 1978). Legitimacy stem from earlier research that found a relationship between high quality care and teacher education, however, more recent evidence on this topic is mixed, with some studies indicating no strong link between a B.A. and child outcomes or classroom quality (Maxwell, Field, & Clifford, 2006). The continued promotion of this norm (degreed teachers) persists because it is too difficult to effectively assess and communicate the aspects of ECE that truly influence instruction (Scott, 1998).

A new institutional analysis of the Texas context might view the state's focus on school readiness and easily measured indicators of program quality as permeating through the field via prekindergarten policies, thereby leading to greater levels of homogeneity across the sectors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The process of increasing homogeneity throughout an organizational field is known as isomorphism, which is fueled by three main types of institutional pressures: 1) *coercive press*ures stemming from organizations they are dependent upon; 2) *mimetic pressures* to replicate successful practices during times of high uncertainty; and 3) *normative pressures* to adopt professional norms to legitimize the organization's practices. It is clear from policy efforts at all levels of government that state prekindergarten will continue to serve an increasing share of the state's four-year olds, and community-based collaborations may benefit from either associating with school-based programs or adopting their norms and practices.

Normative pressures would explain certain adaptations on the part of community-based organizations to mimic public prekindergarten. For example, Ms. Rivers discussed the incorrect assumptions held about the credentials of Head Start teachers and the need

for them to conform to public school norms (e.g., dress, speech) to earn acceptance and legitimization among their peers. Furthermore, CCP is subject to *coercive pressure* from federal Head Start grant mandates that require collaboration with schools as a condition of funding. For Bluebonnet, several conditions characteristic of the child care sector may serve as *mimetic pressures* to collaborate with school districts and adopt their practices, including: fluctuating enrollments, inconsistent funding, and high-rates of teacher turnover.

The introduction of universal prekindergarten in Lone Star may also contribute to less diversity throughout the field if many programs are unable to exist within the field as a viable competitor. New institutional theory is a useful lens for understanding the role of prekindergarten collaborations in reproducing a specific approach to the prekindergarten instruction and expectations, as well as elevating aspects of teaching qualifications as more important than others, regardless of the evidence to support them.

IMPLICATIONS

By all accounts, LSISD is committed to ECE and the practice of prekindergarten collaboration. In the absence of state funding and support, LSISD has pressed on and expanded their collaboration efforts in recent years. The district acknowledges the value of community-based partners in expanding their reach and supporting parents. The collaborations have achieved alignment in many areas across programs including classroom structure, curricula, assessments, and conceptualizations of school readiness. Unfortunately, this study was not able to uncover much about the process that led to the adoption of these practices, but the findings suggest that at least some of it can be attributed to the partners' past participation in the TSR! initiative and the district's top-down approach in administering the collaborations. In any case, these collaborations are

maintaining the district's approach to prekindergarten implementation, however it was derived.

My goal in conducting this study was to examine how prekindergarten collaboration operates in a school district that is committed to this work but lacks the state aid allotted for collaboration activities. My hypothesis at the start of this study viewed prekindergarten collaboration as a viable, if not necessary, strategy for scaling up public prekindergarten programs, but that it may also have the effect of spreading a very specific instructional approach throughout the community. The findings of this study support these hypotheses, at least within the context of LSISD.

My second goal for this study was to understand how these efforts contribute to increased alignment, both in policy and practice, across the three ECE sectors. The findings reveal a high level of coordination among the three organizations profiled in this study with regard to content, curriculum, assessments, classroom structure, and professional development. However, much of this coordination seems to be at the direction of the school district. There were no concerted efforts to tie the prekindergarten collaboration to more systemic reforms in the field of ECE, such as helping child care centers meet certain levels of quality. Their value lies in increasing prekindergarten enrollment and providing parents with more program options, even though the major aspects of teaching and learning are uniform across settings. Community-wide alignment might be beyond the scope and capacity of a school district, and more specifically, the ECE department of a school district.

The findings hold implication for policies seeking to expand or improve state funded prekindergarten. Collaboration strategies are a viable means to increase access and to link public prekindergarten with family supports and services. However, in order for collaborations to function as partnerships, rather than as contracted services, the

school district must have the capacity to provide ongoing monitoring and support to the participating staff and organizations. This is particularly important for models like the prekindergarten partner sites, in which a LSISD teacher is largely disconnected from the school district. One option might be to officially link the prekindergarten teacher with an elementary school in the child care centers neighborhood, rather than as a floating member of a "virtual" school, such as the approach used in LSISD. Providing satellite teachers with a home base within the district would anchor them in a community, provide them with additional administration support, and facilitate relationships for transitioning students into their new campus.

The findings also suggest the potential of community-based programs to facilitate improved transitions into public school for prekindergarten students and families and to support family involvement. Prekindergarten collaboration policies are a logical vehicle for supporting increased family engagement given their placement either within the community outside of a school district, or as part of a popular organization like Head Start. School districts might also think of incorporating some of the aspects of the Good Start collaboration, such as home visits, into the child care partnership model to further strengthen connections with families.

Lastly, the findings of this study point to the need for state policies or supports that provide certain aspects of the TSR! initiative on an on-going basis to districts engaged in prekindergarten collaboration. Otherwise, the reform runs the risk of losing traction once state support is pulled out. Another option would be to provide state support to equip districts to maintain prekindergarten collaboration and the TSR! components themselves. Creating buy-in, ownership, and capacity on part of the school district for collaboration *and* quality improvements is a necessary step for building improved systems of ECE through greater coordination at the prekindergarten level.

LIMITATIONS

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to identify prekindergarten collaboration participants and partners. I made an effort to include views from a range of collaboration stakeholders representing both collaboration models. The sites of focus in this study were selected from a list of possible sites given to me by LSISD and CCP administrators. They may be considered as two of the more successful and established sites in the partnership, which is likely why they were suggested to me. An examination of a newer collaboration might have yielded more clues as to how collaboration members develop their partnerships and influence one another. Unfortunately, the timing of this study did not allow for a study of the more recently established sites. Also missing from this study were the views of the child care center directors, parents, additional LSISD, CCP staff, and state staff familiar with LSISD's TSR! participation. Finally, this study examined school-based Head Start programs but did not include a community-based Head Start site.

The substance of my interviews would likely be strengthened by the inclusion of study participants with a historical perspective of prekindergarten in Lone Star. The lack of such participants as part of this research made it difficult to understand how certain aspects of the collaboration, such as instructional alignment, were integrated into the organizations. I was also unable to complete follow-up interviews with the majority of study participants, which limited my ability to clarify or explore certain topics in depth. Ultimately, this study is more a snapshot of current collaboration efforts in LSISD, rather than a broad examination of the district's efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Further examination of prekindergarten collaboration efforts might focus on the issues introduced in this study related to policy implementation and the collaboration's

value in expanding LSISD's prekindergarten program. Specifically, how might the potential value of community-based organizations be maximized as part of these efforts and how might staff and administration be supported to accomplish these goals? Further research might also delve further into the adoption of shared norms and practices as they relate to school readiness to uncover how they are reproduced and transmitted throughout the field.

More research on the sustainability of prekindergarten collaborations absent any significant state aid to support them is needed to better understand their viability as a program delivery approach. Specifically, further study should address how the lack of professional development made available through the TSR! initiative influences the degree to which prekindergarten collaborations improve and align services across the sectors. Furthermore, additional investigation that focuses on the recruitment and retention of Head Start teachers is important for understanding how the two programs, Head Start and child care, can exist as increasingly like entities and in collaboration with one another. Similarly, more research is needed to explore how these policies can support movement up the career ladder for ECE professionals, as well as how LSISD's expansion to a universal prekindergarten model may impact publicly-funded prekindergarten providers in the Lone Star community, both in terms of staffing and practice.

Finally, future research might focus on the building of a comprehensive ECE system in Lone Star that links together the many services and programs for young families. The city of Lone Star, much like LSISD, is considered supportive of ECE programming and planning. The impending implementation of community alignment efforts and expanded public prekindergarten provide a unique opportunity to strengthen service delivery in terms of quality and reach. Understanding the factors that contribute to

systems building at the ECE level will likely be useful for other communities with similar goals.

SUMMARY

The prekindergarten collaboration of focus in this study brings many of the current topics in ECE research and policymaking to the fore: school readiness, expanding state prekindergarten, the increasing intersection of ECE and the public school system, and program quality throughout the ECE system. The findings of this research reveal prekindergarten collaboration to be a complex process that, absent any substantive supports, may primarily support increased access to comprehensive, full-day services for young children and their families. As LSISD moves forward with implementation of universal prekindergarten, it will likely continue to serve as a useful example as to how many issues are negotiated and addressed between the three ECE sectors as the field continues to evolve.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Teachers/Introductory Protocol:

Thank you for your agreeing to participate. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. I have asked to speak with you today because of your role in LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration efforts. My study focuses on prekindergarten collaboration between school districts, private child care centers, and Head Start. I am interested in learning more about your experience as a partner in this collaboration.

1. Please describe the prekindergarten collaboration between LSISD and <*community based organization*>. How does it work?
2. What are the goals for this collaboration? What are the factors that help make it successful or pose challenges?
3. Has participation in the collaboration influenced how you teach prekindergarten students or your views on school readiness? If so, how?
4. How is your work in the prekindergarten collaboration supported by others in your <*center/school/district*>?
5. *Community-based teachers:* How have you helped to integrate the LSISD/HS/CC prekindergarten teacher into your organization?
6. From your perspective, has your organization's participation in the prekindergarten collaboration had any influence on educational practice organization-wide?

7. Do you have more opportunities to connect with others in your field, outside of your organization, as a result of participating in the prekindergarten collaboration?
8. In your view, has participation in the prekindergarten collaboration influenced how parents view the <community-based> program? Has your program earned a kindergarten readiness certification?
9. In what ways might your work in the collaboration change or grow over time?

Community-Based ECE Administrator/Introductory Protocol:

Thank you for your agreeing to participate. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. I have asked to speak with you today because of your role in LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration efforts. My study focuses on prekindergarten collaboration between school districts, private child care centers, and Head Start. I am interested in learning more about your experience as a partner and administrator in this collaboration.

1. Please describe the prekindergarten collaboration between LSISD and <*community based organization*>. How does it work?
2. What are the goals for this collaboration? What are the factors that help make it successful or pose challenges?
3. In your view, has the prekindergarten collaboration influenced how participating teachers approach their work or view school readiness? If so, how?
4. How are the teachers in the collaboration supported?
5. How have you helped to integrate the LSISD prekindergarten teacher into your organization?
6. From your perspective, has your organization's participation in the prekindergarten collaboration had any influence on educational practice organization-wide?
7. Do you have more opportunities to connect with others in your field, outside of your organization, as a result of participating in the prekindergarten collaboration?

8. In your view, has participation in the prekindergarten collaboration influenced how parents view the <community-based> program? Has your program earned a kindergarten readiness certification?
9. Do you expect the collaboration to continue? If so, how might it change in the future?

LSISD Early Childhood Administrator/Introductory Protocol:

Thank you for your agreeing to participate. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. I have asked to speak with you today because of your role in LSISD's prekindergarten collaboration efforts. My study focuses on prekindergarten collaboration between school districts, private child care centers, and Head Start. I am interested in learning more about your experience as a partner and administrator in this collaboration.

1. Please describe district's Prekindergarten partner and Good Start models. How do they work?
2. What are the goals for prekindergarten collaboration? What are the factors that help make it successful or pose challenges?
3. How do the feeder schools that receive children from this collaboration view this work? Are they familiar with the goals of the collaboration?
4. In your view, do these prekindergarten collaborations influence how participating teachers approach their work or view school readiness? If so, how?
5. What supports does the district offer collaboration sites (e.g., technical assistance, professional development, etc.)?
6. How are the LSISD teachers expected to work with and integrate into the community-based programs? What supports does the district provide for these purposes?
7. From your perspective, do these prekindergarten collaborations have any influence on educational practice organization-wide, beyond the collaboration classrooms?

8. Are collaboration participants given opportunities to connect with one another or with other professional in the field of ECE?
9. In your view, has participation in the prekindergarten collaboration influenced how parents view participating community-based programs? Are programs required to earn a Kindergarten Readiness Certification?
10. Do you expect the current model of prekindergarten collaboration to continue? If so, how might it change in the future?

Appendix B: Invitation Sent to Potential Participants

Dear _______,

My name is Vanessa Morales and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin studying education policy. I am currently working on a research project that is focused on collaboration in early education between school districts and community-based programs. I was given your name by _______, as I am interested in chatting with administrators/teachers involved with the Good Start collaboration/prekindergarten partner program. You have been identified as a potential interviewee because of your experience as a collaboration member. I will be traveling to Lone Star soon to conduct additional interviews for my project and would like to set up a time to speak you for no more than one hour. I'm simply interested in learning more about your experience as a collaboration member.

Please let me know if you'd be willing to set up a time to speak with me or if you'd like any more information about my research. Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,
Vanessa Morales

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