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ACTIONS TAKEN BY DISTRICT LEADERS TO RAISE COLLEGE READINESS IN ONE HIGH PERFORMING SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT IN TEXAS: A CASE STUDY

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ACTIONS TAKEN BY DISTRICT LEADERS TO RAISE COLLEGE READINESS IN ONE HIGH PERFORMING SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT IN TEXAS: A CASE STUDY

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Dedication

No one succeeds alone. Without the endless love and patience of my husband, Brad, I would not have made it through the last four years of my educational journey. Turning our spare room into my dissertation workspace, hiring a housekeeper, and patiently cooking dinner while my head remained buried in research, without ever complaining or questioning our decision to have a Doctor in the family takes a very special kind of love that few ever experience.

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My son, Logan, who gave me reason to laugh, and stopped by on occasion to make me remember there is always time for the things you enjoy.

My mom, Shirley, who always asked about my progress, and checked to see if my tuition was paid. My dad, Sidney, who found pride in having a teacher in the family, was a living example of how one teacher had made a difference in his life.

Most of all, I dedicate this research to the many students who have crossed my path that did not know they wanted to go to college because no one had taken the time to make them believe they could do it. They were the reason I could not stop until I found strategies that give them a brighter future and bring a spark of hope into their lives.

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Actions Taken by District Leaders to Raise College Readiness in One High Performing Small School District in Texas: A Case Study

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The literature highlighted the gaps in educational practice that result in 80% of students in the United States lacking college or career readiness upon high school graduation (Conley, 2007a). This critical case study utilized data from a single school district to learn how it rose above its counterparts across the same state in preparing its high school graduates for postsecondary opportunities. This study identified the best practices employed by one school district with discernibly high levels of college and career readiness for minority and general education students and answered the following research questions:

1. What strategies and systems did the superintendent employ to ensure college and career readiness within their district?
2. How did central office and campus personnel implement college and career initiatives?

A critical case study was used to (a) conduct one-on-one interviews, (b) evaluate the district's operational systems, (c) explore the central administration's and superintendent's actions, and (d) discover the external partners' ability to contribute to

the attainment of college and career readiness among students. Interviews were conducted with 10 district personnel, including the superintendent. The critical case school district received distinction-level recognition in college and career readiness. Research determined there are administrative strategies that will possibly have a positive impact on college readiness. Superintendents faced with maintaining accountability for students beyond graduation might find this study useful. This study might be beneficial for current and upcoming superintendents desiring to promote their expertise in college and career readiness in their current districts. The single case study generated data displaying those practices used effectively to prepare high school students for college and career readiness. The findings offer information to educational leaders and policy makers. The study's findings might enable key school district leaders to reconcile accountability with aspirational effort.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

In 2009, President Barack Obama made college a priority in his first joint session with Congress declaring "by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (para. 58). The U.S. Department of Education was authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), to create the Race to the Top Assessment Program. One of the stated goals for the Race to the Top program was to adopt standards and use appropriate assessments for ensuring students could succeed in college and on the job as they compete in the global economy (Tamayo, 2010). In 2010, while addressing the AP College Board, former U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan noted that "high school should be a place where all students are prepared with the knowledge and skills necessary to enter postsecondary education and pursue meaningful careers" (para. 4).

Students entering college and careers find success difficult to obtain due to a lack of foundational knowledge. Despite this vision for success, the NPSAS reported that students are spending 1.5 billion annually on remedial coursework in the United States (NPSAS, 2012). Since legislation and funding do not differentiate based on size or opportunities available, how do small districts with limited resources meet the demands of college and career readiness goals? College freshmen dropout rates tend to run as high as 26% for first-generation, low SES students of color (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Tung et al., 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). Consequently, ethnicity was a consideration when analyzing data or conducting research on districts. A growing disconnection between

high school graduation requirements and the college and career readiness was evidenced by the increased number of students enrolling in college remediation courses and the decrease in college completion rates (Hill, 2008; Perna & Thomas, 2006). Literature shows deficits in college and career readiness and indicates there is not a direct correlation between high school graduation and college and career readiness (Conley, 2007b).

Districts are expected to provide educational opportunities to link students to adulthood by preparing them for postsecondary opportunities. Thus, educators must ensure high school students have the basic foundation of math and reading to be successful in college, as well as their chosen careers (Bloom, 2010; Conley, 2007a, 2007b). Literature used as a foundation for this research suggested strategies for enabling all children to reach an appropriate level of college and career readiness indicated by high school graduation. However, public high schools continue to teach with curriculum targeting middle- and upper-class White students (Cabrera, Milem, & Jaquette, 2014) that leaves gaps in college and career readiness. Consequently, an understanding of the gaps in foundational learning, especially for students of color and students who are economically disadvantaged guided this study's discovery of the successful strategies that enable all students to become better prepared for college before high school graduation (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Hernandez, 2002; Sleeter, 2011). "Increasing the college readiness and success rates for currently underrepresented populations such as low-income students, students of color, immigrants, and first-generation students also

challenges decades of historical inequities and systemic disadvantages" (Borsato, Nagaoka, & Foley, 2013, p. 35).

Many states, such as Texas, have implemented a foundation program requirement for high school graduation that includes mandatory high school credit acquisition to make sure students have the required knowledge for college readiness (Rothman, 2012; TEA, 2014). The problem with this set of requirements is its failure to address the cognitive skills required for college success (Conley, 2007a) or the support needed by first generation students. Prior research has established the individual academic aspects of college readiness determined by statistical models such as test scores. This study sought to look beyond the physical aspects, building on prior research to look beyond the academic aspects of individual students to analyze school district systems used to impact the academic as well as nonacademic aspects of college readiness necessary for collegiate and career success (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Those non-academic aspects include social capital (An, 2012), family influence (Perna & Thomas, 2007), and cognitive strategies (Conley, 2007b).

Responses to National Literature on College and Career Readiness

National data show that four out of five high school graduates are unable to enroll in college without being required to complete remediation (Conley, 2007a). From 1970 to 2000, postsecondary school enrollment increased by 400% (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). In fact, among the 60% of students who graduate from high school, only 32% are college and career ready at graduation (Camera, 2016). Interestingly, Hispanic students graduate at a higher rate than African American youth, but only 16% of Hispanic students

who graduate high school are college ready, compared to 37% of Anglo students and 17% of African American students (Greene & Forster, 2003. Educators must teach students the foundational knowledge for college success which includes skills needed for conducting research and analyzing data (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2012). Therefore, school districts' leaders have been encouraged to develop strategic frameworks applying college readiness missions (Bloom, 2010; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011).

Schools and communities are the most proximal layer outside of the family that can impact the lives of students; therefore, educators have been challenged to examine how district staff can better engage with high school students' families to prepare students for their college journeys (Perna & Thomas, 2006). High schools can build college access support systems to support students' postsecondary success and enable students to gain the social capital necessary for the first year of college (An, 2012). Such support encompasses family involvement but must include opportunities to address the non-academic factors impacting college readiness (Conley, 2007b).

For the purpose of this paper, the definition of college and career readiness (CCR) was based on the work of renowned author Dr. David Conley. Conley (2007a, 2007b) defined and measured college readiness in the context of the construct of College Knowledge and the foundation of the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC). Conley (2012) defined college readiness as a student qualifying for and succeeding in credit bearing college courses that lead the student toward earning "a baccalaureate or

certificate, or career oriented pathway training programs, without the need for remedial or developmental coursework" (p. 1).

With legislation like the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) setting specific academic targets aligned with college readiness, superintendents must make college and career readiness a priority (Conley, 2007a).

Texas Response to College and Career Readiness

States have implemented rules intended to guarantee access by all college-going high school students in the nation's colleges and universities but have failed to adequately prepare high school students for postsecondary academic success (Bottoms, Spence and Young, 2009). Texas has over 5-million students attending pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 (PK-12) schools, and the majority of Texas' public school students represent minority populations (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2017a). Conley worked with TEA and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to create the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) for Texas. In the Texas Legislature, House Bill 1 (HB1), known as the state's Advancement in College Readiness Bill, established a specific curriculum to address the academic instruction of students and recognized the cognitive skills that students needed in order to be college ready. HB1 was engineered by a group of educators representing the public-school system, universities, community leaders, and nonprofits. The final format was drafted by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) operating under the guidance of Dr. David Conley.

In Texas, all high school students graduating in the top 10% of their classes are guaranteed acceptance into state colleges as part of the effort for college readiness ("Texas Top 10% Rule," 2009). Even though the top 10% rule has reduced gaps in college acceptance for students from all regions in the state, regardless of economics or ethnicity, the rule has not closed the knowledge gap for college readiness among college freshmen.

States have taken measures to guarantee access and to hold districts accountable for college readiness. In Texas, there are two accountability metrics for college and career readiness. On the current system of school accountability, college and career readiness is measured in the statewide accountability system's Index 4. Moreover, the state's accountability system measures college and career readiness in its Domain 4. These two Texas public school accountability systems focus on measuring students' course completion rates and standardized test scores. As part of measuring postsecondary readiness, the TEA (2017b) established its Postsecondary Readiness Distinction for 2017 as based on the following components:

1. STAAR postsecondary readiness (from Index 4) based on end-of-course (EOC) assessment scores
2. Four year graduation rate based on cohort forming the state's high school graduating class of 2016
3. Diploma plans displaying college preparation among the state's high school graduating class of 2016

4. College-ready graduate rate among the state's high school graduating class of 2016 according to Index 4
5. Advanced course/dual enrollment completion rate for 11th and 12th Graders for School Year 2015-2016
6. SAT/ACT performance criterion for college readiness met by students forming the state's high school graduating class of 2016
7. SAT/ACT participation rate for high school students graduating in 2016
8. AP/IB examinees meeting criterion scores among 2015-2016 examinees (i.e., 11th and 12th graders)
9. CTE coherent sequence graduates among 2016 high school graduates (Lead4Ward.org)

The most recent version of the Texas accountability system posted on April 11, 2018, by TEA, not only considers the factors listed above by school district, but also awards additional points for students' military enlistments, career and technology course completion and certification, as well as the special factors affecting middle school and elementary schools within a school district (TEA, 2017b). Special factors include holding schools accountable for students' truancy and dropout in foundation grades prior to entering high school. A single grade of A through F is assigned to the district for accountability Domain 4 based on the compilation of all these factors, forcing some districts who previously earned a college and career readiness distinction to develop new strategies for improving student scores in factors measured for indicating college and career readiness (TEA, 2017b). Consequently, this study was targeted at schools who

received a distinction in Index 4 and an A grade in Domain 4 on the accountability system.

Statement of the Problem

Legislatures have developed national accountability metrics for pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 (PK-12) schools regarding students' college and career readiness. States have developed measures such as the accountability system. However, the measurements used have been entirely based on academic scores and courses completed (Chapa et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2014). Even though academic success in high school is a factor in college readiness, it is only one factor of a multi-faceted, complex skill set necessary for successful college completion (Vaquera & Maestas, 2009). The actions of school district leaders in the area of college and career readiness may impact these academic factors, as well as non-academic factors needed for success.

Given the ever-diversifying demographics of students in today's public schools, educators are challenged to prepare a more diverse population of students for postsecondary opportunities (Greene & Forster, 2003). A significant percentage of high school students are students of color, hailing from parents who live at or below the poverty line, and likely to be first-generation college students (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Vaquera & Maestas, 2009). The efforts identified within the literature highlighted the educational practices designed to fix the problem but did not address the recurring flaws in societal structures that have perpetuated college and career readiness inequity (Harris, 1993; St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2012). Students who simply achieve college-level test scores do not necessarily demonstrate success

throughout college or preparation for employment (Chapa, Leon, Solis, & Mundy, 2014; Conley, McGaughy, Kirtner, Van der Valk, & Martinez-Wenzl, 2006; Tierney, 2014). Other factors within school districts bear consideration for ensuring college and career readiness among all high school graduates.

Among the other factors affecting school districts' efforts at reaching college and career readiness with students are national and state regulations. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education cited the ESEA (1965) when making college and career readiness a priority. Consequently, superintendents have the duty to manage the college readiness levels of their districts (Bottoms & Schmidt, 2010). States, such as Texas, have developed committees to revamp public PK-12 education to focus on college and career readiness. Texas' Senate Bill 1557 established the role of one such committee, the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium (THPSC),

THPSC is a committee of 22 school districts empowered by the Texas Legislature to "improve student learning in the state through the development of innovative, next-generation learning standards and assessment and accountability systems, including standards and systems relating to career and college readiness" (Texas Association of School Administrators, 2018, para. 1). Some districts have included college and career readiness measures into the rubric for measuring superintendent performance (Lafee, 2017). Even though the literature addresses the role of the superintendent (Andero, 2000; Kowalski & Oates, 1993), very little research existed for determining how superintendents and central office personnel impact college and career readiness among the students within their district.

This study enabled an examination of the superintendent actions that create district-wide college and career readiness among students in each of the four keys of college readiness (Conley, 2007a). This study examined the socially constructive impact superintendents make through the actions of central office staff as well as the strategy of influence the superintendent must manage to be effective. By identifying actions enacted by superintendents and central office personnel in a school district recognized for superior district-wide performance in college and career readiness, this case study sought a paradigm shift for reforming education to ensure the college and career readiness among all students was sought.

Purpose of the Study

This research investigated proven practices for ensuring college and career readiness and was focused on meaning as constructed by those interviewed (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). This critical case study utilized data from a single district. The chosen district showed discernably high levels of college and career readiness, rising above its counterparts across Texas in preparing students for postsecondary opportunities. This study built upon prior research recommendations focused on how superintendents close existing achievement gaps for their minority student populations (Lopez, 2015) and on factors promoting college and career readiness among all students (De la Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Klugman, 2013). Researchers have addressed individual aspects of college readiness such as test scores, course completion, and enrollment patterns (e.g., Venezia & Jaeger, 2013), but research about districtwide actions to build college readiness is lacking.

While a plethora of case studies in various districts have identified possible causes for lack of college readiness and types of measures for determining individual students' college readiness, few have focused on the district systems that prepare graduates for college and career readiness (Breslow, Bousselot, & Chadwick, 2016; Conley, 2007b; Lundell, Higbee, & Hipp, 2005). This study discovered aspects of district-wide personnel's roles in creating a culture of college and career ready students that can possibly be replicated in other districts. While the purpose of this study was not to isolate strategies to particular ethnicities, students of color and students of low socioeconomic status (SES) do face additional challenges to becoming college ready, as seen in the literature (Conway, 2010; De La Rosa et al., 2006; Hatt, 2012; Milner, 2012). This study focused on proven strategies used with all students in all grades while acknowledging the fact that college readiness rates are much lower for groups of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Sackett, Borneman, & Connelly, 2009). Expanding the theory of social constructivism normally applied to classroom learning to an entire district (Brooks & Brooks, 1990), this research explored how superintendents create a college and career ready culture where knowledge develops as a result of social interaction. Social constructivism recognizes that college readiness is shared learning, rather than an individual, experience. By building on the works of Brooks and others, this research achieved the goal of determining actions superintendents and central office personnel take to share in that learning.

Research Questions

In this critical case study (Yin, 2014), the researcher examined the artifacts and interview data provided by stakeholders and leaders in a Texas school district with a high level of college and career readiness (TEA, 2017b). The research was guided by the central questions as follows:

1. What strategies and systems did the superintendent employ to ensure college and career readiness within his district?
2. How did central office and campus personnel implement college and career initiatives?

Methodology

After identifying the highest performing school districts on the postsecondary readiness measure (Index 4) in Texas, a critical case study design was used to allow the researcher to review data, including conducting one-on-one interviews, site visits to explore the superintendent's actions, examination of district documents, and overview of avenues of communication used throughout the district. The researcher also maintained a reflection journal and a field notes journal. The researcher analyzed the actions by the district's superintendent and leaders who enabled the school district to reach its goals for a high level of college and career readiness (TEA, 2017b). Additionally, the critical case study was conducted at a school district with more than 40% of the students qualifying as economically disadvantaged, or eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, which is a measure used by the TEA for funding schools. The district was recognized as having a high level of college and career readiness among its students (Conley, 2007a).

For gathering data, interviews started with the district's superintendent and flowed to other district-level administrators. Seven participants responding to questions in one-on-one interviews and three informal interviews were included in the data collection. Artifacts included district documents as well as images collected during tours of the schools provided by administrators. External partners who might have contributed to the district's attainment of the college and career readiness were also sought for interviews, but these individuals were not available for a face-to-face interview. The researcher sought to gather the needed information via email and phone calls.

Definitions of Terms

Accountability System. The 84th Legislature passed HB 2804, changing the Texas school accountability system so that every campus and district receives ratings that indicate what school districts and schools must do to meet state standards of student achievement as well as college and career readiness (TEA, n.d.).

Academic behaviors. Self-management skills, time management, study skills, goal setting, self-awareness, and persistence.

At-risk. This term is used to describe students or groups of students found to have a higher probability of failing classes, facing remediation, or dropping out of school (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2018, para. 1).

College and career readiness. The term refers to the level of preparation students need to enroll and succeed at a postsecondary institution without remediation in a credit-bearing course (Conley, 2007b). This term is used interchangeably with postsecondary readiness.

College culture. The combination of language, behavior, values, and philosophy that are part of a college education forms a culture that involves college students adhering to rules that are usually unspoken, but necessary, for learning how to fit into a college environment.

Cognitive strategies. These behaviors involve problem formulation, research, interpretation, communication, precision, and accuracy.

Contextual skills. These are skills enabling students to meet admissions requirements, choose college types and missions, afford college, adapt to college culture, and build relations with professors.

Every Student Succeeds Act. ESSA is the bipartisan reauthorization of the ESEA (1965) that was passed December 10, 2015, to raise public school standards and that included language to create effective transitions from high school graduation enrollment into college or career commencement.

English language learner. ELL refers to a student who speaks a primary language at home that is not English, such as Chinese, French, Spanish, etc. Multiple acronyms have been used to reference members of the ELL student group. Additional terms used in this study as secondary to the ELL presentation were limited English proficient (LEP) and English as a second language (ESL).

House Bill 1. HB1 refers to 2015 Texas' Advancement of College Readiness in Curriculum. HB1 can be seen in Section 28.008 of the Texas Education Code in order to improve the number of students college and career ready upon high school graduation. This bill required the TEA and the THECB to establish Vertical Teams (VTs) to develop

college and career readiness standards for the content areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. These standards specify what content students must know and be able to demonstrate knowledge in as part of succeeding in entry-level college courses at postsecondary institutions in Texas.

House Bill 5. HB5 was passed in 2013 to instill more flexibility in public education for enabling students to either pursue a traditional path into college and university or to move directly into the workforce to help fill what business leaders say are shortages of critical skills.

Meta-cognition. This term refers to having an understanding, awareness, and management of one's own thought processes.

Rural district. A district is rural when it cannot meet the criteria to be classified in any other subcategory (TEA, 2016). A rural district has either: (a) an enrollment of between 300 and the median district enrollment (n = 879) for the state and an enrollment growth rate over the past 5 years of less than 20%; or (b) an enrollment of fewer than 300 students (TEA, 2016).

Socioeconomic status (SES). The federal government defines the criteria for specific SES in order to describe the economic levels for public school students' families as part of determining school's eligibility for special funding. For example, low SES means students qualify for free or reduced lunch based on the federal government's guidelines for household income levels.

Significance of the Study

Superintendents faced with maintaining accountability for students beyond graduation might find this study useful. The single critical case study was expected to generate data about the proven practices used to prepare high school students for college and career readiness effectively. This study's findings offer beneficial resources to current and upcoming superintendents in Texas desiring to promote their expertise in college and career readiness in their current districts. Faced with meeting the expectations of federal funding, and regulated by state accountability, such as the TEA (2014, n.d.) and the HB5 in Texas, the findings might enable key leaders of school districts to reconcile accountability with aspirational efforts.

Delimitations

This research was confined to addressing the strategies used by a school district to help students become college and career ready (DeLaRosa & Tierney 2006; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow 1997; Roderick et al., 2008). This single critical case study analyzed data from one Texas school district that served a low-SES and primarily Hispanic student population, matching the demographics of the majority of school districts in Texas (TEA, 2017a). The study focused on the actions of the superintendent and central office leaders, including school board members. Students were not included in this study. Focus groups were not part of the data collection process. This study chose to use the lens offered by TEA Accountability study to identify stellar districts. Texas received notable attention with their high stakes testing and educational reform under No Child Left Behind. Texas has the second largest enrollment in public schools in the

nation with 5.4 million students, second to California with 6.2 million students, and while California has seen a steady decline in enrollment, Texas continues to grow, and minority representation continues to increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Limitations

The findings may not easily transfer to other school districts of different geographies and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were purposefully selected based on data specific to the case study district. No data were collected from current students; therefore, the data did not directly reflect the perceptions of the students represented in the college culture readiness efforts enacted by the case study district's leaders. A small sampling of people within the case study district participated in interviews for obtaining rich, in-depth data (Creswell, 2013).

Assumptions

The critical case study school district was identified using the assumption that districts who earn the postsecondary, or college and career readiness distinction have been measured accurately for identifying college and career readiness. For the purpose of this study, the TEA (2017b, n.d.) ratings were assumed to represent the state's intentions for college and career readiness legislation. The third assumption centered around the credibility of school district leaders, such as central office personnel, who participated in the study. To enable the researcher's assumption of honesty and the participants' freedom to speak freely, the researcher kept responses confidential and protected by pseudonyms in the report. Finally, the critical case study district's strategies for ensuring college and

career readiness were considered effective with all children, regardless of ethnicity or background.

Summary

Chapter One of this study included an overview of the study as well as identified the problem addressed. This chapter also contained necessary definitions, the scope of the research, and the limitations. Chapter Two comprises the literature used to determine the scope of this research and the background of practices leading up to the importance of college and career readiness in the United States of America. Chapter Three provides the methodology including research design, data collection procedures, instruments, and analysis plan. Chapter Four includes the description of the critical case school district, data from the data collection, and the findings. Chapter Five contains the discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and the literature as well as includes recommendations for educators and future research to support the educational aspirations of graduates in Texas. The findings, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, fulfilled the importance of the study for superintendents and the role central office plays in developing college and career readiness based on social constructivist theory (Brooks & Brooks, 1990; Stephens & Townsend, 2013).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

With an increase in accountability for college and career readiness in Texas and across the nation, the purpose of this critical case study was to identify factors promoting college and career readiness among all students (De la Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Klugman, 2013). While a plethora of case studies in various districts have identified possible causes for lack of college readiness and types of measures for determining individual students' college readiness, few researchers have focused on the district-wide systems in place to impact the college readiness of high school graduates (Breslow, Bousselot, & Chadwick, 2016; Conley, 2007a; Lundell, Higbee, & Hipp, 2005). This chapter highlights the literature and includes an introduction to Texas' accountability system, the presentation and analysis of multiple case studies and other literature on college readiness, and the initial framework that guided the study.

Texas Accountability Metric

The research conducted thus far on college readiness has been focused on high school practices that seem to create college ready graduates; however, the metrics used to measure the college readiness of students has revolved entirely around academic readiness (Conley, 2007b). The current accountability system in Texas measures school districts via four indices or domains. The first three indices have been used to measure student achievement, student progress, and closing the performance gap. Additionally, the A-F system of accountability system uses the nomenclature of *domain,* but each domain aligns with Index 1 as equivalent to Domain I, Index 2 as equivalent to Domain II, and Index 3 as equivalent to Domain III. However, the A-F system increased the

requirements for meeting the state's standards for postsecondary readiness formally changed the nomenclature from index to domain. The fourth domain was the focus of the current case study and was dedicated to forming college and career readiness among all students in a school district according to a number of criteria explicated in this section.

Index l: Student Achievement

Index 1, or Domain I, indicates the percent of test scores meeting performance standards across all subject areas tested. Index 1 includes data for all students, including students represented through seven ethnicity categories, special education, English limited language (ELL), and economic disadvantage.

Index 2: Student Progress

Only scores in reading and math are compared for Index 2, or Domain II. Progress is measured for all student groups. However, economically disadvantaged students are exempted from this category.

Index 3: Closing the Performance Gap

Index 3, or Domain III, data are used for the two lowest performing accountability groups in the district in addition to the economically disadvantaged students.

Index 4: Postsecondary Readiness

Index 4, or Domain IV, is recognized as the college and career readiness measure. Index 4 includes data for all student groups without exceptions. Domain IV measures more than students' STAAR scores. Domain IV makes the first two measures listed below mandatory and allows for those to be combined with a selection from the final three in the list below:

1. Graduation rate AND
2. Graduation plan rate: Distinguished, recommended, foundation with endorsement AND
3. Met TSI requirement in math and reading OR
4. Earned credit for two dual credit courses OR
5. Earned 3 credits in a CTE sequence

This information is necessary and useful because districts who are accountable under Domain IV will need to understand the factors that make up the accountability matrices.

However, Domain IV includes critical changes that prevent it from being the equivalent to Index 4. Accountability includes data from special education students and ELLs. Chronic absenteeism for elementary and middle schools are factors in a school district's Domain IV calculation, along with the annual dropout rate for Grades 7 and 8.

Domain V: Community Involvement and Student Engagement

In addition to the four accountability indices used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the A-F model adds the fifth domain. Domain V awards points to a school district for community involvement and student engagement. Figure 1 provides a summary of the state's A-F grading criteria for school districts and depicts the new Domain V that is being considered for the A-F system and was not part of the current system.

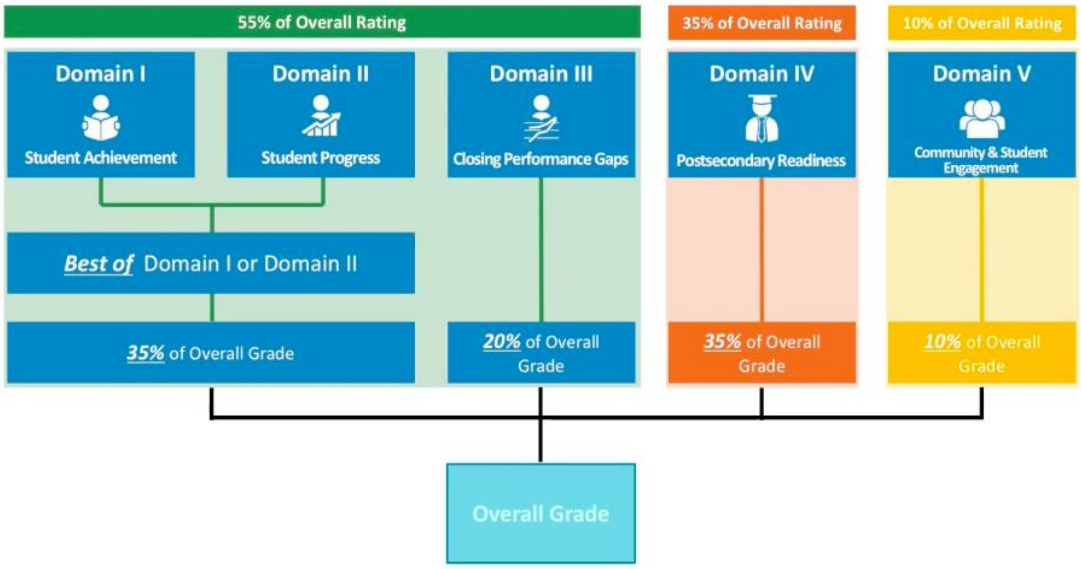


Figure 1. Domains of the TEA's A-F public school rating system.

Case Studies in the Literature

Research precluding this critical case study did not review superintendent actions in relation to college and career readiness. In 1997, Robert Wimpelberg reviewed multiple studies on superintendent leadership and concluded that future research would need to look at the activities and effects of leadership (Wimpleberg, 1997). There are empirical studies on the district central office executive team as instructional leaders (Rorrer, A., Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J., 2008; Snipes & Casserly, 2004) and emerging research on the role of the superintendent in areas other than college and career readiness (Harris, 2014; Mora, 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Wright & Harris, 2010). However, additional research is needed to examine the degree of influence the district superintendent has on college and career readiness (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Mora, 2010).

Studies on Superintendent and Central Office Impact

By combining research focused on superintendents' impact in schools with studies on school districts showing success in college and career readiness, a foundation for this case study was formed. The prior researchers have not developed a consensus on the meaning of college and career readiness or an agreement as to the impact central office personnel have on the levels of college and career readiness obtained by students within a district, yet all stakeholders believe a quality education is a civil right (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, n.d.).

School District Central Office Staff for 300 Schools Share Insights

Voices in Urban Education (VUE) staff combined forces with school districts in New York City, Dallas, and San Jose to analyze the support needed from the central office in the area of college and career readiness. The three districts joining forces with VUE serve over 300 schools and 430,000 students. Together, the representatives in each district stressed the importance of tracking students with progress measures, but also spoke of the impact superintendents and central office have on college and career readiness by making it a priority, allotting funding for initiatives, and aligning curriculum standards to college measures (Alter, Hall, & Lauck, 2012). Lastly, each district stressed the importance of data tracking for individual students by developing a college readiness indicator system such as those suggested by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (2014).

New York City Public Schools

New Visions provides a number of district-like supports and services to the seventy-five New York City public high schools. New Visions looked at academic success and cognitive skills needed for college and career success. After Carrano (2013) provided insight into the non-cognitive factors that have been labeled academic tenacity, Pilot schools used a common core rubric so that students could monitor their own college readiness.

Another pilot involved mentors with college degrees at eight high schools. Carrano described it as follows:

> The iMentor program seeks to develop seven core noncognitive skills: social capital development, utilizing a growth mindset, perseverance, critical thinking, help-seeking and self-advocacy, optimism and excitement about the future, and curiosity and love of learning. Mentors also help their mentees develop college knowledge, such as how to identify the best college match, apply for financial aid, meet application deadlines, write effective essays, and integrate into college life– all of which allows students to reach important milestones on their path to college graduation. (p. 15)

Carrano (2013) reported that New Visions for Public Schools developed the concept for a data warehouse where individual students can be tracked over time. The warehouse will create a house for the integration of data from multiple sources to encompass academic information, behavioral history, teacher assignments, scheduling and program practices, grades and curricula, and budget and resource allocations

(Carrano, 2013). A second concept created by New Visions involved Stock and Flow mapping, developed by New Visions' director of research and organizational learning, Susan Fairchild. These maps show how a cohort of students moves among four quartiles of college readiness over their eight semesters in high school. A large movement to a higher quadrant would signify successful college readiness strategies, where a large flow to a lower quadrant would suggest current systems and strategies are not adequately preparing students who are advancing towards college entrance.

Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD)

From 1998 to 2009, over 75,000 graduates in Dallas ISD were tracked for the purpose of quantifying success based on predetermined college readiness measures and success in completing a degree or certification through postsecondary education (Hall, 2013). Dallas ISD found that one-third of their graduates who completed their freshmen year of college did so with less than a 2.0 GPA. Dallas ISD enlisted the help of counselors and non-profits to support their college and career initiatives. Destination 2020, the district improvement plan, included college and career goals centered around SAT and ACT scores, as well as mandated tests administered during the school day. Destination 2020 reached beyond test scores to include career certification goals for their graduates. Hall reported Director of Counseling for Dallas ISD Silvia Lopez as explaining:

> There is definitely more collaboration across central office and outside resources. The school counselors are more confident when speaking about data and data elements to measure. Principals are also asking counselors to increase the college

> and career readiness work that they do with students. It all seems to be coming together. (p. 5)

Michael Dryden, the CRIS consultant for Dallas ISD, explained in the article (Hall, 2013) that the following lessons had been learned:

> Remember that behind every line of data is a student, and you have to think about students when thinking about college and career readiness. When developing indicators, ask yourself what outcomes you want to achieve, take stock of the data you have, and consider how they can measure your progress. Think outside the square and leverage the data you already have in ways you might not have thought of before. Engage thought partners in foundations and universities to help with this. Making the most of your existing data can mean less additional data to collect. Get support and input from the campuses; after all, principals, teachers, and counselors interact with the students every day and are the best people to implement the appropriate interventions. (p. 9)

Finally, Silvia Lopez responded to Hall (2013) in the article to "be patient and persevere. Never give up and continue to keep the conversation alive when talking about data and college and career readiness" (p. 9).

San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD)

This study which looked at over 33,000 students, recognized that the responsibility for making college readiness supports available goes beyond the district. The CRIS indicators and their respective cycles of inquiry established efforts by the district and its community partners for a citywide network of college readiness support

called Opportunity 21 that were directly aligned with the needs identified in the student population (Borsato et al., 2013). This study focused on using indicators to monitor progress toward college readiness and to activate supports and interventions when needed. The strength of this system was it gave steps for transforming data into action by using the following steps when looking at any college readiness indicator:

1. Take stock and prioritize
2. Identify
3. Plan
4. Implement strategies, policies, and interventions
5. Monitor progress and adjust as needed
6. Analyze results

By following these steps in order, districts will likely facilitate the emergence of a common language and common set of goals around college readiness, ensure buy-in, and also increase the chances that the end product meets users' needs and will be sustained and deepened.

The San Jose Unified District ran a pilot with college readiness strategies for one feeder pattern involving one elementary, one middle, and one high school. Once results were shown to make double digit gains in the area of college readiness, San Jose implemented their college readiness strategies across the entire district. Their results were phenomenal, showing an increase in graduation rate, an increase in completion of college level courses, and a district that was recognized as having an overall college culture (Kless, 2013).

Representing 60 Rural Districts Superintendency

Lamkin (2006) interviewed 60 superintendents across three states regarding the role of superintendents in providing equitable opportunities education for all students. The study was designed to build grounded theory when facing the challenges of school law, finance, personnel, government mandates, and district/board policy. Specifically, the superintendents were questioned about their personal accountability and challenges faced by rural districts that larger districts do not face in regard to resources and services. Superintendents discussed obstacles of isolation, limited resources, and community resistance to change (DeYoung, 1994). The findings from this study revealed that superintendents feel pressured to meet the increased accountability in all areas, but do not feel adequately prepared to handle the task (Lamkin, 2006). Rural districts face rapid turnover (Chance & Capps, 1992). Rural superintendents discussed the pressure of being the only administrator in a district that is sometimes the largest employer in the community.

Superintendents were asked five questions:

1. What were the primary problems and challenges that you encountered as a new superintendent?

2. What are the primary problems and challenges in your role now?

3. How were you prepared or how did you prepare yourself for the superintendency?

4. What recommendations would you make to improve the preparation and support of new superintendents?

5. If money were no object, what new endeavors would you pursue?

All superintendents spoke of needing upgrades in technology not just for academics but also for district accountability and to manage information. Many discussed a lack of administrative support and limited fiscal resources. The superintendents shared the burden of sole accountability for the academic success of students, the financial accountability of their district, and their visibility within the community (Lamkin, 2006). The superintendents recognized that work not finished on their desks translated to students not served, but each superintendent described methods in which he or she found ways to delegate responsibility for curriculum and student achievement to building level staff.

Study of Superintendent Visibility

In 2009, Rueter conducted a case study on how superintendent visibility impacts student achievement, staff accountability, and organizational culture. Rueter examined whether the superintendent actions in regards to visibility lead to the success of the district. The findings based entirely on the perception of school personnel supported the earlier research by Edmonds that effective schools have leaders who are highly visible (Edmunds, 1982). Rueter found that being visible not only meant the superintendent was in the 48 schools in his district, but also visited the facilities that supported schools, such as the transportation barn. Principals in this study discussed that the superintendent made school visits and attended after school events, always as a participant, not an observer. Visibility meant active engagement. The superintendent conveyed the importance of not visiting one area more than another area because it would be mistaken as having favorites

or showing one area more important than other areas. The superintendent said he made a conscientious effort to be seen in each section of the city an equal amount of times. Staff discussed how the superintendent visibility created a culture of collaboration. Staff reported their success was based on the constant visibility of the superintendent and his familiarity with campus operations.

Leadership Practices of Effective Rural Superintendents

The studies acknowledged the vast research on leadership practices of urban and suburban superintendents but sought to determine if the research could be applied to rural superintendents (Arnold, 2000; DeYoung, 1987). Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves sought to examine the six correlates from Water and Marzano (2006) work and if those same six correlates of effective leaders could be identified in the practice of effective rural superintendents. The second quest of Forner et al. (2012) was to see if there were additional practices used by rural superintendents that were unique to the rural setting.

Forner's study found that rural superintendents set non-negotiable goals for student achievement; provided continuous monitoring of students, teachers, and principals; leveraged the relationship with leadership through increased autonomy; and effectively utilized resources. In fact, five of the six correlates seemed to be effective for superintendents in urban, suburban, and rural districts. The only correlate that did not show a parallel was collaborative goal setting. In the rural district, rather than create a vision from the bottom up with a team, superintendents spoke of personally establishing goals and expectations which drove the reforms in their district (Forner et al., 2012).

Central Office Case Study

In his treatise regarding the role of the superintendent's central office personnel which Lopez called the executive team in improving scores for minorities in Texas, Lopez (2015) found superintendents must build relationships to have an impact. The trust resulting from the relationship with staff allows ongoing program evaluation and belief in students. By sustaining a culture of high expectations, superintendents lead pedagogical enhancements that are contextualized to the needs of the school district. Lopez found that the visibility of the superintendent not only made an impact on academic achievement but also had multiple benefits to the overall excellence of the district. The executive team discussed how the open door policy in their district did not mean people would come to your office to speak with you, but rather personnel from central office needed to be in the schools, convenient to campus staff. Opportunities for communication must be built into the schedule of a superintendent. This superintendent not only put out a weekly district memo, but he held a state of the district message for the community, and an annual convocation for staff to constantly communicate the district vision.

Not only did visibility of central office personnel sustain a reduction of the achievement gaps but it allowed staff to discuss needed resources and let the executive team become familiar with what was going on in each and every classroom. Visibility built trust with staff throughout the district and allowed the executive team to have a true pulse of the district. The superintendent reported visiting every classroom in the district once each semester since being hired. Teachers attested to this fact reiterating that the

superintendent had been in their classrooms at least seven times just walking through and interacting with students. The superintendent was viewed as somebody who doesn't just sit at a desk all day. The executive team was viewed as a circle of experts by the superintendent, but to the campus, they were team members constantly available to support the campus.

Studies on College and Career Readiness

The case studies identified in this section of the review of the literature represent several geographies in the United States. Studies from New York, Oregon, California, and Texas are presented herein, as well as research on creating college readiness.

New York City, NY

One exception to the commonly used student focus in college readiness was a study in New York City (NYC) on creating college ready communities. The goal was to investigate why measures to increase college and career readiness of students resulted in the graduation rate of the public high school system increasing by almost 30%, but the college completion rate remained low. The Center for New York City Affairs researchers canvased the city to speak with educators, nonprofit practitioners, student leaders, and college experts (White, Hemphill, & Salmans, 2013). They selected 12 low-income schools to track over a 10-year period. Politics entered the work when NYC's Mayor Michael Bloomberg appointed Department of Education Chancellor Dennis Walcott, who announced that the city's goal would no longer be focused on graduation but rather on ensuring the abilities of NYC children to be college ready and to be skillfully employed. When less than 20% of the graduates were scoring high enough on academic tests to be

considered college and career ready, NYC had huge challenges to overcome (White et al., 2013).

The schools in the multiple case study attempted to address college aspirations of their students by offering remedial classes for students behind in their credit accruals and AP classes for those desiring advanced work. The researchers provided teachers with information tracking former graduates. They enlisted non-profit corporations as partners to help students with the college application process. The center's personnel worked with colleges to help bridge the gap for the graduates by establishing data share agreements and institutional supports. With the changes and gains, however, NYC schools still demonstrated a college readiness rate of only 25% among high school graduates. Nonetheless, this rate was higher than the 15% readiness rate from 10 years prior but was also a large margin away from having all students gain college and career readiness, as Chancellor Walcott promised in 2011 (White et al., 2013).

San Jose, CA

San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) conducted a second set of research which the leadership team presented as an in-house study of the college readiness of their high school graduates. Faced with a desegregation court order from a 1986 federal court ruling, Dr. Linda Murray took the reign of SJUSD as superintendent. Dr. Murray laid out the importance of college and career readiness in relation to high expectations among all students, claiming success would be based on measuring progress. SJUSD began to implement a college prep curriculum for all students that met the college preparatory standards California Department of Education (2017) and trained staff in creating a

college going culture. Systems implemented included strategically placing teachers, building a block schedule, ensuring interdisciplinary learning, and providing open enrollment across the school district. The results included a drop-out rate that was 20% lower than the state's overall rate and the doubling of students' completion of college courses ("Preparing College-Ready," 2009).

The state of California later found that implementation of the college preparatory standards had not been done with diligence and students were counted as completing college courses when they received a D grade, which is too low to be accepted at the University of California. Enrollment in the alternative schools across the district that offered minimum diplomas without the rigorous college preparatory standards experienced double digit gains. Graduation plans were lowered to increase percentages of graduates and reduce the number of students classified as dropouts. (Leal, 2015).

Jordan Valley, OR

In Oregon, the EPIC organization sponsored a multiple case study on college readiness. Selecting four districts across the state in various geographical settings, the researchers looked for similarities and challenges. Of the four schools in this study, Jordan Valley High School provided the richest view of college readiness. The school boasted a 100% graduation rate with 95% of the students scoring on track, but the school also showed that only 40% of the students took the College Board's SAT test that is needed for college entrance (Breslow et al., 2013).

Breslow et al. (2013) highlighted the practices that led to a 100% graduation rate, such as community involvement, offering advanced courses, a strong partnership with the

local colleges, and student leadership. Breslow et al. did not address the number of students who actually attended college, why less than 50% of the students took the SAT, or how they assessed if the students were identified as college ready. Although the reported purpose was a case study of college readiness, the researchers chose to equate graduation rate with college and career readiness, rather than look at factors that showed success in college or career (Breslow et al., 2016).

Southwest Region, TX

The case study in a southwest Texas high school was set to explore the non-academic actions thought to be useful in facilitating college readiness (Ponce-Lugo, 2017). The primary focus of this research was to identify the actions teachers could take to help students overcome the barriers of college readiness. Ponce-Lugo (2017) used data about academic preparation and contextual obstacles. Contextual obstacles in this study referred to the absence of knowledge related to postsecondary institutions. Conley (2007a) referred to this knowledge as *college knowledge*, and Ponce-Lugo identified multiple factors that seemed to play a role in determining a student's college readiness.

For example, parental involvement affects college readiness (Leonard, 2013). Parents provide emotional support to students, facilitate creativity, and help children understand how to manage obstacles. Parental support most often manifested in the children in the form of grit, or the ability to work through difficult situations. Parental involvement also impacts children's social capital as well as the social capital of the friends surrounding the student. While social media plays a role in social capital, the

strongest link between college and social networks centers around the influence of parents and friends (Welton & Williams, 2015).

In particular, involvement in extracurricular activities leads to an increase in cognitive ability due to the experience of working with others, and the feeling of teamwork. Students who are self-directed and able to apply strong study skills show a higher college success rate. A combination of these skills paired with a college culture in high school for assisting students in selecting and applying to college leads to the success of the high school graduates (Ponce-Lugo, 2017).

Los Fresnos, TX

In 2015, Texas Education Agency (TEA) made Los Fresnos High School a TEA Reward School (Moore, 2015). In addition to receiving the TEA award in 2015, the school was given the College Board Inspiration Award in 2013 for the work done to ensure all students had high quality opportunities to access postsecondary participation. Los Fresnos High School with its 96% Hispanic population and 81% Economically Disadvantaged population, defied the norms by receiving five of seven state distinctions, one of which was in postsecondary readiness (Moore, 2015). The TEA identified Critical Success Factors (CSFs) to make the award choice, and Moore (2015) identified what CSFs this exemplar school implemented to obtain their success.

The strongest CSF identified was Academic Performance related to organizational decision making and constant collaborative alignment (Moore, 2015). Teachers work through the summer to develop pacing guides and curriculum. The superintendent was identified as establishing the focus on what needed to be taught in Grades PK-12 and

segued into the second CSF identified with Leadership Effectiveness. Leaders were encouraged to share ideas and observe each other. The last factor identified dealt with teacher quality. Teachers referred to data driven professional development and support from the Education Service Center (Moore, 2015). While many of these strategies took place from the district level down to the teachers, the focus of Moore's (2015) case study was not on the actions of the superintendent but rather on how a college going culture was created at the high school.

Dallas, TX

In 2008, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) granted the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) $3.77 million to measure college readiness and postsecondary success among the school district's students. The district created a project team that included Dr. Dean Spitzer from the Consortium on Chicago School Research and Dr. David Conley. This study included over 75,000 graduates from 1998 to 2009 analyzing measurements of college-going behavior, college completion, and regression analysis. Based on the factors determined to influence college readiness (Johnson, 2011), Dallas ISD's leaders realigned their college readiness criteria and curriculum ("College and Career Readiness Annual Report," 2016). Academic preparedness was addressed by increasing student opportunities for engaging in academic rigor through Advanced Placement (AP) as well as dual credit courses in high school and college course offerings. College Knowledge, one of the Four Keys to College Readiness identified by Conley to be discussed more in depth in the following chapters, was increased by forging college access partners who provided individual counseling to students on applying for college

scholarships and understanding financial aid. Academic Tenacity, a second key, was tracked by comparing data on discipline, class attendance, college enrollment and retention rates, and completion metrics (Johnson, 2011). Dallas ISD analyzed all changes that occurred during the designated time period, and positive changes were equated with increased college and career readiness.

Creating College Culture

In 2015, Melissa Martinez began a three-year study of the college and career readiness efforts in three Texas districts. Martinez focused on Year 1 data and built on the work of prior research into college practices at 38 high schools (Conley, McGaughy, Kirtner, Van der Valk & Martinez-Wenzil, 2010). Martinez used the Conley (2003, 2007a) definition of college readiness. Martinez found a strong commitment from staff in supporting college ready students sustained over several years. Schools in this study had community partnerships that fostered college and career readiness. The findings included the following common strategies: (a) visually and verbally promoting college going in the school via college pennants, posters, etc.; (b) postsecondary information and guidance; and (c) college curriculum. Martinez hoped to understand the role of all stakeholders in college readiness by the end of the three year study and suggested this area as an opportunity for future research (Martinez, 2015).

Framework for College and Career Readiness

While the majority of literature relating to college readiness focused on academic accomplishments, a few researchers examined other elements needed to succeed during college, such as organization, self-efficacy, persistence, time management, and discipline

(Carrano,2013; Conley, 2007a; Daggett, 2013; Lopez & Lopez, 2017). A majority of the literature reviewed focused on one element of college readiness (achievement), outlined the deficits experienced by minority children (Milner, 2012), or focused on the unfair treatment of poor children in their academic preparation (McDonough, 1997; Welton & Williams, 2015). College readiness has often been viewed entirely through a quantitative lens based on test scores. David Conley developed the Four Keys for College and Career Readiness model to help identify the cognitive skills needed for college readiness that contribute to more outcomes than academic achievement.

Four Keys for College and Career Readiness

Conley (2003) categorized all skills necessary for college and career readiness into four areas. These areas are commonly referred to as the four keys or four dimensions of college and career readiness. In the literature on college readiness, both terms are used interchangeably. This research sought to identify behaviors of school leadership that help develop the four keys in the students served by the district. Figure 2 shows an overview of the four keys that make up the college readiness framework (Conley, 2007a, 2007b).

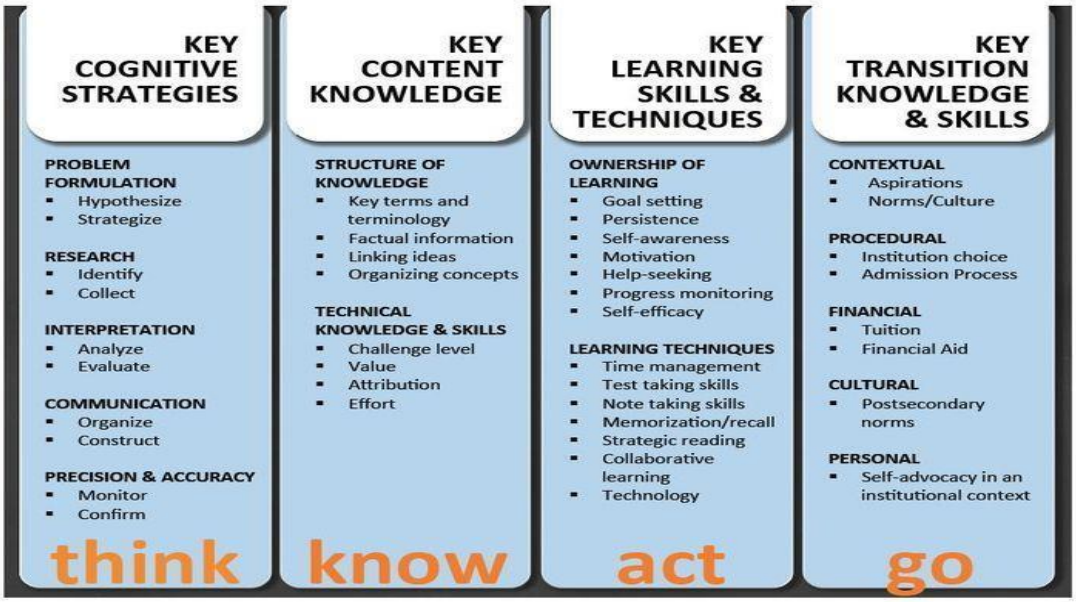


Figure 2. Conley's (2007a, 2007b) four keys for college and career readiness.

David Conley (2007a) divided the myriad skills necessary for college readiness into four keys or dimensions. Key Content Knowledge refers to the curriculum that students learn in Grades PK-12. The other three keys are aspects of college readiness that must be built into a standardized curriculum. The skills for collaboration and problem-solving are garnished through traditional textbook experiences. Collaboration skills are developed when schools provide opportunities for interactions among students to experience growth. Researchers showed problem-solving to be vital to success. Each of these elements is difficult to monitor and even harder to measure.

Accountability systems for individual states require students to master specific curricula for graduation, show college aptitude based on ACT or SAT scores, and achieve a designated minimum grade point average (GPA). All of these factors, only measure two of the four keys that research shows are needed by college students to succeed (Conley,

2015). Standardized tests, grade point averages, and course completion give an indication of Key Content Knowledge and Key Learning Skills. Performance on a norm-referenced test cannot capture the ability to analyze situations, to manage the demands of college culture, or to maintain persistence to get through the first year of classes at a four-year university. Therefore, Conley's (2007a) Key Cognitive Strategies of Think, Know, Act, and Go are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Key cognitive strategies: Think. College readiness is a responsibility shared by the entire education continuum (Bloom, 2010). As a threshold issue, educators must confront any internalized tracking belief that limits students of color and opportunities for children who come from impoverished households. These scholars expressed concern that internal beliefs among educators would translate to fewer opportunities to acquire needed cognitive abilities (Espinosa, Gaertner & Orfield, 2015; Wright & Harris, 2010). Recognizing organizational habitus that determines the influence on an individual's behavior based on his/her cultural group or social class allows districts to explore how to prepare the students they serve (McDonough, 1997). Educators must understand all the components necessary for college readiness and the roadblocks for future college students (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Key cognitive strategies rest at the core of college readiness yet provide the biggest challenge for observation or measurement. The think key refers to the ability to "learn, understand, retain, use, and apply content from a range of disciplines" while in high school (Conley et al., 2010, p. 6). Cognitive skill development strategies include: allowing students to problem solve in elementary, requiring them to prove their

arguments, and teaching them to analyze information for accuracy. All students need this reinforcement. Harsh socioeconomic conditions hinder the development of explorative learning and discussion (Patten, 2015). Students find themselves struggling when asked to process, manipulate, and apply previously learned concepts to new situations (The Education Trust, 2016). Groups such as Odyssey of the Mind, Big Thought, Destination Imagination, and Creative Minds give schools access to programs that focus on interpretation, relevance, and problem solving in Grades PK through 8. Creating learner-centered classrooms and workspaces allow students to develop a college readiness foundation based on the Key Cognitive Strategies for building foundational college readiness (Conley, 2007a).

In the 2010 Race to the Top initiative, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) was awarded 350 million dollars to research performance based assessments to measure college and career readiness that included analyzing research, writing essays, and reasoning with high order thinking skills (Tamayo, 2010). This award to research alternate assessments focused on cognitive skills supports David Conley's (2007a) theory that state standards measure basic academic skills, but actual college readiness traits require further exploration. Higher education experts argue that college access cannot be based solely on merit and that minority students capable of succeeding at the college level are overlooked due to a limited list of requirements for admittance (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). If cognitive strategies, such as problem solving, were included in the college entrance assessments, the next cohort of

college freshmen would look very different than if schools were to continue to base college acceptance solely on content knowledge (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007).

Key content knowledge: Know. Educators are perhaps most familiar with the key content knowledge, and most guided by the mandated measurements of this factor for accountability (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Politicians base campaigns on the perceived growth or downfall of schools using assessment measurements of the core subjects. The research by Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010) on schools, found that districts with high levels of college readiness also had central office personnel on site, in the schools daily. The central office personnel communicated the district goals for college readiness daily with students and peers (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010).

Information has been produced indicating the presence of a direct correlation between content knowledge and college readiness. Academic preparation has been stated to be one of two factors determining college readiness (Perna & Thomas, 2006, p. 97). Some states claim to have embedded the content knowledge needed for college readiness into their curriculum (Chicago Public School Board of Education, 2014). Often districts mandate four years of math that includes pre-calculus, three years of science that includes physics, and an offering of Advanced Placement (AP) courses to ensure students meet the goal of reaching the college readiness indicators (Dounay, 2006). While research indicates a direct correlation between AP course enrollment and resulting college readiness of students (Klugman, 2013, p. 3), there is still a large deficit among high school graduates when looking at the level of college readiness needed to succeed at college and to earn a degree.

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education cited the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as a basis to increase the likelihood of high school graduates having college and career readiness. The brief listed AP courses, along with dual credit enrollment, SAT and ACT scores, and GPA as leading indicators. The ESEA stated that college and career readiness could be measured by looking at remedial course requirements required of high school graduates upon entering college and by retention rates of first year college students (H.R. Res. 2362, 2010). These measurements are applied to high schools, and in some states, the districts receive a college readiness score based on these indicators. Research showed that 40% of college freshmen take one or more remedial course after graduation to prepare them for the actual college coursework (Rothman, 2012). In 2008, The Education Trust (2016) found that public school curricula missed the opportunity to align coursework to college preparatory curriculum. Research indicated successful schools not only aligned the curricula to college standards but incorporated teaching students how to write using evidence provided by credible sources and substantiated arguments across all disciplines (Conley et al., 2010, p. 6).

Key Learning Skills and Techniques: Act. The third key for college and career readiness in Conley's research centered around Key Learning Skills and Techniques. Key learning results from the meta-cognition necessary for self-monitoring displayed as the talent required to apply prior learning to new situations. This type of behavior results from familiarity with information resources, communication skills to discuss learning, filters to scribe the important information gleaned from lessons, and time management to allow application of learning. This dimension required educators to broaden

accountability indicators beyond the minimum academic standards. This key looked at purposeful systems conducive to teaching and learning that would impact the opportunities for metacognition. When students do not assume responsibility for self-monitoring, instructional time on task is wasted due to discipline issues. Staff must teach students how to monitor their own learning. Familiarity with data sources and expectations for success enabled adjusting instruction to match the needs of students (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011).

By rewarding positive academic behaviors, schools show value in measures beyond the Key Content Knowledge. An example of showing such value is rewarding hours spent in tutoring over grades (Stephens & Townsend, 2013). EPIC found that writing is the single most important academic skill associated with college readiness, and writing with a college focus best prepares students for college. Writing and reading are the fundamental skills required for mastery of any college level course. Research of successful schools showed writing permeated all the keys of college and career readiness (Conley, 2007b) and reflected Key Learning Skills.

Key transition knowledge and skills: Go. The last Key Transition Knowledge and Skills starts with staff. Staff must believe all students have the capability to obtain mastery at a college readiness level (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Some students fail to discover if they are a good fit for a particular college because they lack the information needed for college entrance (Lundell et al., 2005). A deficit in Key Transitional Knowledge and Skills may prevent a successful transition between high school and postsecondary education (Conley, 2010).

Once admitted, many students discover they are missing much needed information regarding the college systems and culture. The norms and values of the institution where they seek enrollment are beyond their grasp. The relationship skills needed to survive within a college community have not been developed (Hernandez, 2002). They may not have experienced working with a diversified team or living among people of different cultures. The survival skills necessary to thrive without family may not be practiced (Conley et al., 2010).

Students may have trouble just "fitting in" on the college campus (Hausmann, Scholfield, & Woods, 2007). Staff members educated with college knowledge have greater success in helping students become successful (College Access: Research & Action [CARA], 2012; Martinez, 2015). If staff are aware of traits and information needed for success, they help students develop those characteristics and acquire the contextual knowledge (CARA, 2012). Staff can help community members with college knowledge by offering financial aid workshops in frequently used locations such as local churches (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006). Larry Lezotte, building on the Effective Schools Model, found that effective schools create a positive home-school relation that allows parents to play important roles in helping schools fulfill the mission of college readiness (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Leonard, 2013). Cultural capital researchers showed that parental expectations influenced student's educational aspirations (Conley et al., 2010).

Family Support. Parental involvement in the child's educational journey does not stop in high school or college (Harris, Hines, Mayes, & Vega, 2016). Parents are needed for college readiness to help understand the enrollment process, provide financial

support, and provide emotional guidance (Leonard, 2013). This sometimes presents a new set of non-academic challenges when ethnic variables are considered. Language barriers, personal experiences, and unfamiliarity with college systems may cause parents to forgo the support needed.

Staff can use the high school as a link to help students and families navigate the systems for completing college applications (Hill, 2008; Martinez, 2015). Districts can offer an early college program, dual credit, and dual enrollment opportunities which allow students to sample the college culture (Leonard, 2013). Other practices that lead to successful college entrance are creating a culture where students explore different colleges via online resources, inviting guest speakers with knowledge about college culture, and bringing back alumni students who are successful at college to speak with students (Roderick et al., 2008).

Each college offers a unique campus culture; alignment between that culture and student's interest and abilities provides a formula for college persistence. This matching of students with colleges helps students feel like they belong at the institution and reduces discrimination among students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hausmann, Scholfield, & Woods, 2007). Students who do not have an environment of a college bound culture or the social capital network to gain this knowledge, rely on schools to provide access. Obtaining this knowledge prior to arriving on campus helps students avoid feeling overwhelmed and increases their chances for college and career success. They need informational resources, support networks, checkpoints, and a structured plan to obtain their goal, to

fulfill the mission of the district, and for students to be college ready upon completion of high school (Conley et al., 2010).

School Leadership. While superintendents juggle the myriad of duties from instructional leader and fiscal agent, to buses and buildings, expectations continue to rise (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Wright & Harris, 2010). High stakes accountability and making sure districts adhere to and surpass legislative mandates require a new type of leadership from superintendents (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Santamaria, 2013; Tamayo, 2010). Superintendents must have a growth mindset (Dweck, 2012), and must embrace the paradigm shift required for their students to become college and career ready. This means developing metrics to measure progress each year to hold educators accountable for each group of students while being transparent with communication (Andero, 2000; Conley et al., 2010; Kowalski & Oates, 1993).

Conclusion

Even though the case studies and research presented here offered district perspectives about the impact of college and career readiness in the success of the student, further study is needed to answer questions regarding best practices to instill college and career readiness in students and methods of measurement at the district level. Research into district impact on college readiness that focuses on college success rather than college eligibility offers a new perspective in the area of college and career readiness. This research limited its scope to areas beyond existing burdens of personnel turnover, state policy changes, and misalignment of terms associated with college readiness to help high schools identify what strategies were implemented district-wide

with the guidance of central office personnel. The reviewed literature suggested the need for a critical case study in a low-income district that was not part of a major metropolitan area as well as the inclusion of data related to superintendents' actions for building college and career readiness throughout their school districts. The reviewed literature called for a framework that linked college and career readiness to measurable outcomes beyond academic performance.

Chapter Three: Methodology

A critical case study of a selected district that with no prior accolades received the highest level on college and career readiness metrics from TEA was needed to highlight the strategies that educational leaders employ to equip PK through Grade 12 school students with college and career readiness. The review of the literature revealed methods used by campus personnel in specific case study school districts to prepare students for college readiness, but the research failed to provide data regarding how leaders at the central administrative level ensure college and career readiness across all grades of a school district (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006). This research was conducted to identify best practices, as discussed by central administrators, for increasing students' college readiness (CARA, 2012). This research investigated the proven practices for ensuring college and career readiness and focused on meaning as constructed by those interviewed (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Thus, this chapter includes the research design, procedures, and analysis plan for the single, critical case study.

Research Design

The proposed study was conducted using a critical case study design (Yin, 2014). The rationale for a single case design followed Yin's philosophy on testing a significant theory or a second rationale to test well formulated theory propositions believed to be true. This type of study provided explanations for behaviors and actions by the people operating in the environment (Yin, 2014). By following the four steps of a case study, this research was designed in accordance with the philosophy documented by Yin for qualitative studies. An overview of the case study is necessary, followed by the

procedures used in the field. The research was centered around the research questions that led to this case study report. The case study research involved qualitative strategies including interviews conducted with the superintendent, central office personnel, campus personnel and identified strategic stakeholders. The research provided evidence of the keys that would not be apparent in quantitative data or associated with standardized tests and scores. This effort included obtaining evidence of educators teaching students in one Texas school district key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, key learning skills and techniques, and key transition knowledge and skills (Conley, 2007a) that enabled them to attain college and career readiness. Of specific interest was how the superintendent, alongside stakeholders, impacted the college and career readiness of the district's students in all grades.

A critical case study research design was used to conduct an empirical inquiry investigating a phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2014). The data from the critical case study were triangulated to yield recommendations for districts seeking to ensure students' college readiness. The data provided information regarding the strategies district personnel employed for ensuring that students graduate from high school with college and career readiness.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the central questions as follows: (1) What strategies and systems did the superintendent employ to ensure districts achieve the necessary level of college and career readiness? (2) How did central office and campus personnel implement college and career strategies and systems?

Data Sources

Tools to collect data in a case study may include interviews, observation, and review of artifacts (Yin, 2014). The researcher included social media such as school and district websites as well as Twitter and Facebook accounts' messages in the artifacts reviewed as data (Appendix C) for the critical case study. Documentation of messages to the staff and community were sought as representations of methods of communicating the importance of college and career readiness to students graduating from high school. Interviews included questions about college culture development in the school district. The case study research was primarily conducted via interviews with the superintendent, central office personnel, campus personnel, and identified strategic stakeholders to document perceptions of staff with regards to college and career strategies implemented, supported by observations during site visits. Appendix D contains a list of the participants' interviews.

Site and Participant Selection

The researcher's inclusion criteria to select the critical case study school district and narrow down the list of choices based on availability and convenience were formed according to the TEA's list of school districts receiving distinctions and was used to identify potential districts for this case study. A cross reference of districts from the distinction list that also received a grade of A in postsecondary readiness by the TEA (2017b) was used to attain the list of districts meeting the criteria for this case study. Since the criteria for charter districts, private districts, and alternative districts are different for scores that the TEA uses for Index 4 when measuring for college and career

readiness, the districts eligible for the case study were limited to the traditional school districts recognized by the TEA for college and career readiness.

One school district in Texas representing the unique case of whole-district college and career readiness was used as the study site. The case study district was referred to as Small Town Independent School District (Small Town ISD). First, state archives were examined of school districts that mirror the population of Texas and have scored high on all college readiness measures. Of the 24 districts in Texas recognized for having above average college readiness, and scoring in Quartile One of Index 4 in Texas, one district served as the case study site based on the following criteria:

1. The district closely resembled the demographics of Texas.
2. The superintendent has served the district a minimum of three years.
3. The district received an A grade in postsecondary readiness on the new grading system in Texas.

From the list of 1,247 school districts in Texas, from 2014-2017, 84 districts received a distinction in Index 4 for college and career readiness. Of those 84 districts, only 28 received the distinction for more than 1 year. Additionally, four of the districts receiving a distinction for college readiness were charter schools and one of which was an early college high school district. These five schools did not meet the criteria of being tied to local property taxes for facilities funding. Only six eligible districts received the highest rating for college readiness on the new system of accountability (TEA, 2017b) to form the population from which the critical case district was selected.

Of the six distinguished, public school districts receiving an A in college readiness by TEA, only two had a diverse population and socioeconomic level equitable to the state. The superintendent for both districts had been in place for three years; however, in one district the superintendent served in multiple positions over a period of 20 years and could speak to the history of college readiness within the district. The selected district population of students exceeded the state averages for all school districts' low SES and English limited language percentages.

Participant selection was purposeful. First, the superintendent was recruited to serve as a participant and key informer. Second, the superintendent was consulted for the recruitment of other participants involved in the college and career readiness successes at the district based on superintendent recommendation. Thus, the case study research included inviting the following for interviews: (a) the superintendent; (b) central office personnel; and (c) identified strategic stakeholders, and (d) sponsoring businesses. The researcher documented the participants' perceptions of the process of implementing and maintaining the college and career readiness culture in all grades of the school district. Finally, the sample size for the critical case study included seven total participants contributing data in one-on-one interviews and three informal interviews to represent the case of district-wide college and career readiness among the students of Small Town ISD.

Procedures

The study was conducted within the guidelines for research delineated in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. The researcher kept all data including journals, interview data, artifacts, and notes in a secure place protecting the anonymity of

participants. The school district information was reported using the fictitious name of Small Town ISD, and no conclusions were reached outside the scope of the original study. The semi-structured interview process was designed for two rounds of interviews with the superintendent. This two-phase data collection process allowed the researcher to establish clarifications if the superintendent found any first-round questions to be confusing or to enable participants to elaborate on thoughts that may come to them after the first interview. One round of interviews occurred with each of the central office and campus administrators. Before the first interviews, the researcher field tested the questions for understandability by gaining feedback from fellow educators. Based on feedback from these peers, the questions were modified and sent to all participants prior to the interviews. (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher contacted the superintendent to schedule the first interview that was held at a time and place designated for superintendent convenience. The researcher asked the superintendent to serve as the key informant and refer additional participants who were instrumental in raising the college and career readiness levels of the district. The researcher sought out 10 total participants including the superintendent for the critical case study.

All formal interviews were audio-recorded with permission to do so granted by the participants. Each recorded interview was transcribed immediately to begin the process of making constant comparisons. The primary round of interviews involved implementing a face-to-face interview protocol. The second interview with the superintendent was also face-to-face. The second round of interviews was used to obtain

clarification on any gaps in data, further elaboration on data, and a review of the initial interview transcripts and codes by the superintendent. The participants did expand on any information that appeared to lack detail or clarity for the researcher. Each interview session was scheduled for approximately 50 to 60 minutes. All dialogue was transcribed to enable the researcher to conduct member checking and to verify the codes formed from the data (Creswell, 2013). Transcripts were then sent back to participants for member checking. All names of persons, schools, towns, and the district were masked with pseudonyms, and statistics of the district were adjusted plus or minus one point to reduce the likelihood of the district being identifiable.

Positionality of the Researcher

I have served 20 years in secondary education and am passionate about instilling college and career readiness in today's public school students. Therefore, I seek out opportunities to enable students to become college and career ready. My purpose for the proposed study was to determine what strategies and necessary knowledge are conveyed in a district with students who have reached college and career readiness level on multiple metrics from the state of Texas in order to develop a model of best practices that can be shared with educators, not only in Texas but also in the nation (Alter, Hall, & Lauck, 2012; Cuban, 1976; Edwards, 2006; Kowalski & Oates, 1993; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Rueter, 2009).

Data Analysis

Once interviews were transcribed using a professional service Rev, data were coded using open coding by reading transcripts of data continuously to learn what terms

and phrases form patterns (Saldaña, 2016). Axial coding was used to categorize the patterns into themes. Each interview transcription was printed on colored paper coinciding with the pseudonym used for the specific participant. Two copies of each transcripts were printed according to the color coding scheme so that one printed copy could remain intact for context and one copy could be cut into strips by response to each interview question. Responses from all participants were placed in corresponding envelopes designated for the respective interview questions. Each set of data for each interview question was then analyzed for patterns, for support of the framework, and to triangulate data between respondents. Not all data supported the framework, but all responses applied to the two research questions. Once themes and patterns were identified, the responses were sorted by the two research questions for this case study.

The data analysis provided results related to superintendents' and other key stakeholders' roles in achieving distinguished levels of college and career readiness among an entire school district (Edwards, 2006). The data analysis yielded themes for providing a potential framework or model. Triangulation of data occurred as the researcher used multiple forms of evidence to describe the findings accurately and effectively. Triangulation enabled the data findings to be presented with credibility. Triangulation included data from artifacts, field notes, and transcripts of participants (Creswell, 2013). The participants included the superintendent, central office personnel, campus personnel, and identified strategic education leaders. Participants were given the opportunity to edit and approve interview transcripts. In addition, the superintendent approved the use of all research obtained during interviews and site visits.

Limitations of Case Study

There were two specific circumstances found in the case study that affect generalizability and serve as limitations for the case study. First, this case study district had a leadership team with extended tenure in the district. The superintendent set the vision and expected staff to produce outcomes reflecting this vision. Other districts might not operate with staff as knowledgeable for carrying out the strategies identified as best practices for CCR seen in this case study. The campuses' leadership displayed a *cowboy attitude* and preferred to operate independently, without much oversight. This level of confidence and self-reliance could be difficult to replicate in other districts through only professional development. Three of the seven district leaders had stepped down from superintendent and leadership positions in other districts to work as campus leaders and administrators in Small Town ISD. The expertise and global vision of the participants within their Small Town ISD positions might also be difficult for leaders lacking previous district-level positions experience to replicate.

Second, this district had an intensive CTE focus in place with pathways for industry certifications that might not be valued in all areas of the state. District partnerships that these leaders negotiated might not be possible for other small, rural districts. Professional development to train staff on the importance of CTE might not be financially feasible in other school districts. Providing college access information to children in primary grades might not be as well received in school districts led by administrators who have not seen firsthand the need for promoting college readiness to children prior to middle or high school.

Chapter Four: Findings of the Study

This study focused on proven strategies used with all students in all grades while acknowledging the fact that college readiness rates are much lower for groups of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Sackett, Borneman, & Connelly, 2009). This analysis of data was focused on ascertaining meaning as constructed by those interviewed in one small, Texas district. The purposefully selected district known as Small Town Independent School District (Small Town ISD) was the subject of a single critical case study to examine the roles of the superintendent and the central district administration as well as the strategies and systems implemented to help the district earn two distinctions and a distinguished rating in the Texas measure of college and career readiness district-wide. The district easily met the criteria of a small district with a total enrollment of 1,370 pupils. This case met the criteria of a critical case study because a single case was used to test a specific theory identified in the framework by David Conley (2007a, 2007b) known as the Four Keys to College and Career Readiness. Conley's Four Keys remained under consideration throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Finally, the researcher remained pragmatic while examining the data presented as enabling the district to outperform similar districts in Texas on measures of college and career readiness (Yin, 2014).

Context of the Study

Small Town ISD boasted of their Index 4 STAAR Distinction in 2016 and 2017 during the interviews and on the main page of all social media accounts, as well as multiple slides featured on their webpage. During the interviews, two cabinet members,

the superintendent, and three out of four principals mentioned the gold star awards received for their postsecondary readiness distinctions. Each individual campus website had an announcement of the gold stars distinctions earned.

The superintendent had an unprecedented tenure of over 30 years in the district including the following (a) as a student, (b) as an assistant principal at the high school, (c) as the assistant superintendent within the district for 12 years, and (d) as the superintendent for four years. His journey of growing up in the town, graduating, becoming a teacher, and coming back as a central office administrator gave him the ability to look at the district through several different lenses.

The superintendent provided a rich, historical background understanding of Small Town ISD's previous 30 years, and historical documents contained 50 years of information regarding education in Small Town ISD. Two of the people interviewed had over 25 years each in the district, and one of the interviewed principals had left a superintendent position in another district to take over the high school principal position. The majority of staff interviewed discussed the lengthy process of getting everyone to see the collective responsibility of college readiness and referred to the district's primary goal of academic achievement leading to college readiness. The superintendent shared that the district's "faculty, staff, and campus administrators have worked so hard to get to this point. I assure you that our recent success is a total team effort."

Small Town ISD Background

The superintendent was eager to discuss the successes realized by Small Town ISD to reach a high level of college readiness while overcoming the challenges faced

serving students across three counties and covering over 100 square miles in Texas. The district leaders worked to overcome several challenges such as overcrowded mobile homes in impoverished areas where drugs are prevalent and serving first generation students where many parents do not have postsecondary goals for their children.

The central office staff discussed the challenges of budgeting in this district affected by a steady population decline of almost 20% during the past 10 years and one third of families living at or below the poverty line (TEA, 2017b). Ms. Pink Central Staff discussed the very limited budget and how new initiatives must be researched and planned the prior year. Ms. Tan Central Staff served in the Superintendent's Cabinet and shared that small districts tend to lack "the finances desired to accomplish your goals." Consequently, each campus holds a fundraiser to fund their college visits.

Professional development is the only extra cost incurred by the district for ensuring college readiness. The superintendent noted that professional development enabled the district to support the school board's goal of providing the best education for students within current resources. Therefore, no staff positions were added, no extra pathways were created, and no extra funds for the dual credit courses were used. Parents who were taught the importance of those offerings paid for the courses, books, and transportation. Since the district operated Title I schools in which many students lacked money to pay for lunch or participate in activities such as college visits, parents with the funds to pay for their children willingly donated funds to meet the costs of enabling one more child to have lunch or participate in those activities. Principal Gold said the district

had no problem obtaining enough extra funding for ensuring all students who needed financial help to participate in college and career activities could do so.

Principal Green discussed how being in a small district limits course offerings and available facilities and amenities as follows: "You just cannot offer everything you would like to offer, and there is nothing you can do about it." According to the superintendent, a majority of the townspeople worked in the local manufacturing industry that included over 30 small companies vying for the same category of business; therefore, the school district's leaders sought to provide students with alternative career options.

The superintendent spoke about being "very proud" of providing personal one-to-one devices for a majority of the students but acknowledged the importance of spreading that initiative throughout the district while making sure students have access to the most current technology for education and for future careers. Students in grades 7-12 are issued a personal laptop. For students in Grades 5 and 6, their issued laptops are kept at school. Students in Grades 3 and 4 are issued individual iPads for use on-campus during school hours. In addition to the personal devices, each Grade PK through Grade 6 classroom has a Smartboard (screen sized touch computer screen) and access to computer carts for instruction. The technology is one component of the Key Learning Techniques (Act) for college and career readiness (Conley, 2007a). The district had followed through on its goal of making technology available to all students and staff as had been posted as one of the district's six goals on its website.

The superintendent disclosed the district received 100 points on their Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas and an AAA business rating, while maintaining 30% of

their budget in unassigned fund balance and another 15% of their budget in assigned fund balance. The technology initiative and district improvements were provided from the excess revenue above 30% from their unassigned fund balance rather than pass a bond initiative.

Local Demographics

The superintendent discussed keeping a vigilant eye on the local community's changing demographics. For example, the influx of Spanish speaking residents to the community caused the district's LEP student population to exceed the state average by 5.0% and verbalized a refusal to "stick his head in the sand" and ignore the LEP students who struggled on standardized tests. The superintendent created a district bilingual coordinator position and initiated a bilingual education program for elementary beginning with Kindergarten and adding one grade per year to the program. The superintendent found the program was very successful but offered no data to verify the assertion.

Vision and Goals

The vision of the district emphasized the importance of all stakeholders reaching excellence. The posted vision of the district includes educational goals for the community, staff, and students. The artifacts collected from Small Town ISD incorporated goals for helping students, staff, and community achieve full potential while preparing the students for their postsecondary journeys. Principal Green did not consider high school to be a journey; the journey happens after high school graduation. Principal Green focused on where students wanted to go after high school, making sure every graduate knew exactly where to take their next steps. His perspective closely aligned to

the Key Transition Knowledge (Go) from Conley's (2007b) framework which enables students to have the self-advocacy required for success at a postsecondary institution.

The superintendent, central staff, and campus administrators discussed the importance of personnel. The personnel focus aligned with the school board's posted goal to attract and retain quality personnel. Ms. Pink Central Staff emphasized the need for quality personnel as follows: "You've got to get the people in the boat, and they all got to be rowing in the same direction to get there."

District Organizational Structure

The superintendent provided documents to give insight into the structure of the organization. In 2006, Small Town ISD reduced the size of its staff as a result of declining enrollment. However, over the past 10 years, the district made concentrated efforts to recruit minorities for classroom teachers and other vacancies. The superintendent discussed the strategies he used to get graduates to come back to the district as teachers after they graduated from college. The superintendent believed in the importance of recruiting minorities to work in the district through the local community's families. According to the TEA (2017b), in 2006, the district had just over seven percent minority staff with 27% minority students. In 2016, according to the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), the district approximately doubled its percent of minority staff to over 14 % and served a minority majority student population of 52%. Table 1 displays the ethnicities of the teachers in Small Town ISD (TEA, 2017b).

Table 1

Teachers' Ethnicities in Small Town ISD for 2006 and 2016

Teacher Ethnicity	2006 *n*	2016 *n*
African American	1	1
Hispanic	1	11
White	126	96
American Indian	0	0
Asian	0	0
Pacific Islander	0	0
Two or more Races	0	3

While the school board of Small Town ISD contained seven elected members, with four women and three men currently serving, there were no minority school board members serving at the time of data collection. Three members served a term that expired the same year as data collection, and last year, two seat terms expired with no one challenging the incumbents, limiting the school board to current members, and current ethnicity representation. Only one school board member was recommended for participating in an interview about college readiness. This school board member held an earned doctorate and taught at the local college with which Small Town ISD maintained a dual-enrollment partnership.

The school district allowed the researcher access to visit and observe at each of the district's four campuses. One elementary served Grades PK-2. One intermediate

served Grades 3-6. One middle school served Grades 7-8, and one high school housed Grades 9-12. The elementary school housed the district's STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) lab. Each campus had one lead principal, an assistant principal, and a counselor, with a second counselor serving the high school and overseeing the HB5 and college and career readiness of the district (Field Notes, Research Reflection Journal).

The majority of the interviews took place at the central administration office which housed the superintendent, assistant superintendent, executive director, chief financial officer, human resources director, director of technology, director of federal programs, athletic director, director of food services, and additional support staff. In the organizational chart, all central office administrators reported directly to the superintendent. The superintendent also supervised an administrative assistant, a receptionist, and a payroll person; the support staff was excluded from the case study.

Formal interviews were conducted with three Central Office administrators, all of which had held their current positions since the dissolution of the prior accountability system. Additionally, the four campus administrators who were interviewed had joined the district's administrative team during the past 10 years. Additionally, interviews occurred with other district personnel, community members, and one college professor. Years of educational experience for each interviewed educator exceeded 15 years. Two of the campus level administrators had previously served in Central Offices at other school districts and took demotions to work for Small Town ISD.

District Academic Results

The superintendent reported Small Town ISD's academic rigor reputation had not been positive prior to him holding his current position. Before the superintendent took the role, the district had produced a nationally known career and technology education (CTE) program but had not received any accolades for academics. The intermediate school was under Improvement Required (IR) status under the previous superintendent. The interviewed superintendent had no schools in IR status.

Under the current accountability system in Texas, the distinction issued to entire districts occurs under Index 4: Postsecondary Readiness. In 2016, Texas children were served by over 1,200 public school districts, but less than 2.0%, or 24, school districts earned the distinction from the TEA. The 2016 distinction represented a first for Small Town ISD. Small Town ISD superintendent emphasized the magnitude of receiving this distinction. The superintendent and two of the campus leaders in addition to all central office administrators who were interviewed found the demands of high stakes testing caused them to struggle with adapting to the ongoing accountability shifts in Texas that included the enactment of HB 2804 following the Texas 84th legislative session in 2014 that altered the accountability measures affecting high school graduation.

Ms. Pink Central Staff, who oversaw accountability in the district, reported having frustration with providing current information to campus leaders about state policies for the current year because the TEA had yet to provide final versions of its accountability policies. The new indicators for postsecondary readiness included only measuring an elementary school's student attendance rate as the primary factor. At the

middle school level, the attendance rate was a factor in postsecondary readiness, but dropout rates and percentages of students receiving instruction in high school courses or college and career courses were added to the measurements. For high schools and districts, measures included the following: (a) dropout and graduation rates, (b) career and technology course completion rates, (c) college course completion rates, (d) advanced course completion rates, (e) students' scores on standardized tests (TSI, SAT, or ACT) in addition to students' scores on STAAR End-Of-Course tests, and (f) the percentage of students graduating under each graduation plan. The final requirements for attaining the distinction for college and career readiness for the year in which the data were collected had not been made available by the TEA. During the interview, Ms. Pink Central Office discussed finding it nearly impossible to ensure the district completed all necessary activities to earn the distinction for the current school year because the TEA has yet to announce what factors would be applied to career and college readiness scores.

In 2016-2017, the Texas Education agency published a preliminary pilot rating of schools and districts in Texas. Small Town ISD was among 177 out of over 1,200 districts in Texas to earn an A rating in Postsecondary Readiness. In addition to the factors described for the state's Postsecondary Readiness domain, no district could earn a districtwide rating of A if one campus earned either an overall or a domain rating of D or F. Small Town ISD was one of only three districts with open enrollment to earn multiple Postsecondary Readiness distinctions on the accountability system in the last four years but was projected by the TEA to earn the highest rating on the new system (TEA, 2017), exemplifying the district's focus of ensuring all students were college and career ready.

Finally, the 100% graduation rate produced by Small Town ISD reflected elements from the Key Learning Skills (Act) that require students be motivated and have self-efficacy (Conley, 2007b).

District of Innovation

Small Town ISD is a District of Innovation. Districts of Innovation gain broad flexibility for local control of accountability, customization opportunities for single campuses, autonomy, and latitude in interpreting mandates from the state. The District of Innovation status equalizes opportunities between districts competing with charter schools by allowing some of the same flexibility charter districts receive that traditional ISDs have not received. On March 8, 2017, Small Town ISD's Board of Trustees passed a resolution adopting a District of Innovation plan. In this plan, the district gained additional local control over its operations to support innovation and local initiatives in an effort to "increase the district's flexibility in order to empower educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community," said Ms. Tan Central Office. Additionally, Ms. Tan Central Staff used the term "forward-thinking" to describe Small Town ISD's innovation-oriented culture. This forward-thinking moniker was evident in the district because of its implementation of House Bill 1842 which permits districts to attain the status of District of Innovation.

At the time of data collection, the district had adopted one innovation pertaining to the school calendar. Rather than start after the fourth Monday in August as stated in state education code TEC 25.0811, the district's leaders chose to start school on the third

Monday in August. According to the district website, this decision afforded the following advantages in the area of College and Career Readiness:

1. Create alignment with the academic calendar published by the partner college
2. Ensure contact hour and seat time requirements are met for certification courses
3. Deliver one more week of instruction to students before they take their advance placement (AP) courses' exams.

The Central Office staff noted that this type of organizational effort to adjust the district's academic calendar communicated the importance of AP exams and college partnerships, both of which are identified by Conley (2007a) as Key Cognitive Strategies (Think).

The superintendent felt being a District of Innovation provided a "way to change the laws to what you really need." Future plans of Small Town ISD include adding provisions for more CTE opportunities such as auto mechanics or woodshop taught by tradesmen who may not be certified teachers.

Culture of Universal Achievement (Lopez & Lopez, 2017)

Although the term culture of universal achievement was found used by multiple organizations throughout literature, signs of a district-wide college and career focus for Small Town ISD as part of No Excuses University Culture of Universal Achievement (Lopez & Lopez, 2017) were evident at all four campuses by the researcher. When asked about promoting specific college and career readiness initiatives found across the district, Principal Gold of the intermediate campus listed the following:

- Set up the steps of a Culture of Universal Achievement (Lopez and Lopez, 2017)
- Collaborate with teachers
- Set up systems
- Align standards to the curriculum to meet the needs of students.
- Manage data
- Put interventions in place
- Use college symbolism

The culture of universal achievement by Lopez and Lopez (2017) encompassed the student outcomes delineated in the Four Keys of College and Career Readiness of Think, Know, Act, and Go (Conley, 2007a), and then reached to other areas that Principal Gold found vital to the district success. The culture of universal achievement is found in the college curriculum No Excuses University (Lopez & Lopez, 2017) that was used by one campus. The culture of universal achievement applied the structures and systems found in House Bill 5 relating to high school graduation requirements. By applying the construct of the culture of universal achievement, Small Town ISD's administrators relied on partnerships for a P-16 plan and for CTE. District educators taught parents the necessary skills to build the foundation for their students' college readiness.

The theme was emic and explicitly labeled because when asked about specific initiatives across the district, Principal Gold claimed the district had a "culture of universal achievement." While coding the data, evidence of a universal achievement

culture became apparent. The superintendent said the town had never received any academic awards prior to his arrival and his goal was to change schools' cultures. Thus, the superintendent "put people in that are going to push and make academics a priority, and once you've done that, you celebrate your accomplishments; nobody else is going to celebrate for you." The superintendent mentioned the importance of using a roadside billboard on several occasions to enable Small Town ISD to post their accomplishments that can be seen by drivers as they enter the town.

The superintendent reported supporting the universal achievement culture (Lopez & Lopez, 2017) and communicated his expectation of 100% of high school students graduating on time throughout the district. The superintendent consistently conveyed the same messages to central staff, principals, and teachers who reproduced and shared the messages with students. Principal Green said education is not about getting out of high school but is about the experiences former students have after graduating from high school. The college and career counselor for the district shared that the town's citizens realized students could choose postsecondary options including college, career, or military. The students have choices, and the town valued each of those opportunities. This freedom of choice was discussed by the superintendent, the central office personnel, the counselor, and two principals.

District leaders expected all students to earn multiple HB 5 high school diploma endorsements by the time of graduation with the anticipation that those endorsements could open doors for postsecondary opportunities. Every student was required to have a plan and goal for their postsecondary journeys that followed high school graduation.

Principal Green's biggest fear involved students walking across the stage at graduation without having a plan for their next steps in their post high school lives.

The participants noted that the entire Small Town community shared the responsibility of promoting postsecondary readiness among Small Town ISD's students. The students had conversations about their endorsement efforts with their families. The high school's Principal Green and Mr. Orange Counselor both shared that parents called them to discuss changes in the endorsements for their students and to inquire about whether or not their students had met the deadlines for college applications. Principal Gold said, "As a campus, we are taking that collective responsibility and that everybody is responsible for promoting college and career readiness, and I think that's one of the things that's made [the college readiness efforts] successful."

The participants also discussed the importance of knowing every child at his or her respective campus. Central Office participants noted that principals work diligently not to forget the needs of any one student because every student is assigned to a mentor who monitors progress and helps the children achieve their goals. This logic closely aligned with the theory of student outcomes presented by Conley's (2007b) Four Keys of College and Career Readiness Framework in which Act requires students to own their learning. As part of the empowerment process, leaders adjusted course offerings and discontinued allowing students to obtain late arrival or early dismissal allowances during school hours. Electives were streamlined to promote endorsement acquisition. Not only were student schedules scrutinized for college and career preparation, but teachers' schedules underwent adjustments to ensure teachers had the ability to focus on student

academic success. Principal Green described engaging in “strategic scheduling” and examining the teachers’ course assignments such as by determining “Why is a coach teaching Algebra I, and a straight, non-coaching teacher teaching Geometry? That makes no sense.” Principal Green stated the high school was "very much, an underperforming school when I got here.” Evidence gathered from site visits, the academic awards received by the high school, and the success experienced getting students college and career ready shows the school is performing at a level higher than most high schools in comparable districts in Texas.

Visibility of Superintendent and Central Staff on Campus

The Superintendent and Central Office administrators see campus’ teachers and administrators daily. Central staff members are on a first name basis with campus staff. The Middle School and Administration Building share a parking lot. The Intermediate Principal, grades 4-6, moved down from the Middle School, grade 7-8, to be with his own children. The High School Principal left a superintendent position in a neighboring district to fill a vacancy created when his cousin retired. Everyone in Small Town ISD knows each other. All district employees are expected to contribute to the success of children, and a reoccurring mantra that the participants shared was the following “We all make it our job to work with students.”

Principal Green required his teachers to:

> Get in there and work with students. Don’t just stand there to the side [of the college fair], get in there and grab some kids. Say, “Hey, what do you want to

do? What are you interested in? Hey, I went to Southeastern. Go check Southeastern out."

Additionally, the superintendent relied heavily on Facebook for visibility to promote the students' and schools' successes but also used the billboard on the roadside and the Small Town newspaper to make student success visible to the community. There is no data to show central office staff or campus staff used social media to contact students directly.

Data Driven Decisions

Data staffing meetings are held for each campus, but Ms. Beige stated, "We could always do a better job." Ms. Pink Central Office discussed the importance of improving evaluation of programs implemented and managing the data. The superintendent discussed the expectation for a 100% passing rate and 100% graduation rate. All programs were evaluated with those goals in mind. The district had less than 20 children competing in University Interscholastic League (UIL) academics when the superintendent began his tenure. The superintendent wanted as many students participating in UIL as were participating in athletics and created a stipend for teachers who lead UIL academics that rivaled the athletic football stipend. This effort showed the community that academics were a district priority. This change required an increase in Conley's (2007b) Key Content Knowledge (Think) and generated avenues to motivate students to participate.

House Bill 5 Systems

Campus personnel described the House Bill 5 endorsement initiative to be daunting for the district to attain; however, strategies were implemented to increase

college and career readiness. At the direction of the superintendent, Ms. Pink Central Office provided the schools' counselors with college and career readiness exploration tools. Reliable and valid tools were implemented unless the tool was cost or staff prohibitive. One tool for college and career readiness exploration was Career Cruising (2015) which enabled students to match their interests to a particular college and career. High school students used iCEV (2017) online courses to explore career options, and at the middle school level students take a career exploration class. At the high school level, students take MAPS Growth courses to track college readiness (NWEA, 2017).

Ms. Pink Central Office said, "In small districts, any change can be monumental, and there will always be resistance from those who do not see the importance." Meetings were held in every classroom with every staff and student to make sure they understood what was about to happen. Ms. Pink Central Office relied heavily on Conley's (2007a) Key Cognitive Strategies (Think) to enable students to engage in change.

P-16 Focus

Principal Green discussed the value of college partnerships and obtaining memoranda of understanding from partners such as the local college as quickly as possible when enacting P-16 alignment efforts. In the graduating class of 2017, 55% of the class had earned an average of over 30 hours of dual credit. The superintendent discussed making a concentrated effort to embed professors on its campuses for dual credit course offerings. One of the school board members worked as a professor at the local college.

From elementary curriculum to dual credit courses, the postsecondary readiness mission led to all campuses experiencing cultural changes. Each campus offered a college of the day in which students and staff wore college shirts, the college fight song was played on campus' public address system, announcements included information about the college of the day, and college memorabilia were posted around the entire campus. The college of the day announcements featured the school's facts, song, and notable graduates. Students in primary grades were exposed to Conley's (2007a) Key to Transition Knowledge and Skills (Go) to begin learning about financial aid and dual credit.

Principal Gold, at the intermediate campus, discussed his strategies for enacting the college readiness culture by "setting up systems in your school that prepare kids to look at going to college and [to] look at having that in their future on the campus." The intermediate school executed the program called No Excuses University that provided a curriculum of activities targeted to each grade. Staff attended the professional development offered by No Excuses University to learn how to implement a college going culture throughout campus (Lopez & Lopez, 2017). Children learned about college applications, committing to a university, and needing 10,000 hours to become an expert in a content area or on the job. Teachers applied No Excuses University curriculum in their lesson plans using focus lessons weekly that cover the topics found in Conley's (2007b) Four Keys to College and Career Readiness such as "how to prepare yourself for college," or "what character do you have to have to get into college," or "what do you need to be successful" (per Principal Gold).

At every campus halls were filled with college banners, doors were decorated to reflect colleges, names on lockers included a college logo on every locker. Principal Gold reported that children identify with and have familiarity with the specific institutions of Baylor University, Texas A&M University, and The University of Texas. Principal Gold used those institutions throughout the campus and added that "we have some block teachers that have adopted Boston College, Harvard, and Stanford."

At the high school, students might choose to participate in a program to earn an Associate of Arts degree prior to graduating from high school. Students in every grade visited the college fair at the high school. With almost 100 colleges represented, parents were invited to attend the college fair with their students. Teachers were coached how to have conversations with students prior to visiting a college table. A panel of college representatives provided an open forum for parents to ask questions. Military recruiters participated and discussed options with families. Every student received a plan. On the day after the college fair, if high school seniors lacked a postsecondary plan, they were taken on a field trip in what Principal Green referred to as the "I don't know bus" to the local junior college to complete admissions and financial aid applications and registrations to gain hands-on experience with the postsecondary journey.

Each person interviewed discussed the importance of taking kids to college campuses. These day trips started in the primary grades and were considered by staff to be vital for families unfamiliar with college access. According to Principal Green, college visits are done to "open their eyes up a little bit." High school students would receive a college identification card in order to use the services at the local college.

Small Town ISD's partnerships with local universities ensured the postsecondary institutions would accept the top 25% of the senior class, and according to Principal Gold, visiting those colleges seemed "to give kids hope." Each year students visit a different university. The campuses do fundraisers to pay for the one-day trips and to purchase each student a college t-shirt. Principal Gold stated:

> I really think the biggest impact is exposure when they actually set foot on those campuses. I think it just really brings it to light for them. I think if you're just talking about it, or you're just showing them pictures, even doing the lessons in the book, that's one thing, but when you physically take them there, and they see college students, they can go in and see what these classrooms look like, and they can tour the facilities. To me, that's the most valuable thing that we've done for our kids.

College visits were believed to contribute to students enrolling in postsecondary education, which inevitably leads to better preparation for future careers.

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Mr. Orange Counselor was tasked with managing the district's HB 5 implementation. Mr. Orange Counselor surveyed parents about what careers they felt needed to be offered to their children, consulted with the local Chamber of Commerce, and asked the students to discuss their vocational interests. Most of the parent survey responses reinforced the need to keep agricultural sciences a priority, and Small Town ISD already had a strong agriculture program in place, as an easy vocation to reinforce. Also, parents believed in the agriculture program because they saw their students coming

home knowing how to weld, or how to take care of animals. Due to the data reinforcing the need for Small Town ISD's agriculture program, district staff more readily participated in professional development regarding HB5, endorsements, career strands, and CTE.

The interviewed Small Town ISD staff discussed ways their methods for educating the parents about the endorsements, such as a four-course sequence required by HB 5, helped parents understand the state definition of college and career ready.

The majority of students graduated with a business endorsement associated with agriculture program CTE courses, but they were required to add other endorsements. Many students opted to take courses at the community college for their particular careers of interest. College partnerships also allowed students to have opportunities for taking cosmetology classes and trade classes, such as HVAC classes. Small Town ISD also partnered with neighboring districts to offer additional career development opportunities, such as engineering for their students off campus. Students and families provided students with transportation to these off-site locations. Central Office staff discussed the weighted funding associated with CTE courses and stated that adjustments are made yearly to maximize funding, especially in the order of course offerings. Depending on funding, a practicum course at another district could be moved to make sure CTE funding based on enrollment remains constant. Mr. Orange Counselor said:

> Not every kid is going to go into agriculture program or culinary for a living, but while at college, those courses give them a skill that allows them to work at a higher pay grade than being a waiter. The hospitality branch gives them

something to look at in addition to the agriculture program if they need another class.

Principal Green said students could be more than halfway finished with their Emergency Medical Technician (EMT); machining; criminal justice; or Heating, Vacuum, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) certifications before high school graduation. While the certifications were not available through Small Town ISD due to costs, the students completed half of the requirements by attending off-site classes at the partner locations. During data collection, only two out of over 400 kids were not working to complete a four-year CTE sequence. According to Mr. Orange Counselor, the students of Small Town ISD do not make a choice between agriculture program and the other extra-curricular activities offered; they participate in the agriculture program in addition to their extracurricular activities, such as band, dual credit, and cheerleading.

The superintendent stated that much of the success with CTE coursework is attributed to the "tremendous agriculture program." The agriculture program housed multiple teachers to ensure every student enrolled at the high school could take one or more agriculture program courses. According to Mr. Orange Counselor, the nationally acclaimed agriculture program added value to every student's high school diploma, whether or not they went to college. The agriculture courses allowed the students to show animals and compete using new skills, such as public speaking that would be used in any career or college. The majority of Small Town ISD interviewees emphasized the importance of sitting and talking to students and helping them see the value of the district's courses and programs. Principal Green kept a list of all students enrolled and

met with each them one at a time, face-to-face to discuss the students' after high school plans. The superintendent reiterated the need to know where kids are, and what they are doing. College students are invited back to teach chemistry lessons to underclassmen or to show elementary students how science principles can be found in their everyday lives. Students who graduated from Small Town ISD were highlighted each week in the local newspaper to encourage current students, keep success stories in front of the students, and promote the 100% graduation rate. The superintendent said, "You have to show them the options, and that they can do it."

The superintendent and Ms. Tan discussed the importance of having the right staff to work with the students. The district uses Capture Kids Hearts, a training to reduce discipline issues and develop self-managing classrooms to change how adults look at kids. The superintendent said "adhering to keeping the right staff means severing ties with educators or other staff without love in their hearts." Ms. Pink said, "You have to get the right people in the boat and make sure they are rowing in the right direction." The superintendent discussed how the right people must be in place in order to "put your money where your mouth is" and to enact the right programs. The superintendent said offering the UIL stipend to the academic coach that rivaled the stipend received by the football coach showed students, staff, and parents' academics to be a priority for Small Town ISD and meant the district could retain a high-quality teacher to act as the UIL coach. Finally, the superintendent shared his long-term goal of the district's teams winning the Lone Star Cup, an award given to districts that excel in every UIL competition, both academic and athletic. Increased extracurricular participation helps

build cognitive skills beyond academics such as teamwork, and allows families to become involved in supporting their students.

Parent Outreach

Across all campuses and central office administration, administrators actively pursued engaging parents regarding their children's postsecondary opportunities. Each campus used specific strategies to reach out to parents. Principal Gold discussed how busy the parents in a Title I school could be trying to work multiple jobs, and the need to hold meetings not only during the day time but also during evenings. At the intermediate campus, the administrators held painting parties for parents and students that were hosted by the art teachers. Parents were invited with their students to attend a paint party, and during the party, the art teachers taught the parents not only about painting but also about colleges. These strategies introduced parents to Conley's (2007b) Key Transition Knowledge (Go) as part of empowering them to serve successfully as students' supporters.

The Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) designated time in each of their meeting agendas for college information. The elementary school held financial aid meetings for parents to see the reality of their students going to college as an example of breaking through the barriers to college (De La Rosa, 2006). One night, the elementary school featured Stanford University, and how low socioeconomic students qualify to attend tuition free. Once per six-week grading period, the elementary PTA met to educate parents about college access. By the time students began high school, parents could take part in conversations about postsecondary plans and ask questions such as the following:

"My student signed up for dual credit, which means he will miss practicum, will that hurt his endorsement?" The parents attended the field trips and college visits with the students. The open forums with college representatives provided parents opportunities to ask realistic questions about students' actual college experiences such as the following: "What time is curfew for college students in the dorm?" This parental involvement helped to reinforce the expectation of college and career readiness by students.

Each person interviewed mentioned the use of Facebook to reach parents and to celebrate the successes of students. The superintendent expressly used Facebook and Twitter to recognize students' accomplishments. Students were featured in such posts when they signed with a college or committed to a college and when they were an outstanding citizen of their schools. The local newspaper that served Small Town in addition to two other towns ran features about students' accomplishments and former students' postsecondary successes.

Principal Gold said the school had tried Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and found most parents relied on Facebook. Although the superintendent set up a Facebook page for the district, the central office staff interviewed said they did not participate in using Facebook. Principal Gold discussed focusing on Facebook for generating all social media: "With a small staff, it is better to focus on one social media site, than stretching yourself thin." When the district posted college videos on Facebook, they had more views than they do people in the town. Mr. Orange Counselor said, "The only downfall is that Facebook provides a medium for only one-way communication."

There was a community watch group called Small Town ISD Academics who used Facebook to generate focus on the district's problems; therefore, the district used every opportunity to post positive news. The technology director maintained the district Facebook page and was responsible for posts. Each campus had people assigned to document successes on Facebook. College fairs, military recruiters, college tours, dual credit classes, career classes, and college days were posted on the district's main Facebook page to promote the district's story of success.

Former students who went to college and began careers were recognized in the local newspaper read by all the parents. This visibility of alumni success repeatedly showed parents the possibilities available to their children. Current students were featured "when they do good or reach a goal." Lastly, anytime the district established a new agreement with local colleges or surrounding districts for concurrent enrollment offerings or additional CTE courses, "we blow up Facebook," said Principal Green. Giving students' visibility for accomplishments and making the parents aware of new opportunities is the best use of social media.

Summary

The research produced the background needed to answer the research questions: (a) What strategies and systems did the superintendent employ to ensure districts achieve the necessary level of college and career readiness? (b) How did central office and campus personnel implement college and career strategies and systems? The interviews and artifacts associated with this research highlighted how a small district tackled postsecondary readiness via collective responsibility shared by staff, community

members, local colleges, and the school board. Each of the district's four schools offered a college and career focus. Ms. Pink Central Office offered a summary of the culture of universal achievement (Lopez & Lopez, 2017) she observed throughout the district as "we do whatever it takes" to get them ready for their postsecondary journeys.

Principals talked about setting up systems in the schools to prepare kids to look at going to college. Principals explained the journey does not stop at graduation, so they focus on what happens to their graduates after high school. Every student developed a plan, and all seniors were accepted into a postsecondary institution prior to graduation.

Conley's (2007a, 2007b) framework for the Four Keys of College and Career Readiness was applied to the district's initiatives for ensuring student outcomes in Small Town ISD. The artifacts included resources for a Culture of Universal Achievement from No Excuses University (Lopez & Lopez, 2017). In the next chapter, the findings will be discussed in relation to Conley's framework.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

"We have got to do the best we can, we have to take them as they come, and take them as far as we can get them while we've got them." ~ *Ms. Pink Central Office*

Summary of the Study

The literature highlighted the educational practices designed to address students lacking college or career readiness upon high school graduation. While prior research focused on student actions, this case study sought to determine strategies that central office staff could implement that would result in all students being college or career ready. This study looked at one small Texas school district which rose above its counterparts across the same state in preparing students for postsecondary opportunities. Interviews were conducted, field notes were written at site visits, and website postings were reviewed. Additionally, the district's goals led to specific strategies and systems implemented by district leaders to increase college readiness in relation to the research questions. This study identified best practices used by one school district with discernibly high levels of college and career readiness for minority and general education students, with an attempt to blaze a trail for other small districts in the area of postsecondary readiness. The phenomenal performance of the district demanded a critical case study be used to identify best practices in the area of college and career readiness (Yin, 2014).

Summary of the Findings

Through an exhaustive literature review, one of the most renowned frameworks for college readiness studies emerged from Conley's (2007a, 2007b) framework of the

Four Keys for College and Career that focused on skills needed by students to be college ready. While the Four Keys could be applied to skills needed by superintendents and central office staff, it failed to address the many strategies educational institutions could use to help students acquire college readiness skills or the multiple factors, such as parental support and college partnerships among others, that appeared in the findings of this study that were found to be vital to the success of this critical case study district. Tables 2 and 3 provide the summary of the findings by research question.

Table 2

Strategies and Systems the Superintendent Employed to Ensure the District Achieved the Necessary Level of College and Career Readiness

Key	Strategy
Think	Establish an expectation of college and career readiness for 100% of students, and make sure staff understand your expectations
Know	Make sure you have the right people with the knowledge needed, in the right job, and then give them the autonomy to do their job
Act	Establish technology as a priority, and put your money where your mouth is when it comes to academics
Grow	Get outside the buildings and create opportunities for students by working with partners that can give your students choices

Table 3

How Central Office and Campus Personnel Implemented College and Career Readiness Strategies and Systems

Key	Strategy
Think	Understand it is a collective responsibility to have all students college and career ready
Know	Share knowledge regarding CCR and changes, prepare staff
Act	Convey the vision at every meeting, with every conversation, and in each planning session
Grow	Include parents in efforts to make a college plan for students

Discussion of Findings

Small Town ISD used strategies recommended by Conley (2007a, 2007b) to generate the desired postsecondary readiness outcomes in addition to student academic achievement. The district, consequently, focused on developing students' use of cognitive strategies. Conley's four keys (2007a) of Think, Know, Act, and Go are focused entirely on the students as predictors of success. Small Town ISD applied a broadened focus by using the same factors found in the Four Keys across the entire Small Town community. The findings are now discussed in relation to each research question.

Research Question 1 Findings

This research question asked: What strategies and systems did the superintendent employ to ensure the district achieved the necessary level of college and career readiness? The strategies and systems applied by Small Town ISD followed the

framework of the four keys by expanding on the individual characteristics found under each key and applying them districtwide.

Key Cognitive Strategies (Think). This key requires students to hypothesize, analyze, evaluate, and monitor. The superintendent discussed methods used to get students to think at the higher level which is a concept recognized in the Key Cognitive Strategies (Think). Through district partnerships, students can gain 30 college hours with an Associate of Arts degree. During the year in which data collection occurs, the district began allowing sophomores to take one dual credit college course per semester. The superintendent believed the dual credit program definitely raised the level of thinking required by students, and the students' successes with college course work signified that students do have the cognitive strategies needed for college. The stipends offered by the superintendent for University Interscholastic League (UIL) academics were instrumental in getting a shared district vision for higher academics. The presentations by career professionals, career exploration programs, and allowing students opportunities for college visits forced students to analyze their own capacity for success.

Key Content Knowledge (Know). This key refers to terminology students must know in addition to the factual information needed to gain college acceptance. The superintendent discussed the importance of having the right staff in the right place to ensure students can fulfill their potential and teachers do not get overloaded. The superintendent gave principals autonomy to rearrange teachers to prevent coaches from teaching state-tested content because of all the increased participation in extracurricular

activities. Teachers who are responsible for foundational knowledge should not carry the burden of late nights and extra paperwork.

The superintendent moved a counselor to the high school specifically to be sure students, staff, and parents would receive factual information regarding college and career readiness. The superintendent spoke of hiring content teachers who could serve as embedded instructors for dual credit courses offered on campus to keep students from traveling to the local college. This strategy enabled the instructors to focus on teaching in alignment with the district goals and vision. The three professors the superintendent hired were instrumental in helping the majority of the students complete over 30 hours of dual credit.

Key Learning Skills and Techniques (Act). This key was applied when the Superintendent set a goal for increasing technology access to students. Through multiple years of rollouts, one-on-one devices were added grade by lower grade beginning with the 12th graders; as of this writing fifth through 12th grade students have individually issued technology. This technology strategy provided students with additional opportunities for career exploration, online learning, and college application completion. These findings support Lamkin's (2006) finding that 100% of 60 rural superintendents surveyed had the same regard for technology as a high priority.

The superintendent discussed assigning the right people to the best fitting positions and letting them do their jobs. As one central staff member said, "You get good people in the job, set expectations, and let them roll." To create self-efficacy among principals, the schools' leaders in this small district were empowered to submit their own

budgets and use their own creativity to increase the likelihood of generating college and career readiness among all their students at their respective schools.

Key Transition Knowledge and Skills (Go). This key was activated when the superintendent negotiated an external partnership with the closest university to provide students at Small Town ISD a college identification badge to enable them to "hang out" at the college. This logic mirrored Dika's (2012) presentation of the case study of Dr. Murray in the San Jose Unified District. Dika noted that Murray made college relationships a priority for that district's Opportunity 21 program as a best practice for college success. Also, Breslow (2016) concluded, in a report about this type of effort, that it was a best practice. The superintendent regarded the armed forces as an option to provide to schools and gave students access to a military person to help them when they determined the military would be their postsecondary path.

Beyond the Keys. The interviews with the superintendent revealed many strategies and systems that were not covered by the framework of The Four Keys of College and Career Readiness. The superintendent conveyed the need to think outside of the box and described the changing demographics of the district, the increased struggles of language barriers, the challenges of efficiently using buses in a widely spread district, and the limits of funding. The superintendent also shared the solutions that Small Town ISD found for dealing with those issues.

The superintendent in this small school district was the driver of all the college and career initiatives, which was evident by looking at the organizational chart for the district. All central office staff and all principals reported directly to the superintendent.

The superintendent was the influential leader in all aspects even though the district's results happen based on team effort. The staff referred to the superintendent as making all final decisions but empowering them to have the freedom to present their ideas.

The finding of top-down mandate supports Forner et al. (2012) finding that 304 effective rural superintendents also used top-down mandates. Forner et al. looked at the work of the rural superintendents based on Lezotte and Marzano's six correlates of effective schools. Forner et al. found evidence of all but one of the six correlates in the 304 rural districts researched. The one correlate that did not align with prior research correlated with goal setting. Forner et al. found that rural superintendents did not develop a goal setting team but personally created a vision. Small Town ISD also operated based on one superintendent with a vision which set non-negotiable goals for student success.

The following model expresses how the work of superintendents in small districts operate beyond the four keys to promote college and career readiness outcomes. Small school district superintendents shoulder the responsibility of the district because all decisions revolve around them. Figure 3 represents the superintendent leading postsecondary readiness while being supported by the strategies to lead a learning organization, create internal relationships within the district, build external relationships beyond the district's offices and schools, and convey a vision for planning and setting of goals. The figure also supports assertions made by superintendent studies found in the literature. Edwards (2006) found the duties of the superintendent have evolved during the last decade to include duties such as the Chief Executive Officer of a board, fiscal astuteness, political acumen, and managers of school reform. Kowalski (2005)

recognized the importance of internal relationships but adding that current superintendents must also manage the external systems of politics and economics to be successful (p. 148). Lamkin (2006) discussed the complexity of relationships among life-long residents in small communities and the emotional roadblocks to considerations for change (p. 19). The framework for a strategy of superintendent influence to obtain needed aspects of college and career readiness is demonstrated in Figure 3. Findings as related to the superintendent are discussed in the next four subsections.

Figure 3. The superintendent managing strategy of influence in relation to the four main areas involved in building the culture of universal achievement.

Planning and goal setting. The literature emphasized the importance of goal setting. In the research of Gene Bottoms for the Wallace Foundation, 35 district personnel were interviewed from seven districts, with findings that affirmed districts must have a strategic plan that "manifests the vision" (intro) of the district (Bottoms, 2010). The superintendent and the high school principal discussed the importance of planning and goal setting to ensure students in every grade had exposure to postsecondary options such as through the district career fair. Bottoms (2010) noted the districts in research reinforced the importance of the students having postsecondary goals by inviting parents to attend college fairs with their students. Every student in Small Town ISD worked with teachers and administrators to develop their postsecondary plans. Any students lacking postsecondary goals and plans were taken on a field trip in what Principal Green referred to as the “I don’t know bus” to the local junior college to complete admissions and financial aid applications and registrations to gain hands-on experience with the postsecondary journey. They also received student identification cards affiliating them with the college to give them a tangible result for reaching a goal.

The superintendent conveyed the need to think outside of the box and described the changing demographics of the district, the increased struggles of language barriers, the challenges of buses getting around such a widely spread district, and the limits of funding. He also shared the solutions that Small Town ISD found for dealing with those issues and how they must constantly be open to new ways of looking at problems. The superintendent said the prior gap in test scores for English Language Learners (ELLS) happened because as demographics changed, the district did not take advantage of the

opportunities for proactive planning, mirroring previous discussions of the gap for ELLs in education (Dougherty, 2010; Espinosa, 2015; Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, n.d.; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Learning organization. The superintendent described the professional development provided to staff and his own quest to attend learning sessions. Not only did this district use resources from the regional Education Service Center (ESC), but Small Town ISD also had partnerships with a second ESC for obtaining higher quality professional development. Additionally, staff attended the professional development offered by No Excuses University to learn how to implement a college going culture throughout campus (Lopez & Lopez, 2017). The superintendent noted that professional development enabled the district to support the school board's goal of providing the best education for all students within the current resources.

Internal relationships. The superintendent put "people in place that knew more" than he did in the positions for promoting college and career readiness. He referred to all the administrators knowing all the children in their schools. When referring to the superintendent, one central staff member said, "One of the best things that we do at Small Town ISD is build relationships." The research from Daggett (2005) on successful schools supported this emphasis saying relationships should be "woven into the fabric of school" (p. 7) to ensure that students have personal relationships with adults, and adults have relationships with each other. Principals from each of the campuses met once a month at the administration building to plan alignments vertically with each other and to

make sure they were on the path envisioned by the superintendent. This type of alignment was also recommended in Texas' House Bill 1.

External relationships. The superintendent negotiated external partnerships with colleges, the local drugstore, and businesses to make sure everyone knew about the successes of Small Town ISD. The research from David Conley addresses the importance of high school teachers creating a vertical alignment with college professors to provide an easy transition to college (Conley, 2007). The superintendent not only set up a system for college professors to work with his staff but also developed a partnership with the college that led to more dual credit opportunities and support from the colleges such as college football players visiting the elementary school. The literature supported this type of external relationship as part of bridging the achievement gap in low-income communities (De La Rosa, 2006; Hill, 2008). Finally, the superintendent spoke of the Education Foundation and the district's partnership with the local newspaper as part of making a concentrated effort to acknowledge staff and students.

Research Question 2 Findings

This research question asked: How do central office and campus personnel implement college and career strategies and systems? Central office and campus personnel were eager to share their college and career strategies and to showcase their successes. However, Principal Gold, who aspired to be a superintendent, provided the most strategies, had taken his campus from IR to a campus of distinction, and had artifacts about the college and career efforts that have taken place at the intermediate level.

Key Cognitive Strategies (Think). Principal Gold described this best: "One of the things that we've looked at as a campus is taking that collective responsibility and that everybody is responsible for promoting college and career readiness." Because of the schools' sizes, "we can be terribly responsive," said Mr. Orange Counselor. Schools experience the freedom to strategize and plan new things without requiring months of approval or paperwork. As long as new systems are not "cost prohibitive or personnel restrictive," school leaders have the power determine how to attain a higher level of performance from their teams and students.

Key Content Knowledge (Know). Principal Gold discussed the importance of communicating with staff. "You need to get buy-in from your teachers, but that's with any initiative that you do." Once you have teacher buy-in, the teachers will link ideas and organize concepts in a manner that will support your college readiness goals. Mr. Orange Counselor noted that preparing the community and schools for HB5 "was just making people aware because they didn't know what was coming." Giving staff, parents, community, and students information regarding the career pathway options available to them at Small Town ISD enabled them to have factual information for making decisions regarding their education and their future. The district also made use of Facebook, the newspaper, and the community to keep people informed.

Key Learning Skills and Techniques (Act). At the central office, Ms. Pink Central Office discussed communicating with parents and parents' satisfaction with the elementary, intermediate, and middle school teachers and administrators discussing career options with their children before they started high school. Students gain

increased self-efficacy about their academic abilities and opportunities to set postsecondary goals. This research found it benefitted students in the long term to start those conversations at the elementary level rather than waiting until high school which was the norm documented in the literature.

During the interviews, a theme of collaboration stood out among the staff. This created a self-awareness and help-seeking environment. Central office administrators could commonly be seen on each campus in Small Town ISD. Rueter (2009) and Lopez (2015) introduced the possible importance of administrator visibility in the schools. Rueter found that visibility was a vehicle for creating trust. First names were used by all, everyone knew everyone else's story and were familiar with the work across the district. School staff, students, parents develop a personal graduation plan for every student. In a face-to-face meeting with the counselor and principal, every senior collaborates on developing a postsecondary plan. The engagement that results from a district with a single focus and a unified plan was documented by classroom visits. The expectations for a learning organization were witnessed on each campus. Students were excited about learning; college skills were tied to learning in every subject via a STEAM lab at the elementary and one-on-one technology devices. Additionally, the district emphasized importance preparing for postsecondary work with their curriculum and their budget allocations. Creating opportunities for students to take dual credit courses and to earn industry hours towards a CTE certification allowed the students of Small Town ISD a venue for extensive academic knowledge.

Key Transition Knowledge and Skills (Go). Principal Gold noted that the intermediate schools in Small Town ISD held "a parent meeting where you had to attend to get information about the school and about the college readiness program. We do parent events at least once each six weeks." Principal Gold described having a "paint party where the parents get together with an art teacher to lead them through a painting …. [and] talk about what we're doing on campus as far as promoting the colleges and promoting those expectations with our parents." Mr. Orange discussed the importance of having parents involved in pathway selection, college visits, and the college fair. Parents were invited to a panel discussion with representatives from the various colleges to answer questions about college life. All staff members at Small Town ISD assumed the responsibility of acting on the information presented. No one tried to be the keeper of information.

Implications for Practice

With over 600 school districts meeting the requirements of a small school district (TEA, 2016), the strategies for college and career readiness discovered during this critical case study may be instrumental to superintendents for over 50% of the districts in Texas. Strategies and systems observed could possibly be implemented in small school districts that operate with limited resources, small staff, and distant from the state's urban areas. Public school districts in Texas often serve an emerging majority minority population that requires educators to overcome language barriers and to enable future first generation college students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds to succeed in their postsecondary endeavors following high school. Given changing demographics found in

the United States, at least 99% of public school district superintendents in Texas will serve majority minority populations by 2020 (San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce & Intercultural Development Research Association, 2014). Based on the findings of this critical case study, educators increasingly must reach out to parents, involve parents in college and career readiness education efforts, and empower parents as partners in their efforts to prepare children for attending college and entering a career to benefit students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The superintendent for Small Town ISD expressed his desire for students to go to college or to at least have a postsecondary plan. He admitted that a lot of the initiatives came from him at the top down to the campuses; however, he enlisted his central office and campus administrators to participate in the planning process. When referring to the lead team, the superintendent stated, "We think postsecondary readiness is critical. We want to try to send kids to college, but not just to college; we also want those different avenues for those not college bound." The process of enabling students to develop a postsecondary plan fully occurred not only at the high school but also the intermediate campus with its career exploration course and the middle school at which the following school year a MAPS Growth course was to be taught (NWEA, 2017). School district leaders, therefore, are encouraged to work with campuses' leaders and establish a vertical plan aligning K-12 curriculum to ensure students have opportunities to explore career options and begin to think about their futures as early in their educational journeys as possible.

The superintendent made plans for an academic coach stipend for the UIL program. He said he set the stipend equivalent to the Football Coach to show the importance of academics because "you have to put your money where your mouth is." He shared the long-term goal of winning the Lone Star Cup, an award given to districts that excel in every competition, both academic and athletic. The Small Town ISD's superintendent's efforts align with Ponce's (2017) preliminary findings that student involvement in extracurricular activities contributes to college success. The high school staff brought this concept to reality when discussing the importance of every student being able to take a course in agriculture. District leaders are encouraged to use UIL participation to benefit efforts to promote college-going cultures at their schools.

Parents need to be involved in the demystification of the college experience and career training practices as soon as Kindergarten in order to promote a culture of universal achievement in every school district. Being able to provide college information to parents and students in the early grades permeated the literature (DeLaRosa, 2006; Hill, 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2009). Superintendents should require campus leaders to build information on college and career readiness into every parent meeting. Small Town ISD accomplished this with the Parent Paint Meetings. District sponsored college visits for both students and families unfamiliar with college access, and postsecondary expectations were critical to Small Town ISD in producing higher levels of college readiness as such visits enable parents to understand what their students need to do in preparation for college and to ask relevant questions about what to expect regarding their students attending college. By educating parents, educators and district leaders can

generate a shared vision for college readiness and establish a family support system for the students.

Although HB5 was not explicitly referenced in the interview questions and did not directly align with the two research questions, it was mentioned by every person interviewed. Staff discussed how HB5 directives were introduced through mandatory parent meetings and were communicated to all stakeholders. By making sure information regarding changes to course offerings or bilingual programs were presented prior to the implementation of new programs, Small Town ISD found allies within the community.

Small school districts that lack facilities and technology resources are encouraged to reach out to local businesses and postsecondary institutions to build partnerships for aligning curricula toward preparedness for careers and college. School districts should consider inviting their alumni back to their campuses to interact with current students and provide students with images of visible and explicit postsecondary success stories. College memorabilia should be posted in every hallway, common area, and throughout classrooms. Conversations around college readiness should be the norm in every school, and staff should be educated about the requirements of college attainment. Colleges are encouraged to build relationships with students while still in high school to provide for easier transitions. Not all students will follow the college path, as stated at Small Town ISD, but all students need to have options for careers after high school that can be part of a plan for postsecondary success during their K-12 experiences.

Even though none of the interview data included an explicit focus on equity or social justice, the administration and campus personnel's focus on every child's access to

college represented social justice. Although no one mentioned research into the trends for Hispanic students with college access, strategies such as mandatory parent meetings and providing college information to elementary parents catered to the strong family unit that is more evident within the culture of the Hispanic community. Through educating parents about college readiness and access, the district created a circle of influence for every student. Three of the seven people interviewed discussed the one student who did not graduate 2 years ago, and the ongoing efforts to recover that child by giving him a postsecondary plan. This obsession with making sure every child graduated high school and every child had a postsecondary plan demonstrated the highest form of educational equity, an outcome that should be the goal of every public school district.

Recommendations for Future Research

Bodies of research exist on proving students are not college ready; emerging research addresses the traits students need for college readiness. The uniqueness of this research focused on strategies implemented by superintendents and other district and school administrators for producing a higher percentage of college ready high school students. The following recommendations for future study are derived from the findings of this study:

1. Future studies could examine the outcomes of first year college students who graduated from school districts successful in achieving college readiness distinctions.

2. Prediction studies could be completed to determine at what colleges, universities, and career institutes high school graduates from college and career readiness oriented school districts are more likely to be successful.
3. By looking at the Four Keys of College and Career Readiness identified in this research through the lens of students, districts could obtain beneficial information for further effectiveness in generating college and career readiness.
4. Survey methodology could be used to inquire in a quantitative study, either within the state or across the nation, with superintendents and school administrators about the elements of the culture of universal achievement compared to the high expectations set by George W. Bush for the nation in No Child Left Behind as it relates to college and career readiness.
5. One additional topic for research emerged that would expand the current framework. Future case studies of Texas school districts with college and career readiness distinctions could add to the credibility of this theory of the culture of universal achievement.

Finally, Figure 4 provides a depiction of the emergent adaptation of the culture of universal achievement (Lopez & Lopez, 2017) as depicted by the participants in this study. The figure provides a visual to support the efforts required for attaining college and career readiness across all schools and grades of an entire school district. This figure suggests the need for further study via grounded theory methodology.

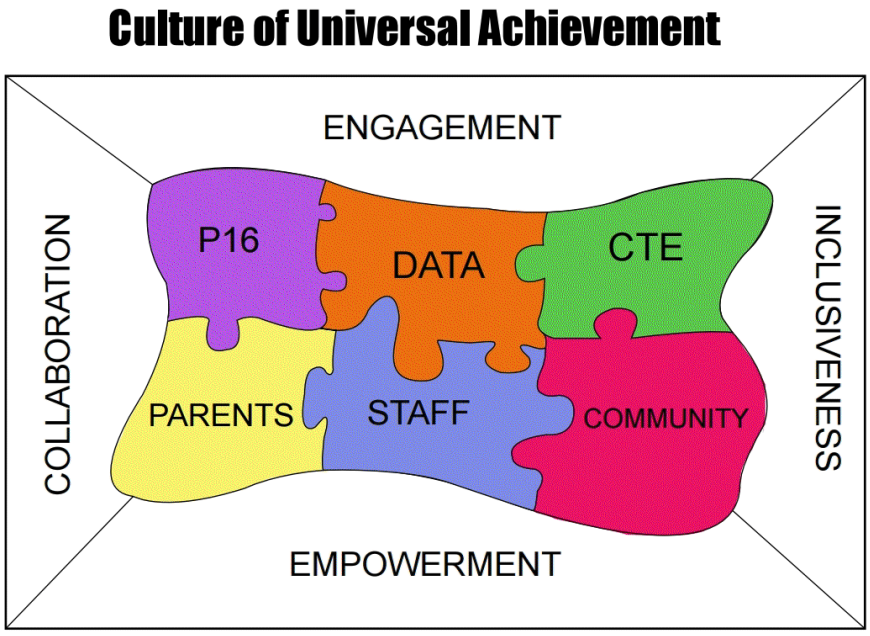


Figure 4. Visual representation of the culture of universal achievement.

Conclusion

Given the qualitative design of this single purposeful case study, the results may only apply to the district subject of the study and may not be applicable to other districts. Superintendents without the community support and buy-in had by this superintendent as an alumnus of the case study district's high school might be hard to duplicate. Much of the success was credited to the high school principal, who had a background working as a superintendent in other districts. Finding a campus leader with a similarly broad skill set and perspective for implementing district initiatives might be a challenge for other superintendents. Overall, this study's findings determined Conley's four keys initiated a preliminary look at college and career readiness but challenged Conley's (2007a, 2007b) framework for college readiness and supported the literature finding by Leonard in 2013 that determined factors such as parental support and relationships should be considered.

Finally, the results indicate a need for a comprehensive postsecondary framework that addresses factors beyond the student level.

Appendices

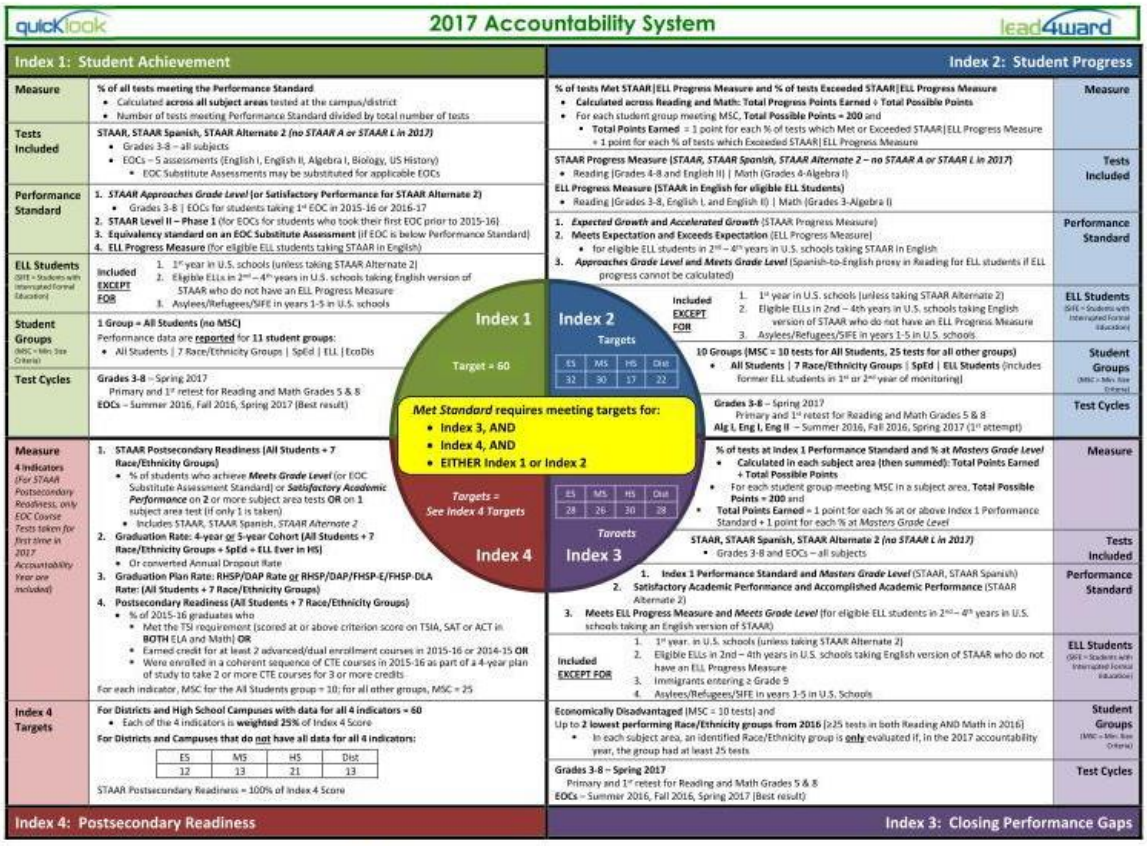
Appendix A

Central Office Interview Questions

1. What is your current position? How many years have you served in that capacity?
2. How long have you been working in the K-12 public school system?
3. How many years total in your current district?
4. When you took over your position, what steps did you take to evaluate the level of college and career readiness in the district?
5. How were personnel roles, responsibilities, and authority realigned to meet goals for college and career readiness?
6. What strategies were implemented to increase college and career readiness?
7. How was the allocation of resources changed to fund the college and career initiative?
8. Who held the responsibility for establishing a high level of college and career readiness?
9. How were the systems monitored for implementation?
10. How is social media developed to address collective buy-in?
11. How did monitoring raise the level of college and career readiness?
12. What are your perceptions of why the new systems did or did not work?
13. Is there anything else you would like to include in the interview?
14. Is there anyone you recommend I should interview regarding the college and career readiness of the district?

Appendix B

2017 Accountability Indexes 1, 2, 3, and 4



This quickLook only addresses key aspects of the 2017 Accountability System for traditional districts/campuses.
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Italics indicate changes to the 2016 Accountability System being implemented for the 2017 Accountability System

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quickLook

2017 Accountability System

lead4ward

Distinction Designations

Topic	Summary	Comments
Campus Distinction Designations (1-7) District Distinction Designations (Only #7)	1. Top 25% Student Progress (top quartile of Campus Comparison Group on Index 2 Score) 2. Top 25% Closing Achievement Gap (top quartile of Campus Comparison Group on Index 3 Score) 3. Academic Achievement in Reading/Language Arts 4. Academic Achievement in Math 5. Academic Achievement in Science 6. Academic Achievement in Social Studies 7. Postsecondary Readiness (1) STAAR Postsecondary Readiness (from Index 4) (2) 4-Year Graduation Rate (Cohort Class of 2016) (3) Diploma Plan Rate (Cohort Class of 2016) (4) College-Ready Graduates Rate – School Year 2015-16 Graduates (from Index 4) (5) Advanced Course/Dual Enrollment Completion Rate (11th & 12th Graders in School Year 2015-16) (6) SAT/ACT Performance Met Criterion – School Year 2015-16 Graduates (7) SAT/ACT Participation Rate – School Year 2015-16 Graduates (8) AP/IB Examinees Meeting Criterion Score – School Year 2015-16 Examinees (11th and 12th graders) (9) CTE Coherent Sequence Graduates – School Year 2015-16 Graduates	Campuses/Districts must earn an accountability rating of ***Met Standard*** in order to be eligible for a Distinction Designation **Academic Achievement Distinction Designations (AADD) Methodology** • Each campus is compared to its Campus Comparison Group on a number of indicators specific to each subject area • To earn AADD in a subject area, a campus must be in the top quartile of its Campus Comparison Group on the following percentages of the indicators applicable to the campus group type in that subject area: ❖ Elementary and Middle Schools: ≥ 50% of the indicators for which the campus has data ❖ High Schools and K-12 campuses: ≥ 33% of the indicators for which the campus has data **Campus Comparison Group** • Each campus is identified by school type (elementary, middle, high school, or combined elementary/secondary - based on fall PEIMS enrollment) • Each campus is assigned to a unique comparison group of the 40 other public schools that most closely match the campus based on the following characteristics: 1. Grade levels served – lowest grade level and highest grade level enrollment (based on fall PEIMS enrollment) 2. Campus size –total student enrollment (based on fall PEIMS enrollment) 3. Percentage of students economically disadvantaged (based on fall PEIMS enrollment) 4. Percentage of students identified as English language learners (ELLs) (based on fall PEIMS enrollment) 5. Mobility rate (percentage of students identified as mobile) (based on PEIMS prior year attendance) 6. *Percentage of students served by special education* 7. *Percentage of students enrolled in an early college high school program* **Postsecondary Readiness Distinction Designation Methodology for Campuses** • Elementary and Middle Schools: top quartile of Campus Comparison Group on Index 4 performance of All Students group • High Schools and K-12 Campuses: top quartile of Campus Comparison Group on ≥ 33% of the indicators for which the campus has data **Postsecondary Readiness Distinction Designation Methodology for Districts** • Determine the percentage of Postsecondary Readiness Indicators for which campuses in the district are in the top quartile of their Campus Comparison Group • District earns a Postsecondary Readiness Distinction Designation if across all campuses in the district ≥ 55% of the postsecondary readiness indicators are in the top quartile of the campuses' respective Campus Comparison Groups.

Academic Achievement Distinction Designation (AADD) Indicators by Subject Area

AADD Indicators - Reading/ELA

	HS	MS/JH	ES	K-12
1 Attendance rate	Y	Y	Y	Y
2 Greater Than Expected Student Growth in Reading/ELA	Y	Y	Y	Y
3 Grade 3 Reading Performance (Masters Grade Level)			Y	Y
4 Grade 4 Reading Performance (Masters Grade Level)			Y	Y
5 Grade 4 Writing Performance (Masters Grade Level)			Y	Y
6 Grade 5 Reading Performance (Masters Grade Level)			Y	Y
7 Grade 6 Reading Performance (Masters Grade Level)		Y		Y
8 Grade 7 Reading Performance (Masters Grade Level)		Y		Y
9 Grade 7 Writing Performance (Masters Grade Level)		Y		Y
10 Grade 8 Reading Performance (Masters Grade Level)		Y		Y
11 English I Performance (Masters Grade Level)	Y			Y
12 English II Performance (Masters Grade Level)	Y			Y
13 AP/IB Examination Participation: ELA	Y			Y
14 AP/IB Examination Performance: ELA	Y			Y
15 SAT/ACT Participation	Y			Y
16 SAT Performance: Reading and Writing	Y			Y
17 ACT Performance: ELA	Y			Y
18 Advanced/Dual Enrollment Course Completion Rate: Reading/ELA	Y			Y
Total Indicators - Reading/ELA	10	4	4	18

AADD Indicators - Math

	HS	MS/JH	ES	K-12
1 Attendance rate	Y	P	Y	Y
2 Greater Than Expected Student Growth in Mathematics	Y	P	Y	Y
3 Grade 3 Math Performance (Masters Grade Level)			P	Y
4 Grade 4 Math Performance (Masters Grade Level)			P	Y
5 Grade 5 Math Performance (Masters Grade Level)			P	Y
6 Grade 6 Math Performance (Masters Grade Level)		P		Y
7 Grade 7 Math Performance (Masters Grade Level)		P		Y
8 Grade 8 Math Performance (Masters Grade Level)		P		Y
9 Algebra I by Grade 8 Participation		P		Y
10 Algebra I Performance (Masters Grade Level)	Y	P		Y
11 AP/IB Examination Participation: Mathematics	Y			Y
12 AP/IB Examination Performance: Mathematics	Y			Y
13 SAT/ACT Participation	Y			Y
14 SAT Performance: Mathematics	Y			Y
15 ACT Performance: Mathematics	Y			Y
16 Advanced/Dual Enrollment Course Completion Rate: Mathematics	Y			Y
Total Indicators - Math	9	7	5	16

AADD Indicators - Science

	HS	MS/JH	ES	K-12
1 Attendance rate	Y	Y	Y	Y
2 Grade 5 Science Performance (Masters Grade Level)			Y	Y
3 Grade 8 Science Performance (Masters Grade Level)		Y		Y
4 Biology Performance (Masters Grade Level)	Y			Y
5 ACT Performance: Science	Y			Y
6 AP/IB Examination Participation: Science	Y			Y
7 AP/IB Examination Performance: Science	Y			Y
8 Advanced/Dual Enrollment Course Completion Rate: Science	Y			Y
Total Indicators - Science	6	2	2	8

AADD Indicators - Social Studies

	HS	MS/JH	ES	K-12
1 Attendance rate	Y	Y	Y	Y
2 Grade 8 Social Studies Performance (Masters Grade Level)		Y		Y
3 U.S. History Performance (Masters Grade Level)	Y			Y
4 AP/IB Examination Participation: Social Studies	Y			Y
5 AP/IB Examination Performance: Social Studies	Y			Y
6 Advanced/Dual Enrollment Course Completion Rate: Social Studies	Y			Y
Total Indicators - Social Studies	5	2	N/A	6

State Accountability System Safeguards

Performance Rates (ELL student group includes current AND monitored ELLs)

	All	Af Am	Am Ind	Asian	Hisp	Pac Isl	White	2 or More	Eco Dis	ELL	SpEd
State: Each Subject Area	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%
Federal: Reading & Math	91%	91%			91%		91%		91%	91%	91%

Participation Rates (ELL student group only includes current ELLs)

	All	Af Am	Am Ind	Asian	Hisp	Pac Isl	White	2 or More	Eco Dis	ELL	SpEd
Reading & Math ONLY	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%

Graduation Rates – Federal Targets* (ELL student group = EVER ELL in high school)

	All	Af Am	Am Ind	Asian	Hisp	Pac Isl	White	2 or More	Eco Dis	ELL	SpEd
4-Year	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%	88.5%
5-Year	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%	92.0%

* Federal graduation rate targets are applied to state system safeguards and include an improvement target

State Accountability System Safeguards – Consequences and Interventions

- Results are reported for each student group that meets Minimum Size Criteria
- Failure to meet a safeguard target for any reported group must be addressed through the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) continuous improvement process

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Appendix C

Artifacts Table

Artifact	Why It was Collected	Claim Supported
State results with distinctions	To determine case study district	District met critical case study requirement as CRR exceptional
PEIMS data on district enrollment	Look for alignment with state averages	District matched or exceeded state averages: low SES percent & on ELL
District Improvement Plan	Identify priorities of district	Focus on technology, academics, and CCR
Snapshots of District Website	See what was communicated to public	Showed a celebration of distinctions, staff, and community
Historical Background of district	To look at prior success with college readiness	Small Town ISD was founded 100 years ago with a plan that surpassed comparison districts
District Data for Past 20 years	Superintendent has served in various job capacities during this period for case district	District has not always had success with college readiness or academics
Photos of college wall displays	Principal claimed entire campus conveyed CCR	College displays were posted in every hallway
Photos of college door displays	Principal spoke of colleges that teachers had adopted for their classroom	Each classroom had a specific college visible at the entrance of their room and college logos on items such as locker tags
Photos of students in college shirts	School celebrates College Day by wearing college shirt or No Excuses University shirt	Students were proud to display college shirts
College curriculum from No Excuses University used at Intermediate school	Principal shared his weekly focus lessons came from this curriculum	Curriculum outlines college conversations and activities for every grade from K-12
Memo outlining CCR goals for Intermediate School	Principal showing what had been done to meet requirements of CCR program from No Excuses University	Intermediate school had a definite CCR plan as part of daily curriculum
School Board Goals	Superintendent's cabinet referred to goals during interview	Board goal for academic achievement mentions CCR
District of Innovation Plan	Superintendent's cabinet spoke of Innovation plan	Innovation Plan adopted a calendar that starts and ends with college calendar for each semester

Artifact	Why It was Collected	Claim Supported
CTE Plan	Superintendent spoke of exceptional CTE program	High School counselor shared CTE plan, and Endorsements expected from every student
Photos of Parent Paint Party	Principal referred to Paint Party as method to inform parents of CCR	Pictures showed parents & grandparents of elementary students attending Paint Party for college information
School Board Minutes	Rationale for Innovation Plan	Reasons stated in minutes included alignment with college calendar
School Board Minutes	Principal stated that each month School Board gets an update from the campuses which includes CCR plan	Minutes showed evidence of school leaders keeping board apprised of CCR measures
Local newspaper	Superintendent mentioned newspaper as way of recognizing students at college	Student successes were featured on monthly basis

Appendix D

Participants

Participant	Face to Face Interviews	Emails	Texts	Phone Calls
Superintendent	2	15	8	5
Central Office Admin				
Mr. Brown	0	2	0	1
Ms. Pink	1	3	0	1
Ms. Tan	1	4	0	0
Campus Leaders				
Mr. Gold	1	6	0	1
Mr. Green	1	4	0	0
Mr. Orange	1	4	0	0
Ms. Red	0	2	0	1
Community				
Business leader	0	0	0	2
College Instructor	1	1	0	0

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