ABSTRACT

Linguistic Diversity in a Monolingual Education System: A Case Study of Texas School Districts and Their Support for English Learning Students

Hannah Renee Harris, M.A.

Mentor: Lakia Scott, Ph.D.

The passing of influential education policy at the federal, state, and local levels of government directly impacts students within the American public education system. Despite a growing population of bilingual students across the U.S., the government has maintained a monolinguistic perspective on bilingual education reflected in education policy. In the American education system, English Learner (EL) students are often labeled as "struggling" due to their lack of English proficiency. This focus on the *lack* of English proficiency highlights the issue at hand: politicians, policymakers, and educators often view bilingualism through a deficit-based lens which devalues the skills of bilingualism and focuses instead on English proficiency. In this case study, I examined the school board member composition, additions to federal and state requirements for EL students, and standardized assessment data at four Texas school districts. My research findings identified influential board member characteristics and helpful bilingual education program methods which led to a narrower achievement gap for EL students.

Linguistic Diversity in a Monolingual Education System: A Case
Study of Texas School Districts and Their Support for English
Learning Students

by

Hannah Renee Harris, B.S.

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_____
Trena Wilkerson, Ph.D. Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

_____
Lakia Scott, Ph.D. Chairperson

_____
Neil Shanks, Ph.D.

_____
Karon LeCompte, Ph.D.

_____
Frieda Blackwell, Ph.D.

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_____
J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

The education of the next generation is one of the clearest ways in which the United States government has invested in the country's long-term success. Despite the United States' value of free, quality education, access to this education is not guaranteed for all students (Ewert et al., 2014). Throughout American history, many children were completely excluded from this opportunity, and many experienced discrimination within the system (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2012). Inequity is deeply ingrained in the public education system and takes active, intentional work on the part of educators, activists, and policymakers to enact systemic change to correct inequalities. Today, the U.S. is still working to acknowledge and correct these mistakes in order to improve public education for all students, regardless of gender, culture, socioeconomic status, race, or religion.

One significant way in which the system of education falls short is in the education of English Learning (EL) students. Goldenberg (1996) highlights this failure of the system in teaching EL students saying that language-minority students "generally do not do well in U.S. schools. Unfortunately, our schools' response to the challenge of non-English-speaking students has been uneven, fitful, and laced with political, ideological, and methodological controversies such as those swirling around bilingual education" (p. 353). The disappointing reality is that the public education system is failing a large population of students. EL students often fall through the cracks due to language barriers and underprepared teachers and school administration. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) confirmed this issue in a 2019 publication saying that "a persistent achievement

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gap exists between academic performance of students identified as English learners and their English-proficient peers" (Kennedy, 2019, p.1). This achievement gap is evidence of the failures within the education system to provide high quality education to all students. As American classrooms become increasingly diverse, it is vital that the American public education system continually adjust to account for the evolving needs of a changing student population.

Statement of the Problem

The division of power between federal, state, and local governments over the public education system is continually developing. Despite the changing relationship between levels of government, state governments have preserved their ultimate authority over public schooling (Delavan et al., 2021). The decentralized approach to education ensures that the state governments maintain responsibility for school success (Center on Education Policy, 2020). As a result, the state retains authority over education which directly impacts school districts. One example of this is the state level emphasis on standardized testing, "local control over education in Texas continued to erode as the accountability ratings system caused local school districts to focus more attention on the performance measurements put in place by the state, particularly the testing system" (Rozas, 2020, p. 13). Because states play such an influential role in the education system, each state has the liberty to adjust its education approach to align with specific needs and issues of the state; with this liberty comes the reality that state politics also influence the education systems within each state.

State political influence on public education is apparent in the immigration crisis in Texas. The political discussion surrounding the immigration boom across Texas has

entered the spotlight in recent years. The effects of the politicization of the immigration crisis in Texas are becoming increasingly evident in the field of education as the student population diversifies along with the general population throughout the state. The country, and specifically the state of Texas, must respond to the academic needs of the growing immigrant and EL student population in public schools to ensure that all students have access to a quality education (Chin et al., 2013). The lack of support for these students is evidenced by the fact that the percent funding for EL students has not changed since 1984 (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). There are many ways in which the state of Texas could provide and require schools to support EL students including increased funding, additional programming, and the changing of academic assessment metrics. There is a clear need that Texas public education is not meeting. The growing population of immigrant and EL students in Texas has not been matched in the state's allocation of resources and commitment to supporting these students. This study aims to identify ways in which the state governments and school districts can better support EL students through the examination of individual district policies and resources and their impact on the education and academic success of EL students in Texas public schools.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

In this study, I conducted an empirical qualitative descriptive case study using archival sources and TEA's published data to determine potential relationships between school board members' role in policymaking, resources and support for EL students, and EL student academic success rates on standardized testing within the context of four Texas school districts. The purpose of this research study was to identify ways in which school districts could better support EL students. To accomplish this goal, I selected four

Texas school districts of similar size and student population, and gathered data from each of these districts in order to answer most accurately the following research questions:

1. What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students?

2. How do districts' support and resources for EL students impact EL students' performance on state assessments?

3. What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?

Definition of Terms

The combination of changing terminology surrounding EL education and the many acronyms used in the field of education can create confusion within education research. For the purpose of reliability and clarity, I define key terms and acronyms used throughout this study are defined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. *Definition of Key Terms and Acronyms*

Term	Acronym	Definition	Reference
Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee	ARD	An ARD Committee is made up of individuals who determine the eligibility of individual students to special education programs.	(Coffey, 2020)
Bilingual Education	BE	Bilingual education programs teach academic content to students in English and in a native language. BE programs aim to encourage English proficiency while also ensuring that students do not fall behind in grade-level academic content because of the language barrier.	(Onah, 2020; Roddy, 2021)
Dual Language Education/ Dual Language Immersion Programs	DLE/ DLI	DLE and DLI programs allow students to learn academic content in both English and their native language. This approach helps EL students transition to on-level courses.	(Callahan et al., 2022; Kennedy, 2019)
Emergent Bilingual	EB	Emergent bilingual students are learning a new language while continuing to develop proficiency in their native language.	(López and Santibanez, 2018)
English as a Second Language Program	ESL Program	ESL classes are taught by an ESL-certified teacher who teaches all instruction in English and adds supplementary materials to assist EL students. ESL programs are administered in two possible ways: the pull-out method allows the teacher to take EL students out of mainstream classrooms for specified ESL instruction, and the content-based approach allows the teacher to use ESL language instruction techniques within academic content in class.	(*Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Policy Roadmap*, 2021)

Term	Acronym	Definition	Reference
English Learner/ English Language Learner/ English as a Second Language	EL/ ELL/ ESL	The terminology used to refer to students who are learning English as a secondary language is continuously changing. The term "English Learner/ English Learning" or "EL" has become increasingly common in recent education research and policy, and will be used in this study to refer to English-learning students.	(Roddy, 2021)
End of Course Exam	EOC	High school students in the state of Texas are required to take the EOC assessments in core subjects including English I, English II, Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History. The state assessments measure students' academic ability to meet grade-level standards for each of the tested core subjects.	(Coffey, 2020)
First Language/ Native Language/ Native Tongue/ Home Language/ L1		Native language, native tongue, home language, and L1 are all terms that are used to describe a person's first language. First language(s) are typically taught or spoken in the early years of life.	(Roddy, 2021; Goldenberg, 1996)
Limited English Proficiency	LEP	LEP students are those whose native language is one other than English. LEP students are not yet proficient in English.	(Bernstein et al., 2021)
On-Level		On-level refers to classes where grade level content standards are the focus of the class.	(Black, 2017)
Proficiency		Language proficiency is a term used to describe the stage a person enters when they have acquired advanced knowledge and skills in a language.	(Kennedy, 2019)
State Board of Education	SBOE	The SBOE is responsible for the development of the Texas public education curriculum.	(Beck, n.d.)

Term	Acronym	Definition	Reference
State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness	STAAR	STAAR testing is the state of Texas's method of ensuring students and schools meet high academic standards. The STAAR test was first implemented in 2012 and continues today to assess public school students in third grade through high school.	(Saldivar, 2020)
Texas Education Agency	TEA	The Texas Education Agency assists in overseeing education for the state of Texas.	(Fernandez, 2002)
United States Department of Education	USDE	The United States Department of Education is the federal government agency which regulates and passes legislation for the public education system across the country.	(Nagro et al., 2022; Reiser & Skalski, 2010)
STAAR Performance Labels: Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, Masters Grade Level		Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level distinctions are used to classify students based on their STAAR score. Approaches Grade Level indicates that the student met the minimum state requirements to pass. Meets Grade Level indicates that a student met grade-level standards on state assessments. The small percentage of students who earn the Masters Grade Level label will need little to no academic intervention to succeed in the next grade.	(Communications, 2017)

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem at hand as well as my research questions which grounded this case study. Additionally, I reviewed important terms and acronyms used in this study to provide background knowledge of Texas education terminology.

This brief introduction to the purpose and method of my study is further explored in Chapter three. Chapter two includes an extensive review of related literature. This literature review includes an exploration of the governmental roles in the American public education system, federal and state education legislation, and similar research studies which focus on Texas education and EL students. In Chapter three, I delve into the methodology and theoretical framework which guided my study. Chapter four includes the presentation and interpretation of my research findings. Chapter five concludes my case study with a review of the implications and recommendations resulting from my case study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

As the student population in classrooms across the United States continues to change, the public education system must continue to adapt to meet the needs of these students. One student group which continually underperforms compared to the broader student population, according to state standards, is the EL student population. Only one in ten EL students is prepared for higher education after leaving high school (Sehlaoui, 2022). This case study investigated ways in which the government, schools, and teachers can support EL students through answering the following research questions: *What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students? How do districts' support and resources for EL students impact EL students' performance on state assessments? What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?* In order to identify successful methods of support for EL students, it is important to first develop a holistic understanding of the U.S. public education system. This requires a review of influential literature which shaped the American public education system, and more specifically, the policy impacting EL students.

This chapter delves into a review of the literature, examining significant education legislation throughout American history, the impact of political and power dynamics among local, state, and federal governing agencies on the American public education system, and similar research studies in the field of education on bilingual education (BE)

and EL students. Rozas (2020) explains how the purpose of education legislation is to enact policy that will support student academic success. With this purpose of education legislation in mind, consider the ways in which the following policies and research studies shed light on the functions and goals of the American public education system, specifically in relation to EL students. The three sections within this chapter focus on three levels of government which play a role in the governing of the public education system in America. The federal, state, and local governments hold varying responsibilities within the system, but all are necessary for its success. Before seeking ways in which to support EL students, I first developed a deeper understanding of how the education system works and what policies are already in place that affect EL students. The following chapter reviews influential education policy and relevant research studies which display an accurate representation of American public education throughout history.

Federal Education Mandates: Examining Federal Legislative Impacts on the Public Education System

The United States Constitution fails to describe the authority of the federal government in the American education system, so public education responsibilities were, and continue to be, the responsibility of state and local governments (Rozas, 2020). The division of power among federal, state, and local powers changed over time as the country evolved but remain decentralized compared to education systems across the globe (Center on Education Policy, 2020). Despite state and local government authority, the federal government assumed an increasingly important role in the public education system in the aftermath of the American Revolution (Center on Education Policy, 2020).

Responsibility for public education is still divided among local, state, and federal authorities. However, the division of power in this multi-tiered public education system looks quite different today than it did fifty years ago.

The American education system transformed with the passing of prominent federal education policy over the last century. The expanding role of the federal government in education can be attributed to the country's desire to remain technologically and economically competitive on a global scale, and to the country's realization that high quality education is a necessity for a successful democracy (McGuinn, 2006). As the country becomes increasingly diverse, public-school classrooms across the country mirror that diversity. Influential federal legislation shapes the experience and education of all students in the American public education system; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act, and the Bilingual Education Act are all examples of federal legislation which shaped American public education.

Former President Lyndon B. Johnson is known for pushing the "war on poverty." As part of this movement to end poverty in America, Johnson proposed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), passed in 1965 (Robelen, 2005). The purpose of ESEA was to expand the reach of public education to help promote educational equity in the United States. The policy was monumental for its time. Researchers consider this policy to be the country's first successful federal education policy which proved the country's commitment to equitable, free education for all (Sharp, 2016). The ESEA focused on clarifying the role of federal and state governments in public education, as it "marked an important shift in American federalism—one that established a pattern of

federal involvement that today continues to have an enormous impact on school funding and policy." (Casalaspi, 2017, p. 247). The legislation set a precedent for education policy and forever changed the American public education system.

The ESEA played a crucial role in the push to end poverty in America. Casalaspi (2017) asserted that the "ESEA was meant to address an epidemic of poverty and simultaneously signal a national commitment to education, and it accomplished both goals to some extent." (p. 277). Although the ESEA made strides in establishing a more inclusive public education system through increasing funding for low-income schools and students, the policy was never without fault. ESEA is regularly reauthorized to account for new challenges and needs of the public education system (Rozas, 2020). These adjustments to ESEA often included reallocation of federal education funding to support different aspects of education. As the role of the federal government in public education adapts to the needs of the country and its school system, so too does the ESEA.

The ESEA has adjusted to meet the needs of a diverse population in the twenty-first century. On January 8th 2002, President George W. Bush reauthorized the ESEA by signing into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB aimed to close the achievement gap, a term used to represent the difference in academic achievement between one student group and another, and to hold schools accountable to ensure that all students were successful in achieving high academic standards (Robelen, 2005). NCLB set the requirement for state standardized testing for students from third to twelfth grade (Rozas, 2020). Tran-Hoang-Thu (2009) explained that the purpose of NCLB was "to ensure that all children have the fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education, and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessment" (pp. 3-4). The Bush

administration recognized that educational jurisdiction needed localization to allow districts and states to address the specific needs of their state. NCLB created systems of accountability to ensure that states addressed the concerns of their students and schools. Rozas (2020) claims that these new accountability systems took power away from local school boards because of the emphasis on state standardized testing. NCLB enforced the use of standardized testing on an entirely new level in an attempt to identify which students were "succeeding" and which were not. This emphasis on standardized testing was meant to provide concrete data to districts, states, and the federal government to show the academic success of individual students across the country.

In conjunction with the push to raise academic standards and ensure that all students attain academic success, NCLB addressed the importance of highly qualified and professionally trained teachers (Barth et al., 2016). A "highly qualified" teacher must have a state teaching certification and must have demonstrated their understanding of the content they teach. NCLB emphasized the importance of hiring highly qualified teachers; however, due to the national teacher shortage and lack of training in ESL instruction for teachers, EL students are often paired with teachers who are not highly qualified to teach them (Gándara & Baca, 2008). Although the law makes the importance of "highly qualified" educators clear, NCLB fails to lay out any expectations or requirements for those who teach EL students (Gándara & Baca, 2008). Due to the growing population of EL students across the country, and especially in Texas, it is becoming the norm that general education teachers have EL students in their classrooms. Texas has been unable to keep up with the hiring of ESL and bilingually certified educators which is evident in the imbalance between the percentage of EL students in Texas and the percentage of ESL/ bilingually certified teachers (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). To take steps towards

improving the education experience and outcomes for EL students, the state of Texas needs to address this teacher shortage and prioritize hiring qualified teachers to teach *all* students.

NCLB targeted interventions for schools with high populations of students with low-socioeconomic status. These interventions aimed to promote high academic success rates, to meet the needs of diverse learners including those learning English, to incentivize students to be healthy, and to raise academic standards so that students were prepared for life after high school (Reiser & Skalski, 2010). The law opened doors for funding to language education and to Title I schools. NCLB held schools accountable for addressing the needs of underserved and underachieving students. Despite the strengthening of the accountability system, many states did not see improvement in students' academic success on standardized assessments after NCLB (Rozas, 2020). NCLB aimed to raise academic standards and reduce achievement gaps across the country, but the legislation was not entirely successful. Rozas (2020) explained that after NCLB went into effect, the state of Texas saw little growth in students' academic abilities which failed to shrink achievement gaps among races. Rozas (2020) expanded upon this argument saying, "NCLB as an example of national reform is complicated because each state can interpret the law and create policies with varying degrees of stringency, thus blurring the perceptions of high- and low performing schools" (p. 9). Although NCLB focuses on accountability and targeting intervention for students who do not meet high academic standards, the results of the law have not been wholly positive.

Title III of NCLB focused on EL students who were identified as one of the minoritized student groups which NCLB aimed to support. In their critique of the NCLB Act, authors Gándara and Baca (2008) studied the direct effects of NCLB on EL students

in California. The authors assert that the NCLB legislation removed all references to *bilingualism* and *bilingual education* within the Department of Education and replaced these terms with phrases which focused on English acquisition rather than bilingualism. Gándara and Baca (2008) provide examples to support this observation:

> The office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) became under NCLB, the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students, popularly known as OELA. While this happened with little fanfare, and seemingly little immediate impact, in fact, the negation of the language of bilingualism set a tone that we argue has undermined protections for these students and reinforced misguided policies. (p.205)

This demonstrates the national shift away from bilingual education to a focus on English acquisition. This perspective is often described as monolinguistic because it shows the nation's sole focus of English acquisition rather than encouraging bilingualism or proficiency in multiple languages. Changing the name of the office from *Bilingual* Education to office of *English Language Acquisition* is representative of the larger governmental perspective shift which values English acquisition first.

The passing of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) during the Obama Administration in 2015 is the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA. This reauthorization adjusted many of the requirements of NCLB, including the monitoring of EL programs which became the responsibility of the states (Callahan et al., 2022). ESSA encouraged states to broaden their definition of student and district success, like considering attendance records and school culture, while also creating a streamlined system for identifying at-risk or struggling schools. This comprehensive education legislation focused on measuring student and district success as well as closing the achievement gap to ensure that all students had access to a quality education. The goal of ESSA was to increase local control over education and effective teaching to close

achievement gaps (Strunc, 2020). ESSA pushed states to reconsider the ways in which they measure success and how they support struggling schools. This legislation marked a major transition in the field of education as discretion was given back to the individual states and local governments.

This authority shift resulting from the ESSA was particularly relevant for the community of EL students because the power to regulate EL teaching and programming now rested on the states and local education agencies (Callahan et al., 2022). The ESSA introduced the notion that, under this ESSA policy, "states are now responsible for articulating how they will measure and monitor progress on several EL-related measures, including identification and reclassification (i.e., entry into and exit from EL status and services) as well as academic achievement and English proficiency." (Callahan et al., 2022, p. 2). Although ESSA commits to education equity, the legislation assumes that states will step in to provide additional support for low-income and minoritized students.

The Obama Administration, along with educators across the country, recognized the downward trend of high school graduation rates, dropout rates, and the widening of the achievement gap. Saldivar investigated the impact of legislation, such as ESSA, on EL students. In this study on the academic achievement gap and college-readiness standards for Black, Hispanic, and White students in Texas public schools, Saldivar found that "While all three groups did show some improvement, student academic achievement overall improved minimal, college-readiness rates of high school graduates continue to be at a low, student drop-out rates continue to climb, and the gap between ethnic groups continues to widen" (pp. 35-36). The government's response to this achievement gap and the lack of college-readiness in high school graduates is to push for greater accountability through testing. Although this response might keep some schools

accountable, the over emphasis on testing can be wearisome for students and teachers alike and can cause some students to fall even further behind (Saldivar, 2020). Saldivar (2020) explains that "high poverty high schools are the ones that suffer the brunt of accountability strategies that force test-based authorizations. ELs are part of this vicious cycle and understanding this fragile population is essential for all individuals involved in making decisions for them." (p. 37). EL students are often double tested as they are required to take the Texas STAAR examinations as well as the annual TELPAS testing to identify their progress towards English proficiency; these students are expected to work towards mastery of content standards with the rest of their peers while simultaneously pushing towards English proficiency (Saldivar, 2020). Educators and policymakers must acknowledge ways to provide substantial support to meet the needs of these students.

The need for quality ESL education became apparent in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Texas Senator Ralph Yarorough advocated for a bill that would provide greater educational opportunity and support for students whose native language was Spanish (Stewner- Manzanares, 1988). This advocacy led to the creation of Title VII of the ESEA, or the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (BEA), which was the first federal legislation to address the educational needs of EL students through promising funding for bilingual education programs (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). The BEA, and the legislation's modern updates, require school districts to offer bilingual education programming if a grade within that district had at least twenty LEP students who spoke the same native language (Chin et al., 2013). Onah (2020) describes the purpose of these bilingual education programs saying,

> Bilingual education is commonly defined as the use of two languages as a medium of instruction for a learner or group of learners in a formal school system. Ovando & Collier (1985) in Malarz (1998) acknowledges that it is totally

impossible to separate language and culture; hence they see bilingual education as a concept of bicultural education. In the same vein, the US Congress (1992) defines bilingual education as a programme of designed instruction for LEP (Limited English Proficiency) children in primary and secondary schools, given instruction in English and study of English language with the aim of allowing the learner to achieve competence in English language, yet maintaining the native language of the learner who is LEP and instruction is given in all the subjects with consideration for the cultural heritage of such learners to allow them progress effectively in their learning experiences even amongst the English Proficient learners. (p. 3)

An important factor of bilingual education is the emphasis placed on preserving and valuing students' native language and cultural heritage; this goal is often lost in modern EL programming which focuses on English acquisition and lessens the desire to maintain proficiency in students' L1. An awareness of EL students' culture is a vitally important aspect of bilingual and ESL education that is often neglected. This requirement for schools to implement bilingual education programs under BEA meant that schools who met the criteria were required to offer bilingual programming for their students. This requirement was monumental as it solidified funding for programs which benefitted EL students.

The BEA reform in 2002 demonstrated a shift away from *bilingual* education to emphasize English acquisition which is evident in the new name of this policy, the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (Gándara & Baca, 2008). This act was created as part of the NCLB Act under Title III. With the goal of English acquisition in mind, this new law set the expectation that EL students learn English as quickly as possible so that they could be successful in attaining grade level proficiency standards as well as the general academic standards which all students were required to meet (Hinojosa, 2019). The NCLB Act expanded accountability systems in which a school's success was based on student accomplishment on

standardized assessments (Rozas, 2020). This "success" in standardized testing was directly linked to the amount of funding that schools received. The incentive to push students to perform "successfully" on standardized testing became a priority as school funding and the school's success as a whole became dependent upon the student assessment scores, specifically in reading and math proficiency (Rozas, 2020). This shift in legislation represented Texas' perspective, and on a broader scale, the view of society reflected in federal policy, regarding the value in bilingualism.

Immigrants and EL students have historically been left out of and left behind in the American public education system. To account for the changing needs of American citizens, the federal government periodically reauthorizes the ESEA to update policy and address the modern challenges in American schooling (Casalaspi, 2017). NCLB was signed into law at the end of 2001 to bridge the achievement gap and to ensure that all students were succeeding academically. The NCLB Act was influential in raising academic standards, updating teacher qualification requirements, and reinforcing accountability in public education with the intent to ensure that all students succeeded; however, the law had many issues which researchers say contributed to exacerbating the achievement gap for many students (Gándara & Baca, 2008). The Obama administration again reauthorized the ESEA, but this time through the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. ESSA still serves as the primary governance over K-12 public education. The law is best known for reallocating authority over education policy back to the state governments and local education agencies. When considering policy that has directly affected EL students and immigrant students, the Bilingual Education Act of 1973 set the expectations for bilingual education. BEA guaranteed resources and funding for equitable education in K-12 education programs for EL students (Lopez &

Santibanez, 2018). These impactful laws were created and passed to improve American education; each of these policies accomplished this goal, to some degree. However, since the beginning of the public education system in America, certain minority student groups, such as EL students, have been left behind in this *high-quality*, *equitable* education system.

Education at the State Level: Texas Law Regarding Bilingual and EL Education

The public education system is primarily the responsibility of the state; therefore, public education can look different on a state-by-state basis. The decentralization of education governance in the United States is reflected in the funding breakdown of this system (Gándara & Baca, 2008). A 2020 study conducted by the Center on Education Policy asserts that the current funding breakdown of the public education system is as follows: 47% of school revenue comes from the state level, 45% from the local level, and 8% from the federal level (Center on Education Policy, 2020). The bulk of school district funding comes from the state and local governments. Even though the federal government provides only a small portion of financial assistance to schools, the federal government has enacted influential education policy to regulate the system. The complicated relationship among local, state, and federal governments in funding and regulating the public education system has made it difficult to ensure all students receive a high-quality education; this deficit is further exemplified in the manner in which the Texas education system treats EL students.

Despite the challenges of a multilayered approach to governance, the state governments are still the primary source of funding and policy making for the public education system (Center on Education Policy, 2020). Current state responsibilities in

public education include determining academic standards for each grade level, state testing and school accountability, teacher certification, and school calendar requirements (Center on Education Policy, 2020). In the 21st century, Texas has become an immigration hub in large part due to its shared border with Mexico and proximity to Central and South American countries (Dixon, 2014). A steady demographic change throughout the state is reflected in public schools across Texas as the state serves over one million EL/EB students, a number that is continually increasing (Núñez Porras & Hernández, 2021). The politicization of immigration in Texas not only impacts Texas immigration legislation, but also impacts the experience of immigrant students, often categorized as EL students, in public schools. The Texas ESSA Plan and Texas House Bill 3 are primary examples of Texas education legislation that directly impact students, particularly those identified as EL.

The ESSA gave power over education back to state governing entities. The ESSA introduced new accountability systems in which each individual state was held responsible for implementation plans where they explain their plan to "measure and monitor" EL classification, progress, and proficiency (Callahan et al., 2022). This legislation required that state and local governments ensure their graduating students met College Career and Military Readiness (CCMR) standards (Saldivar, 2020). According to TEA, the Texas ESSA Title III is to ensure English proficiency and academic achievement for EL students, "Title III will also assist all English learners meet the same challenging State academic standards that all children are expected to meet." (Agency, 2022, section 1). TEA states that under the Texas ESSA implementation plan, all students would be held to high academic standards under ESSA using standardized measures. The standardization of academic achievement changed the course for education assessment

data. The American education seeks to encourage growth and academic achievement in all students. Unfortunately, the state's way of measuring growth and success is insufficient; this is especially true for bilingual students because standardized assessments do not value bilingual skills, but rather focus on where these EL students are lacking in English and other content areas.

The 2019 Texas House Bill 3 (HB3) is one of the most relevant education policies in Texas to date as it addresses reforms to teacher pay, early childhood literacy, and high school graduation standards. In interviews with Texas teachers, Rozas (2020) discovered that teachers consider HB3 the "most pressing" education legislation in the state. Researchers and educators argue that HB3 could be strengthened with the addition of requirements for schools to create separate learning goals for EL students in both English and their home language, "there is not a standard that exists to ensure programs are collecting kindergarten readiness information for English Learner children in both English and their home language. As a result information collected for these children is likely to be incomplete or invalid" (*Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Policy Roadmap*, 2021, p. 16). HB3 aims to ensure that all children meet grade-level standards. This goal calls for an equal education system in which students are provided access to resources. On the surface, the standardization of kindergarten readiness assessments may seem logical as it could produce clear information about whether students are meeting standards; however, this equality mindset does not account for the individual strengths, weaknesses, and differences of each child. Switching to an equity-based system, one where EL students could be tested for grade-level standards in both English and in their native language, would provide teachers, districts, and the state a clearer picture of EL students' understanding and mastery of state standards.

The monolinguistic approach to EL education is evident in state testing requirements and in HB3 legislation. Authors Nunez Porras and Hernandez (2021) researched the impact of HB3 on the Texas EL student population. In this report, the authors reiterated a similar point Rozas (2020) made through highlighting the need to set appropriate and accurate reading goals for EL students. Nunez Porras and Hernandez (2021) propose recommendations for the Texas legislature to assess more accurately EL students' literacy and academic development and to move away from the monolinguistic literacy trajectory to a biliteracy trajectory (Núñez Porras & Hernández, 2021). A monolingual perspective is a deficit-based approach to EL education which dismisses the value in bilingualism and reinforces a deficit framework. In contrast, an asset-based approach to EL instruction would allow teachers and policy makers to foster the unique skills of EL students in their classrooms and in the larger society. Assessment of EL students with this biliteracy perspective would differ from current assessment methods and would require a trajectory shift (Núñez Porras & Hernández, 2021). The path of biliteracy differs from the current monolingual education path on which the state is currently set. Shifting from this monolinguistic approach would require different assessment methods for EL students because these students have a different set of highly valuable skills which should be acknowledged and appreciated.

Often, EL students are labeled as "struggling" because of their lack of English proficiency, but this label reinforces the deficit-based framework and hinders the development of adequate assessment strategies (Núñez Porras & Hernández, 2021). This idea that EL students are intellectually or academically struggling because of their lack of English proficiency again reinforces the deficit-based educational perspective and is a direct result of inadequate assessment strategies and requirements. The "struggling" label

often placed on EL students is a result of the misalignment of assessment metrics which have denied access to high-quality learning experiences (Núñez Porras & Hernández, 2021). Núñez Porras and Hernández (2021) argue that inadequate assessment metrics for measuring EL student success contributed to inequitable education and widening of achievement gaps. To change this approach, both the state's view of EL instruction and their assessment of this population of students must change. Although the authors' recommendations are well-researched, the article fails to discuss the practical implications of their research in schools across Texas. Moving away from a monolingual approach to EL education could have positive effects on learning outcomes for EL students, but past literature neglects to recommend practical ideas or steps for creating an alternative system that would more accurately represent EL students' abilities. Despite this lack of attainable steps to change the system, Nunez Porras and Hernandez (2021) present a compelling argument regarding the importance of shifting away from a monolingual system that views fluency in a home language other than English as a deficit, and moving towards an asset-based framework which encourages and values multilingualism.

Despite the state's efforts to address the needs Texas students, gaps persist in resource availability and appropriate program and assessment requirements for EL students. State and federal education legislation approach ESL and bilingual education through a deficit-based perspective which can be harmful to students. At the local level, school districts have the opportunity to add resources and implement additional programs to meet the needs of students within their individual district.

Local School Boards: Their Purpose, Effectiveness, and Influence

The division of responsibility in the field of education can seem convoluted. Despite the complex relationship among local, state, and federal entities, local school boards and officials have the most direct and clear connection to school districts, teachers, and students. The role of local school boards includes the important task of electing a superintendent. The board and superintendent work together to pass policy that coincides with state and federal legislation but meets the individual needs of their district. The local level of education governance has the most direct contact with students. Because of their close connection to the students they serve, I found it important to examine local leaders' specific roles within the field and how their leadership impacts students. This final section of my literature review identifies studies that explore this breakdown of local school leadership responsibilities, the direct connection between education policy and public-school students, and local leaders' reliance on student assessment data to determine district policy.

Teacher and educator turnover is a pressing issue facing the education system. Alsbury (2003) conducted a research study, reflected in his article titled: *Superintendent and School Board Member Turnover*, in which he used the Dissatisfaction Theory to explore the relationship between superintendent and school board member turnover. This study provides insight into the political and social dynamics in local school districts (Alsbury, 2003). Although politics play a considerable role in the selection of school board members and superintendents, the community holds the power of electing board members. The influence of politics in local education is significant, but this significance is not apparent to many Americans. The pressing issues debated in state and federal politics often draw voters' attention away from local politics and elections. Although the

state and federal governments play an influential role in the public education system, local politics, especially regarding education, cannot simply be an afterthought because of the impact of local politics on the education and formation of the next generation.

To understand better how politics and the functions of a democratic country influence public education at the local level, Alsbury looks to the Dissatisfaction Theory for further clarity. The Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy suggests that citizens have the power in the democratic process of local school board governance (Alsbury, 2003). Albury (2003) explored how dissatisfied citizens impact the education system through election of school board members. The American public education system is largely influenced by local politics and local education leaders such as school board members and superintendents. This study suggests that community members have the opportunity to participate in the governing of school districts through election of board members. If this election process is the primary way in which a community member could participate in the system of local district governance, it should mean that community members are electing board members who represent community interest and values.

The roles and success of local school board members greatly influence the public's perception of education politics. Splawn (1972) conducted a study exploring how board member characteristics like board member term, race, age, educational level, gender, children in school, income, and occupation impact a board member's role and perception of that role on the board. Results found that these factors did influence board members' perception of their role and responsibility on the board (Splawn, 1972). Despite recognition of the importance of these factors, even in the 1970s, there was little diversity or minority representation in school boards during this time, so white male board members and superintendents were in the majority. Splawn (1972) discovered an

overwhelming lack of racial and gender diversity on Texas school boards which Splawn attributed to racial and sexual discrimination. The lack of diversity in school officials had clear effects on both independent school districts and on Texas public education as a whole. Although the study is dated, Splawn's research identified the ways in which school board members' demographics and characteristics influenced their election and their priorities on the board.

Local education leaders have the closest connection to individual schools and their students. School principals bear a significant responsibility in measuring and monitoring student performance, and school board members are often responsible for gathering data collected at each school to study the larger picture of school and district performance. In a case study on the use of student data by superintendents to inform school policies and to measure teacher success, Sutherland (2022) found that school boards and superintendents tended to use assessment data and student outcomes to assess school performance and maintain local control. The study incorporated the perspectives of local school board members and school superintendents to strengthen understanding of the practical ways in which federal accountability policies impact school districts. Student standardized assessment scores provide data which district leaders use to assess teacher and administrator success (Sutherland, 2022). Moreover, school boards use this information to evaluate their own work: "all boards asserted that test scores not only reflected school success but also the skill of the local board to oversee education in their districts" (Sutherland, 2022, p. 1001). School boards rely heavily on student performance data to assess the success of teachers, school administrators, and the district as a whole. Sutherland (2022) explains that school boards use this assessment data to measure students' educational outcomes, to create a supportive community of schools, and to

preserve local control of education by shielding districts from state oversight. The reliance on student assessment data serves as a reminder that all three levels of governance over the field of education rely on student standardized assessment data to determine areas of need and success within the system.

Conclusion

The examination of influential education policy and relevant research studies clarifies the relationship among federal, state, and local governing authorities to show which level of government oversees each aspect of education. The evolution of public education in America is evident in key federal education policy such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the Bilingual Education Act (BEA). The federal commitment to education is apparent in these laws and is carried out in state legislation as well. With the growing population of EL and immigrant students in the state of Texas, it is vital that the state and school districts alike make a commitment to support this vulnerable group of students. The role of state governments in education becomes clearer through exploring the Texas ESSA Plan and the Texas House Bill 3. Despite federal and state oversight, local governing authorities, such as school board members, have the closest and most consistent contact with students and teachers. The system of public education is constantly adjusting to account for the evolving needs of a diverse population, but the continued inequity in the system proves that there is still much work to be done.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The state of Texas emphasizes English language proficiency as the goal for EL students. This focus often neglects the value in multilingualism which can be a detrimental perspective. Although monolinguals represent a minority of the world's population, the American education system, in many ways, devalues EL students' multilingual abilities (Roddy, 2021). Despite the fact that countries around the world encourage multilingualism in education, the U.S. has not fully adopted this perspective. The lack of resources and support for EL students, and for non-English speaking families, in Texas is concerning. According to a research study conducted in the 2018-2019 school year, 84% of EL students in Texas are also considered economically disadvantaged (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). EL students have unique skills and academic needs. The purpose of this study is to build upon education research, which proves the need for greater support programs and resources for EL students, with tangible steps that districts can take to support all EL students.

As the population of non-native English speakers grows across the state, so too does the number of students in need of ESL and bilingual education support. The state of Texas provides minimal guidance regarding teaching content and language proficiency for ESL programs across the state, particularly with middle and secondary level educators (Walker, 2017). Many Texas educators experience first-hand the lack of resources for teaching and supporting EL students. This case study used archival sources to explore ways in which different school districts in Texas support EL students with the goal of

drawing connections to recommend successful resources and methods of support for EL students to Texas districts. The three research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students?

2. How do districts' support and resources for EL students impact EL students' performance on state assessments?

3. What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?

Researcher Positionality and Role

My experience working with EL students in a variety of educational settings exposed me to a great need within the Texas public education system. Throughout my time in the classroom, I came to understand that Texas schools lack of resources for EL students and training for ESL teachers. I observed the struggle that teachers face to identify ways to scaffold lessons for a diverse class of native and non-native English-speaking students. I desperately attempted to communicate with new EL students who spoke little to no English, and whose first language was completely foreign to me. I tutored EL students as they worked to understand the grade-level content of their core classes which were taught only in English. I witnessed an inexperienced and under qualified teacher give up on trying to teach in their ESL classroom full of EL students. The overwhelming sense of frustration from EL students and their teachers pushed me to research options for these students to make this transition for them more manageable.

The discontinuity between teacher and student experience compared to education policy sparked my curiosity for this research study. Thus, I studied the power and

political dynamics within the education system and how these dynamics impact students. My role within this study included data collection, analysis, and interpretation of archival sources with the goal of identifying systems and techniques that proved successful in supporting EL students. As a white woman who grew up in an English-speaking home, I recognize that I cannot fully understand the experience and challenges of learning English as a secondary language. My experience as an educator and tutor to EL students has greatly impacted my perspective in this study, and my experiences with EL students continues to motivate my research into the state and federal requirements for bilingual and ESL education as well as district improvements to these requirements. I conducted this study to deepen my understanding of the unique needs of the EL student community so that I could identify successful methods for supporting these students in public schools across the state of Texas.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the idea that the inequalities and underrepresentation within the education system have resulted in a lack of resources to promote the academic success of EL students in American public schools. The study builds upon scholarship and research on the impact of politics and economics on education policy and governmental support for minority student groups. Using a critical theory frame of reference, this study explores the influence of local school board members on the academic success of EL students in Texas school districts.

The branch of knowledge known as critical theory originated with Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher and educator (Palmer et al., 2019). Much of Freire's inspiration came from work on social theories at the Frankfurt School in Germany during the mid

1900s (Paradis et al., 2020). The theory is heavily influenced by Karl Marx's work (Paradis et al., 2020). The foundational beliefs of critical theory are based on the notion that "oppression is a worldwide reality, but individuals are thinking subjects with the capacity to reflect on such oppressions and recreate their situations" (Palmer et al., 2019, p. 123). Thus, critical theory encourages inquiry regarding dynamics of power and privilege and their role in social structures.

The connection between critical theory and data analysis within the field of education is explored in Winkle-Wagner's research. The researcher explained that critical theory critiques social structures and inequality saying, "Critical social theory is action; it brings forth action for more equitable outcomes in society" (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018, p. xii). The primary purpose in using critical theory as a lens through which to examine ideas and policies is to consider ways that they could be adjusted to end oppressive practices (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). Critical theory originated as a branch of social theory; its goal is to dismantle oppressive structures to create a more equitable society through the critique of ideas, policies, and social structures. (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). For the purposes of this study, critical theory provided an approach to the analysis of social structures within the context of EL education.

Methodology

This qualitative case study used archival sources to determine relationships, if any, between school board members, programs and resources for EL students, and EL student academic success rates within the context of four Texas school districts. I set convenience boundaries help to narrow down the school district search to focus on four large, urban Texas school districts with high populations of EL students. Thus, this study

focused on the general population of EL students at each of these school districts as well as the school board members for each district make up the participant sample for this study.

Procedures

Phase one of this case study required that I select three to five public school districts which would make up my participant sample. According to recent TEA Snapshot data from 2020, Texas is home to over 1,000 public school districts. With my research questions and the purpose of this study in mind, I chose to focus on the large, urban districts in Texas because of the access to resources and the diverse student population in these districts. This first convenience boundary dramatically narrowed the search down to twenty of the largest districts in urban areas around Texas. Continuing to narrow my study through the funneling process, I next considered percentage of EL students within each district. Because this study focused on the experience and support of this student group, I narrowed down the school district search from the twenty large, urban districts, to six large, urban districts with 30.0% or more of the student population who identified as EL students. As I familiarized myself with these districts, I discovered that four out of the six districts use the PolicyOnline platform to organize and publish federal, state, and district policy information. This final criterion of requiring that the districts use the PolicyOnline platform helped to standardize the data collection process because they publish their districts' policy and legislation modifications in the same way.

In taking a deeper look at the functioning of each district, I next examined the composition of the school board at each district. To understand the ways in which each district functions and is run, I needed to consider the experience and role of those in

leadership. In phase two of the research process, I looked at each members' educational background, professional experience and expertise, and each's demographic information. In looking at the general composition of the board, I specifically identified the percentage of board members with prior experience in K-12 schools and those with connections to linguistically diverse communities. Identifying these characteristics is important because they can give us insight into their perspective and priorities when making influential educational decisions for the district they serve.

In phase three of my research for this case study, I identified local school district policy, legislation modifications, and additional resources for EL students. This stage in the research process aimed to identify whether these large, urban Texas school districts with significant EL student populations modified or added additional resources for them. Using the PolicyOnline platform and the school district's website, I identify any district-specific policy, legislation modifications, or additional resources that the individual school boards and districts set in place to support their EL student communities.

Education authorities on local, state, and federal levels look at students' scores on standardized testing as a means of evaluating the success of students, teachers, and the district. The final step in the research process included the evaluation of student assessment scores at each district to develop understanding of the success of each districts' student populations as viewed by the local, state, and federal governments. Standardized testing does not paint the full picture of a student's success, but it is the measuring tool that educators, policymakers, and school board members often use to evaluate success. Because standardized testing is often the determinant of success in the field of education, this study also uses standardized testing as a measurement of student success.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this case study included four phases, each created with the purpose of establishing a clear process for data collection to ensure consistency and generalizability of the data collection and research results. The data collected in phase one identified four similarly situated Texas school districts which became the focus of this case study. In phase two of the research process, I compiled short biographies for the school boards at each school district to compile the board members' demographic information, educational history, and work experience. The purpose of these biographies was to identify the composition of each school board with the goal of understanding the impact, experience, and role of the school board at each of these districts. In phase three of the research process, I identified legislation and policy modifications as well as additional support systems and resources for EL students at each selected school district. Finally, I gathered data on EL student success rates on standardized testing for each district to represent the academic success of EL students in phase four of the research process. Although standardized assessment data may not be the most accurate representation of student success due to a myriad of factors, this data is what the state and federal governments use to assess student and school district success. After I collected and organized data, I interpreted, analyzed, and drew connections among the data.

Table 3.2. *Texas School District Selection Criterion*

Criterion Funnel:	Criterion Description:	Number of Texas Districts Based on Each Criterion and Description:
No Criterion	All Texas Public School Districts	1,202 Districts
Criterion 1 (C1)	District Size Based on Districts with Student Population of 50,000 +	20 Districts
Criterion 2 (C2)	Districts With 30.0% + of the Student Population Identified as "EL"	6 Districts
Criterion 3 (C3)	School District Boards That Use the PolicyOnline Platform	4 Districts
C1, C2, C3	Number of Texas School Districts Who Meet C1, C2, and C3	4 Districts

After using metrics such as school district size based on student population, percentage of students within the student population who were identified as EL, and the requirement that districts use PolicyOnline to organize and publish information on state and district policy, I narrowed down and finalized the search to four Texas school districts. After selecting the school districts to focus on in this study, I next began my data collection. I identified and interpreted three types of data collected from each district including: school board member biographies, district-specific policy modifications and support for EL students, and student standardized test scores. I used the data collected to identify patterns and relationships, if any, between the different types of data at each school district which will then be compared with that of the other selected districts with the goal of identifying methods of support, policy, or other resources that Texas schools implement to support EL students.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are limitations and delimitations in all research studies. This study relied on publicly available information and archival sources rather than other data collection forms such as interviews or classroom observations. One limitation of this study is the lack of EL students' or ESL teachers' perspectives. Due to time constraints on my research, I was unable to take this case study research a step further in conducting interviews or school visits. In an attempt to address this limitation of my study, I have done extensive research on EL students' experiences, on policy briefs about the effects of federal and state legislation on students, and on similar research studies which address societal and educational barriers for EL students and other minority student groups.

The structure of this case study required that I select specific school districts across the state of Texas for my research. Delimitations to my study were implemented in this stage of the research process as I narrowed down the school district search across Texas by selecting districts with a student population of 50,000 or more, and districts who have identified 30.0% or more of their student population as EL.

Summary

The key to success is possessing the right tools. In the education setting, this acknowledgement requires that educators consider the needs of their students and provide students with the best tools to succeed. Unfortunately, this idea is more complex to implement than it may seem at first glance because of the variety of needs and skills of each student. In the American education system, and in American society in general, there is an overwhelming lack of resources for non-English speaking students. Sikes and Villanueva (2021) explain in their research that there is a tendency to oversimplify the

success of EL students to their success in gaining English proficiency when the situation is more complex than solely the need to learn English. In response to this monolinguistic perspective, researchers say, "This narrow perspective often obscures the importance of academic content knowledge, of motivation and social skills, and of developing the academic vocabulary, competent rhetorical skills, and in some cases, basic academic skills students need in order to access school subjects and communicate understanding of content." (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021, p. 19). EL students possess valuable skills through knowing another language. EL students are as capable of meeting academic standards as their peers when EL students are given appropriate resources and linguistic accommodations (Saldivar, 2020). This study answered the following questions with the purpose of identifying successful support methods and resources for EL students: *What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students? How do districts' support and resources for EL students impact EL students' performance on state assessments? What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?* The data collection, analysis, and interpretation of this study is methodically implemented to develop a deeper understanding of factors which impact EL students in their academic journey through the American public education system.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Findings and Discussion

Over the years, Texas has implemented baseline requirements for school districts regarding their responsibilities towards EL students. These basic requirements are meant to push EL students towards English proficiency as soon as possible so that they can continue their education in English language mainstream (ELM) on-level classes with their non-EL peers. Studies show that in 2021, over one million students identified as LEP but less than half of those LEP students were enrolled in bilingual education programming at their schools (Moore, 2021). Although Texas has come a long way in providing support to EL students and their teachers, the system is not fool proof; this is evident in the overall lack of resources for EL students in public schools. The general perspective of EL and bilingual instruction in Texas, and in the greater United States, is monolinguistic in nature as it devalues the bilingual person's skills and experience through solely focusing on English language acquisition and proficiency. Enacting positive change in the public education system in pursuit of supporting EL students begins with understanding federal and state policy and how individual districts react to those policies.

This qualitative descriptive case study selected four of the largest Texas school districts with the greatest percentages of EL students within the general student population. The study identified ways in which Texas school districts could deepen their commitment to the support of the growing population of EL students. This recognition of successful methods and resources for EL students was attained through examination of

district policy modifications, school board members' demographic information and professional experience, and in student academic assessment data. In this chapter, I explain my research findings and make connections between data to identify successful methods of support for EL students in Texas.

Research Questions:

1. What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students?

2. To what extent, if any, do districts' support and resources for EL students affect ELL students' performance on state assessments?

3. What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?

Findings

Phase One: Identification of Districts

The first phase of my inquiry included the identification of districts for my case study. In this research phase, I established three criteria for my selected Texas school districts, which streamlined the district identification process to ensure fairness in district selection. The TEA 2020 Snapshot provided the most recent data on each Texas school district. I used this data to identify the districts on which I focused in this study. The first criteria (C1) for narrowing down the selection process of Texas districts was based on a student population size of 50,000 or more, which narrowed the pool from over 1,000 Texas districts to 20. This choice allowed me to focus on the largest, urban districts in Texas. I chose C1 as my first criteria because large districts often have the most support

and additional opportunities for their diverse student populations. The second criteria (C2) included the requirement that the districts I select have 30.0% or more of their student population identified as EL students. The purpose of C2 was to funnel my search to identify which of the largest Texas districts have the greatest EL student populations. This second step took the 20 largest Texas districts and narrowed them down to the with the greatest EL student populations. From here, I implemented my third criteria (C3) which was the requirement that my selected districts' school boards use the PolicyOnline platform to publish their district policy manuals publically. This final criterion was chosen with the intention of selecting districts that could be easily compared among one another. Because of this criterion, I was able to directly compare the districts' local policy modifications and additional programs since each district published its policy information in the same format. This criterion finalized my search as it eliminated two of the six districts which left me with a participant sample of four Texas school districts. This selection process is depicted below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. *Selected Districts' Student Population Data*

District:	Student Population Size (C1):	Percentage of Total Student Population Identified as EL (C2):	District Policy Manuals from The PolicyOnline Platform (C3):
Aldine ISD	67,130	38.3%	AISD Board Policy Manual
Dallas ISD	153,784	45.6%	DISD Board Policy Manual
Fort Worth ISD	82,704	34.2%	FWISD Board Policy Manual
Houston ISD	209,309	34.0%	HISD Board Policy Manual

(*Snapshot 2020: District Size*, n.d., p. 2)

Table 4.3 lists the data I discovered while implementing C1, C2, and C3 of the district identification process. The data shows that although Aldine ISD had the smallest student population, it also had the second largest percentage of EL students within the participant sample. Dallas ISD, the second largest school district in my sample, had a significantly higher population of EL students compared to the other districts in the sample. Fort Worth ISD falls in the middle of the pack with fewer than 100,000 students with over 34% of the student population identified as EL. Finally, Houston ISD had the largest student population, but also the lowest percentage of EL students, which is a notable contrast.

Phase Two: School Board Composition and District Biographies

After identifying my four Texas school districts for this case study, I next moved on to phase two of the research process: to study school board member composition at each individual district. To understand it, I identified and compared the following characteristics for each board member: education history, teaching or work experience in K-12 schools, attendance of or parental experience with the district which they serve, bilingualism, and race or ethnicity. Research by Hess (2002) and Splawn (1972) supports the idea that these characteristics greatly influence a board member's character, priorities, and election to the position. The results of this investigation are displayed below in Table 4.4 based on the public information on each board member as described on the individual school boards' websites.

Table 4.4. *School Board Characteristics*

	Aldine ISD	Dallas ISD	Fort Worth ISD	Houston ISD
Percentage Who Earned a Bachelor's Degree:	100%	100%	77%	77%
Percentage Who Earned a Graduate Degree(s)	43%	88%	77%	66%
Percentage of Those With K-12 Work Experience	28%	44%	33%	44%
Percentage Who Graduated from the District They Serve	14%	0%	66%	55%
Percentage Who Are or Were Parents of Students at their District	43%	11%	22%	11%
Percentage Who Are Bilingual	14%	11%	22%	22%
Percentage of Members of Color	57%	66%	44%	77%

All four school districts provide a biography of each current school board member which includes the characteristics listed above in Table 4.4. Because of the board members' freedom in choosing what information is public, some data on these characteristics listed in Table 4.4 may not be wholly representative of each board and its members. The possibility that individual board members neglected to publish information on these characteristics is concerning in itself because the public should have access to basic information, such as the characteristics listed in Table 4.4, about those governing and leading schools and their students. These characteristics are still important to recognize because the characteristics give the public a glimpse into each board member's experience and values which can influence his/her leadership style and goals. The

percentages in Table 4.4 provide a helpful visual in comparing the board composition at each district. In continuation of this investigation into the school boards at AISD, DISD, FWISD, and HISD, I next created short biographies to describe each district in the case study.

Located outside of Houston, Texas, Aldine ISD is responsible for the education of over 50,000 students in its 83 individual school campuses making it the smallest district in this study with the second largest percentage of EL students (see Table 4.3). The Aldine ISD website lists that 46 different languages are spoken in the homes of AISD students (CLabod, n.d.). Of the entire AISD student population, 75.5% are considered at-risk and 91.6% are considered economically disadvantaged, which is extraordinarily high (CLabod, n.d.). The AISD teacher salary range is $61,000-$92,334 (CLabod, n.d.).

AISD's school board is made up of seven members from the community. For a list of the individual board members, see Appendix A. Four of the seven members are female, and three board members are male. The seven board members were elected to their positions in the following years: 2019, 2017, 2004, 2006, 2017, 1993, and 2014. The board members' election years show that the board has not added any new members since 2019 which is quite surprising, especially considering the drastic changes in our state, country, and world over the past four years. The appointment dates also prove that all board members have years of experience both in their fields and on the board. While experience is valuable, it also displays a lack in representation of younger educators and current parents of AISD students which distances the board from the students they serve. Two of the seven board members have experience in K-12 education in a variety of roles including teacher, literacy coach, school counselor, and principal. In addition to the two K-12 educators, two other board members have work experience as college professors.

The final three members worked in the law and business professions. The diversity in members' professional backgrounds and experiences could bring unique perspectives to the board, but it is astonishing that such a small percentage of board members at AISD have experience in working in public education. It is also surprising to see that only one school board member attended and graduated from the district in which he/she serves; this means that the overwhelming majority of those leading the district may be oblivious to the actual experience of students in the district since they have not experienced it themselves. Finally, I note that only one of the seven board members is bilingual. Considering that AISD has the second largest EL student population out of the four districts in this study, it is disappointing to see only one represents the bilingual community.

Out of the four school districts in this case study, Dallas ISD has the largest student population of EL students and is home to 230 individual school campuses. According to the Dallas ISD website and the 2022-2023 *About Dallas ISD/ Dallas ISD Facts Sheet*, the district consists of 230 school campuses and has reported that 84.5% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. The DISD student population represents over 65 different L1s. The salary range for DISD teachers in the 2022-2023 school year ranges from $56,500-$102,000.

The DISD district's school board consists of nine members with a variety of educational and work experience. Of the nine board members, two are women and seven are men. Although their positions may have changed since they were originally elected to the board, the board members have served on the DISD board since their elections in the years: 2018, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2016, 2022, 2014, and 2022. The board members' election years show a variety in their time on the board as there are members who have

joined the board from 2014 through 2022. This array of experience on the board also means that there is variation in board members' ages. DISD board members bring a variety of experience to the school board as many members have worked in different fields throughout their careers. Among the nine board members, four worked in law, four have experience in K-12 education, two have experience in ministry work, and one worked in business. Additionally, Table 4.4 reveals that the DISD board has the greatest percentage of board members with graduate-level degrees. The DISD board is also tied for the greatest percentage of board members with experience working in K-12 education compared to the other districts in this study. Despite these many positive aspects of the DISD board members' characteristics, it is disheartening to see that none of the current board members graduated from the district in which they serve, only one board member is or was a parent of a DISD student, and only one DISD board member identified him/herself as bilingual. This lack of connection to the actual schools within the district is surprising because it is challenging for people to lead well if they do not understand the experience of those whom they are trying to lead. For more information on the individual board members for Dallas ISD, see Appendix B.

Fort Worth ISD houses 146 school campuses and just over 80,000 students. The *Fort Worth ISD Annual Report* states that 85.4% of the district's student population is identified as economically disadvantaged and 34.2% of the student population is classified as EL (see Table 4.3). The teacher salary range is from $60,000-$79,467. The FWISD school board consists of nine board members, only three of whom have experience working in K-12 education. The board members come from diverse career backgrounds including work in law, education, medicine, higher-level education, social work, accounting, and business. The gender composition of the board is split between

five female and four male members. FWISD board members were elected to the board in the following years: 2022, 2010, 2019, 2022, 2019, 2019, 2021, 2017, and 2021. The years of experience of members on the board range from one to thirteen which shows that there is a wide variety of experience and diverse expertise that these members bring to the table. It is astounding to see that only seven of the nine FWISD board members have received post-secondary degrees. This surprising statistic could be the result of board members' decisions to withhold information about their education, but a school district's leaders should be transparent about the education of their members. If it is true that two board members at DISD have not received a post-secondary degree, this should raise questions about the district and the voter's priorities when electing board members. For more information on the board members of FWISD, see Appendix C.

Houston ISD is the largest school district in Texas, and the eighth largest district in the entire United States, according to the district's Facts and Figures webpage (*General Information / Facts and Figures*, n.d.; Cruz et al., n.d.). The school serves over 270 school campuses, including 45 dual-language schools, and a diverse student population. The district states that there are about 100 languages represented in the home languages of their student population. 79.17% of HISD students are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 61.47% of students are considered at-risk. The district-wide passing rate on STAAR EOC assessments is consistently lower than the state average in every test category. The 2021-2022 teacher salary ranged from $54,369-$80,309. Table 4.3 reveals that HISD has, by far, the largest student population yet the smallest EL student population within this study.

The identification of HISD board member characteristics in Table 4.4 shows that the district has the greatest percentage of people of color on their school board, has a

significant percentage of K-12 educators on their board, but is lacking in the categories of board members with graduate degrees and board members who are/ were parents of HISD students. The board consists of one man and eight women. For a list of board members at HISD, see Appendix D. The diverse demographics of the school board members are mirrored in their diverse professional and work. From teachers to school administrators and principals, to attorneys, to graduate school professors, to local pastors, to global missionaries, to bilingual special education teachers, the board members have unique perspectives that they bring to the table because of their life and work experiences. Three board members describe their experience as the daughters of immigrants and Spanish-speaking parents which is a valuable asset. The board's webpage only explicitly lists the appointment dates of three members which were from 2017, 2020, and 2021. The ambiguity in failing to state the election dates of each member is confusing. The board's webpage does state that all members will be up for reelection in either 2023 or 2025, but it does not specifically say when each member was originally elected to the board, so it is unclear how long each member has served.

Phase Three: District Policy Manuals

The PolicyOnline platform, which each districts' school board utilizes to publish its Board Policy Manual, describes the Texas state and federal legislation frameworks for education legislation. For this case study, I identified the legal frameworks which specifically address legislation regarding bilingual education, ESL programming, and state assessment requirements for EL students. Out of all education legislative frameworks listed in the PolicyOnline platform, two deal with EL student education.

These two policies and the individual districts' modifications or additions to each are described as follows.

Policy 1: EHBE-Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ ESL (Policy Code EHBE – Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ESL – Aldine ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online, n.d.). The Bilingual Education/ ESL Special Programs legal framework describes the government's requirements for EL and immigrant students with which all districts who receive Title III funding under ESEA must comply. This framework describes districts' responsibilities to the identification and classification of EB students; bilingual and ESL program design, models, and requirements; summer programming; personnel and teacher certification requirements; EB student state assessment rules; and bilingual and ESL program evaluation. According to the legislation, district responsibilities to EL students include identifying EL students using state-established criteria, providing bilingual and ESL programs, hiring "appropriately certified" teachers for EL students, and ensuring accountability for EL students through assessment of state essential knowledge and skills. Districts with twenty or more EB students in the same grade level must be offered special bilingual education programming. Elementary students in kindergarten through grade eight must be offered bilingual education or other agency-approved transitional language instruction, while students at the secondary level (grades nine through twelve) must be offered instruction in ESL. If a district does not meet the minimum requirement for bilingual education programming, the district must offer ESL programming to all EL students regardless of grade level and L1. Every district that offers bilingual programs must establish a language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC). The LPAC must identify the number of EB students as well as each EB students' L1 and must report the information to each district and to TEA by the fourth

week of the fall semester. Districts that are required to offer bilingual education programs

must also provide voluntary programming over the summer for all EB students entering

kindergarten or first grade in the upcoming fall semester; these summer programs must

be intensive bilingual education or special language programming that strives to meet

TEA standards. Additionally, the framework explains that districts *may*, independently or

in partnership with other districts, establish other summer school, extended day, or

extended week bilingual or special language programming for EB students.

In response to the legislative framework for bilingual education, both Dallas ISD

and Houston ISD reiterated their commitment to the education of EL students through

implementing additional programs and expectations for the education of these students.

Both DISD and HISD portray an accepting attitude towards bilingualism and

multilingualism as both districts encourage non-EL students to participate in bilingual

and multilingual school programs to promote fluency in more than one language for all

students. On the contrary, Aldine ISD and Fort Worth ISD both neglect to add to or

modify the legislation when describing their local response to the legislation in the

districts' policy manuals. The difference in these two perspectives and responses to the

legislation brings up intriguing questions about why two districts have gone beyond the

state and federal governments' requirements for bilingual education and why two districts

have not done so. See a summary below of each district's response to this first policy.

The Aldine ISD board fails to provide any significant response to the EHEB legal

framework on bilingual and ESL education. Under the local response to this policy, the

board states that members of the LPAC(s) must be specially appointed by superintendents

or those involved with bilingual/ESL programs. The board states that the district will

provide specialized training and orientation for LPAC members, and that this orientation

must include a description of members' responsibilities, review of confidentiality laws, and relevant policy (*Policy Code EHBE – Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ESL – Aldine ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online*, n.d.).

Dallas ISD's response to the bilingual and ESL education legal framework is extensive. The district's policy manual explains their deep commitment to the education of EL students saying, "The Board has had a long-standing commitment to meeting the needs of… English Language Learners (ELL). This is demonstrated by the fact that, for over a decade, the District has gone beyond minimum requirements by investing numerous material and human resources into the development and provision of a comprehensive and additive bilingual/ESL program for students". This district level programming for bilingual and ESL education is based on these principles: comply with NCLB requirements for EL and immigrant students, provide dual language education for elementary children, and employ the superintendent's set parameters for implementation regarding dual language programs. The district also promises to provide instructional opportunities in students' L1 when possible, as students work to acquire English skills and proficiency. Non-EL students may participate in bilingual education programs with a parent's permission as long as the percentage of non-EL students remains below 40% of the total student enrollment in the program. The ESL programming is based on the following ten regulations: (1) Instruction for students in language classrooms from grades pre-kindergarten- grade six will be taught in both English and the EL students' L1; (2) Children in prekindergarten and first grade will develop literacy in their L1- in second grade, these students will begin receiving formal literacy instruction in their second language while still continuing with L1 instruction through elementary grades; (3) Dual language classrooms will split language instruction by subject so that mathematics is

taught in English while science and social studies instruction is given in Spanish; (4) The goal of dual language programs is bilingualism and biliteracy, so students should not transition to general education instruction before fifth grade; (5) ESL instruction must be available to all preK-12 EL students; (6) Sheltered content courses must be taught by ESL certified teachers; (7) All teachers of core content classes must be trained in best teaching practice for EL students; (8) Educators and students can use any language necessary to communicate throughout the school day; (9) During instruction, language integrity is maintained without simultaneous translation; (10) EL students have access to all extracurricular and curricular activities such as GT programs, athletes, and academic competitions (*Policy Code EHBE – Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ESL – Dallas ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online*, n.d.).

The Fort Worth ISD school board does not describe any notable additions to or modifications of the basic requirements for bilingual and ESL education as described in legal framework EHEB. The district's local policy is verbatim that of the Aldine ISD local response to EHEB which states that members of the LPAC(s) must be specially appointed by superintendents or those involved with bilingual/ESL programs. The board states that the district will provide specialized training and orientation for LPAC members, and that this orientation must include a description of members' responsibilities, review of confidentiality laws, and relevant policy (*Policy Code EHBE – Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ESL – Fort Worth ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online*, n.d.).

The school board at Houston ISD extensively described their multilingual programming at the district in their local response to EHEB bilingual and ESL education basic requirements. The HISD local policy response shows the district's dedication to EL

students and the value of multilingualism. The district makes the same comment as

Aldine ISD and Fort Worth ISD regarding LPAC training and requirements.

Additionally, the district outlines its commitment to multilingual programming through a

district-specific Multilingual Department. The Multilingual programming mission is

described as follows: "It is the mission of the District's multilingual programs to

strengthen the social and economic foundations of the community by assuring that

District students achieve their full academic potential and by providing opportunities for

all students to graduate as proficient in multiple languages. Limited-English-Proficient

(LEP) children also shall learn to read, write, and speak English as rapidly as individually

possible" (*Policy Code EHBE – Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ESL – Houston

ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online*, n.d.). The program commits to encouraging

EL students' development of bilingual skills and English fluency while emphasizing the

value in maintaining fluency in L1. The district goes one step further to offer

opportunities for every K-12 student to learn two languages. The district's goals for this

multilingual programming are as follows: comply with federal and state mandates;

increase student achievement to narrow the performance gap between EL and non-EL

students and through increasing EL student participation in GT programs; establish the

goal of English proficiency for transition into English which may require the district to

hire bilingual education reading specialists to assist EL students; implementation of

standardized assessment and curriculum for multilingual programs that encourage growth

in both English and students' L1 as long as the goal of English reading proficiency

remains the primary goal; increasing of parental involvement through providing

opportunities and guidance for reading at home; increasing the recruitment and hiring of

bilingual educators; and encouraging fluency in two language for all students through an

International Magnet High School and working towards offering dual-language instruction from first grade through high school for any student (*Policy Code EHBE – Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ESL – Houston ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online*, n.d.).

Policy 2: EKBA- State Assessment: English Learners/ Emergent Bilingual Students (Policy Code EKBA – State Assessment: English Learners/Emergent Bilingual Students – Houston ISD Board Policy Manual - Policy Online, n.d.). The EKBA legal framework addresses the state's requirements for testing of EL and immigrant students. The framework explains the role of LPACs in choosing appropriate assessment options for individual EL students, as well as their documentation responsibilities for every EL student. Next, the framework describes the terminology and the district's responsibility to immigrants, refuges, and asylum seekers. EL students in kindergarten through twelfth grade are required to take language proficiency assessments which test students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. An EL student may be presented with an exemption or accommodation for state testing within their first year of enrollment at the school. After this, the framework describes expectations for state testing and EL students. All EL students in grades three through eight must participate in state testing. Some Spanish-speaking EL students in third through fifth grade can have the option to take the state's Spanish-version of the assessment if it will provide the most "appropriate" measure of the student's academic standing. There are also linguistically accommodated assessment options for select EL students in grade three or higher which include math, science, and social studies assessments. These accommodations may be given to EL students if a Spanish-version of that assessment does not exist, if the Spanish-version is not going to accurately measure the student's progress, if the student

has demonstrated no English language proficiency in reading, if the student has been enrolled in U.S. schools for three or fewer years, or if a student qualifies as a refugee or an unschooled asylee enrolled in U.S. schools for five years or fewer. Additionally, EL students at the secondary level are required to continue with state testing through the completion of EOC exams; the only exceptions to the EOC testing requirements are if EL students in English I or ESL classes have not yet attained English language proficiency in reading, if the student has been enrolled in U.S. schools for three years or less, or if the student qualifies as an unschooled asylee or refuge enrolled in U.S. schools for five years or fewer. Finally, any EL student who receives special education services in addition to ESL/ EL education services may receive special accommodations as determined by the student's ARD committee in conjunction with their LPAC.

All four school districts display this legal framework on their PolicyOnline platform, but none of the districts made any adjustment or addition to the state's framework. Because state testing is so heavily regulated, school districts are limited in the ways that they can adjust assessment support for EL students. Accommodations to the state's testing requirements are made on an individualized basis as determined by the individual's LPAC, rather than by the school board.

Analysis of Board Policy Manuals

The two legal frameworks for EL students, the EHEB Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ ESL framework and the EKBA State Assessment: English Learners/ Emergent Bilingual Students are the only two frameworks in the PolicyOnline platform that address requirements for EL student education. None of the four districts made modifications to EKBA State Assessment legislation because of the strict state testing

requirements, but two of the four school districts in this study made additions to the EHEB Special Programs: Bilingual Education/ ESL policy framework.

Aldine ISD and Fort Worth ISD did not describe significant additions or modifications to the federal and state legal frameworks for EL students. Because of the districts' high population of EL students and because the other two similarly situated districts in Texas do provide additional support for EL students, this information is discouraging. In failing to modify or add resources to state and federal requirements, the districts simply maintain the status quo by doing the minimum requirements of the federal and state governments when it comes to the education of EL students. It is possible that these districts have implemented additional resources, requirements, or programs for EL students that are not listed in the boards' policy manuals, but because there is no description of these services in the districts' manuals, the information is not easily accessible to the public and is not solidified in the same way that it would be if it were put into the districts' policy manuals. The failure to provide, or mention, supplemental programming or resources for EL students in AISD and FWISD puts the EL students, and even the whole population of students, in these districts at a disadvantage, especially when compared to the other two districts in this study which have added resources for EL students to their district policy manuals.

Dallas ISD and Houston ISD both go above and beyond the basic federal and state requirements for the education of EL students by providing supplemental resources and programming. Both districts take a holistic approach to bilingual and EL education, which is evident in the district boards' policy manuals that portray a district-wide attitude which values bilingualism and rejects the monolinguistic approach of the state. This

perspective is seen in the district's encouragement of non-EL students' participation in bilingual education programs at each district.

Aldine ISD and Fort Worth ISD do not address additional resources or support programs for EL students in their district policy manuals. Dallas ISD and Houston ISD display their devotion to the education of their EL students through additional bi/multilingual program resources. The geographical relationship between ASID and HISD, and between FWISD and DISD is another factor to consider when comparing the educational resources at each district. AISD and HISD are both located in the Houston, Texas area which is one of the most diverse cities in the state. AISD has a smaller student population than HISD, but a larger percentage of AISD students are identified as EL compared to HISD. Even though all four of these districts are some of the largest in Texas, HISD is more than three times as large as its neighbor district, AISD. Similarly, FWISD and DISD are both located in the greater DFW (Dallas/ Fort-Worth) metroplex. DISD is almost twice the size of FWISD, but DISD has a substantially larger percentage of EL students than any other district in this study. Despite the proximity to HISD and DISD, respectively, AISD and FWISD fail to go above and beyond minimum state requirements like their neighboring districts do.

It is disappointing to see that although Houston ISD has described ways in which the school goes beyond the state's requirements, their neighboring district Aldine ISD has not done so. The same goes for Dallas ISD who listed their additional resources for EL students as compared to their Fort Worth ISD neighbors who have not done the same. These connections bring up questions about why DISD and HISD have prioritized adding programs and resources for EL students but their neighboring districts of FWISD and AISD have not elected to do this. All four districts are similar in student population size,

urban location, and in percentage of EL students in attendance which makes it all the more surprising that there is such a difference in the districts' responses to bilingual education policy.

Phase Four: District and Student Success Data

TEA publishes a performance reporting record, Texas Performance Reporting System (TPRS), for each school district. TPRS reports on STAAR and EOC performance data to indicate each district's performance results by grade level, student race, and students' special education program (*Texas Education Agency - TPRS Reports*, n.d.). For this study, I focused on specific categories within this data to clarify the academic success of secondary EL students on state assessments compared to their peers. Due to the complications to state testing resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, I focused on STAAR data from 2019 and 2021 in the TPRS report. When analyzing this data, I specifically examined the state, district, and EB/ EL categories for the English I EOC and English II EOC state assessments. In addition, I considered the reports for the average of all grade levels in all tested subjects compared with the average of all grade level EB/ EL students in all state tested subjects. Within each of these categories, I distinguished among the three levels of success as stated by TEA: At Approaches Grade Level or Above, At Meets Grade Level or Above, and At Masters Grade Level. These three levels are determined based on the students' scores on each assessment and are used to indicate the students' academic standing as compared to their peers.

Table 4.5. *2021 Aldine ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2021 Approaches Grade Level	48%	31%	55%	31%	47%	40%
2021 Meets Grade Level	29%	13%	37%	13%	20%	14%
2021 Masters Grade Level	3%	0%	3%	0%	6%	4%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

Aldine ISD state assessment data shows that the average assessment scores of EB/ EL students were lower than the average of the general student population within the district in every assessment category listed in Table 4.5. The table shows a wide and consistent achievement gap between EL students and the district's general student population across all state assessments.

Table 4.6. 2019 Aldine ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2019 Approaches Grade Level	57%	33%	58%	31%	70%	62%
2019 Meets Grade Level	34%	12%	35%	10%	36%	27%
2019 Masters Grade Level	4%	0%	2%	0%	13%	9%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

Again, the assessment data for Aldine ISD's 2019 assessments shows a wide achievement gap between EL students and the general student population. According to the data, EB/EL students consistently scored significantly lower than the average for each category from 2019-2021. In the English I and II EOC assessment data in the Approaches and Meets grade level categories for both 2019 and 2021, there is a range of a 16-27% difference in the district average and the EB/EL student score average. Additionally, there is a 6-9% difference between the district's average and the district's EB/EL student population average on the All Grades, All Subjects categories for Approaches and Meets grade level designations. This data also proves that the achievement gap between the EL student average compared to the general student population average is not only a considerable gap, but that the average scores for both EL and the general student population on all tests dropped from 2019 to 2021. This dip in student success could be attributed to the world-wide learning loss which resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. Educators strive to close achievement gaps to ensure that all students within their district

receive an equitable education. Based on the achievement gaps in state assessment data from AISD, the district has work to do to ensure that all students in their district receive the support they need.

Table 4.7. *2021 Dallas ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2021 Approaches Grade Level	53%	49%	58%	52%	60%	58%
2021 Meets Grade Level	37%	32%	44%	37%	34%	31%
2021 Masters Grade Level	6%	4%	6%	3%	14%	12%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

The Dallas ISD assessment data shows that EB/ EL students scored lower than the average of the general student population within the district in every assessment category including the English I EOC, English II EOC, and the average across the district with all grades and all tested subjects in 2021. Although the scores of EL students compared to the district's general student population are much closer than that of the other districts in this study, there is still a small yet consistent gap in every testing category as seen in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8. *2019 Dallas ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2019 Approaches Grade Level	58%	55%	60%	55%	73%	73%
2019 Meets Grade Level	39%	34%	39%	32%	44%	42%
2019 Masters Grade Level	7%	4%	5%	2%	20%	18%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

The Dallas ISD state assessment data shows that the average of EB/ EL students scored lower than the average of the general student population within the district in most assessment categories; the exception is that the district's average and the district's EB/EL student population average are the same in the All Students, All Subjects 2019 Approaches Grade Level category. This is the only category, out of data from all four districts, in which there is no difference in the average score of districts' EL students compared to the average of the district's general student population. In the English I and II EOC Approaches and Meets grade level for both 2019 and 2021, there is a difference of 3-7% in the district average and the EB/EL student score average. There is also a 0-3% difference between the district's average and the district's EB/EL student population average on the All Grades, All Subjects categories for Approaches and Meets grade level. Although EB/EL students performed, on average, at a lower rate than the district average in most categories, the difference between the EB/EL average and the district average scores are significantly smaller than the averages of Aldine ISD.

Table 4.9. *2021 Fort Worth ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2021 Approaches Grade Level	51%	43%	55%	42%	50%	45%
2021 Meets Grade Level	33%	24%	38%	25%	25%	19%
2021 Masters Grade Level	4%	1%	4%	1%	9%	6%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

Fort Worth ISD assessment data shows that the average EB/ EL students scored lower than the average of the general student population within the district in every assessment category 2021. Table 4.9.1 makes the achievement gap at FWISD abundantly clear and is reaffirmed in similar data from 2019 assessments as displayed below.

Table 4.10. *2019 Fort Worth ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2019 Approaches Grade Level	57%	53%	59%	49%	67%	66%
2019 Meets Grade Level	36%	32%	36%	25%	35%	32%
2019 Masters Grade Level	5%	2%	4%	2%	14%	11%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

The Fort Worth ISD state assessment data shows that the average of EB/ EL students scored lower than the average of the general student population within the district in every assessment category. In the English I and II EOC Approaches and Meets grade level for both 2019 and 2021, the EB/EL student score average is 4-13% lower than the district-wide score average. There is also a 1-6% difference between the district's average and the district's EB/EL student population average on the All Grades, All Subjects categories for Approaches and Meets grade level.

Table 4.11. *2021 Houston ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2021 Approaches Grade Level	59%	42%	63%	39%	57%	48%
2021 Meets Grade Level	43%	25%	50%	24%	33%	22%
2021 Masters Grade Level	11%	4%	10%	2%	15%	8%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

The Houston ISD assessment data for STAAR and EOC assessments from 2021 shows that the district's EB/ EL students scored lower on average than the district's general student population within the district in all assessment categories displayed in Table 4.11. Despite the district's additional resources for EL students and their commitment to multilingual education, the district still consistently sees a wide achievement gap in their state assessment scores.

Table 4.12. *2019 Houston ISD STAAR and EOC Score Report*

	English I EOC District Average	English I EOC EB/ EL Students	English II EOC District Average	English II EOC EB/ EL Students	All Grades, All Subjects District Average	All Grades, All Subjects EB/ EL Students
2019 Approaches Grade Level	59%	39%	60%	32%	72%	66%
2019 Meets Grade Level	41%	19%	41%	14%	44%	34%
2019 Masters Grade Level	9%	2%	7%	1%	21%	15%

(*TPRS*, n.d.)

The Houston ISD state assessment data shows that the average of EB/ EL students scored substantially lower than the average of the general student population within the district in all assessment categories. In the English I and II EOC Approaches and Meets grade level for both 2019 and 2021, there is a difference of 17-28% in the district average score and the EB/EL student score average. In addition, there is a 6-11% difference between the district's average and the district's EB/EL student population average on the All Grades, All Subjects categories for Approaches and Meets grade level.

Analysis of District and Student Success Data:

Aldine ISD student assessment data shows that on the English I and II EOC assessments, EB/EL students scored, on average, 16-27% lower than the district's overall average scores on the same English EOC assessments within the Approaches and Meets Grade Level designations. The Houston ISD assessment data shows that EB/EL students' average scores on English I and English II EOC assessments were 17-28% lower than all of the district's English I and II EOC scores. AISD and HISD, both located in the greater

Houston, Texas area, show a significantly greater achievement gap between each district's EL student average and each district's general student population average on EOC and STAAR assessments compared to the other districts in this study. Fort Worth ISD EB/EL students' average scores on the English I and II EOC assessments were 4-13% lower than their district's overall average in the Approaches and Meets grade level categories. In Dallas ISD, EB/EL students' average scores on the same English I and II EOC assessments were only 3-7% lower than the district-wide average in the Approaches and Meets Grade Level categories. Although FWISD and DISD assessment data both show achievement gaps for EL students, the gap is much smaller than either AISD or HISD.

The student assessment data proves that all four districts, no matter the districts' additional resources or policy modifications for EL students, show an achievement gap between the academic performance of EL students compared to the district's general student population on standardized assessments. There are so many complex factors that impact this assessment data, and standardized assessments may not be the most accurate way to assess EL students' knowledge and skills. However, the state has implemented accommodations for EL students on these standardized assessments to assist in leveling the playing field for EL students so that they can be assessed in the same way as their non-EL peers. Even if standardized assessment data is not the most accurate way to assess students' knowledge, it is the way that the state, and the country for that matter, assess district, school, and student academic achievement and progress. Because the government relies on this standardized assessment data, I also chose to look at this data for my research study because it is the data that the Texas SBOE and the USDE use to allocate funding and identify areas of need within the education system.

The two school districts in the Houston, Texas area show significant gaps in student academic performance when compared to the gaps in performance in the DFW schools. Although HISD and DISD are more similarly situated with the larger student populations and similar school board compositions, their assessment data does not reflect these similarities. The achievement gap for DISD students is considerably smaller than that of HISD; the same can be said of FWISD as compared to AISD. This concerning realization brings about questions regarding geographic factors that might influence the wide and consistent achievement gap across Houston, TX districts.

Discussion

In phase one of the research process, I identified four large, urban Texas districts to focus on for this case study. Through applying C1, C2, and C3 to my school district search, I selected Aldine ISD, Dallas ISD, Fort Worth ISD, and Houston ISD as the districts for my case study (see Table 4.3). After I selected these districts, I next moved on to phase two of my research in which I conducted an in-depth exploration of each district's school board. For this phase, I created school district biographies in which I identified influential characteristics about each board member (see Table 4.4). The purpose in phase two of my research was to gain a deeper understanding about the leadership of each district. Through identification of board members' demographics, education and professional history, and involvement with the community, I was able to understand better the boards' composition which influences their policymaking and leadership priorities. I next took my understanding of the boards' experience and identified each board's response to federal and state legal frameworks for bilingual/ ESL education. Finally, I selected state assessment scores from 2019 and 2021 for the English

I and II EOC as well as the district wide STAAR assessment scores for each district (see Tables 5-8). When comparing the data collected in these four phases, I identified connections among data to deduce successful means of support for EL students such as electing school board members who are bilingual, who have work experience in K-12 education and who earned a graduate degree, and through exploring district-wide asset-based approaches to bilingualism and bi/multilingual education.

The Aldine ISD website lists that 46 different languages are spoken in the homes of AISD students (CLabod, n.d.). Of the entire AISD student population, 75.5% are considered at-risk and 91.6% are considered economically disadvantaged, which is high compared to other districts in this study (CLabod, n.d.). The AISD teacher salary range is $61,000-$92,334 (CLabod, n.d.). The district is made up of 83 schools and has the smallest student population of the four districts in this study, but the second largest percentage of EL students within that population (see Table 4.3). The board's composition reveals that one member is bilingual, and one member graduated from AISD (see Table 4.4). The school board did not list any programs or additions to the state requirements for bilingual/ESL education in the district's online policy manual. The achievement gap between the district's testing average and the EB/EL student testing average on the English I and II EOC assessments in the Approaches and Meets grade level categories for both 2019 and 2021 ranges from 16-27%, which is substantial (see Table 4.9 and Table 4.10). The AISD achievement gap is deeply concerning, especially when considering the district's failure to address this issue in their policy manual and their failure to address the issue through electing new board members who could advocate for adding these policies.

According to the Dallas ISD website and the 2022-2023 *About Dallas ISD/ Dallas ISD Facts Sheet*, the district consists of 230 school campuses and has reported that 84.5% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. The DISD student population represents over 65 different L1s, and has the largest percentage of EL students, just under 50%, in this case study (see Table 4.3). The salary range for DISD teachers in the 2022-2023 school year ranges from $56,500-$102,000. Table 4.4 reveals that the DISD board has the greatest percentage of board members with graduate-level degrees. However, there are a few shocking findings from Table 4.4 that are also important to revisit which include the fact that none of the current board members graduated from the district which they serve, only one board member is or was a parent of a DISD student, and only one DISD board member identified him/herself as bilingual. The district does a thorough job of describing the additional resources and programs available for EL students, and for non-EL students who wish to become bilingual, in their online district policy manual. STARR and EOC assessment data on DISD students reveals that DISD has surpassed the other three districts in this study in their success in shrinking the achievement gap for EL students (see Table 4.11 and Table 4.12). The district's efforts to shrink the achievement gap have proved successful; this is proven in the district's establishment of additional EL programming described in their manual, which was published by their diverse school board, and in the smallest achievement gap between EL students and the district's whole student population within this study.

The *Fort Worth ISD Annual Report* states that 85.4% of the district's student population is identified as economically disadvantaged and 34.2% of the student population is classified as EL (see Table 4.3). The teacher salary range is from $60,000-$79,467. FWISD fell at the middle of the pack in research phases one, two, and four.

FWISD has the second smallest student population compared to other districts in the study as depicted in my phase one research. Phase two of my research revealed that not all FWISD members claimed that they had received a bachelor's degree which is quite surprising given their leadership position in the field of education. FWISD has the lowest percentage of people of color on their school board but is tied for the greatest percentage of bilingual board members (see Table 4.4). In my final research phase, it became clear that FWISD's STAAR and EOC scores showed a narrow achievement gap between EL students and the district's general student population on the same assessments; FWISD's gap was just barely wider than that of Dallas ISD. Despite the district's failure to identify additional support for EL students in their policy manual, the district has managed to keep the achievement gap small between the standardized test scores of EL students and the general student population. This could mean that other factors, such as funding or teacher training, influenced the success of EL students at the district such as the district's small student population size or the large percentage of bilingual board members.

Houston ISD is the largest school district in Texas, and the eighth largest district in the entire United States, according to the district's Facts and Figures webpage (*General Information / Facts and Figures*, n.d.; Cruz et al., n.d.). The school serves over 270 school campuses, including 45 dual-language schools, and a diverse student population. The district states that there are about 100 languages represented in the home languages of their student population. 79.17% of HISD students are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 61.47% of students are considered at-risk. The district-wide passing rate on STAAR EOC assessments is consistently lower than the state average in every test category. The teacher salary ranges from the 2021-2022 school year ranged from $54,369-$80,309.

Table 4.3 reveals that HISD has, by far, the largest student population yet the smallest EL student population within this study. The identification of board member characteristics in Table 4.4 shows that HISD has the greatest percentage of people of color on their school board, has a significant percentage of K-12 educators on their board, but is lacking in the categories of board members with graduate degrees and board members who are/ were parents of HISD students. Their approach to multilinguistic education as presented in the district's policy manual seemed holistic and well-thought-out. Despite their commitment to multilingual education, HISD STAAR and EOC assessment results revealed a notable gap between the achievement average of EL students compared to the district's whole student population average. Despite the district's efforts to support EL students, it is clear that something is not working here at HISD. Although the district provides additional multilingual programs and although the district has a diverse board composition, the work on the part of district leadership seems not to be effective enough to close the achievement gap. With the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students in this study, the district's multilingual programs, the diversity in board member composition and experience, and the smallest percentage of EL students within the student population, which should mean that more resources and individual support could be given to each EL student, the district has still failed to bring their EL students up to the same academic achievement level on standardized assessments as the district's general student population. Because of this connection, other issues are at play in HISD. Perhaps the district is simply too big. With over 270 school campuses and over 200,000 students, HISD is by far the largest district in this study. Or, maybe the issue is that the entire district is not performing up to state assessment standards which has exasperated the achievement gap; in fact, this issue of consistent

failure on state assessments across the boared at HISD has become so dire that the state is poised to take over the district to enact major changes. There are many factors which influence student assessment data, but it is abundantly clear that HISD has a lot of work to do to close this achievement gap for EL student academic performance.

Research question one asked: *What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students?* My findings show that Aldine ISD and Fort Worth ISD did not provide additional resources or modifications to the EHEB Special Programs for bilingual and ESL education legal framework. Dallas ISD reaffirmed its commitment to EL students and reiterated the value in bilingualism through their expansion of bilingual and dual-language programs. Dallas ISD also outlined ten specific regulations to clarify expectations for EL students in different stages of ESL programs; the district's goal of pushing students to pursue proficiency in English and in students' L1 is apparent throughout these ten guidelines. Houston ISD described their multilingual program which encourages all HISD students to become proficient in multiple languages. HISD also described a commitment to closing the achievement gap between EL and non-EL students through encouraging greater involvement of EL students in GT programs and other extracurricular activities. The DISD and HISD policy modifications and additions to the bilingual and ESL education legal framework aimed to impact EL students' school experience and academic achievement positively. It seems as though DISD's attempt to support EL students in this way was successful which is evident in the narrow achievement gap. However, the HISD programming was not successful enough to have the same results as the DISD additional programming did.

Research question two asked: *How do districts' support and resources for EL students impact EL students' performance on state assessments?* Past research confirms that school boards and superintendents often use student assessment data as a primary means for determining needs within a district (Sutherland, 2022). The achievement gaps displayed in student assessment data at AISD, DISD, FWISD, and HISD suggest that there is a disconnect between the students' needs and the boards' responses to those needs. When comparing the TEA assessment data for the STAAR and EOC assessments between all four districts, the academic success and achievement gaps between EL students and the whole student population at each district is evident. These TEA statistics show that the average scores of Dallas ISD EL students compared to the district's general student population represent the smallest achievement gap of all four districts. Aldine ISD and Houston ISD assessment data both exhibit wide gaps between the performance of EL students and the whole student population.

Dallas ISD has the largest population of students identified as EL and the smallest achievement gap on STAAR and English EOC assessments compared to that of Aldine ISD, Fort Worth ISD, and Houston ISD. Additionally, the DISD school board has committed to going above and beyond the state's basic requirements for supporting EL students by implementing bilingual education programs for any DISD student as seen in their detailed description of program requirements and expectations for bilingual and ESL programming. Past research supports the point that the basic state and federal requirements for bilingual and ESL programming are not doing enough, and in order to provide the education that EL students need, the inadequate systems need to change, and districts must find ways to provide additional resources to these students (Palmer & Lynch, 2008). The district's school board also has the highest percentage of board

members with bachelors and graduate school degrees and is tied for the greatest

percentage of board members with experience working in K-12 education as compared to

AISD, FWISD, and HISDs' school boards. The district's devotion to EL students and to

narrowing the achievement gap is clear in all three sets of data displayed in phases two,

three, and four of this research process. DISD's efforts to support EL students seems to

have been successful in many ways, though there is always more work to be done. This

success is evident in the narrow achievement gap between assessment scores. Past

research supports this idea that additional resources, programs, and an encouraging

attitude towards bilingualism can benefit EL students' education (Chin et al., 2013). The

fact that a gap still existed, though narrow as it is, at DISD proves the need for continued

efforts in this area.

Research question three asked: *What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas*

school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?

Less than 25% of board members on each school board identified themselves as bilingual

or as having specifically worked with the bilingual community. Considering that each of

these districts has over 34% of their student population who identify as EL, there is an

overall lack of representation of the bilingual community on the board compared to the

student demographic composition. Each district's low percentage of bilingual

representation could be a contributing factor to the achievement gap at each district.

Dallas ISD has the lowest achievement gap, but the DISD school board members bring

extensive and varied experience to their work.

Dallas ISD and Houston ISD, the two largest districts in this study, have the

greatest percentage of board members with experience in the field of K-12 education.

According to Table 4.4, DISD school board has the greatest percentage of members with

graduate degrees, and a majority of members are people of color. However, the DISD board is lacking in bilingual representation and in members who graduated from the district or who are parents of DISD students. The HISD school board has the greatest racially diverse board member composition. Other than representation of people of color on the board, the HISD board is lacking in educational experience as the board has the lowest percentage of members with graduate level degrees. Despite their similar student population size, DISD and HISD boards bring very different strengths and weaknesses. Although HISD is the most racially diverse, the board is lacking well-educated members. Connections could be made between HISD's board member composition and the wide achievement gap on state assessments for EL students, especially when compared to the more holistic composition of characteristics on the DISD board and DISD's narrow achievement gap.

Aldine IDS had, by far, the lowest percentage of board members with graduate degrees and of members with prior experience working in the field of education. Additionally, the AISD board has not added new members to the board in the past four years, and many of the board members have served their districts on the board for over 15 years. The board has also failed to establish legislative modifications or additions to state policy for bilingual education in the district's policy manual. Student success data shows that AISD has one of the largest achievement gaps in this study.

These factors lead me to believe that the school board members' experience, age, and education do in fact have a direct impact on student success due to the district's failure to implement or describe additional programs for EL students. This finding is further supported in past research studies. In the 1970s, American public education looked quite different from today. Despite these differences, Splawn's research revealed

that board member characteristics like age, race, gender, work experience and educational history impact a board member's perception of their role and responsibility on their school board (Splawn, 1972).

Summary

The data collected in all four phases of research for this case study come together to provide a holistic picture of four Texas districts. All four of these districts have large populations of EL students but have taken different approaches to supporting this group of students. Although there may be benefits to each approach, and although the pictures of each district as portrayed in the four phases of data collection do not encompass every influential aspect of EL education, there are similarities in successful support methods that should be recognized. The "picture" of each district allowed me to make connections among the information from each district to determine what supports seem to lead to positive results for EL students.

The AISD school board did not list any programs or additions to the state requirements for bilingual/ESL education in the district's online policy manual. The achievement gap between the district's testing average and the EB/EL student testing average on the English I and II EOC assessments in the Approaches and Meets grade level categories for both 2019 and 2021 ranges from 16-27%, which is substantial (see Table 4.9 and Table 4.10). The AISD achievement gap is deeply concerning, especially when considering the district's failure to address this issue in their policy manual and their failure to address the issue through electing new board members who could advocate for adding these policies.

In the case of DISD, the district's school board members are diverse in experience, education, and expertise; the district also implemented additional requirements and resources within their bilingual education programs. These two factors display the district's commitment to their EL student population and the value in bilingualism. The district's perspective on bilingualism undoubtedly impacts EL students which is evident in their narrow gap in performance on standardized assessments. DISD did a thorough job of describing the additional resources and programs available for EL students, and for non-EL students who wish to become bilingual, in their online district policy manual. STARR and EOC assessment data on DISD students reveals that DISD has surpassed the other three districts in this study in their success in shrinking the achievement gap for EL students (see Table 4.11 and 4.12). The district's efforts to shrink the achievement gap have proved successful.

FWISD fell at the middle of the pack in research phases one, two, and four. FWISD had the second smallest student population compared to other districts in the study as depicted in my phase one research. Phase two of my research revealed that not all FWISD members claimed that they had received a bachelor's degree which is quite surprising given their leadership position in the field of education. FWISD has the lowest percentage of people of color on their school board but is tied for the greatest percentage of bilingual board members (see Table 4.4). In my final research phase, I discovered that FWISD's STAAR and EOC scores showed a narrow achievement gap between EL students and the district's general student population on the same assessments; FWISD's gap was just barely wider than that of Dallas ISD. Despite the district's failure to identify additional support for EL students in their policy manual, the district has managed to keep the achievement gap small between the standardized test scores of EL students and

the general student population. This could mean that other factors influenced the success of EL students at the district such as the district's small student population size or the large percentage of bilingual board members.

The HISD approach to multilinguistic education as presented in the district's policy manual seemed holistic and well-thought-out. Despite their commitment to multilingual education, HISD STAAR and EOC assessment results revealed a notable gap between the achievement average of EL students compared to the district's whole student population average. Despite the district's efforts to support EL students, it is clear that something is not working here at HISD. Although the district provides additional multilingual programs and although the district has a diverse board composition, the work on the part of district leadership seems to not be effective enough to close the achievement gap. With the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students in this study, the district's multilingual programs, the diversity in board member composition and experience, and the smallest percentage of EL students within the student population, which should mean that more resources and individual support could be given to each EL student, the district has still failed to bring their EL students up to the same academic achievement level on standardized assessments as the district's general student population. Because of this connection, it is clear that other issues are at play in HISD. Perhaps the district is simply too big. Or maybe the issue is that the entire district is not performing up to state assessment standards which has exasperated the achievement gap. There are many factors which influence student assessment data, but it is abundantly clear that HISD has a lot of work to do to close this achievement gap for EL student academic performance.

Throughout the four phases of this research process, I selected four large Texas school districts, analyzed the school board composition at each district, compared each district's policy modifications, and student standardized assessment data from each district. After collecting and interpreting data from each research phase, it became clear that school districts across Texas still have plenty of work to do to improve the education experience and academic performance of EL students. Despite the achievement gap at all four districts on the English I and II EOC and district wide STAAR scores, Dallas ISD and Fort Worth ISD both had significantly narrower gaps in EL student test scores. This split in state achievement scores between the DFW area districts compared to Houston area districts raises questions about what factors are influencing these achievement gaps.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study stemmed from my recognition that there were not enough resources for EL students in this public education system. Past research supports this recognition of a lack of resources for EL students (Palmer et al., 2019; Hinojosa, 2019; Fránquiz et al., 2019; Delavan et. al., 2021; Callahan et al., 2022). Research proves the need for systemic changes to EL student education. In this study, I built upon this past research in search of tangible actions that school districts could take to support EL students. This study aimed to investigate factors which influence the EL student's experience in the American public education system so that districts, educators, and policymakers could be better equipped to support EL students. Chapter five summarizes the information presented in the first four chapters of this study, reviews the findings within the case study, and discusses the implications and recommendations for school districts and future research.

Summary of This Study

Chapter one introduced my qualitative research study and the problem at hand. In a research study into the achievement gap between EL students and their peers, Goldenberg (1996) explains that the achievement gap crisis is undisputedly clear, "Eighty-five percent of Hispanic fourth and eighth graders read in English at a "basic" level or below. Over half score even below 'basic,' meaning they cannot demonstrate understanding of a text written at their grade level" (p. 353). This crisis is still prevalent

in the modern-day American education system. The purpose of this study was to investigate further the challenges and barriers experienced by EL students across the state of Texas with the goal of identifying successful support methods and resources for these students. In pursuit of this goal, I aimed to answer the following research questions: *What district-specific modifications and additions, if any, have Texas districts made in response to federal and state education policy that impacts EL students? How do districts' support and resources for EL students impact EL students' performance on state assessments? What impact, if any, does the composition of Texas school board members have on the district's resources for and success of EL students?* Throughout the four phases of my research, I gathered different data so that I could properly answer these research questions.

Before gathering data, I first educated myself through extensive reading of related literature as presented in chapter two. To understand the shortcomings within the system and the barriers that EL students and their teachers face, I needed to build knowledge on the federal and state requirements for EL education as well as the country's general perspective towards the education of EL students. In a study exploring the impact of gentrification and privilege in bilingual education policy, Dorner and others (2021) state that:

> A brief look at the history of U.S. language education for TLLs demonstrates how colonial ideologies persist. Even as public bilingual education policies expanded by and for TLLs in the 1960s and 1970s (Flores 2016), depictions of "limited" language learners and poverty-stricken, "culturally-poor" Spanish speakers overshadowed activists' original intents of political emancipation. Bilingual education became another part of the Americanization project of sorting and segregating TLLs, transitioning them to be English-dominant (Grinberg and Saavedra 2000; Sung 2017). Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, English only and standard language ideologies took even stronger hold, with more policies that

replaced, rather than maintained, students' home languages and cultures. (pp. 324-325)

A range of factors, such as power, politics, and privilege, influence all policymaking. This quote describes the development of the country's perspective towards EL students throughout history as reflected in education policy for EL students. Education policy regarding EL students is no exception to this influence. The American societal perspective regarding immigrants and non-English speaking people impacted both bilingual education policy and the overwhelming lack of resources for EL students. Chapter two explored the history of education policy in the U.S. and how that policy impacts students.

In chapter three, I outlined my methodology and procedures for this case study. Phase one of the research process included my identification of four Texas school districts on which I focused on in my case study. In phase two of my research, I established a list of important characteristics which impact a school board member's priorities and experience on the board. Phase three involved the selection of influential education policy for bilingual education in Texas. With this information, I would later compare the individual districts' responses to the federal and state legislation. Finally, in phase three of my research I described my intent to collect data on student academic success through examination of STAAR and EOC test scores to identify achievement gaps.

Lastly, in chapter four I presented my research findings and discussion. My findings from each phase are as follows. I selected Aldine ISD, Dallas ISD, Fort Worth ISD, and Houston ISD in phase one to focus on for my case study. I examined the leadership of each selected district through identifying important characteristics of each

school board member and in creating school district biographies for all four districts to gain a better understanding of the board composition in phase two. With this knowledge of the board member composition at each district, I next compared the district and school board responses to legal frameworks for bilingual education in phase three. Finally, in phase four, I collected STAAR and EOC student assessment data and analyzed that data which brought me to the realization that all four districts have an achievement gap in EL student performance.

Implications

The most glaring implication from this study is the acknowledgement that despite federal, state, and local governmental efforts to shrink achievement gaps between students, there are still gaps in EL student performance on standardized assessments. Educators and policymakers on all three levels have work to do in order to provide greater support to EL students. The lack of resources for these students is the result of a country-wide monolinguistic perspective which focuses solely on English proficiency rather than fostering growth in students L1 as well. Moore's research into this idea of the monolinguistic approach to EL education supports this point, "The notion that immigrants should favor English at the expense of their native language maintenance is historically pervasive. English speaking as a marker of Americanism has been described as the ideology of English monolingualism" (Moore, 2021, Ch. 2). While English proficiency is an important skill in America, the over-emphasis on English proficiency in schools could be exacerbating the issue of the achievement gaps and overall struggle of EL students in the American public education system.

When considering my research findings through a critical theory framework, systemic injustice is evident in the case of EL education policy. Across the board, EL students performed at a lower academic success rate than the general student population on state assessments. The achievement gap is evidence of inequality within the system of education because no matter the district's efforts to bring EL students up to grade-level standards, there persists a consistent gap between the academic performance of EL students and their peers on state assessments.

Through the collection and analysis of data in this study, it became clear to me that school board members do influence students. School boards with a variety of years of experience on the board, boards with high percentages of members who earned a graduate degree(s), and boards with a high percentage of members who worked in K-12 education were more likely to provide additional resources for EL students in the district policy manuals. These board member attributes affect individual board members' motivations and priorities which is evident in the presence, or lack thereof, of programs or resources for EL students that are not required by the state or federal governments. The effect of these board member characteristics could be the difference in a district's commitment to go above and beyond the status quo requirements for EL education, or not to do so.

School board members' impact goes even further than policy additions to state and federal legal frameworks. This study proves that additional bilingual programming can directly benefit students' academic performance on standardized assessments. The case of Dallas ISD exemplifies this point. Based on the width of achievement gaps on standardized assessments at each district, the additional programs and resources for EL students at DISD proved successful as the district displayed the narrowest achievement

gaps. DISD's variety in school board member experience and expertise, their commitment to the support of EL students depicted in their district policy manual, and other factors impacted the success of EL students in the district which is evident in their narrow achievement gaps. Although there are many factors which influence student assessment data, the district's efforts to support EL students are successful. The DISD school board members' characteristics and experience influenced the continued support efforts for EL students in the district, as evidenced by the district policy manual and student assessment data; their case can serve as a successful example of the implications of providing additional programs and resources to EL students.

Recommendations

Based on my research findings and the implications of my research, I recommend that school districts take certain characteristics into special consideration when appointing board members. I recommend that Texas school districts specifically consider both individual board members' age, experience, and education as well as the board's collective characteristics in these areas when electing school board members because these characteristics affect the board's priorities for EL education. First, it is clear that a variety of experience on the school board is an important characteristic to consider. School boards with some members who have served for many years, and some who have not served for many years creates a well-balanced board. Next, my data shows that the consideration of board members' education is another influential characteristic. District boards with greater percentages of board members with graduate level degrees were more likely to implement additional EL programming in their district policy manual. Finally, the two school boards with the greatest percentage of members with experience in the

field of public education were also the only two school boards with detailed descriptions of EL programming in their policy manuals. Across my research, these three characteristics seemed to be the most influential in ensuring EL program additions and requirements were outlined in the districts' policy manuals and in the width of achievement gaps for EL students at each district. In addition to these three characteristics, there are also connections between percentage of board members of color and district success in these areas, though the connection is weaker than the previously mentioned three characteristics. This finding regarding the influence of certain board member characteristics is significant because it provides a clear path forward for districts, and even community members, who wish to improve support for EL students as they consider board member elections.

Researchers should consider ways in which to expand upon this study to strengthen connections among data and to seek a better understanding of the factors which impact the experience of EL students in the American education system. The findings from this study identified connections between school board member characteristics and EL programs or requirements listed in district policy manuals, and the findings from the study identified the consistency of EL achievement gaps. Based on this case study, districts and policy makers need to do more to support the growing EL student population across Texas and the greater United States. To advocate for changes in the support of EL students in the field of education, researchers should continue to investigate the factors which impact EL students' experience in the system.

Representation is vitally important for students to feel seen and heard. Because of the overall lack of bilingual board members and board members with specific experience working with EL students across all school boards, it is challenging to make specific

recommendations for electing bilingual board members based solely on research in this study. However, because all four districts have space for improvement in supporting EL students, the election of bilingual board members could be one way for each district to move towards strengthening their resources for EL students. To further the study, researchers could consider expanding the number of selected districts for the case study to districts with greater percentages of board members who identify as bilingual; this continuation of the study could shed light on the impact of board member representation.

With this idea of representation in mind, this research study could be continued and improved upon through the involvement of current or former EL students. Bringing in other researchers who experienced the American public education system as an EL student could be incredibly beneficial. Additionally, researchers could consider interviewing current or former EL students who could share insight into the daily experience of a non-English speaking student in the American public education system. This inclusion would allow researchers to gain valuable perspective about individuals' experiences within the system, which is something that this study lacks.

The consistency of achievement gaps in EL student performance on state assessments across all ages and types of assessments and in the secondary English assessments over 2019 and 2021 as discovered in this case study were disheartening. Although there were significant differences in the width of the achievement gaps at each district, the gaps were still present within each district no matter their efforts to close them. Furthermore, the gap in state assessment performance for EL students widened from 2019 to 2021. To deepen the connections between data in this study, researchers could further the study through examining different types of assessments, such as Algebra or Biology, and through examining the same data across the span of five to

twenty years. Researchers could also consider CCMR (College Career and Military Readiness) and graduation rate data to widen the perspective on student success at each district. These recommendations for expanding this study would allow for stronger connections between data and stronger recommendations for school districts and the SBOE.

Conclusion

This study explored the factors which impact the educational experience of EL students in the American education system. Based on findings from this research, there is room for improvement within every district and in the state of Texas in general regarding the support of EL students, but that board member characteristics like educational history and work experience in K-12 education, coupled with varied years of experience on the school board, can have a positive impact on a district's mission to support EL students. Recommendations for future research include the involvement of those with experience as an EL student in the American education system, the expansion of student assessment data to gain a better understanding of the achievement gap, and the inclusion of districts with greater percentages of bilingual board members.

This case study pursued a deeper understanding of the factors which influence the education of EL students. The achievement gap crisis for EL students across the country is concerning, especially as this population of students continues to grow. If the American education system, and the educators, administrators, and policymakers within that system, wish to encourage growth and academic success in *all* students, then there is work to be done. This change starts with district-level support programs for EL students, election of highly qualified board members, and additional resources for both EL students

and their teachers. As individual districts work to close the achievement gaps and find additional ways to support all their students and teachers, the SBOE and USDE must also move towards change in their perspective of non-English speaking students and citizens. Movement away from the monolinguistic and deficit-based perspective, which overvalues English proficiency and devalues fluency in other languages, would not only improve the education experience for EL students and citizens, but for all Americans.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Aldine ISD School Board Members

Randy Bates, Jr., President

Dr. Kimberly Booker, Vice President

Steve Mead, Secretary

Rose Avalos, Assistant Secretary

Conception "Connie" Esparza, Member

Dr. Viola M. Garcia, Member

Paul Shanklin, Member

APPENDIX B

Dallas ISD School Board Members

Justin Henry, President

Dan Micciche, First Vice President

Maxie Johnson, Second Vice President

Joe Carreón, Secretary

Edwin Flores, Member

Dustin Marshall, Member

Camile D. White, Member

Joyce Foreman, Member

Ben Mackey, Member

APPENDIX C

Fort Worth ISD School Board Members

Tobi Jackson, President

Quinton "Q" Phillips, First Vice President

Roxanne Martinez, Second Vice President

Carin "CJ" Evans, Secretary

Wallace Bridges, Trustee

Anne Darr, Trustee

Dr. Michael Ryan, Trustee

Anael Luebanos, Trustee

Dr. Camille Rodriguez, Trustee

APPENDIX D

Houston ISD School Board Members

Dani Hernandez, President

Myrna Guidry, Esq., First Vice President

Bridget Wade, Second Vice President

Kendall Baker, Secretary

Kathy Blueford-Daniels, Assistant Secretary

Elizabeth Santos, Member

Dr. Patricia K. Allen, Member

Sue Deigaard, Member

Judith Cruz, Member

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