

TEXAS EDUCATION REVIEW

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Fall 2020: Volume 9, Issue 1

Articles

Special Education Eligibility Identification Rates in Texas: A Comparative Analysis of Rural and
Urban School Districts
Simmons, Shin, & Sharp
Exploring Students' Endorsement Enrollment in Texas Public High Schools
Fear in the Classroom: Campus Carry at The University of Texas at Austin

Editorials

Yes, Black Lives Still Matter and Politics-Free Schools are a Myth......64 *Bridgeforth*

TEXAS EDUCATION REVIEW

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Welcome to Volume 9, Issue 1 (Fall 2020) of the Texas Education Review (TxEd)

This issue contains three manuscripts, including: a quantitative analysis on recent trends for special education identification rates in urban and rural Texas school districts (Simmons, Shin, & Sharp); a critical quantitative examination of patterns in student endorsement enrollment in the state of Texas (Adamuti-Trache, Zhang, & Hagedorn); and a critical qualitative analysis of student and faculty experience with concealed carry gun policy at the University of Texas at Austin (Butters).

In addition to these articles, this issue features one editorial, which centers one educator's personal reflections on conservative reactions to the New York Times' 1619 project in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement (Bridgeforth).

Information for Contributors

The Texas Education Review is an independent, peer reviewed, student-run scholarly publication based at the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin. The Texas Education Review was founded and is operated by doctoral students at The University of Texas at Austin's College of Education, which consistently ranks as one of the best public university graduate education programs in the United States. The Texas Education Review aims to advance scholarship by publishing an academic journal of the highest quality including works by graduate students, professors, and practitioners, focusing on education policy and related issues. This journal features articles, essays, notes, and reviews relevant to a national and international audience of scholars and practitioners.

The Texas Education Review focuses on analysis of education policy and related issues, with nonexclusive preference given to issues affecting the State of Texas. Each issue shall display unparalleled excellence in content and style. Further, The Texas Education Review fosters the academic and professional development of its members through participation in the editorial process and each member displays the highest standards of integrity and professional excellence in every endeavor. From Sweatt v. Painter and No Child Left Behind, to charter schools, curriculum policy, and textbook adoption, the State of Texas has played and will continue to play a critical role in shaping education policy in the United States. The Texas Education Review is located directly on The University of Texas's campus in the heart of downtown Austin. Its close proximity to the Texas Capitol, Texas Education Agency, and State Board of Education offers unparalleled access to the thought leaders, policy makers, and academics who are driving education policy in Texas.



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Special Education Eligibility Identification Rates in Texas: A Comparative Analysis of Rural and Urban School Districts

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Special Education Eligibility Identification Rates in Texas: A Comparative Analysis of Rural and Urban School Districts

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Introduction

Since 2004, federal regulations in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have provided states with guidelines for serving the educational needs of students with disabilities. These guidelines delineate requirements for the identification of eligible professionals in charter schools, county education offices, and local education agencies (herein referred to as school districts) to conduct comprehensive and individualized evaluations to identify students with disabilities, as well as requirements for the implementation of special education services. The IDEA guarantees all students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Thus, school districts must develop, review, and revise an individualized education program (IEP) for each eligible student according to their strengths and academic, developmental, and functional needs. As school districts implement special education services, the IDEA also requires states to provide school districts with assistance and to ensure their compliance with federal regulations. Ultimately, the IDEA's primary goal is to promote educational equity among students with disabilities by providing them with appropriate academic, cognitive, physical, and socialemotional instruction (Bateman & Cline, 2016; Howe, Boelé, & Miramontes, 2018). However, the guidelines developed and established to ensure educational equity for students identified to receive special education services present challenges when considering service delivery at the state education agency and school district levels. This study examined the impact of federal oversight and consequential legislative correction on the identification rates of students receiving special education services in rural and urban school districts in the state of Texas.

Addressing the IDEA Requirements in Texas

In Texas, the State Board of Education (SBOE) and Commissioner have established special education rules and published them within the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2019e) to help school districts understand how to comply with the IDEA's federal regulations. Additionally, any state-based special education laws passed by the Texas legislature are published in the Texas Education Code (TEC). Consequently, school district administrators who oversee special education services throughout school districts in Texas have access to multiple sets of laws, regulations, and rules (see TEA, 2017b for a side-by-side comparison of IDEA, TAC, and TEC). Every year, the TEA (2019b) monitors the performance of school districts with the state's special education program through the Results Driven Accountability (RDA) system, which from 2004-2018 was known as the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS). Despite the availability of federal and state laws, regulations, and rules, public recognition surrounding special education identification and the correlation between the TEA RDA system surfaced in 2016. Although educators had historically been voicing concerns about special education policy in Texas, this was the first time issues surfaced in a very public manner. As a result, a series of investigative news reports were published that revealed systemic problems concerning Texas's continuous delayed identification and denial of services to students with disabilities (Carroll & Rosenthal, 2016; Rosenthal, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e; Rosenthal & Barned-Smith, 2016). These investigative news reports asserted that the TEA had enacted an illegal cap (i.e., a state limit) in 2004 that set an enrollment target for the number of students that a school district could identify as eligible for special education services. This enrollment target served as a strong disincentive to school districts to not exceed a maximum student enrollment of 8.5% in special education services as exceeding that percentage of identified special education students would precipitate increased oversight from TEA. This enrollment target also violated the IDEA and systematically denied services to a great multitude of students with disabilities (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Michals, 2018).

Within one year of the public media coverage, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) launched a comprehensive, 15-month investigation to examine Texas's statewide practices for special education services (Michals, 2018). When the investigation concluded, OSEP determined that Texas was in violation of the IDEA and cited three findings of noncompliance (OSEP, 2018). Specifically, the OSEP cited that the TEA failed to: (1) ensure that all students with disabilities were identified and evaluated; (2) ensure that FAPE was made available to all students with disabilities; and (3) fulfill its monitoring and supervisory responsibilities. Based on these findings, OSEP required Texas to make associated corrective actions. In 2017, the Texas Legislature passed two state laws related to OSEP's findings of noncompliance. Texas Senate Bill 160 (2017) prohibited the use of any type of enrollment incentive that could potentially influence the number or percentage of students that an LEA may provide special education services. Texas Senate Bill 1153 (2017) delineated parental rights and information about intervention strategies used with students to address learning difficulties.

The Texas Commission on Public School Finance, the TEA, special education advocates, and lawmakers collaborated to pass several bills to address special education funding and initiatives for students with special needs in Texas by the 86th legislative session in 2019 (Chevalier, 2019). Among those bills was Texas House Bill 3 (2019), landmark legislation for students receiving special education services in Texas. Texas House Bill 3 increased the weight of funding an LEA receives for placing a student in a general education instructional setting. Ultimately, this legislative revision generated significant funding increases in the allocation of special education services provided in a general education classroom (Chevalier, 2019). Texas House Bill 3 (2019) also established a state-level special education advisory committee to make special education funding recommendations.

In addition to HB 3, the 86th legislative session included two state senate bills relevant to special education funding and special education identification in Texas. Texas Senate Bill 500 (2019) provided a supplemental spending bill to settle maintenance of support costs and future funding penalty failure prevention in response to decreased funding for special education students that occurred during 2012, 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Chevalier, 2019). Texas Senate Bill 139 (2019) specifically addressed the 8.5% student enrollment target (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019; Knight & DeMatthews, 2020; Michals, 2018) by requiring the TEA to develop a notice to LEAs and families of students receiving special educations services.

Special Education in Rural School Districts

DeMatthews and Knight (2019) conducted an analysis of special education enrollment trends in public schools throughout the United States between 2004 and 2016 to examine the impact that the 8.5% enrollment target had on special education practices in Texas. Their findings showed "a significant long-term decline in special education" in Texas from 2004 through 2016 "that was not experienced in other states" (p. 21). Among their results, DeMatthews and Knight reported two significant findings related to rural school districts in Texas: (1) rural school districts had served considerably larger numbers of students with disabilities prior to the enactment of the state's 8.5% enrollment target, and (2) rural school districts experienced larger declines in special education enrollments compared to suburban and urban school districts.

Several researchers have recognized that the geographical location of a school is a factor that affects special education practices and services (Barrio, 2017; Bouck, 2005; Brock & Schaefer, 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Pennington, Horn, & Berrong, 2009). School districts located in rural areas contend with unique challenges in special education, such as access to service providers, funding, resources, and professional development. Researchers have also found that special educators in rural school districts tend to have lower levels in education beyond the bachelor's degree than their suburban and urban counterparts (Bouck, 2005) and often experience feelings of professional isolation (Berry & Gravelle, 2013).

Texas has more rural school districts than any other state in the United States (NCES, 2013). Out of the total 7,156 rural school districts in the United States, Texas has 631 rural school districts, compared to an average of 133 rural school districts in the other 49 states. During the 2016-2017 school year, Texas and Alabama were cited as the only two states that did not offer IEPs for at least one in 10 of their rural students, with only 9.3% of the rural student population in Texas and 8.3% in Alabama receiving special education services (Showalter, Hartman, Johnson, & Klein, 2019). Showalter et al. (2019) pointed out that this finding suggested, "Some students with disabilities go without the services they need even though such services are required by federal law" (p. 7). Around this same time, Texas's Commissioner of Education, Mike Morath, formed the Texas Rural Schools Task Force to identify statewide challenges and best practices for rural school districts (TEA, 2019c). Members of the Texas Rural Schools Task Force worked together to identify priority issues for rural school districts that were subsequently published in a summary report (TEA, 2017a). Although the priority issues identified did not directly address special education services, the concerns cited by the committee reflected the challenges that rural special education programs face in meeting local, state, and federal policy requirements.

Rationale for the Present Study

Previous researchers have highlighted longstanding educational injustices in special education and evaluated the impact of regulations, laws and guidelines on special education services (e.g., Albrecht, Skiba, Losen, Chung, & Middelberg, 2012; Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Knight & DeMatthews, 2018; Robinson & Norton, 2019; Skiba, Albrecht, & Losen, 2013; Skiba, Artiles, Kozleski, Losen, & Harry, 2015; Strassfeld, 2019; Sullivan & Osher, 2019). These researchers have illuminated data that reflect disparities and disproportionate identification and delivery of special education services to students belonging to subgroups of the general education student population, such as students of color and students from low socioeconomic households. Previous researchers have analyzed school campus state performance ratings (Grubbs, 2000), and also studied comparisons between special education services and academic outcomes among students receiving special education services in Texas based on education agency settings, such as charter schools compared to traditional public schools (Garton, 2019; Kahama, 2015). Against this background, researchers of the present study conducted the first examination of legislative impact for special education services by comparing rural and urban school district special education identification trends within the state of Texas.

The present study sought to add new insights by investigating statewide enrollment trends for special education in rural and urban school districts and by comparing the prevalence of primary disability types among students who received special education services in rural and urban school districts throughout Texas from 2015 to 2019. Specifically, the following two research questions guided the present study:

- 1. What are trends in the number of students identified for receiving special education services in rural and urban school districts in Texas between the years 2015 to 2019?
- 2. How does the prevalence of primary disability types among students who received special education services differ by time (i.e., 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years) and school district locale (i.e., rural or urban) in Texas?

By conducting a Texas-only analysis, the researchers of the present study aimed to focus the investigation on statewide special education practices that are guided by federal and state laws, regulations, and rules (i.e., IDEA, TAC, TEC). The *Houston Chronicle* investigative series, the U.S. Department of Education's Special Education Strategic Plan and Corrective Action Response, the 2019 86th legislative session, and the most current publicly accessible data served as the guide for selecting the four years between 2015 and 2019 for investigation. Accordingly, findings from the present study will have contributed relevant and timely empirical insights to inform ongoing corrective actions that improve statewide special education practices.

Methods

Data Collection Procedure

To retrieve data for the present study, researchers followed a systematic data collection procedure. First, the lead researcher (i.e., the first author) created a master spreadsheet that listed all school districts in Texas and their locale classification by consulting publicly available information on the TEA's (2019a) website. The TEA uses NCES's classification system that categorizes school districts as one of twelve possible categories (i.e., city, suburban, town, rural). Each category contains three subtypes. The lead researcher then filtered the master spreadsheet to only include school districts with the basic category type of city (i.e., urban or rural) (see Table 1 for a listing of the six subcategories and corresponding definitions).

Table 1

	and Shortan Source and D Grannone
Locale	Definition
City: Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.

City and Rural Locale Subcategories and Definitions

City: Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population
	less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
City: Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population
	less than 100,000.
Rural: Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an ur-
	banized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from
	an urban cluster.
Rural: Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to
	25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5
	miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
Rural: Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized
	area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Note. TEA's school district type data search yielded data sets for school years ranging from 2007-08 up to 2017-18. The most recent district type categorization data set available was from the school year 2017-18. Thus, all school districts categorized as city (i.e., large, midsize, small) and rural (i.e., fringe, distant, remote) listed on the district type dataset for the 2017-18 school year were included for analysis.

Next, the lead researcher consulted publicly accessible information on the TEA's (2019d) Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) website to retrieve data from the RDA system Special Education Reports for the school years under study (i.e., 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019). These data summarized the total number of students who received special education services in each school district by primary disability. After the lead researcher retrieved these reports, the data was consolidated into a single report and matched by the school district to the master spreadsheet. As a result, the master spreadsheet housed data for 828 rural and urban school districts (i.e., a total of 3,312 district-level data) in Texas that included the number of students who received special education services by primary disability for the school years under study. To ensure accuracy and completeness with the master spreadsheet, the secondary researchers (i.e., the second and third authors) each performed careful reviews of the data collection procedure.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the initial analysis was to analyze the statistical and comparative trends of disability types among students who received special education services during the school years under study. The purpose of the secondary analysis was to compare identified trends between rural and urban school districts. The researchers identified the following variables for the present analyses:

- the school years under study (i.e., 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019);
- the school district locale category (i.e., city, rural); and
- the counts of students who received special education services by primary disability code (i.e., OI = orthopedic impairment, OHI = other health impairment, AI = auditory impairment, VI = visual impairment, DB = deaf-blind, ID = intellectual disability, ED = emotional disturbance, LD = learning disability, SI = speech impairment, AU = autism, DD = developmental delay, TBI = traumatic brain injury, NCEC = non-categorical early childhood).

The researchers also generated a data point aggregate for the total counts of students who received special education services in rural and urban school districts during the school years under study. **Initial analysis.** For the initial analysis, two-level multilevel analyses were conducted using a *lme()* function from the *nlme* R package (Pinheiro, Bates, DebRoy, & Sarkar, 2020). The researchers coded each school year (time) sequentially in order from 1 (2015-2016) through 4 (2018-2019) and coded the school district locale category as either 1 (city) or 0 (rural). The researchers also calculated the primary disability type as a percentage (a ratio that represents the number of students for each primary disability type out of the total number of students who received special education services) in each school district. With the total number of students who received special education services in each school district as a dependent variable, two-level models were used to account for the school year and the primary disability types based on each district (Level 1) nested within school district locale categories (Level 2). Model 1 tested the first research question, examining the fixed effect of time. Model 2 further tested the interaction between time and district type, hypothesizing the total number of students receiving special education services between 2015 and 2019 may differ by district type.

Secondary analysis. For the secondary analysis, the student count prevalence totals were converted to percentages, and data were presented in a 100% stacked column chart by school year for rural and urban school districts. This analysis included a data set of 1,023,470 total data points. Some values in the data set were masked to comply with requirements in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), so the TEA had replaced values greater than 0 but less than 5 with "-999" or "-999999." In order to assign value during data aggregation, the lead researcher calculated any masked values as 2.5, whereas 2.5 is ([1+2+3+4]/4). Model 3 tested interactions between disability type and time or district type, hypothesizing disability type can be a moderator affecting prevalence rate changes over time or between urban versus rural school districts.

Validity checks. After the lead researcher completed initial and secondary data analyses, all three researchers worked together to perform validity checks. Validity checks encompassed regular conversations held among the researchers synchronously through telephone calls and video conference sessions, as well as asynchronously through email exchanges. During these communication exchanges, the researchers discussed data trends over time, application of discrete comparison variables, and implications for study findings as they related to special education practices.

Results

Trends in the Number of Students Receiving Special Education Services in Rural and Urban School Districts in Texas

Based on 3,312 district-level data extracted from the TEA's PEIMS, the researchers of the present study conducted a two-level multilevel model to examine the trends of students receiving special education services in Texas. As shown in Model 1, there was significant growth in the total number of students who received special education services in each school district during the four school years under study ($\beta = 12.24, p < .001$); approximately 12 new students every year across districts after controlling for grade mean of student numbers. Furthermore, as shown in Model 2, there was a significant interaction between time and district type ($\beta = 34.59, p < .001$), controlling for time, district type, and grand mean of student numbers. The growth of student numbers in special education programs was significantly larger in the urban school districts than the rural school districts between

2015 and 2019; approximately 35 more students in the urban areas than in the rural areas received special education services.

Table 2

Parameter estimate (SE)					
Model 1	Model 2	Model 3			
305.07*** (41.37)	94.23*** (9.07)	76.80*** (8.86)			
12.24*** (1.25)	4.47*** (1.36)	298.28 (194.41)			
_	937.92*** (169.39)				
	34.59*** (2.87)				
—	_	-3.19 (1.95)			
_	_	-2.80 (1.94)			
—	—	-3.04 (1.95)			
_	_	-3.19 (1.95)			
—	—	-3.29 (2.14)			
—	—	-2.88 (1.94)			
—	—	-2.95 (1.95)			
	—	-2.93 (1.94)			
_	_	-2.82 (1.95)			
—	—	-2.51 (1.94)			
—	_	228.14** (78.56)			
_	_	-3.32 (1.98)			
—	—	-2.96 (1.95)			
—	—	10.62*** (2.52)			
	—	10.39*** (1.74)			
_	_	10.04*** (2.06)			
—	_	9.77*** (2.28)			
—	—	-32.37 (27.05)			
—	—	9.77*** (1.78)			
—	—	10.94*** (1.80)			
	—	9.53*** (1.70)			
—	—	9.92*** (1.70)			
	—	10.07*** (1.78)			
	—	-861.78*** (234.69)			
—	—	7.10* (3.57)			
—	—	12.09*** (3.40)			
Parameter estimate (SL	\mathcal{D}				
305922.8 (553.10)	89.80 (9.48)	3.24 (5.69)			
—	5251189 (2291.55)	5255553 (2292.50)			
1105892.8 (1051.61)	47934.44 (218.94)	47039.21 (216.89)			
	Parameter estimate (SE Model 1 305.07*** (41.37) 12.24*** (1.25) 	Parameter estimate (SE) Model 1 Model 2 305.07^{***} (41.37) 94.23^{***} (9.07) 12.24^{***} (1.25) 4.47^{***} (1.36) - 937.92^{***} (169.39) - 34.59^{***} (2.87) - - -			

Fixed and Random Effects for the Two-Level Growth Model

Note. AI = auditory impairment; AU = autism; DB = deaf-blind; DD = developmental delay; ED = emotional disturbance; ID = intellectual disability; LD = learning disability; NA = not applicable;

NCEC = non-categorical early childhood; OHI = other health impairment; OI = orthopedic impairment; SI = speech impairment; TBI = traumatic brain injury; VI = visual impairment. ^aDistrict type was coded 1 for the urban and 0 for the rural area. * p < .05, ** p < .01., *** p < .001.

Overall, the total number of students who received special education services in both rural and urban school districts increased over time with a constant change in trend from the first school year (i.e., 2015-2016) to the last school year (i.e., 2018-2019) included in data analyses (see Figure 1). To illustrate, the total number of students who received special education services in urban school districts during the 2015-2016 school year was 144,840 students, while the total number of students during the 2018-2019 school year was 204,169 students. Similarly, the total number of students who received special education services in rural school districts during the 2015-2016 school year was 63,727 students, while the total number of students during the 2018-2019 school year was 78,311 students.

Figure 1





As shown in Figure 1, the average rate of change in the identification of students who received special education services over the four school years under study in urban school districts was 13%, with an immediate increase in the rate of identification to 30% from the 2015-2016 to the 2016-2017 school year. On the other hand, the average rate of change in identification of students who received special education services over the four school years under study in rural school districts was 7%, with an immediate increase in the rate of identification to 14% from the 2015-16 school year to the 2016-2017 school year. Comparatively, students who received special education services were identified at a higher rate and with a greater increase in percentages over the four school years under study in urban school districts than in rural school districts.

Prevalence of Primary Disability Types among Students Who Received Special Education Services by Time and School District Locale Categories

As shown in Model 3, in general, there was no significant interaction between students' primary disability type and time ($\beta = -3.32$ to 2.51, ps > .05). Only the prevalence of DD showed a significant increase over the four school years under study controlling for all other variables ($\beta = 228.14$, p < .01); annually, approximately 228 new students were receiving special education services in a disability type of DD. On the contrary, in most primary disability types, there was a significant interaction between prevalence rate and school district locale. Specifically, controlling for all other variables, in the urban school districts, students whose primary disability type was SI ($\beta = 9.92$), VI ($\beta = 9.77$), ID ($\beta = 9.77$), LD ($\beta = 9.53$), TBI ($\beta = 7.10$), ED ($\beta = 10.94$), OI ($\beta = 10.62$), OHI ($\beta = 10.39$), AU ($\beta = 10.07$), AI ($\beta = 10.04$), and NCEC ($\beta = 12.09$) showed significantly higher prevalence rates than students in the rural school districts (ps < .05). In only one primary disability type, DD, the prevalence rate was significantly lower among students in the urban school districts than that in rural school districts after controlling for all other variables ($\beta = -861.78$, p < .001).

The researchers also made discrete comparisons between the four school years under study and students who received special educations services by primary disability type. These comparisons showed that the total prevalence of identification varied by primary disability type with a notable change in trends from one school year to the next. As shown in Figure 2, there was a notable change from the 2015-2016 school year to the 2018-2019 school year for each of the following primary disability types: LD, OHI, SI, AI, AU, and ED. In particular, the number of students whose primary disability type was OHI in urban school districts significantly decreased from 24,380 during the 2015-2016 school year to 1,398 during the 2018-2019 school year. In rural school districts, the number of students whose primary disability type was OHI changed from 8,453 during the 2015-2016 school year to 576 during the 2018-2019 school year in urban school districts was 24,381 students and 23,553 students in rural school districts. During the 2018-2019 school year, the number of students whose primary disability type was LD in urban school districts decreased to 11,648 students and 4,148 students in rural school districts.

Figure 2

Prevalence of Students in Urban and Rural Districts Identified for Special Education Services



Note. AI = auditory impairment; AU = autism; DB = deaf-blind; DD = developmental delay; ED = emotional disturbance; ID = intellectual disability; LD = learning disability; NA = not applicable; NCEC = non-categorical early childhood; OHI = other health impairment; OI = orthopedic impairment; SI = speech impairment; TBI = traumatic brain injury; VI = visual impairment.

There was also a prominent increase in the rate of identification among students whose primary disability types were SI, AU, and ED. During the 2015-2016 school year, there were 35,609 students whose primary disability type was SI in urban school districts and 12,729 students in rural school districts. During the 2018-2019 school year, the number of students whose primary disability type was SI more than doubled to 63,975 students in urban school districts and 25,580 students in rural school districts. A similar increase was also noted among students whose primary disability types were AU and ED: the number of students grew from 21,475 students (AU) and 9,738 students (ED) in urban school districts and 5,574 students (AU) and 3,823 students (ED) in rural school districts during the 2015-2016 school year to 39,182 students (AU) and 23,296 students (ED) in urban school districts and 15,296 students (AU) and 6,675 students (ED) in rural school districts during the 2018-2019 school year.

Discussion

The present study was a state-focused endeavor that sought to achieve two goals: (1) to identify trends in the number of students who received special education services in rural and urban school districts, and (2) to determine how the prevalence of primary disability types among students who received special education services differed by time and school district locale. By keeping the focus of the present study on a single state, the researchers were able to investigate statewide special education practices that are guided by federal and state laws, regulations, and rules (i.e., IDEA, TAC, TEC). Furthermore, this approach enabled the researchers to capture changes with statewide special education practices that occurred after the most recent amendment to the IDEA (U.S. DOE, n.d.) and the TEA's corrective actions associated with OSEP's findings of noncompliance with the IDEA (OSEP, 2018).

Regarding the time trend, there was a significant increase in the number of students receiving special education services from 2015 to 2019. In terms of comparisons between the number of students who received special education services in rural and urban school districts in the state of Texas from 2015 to 2019, the rate of identification by primary disability type appeared to follow the same trend as the findings that compared the total number of students who received special education services. Data analysis revealed that students in rural school districts received special education services at a lower average change in percentage when compared to students with the same primary disability type in urban school districts.

Concerning the prevalence of primary disability types among students who received special education services correlated to time (2015 to 2019) and school district locale, results indicated somewhat different results. In most cases, there was no significant interaction between students' primary disability type and time; however, there was a significant increase in the number of students who received special education services identified as having DD only over the last four years.

Conversely, when comparing the total prevalence of identification from the 2015-2016 school year to the 2018-2019 school year, there was a significant decrease in the number of students whose primary disability type was OHI and an increase in the number of students whose primary disability type was SI in both urban and rural school districts. This change in primary disability identification type and rate could be attributed to Texas's 86th legislative session and SB 139 (2019), which required school districts to improve upon the special education evaluation and referral process by better-informing parents of their educational right to a comprehensive full individual initial evaluation or reevaluation.

Overall, analyses from the present study have provided a snapshot of the impact that the issuance of OSEP's (2018) findings of noncompliance has had on statewide practices in Texas for identifying and serving students with disabilities in special education. Furthermore, the multilevel analyses have illustrated a measurable variance that the required corrective actions have had on special education practices in rural and urban school districts.

Rural School Districts Need for Resources

Findings from the present study showed that school district locale was a factor that directly related to changes in identification rates for special education services. The researchers found that following Texas's removal of the 8.5% enrollment target and subsequent disincentive for special education

services and the TEA's implementation of corrective actions, special education enrollment rates were lower in rural school districts than urban school districts. Although there was a measurable increase in the number of students who received special education services in rural school districts, the percentage at which the rate of identification grew was lower in rural school districts when compared to the rate of identification growth in urban school districts. This finding is of great concern because Texas serves such a large number of students in rural school districts and has a relatively low level of per-pupil funding for rural students (Showalter et al., 2019). Moreover, rural school districts grapple with many unique challenges that influence their implementation of special education practices and delivery of high-quality services (Barrio, 2017; Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Bouck, 2005; Brock & Schaefer, 2015; Kurth & Keegan, 2014; Pennington et al., 2009). With this in mind, rural school districts in Texas may benefit from localized assistance that provides guidance with identification processes for special education services, increased funding and resource allocation for special education programs, and access to resources that ensure placements in LREs and appropriate instructional adaptations. In alignment with Texas House Bill 3 (2019) and the state-level implementation of a special education advisory committee, it is strongly encouraged that school districts in rural locales develop and facilitate local special education advisory committees that can oversee and advise the use of funds and resources designated for special education services.

The Role of Education Policy to Meet FAPE Requirements

According to findings in the present study, the number of students who received special education services in Texas increased significantly over the past school years under study (i.e., 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019). As mentioned previously, this time span corresponds with several major events that have been instrumental in restoring educational equity for students with disabilities in Texas. With significant increases in the rate of identification among students with disabilities, the TEA must ensure that they provide school districts with ongoing support to maintain compliance with federal and state laws, regulations, and rules (i.e., IDEA, TAC, TEC). In order to provide a FAPE to all students with disabilities, it is essential that school districts receive adequate funding for special education resources and services. As an initial step toward addressing this funding need, Texas Senate Bill 500 (2019) provided supplemental spending to settle maintenance of support costs and future funding penalty failure prevention. However, the bill did not provide specific guidance to rural school districts. It is suggested that future legislation make allowances and provide allocation guidance directly related to the increased funding needs that exist among school districts in rural areas. Additionally, school districts should be given consistent access to informative and systematic professional development for all special education stakeholders (e.g., superintendents, directors, specialists, principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, school board members).

Conclusion

Identifying and assessing students for their eligibility in special education has been a relevant education issue throughout the United States. As evidenced in the present study, Texas experienced significant growth in the number of students who received special education services from 2015 to 2019. Although there was a decrease in the prevalence of many of the primary disability types, the number of students who received special education services in urban school districts has grown at a greater rate than in rural school districts. Considering the major events that promoted this tremendous growth, several questions come to mind: Are school districts conducting comprehensive and individualized evaluations to identify students with disabilities appropriately? Are school districts implementing special education services to guarantee FAPE in the LRE for all students with disabilities? Are school districts developing, reviewing, and revising an IEP for each eligible student according to their strengths and academic, developmental, and functional needs? Does the TEA provide school districts with sufficient support to ensure compliance with federal and state laws, regulations, and rules? As Texas continues to move forward in the journey to improve special education services, it is recommended that future researchers conduct periodic evaluations through the use of publicly accessible data that determine program effectiveness. It is of vital importance that all students with disabilities are identified and provided with special education services that best meet their individual needs.

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Exploring Students' Endorsement Enrollment in Texas Public High Schools

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Exploring Students' Endorsement Enrollment in Texas Public High Schools

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College and career readiness has recently received increased attention from educators, researchers, and policymakers. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education set a clear goal: "every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status" (2010, p. 3). There is no doubt that the implementation of college- and career-ready standards and the development of assessment tools has been a critical priority for American high schools during the past decade. The U.S. Department of Education's *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) called on all states to "develop and adopt standards in English language arts and mathematics that build toward college- and career- readiness by the time students graduate from high school" (p. 3).

To achieve these goals, many states have adopted new policies on college and career readiness that include rigorous academic content standards and advanced coursework options. While most states are currently implementing the Common Core State Standards, Alaska, Texas, and Virginia have developed their own college and career readiness standards. Twenty-five states, including Texas, require school districts to offer advanced coursework, such as advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB), and dual enrollment (Glancy et al., 2014).

In this study, we focus on the state of Texas, which has the second-largest youth population in the nation and represents about 10% of the 73 million youth under age 18 in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Texas has experienced a large increase in the youth population in the past decade. From 2006 to 2016, the Texas youth population grew by 13.2% (Kids Count Data Center, 2017). Between 2003 and 2013, public school enrollment in Texas increased by 19.0%, more than six times the average increase rate (3.1%) of the nation (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2017, p. ix).

To encourage early motivation for college and careers, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 5 and adopted a new Foundation High School Program (FHSP) in 2013. This new program, implemented in the academic year of 2014/15, allows students to enroll in one or more endorsements, or areas of study: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Business & Industry, Public Services, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary Studies. Similar programs are also found in other states, such as Colorado, Idaho, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and South Dakota, offering forms of advanced diplomas that include specific endorsement pathways (Education Commission of the States, 2019). Texas legislators expect that focused endorsement pathways will help students gain in-depth knowledge in specific subject areas and pursue academic and career interests beginning as soon as high school entry (TEA, 2019a). The FHSP program offers many benefits to students, since endorsements are also designed to contribute to the alignment of coursework and assessments between K-12 and postsecondary education (Callan et al., 2006).

To understand participation in the new FHSP program by *all* Texas high school students regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), English as a second language (ESL) status, or disability, a thorough exploration of students' school records is required. As one of the earliest efforts in the state and the nation to examine Texas FHSP with restricted-use, statewide longitudinal data¹, this study was purposefully designed to reveal the mapping of 9th graders' endorsement enrollment and examine specifically the student endorsement selection through an equity lens. Thus, the overarching question of this study was: For Texas 9th graders presented with the opportunity to enroll in any of the five endorsement pathways, what is chosen and by whom? Through the examination of student enrollments (i.e., potentially limited by endorsement offerings in their school district), we identified structural and societal barriers that limit access to the opportunities supposedly intended for all students in the endorsement policies.

Literature Review

College and Career Readiness

College readiness is frequently defined as students' preparation in specific content subjects, including math, reading, and writing (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Barnett et al., 2012; McClarty et al., 2017). Researchers have used standardized test scores and state accountability indicators for college readiness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Malin et al., 2017). Evidence of readiness has also traditionally been measured through students' curricular accomplishments in high schools, such as advanced course-taking and grade point averages (GPAs) (Long et al., 2012). Since best indicators of college and career readiness include low college remedial rates (Conley, 2012), state and postsecondary remedial and placement policies have been adopted across the nation to communicate CCR standards to schools and students, promote alignment between K-12 and higher education, clarify the role of institutions in providing remedial services, and encourage high school students' academic preparation (Glancy et al., 2014).

Research suggests that enrollment and achievement in courses leading to specific postsecondary pathways is essential to students' careers. Long et al. (2009) found that students' readiness for college-level math depends on the type of math courses taken during high school. Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) argued that high school course-taking patterns help students understand the broad range of fields of study offered by colleges and universities, and thus contribute to a smooth transition to postsecondary education. Adamuti-Trache and Andres' (2008) longitudinal research demonstrated strong relationships between course-taking patterns and participation/choice of postsecondary institutions, as well as a choice of college majors, particularly in science-related fields of study. There is some agreement that college-going students would benefit from early curricular preparation needed for acceptance into a postsecondary program and information to make appropriate course choices (Frenette, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2006). Course selection presumes that students understand their goals and engage in educational planning (Sweet & Anisef, 2005). Choices reflect students' curricular interests and previous achievement (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2014), and are guided by teachers,

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counselors, and parents who are more knowledgeable of the curricular pathways from high school to higher education (Schur, 2015). As noted by Conley (2007), "it is critical that students begin their journey toward college readiness before they arrive in high school" (p. 28).

Until recently, the lion's share of attention and research has been cast toward college-preparation over career readiness. However, the authorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 and its reauthorization in 2006 as the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act² have revived interest in vocational education such as that available through community colleges or apprenticeships (Brand et al., 2013; Rosenbaum, 2001) and inclusively considered any type of training Americans need to get more than a high school diploma. In particular, Symonds et al. (2011) call for a stronger focus on career-related programs to meet the needs of the "forgotten half" of the youth population who do not attend or complete college. Such programs have also been promoted by international organizations as an educational alternative to general education (e.g., Kuczera & Field, 2013). Research shows that readiness for the school-to-work transition has many facets, and "engaging in work-based learning and exploration" and receiving "active support from adults, coupled with an orientation to the adult world, is particularly facilitative in promoting readiness for an adaptive transition" (Phillips et al., 2002, p. 212). Clearly, career readiness should be assessed as an important asset for high school students, especially for those who do not intend to enroll in college.

A model of college and career readiness was put forward (Conley, 2010, 2012) and adopted by many states as reflected in high school curriculum and graduation standards (Callan et al., 2006). As defined by Conley (2012), "A student who is ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate or certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework" (p. 1). Conley's (2012) framework highlights readiness in four areas that prepare students for post-high-school transition, including key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, key learning skills and techniques, and, key transition knowledge and skills.

Legislative and Policy Steps toward High School Endorsements in Texas

Inspired by the work of Callan et al. (2010) who examined areas of public policy that build a state college readiness agenda, Blume and Zumeta (2014) reviewed recent state initiatives that emphasize college and career readiness standards by adopting school success plans, district performance metrics, and reform strategies. They stated that states should implement systemic policy change to ensure "adoption of readiness standards, aligning assessments with readiness standards, and a public school curriculum that reflects statewide standards" (Blume & Zumeta, 2014, p. 1075). Other studies (e.g., Chait & Venezia, 2009) have recommended additional policy initiatives such as dual credit enrollment, early college high schools, and career and technical education aligned with postsecondary preparation. A state by state examination of college readiness scores based on five policies (i.e., P-20 data availability, P-20 governance structure, dual enrollment, advanced course offerings, statewide assessment) placed Texas at the top of the list, with the highest aggregate college policy readiness score (Blume & Zumeta, 2014).

Since 2000, statewide plans to increase college attainment have been the focus of Texas educational agencies and Legislature, culminating with the 60X30TX strategic plan that proposes that 60% of young adults (25-34 years of age) will complete some postsecondary credentials by 2030 (Texas

² In 2006, the name Vocational Education was also replaced with Career and Technical Education [CTE].

Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2015). The implementation of House Bill 5 (HB 5) is intended to increase the college and career readiness among Texas high-school students and thus serve the state *60X30TX* strategic plan. For instance, HB 5 endorsements are mentioned among the strategies to link more seamlessly "guided pathways" at higher education level to K-12 (Cullinane Hege, 2019). In 2018, about 29% of the higher education institutions involved in collaborative activities with high schools mentioned the alignment of endorsements with fields of study curriculum in their Higher Education Assistance Plans (THECB, 2019).

Terry et al.'s (2015) report on HB 5 included some data on the history and political context that led to the implementation of endorsements. The report asserted that 2006's HB 1 started "a long and fitful history of education reform efforts" (p. 14) aimed at shaping education policies on college and career readiness rigor. To ensure college preparedness, the high school graduation plan included four credits each of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The following legislation focused on implementing a more rigorous curriculum by instituting testing initiatives that led to the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and end-of-course exams.

In 2009, the Legislature passed HB 3 focused on public school accountability and curriculum content, approving for the first time, that a student could satisfy some math and science credits through Career and Technical Education classes. This has been an important step in linking academic and technical content from secondary to postsecondary education, and building partnerships among K-12, workforce, and higher education institutions (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2015). Indeed, "for careers that require less than a four-year postsecondary degree, K-12 CTE programs provide important preparation for employment and workforce training" (p. 31), that can be continued through technical training at the postsecondary level. In alignment with these national trends, the HB 3 legislation in Texas gave assurance to parents and employers that high school graduates are either college- or workforce-ready. The HB 3 bill analysis (HRO, 2009) specified that "the bill would give students more flexibility in coursework to pursue their individual interests, while still ensuring a quality education. Having multiple pathways with equal rigor would be important to help each student reach his or her full potential" (p. 19). However, the differentiated curricular tracks created around CTE that require fewer and less stringent math and science courses in the upper high school years could be interpreted as an incremental move toward a tracking system that might become "a second class track into which minorities and other disadvantaged groups would be funneled" (Kuczera & Field, 2013, p. 21).

In 2013, following the budget cuts implemented during the 82nd Texas legislative session, the dissatisfaction of parents with the number of standardized tests (e.g., fifteen end-of-course exams) needed for graduation and the concerns of employers that Texas students were not ready to enter the workforce were important factors in the passage of HB 5 (Sikes, 2018; Terry et al., 2015). The bill created a framework for students to explore their own career interests in high school, motivate them to graduate, and thus improve college and career readiness for all. The choice of one or more of five endorsements (STEM, Business & Industry, Public Services, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary) became the mechanism intended to engage high school students in shaping their own career pathways. Texas was the first state to mandate the development and use of college and career readiness standards (Barger et al., 2011).

Texas High School Curriculum: A Social Equity Perspective

As recognized by Sikes (2018), the 2013 HB 5 passed by the 83rd Texas Legislature "impacted school curriculum standards and broadened support for career and technical education in an attempt to remedy social and economic issues through workforce preparation in schools" (p. 103). The five endorsements added to FHSP were expected to supplement students' academic preparation, thus better aligning the Texas secondary curriculum to Conley's (2012) framework.

The design and implementation of the FHSP program has not been without challenges. *Texas House Bill 5* indicates "a clear interest from state policymakers in enhancing and assessing the relationship between education and economic growth" (Sikes, 2018, p. 103). Through the program, high school students learn about workforce needs and occupational destinations, and also have the opportunity to choose high school endorsements expected to match their interests for specific academic and career pathways. This strategy resembles the public and private goals that Labaree (1997) identified in the history of American schooling: a social efficiency approach (i.e., training productive workers for a market society) and a social mobility approach (i.e., preparing individuals to compete for social positions along career pathways). Since social efficiency goals can generate a social reproductive vision "reinforcing the existing structure of social inequality by adapting newcomers to play needed rather than desired roles within this structure" (p.61), there is a major concern that social mobility goals are not met for all students.

In theory, equal access to educational opportunities, regardless of family background, contributes to individual social mobility (OECD, 2018). However, scholars who focus specifically on the role of school curriculum on social mobility, question if equity in education can be achieved when advantages associated with career pathways are accounted for by the school curriculum studied (Iannelli, 2016). Research has specifically examined school practices such as ability grouping or curriculum tracking that benefit predominantly middle- and upper-middle-class White students but raise social equity concerns for students of color and/or lower-income students (Archer et al., 2018; Labaree, 1997; Loveless, 2009; Lucas, 1999, 2001; Oakes, 1985). Curriculum tracking within-schools has been the practice of grouping students in separate classes based on some measures of achievement or perceived ability. Ability grouping is one method by which educators differentiate instruction (Ireson & Hallam, 2001) to create temporary classroom placements that better match students' needs (Steenberger-Hu et al., 2017). Ability grouping is the basis of AP courses (Hallinan, 2005), it is used to enhance student learning and engagement in mathematics classrooms (Zevenbergen, 2003), and is applied to improve the skills of English learners through content-based English-language-acquisition curriculum (Callahan, 2005). In all these situations, students are to some extent "evaluated and subsequently receive a differentiated curriculum" (LeTendre et al., 2003, p. 44).

A significant body of research on school stratification (e.g., Lucas, 2001) asserts that some forms of tracking that allocate students to different curricula and/or pathways have become part of student educational transitions with negative effects on social mobility. Lucas explains how social inequality is maintained when privileged students and their families seek out qualitative differences in education through a "stratified curriculum." For instance, TEA's (2020) reports on participation in AP or IB programs show systemic social class differences: in 2018-19, only one-fifth (19.7%) of economically disadvantaged students enrolled in AP or IB programs compared to nearly one-third (31.3%) of those not economically disadvantaged. Some also argue that the practice of setting or tracking represents "a powerful and pernicious tool within the social reproduction of unequal power relations" (Archer et al., 2018, p. 136). It could create a challenging environment for certain students (Preckel

et al., 2010) and be perceived as a stigma by students allocated to "lowest sets" who experience a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passerron, 1977/2000).

While the differentiated endorsement tracks shape Texas students' courses and curriculum and place them on different paths regarding college and career readiness standards, there is no evidence yet "what different endorsements signal to employers or colleges about students' readiness, academically and otherwise" (Sikes, 2018, p. 105). On a positive note, Texas FHSP consists of a single basic academic track that requires 22 credit hours, which can then be customized with one or more endorsements. The additional curricular requirements bring the total up to 26 credit hours (TEA, 2019a), which means only about 15% of the curriculum is differentiated and students have some flexibility along the endorsement pathways.

While in the long term, FHSP could respond to a public goal toward social efficiency and boost economic growth through adjustments in the secondary curriculum (Labaree, 1997), one should note that stratified individual choices of endorsements may create social inequity if there is variance in school endorsement availability (Terry et al., 2015) or parents and counselors are not prepared to inform student's choices (Schur, 2015). As concluded by Sikes (2018), "this variance constitutes the gray area of the theory of social mobility through education that Labaree (1997) explained: everyone may have equal opportunities, but realizing equal achievement is improbable" (p. 107). Therefore, our study is first guided by Conley's framework that highlights college and career readiness for posthigh-school transition through endorsement choices, in support of individual and common economic growth. Second, the study is informed by social justice theories (e.g., Archer et al., 2018; Labaree, 1997; Loveless, 2009; Lucas, 1999, 2001; Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, 1976) that denounce how forms of curriculum tracking may create unequal education and career opportunities if there are noticeable patterns of uneven participation along some academic tracks by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Method

Focusing on students presented with the opportunity to enroll in any of the five endorsement pathways, this study aimed to better understand the mapping of 9th graders' endorsement enrollment in the FHSP program. We addressed the following research questions:

- 1. What are the differences in endorsement enrollment reporting (e.g., participation in FHSP, missing data) by student sociodemographic and academic characteristics?
- 2. For students reporting participation in FHSP, what are the differences in endorsement choices by sociodemographic characteristics, special student populations and instructional programs, and pre-high-school academic achievement?

Data Source and Study Population

The data used in this study were drawn from a restricted, statewide longitudinal database that contains rich information of all students in the public education system in Texas. We purposefully chose to focus on 9th graders enrolled in Texas public high schools in 2015/16 which is the second cohort under the effect of the new FHSP program. Our rationale was that school districts may have needed time to develop and implement the program, and to properly collect and report the data³. We further narrowed our selection to those who had a unique student ID and complete endorsement records, which represent about 95% of the entire cohort. We used both enrollment and achievement data for these students and created a dataset that consists of student characteristics, pre-high-school preparedness, endorsement enrollment, and school district characteristics.

There was an important school-related restriction in selecting the study population for the endorsement analysis. Although FHSP is a Texas-wide graduation program, in its early stage of implementation, some school districts struggled and failed to offer students all five-endorsement options (Terry et al., 2015). As a result, not all students had equal access to all endorsement options, so enrollment may not reflect student's first choice in districts with limited endorsement offerings. To control for this access issue and to better understand what students would have chosen if all offerings were available, we selected only school districts in which all five endorsements were presented. While we recognize the importance to learn more about the characteristics of the districts that experienced challenges to implementing all five endorsements and of the students who had to make endorsement choices under these circumstances, we limit our study to examining endorsement enrollment of students who had access to all endorsements within their school districts. Although this approach constitutes a limitation by not considering institutional characteristics that may reduce student access, restricting the 9th graders to the student population enrolled in school districts that offered all five endorsements allows us to use enrollment in an endorsement as a proxy of choice and likely an indicator of 9th graders' future career interests, as intended by the HB 5 legislation (TEA, 2019a).

In total, 365,041 students, who represented 85.2% of the 2015/16 cohort, enrolled in the selected school districts. As shown in the Appendix, even in districts that offered a complete palette of endorsements, about 5% of student records have missing endorsement data. Although these records could not be included in the analysis of endorsement choices, we briefly examined the profiles of students with missing data. The study population with available endorsement data was further reduced to 346,742, which represented about 81% of the cohort of 9th graders enrolled in Texas public schools in 2015/16. The Appendix presents more details on missing endorsement data and student characteristics comparing the selected research study population and the initial 2015/16 cohort. Although differences are not notable, the study population has a slight academic and socio-demographic advantage.

Variables and Measurements

Endorsement enrollments are the key variables in the study. As students can enroll in more than one endorsement, we used five dichotomous variables describing enrollment in each of the five areas (Yes=1; No=0 indicates no endorsement choice, even if a student will graduate under FHSP).

The definition of student characteristics follows the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) standard reporting (e.g., TEA, 2016). Independent variables included sociodemographic variables (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, economically disadvantaged⁴, immigrant), indicators of

³ Based on our initial data examination, the endorsement information was more complete for the second cohort than for the first cohort (fewer missing cases). Although it is likely that some students joined the program later during high school, our interest for this paper was about the immediate response of school districts and students.

⁴ Economically disadvantaged = Students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches for the best six months during the preceding federal fiscal year

special student populations and instructional programs (i.e., special education, gifted, at-risk⁵, limited English proficiency [LEP], English as a second language [ESL], and CTE), and pre-high-school achievement. We used dichotomous variables for gender, immigrant status, economically disadvantaged, special education, gifted and at-risk status. Students' race/ethnicity was coded into six groups: Asian, African American, Hispanic, Indigenous People (i.e., American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian), Multiracial, and White. To better indicate the needs and actual support received by students with LEP, we combined LEP and ESL into a single variable with three categories: a) neither need nor support for English improvement (LEP=0, ESL=0); b) LEPs with no ESL support (LEP=1, ESL=0); c) LEPs who received ESL support (LEP=1, ESL=1). As expected, non-LEP students were not enrolled in ESL programs. Finally, CTE included three categories: a) no CTE enrollment; b) enrollment in some CTE courses; c) coherent sequence of CTE courses.

Variables concerning pre-high-school academic preparedness were primarily measured by student performance in standardized grade 8 tests. The *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness* (*STAAR*) program, which was implemented in Spring 2012, offers annual assessments in various subjects for students in different grades. In grade 8, students are required to take STAAR tests in reading, social studies, mathematics, and science. In high school, students take the end-of-course (EOC) assessments for English I, English II, Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History. However, students who are on accelerated academic paths may take some of these tests earlier. For instance, students can take grade 8 STAAR tests in grade 7 or take Algebra I in grade 8. To account for these pathways, during our data screening and preparation, we explored more than one year of data to create an achievement file for the study population. For instance, we found approximately 6% of the students who took their grade 8 STAAR tests in all subjects in grade 7. In addition, we found that about 9% of the students took the STAAR EOC Algebra I exam (normally taken in grade 9), without having to take the grade 8 STAAR math test.

All STAAR and EOC tests were graded on three levels of academic performance⁶: Level I (unsatisfactory, recommended), Level II (satisfactory, recommended), and Level III (advanced), which is the coding we used for Reading, Social Studies and Science. However, we created a new variable Math/Algebra that combined grade 8 Math and Algebra I levels. Since Algebra I has a higher level of difficulty, and some students took both math and algebra exams, we proposed five achievement levels for the new variable. That is, the first three levels were the same as Levels I, II, and III in 8th grade Math, unless students took Algebra I and obtained a satisfactory or advanced performance, coded Level IV and Level V, respectively.

Analytical Procedure

Since the study uses the entire population of Texas 9th graders who had the opportunity to enroll in any of the five endorsements in their school districts, we are not bound to inferential statistics that rely on a sample to infer to a population. Rather, the main objective of the study is to provide

⁵ At-risk = Students who meet the criteria for one or more of the 13 indicators established by the PEIMS data standards (TEC 29.081(d)).

⁶ We used the 'Recommended Satisfactory Level' as a measure of performance because it indicates whether a student met grade level expectations, and it matches the 'Meets Grade Level' indicator used since 2016/17. Since the 2015/16 STAAR state reports are based on 'Phase-in Satisfactory Levels' of performance with cut-off scores adjusted yearly, we caution the reader that our performance level results are not comparable with state reports data. Also, since 'Recommended satisfactory levels' have higher cut-off scores, we believe they are more relevant to college and career readiness standards.

descriptive statistics of the endorsement enrollments mapping by sociodemographic characteristics, indicators of special student populations and instructional programs, and pre-high-school academic achievement. Analyses were conducted in SPSS 26.

Results

First, the study explored endorsement enrollment reporting to help elucidate policy implementation issues of the new FHSP program. Second, the mapping of endorsement choices by student characteristics helps to discuss student choices and concerns of equity and inclusion.

Endorsement Enrollment Reporting: Student Profiles

The descriptive statistics indicate that, among the 9th graders enrolled in school districts that offered all five endorsements, approximately 5.0% (n = 18,299) had missing endorsement information⁷, 3.2% (n = 11,700) chose no endorsement in grade 9 even if they are expected to graduate under the FHSP program⁸, and 91.8% (n = 335,042) selected at least one endorsement. Thus, we first examined if any differences exist among these three categories of students (see Table 1). Since all students were enrolled in school districts that offered all five endorsements, we hypothesize that differences in endorsement enrollments, if any, may be related to systemic inequities inherent to the system as suggested by social justice theorists (e.g., Archer et al., 2018; Labaree, 1997; Loveless, 2009; Lucas, 1999, 2001) rather than operational reporting issues within districts. As a matter of fact, students with no endorsement are deprived of educational opportunities created through the FHSP program.

Table 1 shows clear disparities in student distributions among the three groups in the FHSP cohort: those with missing endorsement data, no endorsement selected in Grade 9, and at least one endorsement. The missing data and no endorsement groups have higher percentages of African American and Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, LEP/ESL, special education, and at-risk students. These groups also had higher percentages of students with incomplete grade 8 academic records, as reflected in their higher percentages of cases with missing information on STAAR exams. About one-third and one-quarter of students with missing data or no endorsement, respectively, had missing grade 8 STAAR information, which could be the result of higher student mobility during the academic year that hinders data collection and reporting. This suggests an accumulation of instructional disadvantage over time, which could reduce the likelihood of academic progress and success of these students. However, these two groups who demonstrated signs of academic challenges, did not appear to take advantage of the CTE program that supports vocational education (Rosenbaum, 2001; Symonds et al., 2011). For instance, only 13% of students with no endorsement were enrolled in a coherent CTE sequence.

⁷ Missing endorsement data may correspond to students who do not graduate under FHSP, if they started high school before 2014/15 (Texas Education Agency, 2019b) or they received special education or related services.

⁸ No endorsement choice may indicate delayed enrollment or being approved for FHSP graduation without earning an endorsement (TAC §74.11) if parents signed endorsement opt-out agreements.

Table 1

Endorsement Enrollment Reporting by Student Characteristics (colum	in %])

		FHSP study population ($n=346,742$)		
	Missing en- dorsement (<i>n</i> =18,299)	No endorsement (<i>n</i> =11,700)	At least one en- dorsement (<i>n</i> =335,042)	
Gender				
Female	41.9	45.5	48.3	
Male	59.1	54.5	51.7	
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	1.1	4.4	4.2	
African American	19.6	20.5	12.8	
Hispanic	62.4	56.4	52.4	
Indigenous	0.6	1.0	0.5	
Multiracial	1.3	1.4	2.1	
White	15.0	16.3	28.2	
Economically Disadvantaged	71.9	68.9	55.2	
Immigrants	3.6	5.1	2.2	
LEP/ESL Status				
No LEP/No ESL	82.1	77.0	86.8	
LEP/No ESL	3.1	4.2	3.6	
LEP/ESL	14.8	18.7	9.6	
Special Education	16.0	17.1	8.5	
Gifted	4.1	5.6	9.6	
At-risk	77.0	66.5	52.8	
CTE				
No CTE	41.6	44.0	35.7	
Some CTE	29.3	43.4	32.1	
Coherent CTE	29.1	12.6	32.2	
Reading				
Level I	51.7	53.4	54.3	
Level II	9.3	12.1	18.2	
Level III	7.1	10.1	19.7	
Missing	32.0	24.2	7.8	
Social Studies				
Level I	60.6	63.7	69.9	
Level II	4.5	6.9	12.4	
Level III	2.8	5.0	10.1	
Missing	32.1	24.4	7.6	
Science				

Adamuti-Trache, Zhang, & Hagedorn

56.1	57.9	59.9
7.3	10.4	18.0
4.4	7.5	14.6
32.1	24.3	7.6
52.0	51.4	51.3
8.6	10.8	17.4
1.2	2.1	2.7
2.0	3.6	6.3
3.1	5.8	12.7
33.2	26.3	9.5
	56.1 7.3 4.4 32.1 52.0 8.6 1.2 2.0 3.1 33.2	$\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$

This brief analysis reveals that even in school districts that were able to offer all five endorsements as part of the new FHSP graduation program, not all students benefited of the endorsement initiative designed to increase their college and career readiness, and guide their future career paths. The findings suggest that differences in endorsement enrollment reporting reflect social stratifications that exacerbate inequities in access to educational opportunity. Findings also support the notion that some students accumulate educational disadvantages over time which becomes an impediment to their academic progress and success.

Student Endorsement Choices

The study population consists of 346,742 students who participate in FHSP (i.e., have endorsement data) and are enrolled in school districts in which all five endorsements were offered. In this context, we argue that enrollments in specific endorsements represent students' (or parents') choices⁹ likely guided by academic counselors, and could indicate their intentions for future career paths. Most of the students in the study population (84.8%) enrolled in one endorsement, while 9.3%, 2.1%, 0.4% and 0.1% enrolled in two, three, four and five endorsements, respectively. A brief examination of the student population enrolled in more than one endorsement shows an overrepresentation of female students, gifted students, those who are not economically disadvantaged or at-risk, enrollees in coherent CTE programs, students with no LEP problems, and higher achievers in Grade 8. For these groups, data show high percentages enrolled in 3 or 4 endorsements, which suggests students who have some academic advantage are taking a broad range of courses to fulfill several endorsement requirements and to keep options open for both college and career pathways. A small proportion of the 9th graders (3.4%) did not enroll in any endorsement by grade 9 (as shown in the previous section).

Overall, the largest group of 9th graders enrolled in Multidisciplinary Studies (28.9%), followed by Business & Industry (26.7%), Public Services (23.8%), STEM (16.9%), and Arts & Humanities (15.3%). We present the endorsement choices within each student group identified by

⁹ We acknowledge that endorsement enrollments are affected by many student, family, school factors including student academic history that may constrain the choice-making process for some groups of students. Therefore, terms like *choice* or *interest* should be interpreted with caution particularly when adopting a social justice lens that is questioning curricular tracking. However, this terminology that may empower students is used in HB 5 legislation and other documents available to students and parents (TEA, 2019a), so we used it cautiously in this study

sociodemographic characteristics (Table 2), membership of special student populations and instructional programs (Table 3), and pre high-school achievement levels (Table 4).

Student Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 2 shows the percentages of students enrolled in each endorsement by various student characteristics; the following section highlights the main findings for each characteristic. For instance, we may ask: what percentage of female students in the study population enrolled in each of the five endorsements? Are these percentages different for male students?

Table 2

	п	STEM	Business & Indus- try	Public Services	Arts & Humani- ties	Multidisci- plinary
Gender						
Female	167,136	12.5	19.2	32.9	19.6	28.8
Male	179,606	20.9	33.7	15.4	11.3	29.0
Race/Ethnicity						
Asian	14,708	37.1	13.4	19.1	13.7	35.3
African American	45,366	12.4	28.2	23.2	13.7	27.6
Hispanic	182,018	14.7	28.3	27.0	15.4	24.9
Indigenous	1,925	16.0	27.7	22.1	13.8	25.8
Multiracial	6,243	18.6	22.8	19.9	17.2	34.3
White	96,482	19.9	25.2	19.1	16.0	35.8
Economic Disadvantage						
Yes	192,935	13.4	29.4	26.9	14.9	24.7
No	153,807	21.2	23.3	20.0	15.8	34.2
Immigrant Status	,					
Immigrants	7,841	11.3	24.1	18.4	13.8	34.1
Non-immigrants	338.901	17.0	26.8	24.0	15.3	28.8

Endorsement Choices by Student Characteristics (row %) (n=346,742)

Note. The sum of row percentages is above 100% because students may take more than one endorsement.

Gender. Career path intentions and, by extension, endorsement choices are marked by gender differences. Compared to 20.9% of males in the study, only 12.5% of females chose the STEM endorsement. Further, while male students prefer Business & Industry (33.7%), female students prefer Public Services (32.9%). Compared to male students (11.3%), females are also showing a higher preference for Arts & Humanities (19.6%). There are no gender differences in the choice of a Multi-disciplinary endorsement.

Race/ethnicity. Racial/ethnic differences were also revealed in endorsement enrollments. For instance, STEM is the choice of 37.1% of Asians in contrast to only 12.4% of African American and

14.7% of Hispanic students. Meanwhile, only 13.4% of Asians are enrolled in Business & Industry compared to much higher proportions among all other racial groups. Enrollment in Business & Industry is particularly high among African American (28.2%), Hispanic (28.3%) and Indigenous (27.7%) students, the three racial groups also showing the largest enrollment percentages in Public Services. There is a more balanced participation in Arts & Humanities, racial percentages varying slightly around the average 15.3% for the study population. However, there is more variability in the racial distributions for the Multidisciplinary endorsement, with percentages as low as 24.9% for Hispanics and as high as 35.8% for White students. For many students, the Multidisciplinary endorsement is added to other endorsement choices.

Economic (Dis)Advantage. Students on free lunch are identified as economically disadvantaged, and they represent the majority of the study population. Students who were identified as economically disadvantaged are less likely than those who were not to enroll to enroll in STEM (13.4% versus 21.2%) and more likely to choose Business & Industry (29.4% versus 23.3%) or Public Services (26.9% versus 20.0%). They are also less likely to choose a Multidisciplinary endorsement (24.7% versus 34.2%).

Immigrants. The immigrant group is very small (2.3% of the study population), but compared to non-immigrants, it shows distinctive endorsement choices for STEM (11.3% versus 17.0%), Public Services (18.4% versus 24.0%), and Multidisciplinary (34.1% versus 28.8%). More than one-third of immigrants chose the Multidisciplinary endorsement, similar to groups like White, Multiracial, and Asian students.

Special Student Populations and Instructional Programs

Table 3 shows the percentages of students enrolled in each endorsement by a special student population or instructional program. For instance, we may ask: what percentage of at-risk students in the study population enrolled in each of the five endorsements? Are these percentages different for students who have not been identified as being at-risk?

Table 3

	п	STEM	Business & Indus- try	Public Services	Arts & Humanities	Multidisci- plinary
LEP/ESL Status						
No LEP/No ESL	299,773	17.6	26.1	23.6	15.6	29.6
LEP/No ESL	12,585	15.6	29.6	27.5	14.5	22.3
LEP/ESL	34,384	10.6	30.7	24.8	13.2	25.0
Special Education						
Yes	30,465	7.3	29.8	19.9	13.0	32.0
No	316,277	17.8	26.4	24,2	15.5	28.6
Gifted						
Yes	32,672	33.8	18.0	18.9	18.3	32.6
No	314,070	15.1	27.6	24.3	15.0	28.5
At-risk						

Endorsement Choices by Special Population and Instructional Programs (row %) (n=346,742)

Yes	184,646 10	.9 31.0	25.5	14.1	26.1
No	162,096 23	.7 21.8	21.9	16.7	32.1
CTE					
No CTE	124,853 17	.0 16.4	18.2	22.3	36.7
Some CTE	112,678 16	.6 27.2	23.2	12.6	27.4
Coherent CTE	109,211 16	.9 37.9	31.0	10.1	21.5

Note. Sum of row percentages are above 100% because students may take more than one endorsement.

LEP/ESL Indicator. The three groups identified by Limited English Proficiency status and/or using ESL services are quite different with respect to endorsement choices. The lowest STEM participation is found among the LEP/ESL students (10.6%), consistent with the result obtained for immigrants, most likely LEP/ESL students (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2018). This group shows, however, the highest participation in Business & Industry (30.7%) followed by Multidisciplinary (25.0%) and Public Services (24.8%). In contrast, the NoLEP/NoESL group has higher enrollment in STEM (17.6%), Arts & Humanities (15.6%), and Multidisciplinary (29.6%).

Special Education. Students receiving special education services represent about 8.8% of the study population. This group shows the lowest participation in STEM (7.3%) and has higher participation in Multidisciplinary (32.0%) and Business & Industry (29.8%) endorsements.

Gifted. Meanwhile, gifted students represent about 9.4% of the study population. They are overrepresented in STEM (33.8%), Multidisciplinary (32.6%), and Arts & Humanities (18.3%), and underrepresented in Business & Industry and Public Services endorsements.

At-risk. The at-risk group represents over 50% of the study population with distinctively different endorsement profiles than students not being at-risk. Their participation in STEM is as low as 10.9%, followed by Arts & Humanities (14.1%), Public Services (25.5%), and Multidisciplinary (26.1%). At-risk students show the highest participation (31.0%) in Business & Industry.

CTE. Career and Technical Education is a key strategy in achieving college and career readiness goals. In Texas, the program provides a coherent CTE sequence of courses, or students can take some CTE courses at their choice or none. Table 3 clearly shows the Coherent CTE sequences, which are the most structured, are designed to serve Business & Industry (37.9%) and Public Services (31.0%), which suggests these two endorsements are more oriented toward applied education. Students enrolled in Coherent CTE sequences may also choose the Multidisciplinary (21.5%) and STEM endorsements (16.9%). A similar but less pronounced enrollment pattern is observed among students taking some CTE courses who chose Business & Industry (27.2%), Multidisciplinary (27.4%), as well as Public Services (23.2%) and STEM (16.6%) endorsements. On the contrary, students who did not take any CTE courses, have highest participation in the Multidisciplinary endorsement (36.7%), being followed by Arts & Humanities (22.3%), Public Services (18.2%), and STEM (17.0%). The 'No-CTE' group has lowest participation in Business & Industry (16.4%).

Pre-High-School Academic Performance

Table 4 shows the percentages of students enrolled in each endorsement by academic performance levels in the four Grade 8 STAAR subjects. For instance, we may ask: what percentage of students performing at the highest Level III in Grade 8 Reading enrolled in each of the five endorsements in Grade 9? Are these percentages different for students with other performance levels in reading?

Table 4

	11	STEM	Business & Indus- try	Public Services	Arts & Hu- manities	Multidis- ciplinary
Reading ^a						
Level I	188,119	11.8	31.4	26.2	14.4	25.6
Level II	62,379	20.0	25.0	23.9	16.4	29.3
Level III	67,143	30.1	18.1	20.3	18.1	33.5
Missing	29,101	12.2	20.1	16.9	12.1	38.9
Social Studies ^a						
Level I	241,664	12.8	29.7	26.3	15.1	26.4
Level II	42,339	26.7	22.3	20.5	17.0	31.2
Level III	34,512	37.6	16.5	16.1	17.2	35.4
Missing	28,227	11.7	20.1	16.7	12.1	38.8
Science ^a						
Level I	207,401	11.1	30.5	26.7	15.0	26.4
Level II	61,417	22.7	24.4	22.7	16.8	29.5
Level III	49,755	36.6	17.5	17.2	16.6	32.8
Missing	28,169	11.8	20.0	16.8	12.2	38.7
Math/Algebra ^b						
Level I	177,873	9.7	31.6	26.3	14.6	26.0
Level II	59,467	16.5	26.4	24.7	16.2	28.3
Level III	9,455	27.9	18.9	18.2	14.8	33.2
Level IV	21,666	28.0	21.7	23.0	17.5	30.6
Level V	43,279	39.7	15.7	18.4	16.7	33.9
Missing	35.002	15.6	21.2	18.6	14.2	36.6

Endorsement Choices by Grade 8 STAAR Performance Levels ^a (row %) (n=346,742)

 $\mathit{Note}.$ Sum of row percentages are above 100% because students may take more than one endorsement.

^a Reading, Social Studies, and Science, Level I - Unsatisfactory (Recommended); Level II - Satisfactory (Recommended); Level III - Advanced

^b Math/algebra, Level I - Unsatisfactory (Recommended) Math; Level II - Satisfactory (Recommended) Math; Level III- Advanced Level Math; Level IV- Satisfactory (Recommended) Algebra I; Level V- Advanced Algebra I.

Reading. When comparing endorsement enrollment percentages by the three levels of Reading performance, noticeable gradients for STEM, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary show that higher reading performance is associated with higher participation in these three endorsements. Thus, 30.1%, 18.1%, and 33.5% of the most proficient readers enroll in STEM, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary, respectively. On the contrary, Table 4 shows that for Business & Industry and Public Services, higher reading performance is associated with lower participation in these two endorsements. Only 18.1% and 20.3% of the most proficient readers enrolled in Business & Industry and Public Services, respectively. Even more, 31.4% and 26.2% of the poorest readers enrolled in these two endorsements, which suggests students who experience academic difficulties are choosing these endorsements. Students with missing information in Grade 8 STAAR Reading, who are likely to have fallen off track, are significantly overrepresented in the general Multidisciplinary endorsement.

Social Studies. A similar pattern of association between endorsement enrollment and performance is observed for Social Studies. For STEM, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary endorsements, higher performance in Social Studies is associated with higher participation in these three endorsements. Thus, 37.6%, 17.2%, and 35.4% of the highest achievers enroll in STEM, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary, respectively. On the contrary, Table 4 shows that for Business & Industry and Public Services, higher performance in Social Studies is associated with lower participation. Only 16.5% and 16.1% of the highest achievers enrolled in Business & Industry and Public Services, respectively, while 29.7% and 26.3% of the poor achievers enrolled in these two endorsements. Similar to the trend for pre-high school reading levels, students with missing information in Grade 8 Social Studies overrepresented in the Multidisciplinary endorsement.

Science. The achievement-endorsement association patterns continue for Grade 8 Science. High science performance is associated with increased participation in STEM, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary endorsements. Thus, 36.6%, 16.6%, and 32.8% of the highest achievers in science enrolled in STEM, Arts & Humanities, and Multidisciplinary, respectively. On the contrary, Table 4 shows that for Business & Industry and Public Services, higher performance is associated with lower participation, and only 17.5% and 17.2% of the high achievers enrolled in Business & Industry and Public Services, respectively. Meanwhile, these endorsements enrolled 30.5% and 26.7% of students who achieved Level I in science. In addition, 38.7% of students with missing information in Grade 8 STAAR Science are enrolled in the Multidisciplinary endorsement.

Math/Algebra. The achievement-endorsement association patterns previously observed are now very consistent only for the STEM enrollment, with the percentages increasing from 9.7% at Level I to 39.7% at Level V of Math/Algebra achievement. A moderate increase in participation, with slight fluctuations, is also noticeable for the Arts & Humanities and Multidisciplinary endorsements, higher performance being associated with higher participation in these endorsements. On the contrary, Table 4 shows that for Business & Industry and Public Services, higher performance is associated with lower participation. The percentage of Business & Industry enrollment decreased from 31.6% to 15.7% from Level I to Level V Math/Algebra achievement. Similarly, the percentage of Public Services enrollment decreased from 26.3% to 18.4% between Level I to Level V Math/Algebra achievement. Finally, 36.6% of students with missing information in Math/Algebra performance chose the Multidisciplinary endorsement. However, 15.6% of the 'missing data' group enrolled in STEM – a higher enrollment percentage than those from Math/Algebra Level I, which might suggest that missing STAAR information is not always related to low performance.

Discussion

Focusing on the 9th graders in Texas public secondary education, this paper contributes to research on college and career readiness, an essential step toward workforce development, by examining enrollment in the new endorsement program that is anticipated to shape student educational pathways through high school and beyond. As mentioned in the Method section, by restricting the 9th graders cohort to the student population enrolled in school districts that offered all five endorsements in 2015/16, we used endorsement enrollments as a proxy for student choice and intention to explore future career paths. Exploration of careers and preparedness to make future decisions are major goals of the endorsement program, so students should have equal access to this opportunity.

As emphasized by Blume and Zumeta (2014), the attainment of CCR goals requires systemic statewide policy changes in the public school curriculum, so it is commendable that Texas FHSP introduced endorsements to guide students' transition to college and careers. Among other factors, the study investigated the extent to which endorsement choices were related to pre-high-school achievement (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2014; Kao & Thompson, 2003) and participation in CTE (Conley & McGaughi, 2012; Lynch, 2000), key elements in shaping students' academic and career pathways. The study also focused on understanding whether *all* sociodemographic groups and special student populations are equally represented across endorsement pathways as to identify signs of educational stratification (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Labaree, 1997; Lucas, 1999, 2001). Unfortunately, results based on the second year of program implementation reveal an endorsement enrollment mapping dominated by sociodemographic and academic differences that raise equity and inclusion concerns.

Our findings show a clear divide in endorsement choices by academic achievement in Grade 8. The high achievers (i.e., those who received a Level II or higher) in all four subjects (i.e., reading, social studies, science, and math/algebra) are more likely to enroll in STEM; high achievers in reading and social studies also tend to choose Arts & Humanities. However, low achievement in Grade 8 is consistently associated with the more applied-oriented endorsements such as Business & Industry and Public Services, which suggests that the college-career divide may occur during middle school or earlier, and a key difference is academic preparedness (Barnes et al., 2010; Conley & McGaughi, 2012). Similarly, students taking CTE courses are less likely to enroll in Arts & Humanities and Multidisciplinary Studies, and more likely to choose STEM, Business & Industry, and Public Services, areas in which CTE offerings are available.

The study identified the students enrolled in academic-oriented endorsements (e.g., STEM and Arts & Humanities) that reflect a preference toward academic curriculum and college education destinations (Barnes et al., 2010; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Conley, 2007). For instance, males, Asian, high SES, and gifted students are likely to choose the STEM endorsement; female, gifted, and students with no CTE preparation are likely to choose Arts & Humanities. Gender differences in STEM versus Arts endorsements are aligned with course-taking patterns and career interests documented in the literature (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2014; Sadler et al., 2012).

Meanwhile, the rise of CTE courses and integration with some Texas endorsements (i.e., Business & Industry, Public Services and to some extent STEM) reflect the success of the 2006 Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act that revitalized vocational education by allocating federal funding for the improvement of both secondary and postsecondary CTE programs across the nation. This response addresses Abrassart and Wolter's (2020) concern that the "image deficit of vocational training" held by students and parents is associated with perceived lower educational requirements

(e.g., average years of education); the authors suggest the expansion of the career programs at the postsecondary level could improve the perceived social prestige of the related occupations. The College and Career Readiness framework (Conley, 2010, 2012) takes an integrative approach to academic and applied (vocational) preparation during high school, without stigmatizing the latter. STEM endorsement curriculum (TEA, 2019a) includes CTE courses, and according to our findings, 16.9% of STEM students took Coherent CTE sequences and 16.6% took some CTE courses. The STEM endorsement is probably the best example of integrating academic and applied preparation during high school.

However, study findings also show that enrollment in Business & Industry is more likely to be the choice of at-risk, economically disadvantaged, and ESL students, while female, Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students tend to enroll in Public Services. Sociodemographic groups enrolled in the applied-oriented endorsements are most often identified with students underrepresented in 4-year universities. However, their early orientation toward vocational education should not be stigmatized as a demeaning option (Meer, 2005). As discussed by Lynch (2000), CTE in the 21st century high schools should focus on career planning that prepares graduates for both workplace and continuing postsecondary education, thus rejecting the elitist view that "any formal context of education for work is not appropriate for students aspiring to a four-year college or university" (Lynch, 2000, p. 157).

Equity in student counseling and guidance to endorsement pathways matching student interests and potential is important, particularly for minority and low-income students (Cumpton & Giani, 2014; Terry et al., 2015). Successful implementation of the new FHSP requires well-trained counselors who can offer support to traditionally disadvantaged students by adopting strength-based counseling approaches that focus on positive youth development (e.g., Galassi & Akos, 2007). Counselors should also ensure that all students receive unbiased advice as required by the American School Counselor Association ethical standards (ASCA, 2018).

Since endorsements reflect subject-specific preparation sequences that align with a college major or career pathway and ostensibly offer greater student curriculum choice and flexibility, the opportunity to develop one's career interest and skills through early planning and engagement align to principles of social and economic efficiency (Labaree, 1997). The new FHSP program is expected to impact students' long-term achievement and success, as previous research found evidence that early educational planning is positively associated with educational attainment (Callan et al., 2006; Clausen, 1991; Conley, 2010, 2012). Unfortunately, our study showed that not all students participated in the endorsement program at the beginning of their high school education, while some students fall off the track during their transition to high school¹⁰. These students were more likely to be minority students, LEP/ESL students, special education and at-risk students, and economically disadvantaged for whom the opportunity gaps are systemically widening (Reardon, 2011). Thus, Sikes (2018) asserts that the endorsement plan is not intended for all students to be "college and career ready," but "only one or the other to best- or most 'efficiently'-suit the anticipated needs of the Texas economy" (p. 107). As a result, students who cannot take advantage of available instructional opportunities for a variety of reasons are limiting their chance to achieve social mobility through education (Iannelli, 2016).

¹⁰ Students who did not claim an endorsement at 9th grade may still graduate with an endorsement, but will likely experience delays. Even if missing information could be related to data reporting issues, the systemic patterns of cumulative educational disadvantage for some (same) groups should raise social equity concerns.

Research focused on educational equity calls for state accountability policies to improve systems and eliminate inequities in educational opportunities "perpetuated through differential access to a highquality curriculum that focuses on critical thinking skills and prepares students for college and careers" (Learning Policy Institute, 2017, p. 1). This request aligns with the federal government's emphasis on raising standards for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Although the endorsement program appears to create an instructional environment that promotes college and career readiness goals in Texas high schools, we question whether the presence of social stratification in the endorsement pathways (i.e., both participation and choice) resembles a form of setting/tracking and should raise equity and inclusion concerns (Labaree, 1997; Lucas, 1999, 2001; Sikes, 2018). The mapping of 9th graders' endorsement enrollment in the FHSP program indicates that the divide between academic-oriented and applied endorsements is marked by differences in student sociodemographic and academic characteristics which is a sign of social stratification that reproduces educational inequality. Therefore, our study identifies disparities in enrollments that limit access to the opportunities inherent in the endorsement policies and may have long term effects on social mobility.

By highlighting the presence of social stratification in endorsement enrollments at the beginning of high school, we only ask whether some form of college and career readiness planning process should start much earlier or more resources should be devoted to its implementation. Our study shows that about 20% of Texas 9th graders may have had limited endorsement choices, so it supports findings of Terry et al.'s (2015) report that identified a complexity of ongoing issues affecting the implementation of FHSP, such as lack of state guidance, lack of counselors, struggle to recruit CTE teachers and industry partners, staffing shortage for popular endorsements, challenge with curriculum sequencing, etc. Although most school districts show satisfaction with the intent of House Bill 5 policy and relevance for increasing students' college and career readiness, school administrators and policymakers should not forget the students who are missing this educational opportunity.

Conclusion

The study findings are valuable to educators and administrators in schools and postsecondary institutions to understand issues of course and assessment alignments in K-16 education, and could support evidence-based decisions on state policy and funding priorities. It could help advisors develop detailed guidelines on endorsement choices for parents and students, and better inform state legislators and other policymakers on developing policies and programs that ensure high school students' preparedness for postsecondary education and the workforce.

The results of this study provide policymakers and school administrators with baseline information on the implementation of FHSP in the State of Texas. However, we acknowledge that only the examination of long-term effects of endorsement choices (e.g., postsecondary participation, choice of field of study or vocational careers, labor market outcomes) through future analysis of Texas 9th graders' pathways could shed light on potential social stratification effects maintained by the endorsement program. Only a longitudinal study on students' actual educational and career pathways could answer the question of whether some endorsements give long-term 'advantage' to students (i.e., depending on the social and economic contexts, and how advantage is measured). This paper is the first in a series of research studies following a cohort of Texas 9th graders as they progress to enter into postsecondary education and the workforce.

In addition, we acknowledge that school- and district-level data should be explicitly included to fully understand the cross-level interactions among student-, school-, and district-level variables. This will help identify any institutional barriers that may add to the systemic academic and social disadvantage experienced by some groups of students while navigating the new FHSP graduation program.

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Appendix

Table A1

Endorsement Data – The 2015/16 Cohort vs. Five-Endorsement-District Population

	1	
Population	Missing Endorsement	FHSP data
	data	
2015/16 Cohort (N=428,667)	n=22,637 (5.3%)	<i>n</i> =406,030 (94.7%)
Five-endorsement-district population ($n=365,041$)	n=18,229 (5.0%)	n=346,072 (95.0%)

Note: The FHSP population of n=346,072 students with reported endorsement data is selected from school districts offering all 5 endorsements. Table A1 shows a similar percentage of missing endorsement cases in the 2015/16 cohort and the Five-endorsement-district population.

Table A2

FHSP FHSP Cohort Cohort N=428,667 n=346,072 N=428,667 n=346,072 48.2 No-CTE 35.2 36.0 Female 47.9 52.1 32.2 Male 51.8 Some CTE 32.5 Asian 3.8 4.2 Coherent CTE seq 32.6 31.5 African American 13.0 13.1 Reading-Level I 54.2 54.3 52.3 51.5 Reading-Level II 17.6 18.0 Hispanic Indigenous People .5 .5 Reading-Level III 18.8 19.4 9.5 Multiracial 1.8 1.8 Reading Missing 8.4 28.6 White 27.8 Social studies Level I 69.6 69.7 Not-Econ Disadv 43.5 44.4 Social studies Level II 11.7 12.2 56.5 55.6 9.4 Econ Disadv Social studies Level III 10.0 Social studies Missing 9.3 Non-Immigrants 97.8 97.7 8.1 Science Level I Immigrants 2.2 2.3 59.9 59.8 17.7 NoLEP/NoESL 86.7 86.5 Science Level II 17.1 LEP/NoESL Science Level III 13.7 14.3 3.4 3.6 LEP/ESL 9.9 9.9 9.3 Science Missing 8.1 Not-SPED 91.2 90.8 Math/Algebra Level I 51.7 51.3 SPED 9.2 8.8 Math/Algebra Level II 16.8 17.2 91.2 90.6 Math/Algebra Level 2.7 2.7 Not-GIFTED III GIFTED 8.8 9.4 Math/Algebra Level IV 5.9 6.2 Not At-Risk 45.8 46.7 Math/Algebra Level V 12.5 11.6 11.2 At-Risk 54.2 53.3 Math/Algebra Missing 10.1

Student Characteristics (%) – The 2015/16 Cohort vs. Five-Endorsement-District FHSP Population

Note: Table A2 shows slight differences between the 2015/16 cohort and the FHSP population that has lower percentages of at-risk and economically disadvantaged students, and higher rates of attainment in Grade 8 academic performance.



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Fear in the Classroom: Campus Carry at The University of Texas at Austin

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Fear in the Classroom: Campus Carry at The University of Texas at Austin

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When Texas Senate Bill 11 went into effect in Fall 2016, individuals with a license to carry (LTC) were given permission to bring concealed handguns into most public spaces at The University of Texas at Austin, including classrooms (Texas, 2015). There was a loud outcry against the new "campus carry" law, with students, faculty, and staff strongly protesting against firearms in the learning environment, especially in their seminars and lecture halls (McGaughy, 2015). Some were against the legislation on purely ideological grounds, some were afraid for their personal safety, and others believed that it would compromise the quality of education (Gun-Free UT, 2015).

Not all, however, saw the new law as a negative development. UT Austin has a long and complex history of murders on campus. The university's mass shooting in 1966—where 14 innocent people lost their lives—was the first of its kind in U.S. history (Britannica, n.d.). More recently, students have been killed both at night and in broad daylight, in remote areas and on heavily populated thoroughfares (Waitt, 2017). As seen in existing research, previous victimization and perceived risk of violence are known drivers to carry a gun (Dowd-Arrow et al., 2019; Hauser & Kleck, 2013; Kleck et al., 2011). By legally allowing those with an LTC to bring their concealed firearm onto public university premises, as done in seven other states before Texas (Cramer, 2014), campus carry provides a means for individuals to extend this form of self-defense to a wide array of permitted zones, such as classrooms and other public spaces.

The introduction of campus carry at UT Austin exposed conflicting perceptions of security and insecurity—often accompanied by feelings of fear, both implicit and explicit—in the teaching environment. As new and existing fears collided, the collegiate atmosphere experienced a shift. The definition of personal and shared space was redefined, and ideological lines were drawn. Perhaps nowhere was this more strongly felt than in the confined milieu of the classroom, an occasionally volatile landscape where contentious issues are debated and strong opinions voiced.

This paper takes a multimethod approach (Anguera et al., 2018) to examine the significance of fear for both sides of the campus carry divide during this moment of educational change. It draws on 17 semi-structured interviews with faculty, students, and staff held at UT Austin in 2018–2019, as well as two focus groups with undergraduates supporting or opposing the new law, respectively. The qualitative research is also complemented by 58 open-ended written testimonials, in which undergraduates were asked to share their thoughts or experiences with campus carry, either in prose or through illustrations (Lehtonen & Seppälä, 2020). Finally, a survey conducted in spring 2019 provided a quantitative dimension to the study. The sample of UT Austin undergraduates (N=1,204) was representative of that segment of the campus community in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and fields of study (Ruoppila & Butters, 2020).

While existing research on campus carry has focused on practical aspects of the policy vis-à-vis security or explored opinions of university students and faculty (Bouffard et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2013; Jang et al., 2014; Kyle et al., 2017; Shepperd et al., 2018), including quantitative studies on the question of fear (Hauser & Kleck, 2013; Wright, 2014), gaps still remain, especially concerning institutions where campus carry has already been introduced. Through its focus on affect surrounding firearms in the educational context, a subject which has received limited attention to date, this article seeks to respond to anthropologist Niklas Hultin's (2013) call to reconnect awareness of cultural relativism to local studies of guns, understanding practices in their own context while also interrogating the larger context of the driving impulses and experiences of the opposing sides. Criminologists Bruce Arrigo and Austin Acheson (2016) also identify the need for more detailed analysis connecting institution-level and individual-level dynamics with societal conditions. Fear is not only embodied and expressed in terms of individual lived experience but also reflects a broader dynamic of cultural forces. Comprehending fear in the classroom as a complex phenomenon with manifold ramifications for higher education, including matters of pedagogy and the relationships between instructors and students, I thus examine how emotion—whether personal or culturally informed—becomes visible in the learning environment of shared social space.

Theoretically Framing the Multi-level Relationship of Fear and Affect

"I think [campus carry] creates a whole heightened climate." – UT Austin professor, April 24, 2018

Both faculty and students at The University of Texas at Austin have expressed significant apprehension of guns in the classroom (Somers & Phelps, 2018). As seen in the interviews discussed below, this was articulated in different ways, from personal fear to a collective experience of vulnerability. Given the range of feelings of the research participants, it was necessary to establish an analytical frame to better understand the various ways and contexts in which they were experienced. In the following, they are thus regarded in terms of three levels: micro, macro, and meso (Duff, 2019).

As a basic human emotion, fear reflects past personal experiences, informing subjective perceptions which in turn color one's social (micro) sphere. On the other hand, collective expressions of fear reflected in shared attitudes, behavior, and rhetoric can have a powerful (macro) effect on people, as cultural norms and ideologies directly and indirectly shape private lived experience (Furedi, 2002), including those of guns. Recognizing the psychological/cognitive aspects or general sociological processes of fear as micro- and macro-level dynamics, one finds a complex interplay of forces. In the relational (meso) nexus of the university classroom, however, more than mere fear is involved. The meso level is also the domain of affect.

Affect theory is used quite differently in various fields (e.g., sociology, social psychology, cultural studies) and even within them, as seen in the "affective turn" in cultural studies (Clough, 2007). Accordingly, the following analysis pulls from Christian von Scheve's (2018) attempt to reconcile the multiple interpretations. In the context of this paper, affect is understood in two ways: as an orientation toward the world (shaped by a variety of forces) and as a "mode of being." Highlighting the relational nature of affect, this theory may be operationalized in the classroom context.

When discussing the interplay between fear and affect, it is important to examine the relationship that exists between both domains, and how they differ. While fear may certainly be read as individual and affect as collective, the boundaries between them are still fuzzy. As Sara Ahmed (2004) points out, this is due to the fact that fear is relational, extending beyond the individual to include not just preservation of oneself but "life as we know it" (p. 64). In this intersection, an "affective politics of fear" effectively "works to contain bodies within social space through an expectant withdrawal from a world that might present itself as dangerous" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 70; see also Stengel, 2008). The multidirectional dynamic of social space in certain UT classrooms after campus carry does not allow such withdrawal, but rather exhibits aspects of Othering, a separation of "us" and "them" that draws on and impacts both personal and shared experience.

Furthermore, rather than taking affect and emotions such as fear as synonymous, as has been done in cultural studies (see von Scheve, 2018), it may be helpful to expand the discussion of affect to include a state of relations and being (Massumi, 2002). It could be argued that affect is a step removed from the direct trigger or experience of fear itself (caused by someone suddenly drawing a gun or a gun going off accidentally) and, as such, it is more of a sustained feeling (that someone might draw a gun or that a gun might go off). But this does not prevent affect from being quite intense, or even resembling active fear. As Massumi (2005) notes, "When an emotion becomes enactable in anticipation of itself, independent of action, it becomes its own threat. It becomes its own virtual cause. [...] Now, fear can potentially self-cause even in the absence of an external sign to trigger it" (p. 41). This actualization has been found in shared spaces with concealed carry, where fear can grow in proportionality to the uncertainty of the firearm's existence. As one UT student put it, "Not knowing whether or not the person sitting next to you in class has a gun is terrifying" (Testimonial 1, 2/20/2019).

Being different than a momentary surge of emotion, fear-based affect reflects the overall gestalt of the individual and their environment, as well as the change processes within them. At the meso level of the classroom, for example, affect comprises the relations between bodies (i.e., how students and faculty interact) but also the feelings engendered by those relations. Here affect is not a discrete moment but a quotidian reality. For some, campus carry introduced an ambient and perpetual feeling of imminent danger. An undergraduate explained that her lived experience changed overnight:

Before, guns were not present so there was not fear or terror deep-rooted into me. But knowing that my peer, professor, or friend can have a firearm in their possession greatly impacts the way I live every day. Because guns are present, that means there is a reason to be fearful and/or terrified of walking these halls and talking to these peers... And the fear is not [of] the firearm itself... (Testimonial 2, 2/20/2019)

Guns fit well into a discussion surrounding the affective politics of fear because they intersect personal and collective space. Tension arises when the sphere of the individual who carries the gun (defined by their range of action) overlaps the private sphere of the person who is afraid of the gun. Such friction may be accentuated by the limited physical confines of the classroom, as well as through preexisting fractures within and between social bodies of students and faculty, based on ideology, race, gender, and so forth, which have their own intersectional expressions of affect.

Beyond individuals and their micro-level fears, or collisions of relative perceptions of security and insecurity, the atmosphere of the classroom is also impacted by macro-level cultural and societal forces. For example, the media and national gun rights organizations work as drivers of fear. Ideologies channeled through rhetoric filter down from the macro level of U.S. society to inform the micro-level perceptions and experiences of individuals, which in turn feed back into meso-level interactions in the classroom. As Duff (2019) points out, "all of these social components or scalar levels interact or co-produce one another; furthermore, none of the factors (e.g., ideology, identity, interaction) are contained within one level alone" (p. 8).

Fear has long been studied as a macro-level societal phenomenon fomented by the media. Around the same time that Frank Furedi (2002; see also Beck, 1992) advanced his idea of a "culture of fear"

promoted by news organizations but reflecting "a tendency to regard a growing range of phenomena as threatening and dangerous" (2003, p. 16), David L. Altheide framed media coverage on mass shootings in terms of an overall "discourse of fear" and the social control effected by newspaper coverage after 9/11 as part of a "politics of fear" (Altheide, 2006; see also Burns & Crawford, 1999). Read as affect, these phenomena have shaped the collective consciousness of the country, significantly impacting individuals' orientation to public spaces—from Times Square to shopping malls. In the age of school shootings, it only follows that media coverage of violence leading to increased levels of fear (Stroud, 2016, p. 155; Elsass, Schildkraut, & Stafford, 2014) would extend to the classroom as well.

Multiple studies (see, e.g., Heath & Gilbert, 1996; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990) show that an individual's fear grows when media reporting connects seemingly random attacks to a location they frequent. But while coverage of violence at schools and universities can have an effect on the perceptions of people in those areas, the media alone is not responsible for perceptions of increased risk at the university. Incidents of directed violence at institutions of higher education are indeed growing much more common, with instructional areas being one of the most dangerous locations on campus (Drysdale et al., 2010; Gunter, 2016). While school attacks are a nationwide trend, Texas stands out, coming third after California and New York (Drysdale et al., 2010, p. 11, n. 25). This fact may even explain the success of Texas legislators in passing a campus carry law.

At the micro level, there are a range of reasons why individuals may be afraid of guns on campus. Preexisting factors include cultural upbringing, a general lack of exposure to firearms or negative experiences with them, or past trauma of being threatened or shot. As became clear in the interviews, fear became more pronounced with the advent of campus carry. This was especially true for those who knew how volatile the classroom could be. Guns had not previously been part of their day-to-day reality, but future hypotheticals suddenly loomed large. The emotional charge in all these cases is connected to a specific physical object, namely, the gun. Following Latour's (1999) supposition that guns (like other technologies) are invested with meaning, in this case the meaning is negative. Thus, rather than being a tool to preserve one's life, the gun is held to be an actant that can end it. A former graduate student of UT Austin described experiencing such trepidation with guns throughout her whole life:

I've never handled a gun. I've never owned a gun. My parents never owned a gun. I knew friends and family who did, but guns were always very terrifying for me. They never made me feel safe. So, that's always been a kind of deep-seated fear. (Interview 1, 4/26/2018)

A member of the UT Austin Task Force shared a similar sentiment, "I've never touched a gun. I'm deathly afraid of touching a gun" (Interview 2, 4/26/2018). Other members brought firearms for her to touch, explaining that a gun is just "a piece of metal" and "it's not the gun that's going to kill you, it's the person behind the gun" (Interview 2, 4/26/2018). Yet, a majority of UT Austin undergraduates surveyed (56.2%) grew up in a house with no firearms, and 17.2% of those who did not feel safe with guns in class felt unable to openly share their opinions about campus carry. There is a private nature to insecurity, and individual fear can be expressed as affect even if not directly translated into the social dynamic.

Past incidents in the classroom are also instrumental in the formation of strong opinions about the presence of guns in the educational space. This came out as a strong theme during the fieldwork period, with interviewees repeatedly sharing stories of students becoming violent. One professor explained:

When you've been in the classroom, you are aware—very, very, in very concrete terms—that it is a high-stress situation for most students. [...] They can respond very emotionally to what happens in the classroom. I've had students have outbursts. (Interview 2, 4/27/2018)

Another confessed her fear of students: "I've actually had students yell at me. If I had to worry that they were carrying a gun in my office or in the classroom, that's frightening. Or that they would come back, right?" (Interview 3, 4/26/2018). A graduate student shared how her orientation changed after campus carry: "There were a couple of incidents [...] where I saw students who looked really upset, and I felt like I needed to be more on guard, if they were going to pull out a gun and freak out" (Interview, 4/25/2018). An undergraduate further highlighted the danger of students with psychological problems being armed:

There was this one incident [...] in the Slavic department, where there was this guy that had a mental breakdown in front of class before the teacher got there and wrote all this racist stuff on the board and threw a chair at this black kid. Then he ran away and the police had to track him down. If he had had a gun, I am sure he would have killed somebody. (Focus group participant, 4/26/2018)

In one final example, one professor described actually being attacked in a classroom by a student when she was teaching at Austin Community College. When he swung his heavy backpack at her head, she was able to dodge it, but it was obvious that things could have been much worse:

I was terrified by the situation. [...] It had very much occurred to me that if he had had a weapon there, it would have been a disaster. I would say that experience is very much present in my mind and informs my decisions about campus carry. (Interview 2, 4/27/2018)

The types of events described here underline the process of affect formation. That is, while fear of guns based on personal experience is individual, its expression in behavior shared with others becomes *actualized* as affect. In this way, students and faculty have developed communal sensitivity around the classroom being a locus for conflict and vulnerability (see also Trujillo, 2017). At UT Austin, three quarters of surveyed UT undergraduates (77.5%) expressed that they do not feel safe with students carrying permitted concealed handguns in class (Ruoppila & Butters, 2020), and this shared perception is distributed diffusely in the overall environment.

The Actualization of Fear in the Classroom

"T'm afraid of guns so I don't want them in my classroom." – UT Austin Professor Paola Bonifazio (Lopez, 2015)

"Now I have an added uncomfortable feeling in class. [...] I have tried to sit close to doors, or keep a watch on if anyone could be carrying a gun." – Testimonial 3, February 20, 2019

Butters

"I do and don't feel scared in my classes. [...] You don't know who to and not to trust around here. [...] Someone in this very room could pull out a gun and fire at any given moment." — Testimonial 4, February 20, 2019

Given the impact of social forces on multiple levels, it is important to understand how shifts in people's "mode of being" are reflected in actual praxis. How has the implementation of the law directly impacted classrooms at UT Austin? How do the experiences of supporters and opponents of campus carry differ, and what does this mean for the spirit of collegiate community?

Concerns about Security

As school shootings have become increasingly widespread across the U.S., law enforcement agencies have attached greater importance to students and teachers developing situational awareness. The persistent orientation to potential threats in one's environment is expressed through different types of affect, depending on whether one has a gun or not. For those who do, getting a license to carry includes training on maintaining "relaxed alertness," or "Yellow Alert," to use Jeff Cooper's (1989) widely adopted color code. But such vigilance is not for everyone, as learned by an instructor who carries a handgun while teaching. At first, he said, he opened his courses with a security briefing, but then he found it put students too much on edge:

I just told them, "Here is what we do if something happens." Obviously, the chances of that are just minuscule. After that I thought about it more and it really just is going to alarm people more than anything else and I don't think that's good in a classroom environment. (Interview, 4/17/2018)

This example exposes how the exigency for preparedness can lead to fear, thus underlining a fundamental tension between physical and psychological orientations. Introducing a gun into an environment changes how one sees it. For this instructor, a desk was understood in practical and physical terms as potential cover during a shooter event, and line of sight was an important consideration when returning fire. For opponents of campus carry, however, situational awareness acted in an opposite way as a psychological source of worry that now pervaded the classroom. As one student explained:

For example, when I go into a big lecture hall, I always keep an eye on my nearest exit. Even when I go to movie theaters, I worry that someone is going to shoot me. That should not extend to a classroom, but that's the reality. (Interview, 3/27/2018)

In the charged atmosphere of potential violence, both sides engage in profiling. Determining whether someone is armed is foregrounded by creation of the Other, so that a single class might have LTC-holders keeping an eye out for potential shooters *and* people fearful of LTC-holders keeping an eye out for them. Ana Lopez, one of the organizers of the Cocks Not Glocks student activist movement against guns at UT Austin, explained in a news interview: "I feel like campus carry has caused me to profile people a lot more" (Guan, 2017). The act of profiling is subjective but also shared, intersecting with gender and race. In another media interview, Lopez admitted, "If I've got some cowboy-looking dude in my class, I'm going to be more wary than [if it's] someone like my-self' (Purtill, 2017).

Profiling

Tropes like the "good [white] guy with a gun" are built on social imaginaries and cultural stereotypes of Texas, but many gun owners embrace that narrative. To their mind, being profiled in this way accords them an identity of power, communicating that they are not to be messed with. The imposition of fear is part of the strategic effect of deterrence. Yet this identity construction also belies how gun owners perceive themselves as "normal." As Angela Stroud points out, the "good guy" believes there is no problem in his carrying, compared to people in the "bad parts of town"; accordingly, while it is unlikely that he will go to a "bad" neighborhood, he needs to be able to defend himself in the places where he normally goes, like a school (Stroud, 2012, p. 229; 2016).

This example illustrates an inverse dynamic of how profiling of the Other may also be done by those carrying guns. Macro-level stereotypes and personal experiences of violence led to new expressions on campus. In particular, racial/ethnic minority and sexual minority groups' preexisting fears of being targeted (Otis, 2007; Schafer et al., 2018) were exacerbated with the advent of the new gun policy. At UT Austin, this became such an issue that it was explicitly addressed by the Campus Carry Policy Working Group (2015):

Perhaps the most passionate comments we received came from students, staff, and faculty of color and other historically underrepresented groups, including members of the LGBTQ community and international students. Understandably, they fear most viscerally that an increase in the number of guns on campus will place them at greatest risk. For example, a statement by the African and African Diaspora Studies faculty decried the "distinctly vulner-able position of Black people when it comes to firearm violence," adding that "the probabil-ity that bullets will find us is higher than for any other campus population." (p. 3)

Accordingly, the African and African Diaspora Studies Department published their opposition to the law, citing the potential for "deadly violence against us" in "highly charged" and "often fraught" classroom discussions (Gun-Free UT, 2015).

As existing fears became heightened and localized as meso-level classroom affect, individuals reacted in very different ways, as the following examples show. Sharing an experience of a heated discussion of the history of the Black Power Movement shifting to campus carry, one student remembered their instructor explaining: "You have to understand why professors don't want this law. I stand up here and talk to you about the Black Panthers and there's a lot of white frat guys—you guys who stand up there fuming at me" (Interview, 4/25/2018). In this case, the instructor directly spoke to the affect of the classroom, addressing the tension and mutual othering. It could be asked, however, how many similar moments of division and fear go unspoken? In one such instance, when students were using racial slurs against a fellow classmate, who was also a cleric of Islam, he chose *not* to speak up, being terrified "of the uncertainty of what the other person [had] in their backpack" (Bodenheimer, 2018).

Changing Classroom Dynamics

This unspoken aspect of affect can also be found in professors' perceptions of a shift in their authority and a "loss of control" over the classroom, as the possibility of an armed student "completely changes the dynamic" (Bodenheimer, 2018). Faculty have become painfully aware of a new sense of distancing. One professor explained: "I'm very aware of the fact that I could have a licensed gun holder in my class. [...] I think how it changes my classroom is, it takes me longer—it takes me probably a month—before I am comfortable with my students" (Interview, 4/24/2018). Significantly, the interweaving of fear, loss of authority, and polarization can impact teaching (see Jones & Horan, 2019). A so-called "chilling effect"—to cite the term used by three UT Austin professors in a lawsuit brought against the university's campus carry policy (Watkins, 2016)—has led some faculty to behave differently, speak differently, and teach differently.

Furthermore, instructors in Texas have pedagogically modified their courses (Lewis & De Luna, 2016), sometimes on their own initiative but also by following policy guidelines. At the University of Houston, for example, the faculty senate provided professors with specific tips: "Be careful discussing sensitive topics." "Drop certain topics from your curriculum." "[Don't] 'go there' if you sense anger" (DeBrabander, 2016). At UT Austin, campus carry has led some professors to grade more leniently, lest they provoke a dispute with a gun-carrying student (Interview 3, 4/26/2018; Gullion, 2018, pp. 107–110), while others omit polemical course material to reduce possible conflict. Nor is the educational impact of campus carry lost on students. One undergraduate bemoaned what she perceived as censoring:

I know for a fact, the way I've talked to a lot of professors and the way we talk about delicate material has changed. And I know people that have taken things out of their course load because of this. So, that directly hurts my education. (Interview 1, 4/4/2018)

Importantly, however, this student was clear to point out that she did not blame her professor; she understood their perspective, because she had the same fear herself:

My education is affected when I can't pay attention in class because I am afraid of a gun. A lot of the classes I take as a history major and a government major [have] a lot of controversial ideas. [...] There are ethics classes where you are supposed to come and argue abortion and you are supposed to go in and argue the death penalty and stuff like that. Talking to those professors, it is hard to teach those classes now because there is always that fear. What if you have one person that's just so enraged by an idea that they—two seconds, into a back-pack—shoot someone? (Interview 1, 4/4/2018)

This student was not alone in their perception: nearly half of UT Austin undergraduates surveyed (49.2%) agreed with the statement that "the presence of concealed handguns in the classroom creates a chilling effect, limiting discussions on contentious topics." The repercussions of campus carry on education are complex, moving in different directions, trickling down from the instructors' changed curricula and feeding into the classroom with students experiencing fear to freely speak their minds (Somers & Phelps, 2018; Jones & Horan, 2019).

The Impact of the Unknown

The complexity of the situation notwithstanding, there was a shared concern that appeared to inform affect among faculty and students alike. One question in particular was voiced by participants again and again, both implicitly and explicitly, as if always lurking in the background: "What if?" As seen above, in some interviews this concern was located in past experiences of violence: "What if that student had had a gun?" Elsewhere, it was framed in relation to a future hypothetical: "What if someone pulls out a gun in class?" In both cases, the temporality of the experience was bound to the present and narrowed to certain discrete events in one's daily schedule—namely, moments in class—as representing a focal point of danger. Understanding the classroom as a specific locus of emotional vulnerability (Trujillo, 2017), it may explain why UT Austin undergraduates cited that location—more than anywhere else on campus—as the place where guns should not be allowed (on the acceptance of concealed handguns in various parts of the UT Austin campus, see Ruoppila & Butters, 2020).

For opponents of campus carry, the fear is present because of the simple fact that there may be guns in the classroom. One professor underlined the impact of the law: "because it increases the likelihood that a gun will be accessible, [it] increases the danger for me" (Interview 1, 4/26/2018). Yet, supporters of campus carry argue the exact opposite, that guns and LTC-holders are not the danger, but the solution to a statistically unlikely event. An undergraduate who carries on campus explained:

I understand the proportional risk, which is very, very low. School shootings are very rare. School shootings on college campuses are more rare. I do not believe that things being rare means that you should not be prepared to confront them. (Focus group participant, 4/19/2018)

The "what if?" question thus hinges on how it is predicated—namely, whether the imagined shooter is a LTC-holder or not.

Concomitant with the question of fear and affect is the fact that value judgements are often applied to how people orient to a future hypothetical threat. For publicly expressing fear, opponents of campus carry have been dismissed as irrational or even paranoid. Conversely, LTC-holders have positioned themselves as realistic and practical, following the law, adhering to the classic civil defense ethos ("Be Prepared") and directives of how to respond to an active shooter event in the classroom ("Run, Hide, Fight"). These kinds of intentional framings represent epistemological claims vis-à-vis the "real" way to understand threats, on one hand finding expression though rhetoric in a contestation over the legitimacy and nature of fear itself (Butters, 2020), but also potentially leading individuals to not engage or publicly disclose their latent or actualized emotions.

Conclusions: The Way Forward

As seen above, fear-based affect around campus carry is experienced as a social phenomenon and reproduced in a wide range of ways, reflecting personal experiences and societal forces which exert force in the classroom. Accordingly, attitudes and fear surrounding guns have followed cultural scripts and appeared in rhetoric at UT Austin. Emerging from this picture is the power of fear to self-perpetuate, pervading both physical environments and collective perceptions. Indeed, as fear generates more fear, its "ontogenetic force" not only sustains the emotion but can lead it to continually increase. Speaking to this, Massumi (2005, p. 47) concludes, "All that is certain is that fear itself will continue becoming—the way of life." One faculty member agreed, describing the "community sense of fear" as a rising tide: the fact that "more guns exist out there [...] makes me more likely to feel that I have a need to defend myself" (Interview 2, 4/27/2018).

Nearly two decades ago, Altheide (2003, p. 19) noted Americans becoming more "armored," moving to gated communities and carrying handguns. He observed this as part of a vicious cycle, whereby actions reaffirm and create a sense of disconnection that further actions perpetuate. Perceptions of the environment and how it must be negotiated (e.g., seeing threats because one is trained to look for them, situational awareness) are specifically translated into laws and policy that in turn have a social consequence. In this feedback loop, "...the meanings that contribute to and stem from CHL [concealed handgun license] policy play a role in shaping the larger culture, which may well be its most significant impact" (Stroud, 2016, p. 152). Thus, while the classroom provides a discrete locus of fear-based affect impacting community, the phenomenon extends much more broadly.

Of course, such deepening divisions do not have to be the end of the story. Affect is locally operative and malleable, and some students, faculty, and staff at UT Austin are actively working together to find a way forward through the emotional divide caused by campus carry. For instance, they are addressing fear through self-defense workshops, mindfulness training, and open classroom discussion. One professor described the benefits of starting each class with five minutes of meditation, telling her students: "This is one thing that we can have in place that allows us to get together [and] focus on the fact that we are here together for a reason, which is to learn, that we are safe with each other right now" (Interview 1, 4/27/2018). In this way, by building the understanding that fear is a shared experience by both sides, additional points of commonality may be explored for potential reconciliation. It is important to note that campus carry is a process, and the fact that to date no university shootings have been involved with it—nationwide—supports continued dialogue, and possibly even the gradual deconstruction of associated fears.

Although UT Austin represents one example of a university navigating the lived experience of guns on campus, many of the dynamics explored in this article can be seen as more broadly applicable to institutions of higher learning elsewhere in the country (on Kansas, for example, see Drew, 2017; Wolcott, 2017). Fear of guns in the classroom is not limited to one specific locale. Given continually shifting attitudes toward firearms, however, further studies—including longitudinal research—are needed on the ways in which this issue can be navigated in shared space. Demonstrating that rapprochement is possible, even at one university, could provide a path toward a positive resolution of affect surrounding guns in other communities as well.

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Yes, Black Lives Still Matter and Politics-Free Schools are a Myth

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Yes, Black Lives Still Matter and Politics-Free Schools are a Myth

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The crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society.

-James Baldwin, 1963

Ideological poison. Revisionist history. Toxic propaganda. These were the words that President Donald Trump used to describe the *New York Times* 1619 Project in a speech on Constitution Day 2020. In a previous tweet, President Trump had already threatened to restrict governmental funding from California schools planning to teach the initiative (Trump, 2020). However, on this day, Trump used the full weight of his moral and rhetorical power as president (Ceasar et al., 1981; Lim, 2002; Windt, 1986), to position the 1619 Project as the latest attempt at liberal indoctrination in schools, saying:

The left has warped, distorted, and defiled the American story with deceptions, falsehoods, and lies. There is no better example than the New York Times' totally discredited 1619 Project. This project rewrites American history to teach our children that we were founded on the principle of oppression, not freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth. America's founding set in motion the unstoppable chain of events that abolished slavery, secured civil rights, defeated communism and fascism, and built the most fair, equal, and prosperous nation in human history. (Trump, 2020, paras. 11-12)

In this speech President Trump expanded on a particularly prevalent ideology that has been ingrained in the fabric of the United States' political ethos: that America is an exceptional, benevolent nation with a historical record that is infallible and beyond reproach. Therefore, any attempt to provide nuance regarding the influence of chattel slavery and the contributions of Black Americans to this nation's founding, is positioned as a treasonous attack on the very idea of what it means to be an American.

In a recent *Education Week* opinion piece, a Virginia parent described her experience with her child's virtual learning orientation meeting, which primarily centered on her discomfort with the Zoom background of the school's dean of students that read: "No Family Separation, Black Lives Matter, Pro Civil Liberties, Climate Change is Real" (Gunlock, 2020, para. 7). Previous research has illustrated the significant levels of pushback from communities where teachers have engaged in controversial attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of American history, let alone present-day issues of justice and equality (e.g., Lintner, 2018; Swalwell & Schweber, 2016). Like President Trump, the opinion piece author decried this sign as further evidence of the indoctrination of public-school students and called for a return to a nostalgic notion of a "politics-free" education (Gunlock, 2020, para. 14). However, this idea in itself is a fallacy.

As many have argued, American education has never been inherently "politics-free" and never will be (Kolluri, 2017; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Conservatives' attempts to ensure that America is heralded as a benevolent nation dedicated to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is an inherently political act that serves as little more than an attempt to silence those whose lived experiences and histories contradict that framing. As a former public-school teacher and current educational researcher, I believe that it is time for educators to disregard the notion of a politics-free education and wholeheartedly acknowledge the ways that the various social identities of students, teachers, and families are inherently political and deserve to be acknowledged and embraced. This more critical approach acknowledges the legacy of oppressive political ideologies in schools and works to incorporate a deeper understanding of the ways that such ideologies continue to impact students' educational experiences. A crucial first step for this work involves integrating historically accurate and culturally relevant curricula, such as the 1619 Project.

A Brief History of the Influence of Political Ideologies in U.S. Schools

Political battles over the ways that we educate our children have raged for centuries (Zimmerman, 2002). In the 19th century, driven by xenophobic and fundamentally racist ideals, the United States government sanctioned what came to be known as "Indian schools," with an expressed mission of "civilizing" Native Americans through an assimilationist re-education program (Churchill, 2004; Malmsheimer, 1985). In the 20th century, based on beliefs of White supremacy, segregationists worked tirelessly to deny Black students their constitutional right to public education until the Supreme Court forced their hands (Alexander, 1976; Day, 2016). Even today, textbooks and curricular materials in U.S. public schools are regularly and directly impacted by political pressures (Ighodaro & Wiggan 2011).

In yet another example, Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) joined President Trump in dismissing the 1619 Project as "a racially divisive, revisionist account of history that denies the noble principles of freedom and equality on which our nation was founded" (Cotton, 2020, para. 3). Paired with his proposed legislation to ban the 1619 Project, Cotton's statement aligns with conservative political leaders who quickly censor truths deemed divisive, especially when those truths appear to threaten the carefully constructed vision of American exceptionalism. This forms the crux of the argument against the 1619 Project. Therefore, it is important to understand exactly what the 1619 Project is and is not, rather than the caricature that has been presented by its critics.

Situating the 1619 Project

Complete access to the fundamental human rights explicated in the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, all rest upon whether or not one can claim ownership to whiteness. In conceptualizing the exclusionary idea of *whiteness as a property*, Harris (1993) describes how the Virginia Assembly fundamentally altered previously settled common law in 1622 to further dehumanize Black people in order to justify the system of chattel slavery. By amending the law to change the legal status of a child from the father to the mother, Harris illustrates a clear example of White lawmakers using the power of White supremacy to change a legal framework and definition for the benefit and exclusion of anyone deemed nonwhite (p. 1719). In this regard, Blackness, and ultimately the Black experience(s) related to White people in the United States, have been inextricably tied to the degradation and dehumanization of Black people (Dumas, 2016; Wilderson, 2010), providing an explicit impetus for the development of the 1619 Project.

In August 2019, the 1619 Project was published by the *New York Times Magazine* in an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which the institution of chattel slavery was a fundamental component of the founding of the United States. Recognizing that the significance of the year 1619 is largely unknown in the U.S., the developers of the initiative set out "to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of our national narrative" (Silverstein, 2019). The purpose of this project is not to

diminish the accomplishments and accolades of the Founding Fathers, but rather to provide critical context related to the inherent value of the contributions of enslaved Africans during this time period. Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019), the originator of the 1619 Project explains the importance of this initiative by asserting:

For centuries, white Americans have been trying to solve the "Negro problem." They have dedicated thousands of pages to this endeavor. It is common, still, to point to rates of black poverty, out-of-wedlock births, crime and college attendance, as if these conditions in a country built on a racial caste system are not utterly predictable. But crucially, you cannot view those statistics while ignoring another: that black people were enslaved here longer than we have been free. (p. 26)

With this understanding, the 1619 Project provides critical context that has largely been missing from contemporary explanations of United States history in K-12 schools. This form of erasure is common in educational curricula as evidenced by Chu's (2017) analysis of social studies textbook research. While attempting to address previously noted methodological shortcomings in textbook content analyses, her findings demonstrate the persistent lack of meaningful representation of racially minoritized populations. Although inclusion of racially minoritized groups in curricula has increased over time, representations of people of color largely remain "…stereotypical, biased, and inaccurate" (Chu, 2017). A report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2018), *Teaching Hard History*, provides a complementary indictment of the ways that slavery is taught in American schools. Students are commonly taught about the triumphs and resilience of enslaved people with little attention paid to the philosophical underpinnings of White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and racial capitalism that fueled the system of chattel slavery. While the inclusion of this content absolutely has political implications for schools, I argue that this is not something to shy away from. Instead, I believe this is exactly what our schools and students need.

The Impact of Politics in my Own Classroom

Some research suggests a significant tension between teachers' beliefs regarding teaching topics that could be deemed controversial and the potential negative consequences of taking such actions. Levitt & Longstreet (1993) argue that teachers believe it is important to tackle controversial issues in their classrooms. However, teachers also maintain that it is incredibly difficult and potentially harmful to their future careers (Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009). As a Black, queer former elementary school teacher who was raised and worked in the Deep South, I can empathize with those concerns. Even as I recognized the need to work with students to critically analyze our nation's history in order to understand our current socio-political context, I acknowledge that my positionality directly impacted the way that I taught. Initially, I was hesitant to bring my full, authentic self into the classroom, as there was a clear understanding of the "correct" persona that I should portray as a Black male educator. However, I soon realized that my positionality was not something to be tucked aside when I became a teacher. Instead, it was an important component of who I was a person and who I would become as an educator. When students and educators enter their schools, whether virtually or in person, they do not miraculously shed their racial identities and the political implications of those identities. Their religious, gender, ethnic, national, and yes-racial identities are all inherently political and often directly impact their educational experiences and outcomes (Lewis, 2003; Moya, 2006).

During the 2016-2017 academic year, I was lucky enough to teach one of the most brilliant groups of students that I have ever encountered. My students were politically adept and had an incredible

aptitude for engaging in critical conversations. Although they were only 8-9 years old at the time, they came to me with well-formed opinions related to equality, fairness, and justice. As their teacher, I refused to shy away from issues that could have been deemed too political or controversial. Instead, we navigated the contentious 2016 presidential election with careful thought, discussion, and an ever-deepening sense of understanding. In the early days of the Trump administration, my students skillfully debated issues of national security and xenophobia, ultimately forming their own carefully crafted opinions on the development and implementation of President Trump's travel bans. Not only was politics a part of my classroom, the rigorous learning environment that we built together would have been impossible without it. Instead of ignoring the political nature of education, I believe it is absolutely necessary for educators to strategically counter societal myths, such as "politics free education," that oppressors have employed to maintain the status quo (Freire, 1972). Critical content like the 1619 Project is politically courageous and builds educators' capacity to do such work. It deserves to be praised and widely replicated, rather than shunned and struck down by those who remain beholden to the myths of the past. In that way, we do the work of shifting the very foundations of society, by asserting new, empowered roles that those who have historically held power never envisioned for us (Baldwin, 1963).

Conclusion

Although we are at the precipice of a new presidential administration, the reality remains that President Trump's assertions carry significant weight among his supporters. For example, even as his campaign has lost a dizzying number of election-related lawsuits and multiple recounts that repeatedly confirmed Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election, 70% of Republicans do not believe the election was free and fair (Kim, 2020). Therefore, his faulty rhetoric positioning K-12 schools as factories of liberal indoctrination is likely to remain popular among his supporters even after he leaves office. In fact, he has demonstrated his continued commitment to this rhetoric by appointing members to his new 1776 Commission, which "was formed to advise the President about the core principles of the American founding and how to protect those principles through promoting patriotic education" (Guadiano, 2020).

Furthermore, the closer than expected election results have already begun to cause conversations about the need to be less vocal regarding issues of racial justice for Black people. For instance, moderate House Democrats, in search of a rationale for their unexpected losses, have expressed the belief that activists' calls and proposals to "defund the police," were too divisive (Farris, Caygle, & Mutnick, 2020). These sentiments have been further echoed by former President Barack Obama, who opined that Black Lives Matter activists pushing for a full restructuring of policing should "decide whether they want to get something done or feel good among the people they agree with" (Duster, 2020).

As the United States undergoes what has been described as a racial reckoning in the wake of continued police brutality that disproportionately harms Black people, it is important, now more than ever, for educators to do all that they can to affirm the humanity of their Black students. Critics have strategically used the words and policy proposals of individual members and affiliates of the Black Lives Matter Global Network to portray the larger Black Lives Matter movement as divisive, radical, and un-American. It is important to note that the affirmation of Black lives does not necessarily imply agreement with every policy that they propose. However, their mission of working "to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (Black Lives Matter Global Network, n.d.) should not be considered controversial. Calls for a "politics-free" education system and labeling policies aimed at saving Black lives as too divisive are little more than thinly veiled attempts to silence any ideology that challenges the status quo that continues to leave Black people in constant danger. Instead of criticizing educators for daring to openly support their Black students, community members should instead do whatever they can to affirm the fact that Black lives do indeed matter. These efforts demonstrate to Black students that their teachers, school leaders, and the broader community are not simply aware of the legacy of anti-Black racial violence in America but understand that this intergenerational curse cannot and should not continue.

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